

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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DICTATORSHIP!

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
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- 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.
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Far right attacks Jim Larkin memorial march

By Bob Sutton

On Saturday 21 July, a march to commemorate the birth of the Liverpool-born Irish socialist and trade unionist Jim Larkin, was met with a violent counter demonstration by a coalition of right wing, fascist, Loyalist and veterans' organisations.

The march had been called by the Irish Republican marching band, the Liverpool Irish Patriots, in response to a similar incident in February where their annual march through north Liverpool was harassed, blockaded and prevented from entering the city centre by around 250 far-right activists.

The Patriots, whose activity seems to consist of routine commemorative marches rather than direct political activity, called this march under the banner of 'Working Class Unity Against Racism and Fascism'. By routing the march from Larkin's birth-

place in South Liverpool through the predominantly black and migrant area of Toxteth, they intended to forge links with those communities.

Unfortunately the march was poorly attended, (100 at the start rising to maybe 200 by the end), overwhelmingly white, and largely the Patriots themselves plus the "usual suspects" of the Liverpool left.

This reflects damningly on the organisational weakness of the left and the labour movement, especially among black communities. Basic things like leafletting, stalls and meetings were either not done or done woefully late in the day.

However, the most damaging failure was political: the counter demonstrators were able to successfully cast the demonstration as "pro-IRA". This was absolutely disastrous.

The far right in Liverpool has recently been of a state of disarray; the "IRA" issue whips up a wider periphery for them.

The most vocal and

physically threatening group on the day were the significant number of former soldiers.

They focused on the children killed in the Warrington bombing in 1993 (something that was indefensible).

OPPORTUNITY

These people do not turn out for the pet causes of far-right cranks ("opposing Muslim paedophiles" etc).

The left has no interest in giving them the opportunity to mobilise or link up with the fascists.

We need to link the fight against the far right to the police harassment of black communities, the vicious border regime and the

smashing up of the welfare state, not a series of set-piece rucks.

Any honest appraisal of how the fascists/loyalists were able to surround and harass the march must conclude that it was only the heavy police presence which prevented everyone getting beaten up.

The most bizarre and depressing experience was when some young black teenagers joined in to hurl abuse at the left. The majority of the rally was eventually bussed out under police protection, as gangs of skinheads with regimental tattoos roamed the city centre.

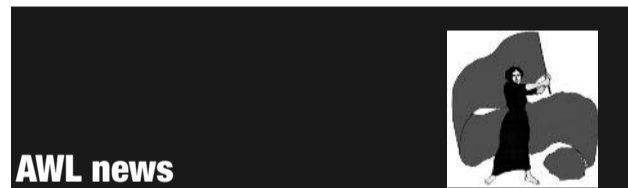
Anti-fascists in Liverpool have a lot to discuss.

Anti-Fascist Network



The AFN was formed last year with the support of local groups in Bristol, Brighton, and Liverpool to co-ordinate direct-action, working-class resistance to the far right. For more, see antifascistnetwork.wordpress.com

For anti-capitalist politics at Pride



AWL news

By Emma Rickman

An estimated 25,000 people attended London Pride on 7 July, including delegations from many trade unions.

The march was lively and colourful, and despite (or perhaps because of) the fiasco around its organisation, there was an atmosphere of political discussion about the nature of the event and the direction of LGBT politics in London.

Workers' Liberty held a "Proud to be Radical" meeting in central London following the march, with speakers including RMT member and LGBT activist Paul Penny, sex worker activist Thierry Schaufhauser, and Unison rep Lynne Moffat. The meeting discussed the work of LGBT activists in unions, LGBT rights internationally, the impacts of austerity, homophobia in Britain, marriage, religion, Queer Theory, capitalism, and more. At points the discussion was very honest, personal and moving.

We also discussed the politics of Pride at great length.

Workers' Liberty members who are also LGBT activists are now discussing how to help establish an ongoing and visible working-class, anti-capitalist presence within Pride and wider LGBT politics.

We want to update our pamphlet *Radical Chains*, and produce more literature about revolutionary LGBT politics in *Solidarity* and other publications.

We also want to continue working with other

groups with whom we have some political common ground on these issues, including Queer Strike, Queer Resistance, and rank-and-file militants within trade union LGBT sections.

Trade unionists discuss the future of Pride

By Paul Penny

Around 90 LGBT community activists attended an open meeting on Monday 16 July convened by the TUC to discuss the future of LGBT Pride London following this year's scaled-down event (7 July).

The meeting was optimistic and constructive, notwithstanding some speakers expressing their anger and frustration at this year's World Pride organisational debacle.

The interim, self-appointed Pride London Chair, Tony Hughes, told the meeting that "a new Pride London board will be elected or appointed in August", that "clearly there are some issues" and "it is about the right balance".

This prompted many questions from

the floor. How is the board formed and who elects the board? What kind of accountability? How is Pride to reach out to all of sections of the community? Why not a formal election involving the LGBT community? What sort of model is needed to organise Pride?

Peter Burton, TUC Equal Rights Policy Officer, explained that the TUC is not currently involved in Pride board but believes that LGBT Pride London should be free, inclusive and representative, have a campaigning edge, be community-led.

There was a general consensus in the meeting on this set of principles.

It was agreed the TUC would call a follow-up meeting in early September. Tony Hughes agreed to postpone the Pride London Board meeting till later in September.

Our answer to the double dip

By Sacha Ismail

Britain's "double-dip recession" has extended into the third quarter of 2012, with economic output falling by 0.7 percent in the second quarter. (In the two preceding quarters it fell by 0.4 and 0.3 percent.)

In the first half of 2012, service sector output dropped by 0.1 percent, industrial production by 1.3 percent and construction output by 5.2 percent.

Whatever the spin about the negative impact of the Royal Jubilee, the reality is a capitalist crisis made worse by economic policies supposed to solve it.

Are the Tories incompetent? Do we care?

What is certain is that they are more bothered about beating down workers' living standards and services than about generating economic growth, so that when growth does revive more of it will go to the bosses and the rich.

The lesson for workers should be an even stronger rejection of arguments about cuts being "necessary" for "the economy".

The facts should embolden labour movement activists to push our unions towards a much stronger anti-cuts fight-back, and bring pressure to bear on and in the Labour Party for a shift from its current pro-cuts position.

In place of platitudes like "A future that works" (the slogan of the TUC's demonstration on 20 October), the labour movement needs a clear and distinctive plan to counterpose to the mess the ruling class is making.

A program like Syriza's, with demands like reversing cuts, taxing the rich and taking over the banks, would be a start. And we need to aim for a government that would serve the interests of our class by implementing such a program.

Miliband faces both ways

By Gerry Bates

On 14 July up to 100,000 people attended the annual Durham Miners' Gala. These included a noticeably uncomfortable Ed Miliband, the first Labour Party leader to address the event since 1989.

As Miliband sat on the platform he was obliged to listen and applaud speakers including striking Spanish miners describing their militant battle with the Rajoy government, the

labour lawyer John Hendy arguing for the repeal of the anti-trade union laws, and the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union general secretary Mark Serwotka, who rebuked the Labour leader for his opposition to the pensions dispute.

That Miliband felt he had to attend is a sign that the event has been rejuvenated in recent years, owing in large part to the patient work of the organisers and the support it has received from trade unions other than the National

Union of Miners (NUM).

However, we should not take this as a sign that the Labour leadership is more willing to fight for working-class interests. Three days later Miliband sought to "balance" his attendance at the miners' gala with an appearance at a reception in the City of London.

His speech was an attempt to win support from business leaders at FTSE 100 companies. The shadow business secretary Chuka Ummuna went further, calling for more

Labour MPs who have "set up and run businesses or worked for businesses."

The bosses already have two major parties to serve their interests without the Labour Party acting as a poor third.

Despite bourgeois press hysteria about "Red Ed" and rumblings from Blairites such as Liam Byrne, the labour movement still has a long way to go to make the Labour Party a vehicle for working-class politics.

Blue, New, or just pale?

By Colin Foster

On 15 May Ed Miliband appointed Jon Cruddas to replace Liam Byrne as head of Labour's policy review.

No socialist in the Labour Party or the trade unions will be sad to see Byrne, a notorious Blairite, go; and some will draw shreds of hope from what Cruddas has said in the past about the need for Labour to reconnect with its working-class base.

At least three problems remain, though. One: the policy review, whoever heads it, is in effect a move to sidetrack policy-making by Labour's annual conference of delegates from trade unions and local Labour Parties.

Instead of delegates di-

rectly debating policy, they are likely at some point to be handed a long text concocted by the "review" and told they can only vote for or against, but not amend it.

Second: the policy review process remains nearly as opaque to Labour and union activists under Cruddas as it was under Byrne.

And the third problem is Cruddas's politics. After spending almost all his adult life in Labour Party backroom jobs, he was a chief fixer for Tony Blair from 1997 to 2001.

After 2001, he shifted, voted against the Blair government on top-up fees, asylum seekers, trust schools, Trident, and other issues, and won some union support for his candidacy for Labour Deputy Leader in 2007.

Then in 2010 he backed the hardline-Blairite David Miliband for Labour leader. He now says (Guardian 16 June): "I made a mistake on that; but also that "he will be knocking on the doors of David Miliband and [another diehard-Blairite] James Purnell" to contribute to the policy review.

Cruddas and Purnell have associated with a trend called Blue Labour. Its best-known advocate is Maurice Glasman, who declared (Daily Telegraph, 18 July 2011) for "stopping immigration virtually completely for a period".

Purnell, however, has declared that "we [New Labour] already had about as 'tough' a policy on immigration as we could have". He says Labour should be bolder about "reform", meaning (for him)

"if you want people to have choice in democracy, then why not in health or education too?"

Another Blue Labour ideologue, Jonathan Rutherford, claims: "Labour's future is conservative... Labour needs to develop a politics of belonging and a reform of capitalism that draws on the traditions of the common good and a common life. It must... again become an organising force in the life of our country, from the cities to the market towns and the villages".

All very far from even discussing policies which would enable the labour movement to get to grips with the great crisis of capitalism unfolding around us.

• bit.ly/blue-lp

Adult social care: all "innovation" and no money

By Marla Linden

The government's White Paper "Care and Support", on reforming adult social services, was launched on 11 July. It is full of supposedly innovative ideas but without any money or commitment.

The government keeps repeating that it will put £300 million into adult social care between 2013 and 2015. The majority of this money is to implement the innovative ideas with none left to cover shortfalls left by cuts to a system that was already on its knees.

The government's answers to problems involve the appointment of principal social workers in local authorities (with a very ill-defined role), social workers setting up social enterprises, and giving private companies the chance to take over parts of the assessment process.

This is so wrong it that it's hard to know where to begin. As someone who works in social services I can tell you most of our complaints (which rise in line with our cuts) and general dissatisfaction aren't about the assessment but about the outcome

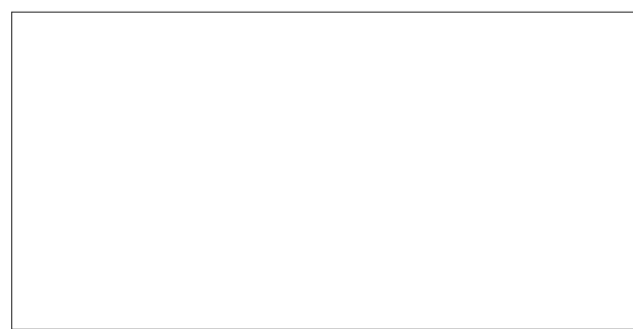
In Worcester there have been caps put on the care you can receive at home and the independent living fund, which topped up local authority care for people with high needs, is being abolished.

Increasingly, the support people receive is less yet they're asked to pay more.

Charges for services have increased massively as has the local authority's chasing of them.

In my own London local authority this isn't bringing in many savings.

Local authorities will retain their statutory duties. The opportunity to assess, write support plans and provide



services can be privatised but the monitoring, quality assurance and safeguarding has to remain with the local authority. Private companies take all the easier (and often more pleasant) work including any profit and local authorities take all the risk.

The government has already made it clear that they want fewer staff and to leave those remaining with less support, lower pay and worse conditions.

Whenever local authorities tender anything out it takes months of scrutiny by staff, usually in lower or middle management. We still have the monitoring role but fewer staff to do it with.

This leads to a general lower standard in care, corners have to be cut and risks taken, and most of the time service users muddle along with the care they can get.

Sometimes this results in fatal disasters, but these hit the papers only occasionally so that's okay!

Since the purchaser/provider split was introduced in 1990 there's been a rhetoric of reducing bureaucracy but it has actually only increased. A colleague of mine recently worked out that I spend about 10% of my time in face-to-

face contact with service users, carers and families.

At times the rhetoric of social enterprises with social workers committed to practice can sound appealing, hence the College of Social Work is lukewarm on the idea. However, research shows that those that have been set up have closed down or been taken over. People know the reality hence there is little in the way of enthusiasm in local authorities and a lot of resistance from frontline staff.

IDEOLOGY

This White Paper is just the latest chapter in the government's ongoing ideologically-driven campaign against any kind of a welfare state.

Campaigning against the proposals must be combined with campaigns against the cuts to social services that are taking place in councils across the country.

Unfortunately, the main union organising staff, Unison, continues to miss almost every opportunity to provide any leadership or strategy to push back against attacks.

Unison correctly calls for funding of social care to be through general taxation, but their mealy mouthed press release only makes this clear in the last paragraph, after much about how it's "unrealistic" to rely on private insurance. There's no strategy from Unison to succeed in getting this demand.

Workers in social care need to organise, both in Unison and outside of it through campaigns such as the Social Work Action Network (SWAN) which links social workers, academics and service users.

The rank and file needs to force the bureaucrats in our union to run a decent campaign, and join with service users and activists to make the government fund services properly through taxing the rich.

Quebec students face government intransigence

Paul Dagenais reports from Quebec

At the end of May there was a new period of negotiations between the government of Quebec and the student associations. The negotiations lasted from Monday 28 to Thursday 31 May.

The government hastened to end them, claiming that the student representatives were “intransigent” and it was impossible to reach an agreement with them. The real reason was the Liberal government that did not want to reach a satisfactory agreement.

To keep the increase in student fees is an ideological question for this deeply neoliberal bourgeois government; to give up on it

would be seen as a capitulation by the whole bourgeoisie.

On Saturday 2 June there was a big demonstration, in grey and rainy weather, on the streets of Montreal, which rallied several thousand people.

POLICE

Once again, the organisers, as a gesture of defiance to the police and to show that the new law restricting demonstrations is unworkable and unnecessary, had not notified the police of the route of the demonstration.

At the end of the demonstration, a representative of the CLASSE coordination, which had organised the event, de-

scribed how the negotiations had gone and how stubborn Jean Charest’s government is in sticking to the increase in student fees. The government does not want to “lose face” in this struggle, and wanted to maintain an image of inflexibility and firmness.

Regular nighttime demonstrations have continued, but their size has much diminished.

There was a big demonstration on the afternoon of Friday 22 June which drew thousands of people in Montreal and in Quebec City.

There are more and more rumours of a general election in September. Québec Solidaire, the main party of the Quebec left, which includes many socialist activists, is actively

preparing for such elections, and has participated in the struggle since the beginning.

ARRESTED

Its only member in Quebec’s National Assembly, Amir Khadir, was arrested on a demonstration in Quebec during a civil-disobedience action.

That provoked the anger of the bourgeois editorialists and of the Charest government, which accused him of behaving in a way which was “irresponsible” and “unworthy” of an Assembly member.

The New Democratic Party (sister-party of the British Labour Party in the Socialist International) has maintained a shameful si-

lence on the student strike and the government and police repression. It has refused to denounce law 78 (restricting demonstrations).

This despite the fact that the NDP took 58 out of 75 seats in Quebec in the federal election of 2 May 2011, and thus became the leading federal party in Quebec. Political

commentators then talked of an orange wave (orange being NDP’s official colour).

Some NDP assembly members have participated in demonstrations, but as individuals.

The new NDP party leader, Thomas Mulcair, who replaced the late Jack Layton in March 2012, is a former Liberal minister in Jean Charest’s govern-

ment; he resigned in 2006 on environmental questions.

The union leaderships have also been reluctant to support the students, and have done all they can to sideline the slogan of a “social strike” put forward by union activists to support the student movement against the Charest government.

Once again, the leaderships of the workers’ movement have shown themselves incapable of carrying out their duty to pursue the struggles against the cuts policy of bourgeois government and the bosses.

The activist rank and file should organise itself to avoid having its struggles sabotaged by the bureaucrats

Iraqi trade unions fight for independence

By Falah Alwan, President of the Federation of Workers’ Councils and Unions in Iraq (FWCUI)

The main issue facing Iraqi workers is the government’s attempt to impose a new labour code.

Workers have been working without an official labour code since the fall of the Ba’athist regime. Effectively people have been working on the basis of established traditions, conventions, and practises rather than a legal code.

There was a draft in 2004, but in our view this was worse than the 1936 labour law of the old monarchy! The new labour code also perpetuates Saddam Hussein’s 1987 ban on unions and collective bargaining in the public sector.

OBJECTIONS

The new draft includes 156 articles, and we have serious objections to 140 of them.

The code was produced by the Ministry of Labour, so it’s been produced entirely by representatives of capitalism. There was some sham consultation with “workers’ representatives” — two individuals from government-backed unions were involved — but there was no real participation from independent workers’ organisations.

The new code does include a notional right to join a union, but only unions sanctioned or officially recognised by the government.

Independent unions in Iraq met with the AFL-CIO Solidarity Centre in Lebanon recently to dis-

cuss campaigning against the law. We want to pressure the Iraqi authorities, both internally and internationally, on this issue.

We want a labour code based on positive workers’ rights — the right to form independent unions, the right to strike, health and safety benefits, social security, and other basic rights in the workplace.

The government needs to pass it through a second reading in parliament before it can be formally ratified, but they haven’t yet announced when that second reading will be.

RATIFIED

We want to stop it getting that far. If it is ratified, that would be a disaster for Iraqi workers.

There is ongoing interference from the Ministry of Labour in the affair of Iraqi unions. There has been a long-running attempt to delegitimise all unions except for a single, government-sanctioned federation.

The Ministry has been holding sham “elections” for “union” representatives — a direct attempt to undermine the internal democracy of the existing federations. Workers are being asked to vote in a general election, regardless of which union they are a member of, for “representatives” who will negotiate with their employers. Authorities have effectively been bribing people to participate in these elections, for example by promising unemployed workers jobs if they vote.

The backdrop is an attempt by Islamist forces within the Ministry of Labour to gain political control of the unions. The Minister of Labour himself

(Nassar al-Rubayie) is a supporter of Islamist cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. The Basra branch of the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW) had its offices raided, and there were labour movement protests against this.

This is about the right of workers to choose which union to join and to elect their own representatives.

The imposition of sham elections threatens the independence of the labour movement and to undo everything we have built in the last nine years.

DIFFICULT

Despite these difficult conditions, there are many industrial disputes and struggles still ongoing in Iraq.

In Basra, there have been large demonstrations demanding electricity services. Many homes are still without electricity, and in the current conditions — which are incredibly hot — it’s awful not to have electricity to power fans, AC etc. These demonstrations have been repressed violently by the army and the police, with many arrests.

There have been similar demonstrations in Diwaniya.

Municipal authority workers in Baghdad held a protest in the main local government building in a dispute over housing benefits. Public sector workers have a clause in their contract that guarantees them accommodation, but they have been denied that.

Again, the authorities responded very heavily-handedly to the demonstration.

The petrochemical workers in Basra are continuing their campaign against job losses and transfers. Of 5,000 workers at one particular plant, 3,000 have been declared “surplus”, and face lay off or transfer to other work-

places.

Leather workers in Baghdad have also taken action recently, demanding health and safety benefits.

Workers internationally can help our campaign against the government’s labour law by protesting at Iraqi embassy, writing to the Iraqi authorities, and generally raising awareness of the issue.

We need maximum international solidarity to win a labour law based on the protection of workers’ rights.

• For more information on workers’ rights in Iraq, see the USLAW website’s section on the issue: bit.ly/M2ew0x. The FWCUI website is at fwcui.org.

Israel’s social justice movement back on the streets

By Ruben Lomas

Moshe Silman, a benefit claimant and protestor, set himself on fire before a social justice demonstration in Tel Aviv, Israel, on 14 July. He died six days later.

In a letter he read out before he died, he accused the Israeli government of “taking from the poor and giving to the rich”. Despite being incapable of working due to a stroke, his claim for housing benefit had been denied.

Silman’s tragic death — a “political suicide” — is part of the growing and explosive re-emergence of Israel’s social justice movement, which first rose to national political prominence a year ago when it mobilised the biggest demonstrations in the country’s history.

Several copycat self-immolations have taken place since Silman’s, including one on Sunday 22 July in which a wheel-

chair-bound man set himself alight and sustained burns to 80% of his body. Thousands of Israelis have mobilised for vigils to commemorate Silman.

Silman’s suicide took place before the demonstration called to mark the first anniversary of the “J14 movement”. In the run-up to the demo, smaller actions in Tel Aviv had seen violent clashes with the police, with over 85 protestors arrested.

The movement began as a protest against rocketing house-prices, but has expanded its political perspective to take in opposition to ongoing privatisation and neo-liberal economic policies.

Its rhetorical edge echoes that of the Occupy movement’s “99% vs 1%”, with much made of opposition to the “eighteen families” said to control 60% of the equity in Israel.

It intersected with significant industrial disputes, including the February general strike aimed at winning the levelling-up of pay and conditions for sub-contracted employees in the public sector.

The movement’s most significant silence in its first incarnation was on the question of Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories, although it did raise in a muted way the treatment of Arabs and other national and ethnic minorities within Israel. But after months of

racist attacks against African immigrants in Israel — tensions caused by the same divide-and-rule austerity economics the movement exists to protest — its political horizons must broaden again.

Establishment commentators and politicians in Israel are worried that the resurgent movement will be less “polite” than in 2011; certainly, the violent clashes with the police and the direct action taken against some of Tel Aviv’s banks, suggest that many protestors are through with attempting to appear “respectable”.

If they can combine that new attitude with a serious debate within the movement about racism and the occupation, and take a radical, internationalist, and anti-racist position on the occupation and state-sanctioned racism, the J14 movement’s potential is huge.

The Spanish miners need your help!

By John Cunningham, Spanish Miners Solidarity Committee (personal capacity)

The Spanish miners' strike against a cut in the subsidy to the industry is now in its tenth week. Support in Spain and internationally is growing all the time.

When the miners' march (the "Black March" or "Marcha Negra") from the coalmining regions to Madrid reached the capital on 19 July they were greeted by thousands of supporters and well-wishers in a clear demonstration that their strike is now seen as the spearhead against the government's austerity policies.

In a reference to Spain's all-conquering national football team sections of the crowd were heard chanting "This is our national team!" as the miners marched past.

Hardly a day goes by now without one section of workers or another taking some kind of action and street clashes in Madrid are now almost



Black March to Madrid earlier this month

commonplace.

The government must surely be rattled by this continuing unrest as more and more Spanish workers follow the lead of the miners, even police and soldiers have been seen on demonstrations; with unemployment at almost 25% the whole country seems to be on a knife edge.

A general strike has been called for, while in the main mining regions of Asturias and Castile and

León, the miners continue to pursue their militant and extremely effective tactics of barricading motorways.

The local police are not used by the authorities who instead deploy the hated Guardia Civil (a kind of militarised police force). But despite the use of tear gas and rubber bullets the miners remain defiant and usually have the upper hand in any clashes.

The Guardia Civil are

now attacking miners' villages, breaking into miners' houses and generally terrorising the inhabitants of these often small and isolated communities.

Money is now flowing into the coffers of the strike fund and this will need to continue as autumn and then winter approaches. All indications are that this will be a long strike.

In the UK, the Durham Miners' Association and

the NUM have both donated £5,000 to the strikers and the PCS has contributed £2,000. The Spanish Miners' Solidarity Committee (the only organisation in UK recognised by both the two main Spanish unions — the Comisiones Obreras, CCOO and the Union General de Trabajadores, UGT) — has been busy collecting money and organising support.

In a number of areas support groups have been set up, street collections are planned in various cities and it is hoped to bring over some striking miners to speak at meetings around the UK.

Posters, leaflets and T-shirts have been produced and, so far, in just over two weeks, £19,000 has been collected — a magnificent response but one that needs to be maintained.

Try to think of what you can do to help the Spanish miners who, it must never be forgotten, were generous in the extreme in their support for the British miners in 1984-5.

Can you set up a local support group, raise the issue at your trade union

or Labour Party meeting, leaflet meetings and rallies, organise a street collection and/or a public meeting? If you need any help please contact the Spanish Miners' Solidarity Committee who will be happy to provide posters, leaflets and speakers etc.

- The SMSC can be contacted at: smssc@talktalk.net

- The SMSC blogspot is at: smscuk.blogspot.co.uk

- Our facebook site is: "Solidarity with the Spanish miners"

- The SMSC bank account details are:

Sort code: 08 92 99

Account number: 65568150

- Or, you can send a cheque to the SMCS treasurer, John Cunningham at 136 Regent Court, Bradford Road, Sheffield S6 2BW, South Yorkshire. If you send a cheque please include an address so that we can acknowledge your donation or send you a receipt if you wish.

Whatever you choose to do, let the SMSC know and we will do all we can to help you.

Believe Draghi? We doubt it

By Colin Foster

With interest rates on Spain's and Italy's debt remaining high, it is clear that yet another plan by the European Union and European Central Bank supposed to solve the dance of death in Europe's economies has failed.

Governments become less able to get credit because they are dragged down by collapsing banks; banks are collapsing because the government bonds which make up a large part of their assets lose value; the spiral is speeded by dwindling output because cuts are pushing economies into slump.

ECB president Mario Draghi declared on Thursday 26 July that the ECB was "ready to do whatever it takes" to preserve the single currency. "Believe me, it will be enough".

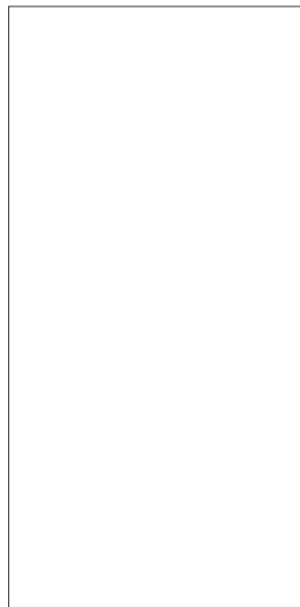
But he offered no specifics. A few days later the *Financial Times* reported ECB officials warning that the ECB was unlikely even to restart the "Securities Markets Programme" under which, between May and July 2010

and between August 2011 and January 2012, it bought up bonds of countries in credit difficulties, so as to limit the collapse in those bonds' selling prices (or, in other words, to limit the rise in the effective rate of interest on their market value which the fixed rate of interest on their face value converted to).

Meanwhile, Greek economist Yanis Varoufakis reports that on 20 August Greece will have to borrow 3.2 billion euros to pay back money it borrowed from the ECB last year — to the amount of 2.3 billion euros.

In other words, the "bailouts" do not bail out countries like Greece from their debt burdens. They help maintain payments to the banks on previous Greek debt, but they do not help the people of Greece.

Varoufakis comments: "The bottom line is that, once again, they [the EU leaders] have not decided. They are afraid to throw us [Greece] out, but also unwilling to get on our feet regarding the debt, and therefore in prac-



Mario "whatever it takes" Draghi

...tice lead us to the abyss".

Economists studying the macabre spiral are moving to one or another of two views.

One: that the spiral will with months or a year force Greece out of the eurozone, and that the consequent disruption will motivate EU leaders, or give them cover, to make more radical moves to save Spain, Italy, Portugal, etc. from spinning out.

Two: that things have got so bad that the EU leaders will be forced to cut slack for Greece, because the eurozone has now become so fragile that Greece spinning out would lead to wider collapse quicker than can be controlled.

Genova 2001: "Injustice seen to be done"

By Hugh Edwards

Earlier this month Italy's final appeal court upheld a previous guilty verdict on twenty-four of the most senior police officers involved in the planning and execution of the shocking acts of police violence at the 300,000-strong G8 protests in Genoa in 2001.

Following the demonstration, around four hundred highly trained thugs of the state machinery were set loose for three days. A hundred and fifty of the occupants of the Diaz schoolhouse were beaten to within an inch of their lives on the dishonest pretext that the building was a haven for black block anarchists bent on further rampage.

However, not one of the guilty has spent or will spend a day in gaol. The penalty for the crimes committed has been timed out due to the statute of limitations in a case that, all too typical of those involving the rich and powerful, has lasted almost ten years. They have been suspended — with pay — from holding public office for five years.

A decision a few days earlier had conveniently exonerated them of them from the charge of torture in the original guilty verdict, thus preparing the ground for their eventual "rehabilitation" within the repressive state apparatus.

This parody of justice becomes even more grotesque when we realise that the decision in 2006 to reduce the timing-out period for their crimes came not from a Berlusconi government but from the cen-

tre-left outfit of Romani Prodi, with several ministers of Communist Refoundation occupying key positions.

In the teeth of the true facts emerging about what really had occurred, Prodi, with the total silence of the "communist" ministers and their party, promoted all of the senior coppers to even more powerful roles. Gianni Giannini, the wirepuller at the very heart of the murderous events, assumed control of the vast network of secret services. He is still there.

On one level the coordinated project by the Italian ruling class to discredit and destroy the widespread and mounting resistance movement failed as the immediate aftermath witnessed even larger protests, culminating in Florence in 2003. But from another level it succeeded, raising evermore sharply the question of resistance to state violence, which from Genova onwards has assumed the form of brutal and indiscriminate responses to each and every form of collective protest.

In sharp distinction to the case of the twenty-four police officers, the same court upheld guilty verdicts for five of the ten people tried for acts of "sacking and devastation" at the Genoa protest. While the remaining five will have their cases re-examined, the guilty have been sentenced to a total of fifty-four years and three months.

It is needless to add that their trials did not last ten years but five — a sprint for the Italian legal process. Unlike the cops, they will go inside promptly following a further pantomime of justice at work in Italy.

To make life better, make banking boring

By Colin Foster

The labour movement should aim for public ownership of high finance, and for it to be run as a public banking, insurance, and pensions service, under democratic and workers' control.

Bankers and their apologists make a pretence and a virtue of vigorous swashbuckling individualism, but least of all is finance a sector where swashbuckling makes any social sense.

Eliot Spitzer, former New York attorney-general who sought fame through campaigns against Wall Street misdeeds, puts it aptly: "Banking should be boring. When banking isn't boring, you're asking for trouble long-term".

So long as we use money in economic life — and we will for a long while even under a workers' government — banks, insurance companies, and pension funds should store our cash carefully, lend it out on sober principles of social need, and reimburse it reliably. We no more want finance managed with swashbuckling than we want phone directories or library catalogues to be edited with imaginative fiction-making zest.

The bulk of "financial innovation" is not like technological innovation, generally a social boon although perverted by capitalist power. It is a sneaky codeword for frantic efforts by financiers to rip off the general public, each other, and non-financial capitalists.

The conservative *Financial Times* columnist Martin Wolf writes: "Banks, as presently constituted and managed, cannot be trusted to perform any publicly important function, against the perceived interests of their staff [meaning their top bosses, not the routine clerical staff]. Today's banks represent the incarnation of profit-seeking behaviour taken to its logical limits, in which the only question asked by senior staff is not what is their duty or their responsibility, but what can they get away with".

Yet banks have immense public power. That is why in 2008 the British government put out £1100 billion in cash, loans, and guarantees to stop Britain's big banks going bust. Under the present system, the gains of financial "swashbuckling" are privatised, and the losses are socialised.

We want workers' control in finance to guard against diversions and swindles, and to see that the work is organised in the way least oppressive for the workers. We want democratic social control so that credit is allocated to social need, not to what may bring the biggest gains to a few.

The rise of financiers to be "masters of the universe" has come most decisively over the last 30 years. In the 1970s, the system set up among the richer capitalist countries since World War Two, of fixed currency exchange rates and strict government control over currency exchange transactions, broke down. In the 1980s, a new regime emerged, of free and rapid financial flows across the globe, and floating exchange rates.

The new regime compelled multinational corporations — which increasingly dominated industry and trade — into more financial manoeuvres. If a corporation is borrowing in dollars, getting revenue in euros, and paying expenses in pesos, then it wants to guard itself against shifts in relative values. If holding its reserves in, say, Spanish government bonds will mean big losses compared to holding them in US equities, then it will work at juggling its portfolios.

On the other side of the financial trades made by those corporations as "insurance" must be banks and other financial firms "betting" the opposite way. Their speculations acquire their own momentum. Speculation builds on speculation. A world is generated where vast fortunes move rapidly every day, where a financier who can find a way to take a fraction of a percent off each transaction can become rich, and where those who can tweak the system even slightly can become even richer.

The ratio of financial assets to yearly output of goods and services rose globally from 109% in 1980 to 316% in 2005 (and 405% in the USA).

As of March 2012, the global total outstanding of financial futures (deals to buy financial assets at a certain rate at a future date) had risen from US \$394 billion in 1986 to \$23,512 billion. The global total outstanding of financial options (deals to have the option of buying or not buying, at a certain rate at a future date) had risen from \$223 billion to \$40,479 billion.

That is \$9000 of global-finance trading outstanding for every child, woman, and man on the planet. And the figures are only for deals traded on public exchanges: an unknown large further amount of trading is done privately,

The cod-dialectics of Euro-exit

The Left

By Rhodri Evans



One line in Greece, another in Britain. Both the SWP's and the Socialist Party's international networks say, on the EU, the opposite in Greece to what they say in Britain.

SWP: "get out of the EU!" for Greece, but not for Britain. SP: "get out!" for Britain, but not for Greece!

In Greece, the SWP's sister organisation SEK, and the coalition in which it is a major part, Antarsya, have as their leading slogans: "Down with the Memorandum! Out of the euro and EU!"

They push this call for Greece to get out of the euro and the EU as the big thing setting off Antarsya as a more revolutionary alternative to the bigger left coalition, Syriza, which does not call for exit.

The SP's sister organisation Xekinima, however, pointedly does not denounce Syriza's opposition to calls for Greek exit, and stresses: "the vast majority of Greeks want to remain in the eurozone".

Writing about Greece, SP leader Lynn Walsh says: "Exit from the eurozone will not provide a way out of crisis for Greek society".

In Britain the positions are inverted.

The SP provided most of the troops for a 2009 European Parliament election campaign under the banner "No2EU". "No2EU" did not, in its leaflets, say explicitly that Britain should quit the EU; but no reader could doubt that this was "tactics" and that "No2EU" did indeed, as its most urgent desire for a way out of crisis for British society, want exit.

"No2EU" was the SP trying to ingratiate itself with Bob Crow and other leaders of the RMT rail union, who, though often left-wing on industrial issues, are openly for British exit from the EU, and for that reason support the People's Pledge, an alliance constructed by right-wing Tories with Labour leftists and trade-unionists to help front it.

Weekly Worker editor Peter Manson was at a session at the SWP's "Marxism" festival where SWP leader Alex Callinicos tried to explain the Greece/Britain contradiction. Manson reports that Callinicos said: "In Britain we do not call for withdrawal — that is why Bob Crow and the 'No to the EU, Yes to Democracy' coalition that contested the 2009 EU elections were wrong. However, in Greece... leaving the euro zone would be 'a start'." (*Weekly Worker* 922).

Asking itself (SW 13.12.11) "Wouldn't things be better for workers if Britain pulled out of the EU?", *Socialist Worker* responded with a mumbly "yes, but", very different from SEK's "Out of the euro and the EU!" — "*Socialist Worker* is against Britain being part of a bosses' Europe... But withdrawing from the EU wouldn't guarantee workers' rights".

Both SWP/SEK and SP/Xekinima, when challenged, talk, with much pretence of "dialectical" profundity, about "differences" between Britain's situation and Greece's.

That "differences" can be cited both as a reason for supporting "get out" in Britain but not Greece, and as a reason for the opposite — supporting "get out" for Greece but not Britain — makes the argument suspicious.

The basic argument for "get out" slogans is the same in either case: that the EU is a capitalist construction.

The basic argument against is the same in either case: that capitalist states split off from the EU are no less capitalist than when integrated into the EU; and that focusing anti-capitalist anger against the international or cosmopolitan character of the EU, rather than on the capitalist structures common to Britain, Greece, and the EU, veers inevitably towards nationalism.

bank-to-bank.

Increasingly, most of the wealth of the wealthy is not physical assets (houses, yachts, planes, etc., though they have plenty of those), but bits of paper giving them claims over future profit flows.

In 2009 the "net capital stock" of the UK was estimated at £3.2 trillion. £1.2 trillion was household assets (almost all houses). The fixed assets of corporations and government (central and local) totalled £2 trillion — £1.2 trillion buildings and structures, £0.1 trillion transport equipment, and £0.5 trillion machinery and equipment.

But total personal wealth (including private pension wealth) in Great Britain in 2006/08 was much higher: £9.0 trillion.

Taking banks into public ownership and under democratic and workers' control would shift the balance of power in economic life hugely. But the action would have to be extended to public ownership and democratic and workers' control of the big industrial enterprises too, or fail.

Capital is not divided into two compartments, financial (bad) and industrial (good). The pretence that the evils of capitalism come only from financiers has often been used by right-wing demagogues, even fascists. Since some well-known bankers have been Jews, the pretence nourishes anti-semitism.

The financiers rip off each other, and the general public, and they exploit their bank clerks and other workers; but the main work of exploitation, of squeezing workers to produce the surplus-value which forms the pool from which all top incomes draw, is done by industrial rather than financial capitalists.

In some industries swashbuckling, flair, and risky venture may well produce social benefit. But the people with the industrial flair — the scientists, the inventors, and the designers and technicians — do not draw the profits. In Britain now 51% of the top bosses of the top 100 companies come from a background in finance, and few from one of any deep knowledge of what the company produces and how. The big industrial corporations are also big financial operators.

Top bosses of the top 100 companies pocket an average of £4.2 million each per year, while incomes for experienced and senior production managers in big companies are estimated at between £40,000 and £65,000.

Industrial capitalists are as much leeches on the working class as financial capitalists are.

Not rogue reporters but a rogue system

Pat Murphy reviews *Dial M for Murdoch: News Corporation and the Corruption of Britain*, by Tom Watson and Martin Hickman

On 24 July eight senior figures connected to News International were arrested and told that they would be charged with criminal offences related to the hacking of phones affecting some 600 people over a six-year period.

The alleged perpetrators include Rebekah Brooks and former political adviser to David Cameron, Andy Coulson. If there is any justice they will spend a couple of years studying the inside of a jail cell. And yet they very nearly got away with it.

When it first became public knowledge that journalists on the *News of the World* were illegally hacking into phones (and not just any old phones but royal mobiles) News International executives insisted they had a rogue reporter. They held to this defence doggedly for four years and used their manifold powers to prevent or obstruct all attempts to investigate further.

Dial M for Murdoch (by Labour MP Tom Watson and *Independent* journalist Martin Hickman) explains in great detail how this defence was sustained in the face of mounting evidence of wrong-doing at the highest level of the organisation. It is a story of two halves.

COVER-UP

Between 2007 and 2011 the Murdoch empire repeatedly fought off all efforts to lift the lid on their criminality and the web of corruption and power that sustained it.

The authors, key protagonists in the battle to hold NI to account, came close to giving up in despair as government, police and the leaders of both major parties showed zero appetite for confrontation with the owners of Britain's biggest-selling papers. Worse than that, Labour, the party in government openly supported Murdoch and was complicit in his company's wrongdoing.

In retrospect it is hard to understand why the company's senior executives thought they could get away with their strategy of denial and cover-up in the face of fast-growing evidence. Retrospect, however, demands that we forget how powerful NI had become in British politics and society and for how long they held this position.

What Watson and Hickman's book does very well is highlight how elaborate was the network of power, fear and influence which linked News Corp to political leaders, senior police and well-placed journalists. To take on the Murdoch empire prior to the phone-hacking scandal was to guarantee defeat. Defeat most likely preceded by a ritual public humiliation which would end your career. To support Murdoch on the other hand, promised flattery and promotion in the most widely read press and, in many cases, financial riches.

MILLY DOWLER

The second half of Watson and Hickman's book starts on 4 July 2011 when a single revelation published in the *Guardian* blew the corporation's defence apart.

The story began with the stark news that the *News of the World* targeted the missing schoolgirl Milly Dowler and her family in March 2002, interfering with police inquiries into her disappearance. Several years of evasion, not to mention three decades of raw power, crumbled to dust within days. Political apologists ran for cover, huge capitalist firms pulled their advertising money from the *NotW*, a boycott campaign launched on social networks garnered thousands of supporters extending to *Times* (and therefore NI) journalist Caitlin Moran. The police could no longer claim, as they had done throughout this period, that there was nothing further to look into.

Before the week was out the Murdoch's had decided to close the paper down. The spineless Ed Miliband, having waited until the bully lay bleeding on the ground, finally called for a public inquiry into the conduct of NI. The company's slavish ally, David Cameron, decided he no longer had any options and agreed to set up a judge-led investigation which became the Leveson Inquiry.

By that time there were already three separate police investigations under way, Operations Weeting (into phone-hacking), Elveden (into police corruption) and Tuleta (into computer hacking). No senior politician can take any credit for the exposure of News Corporation, on the contrary they either explicitly (Cameron, Blair) or implicitly (Miliband, Brown) helped protect them from scrutiny and justice.

To be fair Watson, a parliamentary enforcer for Gordon Brown, doesn't pretend otherwise. His own confrontation with the evil empire has clearly taken its toll on him and there are some very confessional parts of the book which illustrate that: his marriage breaks down, he has alcohol problems and becomes increasingly paranoid. It's hard to see whether and to what extent the whole experience really shook up his world view but it is telling that he reminds us



New Labour also bowed before News International

of his own comment on *Newsnight* on the evening of the Dowler revelations: "Politicians are frightened of News International. Ed Miliband is as guilty as David Cameron and Nick Clegg, he said. Jeremy Paxman checked with Watson whether he had just included his own leader in that list. He had."

This is not a particularly well-written book. The style veers uneasily between noirish crime thriller and technical political reporting and can't quite succeed as either. The decision to write about one of the authors (Watson) in the third person is an odd, though not crucial, quirk. These flaws are overcome, however, by the jaw-dropping nature of much of the material unearthed during this incredible affair.

Prime Ministers and their cabinet members are wined and dined by corrupt media executives and, if that doesn't work, threatened to be careful not to upset the company.

Senior police are bribed and, when quietly pushed out of their posts, employed on huge salaries by their paymasters.

A private investigator is murdered after raising concerns about corruption and the police officer who shuts down the murder inquiry later takes over his vacant job.

The victims of some of the most tragic murders in recent British history (Soham, Milly Dowler, 7/7) are callously hacked by the paper that shouted most loudly about being on their side.

It would be hard to make a dull tale of events as compelling as these but the mouth waters at what could have been spun from them by a writer like James Ellroy or *The Wire*'s David Simon.

POLITICS

***Dial M for Murdoch's* main fault is that the really significant political issues are left unexamined.**

Murdoch and his grim family got away with their criminal behaviour because they had accumulated immense power. They were not only allowed to accrue this power — they were encouraged and helped to do so. News International is not a separate, special or aberrant part of the capitalist society we inhabit, rather it is part of the fabric.

The watershed political moment of the last half century was the emergence of Thatcherism in the UK and Reaganism in the US. Before that the most advanced capitalist societies in the world had been forced to concede significant social provision and collective rights to the workers they exploited. Afterwards we saw trade unions repressed and legally shackled, public services dismantled or "marketised", social welfare stripped to the core and all the most powerful bosses' institutions (banks, the media) deregulated. The share of wealth paid in wages dropped sharply, profits rose and the painstaking progress in reducing inequality since 1945 was rapidly reversed.

The unaccountable power accumulated by News International was not an incidental or marginal part of these developments, it was a crucial part of reasserting the power of capital over labour.

Murdoch was in the forefront of destroying the power of labour in Britain; sometimes directly as in the case of the print unions at Wapping, but at least as important in the relentless anti-union, anti-collective poison poured out by his mega-selling papers.

Having enjoyed a mutual love affair with Thatcher he began to take it for granted that he could pick and choose Prime Ministers and their policies. Political leaders related to this not by challenging him but by courting his support.

Tony Blair responded to the famous Labour election defeat of 1992 by concluding that News International were probably right that "It was the *Sun* wot won it" and resolv-

ing to make his party acceptable to Murdoch. Alistair Campbell, Gordon Brown, Ken Livingstone and Ed Miliband followed Blair's lead. They studied the power of Murdoch just as they did that of capital generally. It was anti-union, anti-welfare, anti-tax and aggressively pro-market. It was hostile to everything the labour movement was supposed to be about.

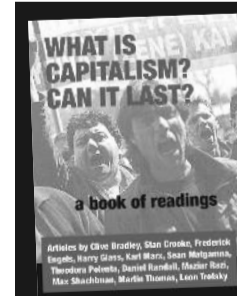
The response of any self-respecting socialist would be to challenge it, to work tirelessly to build an alternative to it. The whole New Labour crew had neither self-respect nor socialism in their veins however. They bowed before News International just as they bowed before capitalist power in general. Tom Watson distinguished himself during this period only by threatening and cajoling those Labour MPs who were inclined to show more backbone and principle.

Society will be marginally healthier and more open to alternative ideas if the Murdoch empire really does fall. It is already better for the decline in its reputation and power. But there have been previous Murdochs and there will be more to come.

Paul Dacre's *Daily Mail* and Richard Desmond's *Express* and *Star* are smaller, more localised versions of the same toxic model. In every bourgeois society an overwhelmingly right-wing popular press feeds a combined diet of reactionary prejudice and celebrity trivia to a mass audience which then finds it increasingly hard to digest anything more nutritious. The work carried out by these press barons is as central to the survival of the ruling class as their control of the commanding heights of industry. Its purpose is to ensure victory in the industrial and political class conflict by giving them the most powerful weapon in the battle of ideas.

The crimes of News International were not the work of a rogue reporter, or even, as the company later claimed, a number of rogue reporters or a rogue paper. Watson and Hickman conclude their account with the suggestion that it was a case of a "rogue corporation". The truth is something the book's authors are not prepared to consider — Murdoch and his rotten company are products of a rogue economic system.

The answer has to be more than the fall of the house of Murdoch. The whole of the labour movement has to fight the battle of ideas on our side with at least the same determination and co-ordination shown by our rulers.



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They only call it “class war” when we fight back

The Daily Telegraph

Press Watch By Darren Bedford

The Sun and the Daily Telegraph have continued their hysterical anti-union scaremongering with a couple of delightful pieces picking up on an interview that Dave Quayle, chair of the National Political Committee of the Unite union, gave to *Solidarity* in our last issue.

In the interview, Dave explained the union’s recently ratified political strategy, an attempt to increase democracy and accountability within the Labour Party by giving members of Unite, and other trade union affiliates, more control over the political direction of the party and its work. From Workers’ Liberty’s point of view, the strategy is not perfect, but it does represent an important attempt by a major national union to shift the debate about working-class political representation onto some new ground.

For years, the debate about our unions’ relationship to “official” politics and specifically to the Labour Party has hinged almost entirely on the financial relationship between unions and Labour. The level of the debate has deteriorated to such a degree that the question is now conceived of almost purely in financial terms — we are asked to consider whether our unions’ affiliation fees represent “value for money”.

This financial conception of the relationship is alien to the political basis upon which the Labour Party was established. It is not a pre-existing political force, external to the organised labour movement, to which our union choose to give money in the hope of receiving political favour in return. It was set up by a radical minority of trade unions to give organised labour a voice in the political sphere. It was set up to be the political wing of organised labour.

From its inception, middle-class and bourgeois forces

within it fought working-class elements for political control. It has never been a straightforwardly working-class party, and as such cannot be “reclaimed”. But the debate about how our unions relate to the party must be about more than the “value” of an annual financial transaction, and Unite’s new strategy represents an important move towards a more meaningful debate.

The hysterical response of the Murdoch press is predictable. The *Sun* describes Dave’s statement that “we want a firmly class-based and left-wing general election campaign in 2015” as “a chilling warning” (“chilling” for whom, exactly?) The *Telegraph* quotes Tory chair Baroness Warsi, denouncing “Unite’s bosses” for “openly boasting of turning the Labour Party into an instrument of class warfare.” (It is worth pointing out that unlike the bosses of the *Sun* and the *Telegraph*, Unite’s leaders were actually elected).

A class war is being waged in Britain, and it is Baroness Warsi’s class which is currently on the offensive. FTSE 100 Chief Executive pay grew 10% this year, at the same time as the NHS suffered a 7% spending cut. Bob Diamond has walked away from the Barclays Libor scandal a richer man; workers across the economy face wage cuts and lay-offs. Benefits claimants face destitution, the corporate profiteers circling to snap up privatised public service contracts face increased profits (even when, like G4S, they prove themselves utterly incompetent). To resist that offensive, our class does need an “instrument of class war”.

Unite’s political strategy will not magically turn the existing Labour Party into that instrument. But it can play an important role in helping reinvigorate active working-class engagement with politics, and reignite a fight for independent working-class political representation.

That fight needs to take place inside the Labour Party, against its New Labour leadership, as much as it does against the Tories.

The response to Dave Quayle’s interview on “Labour Uncut”, an influential Blairite blog, from Atul Hatwal, showed that — despite Ed Miliband’s platitudes and over-

tures at the Durham Miners’ Gala — New Labour is still, if not quite “well”, unfortunately alive.

Hatwal wrote: “Unite’s plans for Labour, backed by the millions of pounds at their disposal, can be summarised: yes to class conflict; no to the free market; and forget about the votes of businessmen, Tory switchers or the centre ground. Anyone in the party disagree? Lump it.” Frankly, that sounds pretty good to us.

Hatwal used his piece to red-bait the AWL: “Comrade Quayle recently gave an interview to the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty... This would be the AWL that defines itself as an organisation committed to the ideas of ‘Marxism and revolutionary socialism’”. Yes, Atul, it would.

And presumably you would be the Atul Hatwal who runs the PR agency “Fifth Column”, which helps businesses “place [themselves] at the heart of the news agenda”? For too long, people like Hatwal — people from the ‘business sector’, with little or no background in the labour movement at all — have set the agenda in the Labour Party. They have turned it into a political space where “electability” is the only concern, and where the basic principles upon which the party was founded are jettisoned.

A palpable air of fear pervades Hatwal’s piece, and he is right to be scared. Unite’s new strategy puts it and its labour movement allies on a direct collision course with people like Hatwal and those that think like him in positions of power within the Labour Party.

The Coalition government functions openly as a government by, of, and for the rich. To oppose their rule, our movement needs to be capable of forming a government by, of, and for the working class. In short, the labour movement needs to make itself fit for power. Taking on the free-marketeers within our own organisations is a good place to start.

- Dave Quayle’s original interview: bit.ly/LQKfYE
- The *Sun* article: bit.ly/O598xA
- The *Telegraph* article: bit.ly/MALKKq
- Anul Hatwal’s piece on “Labour Uncut”: bit.ly/NCqotk

Help the AWL raise £20,000

With just one month to go before our deadline of 1 September we need to raise £2,200 to meet our target.

Will we do it? Maybe not. However while we do not advocate fiddling our own the figures as bankers fiddle their own interest rates, we do intend to get pledges from AWL branches to make plans to raise money through into the autumn.

In London for instance we plan to put on a fundraising gig in October. We will report on this and other plans in the next issue.

You can continue to help us by:

- Taking out a monthly standing order. There is a form at www.workersliberty.org/resources and below. Please post to us at the AWL address below.

- Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to “AWL”) or do it online at www.workersliberty.org/donate

- Organising a fundraising event
- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.

- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

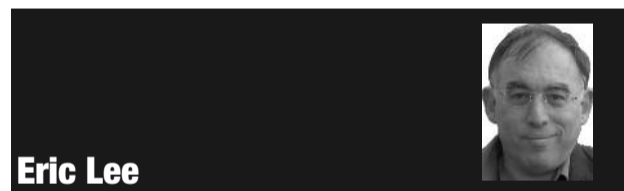
More information: 07796 690 874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Rd, SE1 3DG.



Total raised so far: £17,806

We raised £206 in the last three weeks in new standing orders and donations. Thanks to Cath, Eric, Kate, Liz and Serena

Munich and the left: the case of the American SWP



Eric Lee

This may be news to some, but what is today commonplace was once quite rare. I’m referring to anti-semitism on the far left — and am reminded of what some of us saw as a turning point back in 1972.

For a quarter of a century following the defeat of Nazi Germany, anti-semites everywhere were laying low — especially in the west. The Soviet leadership was growing increasingly anti-Jewish and anti-Israel, and anti-semitism was rife in the Arab world, but in countries like the USA, it was quite rare for Jew-hatred to be expressed openly. And certainly not on the left.

So while there were various degrees of criticism of Israel — especially of Israel’s brand-new occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, Sinai and the Golan Heights — these took place at a time when anti-semitism remained taboo.

That’s why the Munich massacre of that year — and particularly the reaction of America’s largest far left group to it — was such a shock.

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) was then still riding on a wave of support following its successful leadership of a large part of the anti-war movement during the Vietnam years — a war that was still raging. Its youth section, the Young Socialist Alliance, was strong on many college campuses. And it was still at that time pretty much an orthodox Trotskyist organisation, though was later to drift towards Stalinism.

When 11 Israeli athletes were killed following the attack by Black September terrorists, most political activists either grieved or denounced the terrorists. Some would have criticised the botched German government attempt to rescue them.

But not the SWP.

In its weekly newspaper *The Militant*, the SWP ran an article on the “real victims of the Munich massacre”. And the real victims, in their eyes, were not the 11 innocent Israelis, but ... the Palestinians.

An editorial in *The Militant* following the Munich massacre labelled the world outcry as a “hypocritical roar of indignation” whose purpose really was “to make the criminal look like the victim” and said the massacre itself was merely a mistake in tactics.

Those of us who were in the Socialist Party, at that time still under the ideological leadership of Max Shachtman, were shocked at the SWP’s stance.

Our youth section, the Young Peoples Socialist League (YPSL) produced a flyer for distribution at SWP and YSA events where we bluntly accused our former comrades of having crossed the line from criticism of Israel to hatred of the Jewish state — and of Jews.

The SWP was shocked at the allegation and responded by publishing a series of articles in *The Militant* defending their record in the fight against anti-semitism, going back to the Second World War.

Looking back at that today, it strikes me what an innocent time that was.

Today, if a group on the left is accused of anti-semitism it rarely goes to the lengths that the SWP of 1972 went to defend themselves.

Accusations of Jew-hatred are today greeted with a shrug. What was so shocking 40 years ago — that a socialist organisation would identify somehow with a brutal terrorist attack on innocent people if those people happen to be Jewish — is commonplace now.

In the decades that followed the Munich massacre, the SWP drifted away from Trotskyism and lost nearly all of its members, leaving only a tiny organisation left, bereft of all influence.

But the poisonous legacy of anti-semitism remains.

Oppose Assad's tyranny! For secularism and democracy

As *Solidarity* goes to press fighting continues in the Syrian city of Aleppo. The BBC reports 200,000 people have fled the town as the thuggish state, backed by its Shabiah militia, attempts to retake the city from the Free Syrian Army (FSA). The US and UK governments say they fear a massacre.

July has been the bloodiest month since the Syrian uprising began in March 2011 as the rebellion is increasingly arming itself against intransigent and murderous repression. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights estimates that well over 100 people a day are being killed.

The total death toll is now over 20,000, with 8,000 killed since March 2011. 770 have died under torture and 1,600 children have been killed. Over 200,000 have been detained and 65,000 are missing.

115,000 Syrians have registered as refugees, mainly in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. The UNHCR estimates the true figure is over 270,000.

Up to one million are internal refugees, from a total population of 22 million.

REBEL GAINS

The opposition received a big boost when four of President Bashar Assad's key security officials were assassinated on 18 July.

FSA fighters took the initiative and moved into Damascus and Aleppo. Both towns are vital to the state and had been relatively peaceful during the uprising.

Border posts to Turkey and Iraq were also overrun by rebels. And there were reports of new, large army defections.

The main groups of FSA fighters were forced out of Damascus within a few days, as they probably knew they would be.

Next the focus shifted to Aleppo, Syria's largest city with a population over two million. Unlike Damascus much of the countryside around Aleppo is controlled by rebel militia units. Aleppo is much nearer FSA supply routes from Turkey.

However the FSA is unlikely to hold Aleppo either. One FSA commander stated: "The FSA has several hundred soldiers inside [the town] and in total a bigger force of 2000 in the area. The regime has 100 tanks, 400 troop carriers with 1500 soldiers [and militia]. And the regime has helicopters" (*Guardian*, 30 July).

The government has used artillery and aerial bombing against much more lightly armed FSA fighters.

Aleppo is home to the Sunni capitalist class; that elite had accepted minority, sectarian Alawite rule (the Alawites are a 10% minority) on the understanding that its business interests will be protected. The elite is now caught in a bind: on the one hand the current government has failed to smash the rebellion and the economy is going to hell; on the other they are scared about the FSA, made up of the Sunni poor from outlying villages.

US academic Josh Landis notes: "The [Sunni business people] look out at the countryside and think: What if these people win? Are they going to respect capitalism? Are they going to preserve our wealth? Or are they going to come by and say, 'Oh, you've been a collaborator for 40 years, and we're going to take everything you own'? The [elite] don't know."

KURDS

In order to mass loyal units outside Aleppo the regime has had to abandon army posts in the Kurdish areas of north east Syria

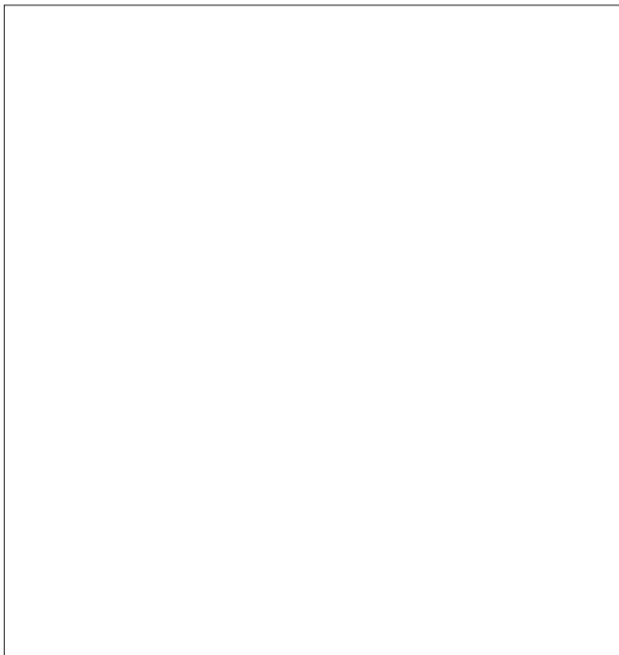
The state's forces are now seriously stretched. Most of the regular army is locked-down in barracks and monitored closely by the intelligence services to guard against defections. The government is estimated to have about 70,000 loyal troops — albeit much better armed than the FSA.

In a number of Kurdish villages and towns the flags of the PYD, the political wing of the terrorist Kurdish PKK, and the Kurdish alliance, the Kurdish National Council (KNC), are flying. The balance is very much with the PKK, which has moved its forces into northern Syria from Turkey and Iraq, much to the alarm of the Turkish government.

The Turkish Islamist government continues its state's chauvinist attitude to Kurds living inside Turkey. The Turks have fought a long, bloody war against the PKK and are alarmed that the PKK is regrouping in Syria.

The Syrian regime seems to have informed the PKK/PYD in advance of their withdrawal. The Syrian rulers have had a working arrangement with the PKK, using them against Turkey when they found it expedient.

The main Kurdish organisations remain outside the main



Syrian opposition grouping, the Syrian National Council (SNC). The SNC remains hostile to any idea of Kurdish rule, defining Syrian nationality in Arab nationalist terms.

THE OPPOSITION

The content of the rebellion remains as it was: a mass popular upsurge against Assad's police state which has spread to engulf the whole of Syria geographically and is essentially both democratic and plebeian.

It has produced a large number of grassroots committees which have directed the rebellion on the ground.

The revolt has had the active sympathy of the Sunni Muslim workers and poor since its beginning; now the majorities of the Christian (10% of the total), Palestinians (half a million), and the Druze population, probably back the movement.

The only minority which remains solidly tied to the state in their majority is the Alawites. Alawites have received preferential treatment in jobs, housing and education. Alawis are in key positions in all the security services.

The rebellion retains its basic character, while becoming more and more militarised. However some reactionary features are being strengthened.

First, there has been a growth of independent, salafist Islamist militias, backed and funded from outside Syria. Two journalists were recently kidnapped by such a group in northern Syria and report that their captors were all foreign fighters.

Second, there has been drift within the main body of the organised opposition towards both a more (Sunni Muslim) religious and a sectarian (Arab and anti-Alawite) stance. One chant heard in Hama is, "The Alawi in the coffin, and the Christian to Beirut."

For example, Zabadani, a town with a population of 5,000 Christians and 30,000 Sunni Muslims has two Free Army militias. One is more secular; the other — bigger and better funded with guns and money from abroad — is salafist.

The FSA is estimated to have about 40,000 former armed forces personnel in its ranks supplemented by civilians — the proportion for civilians varies from area to area. The FSA is a federation of local groups, many with tenuous relations with the FSA command based in Turkey.

Saudi and Gulf states money is allegedly being channeled through the SNC to the FSA — although little money or equipment seems to have arrived so far.

The Saudis and Qataris have often promised money and weapons aiming to cultivate allies.

The largest political opposition front, the Syrian National Council (SNC), is now largely dominated by the Muslim Brothers. It has relatively little direct purchase inside the country although it may end up being the beneficiary — as in Egypt — of the overturn of the regime.

As the western powers have come to believe that it is only a matter of time until Assad falls they have been shifting around to find better "partners" than the SNC. Currently former regime insider, friend of president Bashar Assad, and recent defector, Manaf Tlas, is being touted as someone who might hold the state together and be someone acceptable to the Russians. Of course such a person — a rich, ex-General in the Republican Guards, who for twenty years was a personal friend of the Assads — is hardly likely to be warmly welcomed by those actually fighting the regime.

ECONOMY

As a result of EU sanctions over 130 Syrian individuals and 50 companies have had assets frozen. £100m has been frozen in the UK alone.

Syria formerly sold most of its oil to the EU and sanctions have meant a loss of up to \$4 billion.

In order to continue salary payments for over two million state employees among a workforce of 4.5 million the state has begun to circulate a new run of banknotes. Inflation is now at over 30% and the new banknotes will make that worse.

Syria's economy shrank 3.4 percent in 2011 and may contract by a further 8 per cent this year.

There are now widespread, hours-long power cuts each day in all areas of the country. Heating oil and petrol are very expensive. The wheat harvest has been seriously affected because of diesel shortages.

ALAWITES

Recent press commentary suggest that the Alawite community may retreat to its traditional heartlands in north west Syria. The evidence claimed for this is some ethnic cleansing by Alawite militias against neighbouring villages. There are echoes of a suggested Boer state at the end of South African apartheid.

In the 1920s the French colonial authorities divided Syria into various units, including an Alawite entity. The Alawites were unsophisticated, mountain village people. The French gave the Alawites a role in the military precisely because they had few ties to the majority Sunnis in the big cities. It was this base in the army which later allowed the creation of a sectarian Alawite state across all of Syria.

However the Alawites — after 40 years of power — have often moved into Syria's cities and towns. And large towns in the north west — such as Latakia on the coast — are now Sunni majority towns. There is no going back.

REPERCUSSIONS

Although the current rebellion in Syria is a product of the situation inside the country (not the malign creation of meddling outside powers as the Syrian state claims, and some of the far left seems to believe), foreign governments see dangers and opportunities.

One the on hand the Syrian state continues to receive military, economic and diplomatic support from Iran, Russia and China. These states are weighing in heavily on Assad's side.

On the other hand, seeing the likely end of Assad (if not necessarily the end of his state) the US has begun to look towards a post-Assad Syria. The US fears that Syria will "explode, not implode." They are (rightly) concerned about the possibility of the Syrian state collapsing into sectarian civil war which would spread to Lebanon.

Other dangers include Syrian chemical weapons being given to — or taken by — Hizbollah or other Islamists (and Israeli intervention as a result); a Muslim Brotherhood victory in Syria leading to the fall of the Jordanian monarchy to its own Brotherhood; Turkish invasion of northern Syria to smash the PKK.

Still, US officials are insisting they won't provide arms to Syria's anti-Assad forces or push for a no-fly zone over rebel-controlled areas. The US has been very active attempting to stop weapons getting to people who might later turn them on the US. The FSA has demanded weapons from the west — which it has a perfect right to do — but these have largely been denied (something which underlines the absurdity of "left" claims that the war in Syria is an "imperialist" provocation).

The Saudi state's reaction to the "Arab Spring" has been two-fold: preventing pro-democracy movements doing damage its own reactionary interests; ensuring that Iran does not benefit from any changes to the regional balance of power.

The Saudi (and Gulf states') policy is to break the alliance between Syria and Iran, while also worrying about the consequences of the regime's fall (which has inhibited them). They also present themselves as the protector of Sunnis against Iranian interference in Arab affairs.

Workers' Liberty supports the fight for women's rights, secularism and workers' rights in Syria. Down with Assad's regime! For liberty and democracy!

A workers' Olympics?

By Edd Mustill

Most people on the left have greeted the London 2012 games with healthy cynicism or hostility. This is understandable, given the profiteering, the property development, and the exploitation that comes to town with the Olympics.

In all the debates going on about the political nature and social effects of the games, are there any models for socialists to look to when it comes to staging big sporting events? Is there such a thing as "workers' sport" or "socialist sport"?

WORKERS' OLYMPIADS

For a brief period in the 1920s and 1930s, the international workers' movement was strong enough to organise and stage its own alternative games.

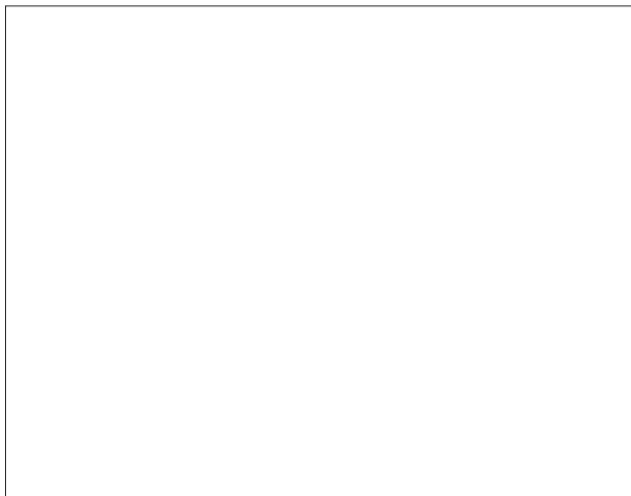
The existence of workers' sports clubs stretches back into the 19th century (of which, more later), but after the Russian Revolution, the great split between the reformist and revolutionary wings of the socialist movement was mirrored in these organisations.

There was a Socialist Workers' Sport International (SASI), supported by the social democratic parties and the "Amsterdam" trade union international, and a Red Sport International (RSI), or Sportintern, founded by revolutionary Communists. Calls to unify the two throughout the 1920s came to nothing, as the political divide between social democrats and Communists became more entrenched.

SASI held three summer Workers' Olympiads, and one in winter. In 1931, both the summer and winter Workers' Olympiads were larger than their "official" counterparts. There were no national flags, only the Red Flag of the workers' movement. One poster for the 1925 Workers' Olympiad, held in Frankfurt-am-Main, shows a socialist worker with a huge red flag standing over broken rifles and a battered swastika flag. It is obvious from this image what the political message of the event was; peace and internationalism. The motto of the Frankfurt games was "No More War." Worker-athletes from different countries stayed with working-class families. There was no cosetted Olympic Village built over cleansed working-class neighbourhoods.

The IOC will always bang on about the "spirit of the Olympics" being about peace and international unity, but in the 1920 and 1924 games, athletes from the losing countries in the First World War were barred.

The RSI similarly held one winter and three summer sports events, which they named Spartakiads, between 1928 and 1937.



Entrance to the Frankfurt 1925 Workers' Olympiad. Sign reads: "Workers beware of alcohol!"

In 1931, the high point of this Labour Olympics movement, the SASI was much larger than the RSI. It had over one million affiliated members in Germany, or about ten times the number affiliated to the Communist organisation. The RSI did, however, apparently win to it a majority of workers' sports clubs in certain countries, notably France, Sweden, and Canada.

The RSI was founded in 1921 with little fanfare and little interference or assistance from the Communist International, but throughout the 1920s it became organisationally dependent on the International's structures. As early as 1923, the Executive Committee of the Communist International agreed that, although formally independent and involved in the organisation of non-Party workers, the RSI "carries out its work in accordance with the political directives of the Communist International."

By the mid-1930s, Stalinist policy changed to one of rapprochement with social democracy through the "Popular Front." In 1936, Barcelona planned to host a "People's Olympiad," as Republican Spain had declared that it was boycotting the Berlin Olympics, held under Nazi rule.

The competition was never held because the military uprising that triggered the Spanish Civil War occurred just days before it was scheduled to start. However, some of the athletes, mostly representative of trade unions and political groups rather than nations, had already arrived in Spain, and proceeded to join the military struggle against Franco. One such athlete was Clara Thalmann, a German swimmer and

Gymnastics at the 1925 Frankfurt Workers' Olympiad

Communist Party oppositionist who joined the anarchist Durruti Column.

WORKERS' SPORT?

Organised sport with a mass audience is a relatively modern phenomenon, dating back only to the mid-19th century.

Fairly rapidly, sports programmes were set up in many European countries by organisations as diverse as religious groups, military academies, and trade unions. The latter developed into the concept of "workers' sport."

Self-organised, independent working-class sports clubs were different from the idea of "works teams," set up by employers (from which many modern football clubs, such as West Ham United and Arsenal, originate). In Britain in the 1890s, clubs set up by supporters of the socialist Clarion newspaper were largely focused around non-competitive cycling and hiking. In Germany, workers' gymnastics clubs were most popular.

Are such activities "more socialist" than competitive team sports? The self-proclaimed mission of the RSI was "the creation and amalgamation of revolutionary proletarian sports and gymnastics organisations in all countries of the world and their transformation into support centres for the proletariat in its class struggle."

But the RSI did not exclude its clubs from participating in competitive sports. On the contrary, it welcomed any sport which "aroused the interest of the masses." Ostensibly, competition in and between Communist clubs was about preparing members physically and mentally for class struggle.

Ernst Grube of the Communist Party of Germany declared: "Worker sport has nothing in common with the petty bourgeoisie's craving for freedom; it is Marxist class war on all fronts of sport and physical exercise." But, with only about 10% of RSI-affiliated athletes Party members, to what extent was this just hot air from a Stalinist functionary?

Perhaps the "socialist" nature of the inter-war organisations can be judged from their social role, rather than the types of sports they were promoting. Social democrats ran free swimming lessons in Austria, and a bicycle-making cooperative was run by the German social democratic cycling club. Such pursuits were more worthwhile than the increasingly dogmatic partyist pronouncements of the Communist organisations.

Although the various national sections of the RSI succeeded in attracting workers from non-Communist leftwing traditions, including anarchists, the real decision-making processes of the group were Stalinised during the 1920s. The lack of "correct" political awareness from members of local clubs, who had perhaps only affiliated to the RSI through accidents of geography, was a constant source of frustration to the RSI leadership, who saw sporting competitions as opportunities for political education.

The idea that some sports are inherently "un-socialist" comes from a type of Stalinised cod-Marxism; nor is it "un-socialist" to enjoy or be inspired by Olympic sports. If "workers' sport" is a concept worth reviving, it should examine the basis on which sporting events are being held.

There are certain elements of internationalism to the current Olympics, but they are mostly buried by the nationalist and corporate landslide. This was a state of affairs that the workers' movement in the 1920s was confident and powerful enough to at least try to oppose, without turning its back on the sports in the process.

Scandal of cleaners' prison camp

By Rebecca Galbraith

On 15 July, the *Daily Mail* reported on the slum accommodation that has been provided for Olympic cleaners.

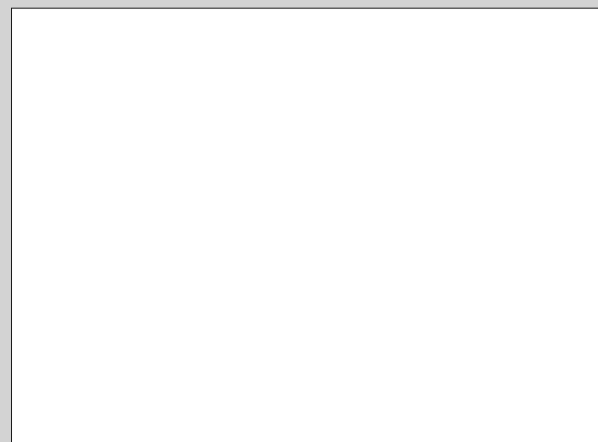
A portable-cabin village, which has been likened to a prison or a slum by residents, has been erected away from public view near the Olympic Park in Newham. Cleaners are sleeping 10 to a room, there is one toilet between 25, and one shower between 75.

Workers were promised employment immediately but were horrified to learn when they arrived that they would have to wait two weeks to start. Meanwhile, they still have to pay £18 a day (£550 a month) for the "accommodation", many units of which are leaking due to the heavy rain that has flooded the site.

The workers have been forced to agree not to discuss their conditions with the press, and families and friends have been barred from visiting them, officially "for security reasons".

It is good (and also surprising) that the *Daily Mail* has uncovered and reported on this. However, the paper is also arguing that the jobs should have gone to locals rather than migrants. The same is true of an on-line petition against the slum conditions, which has already gained 7,015 signatures.

The last thing we need at this time of European-wide



Cleaner's camp

crisis is for the ugly spectre of "British jobs for British workers" to raise its head again. Instead we argue that — British born or migrant — we organise together as the working class.

Organisers are taking advantage of the unemployed and of migrants. We should be calling for decent pay and conditions for all Olympic workers and exposing the super-exploitation that inevitably follows the use of private companies and agencies.

Several hundred people marched in Tower Hamlets last Saturday on a demonstration called by the Counter Olympics Network. The organisers said that they were protesting against “Cameron and Coe’s corporate games”, highlighting issues such as the “two million free tickets for the rich” and “roads being turned into exclusive highways for VIPs”. The march also raised the sidelining of local residents regarding the placing of missiles on the roofs of residential buildings, a move described by one protestor as “a completely irresponsible and stupid thing to do.”

Olympics “legacy” hollow when school sports threatened

By Ruben Lomas

For schoolchildren across the country, as well as for the residents of East London’s working-class communities, the “Olympic legacy” will exist largely as rhetoric that jars appreciably with their lived experience.

The broken promises around the housing legacy of the

Games are already well-documented. The new developments and regeneration were supposed to improve and create homes for local communities; the reality is turning out to be quite different. Five new housing developments in Hackney, Tower Hamlets, and Newham were supposed to be leased at affordable rates following the Games, but since those commitments were made, the Coalition’s changes to housing policy mean that developers and landlords can charge up to 80% of market rates for subsidised “social” housing. That means that the major Olympics developments could be rented for up to £762 per month (80% of the median monthly rent for the area, calculated by housing charity Shelter) — totally unaffordable for many locals.

The sporting “legacy” of the Games was exposed as transparent almost as soon as the Tories and Lib Dems took power, with Michael Gove announcing plans to scrap the “School Sports Partnership” schemes, which had increased access to sport in local schools. Evidence in the run-up to the Games has suggested that *less* sport is now being played in schools (although hard data is difficult to compile, given that Gove has also abolished the government agency responsible for monitoring sports participation in schools).

Under the School Sports Partnership (SSP) programme, the number of secondary school children playing two hours or more of sport a week rose from 20% to 85%. Last year, a Labour Party poll of school sports co-ordinators found that 80% of them believed the number of sports on offer would drop following the abolition of the SSPs, with 94% saying they thought they would offer less hours.

The Tories have argued that increased support and funding for the School Games — a national, selection-based, multi-sports tournament, which this year culminated in the Olympic Park in May — is evidence of their ongoing commitment to sports in schools and its close relationship to the Olympic legacy. But funding for a selection-based national tournament is not an adequate replacement for abolishing grassroots-level access and participation schemes, and funding for the School Games is not guaranteed beyond 2014/2015 anyway!

What will be left behind when the Olympics circus leaves London? Housing that only middle-class people can afford, a sports in schools policy based on *reducing* funding rather than increasing it, and ongoing resentment towards a semi-militarised policing operation and social cleansing. The London 2012 Olympics will make its corporate sponsors richer; for working-class people, particularly in East London, it’s just another kick in the teeth.

Olympics police arrest... cyclists

While all eyes were fixed on last Friday’s Olympic opening ceremony, the Metropolitan Police used CS gas and kettling to break up the weekly Critical Mass bicycle ride, arresting 182 cyclists, including a 13 year-old boy.

After what is thought to be the largest mass detention in the UK since the 2011 riots, many of those arrested alleged that they were held overnight in windowless cells.

Some were held for several hours on buses waiting to be processed, while others were locked in what the Met described as a “former transport garage” converted for use as a police custody suite.

One of those arrested told *Solidarity*: “The police were clearly aware that that entire operation was politically motivated. Those around me spent the entire night moaning about the waste of time and resources.

“We’ve been charged with being a nuisance to the people of Newham — but it’s entirely clear that all the disruption and nuisance has been caused by the thousands of militarised police, not a couple of hundred cyclists.”

New York City Cops



Songs of Liberty & Rebellion

On 19 July, Simon Harwood, the policeman who killed Ian Tomlinson, was found “not guilty”. No police officer has ever been brought to justice for the killings of Smiley Culture, Mark Duggan, Jean Charles de Menezes, or any of the other vic-

tims of police

shootings. In America, Manuel Diaz and Joel Acevedo of Anaheim, California, recently became the latest additions to a long list of individuals — invariably black or Latin American — killed by the police in suspicious circumstances, sparking riots in response.

Throughout the “liberal democratic” world, the police remain an often brutal, sometimes murderous, force that exists fundamentally to protect the interests of the state. These extracts from “New York City Cops”, by Queens rapper Himanshu Suri (aka Heems, from the group Das Racist), detail some of the killings committed by “New York’s Finest” (or “New York’s spineless”, as Heems rechristens them).

The structure and rhyme patterns are relatively simple, but the percussive, emphatic effect of naming the police’s victims — including some less well-known ones alongside higher-profile cases like the 1999 shooting of Amadou Diallo — has real power. The track is a re-working of the 2001 song by the same name by rock band *The Strokes* (which said of the NYPD that they “act like Romans”).

The Ruby Kid

Oy vey, these guys is New York’s spineless
Strangled and denied it for Anthony Baez
They was cool maybe, had a pool proly
That was ‘94 he was one of three bodies (unarmed).
Ernest Sayon (unarmed),
And Johnnie Cromartie (unarmed),
Under Giuliani well they had them a party (bang bang!)
In ‘73 there were riots in Queens (Jamaica),
When they merked Clifford Glover, he wasn’t even a
teen (a child!)
Used to be nine, he had just turned ten (a child!)
Pig said “die you little fuck!” and got off clean (yup)
And ain’t a thing that these bars do
That can make up for the pain of the family of Fermin
Arzu
They the ones who always put the fire up on you (on
you!)
And shoot and say they thought you had a gun in the car
dude (theres no gun no gun)
Ousmane Zongo ‘03, Diallo in like ‘99
I swear this shit happen like 90 times definitely
Definitely happens like plenty times
But it’s documented like 20 times
Well, Randolph Evans, well...

I never felt safer,
Never never felt safer
(Well I’m a white cop so I own this world?)
Heems never felt safe around the police
(Uh yeah well I’m white, soooo...)

And Michael Stewart who do art under the ground
Got found and laid down by
Eleven white cops that pound
-ed him for thirty-two minutes between arrest and
delivery
(they played with the paperwork!)
Alive and barely breathing to dead in ‘83
Radio Raheem (Spike Lee!)
I don’t fuck with cops!
It’s Heems!

• Full lyrics: bit.ly/xd0PGT

“A cloud of 21st-century consciousness”

By Steve Hansen

“It’s so exotic, so homemade.” Paul Scofield narrating Patrick Keiller’s film “London”.

I couldn’t stop myself from watching the Olympic opening ceremony. I predicted hours of torture as I tried to stifle my discomfort, but actually, the event was more interesting than I expected.

Essentially, director Danny Boyle attempted a representation of Britain from the industrial revolution on up, via a romanticised, feudal pastoral scene, an unnatural “zero moment”. Phallic chimneys split the ground, replacing the phallic maypoles and jingoistic Oak tree, and planted the “dark satanic mills” of Blake, whose ‘Jerusalem’ was sung. Brunel made a speech in his big sideburns, and the Olympic rings were forged. All of this was presented as “natural”, but the seams were showing occasionally, via which a critical entry could be made. You had to look carefully for these joins though, because they were often absences, places where the cultural texture had been folded back under, then stitched into place.

In a recent documentary, Iain Sinclair and Andrew Kotting describe the zone around the Olympic Park as a “cloud of 21st-century consciousness”. Sinclair relates the Blake quote, “human thought is crush’d beneath the iron hand of power”, to the capitalist regeneration attempt around and through the Olympic site, which he and many others think is crazy, even on its own terms. Blake’s ‘Jerusalem’ is anti-capitalist in many ways, but its employment in the ceremony wasn’t simply hypocritical, it gave it a double-bind-like quality, intentionally or otherwise. The double-bind, Derrida once explained, operates like the term “pharmakon”, which means both medicine and poison.

More obviously, this celebration of a Britain “forged” in the industrial revolution masked the politicised attacks on industrialism by certain quarters of British society: “The City” has long militated against industry in the rest of the country, long before Thatcher even, a figure who lurked behind the scenery of the opening ceremony. Thatcher was the real Child Catcher here, not the one raised mythically from Mary Poppins during the ceremony; Iain Sinclair thinks of her quite literally as a witch.

Thatcher could also be glimpsed in the splitting of the event in two, narrative-wise: when the identikit Beatles arrived, in Sergeant Pepper costumes, erroneously ahead of the Empire Windrush, no bell was rung, but a switch had been thrown; we went from a Britain accounted for in terms of its manufacturing economy, which replaced rural feudalism, to a Britain accounted for almost entirely in terms of its cultural consumption. We had been symbolically shifted from “the base”, to “the superstructure”, to use the Marxist terminology, like a train going through a set of points. This is correct in one sense, if we think about the way working lives and experiences in Britain have changed, the switch is real, but it is interesting to think about in relation to the Empire Windrush: inward migration was represented, but not the practices of offshoring labour; after the Windrush and the Yellow Submarines we should have seen container drivers, meandering in a patternless weave across the space.

This historical switch was thrown by Thatcher, and prosecuted through advocacy such as the Ridley Report, the ramifications of which are still live. But I also wondered what other nations thought of this, as they watched the opening ceremony, as this narrative of two halves — producers and consumers — reproduced an islander’s view of

Britain, rather than an outward-looking one.

There were other moments where the seams showed: for instance, there were two mourning pauses, one for the World Wars and one for 7/7, which tends to fold the events into each other. There was more than a trace of 1950s “blitz” aesthetic in the ceremony already, which risked reinforcing the latent idea that what happens in Afghanistan and Iraq are collapsible into the fight against fascism and the capitalist war of 1914-18. It all gets resolved at the symbolic level of a big Poppy and a Help For Heroes bumper sticker.

There was much John Bullish trumpeting about the volunteers too, who performed Boyle’s “vision” for free. One pundit claimed that these people gave the lie to the idea that no-one will do anything in Britain unless we pay them “shedloads” of money. Well, that’s untrue, real wages for ordinary jobs have been in decline for years, but people still work them.

The elitism of England was reproduced in the £1600 or £2012 ticket price, entitling spectators to watch unpaid performers. How perfectly reflective of 2012 England, and here we really did have the “superstructure” properly reflecting “the base”, as Walter Benjamin urged us to describe it.

This is a great metaphor for the British cultural industries too, which a commentator explained was one of Britain’s biggest exports, exports powered by the narcissism which propels people into unpaid labour, both in this spectacle, and in “the media” industries more generally.

We’re always told that the great thing about capitalism is choice, Coke or Pepsi, and affordability, and that all this is delivered by competition. Yet here was “choice” as fait accompli, Coke not Pepsi, literally, and this is before we discuss whether Coke or Pepsi was ever a choice in the first place.

Here also was “competition”, the unpaid before ludicrously expensive ticket holders and corporate boxes, in an assemblage put together via a “competition” for franchise, which took place thousands of feet above street level, but nonetheless sent the cops in when the terms of its agreement were broken on those streets. Just cast your mind back to the August 2011 riots, here, in poetic, assemblage-form, is what happened to the social contract, what replaced it in fact.

The “brand policing” — which usually only means the application of aesthetic rules — was literal policing here. The “free” in free market seemed to have been replaced by a kind of cultural Stalinism — which is perhaps over-stating the matter; nobody, as far as I’m aware, was asked to rise early for the electric mattress and fingernail spa — but the irony was clear. “Competition”, to which the words “liberty”, “freedom” and “progress” are always attached, has always been the chilling process of watching bigger fish watching you, with their giant, dead eyes, waiting to open their cold-blooded jaws. Competition isn’t a jolly wheeze of a running race for all, with fair handicaps, all British and sportsmanlike what-what, something also coded into the opening ceremony.

All the exclusions here act as metaphors: the system cannot maintain itself without those outside, they are the economically necessary who are always described as unnecessary, although their describing as such is necessary for those in power. Anyone who has worked for a reasonable amount of time in any institution — public or private — will know that the cultural orders there are never straightforward hierarchies of ability. And this, all of this, was coded into the Olympic opening, although it was nec-

essary to turn its cultural fabric inside-out at this point, to find the truth of its construction; competitions, “meritocracies”, don’t single out the able individual for special treatment, they single out the masses who are “not able” for “special treatment”, and often this has little to do with ability, because under capitalism “the able” simply means those who happen to be in the always very much less than full employment.

But the ceremony wasn’t uncritical, or only unconsciously critical: NHS beds were crawled over by monsters at one point, and this made the event partly nationalistic and partly critical, again, it was a double bind. You could feel the tears welling up, the affect was strong, but I would argue that this affect strongly risks re-coursing into thin nationalism.

Danny Boyle’s selection as director also illuminated the shifting of cultural capital in Britain, and the inclusion of the countercultural in this was telling. A bit of the soundtrack flashed up like the new national anthem, and I was thinking, “where do I know this from?” It was a rehashed fragment of “Two Months Off” by Underworld, who put the music together, which ten years ago you might have heard coming down from a pill, but here it played like “Ode To Joy”.

POPULAR CULTURE

I saw the sociologist Mike Savage feed back the results of the Great British Class Survey recently, and he explained how our cultural capital references have shifted towards popular cultural ones, away from high cultural “elitism”.

Of course, popular culture, since its major rise in the 1960s, fragmented the “us and them” situation of the Edwardian era. But in another sense entirely, the idea that the counterculture has “won” by entering the canon is also misguided, because, for instance, the romantics were already “countercultural”, Blake certainly.

But it is clear that the gap between protest culture and cultural capital has been effectively shut down in 2012, by the nanosecond of reflection time between the receive-and-send of interactive communication, and the corresponding speed-up of purchasing and cultural redundancy. Both “radical” and “mainstream” were winking out of existence via these processes, this is a cultural Ouroboros, the snake that eats its own tail. In essence, the a-central hell of the industrial revolution Boyle depicted simply turned into the a-central hell of our consumer landscapes, when the switch was thrown from the “base” industrial narrative to the “superstructural”, pop-cultural one. We were simply put into different, but equally alienating, evaporating spaces.

In fact, the whole thing resembled everyday life in many ways, like a train station or an airport, with its vast scale and confusing morass of people, nonetheless roughly choreographed, with different, symbolically-coded groups rushing one way or another. If we add the glib bidding for the Olympic franchise and its deeply cynical policing to this “gesamtkunstwerk”, we are actually left with a very large critical ensemble, which begins to look like “reality” itself: if we think about the Greek libation, it was for “the gods”, but birds and other animals actually took the offerings away. In this ceremony they took your Pepsi away and air-brushed any un-franchised Olympic rings from the city, but then others can come along, like me, and read the remaining assemblage like a jewel, turning it over in different lights.

Put simply, it was useful. It was a pre-winter underlining of who we are, if one accepts that “who we are” is edited, slurred, exclusive, even patronising, but most certainly exotic and homemade. Walter Benjamin’s interest in the Paris arcades was to show us the dreaming life of the masses in the nineteenth century, to wake us into the twentieth, and therefore we might wake to our own era via a similar study. Benjamin describes the “dialectical images”, rescued from the rubbish of his own era. On one level, it was possible to get near to what Benjamin urged us to do via the Olympic ceremony, but it was a mass spectacle, and to fully do what Benjamin asked we would have to locate a receding, half-forgotten zone. But it is clear to me that much can be mined from big spectacles such as this one.

The point for me though is not necessarily to read the Olympic opening ceremony all the way through, and certainly not the Arcades Project, but to ask, “what can we do to wake us in the twenty-first century and shake the twentieth century sleep from our eyes?” But perhaps it will be the lack of spectacles such as these, rather than their reading, which will eventually do the awakening. I’m relieved that the enormous outpouring of collective hysteria called “The Olympics” only lasts until 12 August. At which point, I assume, the bread and circuses will all be used up, and we will have to account for our true circumstances, in the cold light of an on-coming winter. I can’t wait, frankly. In the meantime, I’m tuned into Radio 3 and may never re-emerge.

• Steve Hansen blogs at steveaitch.wordpress.com

Who “owns” anti-apartheid heritage?

By Martyn Hudson

Since South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994 and the decisive victory of the African National Congress there have been several scandals involving the ruling party. But the ANC's level of electoral success in post-apartheid South Africa has made the country, to all intents and purposes, a one-party state. It is a remote possibility that any other party could succeed to power unless the ANC itself splits into warring factions.

Once perceived as the younger and more radical sister of the ANC, the Pan-Africanist Congress founded by Robert Sobukwe, and led by inspirational thinkers and activists like the martyred Steve Biko, was always politically disorganised and offered little challenge. Its concept of “one settler, one bullet”, the memorialisation of Biko, and the suspicion that many black activists had towards the largely white leadership of the South African Communist Party has not translated into a political stakehold in government.

At the same time demagogues like Julius Mulema (the expelled leader of the ANC's youth wing) — a product of the new black middle class — have used the rhetoric of black nationalism to secure support amongst a youth which feels dispossessed even now by what is perceived as *white*, economic rule. Recent scandals involving Mulema have not dampened down an enthusiasm for his politics in townships still riven by dire poverty, health problems, and a rapidly expanding refugee population.

Recent events involving the image of President Jacob Zuma, at first sight quite trivial point to serious issues about the future of South Africa and independent working-class politics.

THREE PROBLEMS

The Tripartite Alliance of the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP), and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was forged long before the victory of the ANC in the early 1990s. But the trade unions have become increasingly critical of ANC government describing Zuma's presidency as a “predator society” and decisively differing from the government on the three central problems facing the post-apartheid state.

Firstly, the Zimbabwean refugee problem and the status of the ANC's relationship to the Mugabe government with two major delegations of COSATU observers being forcibly expelled from the country in recent years.

Secondly, on the AIDS situation which the government, particularly under Thabo Mbeki, largely underestimated, or even made worse with its inability to face the reality of the situation (around six million people, one tenth of the population, have positive status) and to offer much of a treatment programme.

Thirdly, with all of the international aid and development money which supported social grants and aid the emergence of a minimal welfare state and housing programme the ANC has still not made a dent into the mass poverty in the townships, particularly in rural areas, but also in cities where crime is rife.

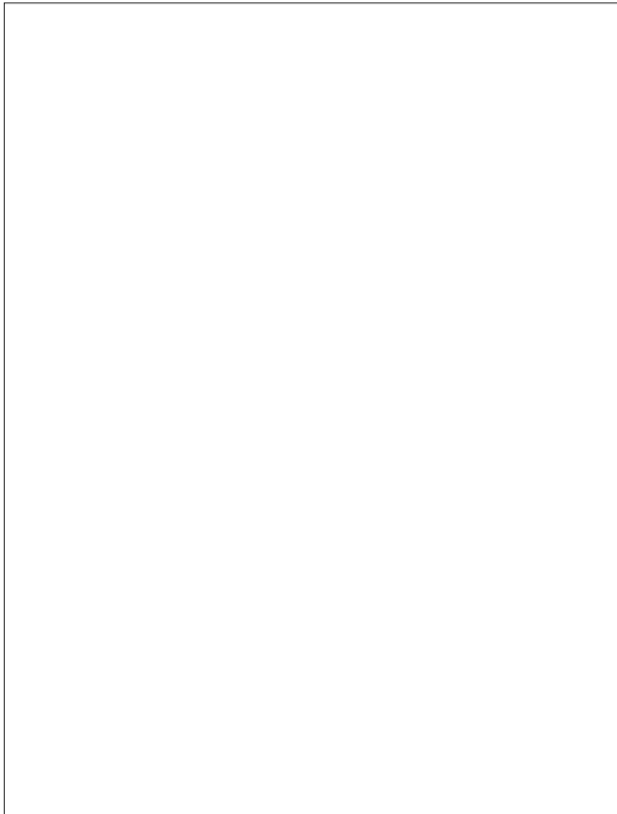
Most young people still see their way to a better life through an underground economy, by getting to positions of influence in the ANC, or through gangsterism which is a blight on the townships particularly in Gauteng province.

The housing programme is quite extensive in the country but it started from a very low level of development and one which had to grapple with the fact that the townships were profoundly geographically divorced from the old white's-only city centres — leaving the black workers with huge journeys to work usually by walking, rail, or on the informal taxi buses.

The “white flight” that has been part of the visible change in the cities has led to an even more geographically uneven city structure with many affluent whites either fleeing South Africa entirely, like the novelist JM Coetzee, who left for Australia in protest at the lack of credibility that the ANC had in dealing with crime; or to semi-militarised compounds in the suburbs (often shared by the emerging black middle class) surrounded by razor wire and armed guards.

The critical status of refugees in South Africa is in some ways a telling indicator of the social problems of the state. Many refugees are HIV positive, trafficked into the country across its borders to the north, arriving traumatised and expecting a first world solution to their problems and instead finding themselves in isolated rural townships or in crime-ridden city centres with little support and with widespread violence meted out against them on the streets.

The refugee situation also highlights the massive problem with corruption amongst the police and border officials with financial racketeering playing a large part in how migrants get in to the country and how well they are treated once they get there.



Red Location museum in New Brighton is a beacon for tourists but has little impact on the local community and is vilified by many young people in the township.

Dissatisfaction with the ANC has also led to the securing of political footholds for the liberals of the Democratic Alliance in places like the Western Cape. They make a fetish of taking a stand against corruption but also point to the role of many of their cadre in the past in the anti-apartheid struggle. Although largely supported by the white affluent classes they are also becoming a pole of support for many black South Africans who have had enough of the evasions and corruption of parts of the ANC.

Corruption is perceived by many to be not just in the lower ranks of the ANC and in the police force but higher up. One of Zuma's closest colleagues, Schabir Shaik, was jailed for corruption. As a result of hostile press intrusion into Zuma's personal life and economic dealings the ANC have pushed through the Protection of State Information Bill which many on the left perceive as a further assault on civil liberties and part of the consolidation of the one-party state.

COSATU continues to ally itself with both the SACP and the ANC for want of any other political expression.

The SACP itself stands at the heart of the mythology of the struggle. As East European Stalinism collapsed, the last apartheid leader FW De Klerk, knowing that a fully Stalinised revolutionary state in South Africa wasn't on the cards (and no longer seen as desirable by leaders such as Joe Slovo and Chris Hani), accepted that a multi-party democracy would come into being.

He became convinced by the “Rainbow Nation” rhetoric of the ANC so that to some extent the maintenance of the Afrikaaner community in post-apartheid South Africa could continue without violence. But this reconciliation also ensured the continued maintenance of the economic power of the ruling elite, to the great frustration of many of the dispossessed black youth in the townships.

The SACP itself never wavered in its commitment to the ANC, with some reservations, but had a less than easy relationship with the administration of Thabo Mbeki. But as an ex-SACP politburo member, Zuma has created a populist ascendancy around his own personality and his clique and fosters the language of anti-imperialism and non-alignment at the same time as supporting an array of fairly dictatorial regimes in Southern Africa.

The left outside of the SACP is fairly diffuse with a myriad of Trotskyist groups and there are many grassroots struggles against the regime with the organisation of unemployed workers in places like Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape who are very hostile to the ANC, its corruption, and its inability to deal with the employment problem.

THE FUTURE

Neither the image nor the reality of the ANC was pristine even before the democratic elections of 1994.

Widespread accusations of brutality and torture were emerging from ANC camps outside of South Africa in the 1980s and certainly in power it has verged from recklessness to outright stupidity. But part of the reason it remains electorally successful is its ability to point to the absolutely

correct notion that it was central to the struggle against apartheid from the birth of the apartheid state onwards.

At the same time there has been the sanctification of Mandela, both by himself and by the media, the heritage industry, and by observers outside of South Africa who have the power to wield opinion is absolutely decisive. Images of Mandela are everywhere and in many ways symbolise a combination of the idea of peaceful transition, justice and reconciliation, and the “rainbow nation” concept. The eleven national languages of South Africa, the plurality of ethnicity, and the commitment to anti-racism in sports such as cricket and rugby are important gains of the post-apartheid state at the same time as the economic dispossession of the mass of the South African working class remains largely what it was prior to 1994.

The political and spiritual crisis that Mandela's death will undoubtedly bring will be critical to defining the direction of a future South African state — one in which demagogues like Mulema may be victorious. The cliqueism and corruption of the ANC can only be a good thing for the development of this kind of demagogic politics — posing false solutions to very real problems.

This has come to head in the past year with two pictures depicting Zuma causing widespread furore. The first was a picture by the artist Brett Murray of Zuma posing as Lenin with his penis exposed. The second was by the cartoonist Zapiro with Zuma simply represented as a penis.

Arguably both link into racial discourses of African men and obviously point to issues around his previous accusation of rape and his polygamy. But the reaction to these pictures have been hugely instructive, with the ANC as a whole protesting against them, seeing them as part of a disenfranchised white assault on the multi-racial ANC state. The touchiness of the ANC around its image is of course understandable when its whole political presence is dominated by its reliance on the memory of its martyrs and struggles but there are many who lay claim to that legacy of struggle who are deeply unhappy about the direction of the ANC under Zuma.

Oliver Tambo's own daughter has said of the Zuma cartoons — “Do the poor enjoy poverty? Do the unemployed enjoy hopelessness? Do those who can't get housing enjoy homelessness? He must get over it. No one is having a good time. He should inspire the reverence he craves.”

Whilst many live in poverty in the townships massive capital projects have been put into place vindicating the ANC and its version of the history of the struggle which, if not particularly reminiscent of totalitarian architecture, have basically the same aim as it.

Red Location museum in New Brighton is a telling example of this. It is a beacon for tourists but has little impact on the local community and is vilified by many young people in the township even though it witnesses to the Langa massacre in nearby Uitenhage.

The monument to justice and reconciliation in Johannesburg — Constitution Hill — is an impressive rendition of the history of the struggle as is the women's prison and to the famous “Prison number four” where Mandela, Gandhi and Alex La Guma were imprisoned. It focuses on the achievement of democracy and the rule of law, but in the centre of the suburb of Hillbrow, a byword for poverty and urban decline.

South End museum, in Port Elizabeth is more effective, documenting the wholesale elimination of the multi-ethnic working class district to create a whites only housing development. The workers have never forgotten this assault upon their homes — many were forced to separate under the old racial laws of the Afrikaaner state — others found themselves in the torture cellars of the security agencies.

What this points to is the importance of memorialisation struggles which celebrate the memory of the working class, its resistance and its sacrifice and not the consolidation of powerful political elites. And here lies the contradiction. The new heritage projects in South Africa are designed to provide support for a regime which is dying on its feet under the weight of its own contradictions, its abdication of any concept of a workers' government, its betrayal of a commitment to a truly multi-ethnic state and against the cliqueism of tribalism, and its inability to solve the problem of poverty in the shadows of the Johannesburg stock exchange.

Its abdication of basic political honesty and freedom of expression exemplified by the cartoons controversy goes hand in hand with a particular, saccharine version of the history of the struggle which still leaves the basis of economic exploitation untouched.

As new labour struggles emerge and young South Africans struggle over the terrain of their contested histories new political forces may emerge which can overcome tribalism and violence, challenge the consensus from the left, and break apart the Tripartite Alliance.

Self-organisation for workers' power?

Comments and opinions from the Greek left on the possibilities for developing neighbourhood committees and assemblies.

We asked many people in Greece about what forms of grass-roots self-organisation exist in the Greek working class or can plausibly be developed towards something comparable — though possibly very different in detail — to the soviets (workers' councils) which were the basis of the Russian workers' revolution of 1917 and which have re-emerged in many revolutionary crises since then.

Tereza from Kokkino said explicitly that given the dominance of small enterprises in the Greek economy, neighbourhood-based committees were a more likely form than factory councils; and everyone described more life and movement in neighbourhood organising than in industrial organising.

Everyone agreed, more or less, that neighbourhood-based assemblies are at a lower level now than before the election campaigns and the start of the summer, during which heat and holidays reduce political activity.

Everyone also agreed, however, that there is potential for neighbourhood-based organisation to grow again as the struggle against the new coalition government's discredited and destructive policies grows, especially from September.

Spiros from OKDE in Thessaloniki said that neighbourhood committees had been formed from the movement in the city squares in June-July 2011. Then there were neighbourhood committees formed in the campaign for non-payment of the new property tax.

Now, said Spiros, "each committee has a special thing. In west Thessaloniki there is a committee to create a self-organised food market and a community restaurant. There is another committee in Kalimaria, in east Thessaloniki, with about 40 or 50 people involved.

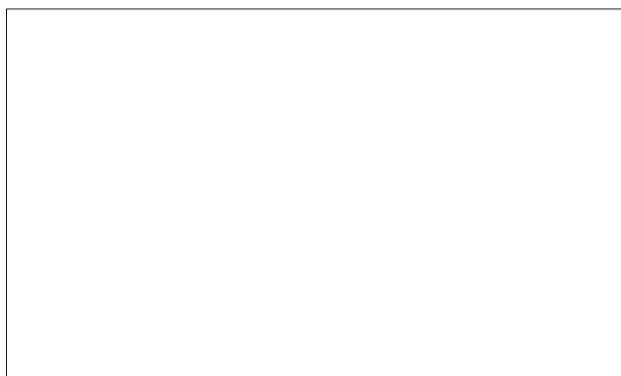
"There are a couple of other neighbourhood committees in Thessaloniki where we don't participate. There is one in northern Thessaloniki against plans to develop a toxic waste site there.

"The neighbourhood committees usually meet weekly or fortnightly, but less often in the summer. They aren't elected" (i.e. they are open meetings for anyone who wants to be active).

Vicky Karafoulidou and Yannis Karliampos at the Syriza office in Thessaloniki, who emphasised that they were talking informally rather than speaking officially on behalf of Syriza, told us that Syriza had run "popular assemblies" to "talk to the people and hear their ideas" during the election campaign, and now plans to continue them permanently.

The idea, they say, is to run an Assembly, monthly, for each neighbourhood of say 10,000 people.

They reckon to get 100 or 200 people to each Assembly



Popular Assembly, Athens, May 2012

(though, they say, an attempt to organise an Assembly at the university was not so successful).

People are and will be informed of the Assemblies by social media and posters.

There "is a plan", they said, to have these Assemblies, if they develop, elect their own committees, not necessarily of Syriza members.

However, when we spoke later, and more officially, with Miltos Ikononou, a Syriza leader in Thessaloniki, he was categorical that these assemblies will be Syriza assemblies.

"We are making open assemblies, and we want to have a Syriza place in each neighbourhood. We had a hundred people to one last week, and others are in the next few days.

"We want new members, but our target is first to involve the people".

So, these are Syriza assemblies. What about also building broader neighbourhood organisations, not just of Syriza supporters, with the aim of enabling people to take control of their own neighbourhoods?

"These are the open assemblies of Syriza. People who come, become members of Syriza and then elect committees in their neighbourhoods.

"Our target is to see how we can inspire people to become involved in the cause of Syriza. The basic idea of the left is to fight about one's rights".

Of the non-payment committees which grew up in neighbourhoods to resist the new property tax and the threat to cut off electricity to non-payers (because the tax is levied on electricity bills rather than through the regular tax system), Vicky and Yannis said that "they come and go".

The government has now conceded that people may pay their regular electricity bill but not the tax addition (at one time, the electricity company was allocating all payments first to the tax, so that any partial payment would leave electricity charges unpaid), and people are not having their electricity cut off.

However, Vicky and Yannis said, there is a neighbour-

From 4-9 July Ed Maltby and Martin Thomas visited Athens and Thessaloniki. We print two their reports. Other reports and interviews can be found at www.workersliberty.org/greecejuly2012

hood committee which was based in that movement still functioning in the eastern part of Thessaloniki.

On Syriza's Popular Assemblies, Spiros was cool. The KKE has run local Popular Assemblies, too, he noted, though Syriza, unlike KKE, participated in the city-squares movement.

"We can have common committees with Syriza", he said, "but Syriza has not been very successful with its local assemblies in the past. Probably it will have some success now, but probably it will fade. Syriza needs a more developed policy".

Sofia, from OKDE in Athens, gave a more downbeat picture. In autumn 2011, after the city-squares movement, OKDE had been participating in local assemblies in five municipalities (areas covering some hundreds of thousands of people), with attendances ranging from 30 to 100 at weekly meetings.

There are none functioning now, she said. OKDE will intervene in Popular Assemblies if Syriza initiates them.

Mihalis Skourtis, from OKDE-Spartakos, was more scathing. Popular Assemblies? Syriza is doing nothing, he said, but propagating its electoral programme.

Syriza did nothing against the fascists. The only thing in its mind was the election results. Now OKDE-Spartakos is calling on Syriza to organise open assemblies in the neighbourhoods, to resist the fascists, to organise solidarity, and to combat poverty. But we will see.

Tereza from Kokkino described a local assembly in Athens she participates in. Currently meetings draw a maximum of 20 people, where there were 50 or 100. Tereza was not sure of the population size for the area covered by the assembly, but says it contains three high schools, which suggests a population of about 30,000.

The Syriza committee for that same area, she said, would have thirty people at a general assembly of Syriza members, but fewer for regular gatherings.

Mihalis Skourtis, despite giving the most downbeat picture of the situation now, also stressed the possibilities for the near future.

The movement of neighbourhood committees against the property tax was, he said, a big affair, where in some communities you might have a thousand people meeting weekly. It won a big victory. Non-payers of the tax now do not have their electricity cut off. "The people are still there".

That movement has subsided. But it will re-emerge on other issues. "The people are still there".

"We must end this Memorandum if we want work"

Interviews and conversations at the Thessaloniki Trade Union Centre.

Near the middle of Thessaloniki, and overlooking the ruins of the city's old Roman forum, the Thessaloniki Trade Union Centre is housed in a typical, somewhat run-down, multistorey concrete block building.

On the walls outside, across the windows of the shuttered shop next door, and on a noticeboard inside the centre, are plastered political posters from the left. As well as the main trade union offices, there is also a door marked for PAME, the union association linked to the Communist Party (KKE).

As we waited for union officials to arrive, Elena Apostolidou, secretary to the president of the Trade Union Centre, told us that no-one in the trade union centre has been paid their wages for a couple of months now.

Costas, a leader of the Thessaloniki water company workers, later explains to us that the Trade Union Centre building, its utility bills, and the wages of the people working there, used to be paid by the government. For many months now, the government has stopped paying, as it has stopped paying many suppliers.

At first the Trade Union Centre tapped funds from the "first level" unions (a term Costas will explain), but now that money has run out too. "The Government says it's a problem that will be solved, but it's being going on for too many months now".

Costas also asks us a question. Is Thessaloniki as we expected? One of us replies that what we have been told by many people indicates that there is great trouble and suffering behind closed doors, from unemployment and poverty.

Yes, replies Costas. Things look all right in the city centre. (There are some shuttered shops and cafés, but nothing dramatic. The remaining cafés still have people sipping iced coffee through straws, playing backgammon, and chatting).

But it is different further out. "People are sleeping in doorways, and sorting through garbage heaps to find something to eat. That didn't happen before".

Costas believes that the trade unions in other countries "must inform people that the problem with have in Greece is a problem will have in every country. It is a system problem. When they are done with us, and with Spain and Italy, they will go on to others, maybe France.

"We have to change the rules where everything is privatised and everything goes to a few people".

Costas has come to tell us about the campaign against privatisation of the Thessaloniki Water Company. In the early 2000s, 39% of the Athens Water Company was sold off, and 25% of the Thessaloniki Water Company. That means, for a start, that water workers have three different wage agreements: one each for Athens and Thessaloniki, and one for the rest of the country. The workforce has decreased, the average age of the workers remaining is high, and a lot of job knowledge has been lost.

All wages of public employees have been cut 35%, and that includes the water workers. Now the government wants to complete the sell-off. It said it would start selling last year, but hasn't yet.

"You know in Britain what water privatisation means", Costas tells us. "And in other countries, not to mention South America. It will not just be bad for the workers. The price of water will rise, and no investment will be done".

Costas's union has run a campaign in Thessaloniki called Initiative 136. The goal, he says, is to let people know what is happening, and gather money so that the people themselves can buy the company, which makes a profit.

Costas also tells us about the structure of the Greek unions. "First level" unions cover a workplace, or a firm, or trade, within an area. The water company, for example, has its own single "first level" union, uniting all trades and

grades. 220 workers out of 370 are in the union. Most workers join strikes when they are called, "but I think everywhere there are a few who won't".

Unions can then choose to be represented at the "second level" in a local Trade Union Centre like Thessaloniki's — there are 15 centres across Greece — or in a trade federation. The "third level" is that of the union confederation.

The Thessaloniki Trade Union Centre is the oldest in Greece. It started (under a different name) in 1912, when Thessaloniki was still ruled by the Ottoman Empire.

A board near the entrance of the Trade Union Centre records its successive presidents since 1974. Why since 1974? Because since then — that is, since the end of the 1967-74 military dictatorship — the presidents have been elected, every three years.

The next election for Trade Union Centre president is in November 2012. First level unions elect their representatives every two or three years. All the elections are by postal vote.

The Trade Union Centre covers 250 "first level" unions, with a total of 100,000 members. The smallest of those unions has 22 members; the biggest, the local bus workers', almost 3000.

Panagiotis Tsaraboulidis, president of the trade union centre of Thessaloniki, gave us his picture of the situation.

"Everyone in government tells us that they don't want the [EU/ ECB/ IMF] Memorandum, but we have to go on this road. But we must end this Memorandum if we want work in this country".

He sees long-term problems. "We have had a fake economy. We import everything. All the factories have closed because businesses went out of the country, and here in Greece everyone wanted to open their own little business, a café, a shop".

There is officially 27% unemployment in Thessaloniki, and 32% in the region.

Who are the Greek Trotskyists?

By Martin Thomas

Greece is one of the few countries where a main organiser, writer, and theoretician of the communist movement in its heroic early years then became directly the leader of the Trotskyist movement, and handed down writings which still inspire today.

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE), founded in 1918, was the only serious party of the left and of the labour movement. The first general secretary of the KKE, Pandelis Pouliopoulos, sided with the Left Opposition against Stalinism as early as 1927.

Another sizeable KKE opposition, the Archeo-Marxists, also oriented to the Left Opposition. Pouliopoulos and a section of the Archeo-Marxists united in 1934 to form the OKDE, Organisation of Communist Internationalists of Greece.

The Trotskyists suffered under the repression of the Metaxas dictatorship (from 1936) and the Nazi occupation of Greece (from 1941). They were also massacred by the now-Stalinist KKE.

In December 1944, in complicated conflict between the forces loyal to the Greek bourgeoisie, the Stalinists, dissident elements of the Stalinist-led resistance movement which had fought the Nazis, and the British army, a Stalinist leader claimed to have killed several hundred Trotskyists.

To the Stalinist leader, no doubt, "Trotskyist" signified any left-wing rebel. British prime minister Winston Churchill used the same terminology, telling the British Parliament that the British military intervention was to aid the proper Greek government against "Trotskyists".

A more careful survey indicates that the Stalinists murdered 34 actual Trotskyists. Others fell to the German and Italian occupiers, or to the Metaxas government.

AFTER 1944

In July 1946, 34 delegates from three Trotskyist fragments remaining after the multiple repression united under the hopeful name KDKE (Party of Communist Internationalists of Greece, later to be replaced by the old name OKDE).

Michael Raptis, a prewar Greek Trotskyist (from 1929: Archeo-Marxist in 1982-9) who since 1937 had been abroad, in Switzerland then France, and since about 1944 had been a leading figure in European Trotskyism, came to and helped convene the conference.

But Raptis (who now mostly used the name Pablo) was in France, and played no special role in the Greek movement. In the views of many, including AWL, his codification of a perspective of more-or-less automatically-unfolding "world revolution", which, unfortunately, deformingly, but inevitably, would be largely led by Stalinists for now, would hinder rather than help the Trotskyists. Raptis-Pablo would return to Greece in old age, after 1974, pick up on his old friendship with Pasok leader Andreas Papandreu (who had briefly been a Trotskyist in 1938-9), and be granted a state funeral when he died in 1996.

Cornelius Castoriadis, who had been in the Greek Trotskyist movement from 1942 to 1945, developed a critique of the Stalinist USSR as a system of class exploitation (which he at first called bureaucratic-collectivist, and then state-capitalist), with quarter-anarchist different political conclusions; but he did that from within the French Trotskyist movement, after moving to France in December 1945, and all his subsequent political activity was in France. In Greece itself, Agis Stinas developed a similar view, and organised a small group linked with Castoriadis's "Socialisme ou Barbarie" in France. Like the French group, it faded away in the 1960s. As far as I know, no Trotskyist in Greece identified more closely with the more developed "Third Camp" views of Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, and others.

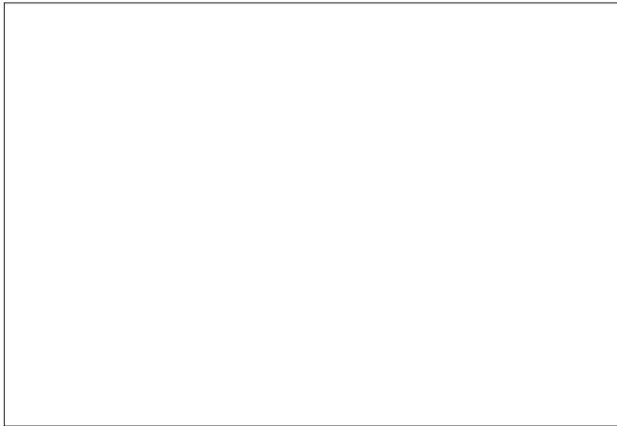
In some European countries, such as France, extrapolations of Pablo's perspective into a tactic of having the Trotskyists try to join the still very tightly-controlled mass Communist Parties as secret factions rallied many Trotskyists to the side of Cannon. As far as I know, no similar tactic was proposed in Greece, where the Stalinists, though still a major force in the working class, were themselves illegal (though with a tolerated legal "front").

Within KDKE/OKDE, Christos Anastasiades broadly sympathised with Pablo, and Loukas Karliftis with Cannon. In 1958, they split. In 1964 Karliftis's group rallied to the "International Committee", which was now led by Gerry Healy and Pierre Lambert, since Cannon and his comrades were moving towards reunification with the strand which had been led by Pablo and was now led by Ernest Mandel.

MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

By the 1960s, Greece was becoming a majority-urban society.

Today, four million of its eleven million people live in



Pandelis Pouliopoulos sided with the Left Opposition against Stalinism in 1927

Athens alone. At the birth of the modern Greek state, in the 1820s, its capital, Athens, had been a village of 5000 people, and far more urban Greeks lived in Istanbul (then Constantinople, and home to 200,000 Greeks at that time) or Alexandria (with tens of thousands of Greeks then, and over 100,000 at the high point of its Greek population).

The CIA-backed military coup in Greece, in 1967, drove the Trotskyists underground again.

This period of military rule, however, also brought new elements into the movement. Many left-wing Greek students and young people ended up in London.

The Greek "International Committee" group came under the close influence of Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League and Workers' Revolutionary Party. In 1975-6, soon after the fall of the dictatorship, Healy would organise the expulsion of Dimitri Toubanis (Sklavos), who for some years (replacing Karliftis) had led the Greek group, and replace him with Savvas Michael, who was closer to Healy.

Michael remained loyal to Healy through the 1985 explosion and collapse of the WRP in Britain, but was eventually, in 1987, disowned by Healy for refusing to go along with the elderly and disoriented Healy's enthusiasm for Gorbachev in the USSR.

Michael's group, EEK, remains relatively intact. It retains some of the declamatory style of the old Healy movement, and seems to continue the habit which the Healy movement got into from 1970 to 1985, of demanding an all-out general strike, week in week out, as the universal answer. But it no longer refers to Healy's ideas or writings as a model. It is now linked with Jorge Altamira's Partido Obrero in Argentina (a group which has an "International Committee" background, but which, along with the French "International Committee" people, parted ways with Healy in the early 1970s).

EEK says it has about 200 members. It publishes a fortnightly paper. It does not participate in either of the two main left coalition in Greece, Syriza or Antarsya.

Another group of young Greeks in London, notably Panos Garganas and Maria Styllou, came under the influence of the International Socialists (later SWP), led by Tony Cliff. After 1974 they would launch the OSE, now called SEK.

Styllou describes the evolution like this: "I had moved to London and was at the London School of Economics. I first met members of the IS [forerunners of the SWP] in 1966... The 1967 events made me break from the reformists and the 1967-68 world events plus my relations with IS brought me to revolutionary politics. Then we started building the first Greek group in Britain..."

"In 1974 when the Junta fell we all went back to Greece. We started building OSE... with around 15 people. We quickly moved to 50 members but we faced an upsurge and revival of Maoist politics.

"The first important victory that we got was during the last years of Pasok [government] in the late 1980s - years of deep crisis and scandals... This opened up an audience for us and new opportunities. We moved to a fortnightly paper. In 1993 when Pasok returned to government we moved to a weekly paper and started growing politically, in numbers and in influence..."

SEK is the most important group of the SWP's international network outside Britain, and since the 1990s at latest has probably been the biggest of the would-be Trotskyist groups in Greece. In some ways it is senior to SWP: Garganas and Styllou, still leaders of SEK, were leading an organisation, amid political tumult, long before any of the current members of the SWP Central Committee did anything much in politics.

SEK is in the Antarsya coalition. Other Trotskyist groups in Greece say that the SEK suffers a rapid turnover of members, is erratic and opportunist in analysis and tactics, and achieves little in the way of solid revolutionary Marxist influence in the labour movement; but it is the only group able to sustain a weekly paper.

Yet another new element in the Greek Trotskyist left was Xekinima, launched in 1974, and initially as a faction within

Pasok, the social-democratic party set up by Andreas Papandreu that same year. It was influenced and shaped by Militant in Britain (today Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal: as well as Xekinima, linked to the SP, there is today a small group in Greece, a faction in Synaspismos, linked to Socialist Appeal).

KKE SPLINTERS

KKE, pursuing a diehard-Stalinist line, is still the strongest party of the Greek left, with the strongest base in the working class.

For over fifty years now, since Stalinism began to fray around 1956, it has suffered a series of splits, Maoist, Eurocommunist, and other, generating a large variety of groups which shape the political field within which the Greek Trotskyist groups operate.

There are ten groups in the Antarsya coalition (founded 2009) and thirteen in the Syriza coalition (founded 2004). Most of those 23 groups have some historical connection to a split from the KKE, and are shaped to some degree by elements of KKE tradition. In addition there are Maoist groups outside both Syriza and Antarsya, such as KKE-ML and ML-KKE, likewise with KKE roots.

The biggest of the post-KKE groups are Synaspismos, the leading faction in Syriza, originating from the "Eurocommunist" current; and New Left Current, the leading faction in Antarsya, originating in a 1989 split against KKE's participation in a bourgeois coalition government, and politically eclectic (though "Trotskyist" enough that it will talk about "transitional programme").

GREEK NATIONALISM

Back in 1940, Pandelis Pouliopoulos wrote: "The composition of a revolutionary proletarian party in Greece is impossible without the struggle against nationalism in general and particularly on the Macedonian question. The KKE's nationalism not only facilitated its treacherous policy of class collaboration — 'Popular Front'... it will express itself unavoidably also during the war, with social-patriotic positions in other fields too, for example the national question of the people of Dodecanese, Cyprus..."

Left nationalism, expressed as anti-EUism, has long been axiomatic for the KKE, if only because USSR foreign policy dictated opposition to the EU.

Pasok, when it was founded in 1974, made "national independence" one of its four slogans, meaning opposition to the EU and to NATO. That did not stop Pasok governments taking part in the EU and NATO! But there were strong pumps infusing the Greek left with nationalism.

Both Stalinism and, to some degree, the early Pasok were informed by a picture of the world as divided into two camps, originating in Stalinist ideology of the late 1940s. Some countries and nations are in the "imperialist camp", led by the USA. Others are in the "anti-imperialist" or "progressive" camp. They are defined as such by hostility to the USA and, in the original version, friendliness to the USSR.

The picture defines it as desirable to side with the "anti-imperialist" camp, and to separate Greece from groupings like the EU so as to transfer it to that "anti-imperialist" camp.

The SWP-Britain tradition to which SEK and DEA subscribe contained, for a while, elements of a radical rejection of the "two-camps" picture and advocacy of a working-class "third camp". It defined the Stalinist USSR as imperialist. Since about 1987 the SWP-Britain and its offshoots have gone over wholesale to a new version of the "two-camps" scheme. The "anti-imperialist" camp, in their view of recent decades, is defined by forces militantly against the USA, more or less regardless of what they are for: the chief exemplars are Hamas, the Taliban, Hezbollah, etc. ("We are all Hezbollah!")

Thus the infusion into Greek Trotskyism of SWP-Britain influence has not, at least in recent decades, helped to dispel the old influences.

In Greece there has been much grist for nationalist mills, in two distinct senses.

For centuries Greece was subjugated by the Ottoman Empire. An independent Greece was created in the 1820s, but under heavy informal domination by Britain and an imposed monarchy of foreign origin. Its area was originally only a small fraction of today's Greece. Greece has had repeated conflicts about border areas, and even today some people in Greece will not call ex-Yugoslav Macedonia "Macedonia", for fear of prejudicing the Greek claim that Macedonia is part of Greece. (They call it "Skopje" instead).

After World War One Greece was manipulated into war against Turkey as a proxy by Britain and other powers. The war resulted in massacre and mass expulsion for the Greeks of Smyrna (now Izmir), and large forced population movements of Greeks and Turks.

Continued on page 16

The British army intervened heavily in Greece at the end of and after World War Two to suppress the Stalinist-led movement which had resisted the Nazi occupation. The CIA had a hand in the 1967 military coup.

Britain held on to Cyprus until 1960, and resisted the demands for the unification of the island, which has a large Greek majority, with Greece. In 1974 the Greek military junta carried out a coup to try to force unification of the island with Greece. Turkey invaded Cyprus and created a separate “Turkish Cypriot” state. The junta fell.

At the same time, the Greek wealthy classes have long had large international operations. They made up a large part of the elite of the Ottoman capital of Constantinople (Istanbul), of the bourgeoisie of Alexandria, in Egypt, and of the magnates of the world shipping industry. Greece has the largest merchant fleet in the world.

Thus Greece has been both a mistreated nation, and the nation of a bourgeoisie with international ambitions.

The people of Greece were reluctant to enter the European Union (1981) and the eurozone (2001). The current big majorities in Greece for keeping the euro can be explained from the fact that until the current crisis Greek bourgeois society did, however, do relatively well out of the EU. Income and wage and productivity differentials between Greece and Northern Europe narrowed. Between 1979 and 2007 Greek GNP per head increased from 38% of the Netherlands’ to 54%.

That Greek people with some knowledge of history are doubtful about a return to the drachma is understandable. Greece spent 95 years of the 180 between independence and entry to the euro in 2001 in default, with five separate defaults.

Capitalist productive forces have made national barriers in Europe outdated, and socialism must go beyond capitalism in that respect, not fall behind it. Nevertheless, there must be many people in Greece who see rejection of demands for Greece to hivel itself off and erect high economic barriers around itself, not as enlightened understanding of that Marxist thesis, but as regrettable timidity, typical of the Syriza leadership.

All this sets the scene for Maoists and others to agitate about “anti-imperialist struggle”, and for elements in Antarsya to complain about how the EU has blighted Greece’s national development.

TROTSKYISTS AND THE EU

That structures a differentiation among Greek Trotskyists. Some groups take part in and orient to Syriza, and reject the demand for Greece to quit the euro and the EU. Others take part in Antarsya, and champion that demand.

The old OKDE has divided into OKDE, publishing Ergatiki Pali, and OKDE-Spartakos, publishing Spartakos. Both groups consider themselves in broad terms to be instructed by the theories of Ernest Mandel.

OKDE-Spartakos is the group officially recognised by the main international network of those who look to Mandel’s ideas, the Fourth International centred round activists in the French NPA. It is in the Antarsya coalition, and, despite muttering about NAR’s tendencies to left nationalism, goes along with NAR’s and Antarsya’s prioritising of Greek exit from the EU as the immediate demand deemed to separate Antarsya, as revolutionaries, from Syriza, as reformists.

OKDE is the larger group by some margin, though still not big enough to publish Ergatiki Pali more than monthly. It has separated from the Fourth International network, objecting in 2005 to “deliberate ambiguity on whether the objective is to build up 4th International sections or anti-capitalist parties. In fact, many sections (or however they can be called) are slipping into very dangerous alliances, which end up in centrist parties or even alliances with social-liberal advocates of neo-liberalism... a member of the Brazilian section [became] a minister of the Cabinet in a government that the International itself considers neoliberal... the recent dissolution of the Portuguese section into a current inside the Left Block will lead to the destruction of a historic base of 4th internationalism in Europe... The platform of Respect [in Britain], which our comrades energetically participate in, is on the borderline of a petit bourgeois platform...”

In line with this emphasis, OKDE prides itself on having — and seems in fact to have — a more rigorous orientation to grass-roots working-class organisation, and stricter standards of Bolshevik party-building, than other would-be Trotskyist groups in Greece.

Like EEK, it stands outside both Syriza and Antarsya. But it makes Greek exit from the EU a leading demand as much as Antarsya does.

EEK has more complex position. It denounces Antarsya on the European question: “the line for an exit from the EU and abandonment of the euro, without the alternative of the United Socialist States of Europe, was indistinguishable from the line of the KKE.

“The call for a break with the euro and a return to a (devalued) drachma, within the capitalist framework, both in the case of the KKE and Antarsya, collided completely with the will of the vast majority of the Greek people, which is hostile to the EU because of its austerity measures that destroyed its living standards but nevertheless it sees a return to a devalued drachma as the culmination of the current catastrophe”.

On a good day, Antarsya groups such as SEK and NAR do in fact advocate the United Socialist States of Europe, and explain that they call for an “anti-capitalist” exit from the EU. The slippage to advocating Greek exit from the EU as a good thing in itself, and perhaps even inherently anti-capitalist, results from a core nationalist myth which EEK shares: that the EU as such is somehow qualitatively more “imperialist” or “capitalist” than its member states. EEK advocates “workers fighting to smash the imperialist EU to establish the United Socialist States of Europe”.

As if the unarmed, relatively lightweight EU bureaucracy in Brussels were the key “imperialist” institution to be smashed, and once the economic links and treaties between the capitalist states of Europe were broken and replaced by nationalist barriers, those states would be benign!

As a focus on breaking up “the imperialist EU” makes more socialist sense than directing workers in California, say, to focus on smashing up the federal links of the imperialist USA, in order later to reassemble the severed states as a United Socialist States of North America.

TROTSKYISTS IN SYRIZA

There are three Trotskyist groups which are inside Syriza, or orient to it, and which explicitly reject the demand for Greek exit from the euro, counterposing a

drive to Europeanise the workers’ struggle.

One is Xekinima, the group linked to the Socialist Party in England, which seems to be fairly small, publishing only a monthly paper and not claiming any great impact in the trade unions. It quit Syriza in 2011, apparently on a misjudged view that Syriza’s support was waning. Now it seems to be reorienting to Syriza, focusing its agitation on the demand that Syriza adopt “a socialist programme”. (The model must be Militant’s agitation, year in year out until the late 1980s, for “Labour to power on a socialist programme”).

The two socialist groups actually in Syriza derive from splinters from SEK. The larger one, DEA, is a regroupment of two ex-SEK splinters.

The splinters were generated by would-be “party-building” contortions adopted by SEK under pressure from the SWP-Britain in 1993 and 2001. In the early 1990s the future DEA activists complained of “overoptimistic analysis of the period (decade of wars and revolutions, the 30s in slow motion)... organisational adventurism... indifference to the formation of members... political confusion”. In 2001, of “revival of the ‘things will automatically turn to the left’ outlook... [a tendency to] underestimate the centrality of the working-class movement... diffusion into the ‘movement’...”

In some ways it is paradoxical that DEA today finds itself integrated into Syriza, and hailing the possibilities for Syriza to move further left, while SEK is with Antarsya, bemoaning the 17 June election result as a shift of voters from the militant left to a supposedly hopelessly rightward-moving Syriza.

DEA is linked to the ISO-USA, and still reckons itself to be politically “in the tradition of” the SWP and the IS. It publishes a fortnightly paper and may have about 300 members.

The smaller one, Kokkino, came from a split in DEA over tactical issues, but now includes activists from different backgrounds, does not consider itself to be in the SWP “tradition”, and has observer status with the Fourth International. It has 50 to 100 members and publishes a more-or-less monthly magazine. AWL members visiting Greece found what Kokkino members said acute and instructive.

Neither KKE, nor the reformist Synaspismos leadership of Syriza, is capable of leading the Greek working class to victory out of the great turbulence into which it is now flung.

The sudden rise of Syriza shows that working-class political allegiances have become fluid and malleable. There is scope for a Trotskyist-inspired revolutionary party to win hegemony.

That will not be achieved by the seven or so current Trotskyist groups all beaver away separately, making smaller gains here or slightly larger gains there.

The basic ideas of historical Trotskyism are vital. They need to be given force by a Trotskyist regroupment which also works out clear answers to the new questions posed by current issues. The axial questions now are:

- how to relate to the existing workers’ movement (unions, Syriza, KKE, neighbourhood groupings)
- how to develop forms of local workers’ self-organisation which can approximate the role of soviets (workers’ councils), and:
- **how to integrate a Greek working-class strategy into a European (at least) working-class strategy capable of tackling the European and global scale of the capitalist crisis and capitalist strategies.**

Dave Packer

Dave Packer died on 3 July, suddenly and unexpectedly though after a long period of poor health.

He was one of the last of a political species: the cadres of the 1970s “Mandelite” International Marxist Group. Dave was always devising theoretical schemes, always argumentative, always keen to talk.

Those cadres included many talented people. Unlike many of them, Dave remained loyal to the last to what he considered Trotskyism and to the obligation to be active in building what he considered a revolutionary organisation.

The IMG, successor to a lacklustre group which had ticked over through the late 50s and the 60s, grew rapidly in the early 1970s. It peaked at maybe 700 members around 1977, and was active and highly visible.

Some of the personal virtues of members such as Dave became transmuted into collective vices. The IMG had exuberance; but it was chronically torn by faction-fighting in which many members became disoriented, and it made a habit of frequently half-baked and usually exaggerated “turns”.

Dave was one of a group of 18 dissatisfied members of Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal) who joined the IMG in January 1974. (The best-known member at the time was Ted Coxhead. Another was Gregor Benton).

Oscar Gregan, a leading IMG member at the time, has reported that when Dave and the others first approached the IMG — “As the IMG had zero writings on that tendency

[Militant], I recommended [Sean] Matgamna’s pamphlet from the 1960s which they obtained from Workers’ Fight [forerunner of AWL] and found very useful in that it echoed many of their own criticisms”.

Dave and the others, resigning from Militant and joining the IMG, wrote: “When Labour discusses nationalising 25 companies, Militant demands that the figure should be 350. It is of course necessary to do this. But the question... is how to nationalise even 25 companies which the bourgeoisie wishes to retain... The workers must create new organisations able to smash [the] resistance”. (Thanks to the “Red Mole Rising” blog.)

It is a pity that they did not join us. But the élan and high profile of the IMG at the time makes it no mystery.

The IMG eventually blew up in 1985. It had changed its name and begun to fray before then, but 1985 was the turning point. It divided into three groups.

Socialist Action, led by John Ross, became, and continues as, a semi-clandestine group, sometimes a factor in the affairs of the left because of its ability to burrow into such corners as Ken Livingstone’s office. The Communist League, originally led by Brian Grogan and Celia Pugh, can sometimes be seen on demonstrations with its literature table displaying the US paper *The Militant*.

Both those groups are quasi-Stalinist in world view.

Dave was one of the leaders of the third group (called the “International Group”, and later the “International Socialist Group”), the group which resisted that quasi-Stalinism and

took a stand for what they reckoned to be Trotskyism. By 2012, he was maybe the last of those leaders still centrally active in revolutionary politics.

The International Group and the ISG were never dynamic, and today have dwindled into the almost-invisible Socialist Resistance group. In the early 1990s, however, we were able to work usefully with them in some areas, for example in campaigning against the USA’s and Britain’s war in the Gulf over Kuwait.

After having a few public debates with us, over what the USSR had been, over Europe, etc., and an angry exchange over policy in the RMT on London Underground, the ISG distanced itself and refused further debate or dialogue.

I doubt Dave disagreed with “official” refusal of dialogue. He understood well that socialist ideas are empty without a hard-headed commitment to building a revolutionary organisation which endures in adversity as well in triumph. Once persuaded that it was to ISG’s advantage to refuse dialogue, his loyalty would make him resolute about it.

Personally and individually, though, Dave was always open, always willing to give and argue his opinion with good humour.

In recent years Dave’s activity was limited by his own poor health and by his obligations as carer for his partner Jane Kelly, also an old IMG cadre, disabled in an accident. But active he remained.

The hall was crowded for his funeral; but it is a sad comment — not on Dave, but on the condition of the left — that few of the revolutionary-left organisations with which Dave had worked and argued over the years chose to be represented there. (As far I could see, the only organisation represented, apart from Socialist Resistance, was AWL).

Martin Thomas

My adventures among the Third Camp

By Michael Hirsch

In *Solidarity* 242, we began series of recollections and reflections from activists who had been involved with the “third camp” left in the USA — those “unorthodox” Trotskyists who broke from the SWP USA in 1939/40 to form the Workers Party, and the tradition they built (the Independent Socialist League, and later the Independent Socialists and International Socialists). The ongoing symposium is at tinyurl.com/thirdcampsymposium.

This issue, we publish a contribution from Michael Hirsch. Michael joined the International Socialists (US) in 1972 and was a member until 1986. He served as branch organiser for the group in Boston before moving to the Midwest to join comrades in the steel industry. He has worked as a New York City-based labor journalist and political writer since 1985, and is an editorial board member of the US socialist journals *New Politics* and *Democratic Left*.

Daniel Randall

Socialism from below was the image that stoked my fired imagination. Third Camp socialism... not so much. As a militant with the International Socialists during the 1970s and well into the 1980s, I often felt like the atheist in the church choir. The singing was glorious; it was the sanctified liturgy and the smug churchmen I couldn't abide.

Not that I had any distaste for Third Camp formulations in principle; Hal Draper's *The Two Souls of Socialism* clinched it for me. It still does. So did making the acquaintance of Julie Jacobson, the quondam editor of Max Shachtman's *New Internationalist* and, with Draper, among the few comrades who didn't fold into the arms of the State Department when the US government went homicidal in Vietnam. Prob-

lem was, our ideology never transcended the parlour. Or the coffee house. Or the classroom. Or the discussion circle. Propaganda efforts aside, it never much affected our practice.

That was the pity. *New Politics*, founded in 1962, was a refreshing alternative to the whiney agony-aunting of *Dissent* magazine.

Then there was Benny the Ape, another ex-Shachtmanite companion of the road. If Benny, a genuinely disarming if peculiar Damon Runyon-type character, had another name, I never knew it. After he told me what I already knew about Stalinism (as a precocious 19 year-old when we met in 1965, I had of course read Deutscher and a little Trotsky, which if anything rid me of any “East is Red” sympathies), I asked him if he was still in Shachtman's camp. We young radicals all knew about Mad Max. We were SDS activists who were summarily dismissed as its youth affiliates that same year by the League for Industrial Democracy, then a wholly owned Shachtman subsidiary. Benny called Shachtman a bombardier; that was good enough for me.

Problem was, Third Camp socialism as politics was abstracted from any praxis. It was a revolutionary philosophy that never cohering as a revolutionary practice. Like Trotskyism, at least as it operated on this side of the pond, it seemed to carry its émigré status with it.

The vanguardism to which we increasingly gave allegiance never described an actual sociological relationship with working people so much as a set of prophetic ideas. One refugee from the SWP USA told me in 1972, when I was at the ripening age of 26, that if the vanguard were down to a lone individual in the desert, there would still be a vanguard. Mercifully I never met a Third Camper with that inflated sense of self, but the émigré status was always there. Even when we considered ourselves activists, even industrialising in the early 1970s, our trade union work was no more or less democratic than that of any other left groups — at

least those that considered themselves anticapitalist.

Nor in truth were we better at bringing our democratic values home. In a period of five years, the IS suffered three major splits that I can remember. One, in 1977, was even orchestrated in part by our ostensible co-thinkers in the British SWP, with Cliff sending in stealth comrades to stir the pot. Up to that time I considered myself a Cliffite; this move by him was the shock of the new. It was also sadly unnecessary. If the Stalinist state, after war, the collapse of the revolutionary tide in Europe and the rise of a self-interested bureaucratic caste in Russia represented at least a problem for Leninists, what could I make of Cliff's martinet-like intervention when the stakes were minute?

Looking back at some of the screeds I wrote in those days — I'm just now packing and shredding in preparation for house repairs — I can't say I was much better at unifying theory and practice.

We all took Marx's injunction to represent the movement of the future in the present as writ, so that any wildcat strike was an implicit critique of class rule and every call for parity by minority workers an inherent and destabilising class demand.

I suppose that's better than not seeing the future in the present, denying there is a historic mole busily burrowing underground, believing that reforms are inherently progressive and necessarily incremental, or being blind to disruptions having any larger meaning. We certainly knew better than to collapse history into an eternal post-industrial present.

But the sheer triumphalism of the writing suggests a millenarian mindset that had more to do with wishing that knowing, or hoping than investigating. Marxism may not be a science, but it's not a prayer wheel, either. And Third Camp socialism, as I experienced it, was very much a creed. And in itself no salvation.

“The best type of Bolshevik”



Our Movement

By Liam McNulty

Yakov Mikhaylovich Sverdlov (1885-1919) was a leading Bolshevik organiser and, as chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, was the first de facto president of the Russian Soviet Republic.

It would only be a small exaggeration to say that a biography of Sverdlov is in large measure a history of the birth, development and eventual triumph of the Bolsheviks, so involved was he in every crucial stage in the party's life until 1919.

From allying with Lenin at the 1903 Second Congress of the Russia Social Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) over organisation questions (which led to the Menshevik-Bolshevik split), to his careful work in preparing the 1917 October Revolution with Trotsky in the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC), Sverdlov was, in the words of Anatoly Lunacharsky, “a tireless fighter for social democracy, for Bolshevism.”

Sverdlov was born to Jewish parents in Nizhni-Novgorod on 3 June 1885. His father, a skilled engraver, arranged for Sverdlov to attend school as a boy of ten. He left after five years, taking a job at a pharmacy, though spending much of his spare time at a bookshop run by an old member of the Narodniks (Populists). It was there that he was introduced to the classic works of Alexander Herzen and read Maxim Gorky's novels cataloguing the oppressive reality of Nicholas II's Russia.

Aged sixteen, Sverdlov joined the revolutionary movement and was involved in the first underground committee established in Nizhni-Novgorod in 1901. He soon came to prominence in the underground movement, organising study circles, publishing propaganda and smuggling publications from centres of Russian Social Democracy abroad such as London and Geneva.

In 1903 he joined the Bolshevik side of the split in the RSDLP. He agreed with Lenin about the need to knit together the disparate underground networks of Social Democrats into a unified and national revolutionary party with a common programme and a regular publication.



On behalf of the party, Sverdlov moved first to Kaznan and then to the Urals, organising underground committees and playing a leading role in the Soviet of Workers' Deputies which sprung up there during the revolution in 1905.

In 1906 he was arrested and spent much of the next decade in Tsarist prisons or in exile in Siberia, mounting nu-

merous escape attempts in order to continue his work as a revolutionary amongst the Russian working class.

In the climate of relative openness won by Russian workers following the strikes and protests against the massacre of striking miners at Lena in 1912, Sverdlov took charge of the new Bolshevik daily newspaper *Pravda* and in 1913 was co-opted on to the party's central committee on Lenin's recommendation. Betrayed by a Russian Okhrana (secret police) agent, Sverdlov was arrested once again and remained in exile until the revolution in February 1917.

It was in 1917 that Sverdlov proved his immense skill as a party organiser.

After a massive protest by soldiers and sailors against the Provisional Government's (known as the July Days), *Pravda* was shut down and the Bolshevik leaders wrongly blamed for inciting the disorder.

Arrest warrants were issued for Kamenev, Zinoviev and Lenin, prompting the latter two into exile, and Trotsky also found himself in prison. It was in this desperate situation that Sverdlov worked tirelessly to rebuild the party. In such times, Trotsky recalled in 1925, “Sverdlov was irreplaceable with his revolutionary calm, his far-sightedness and his resourcefulness.” He was “confident, courageous, firm, resourceful — the best type of Bolshevik.”

In October, as a member of the Military revolutionary Committee he assisted Trotsky in the execution of the uprising in Petrograd and in recognition of his efforts, Trotsky proposed him for the position of chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, effectively the head of the new Soviet government.

His encyclopaedic knowledge of the party enabled him to make the appointment necessary to construct a totally new form of government, a workers' state based on the national network of Soviets.

As head of the party secretariat and the government, a potentially dangerous fusion which would later be exploited ruthlessly by the Stalinist bureaucracy, Sverdlov had massive responsibilities. In 1919 he took ill and died prematurely aged 34.

Lunacharsky wrote: “Sverdlov caught a cold after one of his speeches in the provinces, but because he refused to give in to it, he actually broke under the weight of the superhuman tasks that he had set himself. For this reason, although unlike some revolutionaries he did not die on the field of battle, we are right to see him as a man who gave his life to the cause he served.”

Capita to run benefits services

By a benefits worker

On Monday 16 July, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Contact Centre Services released a previously embargoed statement, explaining that its Jobseeker's Allowance Online (JSAOL) service would be outsourced to Capita from the end of September 2012.

The JSAOL service is currently one of several options open to people newly claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, though the Department recently stated it wants to increase online applications from 20% of all new claims (at present) to 80% over just a few months, incentivising people to apply in this way by "prioritising" online claims over telephone or clerical (paper) applications. In practice this means customers without internet access or unable to use a computer will be penalised and wait longer for their benefit to be processed, which can already take up to six weeks.

The decision to hand the running of these services to a private company was made with no consultation with the PCS trade union, in spite of formal consultation processes regarding privatisation and outsourcing.

INFORMATION

The information was actually released to workers and local PCS reps in workplaces before the full information had been given to the PCS Group Executive, who had received a three paragraph memo without plans or timescales from the Contact Centre Services manager just a few hours prior to the announcement to workers.

It appears that the member of DWP HR who was tasked with sending this memo to the union was in fact on annual leave until the day of the announcement. Nevertheless, no consultation took place.

It was stated by management on release that the decision was made purely on the basis of providing an improved customer service; that DWP only works Monday-Friday, and that an online service requires a seven days a week cover in order to better serve the public. When one member of JSAOL staff asked for the differential in figures between the current cost of running the service in DWP, and how much it will cost to contract to Capita, they were told that



that was confidential information. Perhaps it is just a coincidence, then, that although DWP has the lowest wages in the civil service, where workers who perform this role are on a starting wage of £16,080, Capita will be paying just £13,893 for the same role according to their current recruitment adverts. Capita workers will also be working an extra 0.5 hours a week on top of the current DWP contracted 37 hour week, and working that over seven days.

DISABLED

This service line has also been used across Jobcentre Plus call centres to provide a role for a great number of workers across the country who suffer from various disabilities which preclude them from working on the inbound telephony work which makes up the majority of the work in the contact centres.

They do this work because they have been found unfit to perform any other role in the Contact Centre, and DWP management have consistently refused to consider any re-deployment outside of the Contact Centre, even when even this JSAOL role has been deemed unsuitable.

These staff have been guaranteed that their employment with DWP will continue, but have been offered no redeployment opportunities.

The tragedy is that they are the last of many more, the rest of whom have previously been sacked from the Department due to long term sickness, caused by the stress of being left without work, or being forced into an unsuitable role for months on end, or who have taken early retirement pack-

ages, seemingly left with no other option.

Since the privatisation announcement, local union reps in Sheffield met with members explaining the need to oppose the privatisation. Sheffield Contact Centre has 20 of the 90 members across the country which currently solely perform the JSAOL role. PCS members are rightly concerned that, with the direction of the department's work moving more and more to pushing claimants to use online services, the amount of work handed over to private sector from this privatisation will dramatically increase over the next year.

Members are also aware that if the government is able to privatise one small section of the department without a fightback from the union, then others will surely follow.

ACTION

The Sheffield PCS branch put a submission for industrial action to the PCS DWP Group Executive (GEC). This was discussed at the GEC meeting on Wednesday and Thursday of last week.

The long-running Contact Centre campaign was also discussed and two new strike days were discussed. The GEC has asked the branch to discuss whether they also wished to take further action in addition to the two days.

It is unclear whether PCS intends to add a demand to keep JSAOL in house to the demands of the Contact Centre campaign, or whether it wants to defend JSAOL through the national (civil service-wide) ballot against privatisation. Either way, with the date for handing work to Capita due in late September, effective opposition needs to be planned and action taken quickly. Unfortunately there are currently no indications that any other branches have made any plans to defend JSAOL. The action would be more effective if it involved more sites. If branches haven't organised opposition themselves, then PCS members require leadership from GEC.

The main message from any campaign to defend JSAOL must be to oppose the privatisation of public services. It is obscene that the benefit system is increasingly being run for private profit. If the PCS wants to defend its members' interests and public services, it must defend JSAOL and fight to maintain it within the DWP, as there is no doubt that this is just the thin end of a very fat wedge.

New NHS pay attacks

From the Red Pill bulletin

Feeling confident that the pensions dispute is over, the government is preparing a fresh attack on our terms and conditions. The new proposals are a "bully's charter" that will give line managers control over whether or not you get increments.

Under the new schemes, we will have to meet locally determined performance targets before we get our increments. Moreover, those at the top of their pay band will get their pay increases as a lump sum, and not as part of their monthly pay packet.

The bosses are trying to promote the idea that our increments are like bonus pay for good performance, rather than part of our contracted pay. The effect of this change is to create a system where managers can restrict pay at will. It will also mean that union representatives are overloaded with individual case work, as member challenge their bosses' judgement.

Other changes include sick pay being paid at a basic rate, plus cost-of-living increases, but without any unsociable hours payments. This will be particularly harsh on workers who work permanent nights, and rely on regular unsociable hours income. Trusts can also set their own pay scale for senior nurses, and they are abolishing the double increment rise for new starters.

Unions have threatened to walk out of negotiations because 20 trusts, mostly in the south west, have joined a "cartel" which is ignoring the national negotiating process and railroading through their own pay plans. Their proposals include cutting staff pay by up to 15%.

The cartel represents a growing trend across a variety of sectors for bosses to unilaterally rip up collective agreements and impose new terms and conditions without consulting unions. A similar "cartel" method was behind the electricians' dispute which eventually saw seven construction industry contractors back down from their attempts to rip up the existing Joint Industry Board agreement and impose a 35% pay cut.

The electricians beat their bosses' pay cartel through a sustained campaign of industrial direct action. Healthworkers should discuss how we can do the same.

Fighting for public railways

Rail unions took their campaign against the "McNulty Report", a new government plan to massively cut railworkers jobs and pay while increasing fares, to South Yorkshire recently. Craig Johnston, relief regional organiser for the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT)'s northern region, spoke to Dave Harris.

Britain's railways are a mess — they have been since John Major's discredited Tory Government privatised them in the late 90s. In Britain we have some of the highest train fares in Europe with the least amount of electrification and high speed rail lines compared to our comparator countries.

Independent research has calculated that every year around £1.2billion goes out of the industry as a result of dividends to shareholders, payments and costs caused by the fragmentation of the industry — a fragmentation that happened at privatisation. If this privatisation nonsense was stopped there could be an 18% reduction in train fares.

Research has also shown that private sector investment is only 1% of all investment in the privatised railway industry — the rest is public investment or underwritten by the public sector.

The last Labour government recognised there was a problem with the cost of rail so they engaged Sir Roy McNulty to commission a report on the industry.

However, it seems that Labour government decided not to set McNulty a remit of looking at the costs of privatisation and fragmentation and the potential benefits of renationalisation but to look at "efficiencies" instead.

He has come up with a cynical piece of work that seeks to make huge cuts to front line rail staff whilst continuing to allow the privatisation gravy train to proceed at full speed with director bonuses, shareholder dividends and never-ending avoidable costs associated with the fragmentation of the industry and administering the shambles.

Rail workers are facing a massive assault on our industry. Following on from McNulty's odious report, proposals are now being drawn up to get rid all staff on trains except for drivers; close station ticket offices and replace front line staff with machines that are often "out of order"; axe front line station staff who assist passengers and make our stations safe; decimate what is left of the train catering services, re-

ducing the quality of train travel and the total travel experience; cut back on proper track inspections.

RMT and the other rail unions, supported by the TUC, have launched a high profile campaign — "Action for Rail — People before profit". That's why rail workers were out protesting in South Yorkshire recently, outside Sheffield railway station where we took our campaign to the city where Nick Clegg is an MP, and in Doncaster where Ed Miliband is a local MP.

We're fighting to defend rail services, safety and jobs, but there is another issue. McNulty also proposes huge fare increases. In that respect, whether you are a rail worker or rail passenger you have a serious interest in supporting this campaign.

Essex firefighters strike

By Ollie Moore

Firefighters in Essex struck again on Thursday 26 July as part of their fight against cuts. Industrial action short of a strike took place the following day, with firefighters only attending 999 calls.

The action follows a series of one-day strikes, which were supplemented by a 1,000-strong demonstration through Chelmsford on Wednesday 18 July. The firefighters are attempting to halt their bosses' cuts to frontline services, which have seen 100 full-time and 60 part-time posts axed since 2008.

Essex Fire Brigades Union (FBU) brigade chair Alan Chinn-Shaw said: "[The authority] has got the money. The fire authority has increased its reserves from £4 million to £16 million—yet at the same time we've lost 160 firefighters."

Further strikes are due in August, with action continuing into the autumn.

London bus workers' victory is bittersweet

By a London bus driver

The latest circular to Unite bus workers tells us the fact that, "on 22 June thousands of Unite bus workers came together in a historic act of unity".

It says that "every bus operator in London was forced to negotiate in one room with Unite for the first time" and "over two thousand new members joining since the start of the campaign" and "how can anyone say this isn't a total victory?"

It is true that from zero offered at the beginning this represents a victory, but a very minor and limited victory. It was achieved by strike action and can be built upon. But this is only a small part of the story. 29% voted against this deal because it is for £27.50 per completed duty, amounting to a maximum of £577 before tax.

But those off sick, on holidays, or having rest days will lose out.

And there is no mention of the use of court injunctions during this dispute, granted against three companies by anti-working class judges (are there any other kind?) on the most spurious grounds. Before that last day's strike (Thursday 5 July) was called off, seven more companies had applied for injunctions.

DEFYING
There was no question of Unite defying these laws, which declared illegal a 96.7% vote for strike action in Metroline, for instance.

Until these laws are defied in a mass way and the laws repealed as a consequence, we will see the democratic right to strike effectively abolished by these injunctions.

The dispute was also correctly seen by many drivers as a diversion from

the central attacks on bus drivers over the last three years, since the abandonment by Unite of the equal pay campaign in late 2008.

Since then, wage settlements have been below inflation for all drivers. The two-tier workforce has been introduced by the companies across London without even a token show of opposition from Unite. This has escalated recently; for instance Metroline introduced its new starter rates on 1 January 2012

after losing the 266 route to FirstBus without even bothering to consult the

union. That amounts to effective de-recognition.

And because there is now such a two-tier workforce, it is obviously in the best interests of all companies to get rid of the higher-paid "senior" staff, so the rate of disciplinaries and sackings has enormously increased, with final written warnings sent out for brushing another bus's mirror and sackings for three revenue reports of missed passes of passengers who could have boarded by the back door.

A strike during the Olympics on the above

might have won us back all we lost in recent years. And this is what makes this Olympics bonus "total victory" such a bittersweet pill to swallow. Drivers all across London know that Unite could have done so much better by its members on the issues that really matter if they chose to fight on them.

In July 2008 Unite Regional Secretary Peter Kavanagh said: "If we don't get parity across London by the time the Olympics starts, no one will get to the starting line". Not only have we not got that across London, we do not have it within individual garages themselves. At Arriva The Shires, based in Watford, they pay £7.80 per hour for starters.

Unless the rank and file can rally against the bureaucracy, that is where this race to the bottom that they all condemned so vociferously in 2008 (but are now totally silent on) will get us.

Home Office strikes off

By Daren Bedford

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) called off a planned strike of Home Office workers on Thursday 26 July, after the government made a renewed offer which the union described as amounting to the creation of over 1,000 jobs.

The strike, which would have involved workers in the UK Border Agency, was part of a battle against massive job losses. The government plans to axe 8,500 posts from the department.

The response to the planned strike, which would have taken place the day before the Olympic opening ceremony, from the employer and the press

was vitriolic. Senior Tory figures announced that they would seek injunctions or other legal means of preventing the strike from going ahead.

Train drivers in the ASLEF union, who plan to strike on 5, 6, and 7 August as part of their battle to defend their pensions, have been subjected to similar criticism, as were the Tube cleaners who struck on 27 and 28 July (see back page).

An atmosphere is developing in which almost any strike at all is accused of being fundamentally damaging to the (imagined) national interest, putting immense pressure on workers to vote against or work through strikes. The entire labour movement needs to rally behind any union taking action and as-

sert our right to withdraw our labour in any circumstances we choose. Unions also need to urgently consider ways to defy — rather than simply "work around" — the anti-union laws, which at some point will mean taking "illegal" strike action, as electricians did in their successful dispute against pay cuts.

Questions need to be asked within the Home Office dispute itself.

Although the concession from the government is positive, many activists will question whether the offer — to create 800 jobs in the Border Agency and 300 jobs in passport offices — was sufficient to call off action when eight times that number of jobs are on the line.

Coryton closure fight continues

By Darren Bedford

Oil workers at the Coryton refinery in Essex are continuing their campaign of demonstrations and pickets against the closure of their workplace.

Coryton is one of eight refineries in the UK, and supplied 20% of all the fuel used in London and south east England. Its closure is estimated to represent a potential £250 million loss

responsible for its closure. Unite organiser Russ Ball said: "We will not be picketing, we are not asking people at the terminal to stop work, but we are taking this campaign one step at a time."

"This is part of our campaign for a public inquiry into the Coryton sale and closure and demos can be just as effective as other means when we get the numbers."

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Remploy pickets strong

By Jason Hill

(Workers at Remploy factories across the UK have been striking to prevent the closure of 27 factories nationwide. This report is from their strike day on 19 July. They also struck on 26 July. Their next strike is scheduled for 6 August.)

About 50 people braved the rain to show their solidarity with striking Remploy workers at the Stoke-on-Trent plant on Thursday 19 July.

There were banners from the striking unions Unite and GMB, as well as Unison, CWU, PCS, North Staffordshire Trades Union Council, and North Staffordshire Against Cuts. Representatives of several other unions were also there to show their solidarity — including NUT, Musicians' Union, and the ceramic workers' union Unity.

Local Labour MPs Joan Walley (Stoke North) and Rob Flello (Stoke South) came along to show their support, as well as Gareth Snell, Labour leader of the neighbouring local authority, Newcastle-under-Lyme.

The Stoke Remploy factory is one of the 27 which the Tories plan to close. It employs 114 disabled workers in a variety of jobs, including assembly for car companies and book binding. Virtually all the workforce were out on strike on Thursday.

Remploy worker Joanne O'Connor, who has worked there for 16 years, said: "Everyone has been feeling down and miserable since it was announced the factory could close. There aren't enough jobs out there for able-bodied people at the minute, so how are we going to find employment if we lose our jobs?"

The campaign to save the Stoke Remploy factory has had widespread support, and is backed by the local Trades Council and North Staffordshire Against Cuts.

As Colin Hanley, Unite steward at the factory, said: "The massive support we have had for the demonstration shows just how strongly everybody feels about these closures".

Posties' wildcat wins

By Clarke Benitez

A 48-hour wildcat strike by postal workers in Bridgewater, south west England, ended in victory as a suspended Communication Workers' Union (CWU) activist was returned to work.

Workers also secured agreement for national talks around deteriorating industrial relations at the Bridgewater Delivery Office, where the CWU accuses bosses of heavy-handed management, refusal to comply with agreed upon consultation procedures, and making unilateral cuts to workers' hours. The strike began on Friday 20 July.

Dave Wilshire, branch secretary of Bristol CWU, said: "Royal Mail can say what it likes but the fact is they would not talk to us about lifting this suspension until the strike went into its second day. That's a fact."

"This is a major Royal Mail turnaround from last Friday, when it looked like we might be out on strike for a week or more. Our suspended CWU member will return to work today with the threat of serious disciplinary action removed. The other issues members were on strike about should now be addressed."

"The tremendous solidarity shown once again by 110 Bridgewater postal workers has, we believe, forced Royal Mail to show some common sense. We hope this approach continues."

More industrial news online

• Community march against privatisation in Brent — bit.ly/LYnrov

• National Gallery strike — bit.ly/LYnkt4

• Latest on Tube battles — workersliberty.org/twblog

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Cleaners fight back

By Ruben Lomas

Tube cleaners and their supporters rallied at Stratford station, on the edges of the Olympic Park, on Friday 27 July as cleaning and security workers employed by Initial, ISS, and Carlisle struck to win Olympic bonuses and living wages.

Cleaners have been frozen out of the Olympic bonuses the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT) has succeeded in winning for its members in other grades. They picketed at depots and stations across London Underground and the Docklands Light Railway and leafleted other Tube workers and members of the public.

Across the network, strikers reported the widespread use of agency staff by cleaning contractors. One worker told *Solidarity*: "They're using ten agency staff for work that would normally be done by two people."

The cleaners' rally at Stratford maintained a lively and noisy presence under the nervous gaze of dozens of British Transport Police, Metropolitan Police, and G4S security guards. Speeches at the rally had a common theme: the obscenity of extreme low-pay and hyper-exploitation in a city as rich as London, and a time when billions of pounds were being spent on the Olympics (an event which couldn't function without the labour of workers like the Tube cleaners and others like them, but who will receive no reward for their essential role).

One striker said "London has everything for you, but it will not be given to you on a platter. You have to fight for it." Activists also spoke of

Tube cleaners, organised by the RMT union, struck on 27 July

their hope that the strike could provide the impetus for a renewed organising campaign amongst cleaners on the Tube.

The Tube cleaners' strike is part of ongoing struggles, citywide, of cleaning workers. This group of London workers are in large part an invisible migrant workforce. They keep its transport network, its offices, and its institutions clean, but face low-pay, bullying bosses, unsafe conditions, and precarious contracts.

JOHN LEWIS

The strike of cleaners at John Lewis' flagship store on Oxford Street, although involving only a small number of workers, is another hugely significant battle.

Their planned strike on Thursday 26 July was suspended to discuss a renewed offer from management; their pickets on previous strike days had been similarly lively and assertive.

Representatives from the union, the Industrial Workers of the World, attended the Tube cleaners'

picket lines on Friday 27 and spoke to the Stratford rally to offer solidarity.

The IWW's campaign at John Lewis shows that low-paid precarious workers in the private sector (and in a prominent high-street employer) can be unionised and can fight back. Most of the labour movement has been reluctant to attempt any serious organising on the high street, seeing the combination of staff transience and hostile anti-union employers as too big a mountain to climb.

Cleaners at many of London's most prestigious academic institutions, including University College London, the London School of Economics, and the School of African and Oriental Studies, have also fought long struggles to win living wages.

Last year, the Senate House Living Wage Campaign formed to link up cleaners' struggles across University of London institutions and fight for a living wage across-the-board. Here again, outsourcing is a ubiquitous feature, and bosses' responses have in-

volved often brutal victimisation and collusion with the state to have troublesome workers (whose immigration status is often precarious) deported.

Cleaners' struggles are not limited to London. On 5 August, cleaners on the Tyne and Wear Metro in Newcastle (employed by the contractor Churchill) will strike again for 48 hours as part of their battle to win living wages and the levelling up of conditions between directly employed and sub-contracted staff. They are also striking against the victimisation of a colleague.

Cleaning workers are an integral and growing part of the modern urban working class. Their struggles — like the struggles of unskilled, precarious, immigrant workers before them, such as the dockers' battles in the 1880s — show that, despite conditions of extreme exploitation and personal danger, the logic of capitalism will always compel workers to resist.

Solidarity can help turn that resistance into victory.

Spain: a storm is brewing

By Pablo Velasco

As the Spanish government teeters on the brink of a bailout, the Spanish working class has responded with a spectacular burst of militancy that sets the tone for a fightback against Europe-wide austerity.

The right-wing government of Mariano Rajoy is imposing vicious cuts in welfare and social spending. This includes £50 billion of austerity measures: a VAT hike, cuts to unemployment benefit, a 7% cut in public sector wages and the privatisation of ports, airports and railways.

But the militant Spanish workers' movement is fighting back. They are led by the magnificent miners, the first major group of workers in Europe to go on indefinite strike against neoliberal austerity measures.

But other workers are also being drawn into struggle. The trade union day of action on 19 July in response to the austerity vote in the Spanish parliament saw 800,000 march in Madrid, 400,000 in Barcelona and action in 80 cities across Spain.

Civil servants engaged in walk outs in the week leading up to the vote.

Madrid firefighters have their own struggles, and formed an honour guard for the miners "black march" when it arrived in Madrid on 10 July.

Cracks have even appeared in the apparatus of coercion, with police officers taking part in some protests (although this did not prevent brutal attacks on demonstrators on the day of action).

The demonstrations have been called by the two trade union federations, the CCOO and the UGT. Both claim around one million members each, with some other smaller and nationalist unions — but this is only around 10% union density. The UGT traces its roots back over century and was for many years close to the social democratic party (PSOE). The CCOO emerged as a rank and file movement underground under Franco's rule in the 1960s, and was associated with the Spanish Communist Party (PCE). Both these political links weakened in recent decades, particularly as the PSOE has supported neoliberal policies and austerity.

The biggest left formation is the United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU), which received 6% of the vote in November 2011. The IU now has around 12% in the polls and following the parliamentary vote called for rebellion against the cuts. However it is compromised in some regions by joining coalitions to govern with the socialists. The IU joined the government in Andalucia but they were rebuffed by their own supporters in Asturias when they attempted the same tactic.

A general strike may be called for the autumn — though union bureaucrats are dragging their heels. Some 10 million turned out for a general strike day in March. However such strike action will need to be longer than a day to seriously rock Spanish capital.

A united front of workers organisations should demand the nationalisation of the banks under workers' control as part of an emergency plan counterposed to austerity. The labour movement needs to fight for a workers' government, based on working class organisations. Although there are small Marxist groups, a mass revolutionary party is a vital missing ingredient which could propel the workers' struggle forward.

• Solidarity with Spanish miners, page 5

The **NHS** Liaison Network
A liaison network for campaigns and activists fighting to save the NHS

Labour rebuild the NHS!

LOBBY THE LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE

Monday 30 September, 2.30 onwards
Manchester Central Convention Complex,
Peters Street, Manchester

More: email: nhsliasion@yahoo.co.uk
07904 944 771
labournhslobby.wordpress.com

Supporters include Unite North West region, Merseyside Trades Council, Wirral Trades Council, Wirral South CLP, Labour Representation Committee