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Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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Tories plan to double cuts

Their target: after slashing £25 billion,
to cut another £48 billion

Belgium and Italy show fightback



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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.



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- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
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Oppose Pickles' take-over!

By Gerry Bates

The take-over of Tower Hamlets Council by commissioners appointed by the communities secretary Eric Pickles entrenches a worrying precedent with negative consequences for local democracy.

The transfer of some of the council's powers came after a £1m report commissioned by Pickles and carried out by the accountants PricewaterhouseCoopers.

The three commissioners will remain in place until 31 March 2017 and will report to the secretary of state every six months.

The report alleged that council, run by former Labour mayor Lutfur Rahman, awarded more than £400,000 in grants to "ineligible organisations", and questioned the spending of public money on what could be seen as party political advertising.

The report also raised concerns about the sale of Poplar Town Hall for £875,000 to a political supporter of Rahman, "even though the bid arrived late, and after rival bids had been opened, which created a

'risk of bid manipulation'. A higher offer was rejected, contrary to independent advice, and the winner was later allowed to change his contract."

Allegations of communalism were also raised, with the BBC reporting "that a proposal to award money to lunch clubs for Jewish, Sikh and Hindu communities resulted in £99,212 being awarded to Bangladeshi or Somali groups, none of which had applied for the money."

It is not necessary to disbelieve these allegations, as some on the left will do, simply because they come from Eric Pickles.

Nor, however, is it necessary to politically support Rahman to realise that the takeover of parts of Tower Hamlets Council is no answer to the problem and should be opposed.

When it comes to problems in Tower Hamlets Council, it should be up to the residents of Tower Hamlets to sort them out democratically. As it is, Rahman was re-elected in 2014 and it is not for Pickles to override that.

Yet the situation also



Tower Hamlets mayor Lutfur Rahman

makes the case against the over-powerful system of elected mayors — with only 18 of the 45 council seats, Rahman's group Tower Hamlets First can effectively dominate the Council through its control of the Executive.

There is also a broader context. Local government services have been cut to the bone under the Coalition, and Labour-controlled councils have simply managed central government cuts.

As pressure on local government budgets continues, we are likely to see more pressure for councils to stand up against central government — whether Tory or Labour.

This fight needs to challenge the power of Westminster to impose their agenda on local councils, including the ability of Pickles to take over council services and ride roughshod over local communities.

Devo Manc? No thanks!

By Bruce Robinson

Following the Scottish referendum English devolution has come to the top of the political agenda and the Tories are trying to define a framework which would suit their purposes as quickly as possible.

Last week George Osborne did a deal with the leaders of the ten local councils in the Greater Manchester region — all bar one Labour-controlled — which is seen as setting the benchmark for other cities and regions in the North as they "become ready" for devolved powers.

The deal provides a minimal amount of powers and money in exchange for accepting the imposition of an elected mayor — something which was rejected in a Manchester referendum in 2012. The region gets powers over transport, planning, housing, policing, skills training and some business support functions plus control of £1 billion out of exist-

ing funds.

But there will be no fundraising powers and no restitution of the cuts that have hit northern cities disproportionately hard. Rather: "In the context of the wider fiscal consolidation agenda, the city region would be required to take a fair share of any reductions that are made to any of the devolved funding streams." So, more cuts to come. And the purse strings still in the hands of the Treasury.

As for the mayor, it seems Osborne's aim is to empower one person without even the minimal democratic accountability provided by the Greater London Assembly. There will be no elected body to which he or she is answerable and the only resort the electorate will have is an election every four years, or possibly some complex recall mechanism. Between now and the election in 2017 a totally unelected pseudo-Mayor will be chosen from among the existing council leaders.



George Osborne

It is not surprising that the Labour councils who have done nothing to fight government cuts have meekly accepted the first offer Osborne made. His talk of "northern powerhouses" fits quite well with the policy of business-led "regeneration" favoured by local leaders. There is little in this package that will deal with the serious social problems in the region.

Nor is it a real plan for regional devolution which would start to redress some of the major inequalities between the better-off (Tory-voting) and poorer regions of England.

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Why US pessimism goes Republican

By Barry Finger

In the American electoral system there are four ways to register one's disgust with the status quo.

Cast a ballot, where possible, for a radical third party that raises the decibel level and gives shape to anti-corporate outrage; vote in despair for the lesser-evil with the expectation that doing the same feckless act repeatedly will deliver progressive results; vote for the out party regardless of what it stands for with the hope of shaking things up; or sit on one's hands with a clothespin fixed to one's nose.

This time, lesser evilism did not offer a winning hand. The Democrats lost nearly every close Senate race, with the exception of New Hampshire. But if the Senate races were arguably fought on Republican terrain, the re-election of hard-core reactionaries to gubernatorial office and the capture of state legislatures by Republicans can only be explained by the national political climate.

The liberal left has offered

many theories to explain the Democratic rout. Some of them actually are rooted in fact. Yes, there was poor voter turnout. Yes, there was a lack of enthusiasm among the Democratic base. Yes, the electoral map conspired against them in so far as the main battle ground states in this cycle normally lean right.

None of this however speaks to the deep pessimism of the American people in the midst of a supposed economic recovery. Almost half of those who voted still believe that life for the next generation would be worse than it is today. Two-thirds said the country was seriously on the wrong track.

All of which contributed to the well-known fear of Obama contagion on the part of Democratic candidates. The Obama presidency is widely seen as toxic. 59% of voters in national exit polls asserted that they were angry or disappointed with the Obama administration. But hasn't employment made impressive gains? Hasn't the stock market recovered? Haven't

deficits dropped from nearly 10% of GDP to 3%? Aren't record high profits a harbinger of a renewed prosperity to come?

Is the electorate simply ungrateful? Or is it thoroughly alienated by the massive and historically unprecedented upward transfer of wealth and income that financed and accompanied the Obama recovery? Under the Bush recovery the top 10% captured nearly all the gains. Not only was this again true under the Obama recovery, but the bottom 90% also lost ground. There was employment growth, but this growth was disproportionately concentrated in the lowest paying service sectors.

Obama helped Wall Street avert financial catastrophe and furthered measures to support business. He endorsed much deeper cuts in social spending and the deficit during the 2011 budget negotiations than the Republicans. 5.5 million more Americans live in poverty today and median household income has declined by 4.6%. The real unemployment rate, despite

the statistical slight of hand, is still at 12%.

Even Obama's "Affordable Care Act", is a subsidy to insurance companies and big Pharma. It reasserts the neoliberal principle that one should be able to access precisely as much health care as you can afford, just not necessarily as much as you also happen to need. In places where the uninsured rate dropped, the Republicans still managed to score massive victories.

REPUBLICANS

The Republicans were hardly twisting the truth when accusing the administration of being too cozy with Wall Street and a select cohort of corporate cronies.

How then did Democratic Party candidates react to this? Did they soften or repudiate the pro-corporate Obama agenda? Did they offer a broad platform of economic remediation, which would give hope to the American rank and file that it too might share in the economic recovery, and begin to enjoy the fruits of a

more egalitarian society?

No, they doubled down on their "principles", while distancing themselves, ostrich like, from its lead author. It's patently obvious that Democrats, with few exceptions, will not even go out on limb for a \$15 minimum wage, for card check reform that would assist unions to organise, or for a desperately needed green jobs program.

Not a word will be heard from liberal left for even more radical departures and initiatives: Medicare for all, guaranteed federal employment or job training on demand, the right to a basic income, a debt jubilee for workers and the poor, the elimination of college tuition in state schools, a fully funded national pension and affordable urban housing. Democrats simply don't believe that such things are attainable – or worse. They do not believe them desirable.

Most of what we need to know about this election, we can learn from the Alaska microcosm. There, voters imposed restrictions on mining, chose to legalize pot

and opted to raise the minimum wage. And they elected a reactionary big business Republican.

In fact everywhere in which the electorate was offered the opportunity to express class solidarity by ratifying a hike in the minimum wage, it did so. And it did so while punishing Democrats and electing Republicans who denounce the minimum wage itself as a dangerous Commie plot.

It takes a special aptitude to be defeated by a hated Republican Party obsessed by a porous borders, Ebola contamination, the punishment of recreational sex, tax cuts for business, government overregulation, restrictions on gun ownership, a Benghazi cover-up and the war on Christmas.

But by falling on their sword, the Democrats once again proved themselves noble paladins of capitalism. Better to lose power waging a common defence of the corporate status quo, than to break ranks and threaten privilege.



Irish revolt on water fees

By Michael Johnson

A movement against water charges has led to some of the largest protests against government policy ever seen in the Republic of Ireland.

A system of domestic water charging introduced on 1 October could cost hard-hit households more than €500 (£390) a year. The scheme was part of the conditions attached to the November 2010 bailout.

The government set up a new semi-state company, Irish Water, in 2013, which has already spent tens of millions of euros on consultants.

Opposition to water charges began with residents taking direct action against contractors installing water meters. It has since grown, with mass protests shaking the Fine Gael-Labour coalition.

Around 120,000 people took to the streets on 1 November. About 20 protests were staged in Dublin alone, 10,000 demonstrated in Cork city and more than 8,000 people marched in both Letterkenny and Drogheda.

Polls show around a quarter of the population are unwilling to pay the charges; on 9 November *The Sunday Independent* reported internal dissent

within Fine Gael about Taoiseach Enda Kenny's handling of the situation.

Reflecting anger against the governing parties and the main opposition, Sinn Féin are now the most popular party in opinion polls, with around 26%. Fine Gael stands at 22%, Fianna Fáil 20%, Labour is at 7% and Independents and Others at 23%.

The election of Socialist Party's Paul Murphy in the recent Dublin South-West by-election as part of the Anti-Austerity Alliance raises the issue of uniting the far left to challenge all of the pro-capitalist parties.

“Alive we want them back!”

By Thais Yáñez

On 26 September students at the Mexican Normal de Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College in Iguala, Guerrero, were planning to go to Mexico City to join a protest.

The students peacefully took over three buses, common for protests in Mexico, and were asking fellow passengers for money to fund their trip when they were ambushed by the police who started shooting indiscriminately.

Attacks from police and gunmen in civilian clothing left six dead including one student who was skinned and was left with no eyes. Five were gravely wounded (one is now brain dead) and 43 became “disappeared” comrades, whose whereabouts are still unknown.

Initially many blamed the mayor, Abadal, whose history of corruption and involvement with cartels through his wife is well known. However this incident goes beyond his small office. In fact he went into hiding shortly after the

event. He was finally found and arrested. But the investigation shouldn't stop there. Did he give the order alone? Is the federal government trying to make him the only scapegoat?

Forty-three families are looking for their children who went missing whilst fighting for democracy and support for rural colleges and schools.

The forty-three families were received by the President of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto and were promised justice. It hasn't been delivered. One of the fathers of a missing comrade would later ask the President himself, face to face, for his resignation as he cannot control what his people do.

All over the world support and solidarity has been mounting for the families and the students of Ayotzinapa, not only from Mexicans abroad but from progressive students everywhere. There have been many demonstrations out-



side Mexican embassies. In Mexico demonstrations are very often held to cry, to mourn, to protest, to demand the government to give us back our brothers. “Alive they took them. Alive we want them”.

These events happened just five days before Mexico commemorated the 46th anniversary of the biggest massacre of students the country has seen

In the Tlatelolco massacre of 2 October 1968 between 30 and 300 students were shot by police in Mexico City. Sadly, 46 years later Mexico still struggles with becoming a democratic country.

Scottish Labour: vote Findlay!

Scotland



By Dale Street

Over a hundred people turned up last Saturday (8 November) to a rally in Fauldhouse at which Neil Findlay MSP launched his campaign to be voted in as leader of the Scottish Labour Party (SLP).

Neil is the left challenger for the position, with Katy Clark MP standing as the left candidate for the post of SLP deputy leader.

Both of them are committed to rebuilding electoral support for Labour by a return to “the timeless Labour values of community, solidarity, fairness and justice.” They want Labour to adopt policies to attack poverty, unemployment, exploitation in the workplace, and health and wealth inequalities.

Both of them also have an established track record of campaigning for such policies. Unlike one of their competitors in the elections — Jim Murphy MP — they have not discovered such issues only after the resignations of the previous SLP leader and deputy leader.

Neil and Katy have won nominations from Unison, Unite, GMB, UCATT, ASLEF and TSSA.

Constituency Labour Parties are meeting this week to decide on their nominations. CLPs already backing one or both of the candidates include Glasgow Kelvin, Cunninghame South, Coatbridge and Chryston, Almond Valley, and Carick, Cumnock and Doon Valley.

Hundreds of CLP and trade union activists have also already volunteered to help build support for their election campaigns.

In deciding which candidate to support for leader and deputy leader, SLP members and members of affiliated organisations need to face up to reality and recognise the tasks now confronting the SLP.

Between 1997 and 2010 Labour Party national membership fell by over 60% (from 440,000 to 180,000). Over the same period Labour lost five million votes and two trade unions disaffiliated from the party.

SLP membership is now around one fifth of that of the SNP. The SLP lost the 2007 and 2011 Holyrood elections. Electoral support for the SLP between 1999 and 2011



Neil Findlay MSP is the left challenger for leader of the Scottish Labour Party

slumped by a third. And although an overall majority voted “No” in the recent referendum, what had once been Labour urban heartlands voted “Yes”.

Recent opinion polls put Labour on around 23% of the vote and the SNP on 52%. In a Westminster general election this would give Labour just four seats, and the SNP 54.

The politics which have reduced the SLP to this pitiful state are the politics represented and embodied by Jim Murphy.

Murphy voted in favour of spending billions of pounds on

war in Iraq. He has also voted in favour of a benefits cap for claimants. That sums up his politics: billions for war, but more attacks on the unemployed and low paid.

In an earlier life as President of the National Union of Students Murphy railroaded through the dumping of NUS policy opposing the scrapping of student grants. On a scale of one to ten, his chances of rebuilding support for Labour among young people are therefore zero.

People in Scotland, like elsewhere, are disenchanted with politicians. Murphy is not going to restore their faith in them. He rented out his property in London, and then exploited the parliamentary allowance of £20,000 to rent a property for himself.

Murphy has certainly won more nominations from career-minded parliamentarians than the candidates of the left. He has also won nominations from small and poorly attended CLP meetings. And the right-wing media have boosted him as the “odds-on favourite”.

But, symptomatically, the only union backing Murphy to date is Community (although USDAW may end up nominating him as well) – and Community is very small, very right-wing, very bureaucratic, and renowned as the union for labour movement careerists.

The problem is not that Murphy has a lot of skeletons in his cupboard. The problem is that he is the skeleton.

If Murphy is elected SLP leader, the SLP should rename itself Dignitas Scotland – the only difference being that Dignitas is about people dying with dignity whereas a Murphy-led SLP would be more likely to die a lonely, miserable, poverty-stricken death in the gutter of Scottish politics.

The time is long overdue for SLP members to have a leader who is not an embarrassment, one for whom they are not constantly required to apologise.

The last SLP leader invoked Thatcherite language to attack Scotland’s supposed “something for nothing culture”. Her predecessor ran away – quite literally – from political argument. And his predecessor, despite having overall responsibility for the entire Scottish budget, could not even keep track of the rental income from subletting part of his constituency office.

Nominations by CLPs, trade unions and affiliated societies close at midday on 14 November. The next stage will be to win further support for Neil and Katy in the balloting period, running from 17 November to 10 December.

The exaggerated death of the Scottish Labour Left

The quote (actually a misquote) attributed to Mark Twain that reports of his death had been greatly exaggerated, could equally well apply to the Scottish Labour Left.

The vast majority of socialists in the Scottish Labour Party (SLP) campaigned for and voted “no” in the referendum campaign. This in itself was enough for many in Left groups outside the SLP to consign it to the dustbin of history, rather perversely given the long anti-nationalist history of the socialist movement.

Of course, and here I have some sympathy, this sat alongside other accusations that the Scottish Labour Left had made little impact ideologically on the SLP, was numerically small, and showed little sign of challenging for the political leadership of the party any time soon.

On Saturday 25 October, all of that changed.

It wasn’t just that the room booked for the Campaign for Socialism’s post-referendum analysis in the STUC in Glasgow had standing room only; it was the renewed sense of purpose and commitment from so many of the speakers and participants.

First up among a high powered list of political, trade union and local council speakers were Elaine Smith and Neil Findlay, both MSPs.

Elaine Smith argued that the reason for Scottish Labour’s poor performance in its heartlands of Dundee, Glasgow, Lanarkshire and West Dunbarton was a lack of socialist analy-

sis and socialist solutions.

“The root of the problem is class society; the root of the problem is inequality; the root of the problem is in-work poverty; the root of the problem is unemployment. The root of the problem is avaricious capitalism and our job and the job of the Labour Party, surely, is to root it out.”

Neil Findlay spoke next, suggesting in some detail how Scottish Labour might go about the tasks that Elaine Smith had outlined arguing that Scottish Labour had to commit to:

- a policy of full employment;
- establish a national house-building programme to build council houses and social housing on a grand scale;
- set up a living wage unit in the Scottish government that would use grants, procurement and every lever of government to raise the minimum wage to the living wage;
- re-democratise local government, financing services, freeing councils to set their own taxes again and be held to account for doing and so beginning to reverse the 40,000 job losses across Scottish councils;
- end the social care scandal by making social care a rewarding, fairly paid career and ending the indignity of short-timed care visits;
- create quality apprenticeships and new college places that set young people up for life and develop an industrial policy that promotes manufacturing and new sustainable

jobs;

- undertake a wholesale review of the Scottish NHS — recruiting enough staff and rewarding them to ensure an NHS for the 21st century and ending the increasing spend on the private sector;

- and, finally, build a charter of workers’ rights and new legislation on equalities.

Neil Findlay’s contribution was all the more important given the announcement on the day before the conference that Johann Lamont, leader of the Scottish Labour Party had resigned, citing unacceptable interference from the UK Labour leadership, and ensuring a Scottish Labour leadership contest.

Neil Findlay has since announced his intention to stand for the vacant post allowing the Scottish Labour Left to test the support for a Left agenda in the wider party.

The anticipation of this challenge on 25 October generated considerable optimism.

This left programme is far from the Utopian promises of the Yes Left because it is actually deliverable and this Labour Left is far from a historical footnote. It may actually be on the verge of its most important hour.

Vince Mills,
Campaign for Socialism and Red Papers Collective

Tories plan to double cuts

The Tories' declared budget plans mean more and more cuts, and at an accelerating rate, in 2015-20.

On top of the £25 billion cut from annual budgets between 2010-11 and 2014-5, they would cut another £48 billion from those budgets by 2018-9.

The *Financial Times* estimated the numbers from official statistics and the Tories' declared intention to have the government budget in overall surplus (current income covering both current and capital spending) by 2020.

The Tories plan to do that by cuts, not by taxing the rich. They have offered tax cuts to the rich, on inheritance tax for example. They may increase taxes hitting the worse-off, such as VAT, but have announced no plans for that.

The *Financial Times* conclusions are in the same ballpark as a 19 September study by the conservative Institute for Fiscal Studies, which estimated that Tory plans mean they would "cut spending by government departments by a further 10.6% in real terms (or £37.6 billion) between 2015-16 and 2018-19. This is on top of the £8.7 billion cut that has already been set out for 2015-16".

Both the IFS and the *FT* debunk David Cameron's claim on 30 October that Tory plans imply much milder cuts in 2015-20.

To make the £48 billion cuts just from administration expenses of government departments would imply virtually shutting down some departments, drastically cutting civil service wages, and passing on even sharper cuts to local councils.

Even the Tories are unlikely to do all that. Tory chancellor George Osborne has said that some cuts will come through reducing welfare benefits for working-age people even more.

Probably the Tories will increase their benefit cuts, take cuts into benefits for pensioners (so far less affected), and scrap or subvert their supposed ring-fence for health, schools, and overseas aid. Already the NHS is stretched because the "ring-fence" assumes large "savings", does not allow for increased medical costs and an ageing population, and does not allow for the extra admin costs coming with the Tories' drive for contracting-out to private profiteers.

The Lib-Dems, anxious to differentiate themselves from the Tories in the run-up to the general election, have said they want a looser budget-balancing target.

So have Labour. But the Labour leaders, terrified by opinion polls showing most people say the Tories are more "economically competent" than Labour, still say they will continue cuts, only more softly.

At the Labour Party's National Policy Forum in July 2014, all the big unions joined with the Labour leaders to vote down a move from constituency activists to commit a Labour government after 2015 to refusing cuts.



Italian workers plan strikes

In fact, economic depression calls for increased public spending rather than cuts. And what budget-balancing is necessary should be done by taxing the rich, whose wealth is spiralling, not by freezing wages and cutting services and benefits for the majority.

The union leaders sometimes echo that message, and should be made to fight for it.

The Tories' policy is only a more extreme version of what is being done across Europe. In some countries, unions are now fighting back.

In Belgium, 120,000 workers joined a demonstration on 7 November against the cuts plans of the new right-wing coalition government. Even the Catholic union confederation



says: "We make everything, they make nothing. Everything they have, they have stolen. Redistribute working hours, redistribute wealth!"

The social-democratic union confederation (Belgium has two "TUCs") plans regional strikes between 24 November and 8 December, and a national one-day strike on 15 December.

In Italy, a million people marched on 25 October against prime minister Renzi's attack on job-security laws. The metalworkers' federation FIOM has called a series of regional protest strikes between 14 November and 27 November.

Labour needs anti-cuts policy, not a Blairite new leader

By Jon Lansman



Labour MPs are their own worst enemies.

Many of them are panicked about losing their seats, and are sufficiently stupid and disloyal to blame Ed Miliband and brief the press accordingly. Deputy chief whip, Alan Campbell, rather than feeding reports of discontent to his leader, is whipping it up.

And yet, if Labour MPs keep their cool, there will be no Labour meltdown in England or Wales in 2015. UKIP may take a seat or two from us, and prevent us winning a few marginals. But we shall still win others from the Tories and Lib Dems, whose problems are worse than ours. And no short-coming of Ed Miliband is responsible for the rise of UKIP.

Scotland is a different story. Labour could face meltdown there in 2015 and 2016. And it will be worse if Jim Murphy and Kezia Dugdale win the current leadership contests. But

that too has nothing to do with Ed Miliband, though a second leadership contest in the UK party would make matters even worse.

The idea of a smooth, consensual transfer of the leadership to Alan Johnson, the man who told Kirsty Wark in 2007 that he wasn't up to the job of Leader and who demonstrated through the gaffes of his short period as shadow chancellor that he lacked a grasp of basic economics, is just plain daft.

He may be working class, whose humble origins and tough upbringing are now well known. Len McCluskey may have suggested he be given a role in Labour's campaign. But he's still a leading Blairite who backed privatisation of the industry in which he worked. Without question, he would face a contest if he stood for the leadership.

There is no alternative candidate who could command such widespread support that a simple transfer of the leadership is possible. Six months before an election, just forget it.

And those who continue to speculate about it do nothing but undermine and damage their own party.



Replacing Ed Miliband by a Blairite would not help

• From www.leftfutures.org

Kobane: tide is turning

By Simon Nelson

The situation in Kobane has been boosted by the arrival of Iraqi-Kurdish peshmerga fighters, whose commander Ahmaf Gardi has stated that: "We will not leave until the city is wiped clean of ISIS".

A representative of YPG, the military wing of the PYD, is quoted as saying that the "existence of peshmerga in Kobane changed the balance of power. We are advancing towards ISIS positions, and now the majority of the city is under our control".

Figures released by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimate that over 1,000 people have now been killed during the siege of Kobane. The majority of those killed have been Islamic State (ISIS) fighters, and the total does not include those killed in the US-led airstrikes.

The Iraqi Kurdish Rudaw website reports that the Turkish state has killed a pro-Kobane activist when she and 12 others rushed the border during a brief stand-off between Syrian Kurds and Turkish troops.

They were on a demonstration, not just to show support for the PYD (Democratic Union Party) and PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party), the two largest forces now engaged in fighting ISIS, but to monitor Turkish state complicity with ISIS, who are believed to have up to 4000 fighters surrounding Kobane.

In Iraq the US has announced the next stage in their proposed fight against ISIS. 1600 US military advisors are currently in Iraq and will be joined by 1500 more US troops to assist and "rebuild" the Iraqi Army.

There has been a wave of car bombs in Baghdad targeting Shias, and distrust of the security forces amongst the Sunni minority and sectarian tension are steadily rising.

US President Obama has tried to reassure public opinion that he does not intend to commit combat troops to fighting IS directly. Speaking to CBS he said: "Our troops are not engaged in combat... we are taking four training centres... that allow us to bring in Iraqi troops, some of the Sunni tribes.... giving them proper training, proper equipment, helping them with strategy, helping them with logistics".

But the US troop surge in 2007 which managed to evoke and sustain Sunni militias fighting against ISIS's predecessor Al-Qaeda in Iraq was soon replaced with US support for the Shia-sectarian government of Maliki which helped to disenfranchise and exclude those Sunni fighters from the new Iraqi state.



What Turkish Marxists

The Turkish revolutionary socialists of Marksist Tutum have responded to questions put to them by Solidarity.

What is your assessment of the Turkish government's policy with regards to ISIS?

Despite official denials and recent back-steps, the Turkish government supported ISIS wherever it suited their interests. It did this in various ways: providing them shelter, arms aid, training facilities, treatment of ISIS militants, providing safe passage to Syria via Turkey etc. Recently it abandoned apparently some of these at least.

The government followed this policy as part of its general policy towards the Middle East. That policy is a consequence of the new level of development of Turkish capitalism. Being the 17th biggest economy in the world and a member G-20, Turkey has been a sub-imperialist country for some time. AKP's particular ideological background produces aspirations to establish dominance over the region as was in the past exercised by the Ottoman Empire.

However, supporting radical Islamist groups is only one form of this general imperialist policy. Before the mass revolt and civil war in Syria, Turkish government was following a different policy. They tried to establish friendly relations with Assad with a view to transforming the regime in a peaceful way from top down. Assad seemed to agree.

With the wave of popular revolts in the Arab world, Turkey became alarmed and changed course in relation to Syria. First, it was because of the Kurdish question in the context of Syria. The Turkish government was aware that Syria was in a process of being divided up. And they did not want the Syrian Kurds to take advantage of the Syrian civil war and gain some kind of autonomy like in Iraq.

Keep in mind that Syrian Kurdish movement is dominated by the PYD, which is part of the wider PKK movement. Any PYD gains in Syria would certainly strengthen PKK's hand in the talks going on between the Turkish government and the PKK. And secondly, not to lose ground to gain a position in Syria after Assad's expected overthrow. They expected a relatively fast overthrow of Assad as in the examples of Ben Ali, Mubarak and Gaddafi.

To implement its imperialist policy in practice the Turkish government decided to capitalize on sectarian divides in the region. As they needed actual local forces on the ground, they chose to support the Islamist groups, like many other imperialist and regional powers in the region do.

How have Kurds in Turkey reacted to the ISIS-Kurdish conflict?

Kurds in Turkey are very sensitive over the question of Kobane. ISIS attacks on Kobane with Turkish government backing caused fury among the Kurds in Turkey. They launched a broad campaign to make solidarity with Kobane under siege.

There have been also many mass protests across Turkey. Apart from these many Kurdish youth went there to join the fight. Hundreds of thousands of Kurdish people joined the mass demonstrations called by HDP.

During mass demonstrations on October 6-7, more than 40 people were killed by the police and fascists.

What have the different responses on the left in Turkey been?

In general the left sided with the Kobane resistance against ISIS. But there are differences in attitude and approach.

For example, those sections of the left with Kemalist leanings expressed their uneasiness with the US support for Kobane. So they have been more distanced in their support for Kobane. And on the other extreme, we have those left groups who act as appendages of the Kurdish movement and

mass around it. Their support for Kurdish movement is not principled and they abandon Marxist principles in their approach. They seem to have forgotten the task of Marxist revolutionaries to bring socialist consciousness to workers and organise them.

What activities have you and those you work with carried out around these questions?

We have been doing a variety of things in regard to this question. First of all, we organised marches in working class neighbourhoods and invited other groups and institutions to join. Aside from publishing articles and statements in our publications, we keep our independent work in factories, industrial areas and working class neighbourhoods by setting up stands for a robust agitation, and distributing leaflets to break the chauvinist wave among workers. We keep holding educational seminars and events every week and regularly visiting workers' homes in working class neighbourhoods.

Apart from our independent work, we take part in general protests, demonstrations and campaigns in support of Kobane. We are part of the HDK (People's Democratic Congress) which is a kind of front including the Kurdish movement and many socialist parties and groups.

We joined the marches and demonstrations called by HDK and HDP (People's Democratic Party).

We read on your website that various trade unions in Turkey called strikes in support of the Kurdish struggle against ISIS. Can you say more about this, whether it was surprising to you, what the response from workers was, etc? Are there any more such actions planned?

Yes there were those calls, but they were unfortunately ineffective. No strikes took place. It was a token move having almost no substance.

This is mainly because trade-unions in Turkey are generally ineffective and "weightless". They are extremely disorganised and bureaucratised. They have almost no contact with their membership, resulting in workers having no trust in them.

What is your assessment of why the US government has undertaken bombing, e.g. in support of Kobane, and what slogans would you raise with regard to this military intervention?

We think the question is formulated in an erroneous way which rules out an integral answer. We will try to give our answer by splitting up the question.

a) As for the reason why the US imperialism has undertaken bombing: the US imperialism has its own interests in the region. It actually provided the basis for the rise of ISIS and now is making use of it as a pretext to re-intervene in the region. It turned a blind eye to the growth of ISIS up to a certain stage. But when ISIS seized Mosul and began attacking Iraqi Kurdistan, the US imperialism became alarmed and started its campaign.

But even now we don't think its goal is to eradicate it completely. It seeks to reduce ISIS into a more controllable level. And, to do that it needs forces on the ground.

After many cases of defeat suffered by other forces against ISIS, the example of Shengal resistance led by the PKK and Kobane resistance by the PYD showed that the PKK and its wider movement are the only serious force that proved itself in the fight against ISIS on the ground.

And the US imperialism seized the opportunity to re-impose itself on the region by showing its support for the Kurds. Keep in mind that the wider PKK movement is almost the only secular Muslim force in the region having a mass base.

Also, in regard to the Kurdish question in Turkey, US im-

s say about Kobane and PKK

Berlin demonstration in solidarity with Kobane



perialism was very keen to be in the game. The Kobane issue was a perfect opportunity for it to get involved. It seized the opportunity to present itself as the protector of the Kurds.

b) We do not think the second part of the question is posed correctly. There is an imperialist war going on and what we experience at present are instances, moments of it. They are within the logic of an imperialist war.

Revolutionary Marxists are not in a position to say “yes or no” to these kinds of turns and moments and raise specific slogans in regard to them. We reject this “yes or no” dichotomy. We must not lose sight of the greater picture. These kinds of instances are simply part of imperialist war.

We must stress that saying no to US bombing in this particular bombing is not necessarily anti-imperialist. One must remember that it is not a rarity that national liberation movements receive support from this or that big power.

While this bombing helped the Kurdish forces in Kobane, we know that imperialists do not carry out this out of good intentions towards the Kurds and that later it might mean something completely different. This is a very slippery ground. We must expose the essence of the imperialist war and express our support to the resistance of the Kurdish people.

How would you assess the character of the PKK and its movement and, in so far as you can judge, the forms of social and political organisation in the areas of Syrian Kurdistan it controls, e.g. Kobane?

The PKK was founded at the end of 1970s by Kurdish revolutionary intellectuals. At a time when the USSR still existed and many national movements around the world called themselves Marxist-Leninist (ML) to be able to get its support, the PKK followed the same path.

In the beginning this movement appeared as a revolt of the radical urban petty-bourgeoisie and poor peasants, adopted the strategy of people’s war, claimed to be socialist, but argued that the first task to be given priority was to create an independent and united Kurdistan. It had no difficulty in

finding a justification for this argument in the Stalinist conception of revolution in stages.

After the 1980 military-fascist coup in Turkey, the fascist regime inflicted heavy blows on all left organisations and imposed a suffocating repression over the whole society. The PKK launched a guerrilla war in Turkish Kurdistan against the Turkish state in 1984.

After the collapse of the USSR at the beginning of 1990s, the PKK began to strip itself of the burdens of the ML label. It declared that it did not assume the ML label anymore, dropped the hammer and sickle from its flag, and even changed its name several times in the following years.

Thus it placed itself on a political line corresponding to its real nature (peasant-based petty-bourgeois).

Despite this, we emphasised, on the basis of the fact that Kurds are a people deprived of their democratic rights, the democratic and relative historical progressive character of the national liberationist struggle of the PKK against the racist-chauvinist and eliminationist Turkish state. We have defended the necessity of unconditional acknowledgement of Kurdish people’s right to self-determination, including independence. We have regarded the Kurdish movement fighting for this demand as not a socialist but a democratic and progressive movement.

We knew from the start that the PKK was not a Marxist and socialist movement based on a proletarian class ground. For us the PKK was a national liberation movement waging a legitimate and rightful struggle. Like every progressive national movement it had a bourgeois democratic character, programme and aims. We have never found it right to attach socialist labels to it.

We must underline that, for us, those approaches that assume the PKK as socialist and then blame it for betraying socialism are fundamentally wrong. Also we need to make it clear that as the PKK gained strength and spread its influence over various cities all around Turkey, a wrong belief that the PKK is a socialist organisation of the working class gained influence among Kurdish workers and particularly Kurdish left youth.

This belief is an illusion, and the perception of the PKK as an organisation waging the socialist struggle of the working class does not strengthen the revolutionary struggle of Turkish and Kurdish workers, but weaken it.

As it grew stronger, the bourgeois democratic national character of the PKK has become more apparent. However, the burning character of the Kurdish question, especially taking the present disorganised situation of the working class into account, keeps this movement as the most important democratic dynamic of Turkey.

Another reason for our support to the democratic demands of this movement is to break the nationalist prejudices among the Turkish working class. Considering the existing widespread Turkish chauvinism, this position is a hard one to maintain, but we do not have the slightest intention to submit to chauvinism and compromise our internationalist principles on this issue.

As for the second part of your question, different political groups in Syrian Kurdistan, i.e. Rojava, agreed to establish a cantonal structure under the leadership of PYD. They declared three cantons in Rojava, which are territorially separated from one another.

A relatively democratic system of government practice has begun. In the assemblies of cantons not only Kurds but Arabs, Turkmen, etc. are given certain quotas and women’s representation is also considered. They implement a co-chair system in many levels of government, allowing women to actively take part in government business.

It is important to emphasise that the steps taken by Rojava government are in the sphere of bourgeois democratic reforms. It would not be correct to equate these kinds of reforms with a commune-like structure or with socialist reforms.

Some groups on the Turkish left are very keen to label these reforms as a kind of commune, even surpassing the experience of the Paris Commune, the soviets, and the workers’ councils. This is an extreme exaggeration which is harmful.

You do not need to do that in order to extend your support to the struggle of the Kurdish people and their democratic achievements. But the level of some of the Turkish left is so low that they could even talk about the existence of a “commune” in the Gezi Park protests.

What do you think the left and workers’ organisations internationally can and should do about all this?

First we must repeat that there is an imperialist war in progress. And the Middle East is the main battle ground. This is the greater picture to understand the deep nature of developments and put them in context. Without understanding this fact no-one can take a correct and consistent attitude.

Marxists across the world should expose and act against the imperialist intentions of their own governments in the first place. They must carry on serious activity within the working class to explain to them the nature this imperialist war. And they must fight nationalist sentiments within the working class and swim against the current if necessary.

Part of the Marxist attitude towards imperialist wars is the duty to support the right to self-determination of the oppressed peoples and support their national democratic demands and movements against their oppressors. In the case of the Kurdish national movement in Rojava, and Kobane in particular, the left can organise various activities to raise this question in all working class organisations, particularly in trade-unions.

There is also a campaign led by the Kurdish movement to aid besieged Kobane. We know that some left groups joined the international day of action in support of Kobane. This is a good example.

The PKK and Rojava

By Simon Nelson

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was founded in 1977 by a small group of students who had previously been involved in the banned Dev-Genç (Revolutionary Youth) organisation, one of several revolutionary organisations that formed in Turkey in the 1960s.

PKK defined itself as a “Marxist-Leninist” organisation prepared to wage armed struggle for an independent Kurdistan, and its base was mainly the Kurdish peasantry in the mountains of South Eastern Turkey.

It found auxiliary bases of support across Europe among Kurdish workers who had emigrated. At that stage the PKK described its mode of operation as “revolution in the countryside” which would have to take a “national character”.

Since the PKK’s formation, over 30,000 people have been killed in fighting between their fighters and Turkish state forces.

In 1980 a guerilla group called the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party–Front (DHKP/C) assassinated Turkish Prime Minister Nihat Erim. A general crackdown on armed and opposition political groups forced the PKK leadership and much of its militia to flee to Syria and Lebanon. Abdullah Öcalan, one of PKK’s founders and its current leader, had already set up bases there and began to build contacts with other movements.

The PKK had uneasy relationships with Kurdish groups and parties in Syria, Iraq and Iran. However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s it was able to operate across the borders of those states particularly during the 1991 Gulf War. It was heavily associated with the importation of heroin through Iraq.

Early attempts by the Turkish government at peace negotiations fell apart in 1995 following the death of Turgut Ozal, a half-Kurdish Turkish Prime Minister. In the mid 1990s, after Kurds in Iraq gained a form of regional self-government, the PKK restarted its campaign against the Turkish state with a series of bombings, coupled with thousands of PKK prisoners going on hunger strike.

Following clashes with the two major Iraqi Kurdish parties, the PKK was forced to retreat from its bases in Iraq. It was then largely forced to operate from Syria and under increasing international pressure to use peaceful methods to fulfil its aims. Further international pressure increased following several suicide bombings, largely conducted by women within Turkey.

Relations between Turkey and Syria were increasingly under strain as the Government of Hafez al- Assad had sheltered Öcalan and the PKK leadership and allowed their military and intelligence training as well as drug trafficking to continue with relatively little interference.

At various points the PKK has sought and been supported by Syria, Iran, Iraq and Armenia. Under increasing pressure from Turkey and Germany, where there is both a large Kurdish and Turkish community, the Syrian state confirmed it would assist Turkey in driving out the PKK.

The Syrian regime incurred Turkish ire for its lack of action, but when Turkey broke off diplomatic relations in 1998, Syria reacted and Öcalan was deported.

From exile in Rome, Öcalan declared that he wanted an end to the war and to get a political solution to Kurdish autonomy through a “process of peace and democracy”.

He was arrested in Nairobi by the Turkish intelligence forces and has remained in a Turkish prison in Imerli ever since. He was sentenced to death, but pressure from the EU, which Turkey was hoping to join, commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. Through his lawyers, he remains the PKK’s leader.

He is commonly known as Apo, meaning uncle. His published books, particularly since his arrest are extensive, and his image adorns the yellow flags of Kurdish protestors and activists across the world.

Zaher Baher of Haringey Solidarity Group and Kurdistan Anarchists Forum has commented that the work of Öcalan is treated almost as “sacred”, and that schoolchildren are told about him as the great leader of the Kurdish people.

His control of over the PKK and its affiliates from prison remains very strong. The apparent shift in their ideology from a nationalist variant of “Marxism-Leninism” (Stalinism)



to the theory of “democratic confederalism” has not widened the democracy within the PKK itself, which retains a strictly hierarchical and largely military apparatus.

Murders of former members and rivals have continued, and Öcalan himself has had to request that no more of his supporters go on hunger strike for his release or repeat the act of six of his supporters in self immolating in order to get his release.

The BDP (Peace and Democracy Party), which is currently the largest legal Kurdish party in Turkey, calls for Öcalan to be the lead negotiator with the government on a peace deal. Alisia Marcus, an expert on the PKK, has said that if Öcalan were to die in prison then the Turkish state would be seen as complicit and this would make any deal much harder to negotiate.

Former members of the PKK who have been expelled or left have also made claims about the PKK’s attitude to women. Many women are involved in combat operations and that they play a major role in the fighting against ISIS in Syria.

However Mehmet Cahit Sener, a founder of the PKK, has claimed of Öcalan that: “[He] has forced dozens of our female comrades to immoral relations with him, defiled most and declared the ones who insisted on refusing to be people ‘who haven’t understood the party, who haven’t understood us’... The relations between men and women within the party have turned into a harem in Apo’s palace and many female comrades were treated as concubines by this individual”.

DROPPED

In a widely available quote from Öcalan’s 1992 book, *Analyses, Orders and Perspectives* he writes:

“On these subjects, they leave aside all the real measurements and find someone and gossip, say ‘this was attempted to be done to me here’ or ‘this was done to me there!’ These shameless women both want to give too much and then develop such things... I’m saying it openly again. This is the sort of warrior I am. I love girls a lot, I value them a lot. I love all of them. I try to turn every girl into a lover... I define myself openly. If you find me dangerous, don’t get close!”

The PKK dropped the hammer and sickle from its flag in 1991 and now does not consider itself a nationalist organisation as it no longer calls for an independent Kurdistan. It views itself as the military wing of the “Kurdish freedom movement”, and although it remains committed to armed struggle in defence of Kurds it no longer describes this as its main field of activity.

Like the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein the PKK has now moved towards gaining wider political legitimacy. The Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK) is now the umbrella organisation that brings together the PKK and all its international affiliates, political parties and campaigning organisations.

Following Öcalan’s arrest and imprisonment there has been a supposed change in his ideology to something he

refers to as “Democratic Confederalism”. This is influenced by the American leftist Murray Bookchin, who mostly described himself as an anarchist but in his later years rejected the label.

Öcalan is quoted as saying this rests on replacing the basic elements of modern society, “capitalism, the nation-state, and industrialism” with “democratic nation, communal economy, and ecological industry”.

To do this requires three distinct programs for a “democratic republic”, for “democratic-confederalism”, and for “democratic autonomy”. This means in short, the granting of Kurdish civil rights, and a move from representative forms of democracy to a “more direct... political structure”.

Some of the British left believe that this is being achieved in parts of Syrian Kurdistan and in Diyarbakir, the largest city in Turkish Kurdistan.

On the ground, assemblies exist, but they are dominated by the PYD, which also control all the arms and military actions in the area. In a report by the Crisis Group, a resident of Qamishli is reported as stating in an interview: “People’s councils are for everybody, not only Kurds. In Qamishli, Christians have their own council leader responsible for gas distribution who is selected by the PYD.... Members and leaders are selected by the PYD and report to the PYD-controlled police”.

Another is quoted as saying: “I was in the YPG since before the uprising... Since last year, at least 400 new PKK military personnel came from Turkey and Iran. They are not Syrians, and they want to control everything”.

The PYD, whilst tolerating opposition parties and activists, remains in full control of the state. Salih Muslim, the PYD leader, has also made statements suggesting Arabs may be forcibly expelled from Kurdish areas.

David Graeber, in his widely-read *Guardian* article “Why is the world ignoring the revolutionary Kurds in Syria?” (bit.ly/graebr), says in passing: “Clearly, authoritarian elements remain”, but does not expand on what this means and how or whether this will be overcome.

The KCK contract which is part of the political basis for Rojava states that: “This system is one that takes into account ethnic, religious and class differences on a social basis... Three systems of law will apply in Kurdistan: EU law, unitary state law, democratic confederal law”.

Whilst the Rojava cantons are vastly superior to the medieval barbarism of ISIS we should not have illusions that such a system has somehow abolished class antagonisms, or that a guerrilla movement with a Stalinist background has been able to transform itself so readily and with little opposition into protectors of a libertarian autonomous zone.

The PYD and its allied forces are defending the Kurds from IS fighters and protecting the right of Kurds to self-determination. That is enough to mandate international solidarity; but the need for independent working-class and socialist politics among the Kurds is still very real.

•Sources: bit.ly/refpkk

Never go down without a fight

How I became a socialist
by Karina Knight



I was born in 1974 and grew up in the north east of England in the 70s and 80s.

It was a properly matriarchal family. My mother was one of six sisters. Their deceased father and their mother had been solid Labour supporters. I was told stories by Lesley (my mother) of them stitching rosettes for the party when they were young “until their fingers bled” — there may have been some exaggeration, maybe not!

There were also socialist feminist politics about — my auntie Anna had been involved in *Scarlet Women*, a socialist feminist zine, copies were knocking about the house. We had posters of Victor Jara and the FSLN (the Nicaragua Sandinista National Liberation Front), courtesy of a couple of my uncles.

As I became politically aware in the early 80s, my earliest influences were anti-nuclear activity. Lesley was involved in Coast CND (Whitley Bay) — we did flag days, street theatre (which involved lots of dying) and I got taken down to Greenham Common twice. I remember being scared shitless a lot of the time.

Although socialist politics were present in the background and were a fundamental influence on my concepts of right and wrong, we weren't generally labour movement activists. The miners' strike went by on the telly. That's not to say that members of my extended family weren't involved, but if they were that knowledge didn't filter through to 10 year old me.

My early teenage years were taken up with vegetarianism and animal rights. I knew the world was deeply unfair and had a strong sense of morality, but it hadn't found political direction and was fundamentally individualistic.

I flirted briefly with radical feminist ideas in my mid-teens, but these were only attractive in that they gave political cover and justification in my mind to my lesbian sexuality — a psychological defence against internalised homophobia, if I'm brutally honest.

I met the AWL in 1991. I learnt then about socialist ideas, about solidarity, about class unity. I came to understand that capitalism exploits the whole planet as well as the working class, that women's structural oppression developed in tandem with private property; that lots that we hold dear and important was won through class struggle; that class society must end before we can become free, physically, economically and psychologically; and that the working class has the power within it to radically transform the world.

I stayed in the group until 1995. It wasn't political differences that made me fall out of activity. In 1995 I was in a minibus crash with our Lancaster comrades that ultimately claimed the lives of three of our young comrades, one of whom was my partner, Jo Walker. Guilt, grief and depression took me out of functioning life for a few years.

In some ways, it was easier during the period of the Labour government to not think too hard. Yes, they extended privatisation of the NHS and other public services but the investment was there, you could get an NHS appointment within target time, I had a well enough paying job to insulate myself.

Then the Tories came back, fighting for their class with all their might, to destroy our limited gains and send our class back to penury.

When they were elected I felt like we had a stark choice: either roll over and die, or fight back. No escaping the bitter fact of class war now, it was right on our doorstep. It was time to re-engage with socialist politics seriously, and to become organised again. It's taken a couple of years to get back to where I was — some long-term mental health issues needed sorting, but here I am.

Even when we lose a battle there are some things to be gained: knowledge, confidence, the forging of links and solidarity between sections of our class; the personal and collective dignity of every victory, and in every defeat, the knowledge that we could not, and absolutely did not, go down without a fight.

The gothic reaction to industrial capitalism

Luke Hardy reviews 'The Art of the Gothic', BBC 4.

What have Karl Marx, Dracula, a modern robotic production line and St Pancras station got in common? According to Andrew Dixon, they all have more than a touch of the gothic about them.

In this three part series, Dixon makes a convincing and fascinating case that the gothic sensibility has become a way of responding to and critiquing industrial capitalism and the urbanism, technology and pollution that comes with it.

Dixon points out that the modern, world-wide obsession with the irrational, deranged, morbid and spectral that makes up gothic started out as little more than an aristocratic fashion in mid-18th century Britain. Those fed up with “classical” architecture and literature were drawn to medieval ruins and the bloodthirsty tragedies of William Shakespeare. Lost texts of the middle ages were re-discovered or made up and passed off as ancient.

However these ruling-class fads took on a very different dimension with the coming of industrial capitalism, the French revolution, and the scientific and a technological revolution. Dixon introduces us to the painter Joseph Wright, from Derby, who captured the new mills and foundries as every bit as horrific and forbidding in the landscape as the castles of *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. Wright makes a scientist seem more like a dangerous sorcerer as he suffocates a bird in a elaborate but cruel experiment.

Dixon expands his definition of gothic far beyond the usual definition — horror stories and medieval style architecture — to become by the nineteenth century a whole sensibility and world view as contradictory as the age. There were reactionary utopians like Augustus Pugin and John Ruskin who wanted to use gothic architecture to return to what they saw as the certainties and social cohesion of the pre-capitalist middle ages. Dickens shows us the London of the mid-19th

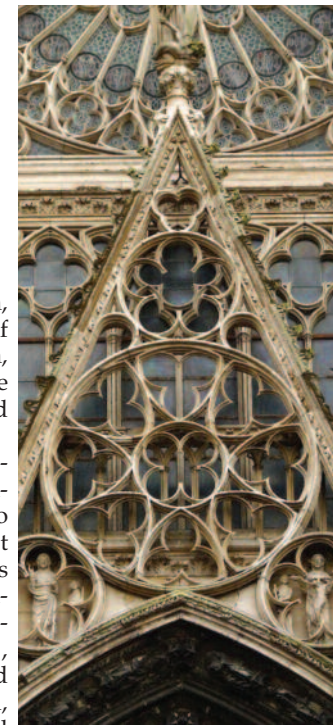
century as a nightmarish, smog-smothered, warren of slums, prisons, degradation, poverty and despair, beside a diseased and polluted river.

It was in the final instalment that Dixon's idiosyncratic vision came fully into its own. Dixon points out how much gothic imagery is suffused through Marx's critique of capitalism. The capitalist is “vampire-like”, spectres haunt Europe and commodities are congealed, dead labour transmogrified into voodoo-like fetishes. Dixon also talks about William Morris and his critique of modern production techniques and the factory system for dehumanising production.

Like Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's monster, technology under capitalism can sometimes seem to be beyond our control and become a means of humanity's own destruction. Dixon also saw a gothic critique of empire in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and in TS Eliot's response to the First World War; *The Wasteland*.

Dixon's history of Gothic was not definitive and left out many of influential artists and thinkers who inspired the gothic sensibility. The politics of gender and sexuality that are so evident in the gothic writings of Ann Radcliffe, Oscar Wilde and Christina Rossetti were not even touched upon by Dixon.

Yet as a partial short history of modern capitalist society through the fever dreams and nightmares of the gothic, it was an excellent piece of television.



The horror is in our own society

Harry Davies reviews 'The Babadook', in cinemas now.

'The Babadook' is an unexpected box office hit which seems to have left some of its audience rather confused, to judge by online comments. Is it a Nightmare on Elm Street-style ghostly slasher film? An homage to The Shining? An indie psychological horror? Actually I'd call it one of the finest horror films ever made.

'The Babadook' tells the story of Amelia, struggling to raise her “troubled” son whilst barely clinging onto a precarious zero hours nursing home contract. The mechanistic forces of an uncaring, target-driven state surround her; the teachers who don't seem to know her son's name and want to exclude him from mainstream education, the police who giggle openly at her fears even as she weeps in front of them, the supercilious social workers, so clearly judging everything they observe in her troubled home.

Amelia is broke, depressed and isolated. It's a powerful performance by Essie Davis, a deeply affecting account of what it is to be working class and in pain in a society that would rather not think about either subject.

And then there's Mister Babadook himself, a rather nasty piece of work, inclined to communicate through the medium of an unpleasantly graphic pop-up book, or occasionally whispering his name late at night. Represented by a combination of puppetry and stop motion animation, the Babadook is everything that children are irrationally scared of. He's the monster under the bed, the dark in the wardrobe and also the manifestation of some very adult terrors too.

The power of this extraordinary film lies in its ambiguity. Like all good horror films, it balances the oldest fears of the night with a believable set of very contemporary real life terrors. We're shown a situation tragically all too common, as Amelia's identity collapses under external economic and social pressures and internal psychological trauma.



Amelia struggles to raise her son in a society that doesn't care

Soon, we're almost desperate to see the focus shift back to the Babadook again; his supernatural frights are somehow far more palatable than the grim and all too common domestic situation which unravels with painful inevitability, until the unexpected and (almost original) ending which carries a powerful and unsettling resonance, especially for anyone who's ever had to deal with overwhelming personal issues of their own.

The tagline is a gift to reviewers: “You can't get rid of the Babadook”; I couldn't agree more.

De Leon: a revolutionary pioneer

Our Movement
by Michéal MacEoin



Daniel De Leon (1852-1914) was a pioneer of the American socialist movement, educating a generation in the basics of class-struggle revolutionary politics.

Born in the Dutch colony of Curacao, off the coast of Venezuela, on 14 December 1852, he was educated in law in Germany and the Netherlands. He moved to the United States in 1874, finding work as a lecturer.

Settling in New York, De Leon became influenced by the writings of the socialist novelist Edward Bellamy. He joined the Knights of Labour, a fraternal organisation which nevertheless began to act as a trade union, organising railroad strikes and demanding the eight-hour day.

Despite his well-off background as the son of a colonial official, De Leon threw himself into left-wing political life. His enthusiastic support for Henry George, United Labor Party candidate in the 1886 New York mayoral election, may well have cost him his part-time teaching job at Columbia University.

In 1890, De Leon joined the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), becoming the editor of its newspaper, *The People*, and its candidate for governor of New York the following year. He soon established himself as a prominent figure in the party, advocating a form of revolutionary Marxism.

De Leon was a vociferous critic of the shortcomings in existing American trade union movement — especially the American Federation of Labor (AFL), dubbed by some radicals as the “American Separation of Labor” on account of organising workers along narrowly-defined craft lines.

In 1895, the SLP set up the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance (STLA) after the party was ejected from the Knights of Labour. Although the new union was never much more than an extension of the SLP, it was a precursor for an altogether more important development in US labour history.

On 27 June 1905, De Leon took part in a convention of militant trade union activists in Chicago. The meeting was also

attended by Eugene V. Debs and Bill Haywood, and agreed to set up a new labour organisation — the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

In its scope and aims, the IWW was far beyond any of the unions in the US at the time — and in many ways, since.

As the American Trotskyist James P. Cannon wrote: “The men who founded the IWW were pioneer industrial unionists, and the great industrial unions of today stem directly from them. But they aimed far beyond industrial unionism as a bargaining agency recognising the private ownership of industry as right and unchangeable. They saw the relations of capital and labour as a state of war.”

The idea of class war and the irreconcilability of class interests was at the heart of the IWW, as enshrined in its famous preamble: “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common.”

As well as fighting the class struggle on the economic front and popularising the idea of industrial unionism — that all workers in a given industry should be united together against their employers — the IWW was also, in effect, a revolutionary political organisation, making propaganda for the overthrow of capitalism.

However, as Cannon wrote: “One of the most important contradictions of the IWW, implanted at its first convention and never resolved, was the dual role it assigned to itself. Not the least of the reasons for the eventual failure of the IWW — as an organization — was its attempt to be both a union of all workers and a propaganda society of selected revolutionists — in essence a revolutionary party. Two different tasks and functions, which, at a certain stage of development, require separate and distinct organizations, were assumed by the IWW alone; and this duality hampered its effectiveness in both fields.”

Indeed, it soon suffered a number of splits on an explicitly political basis which shattered its industrial unity. The 1905 version of the IWW constitution mentioned that the working class should “come together on the political as well as the industrial field”. Almost immediately, however, there were some who wished to remove the reference to the political field and focus instead on strikes, boycotts and direct action.

De Leon and the SLP were amongst those who continued to advocate political action. As he wrote in *Reform or Revolution*: “The capitalist is organised on both lines. You must attack him on both.”

The SLP then split from the IWW in 1908, and formed its own Workers’ International Industrial Union. It never made much of an impact and the SLP continued as a propagandist sect.

De Leon’s attempts to combine industrial and political action count in his favour, though they were not without problems either. His brand of “Marxist-syndicalism” contained a conception of politics that was narrow and overly legalistic and schematic, with the main constructive element residing in the industrial organisation.

In his reckoning, workers would use the ballot-box for the purposes of attaining and then destroying political power; at the same time, their unions would “take and hold” the economy at a workplace, and power would be simply transferred to a new “industrial form of government.”

In reality, the dynamics of revolution (as in Russia in 1917) proved more fluid, with new structures (such as soviets) emerging in the course of struggle. This required a revolutionary party with a more expansive conception of politics than simply the ballot box, organising the most advanced workers around a programme which could see the working-class navigate its way to power.

Nevertheless, those like De Leon and the IWW, were revolutionary pioneers, operating at a time when the US labour movement was in its relative infancy. That the subsequent generation saw further was because the IWW had already laid much of the important groundwork.

De Leon died in New York on 11 May 1914. His politics contained many of the necessary elements – class struggle, revolutionary political organisation, and the unity of the working-class on the industrial front. Yet they were arranged awkwardly, like a Cubist portrait, and it was for his successors to render a clearer and more coherent picture.

“Stalin renders commendable service to Fascism”

Another day



Benito Mussolini addressed to Joseph Stalin last week, the felicitations of one butcher to another. He wrote in his own paper, *Popolo d'Italia*, that Stalin “had become a fascist” and, in effect, that Stalin was doing more than any other to destroy the faith of the workers of the world in the communist movement.

For cutting down thousands of revolutionists as “fascist spies,” Stalin has won the gratitude of the fascist dictator, Mussolini. Let those who still think they can believe in the monstrous frame-up-terror system of Stalin, who think they can ignore the heavy blows the Stalin terror is dealing the whole revolutionary movement, ponder the brutal irony in the words of Mussolini: “Stalin does not resort to castor oil to punish Communist leaders who are so stupid or criminal as still to believe in Communism, Stalin is unable to understand the subtle irony involved in the laxative system of castor oil. He makes a clean sweep by means of systems which were born in the steppes of Genghis Khan ...

“Stalin renders a commendable service to fascism.”

Socialist Appeal, March 12 1938



These front pages are from the American Trotskyist newspaper *Labor Action*, published in the 1930s and 40s.

Labour's NHS bill: not good enough

By Jill Mountford, Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign, personal capacity.

After months of speculation and vague promises Labour's Clive Efford MP has published his NHS (Amended Duties and Powers) Private Members Bill.

Was it worth waiting for? With the political limits of the Labour Party and the practical limits of what a Private Member's Bill can achieve, it was never going to repeal the 2012 Health and Social Care Act, nor reverse the cuts and privatisation of the NHS. The Bill mitigates some of the worst bits of the Health and Social Care Act, but not nearly enough.

Backed by the Labour leadership and supported

by Unite, Unison and the GMB leaders, it's an attempt to show Labour mean to restore bits of the NHS without committing to any spending and without challenging the crippling PFI debts accumulated by hospital trusts under New Labour.

The Bill says it will restore the powers of the Secretary of State for Health (to ensure there is a national health service) but in fact will give the Secretary of State the duty to commission.

It will repeal Section 75 (bringing in competition to the NHS) and that is good.

It stops any UK government agreeing to any legally enforceable procurement or competition provisions for the NHS in the current Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership treaty negotiations.

The Bill still needs to

gather some cross-party support and none of the sponsors come from any party other than Labour.

In the run up to second reading on 21 November the unions are organising town-centre street stalls to tell people about the Bill and Labour's commitment to the NHS. But this is a really tepid, half-baked approach to campaigning.

There's speculation that the Bill could be amended to include more radical and far reaching demands. Some of the demands in Allyson Pollock's NHS Reinstatement Bill which she and others are campaigning for Labour to commit to could be incorporated. But these are big ifs and as it stands, the Bill does not go far enough and doesn't stand much of chance of becoming law.

On 21 November campaigners will be outside Parliament encouraging

support for the Bill but more importantly raising our own independent demands for the NHS.

Repeal of the Health and Social Care Act is top of the list, followed by calls for the reversal of cuts and a massive cash injection to meet growing healthcare needs; removal of the PFI burden on the NHS; an end to privatisation and the market in the NHS; a decent living wage for NHS workers; a guarantee of safe staffing levels; an end to blaming migrants for the NHS crisis. After the protest there will be a meeting inside to discuss how we can organise to win our demands. Clive Efford and Andy Burnham are among invited speakers.

Join us outside Parliament and come along to the meeting at 2pm in the House of Commons. Join the fight to save our NHS!

Cleaners strike over bosses' racism

Cleaners working for Interserve at Waterloo station struck on 10-11 November after a manager claimed "we shouldn't be employing black people."

The strikes will take place between 3pm on Monday and 3pm on Tuesday, and for a further 24 hours starting at 3pm on 21 November.

The RMT union says bosses have refused to address the allegation through agreed procedures. The union also says Interserve has underpaid wages, as well as victimising, bullying and harassing staff.

Cleaners at Waterloo are not the only ones facing these conditions, or fighting back. Across various contractors, cleaners experience

low pay, unsafe and unpleasant conditions, and substitution by agency workers.

Cleaners on the Eurostar fought a campaign this year over pay, workload and staffing levels. Cleaners on London Underground's Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines battled hard to resist their employer's imposition of biometric booking on.

Cleaners fought a dispute with contractor Voith on Virgin West Coast over the victimisation of a workmate. Merseyrail's cleaning contractor Lorne Stewart faced strike action after tabling a below-inflation pay offer.

Workers on all grades should support the disputes of cleaners in their union.

German train drivers strike again

By Gemma Short

German train drivers struck again from Wednesday 5 November to Saturday 8 November.

Drivers' union GDL called the strike off early on Saturday as a "conciliatory gesture", meaning the strike did not disrupt celebrations of the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall.

The strike is the sixth in recent weeks, following a 50 hour strike in late October. The union is demanding a five per cent wage hike and

a shorter working week of 37 hours.

Train company Deutsche Bahn took a case to a labour court in Frankfurt trying to gain an injunction which would rule the strike "disproportionate" and force drivers back to work. Lawyers for Deutsche Bahn claimed the strike was costing the German economy €100 million a day. The strike has knocked out about two thirds of Germany's train service.

GDL is yet to announce more action.



Housing charity workers win on pay

By Charlotte Zalens

Unite members at St Mungo's Broadway celebrated on Wednesday 5 November after management made concessions in ACAS talks.

Workers were set to strike for another 10 days, following 7 days on strike in October, in a dispute over pay and union rights. Management have reversed their decision to change pay, terms and conditions for frontline workers. Unite says that St Mungo's Broadway management have "agreed to 99.9% of our demands."

The offer sees workers on a two tier system, following the merger of two charities, leveled up to the better set of terms and conditions. St

Mungo's Broadway will also honour an existing recognition agreement Unite had with one of the pre-merger charities.

Unite regional officer Nicky Marcus said: "This is a significant victory not just for staff, but for the service users our members work so tirelessly to help. It is a testament to what can be achieved when workers stand shoulder to shoulder and say enough is enough."

During the strike in October Unite members organised 19 pickets, covering all the London-based charity's offices as well as lobbies and protests at the Town Hall buildings of councils who work with the charity.

Unite members will be balloted on the offer.



Care UK offers deal

By Gemma Short

Unison members at Care UK are being balloted over an offer from management.

After 90 days on strike in a dispute over Care UK slashing pay by 35% and recruiting new staff on a much lower wage, management have offered an immediate 2% increase, followed by 2% in both 2015 and 2016 or an increase equivalent to the Consumer Price Index if that is higher.

Andy Squires, Unison steward, said "it is generally speaking a good offer for the private sector, but doesn't come anywhere near to recouping the 35% lost." However, he said, "the offer comes with a three-year no strike deal, we cannot strike

over anything to do with terms and conditions or pay, effectively meaning we can't strike."

Unison is recommending that members accept the offer.

On their facebook group some strikers have expressed their disappointment. One said "None of us are celebrating at all, each and every one of us deserve a lot more!" in response to Unison's claims that workers are celebrating a victory. Another said "So we're now celebrating having our wages cut by up to 33% instead of 35%. Celebratory drinks? No thank you!"

The ballot closes on 24 November. Appeals for donations and messages of solidarity are still on going.

Defend Julie Davies

Teachers at two schools in Haringey, London, struck on 5 November to defend suspended branch secretary Julie Davies.

The teachers at Fortismere and Highgate Wood schools gathered on Crouch End and Muswell Hill Broadways, handing out leaflets to explain why they were

taking action.

Teachers in two more schools, Park View and Hornsey, are being balloted to join the strikes.

There will be a lobby of Haringey council at 6pm on 24 November and future strikes on 12-13 November at Fortismere and Highgate Wood.

Cineworld: pay your staff a living wage! Sign the petition: chn.ge/1w0EgrN



Solidarity

No 343

12 November
2014

30p/80p

We can win free education!

By Tom Harris

The British student movement should take its lead from its counterparts in Germany, Chile and other countries, which succeeded in overturning the introduction of a sham-bolic, transparently unfair system of tuition fees.

And it must go further, and demand that the debt hanging over millions of students who have already left study is abolished.

On the introduction of tuition fees in 1998, many predicted that the change would further entrench university education as the preserve of those wealthy enough to pay.

It was predicted that the loan system would saddle millions of students with debt that would take decades for them to pay off. It was predicted that once individual fees, rather than public funding, had been established as the means by which education was funded, its inexorable logic would lead to students paying higher and higher sums in order to keep the system

going.

16 years later, those predictions have been vindicated. An undergraduate course will now cost a British or EU student £9,000 a year — three times as much as it did five years ago, nine times as much as it did in 1998.

The principle of education as a universal right and a public good has been deeply undermined, and the higher education sector is now rife with privatisation.

Under the current fees regime, students will have an automatic debt of £27,000 from three years of undergraduate study.

DEBT

In reality, debt accrued through the cost of living over that period of time is often over £50,000.

It is much worse for post-graduate and international students — many have to resort to commercial loans to support them in their studies.

For some students, concerns about the cost of living during their studies are at least limited by the knowl-

edge that their parents will stump up some cash if things get too grim.

But hundreds of thousands of students from poorer backgrounds are less able to rely on family support when money is tight. Instead, more and more are pushed into working long hours to keep themselves afloat, work that takes place during what are supposed to be full-time degrees.

The problems don't end with graduation. When the government moved to treble fees in 2010, ministers brushed aside concerns about the burden of debt, claiming that since a university degree enables students to enter well-paid professions, the debt could be relatively painlessly paid off.

Unfortunately, this argument rests on the idea that a degree more or less guarantees access to a high-paying job. In fact young workers are often employed in badly paid and precarious jobs.

The government is starting to get a bit panicky about the prospects of ever getting the money back. According to the *Daily Mail*, the government has recently

begun looking into hiring overseas bailiffs to try and track down students who have moved abroad without alerting the Student Loan Company.

Before that, they considered selling off £12 billion worth of loan debt into private hands. That plan was abandoned in the face of a combination of student protest and coalition in-fighting. It is likely the government will continue to devise ways of raking back the debt, which is predicted to amount to £330 billion by 2044.

Considering the stated motivation for trebling fees was to help reduce public debt and make higher education less expensive to the taxpayer, it would seem the policy has failed on its own



Students on the 18 October TUC demonstration

terms. The system seems unworkable and shoddily executed.

But in a sense, the introduction and rapid increase of tuition fees has worked very well for the Tories, the neo-liberals in the Labour Party and the ruling class they represent.

The restructuring of education funding has shifted

much of the responsibility for funding education away from collective public funding based on taxation and towards contributions from private individuals.

It has opened an enormous gateway for private companies to enter the higher education sector and run it for profit.

Free Shahrokh Zamani and Reza Shahabi!

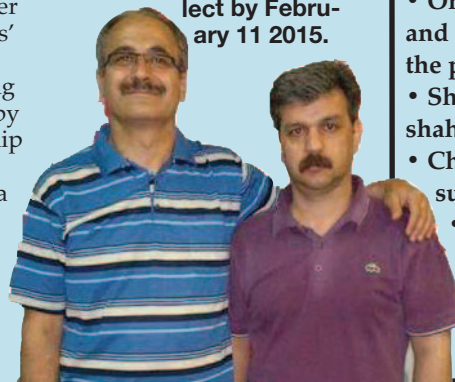
Workers' Liberty are campaigning for the release of Shahrokh Zamani and Reza Shahabi, two trade unionists jailed in Iran.

Shahrokh is part of the Tehran paint-workers' union, Reza is the treasurer of the Tehran bus-workers' union. Both have been jailed on charges of "acting against national security by establishing or membership of groups opposed to the system" and "propaganda against the state."

This week activists collected signatures at Labour Representation Committee (LRC) conference and at the Socialist Party's "Socialism 2014",

including that of Irish TD (MP) Ruth Coppinger. Comedian Kate Smurthwaite also tweeted her support for Shahrokh and Reza.

So far we have collected 1543 signatures of the 10,000 we aim to collect by February 11 2015.



What you can do to help:

- Take a petition around your union branch meeting, ask your work colleagues to sign or pass a petition around a university lecture you are in.
- Organise a regular street stall; make banners and placards, ask members of the public to sign the petition.
- Share the online petition — bit.ly/free-shahrokhandreza
- Change your facebook and twitter pictures to support Shahrokh and Reza.
- Write to your MP and ask them to sign the Early Day Motion tabled by John McDonnell.
- Join us outside the Iranian Embassy, London on February 11 to hand in our petition signatures.

MARCH FOR FREE EDUCATION

Wed 19 Nov, 12pm Malet St, London

WEDNESDAY 3 DECEMBER

Walk out of lectures, organise occupations and protests on your campus to spread the word about the free education movement

SATURDAY 6 DECEMBER

Make noise in your local town! Organise within your local community to keep up momentum from the national demonstration

13/14 DECEMBER

The annual national conference of NCAFC — the only democratic student-left group in the movement. Submit motions and stand in elections. Shape the movement for the coming year!

againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com
anticuts.com