

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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Win Living Wages. Save NHS

TAKE FROM THE RICH!

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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Anti-EDL: questions from Sheffield

By a Sheffield anti-fascist activist

On Saturday 21 September around 300 EDL supporters descended on Lane Top in Sheffield.

There hasn't been a sub-urban or estate-based demonstration by the racist English Defence League (EDL) in South Yorkshire before and the location brought a greater immediacy to the threat of violence to local Asian residents.

The excuse for this racist display was a plan to convert a disused pub, The Pheasant, into a mosque. The Muslim community group that had made enquiries about the property had already dropped the plan before the EDL protest.

Unexpectedly, Unite Against Fascism (UAF) broke with tradition to call a counter-demo at the same location as EDL. This was a positive alternative to their tactic of holding politically

empty "festivals" without any intention of hindering the EDL's physical progress.

It was also the first time that a network of independent anti-fascists had organised a separate march, prepared with scouts and leafleting sessions in the area in the week before. This happened despite attempts by EDL members to intimidate and prevent a planning meeting, which avoided violence only by a last minute move of venue.

On the day, the independent contingent made up around two thirds of the anti-EDL protestors, but there were still only around 150 opposing the far right group. Mounted police effectively coaxed the march along to the UAF's demo, which was topped and tailed by five police riot vans and three lines of police covering the 200 metres to the junction where the EDL were set to demonstrate.

There's a tactical question here, especially when there numbers are too small to drive EDL off the streets and to protect Asian residents from racist violence.

Can we do more than make a symbolic display of opposition? Even with the best political slogans and banners, marching to a static demonstration is not enough, especially when local people are curious about what's happening or see little more than two opposing groups shouting slogans at each other.

The most productive part of the day was talking to people shopping in Firth Park. Without preaching or dismissing people who were sympathetic towards the EDL, we talked about inequality, cuts and a lack of political representation.

The anti-fascist initiative is really positive and there are already plans to meet again to discuss next steps. It's vital that a network maintains momentum, and

that it moves away from mostly internet-based organising which can be too exclusive. There seems to be some consensus to mobilise against racists based on working class unity to address underlying social grievances that EDL exploit, and avoid broad, bland and wholly negative approach of other strategies.

With greater numbers involved in the planning of action and a wider willingness to physically confront the EDL, there could have been small groups breaking off through side streets and between houses to bypass the police kettle. But to do this from the static protest point would have been impossible.

An anti-fascist campaign must be outward-facing and engage in the slow trudge of listening to, and arguing with, working class people who are the target of the EDL's racist populism.

Post workers set to strike

By Jonny West

The government has promised that the privatisation of Royal Mail will take place "within weeks".

Shares in the privatised company will be offered to Royal Mail workers for a minimum spend of £500 (which can top up a free share bundle every worker

will receive, with the total shares going to staff amounting to 10% of the business).

The Communication Workers Union (CWU), which organises Royal Mail staff, began balloting its members for strikes on 20 September, with the results due on 3 October. The ballot focuses on a number of on-going industrial issues, in-

cluding pay and pensions. In an attempt to avert a strike, Royal Mail has made some concessions on its proposed pension reforms, and have agreed to allow promotional increases to pensionable pay (and increments) to be counted as final salary pensionable pay until March 2018 (as opposed to April 2014 as they had previously proposed).

However, CWU officials say members are "certain" to vote for strikes, which could begin on 10 October. They will be the first national postal workers' strikes since 2009.

Strikes could throw a spanner in the works of privatisation. Potential buyers may be stalled or put off altogether by sustained strikes, and the movement Royal Mail has already made on pensions shows that the threat of strikes can force concessions from bosses.

Local disputes like Bridgewater, which succeeded in beating back a bullying management through sustained and escalating strikes, coordinated through mass meetings, show how the national dispute could be organised. Strike funds will be essen-

tial to sustain action.

CWU also needs a political strategy. Currently, its political campaign against privatisation has little public life. CWU officials have talked about playing on rural middle-class fears about post office privatisation and cuts, and have floated the idea of an alliance with Ukip and countryside Tories.

So far, Labour has pointedly refused to commit to renationalising Royal Mail if privatisation goes ahead and Labour wins the 2015 election. Shadow Business Secretary Chukka Umunna has claimed it would be "irresponsible" to make such a commitment.

CWU will force a vote on renationalisation at Labour Party conference on 25 September, and expects to win a majority. A concerted effort by CWU and other unions to pass policy at every level of the Labour Party, and to take direct action against Labour MPs who refuse to back public ownership, could frighten and shame Labour into action.

In the meantime, we should gear up to support a postal workers' strike, including by fundraising.

Against Lincs library cuts

On Saturday the Worst Witch, Harry Potter, and Sherlock Holmes, along with a host of other literary characters and around 500 people turned out to protest in Lincoln against planned closure of 32 out of 48 of the county's libraries. The Tory county council are also to cut back mobile library services by over two thirds. Unison estimates all this will cost 170 jobs and is talking about strikes.

Remembering Paul Fyssas

By Theodora Polenta

Paul Fyssas, killed by a fascist in Piraeus on 17 September, grew up in the working class neighbourhoods of Keratsini.

The son of a shipyard worker in Perama, he in turn went to work in the yard.

From his school years he loved hip hop and from a listener quickly he turned into an artist. He continued to work from time to time in the yards, was a member of the Piraeus metal workers' union, and consistently participated in its mobilisations.

Paul distributed his music free via the internet. "He was one of Golden Dawn's targets because of his anti-fascist lyrics", admitted one former local Golden Dawn member.

Paul was not a member of a particular left wing political party, but he steadily participated in social movements. One frosty winter night he mobilised all the hip hop artists to help out the homeless in dodgy areas.

Even the time of the attack, his first concern was to protect his friends. He

stood out against the mob, looked the thugs in the eyes, and asked them if they had the guts to come on one by one.

Though some try to convince us it was a clash of "two extremes", in fact two different worlds clashed that night. The selflessness, courage, and militancy of the working class as expressed by Paul Fyssas, and the rottenness of the Nazis and the system that breeds them.

The attack on the KKE trade unionists in Perama, and the murder of Paul, have taken place in a context of the re-emergence of working-class struggle, with rolling strikes by teachers and other public sector workers.

A 48 hour general strike starts on 25 September. The "hope" of the ruling class was that this murderous attack would numb the working-class movement. We are proving them wrong.

Yet the left and the labour movement have underestimated the danger from the neo-Nazis.

KKE, especially, has for years mocked the Trotskyists that threw their forces in the struggle against the

Golden Dawn. Only one and a half years ago, prominent KKE member Giorgos Sifonios, union president at Greek Steel, invited Golden Dawn into the occupied factory and handed over the microphone to GD spokesperson Ilias Kasidiaris to address the workers!

Syriza has had a better stance, but until now has underestimated the threat of Golden Dawn. Hundreds of rank and file Syriza members are pivotal in the building of antifascist committees in their neighbourhoods, but that is done

without a plan and without any coordination from the party leadership. And a number of prominent Syriza MPs sent completely the wrong message by asking for cooperation of the "constitutional arc" (I.e. the Left parties along the memorandum Pasok and ND parties, whose policies have paved the way for the Nazis).

The smaller sections of the Left bear some responsibility, too. Antarsya and Keerfa (the "Uniting Movement Against Racism and the Fascist Threat", which is part of Antarsya) continue

even today sometimes to act divisively and to tend to limit proposals for action to organising marches (which is of course important, but not enough).

Only united and organized we can prevent further killings and smash fascism. Organised and networked in local committees, with workers' defence groups - that is the way to win.

When we say "united", let us clarify one thing: those who have tolerated Golden Dawn, who have whipped up hysteria against immigrants, and prostitutes - the political parties that govern us and serve the Troika, ship-owners and bankers - do not fit into our unity.

We should have no reliance on them or on any version of the "constitutional arc".

The task of combating fascism belongs to the left, the trade unions, and young people.

We need immediate marches and actions against the fascists everywhere. We also need an understanding that the protests and demonstrations are not enough.

One of the first priorities

should be organisation in schools, universities, football clubs, youth centres, etc). Golden Dawn has gained ground in some high schools where it is considered fashionable and the basis of a "lifestyle" subculture. A very important step is the establishment of the Coordination of Anti-fascist Committees with collectives from all over Athens and Piraeus. Similar movements are taking place in Macedonia and Thessaly.

Our struggle against fascism is also a struggle against the capitalist system that generates and nourishes fascism.

A united anti-fascist front led by Syriza and the Left should be complemented by a comprehensive response to the crisis, the Troika and the aim of the government of the Left. The Left must claim the power to do this on the basis of a program that removes power from the capitalists and opens the way for workers' control.

Otherwise, the crisis of the capitalist system that we live in today will keep regenerating the fascist threat in one way or another.

Syria: regime calls for negotiations, buys more time

By Stephen Wood

Deputy Prime Minister, Qadri Jamil has raised the prospect of a ceasefire in Syria.

Jamil is seen as Russia's man in the Assad Government, but says he is giving the regime's view. He says forces were at a deadlock on both sides and that negotiations should begin.

Such negotiations could stall the drive to get a UN resolution authorising force. They will also help Russia to continue backing Assad without getting into conflict with the US.

We could neither support nor advocate any rotten deal likely to come out of these negotiations. Given the fragmented nature of the opposition, the likely advantages to Assad such negotiations would bring, and the refusal of even the moderate rebels of the FSA to see Assad remain in power, no deal is likely. Nonetheless, an end to the fighting, however brief, would be a good thing.

Bitter fighting over towns, settlements and their resources is on the rise. More and more people are displaced. Towns are passing between the FSA, ISIS and other groups in continuing circles of fighting, temporary alliances and further conflict. The different views between one FSA commander and another about the role of the jihadist fighters increases the complexity of what rebel gains mean. Minorities like the Kurds, Alawites and Christians are right to be fearful of a rebel victory.

The regime is currently negotiating the handing over of its chemical weapons and has provided a provisional inventory of its major sites. It has requested a year to hand

over the weapons, with the caveat it may not manage to get rid of them all. The Syrian army still has fearsome supplies of conventional weaponry with which it continues to slaughter the people.

The UN wants Iran to take part in negotiations as Syria's main Shia ally. The call coincides with Iran's new President, Hassan Rouhani's tentative return to international diplomacy. The outward softening — on issues such as anti-semitism — is not matched by the regime's stance inside Iran of continuing to back Assad and Hezbollah.

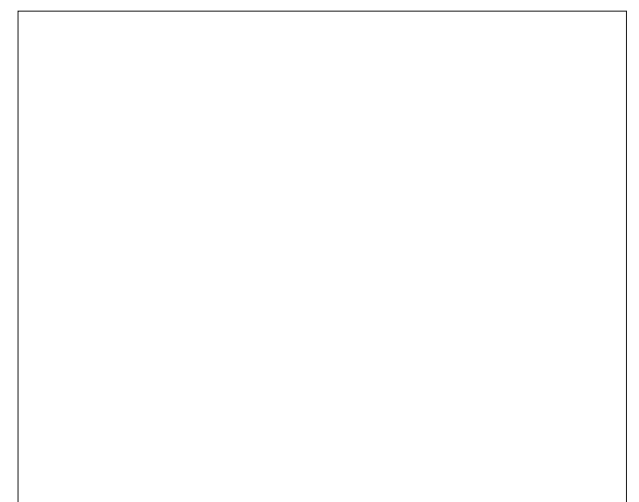
Speaking on the consequences of the war for the Middle East, Major General Yair Golan, a senior figure in the Israeli military, has said that "The rebels cannot succeed in creating an alternative, and Assad cannot succeed in governing."

He warned Hezbollah that should it take control of chemical weapons from Assad, or attempt to attack Israel as the regime weakens, Israel will respond. Israel should not, he said, "be put to the test".

Many of Hezbollah's missile launchers are in heavily built up areas. Bombing by Israel could be devastating to Lebanon.

It would be no victory for the Palestinians for Hezbollah to launch an attack of Israel. Fortunately there is no evidence that Hassan Nasrullah, the leader of Hezbollah, wants to take control of Syria's chemical weapons and the ability of Syria to launch a long range offensive or sponsor Hezbollah in launching one against Israel is low.

With Syria having used 40-50% of its long range missiles, sustained but sporadic fighting throughout the coun-



A ceasefire would help Syria's refugees, but prospects do not look good

try with no clear end or resolution remains the most likely prospect. None of the groups with a substantial military arsenal deserves political backing from workers and minorities in Syria. We have to continue to push for independent working class defence against both the regime and the militias.

Any cessation in fighting may provide a chance for those forces, or potential forces, to consolidate and begin to discuss how to win a democratic, secular and free Syria.

How fair is Fairphone?

Eric Lee



I recently attended the London launch of Fairphone — “a seriously cool smartphone that puts social values first”.

Fairphone is a Dutch initiative to create an alternative to the decidedly “unfair” phones that are being made and sold today.

Their phone, prototypes of which were available at the launch, is in some ways an improvement upon the mass-manufactured phones most of us carry around today.

Those phones are usually made with little or no concern for the environment or the well-being of the workers who make them.

Fairphone, on the other hand, aims to use “fair and conflict-free resources”, is committed to environmentally-friendly solutions to the problem of e-waste, and has given the phone an “open design”.

All good, but when it comes to who actually makes the phone, we run into some problems.

Originally, it seems, Fairphone aimed to make the phone in Europe, but quickly gave up on that and moved its manufacture to China.

As they explain, “Fairphone intends to manufacture in China because ... we feel our model can make a difference in improving working conditions and environmental impacts in China”.

So, it’s a unionised factory then?

Not exactly.

Because Fairphone’s vision for workers doesn’t seem to include unions — any unions.

Fairphone says that in China they are committed to “creating a fund to improve workers’ wages and working conditions and open discussions between workers and their employers”.

Open discussion between workers and their employers? That’s it? Even the state-controlled unions in China offer more than that.

Let’s be blunt: these are weasel words.

Fairphone says they “want every worker ... to earn a fair wage” but the only concrete step they’ve taken in that direction is to partner with “an independent, third-party social assessment organization to perform an assessment”.

In plainer English, that means a group that like the Rainforest Alliance, which notoriously certifies union-busting banana plantations as being “ethical”.

The company Fairphone has hired is paid by Fairphone to give a similar (and equally worthless) seal of approval for their factories.

This kind of paternalistic approach to industrial relations takes us back centuries, back to the pre-Marxian Utopian So-

cialists who relied on the goodwill of well-intentioned, humane capitalists like Robert Owen.

Workers don’t need “independent third-party social assessment organizations” and they don’t need “open discussions” with their bosses. They need the only thing that actually works to ensure health and safety in the workplace, decent wages, and job security — an independent trade union.

And there won’t be any of those in FairPhone’s factory in China.

To be fair, it may well be difficult for FairPhone to compete on price if it were to be manufactured in Europe.

So one might understand the need, strictly on a commercial basis, to use a low-wage country somewhere in Asia to make the phones.

But why choose a low-wage country that also happens to be completely union-free?

Asia is full of countries that have low-wage workforces, but where there are unions that at least try to organise and represent those workers.

China is surrounded by such countries, any one of which (except North Korea) has a better record on workers’ rights.

The people behind Fairphone are clearly well-intentioned and want to make the world a better place. But by opting for non-union manufacture in China, and trying to placate critics with sops like “social assessment” and “open discussion”, they’re ducking the serious issues.

A truly fair Fairphone would carry the one label that really mattered: a union label.

Challenge Islamist ideas, don’t “tolerate” them

Letters



I agree with Cathy Nugent (“No absolutes in niqab debate”, *Solidarity* 296, 18 September 2013) that there must be debate of the issues surrounding the decision by Birmingham Metropolitan College and of Judge Peter Murphy to back down over the wearing of the niqab in college and in court.

I am surprised that the left went along uncritically with the student protests supporting the challenges by the women involved. Claims to wear the niqab in such places are made, and supported by others, on the basis of “a woman’s right to choose” and of promoting religious “tolerance”.

The misappropriation of the “woman’s right to choose” slogan by right-wing religious forces has confused many on the left. Politicised religion stands for the subjugation of women — it is not simply a case of supporting an individual

woman’s right to express herself or wear what she likes.

I live and work in Tower Hamlets. When George Galloway stood against Oona King here in 2005, he cynically and opportunistically took up the cause of a secondary school student who demanded to wear the niqab in class. The student, thankfully, did not win and the furore died down. However, during the period, some female Muslim students in the school complained to teachers that they felt pressured by members of the newly-formed Islamic Society to veil up. Hizb ut-Tahrir stickers began to appear on school bags, adding to the oppressive atmosphere.

Bolstered by this, two members of the society wrote to the then head teacher complaining that the cleavage of a member of support staff, a midday supervisor, could be seen. The head, who had considered herself a left winger in her past, who had been politically active during the 1970s women movement, responded by attempting to introduce a “modest” dress code for women. There was no mention of a code for men.

The supervisor, who had worked for many years with teenagers, in schools, and was much respected and loved,

found herself staring in the mirror every morning, fretting about how she looked, suddenly self-conscious about her body, and utterly unsupported by management.

This was an attack on that woman, from the right, by Islamist activists attempting to change for the worse the culture and atmosphere of their place of learning for everyone who learned, taught, and worked there.

The fear of being considered an “Islamophobe” has the effect of preventing political activists from speaking and thinking clearly. It has meant failing to make solidarity with women in religious communities who want to stand up to conservative clerics and “community leaders”.

CHALLENGE

Political Islam has gained strength in East London, helped along by Galloway’s Respect and their sometime-bedfellows, the SWP. Why would we, the left, revolutionary socialists, side with right-wing religious forces against the women of our class? We should challenge, not “tolerate”, religious ideas.

This does not mean that we support state bans on religious clothing or the forcible removals of veils. We would not have supported the use of state force to prevent Catholics worshipping in Stalinist Russia. Suppression of religious practice from above tends to have the effect of driving people more firmly into the arms of religious reactionaries.

We should, however, challenge the ideas of those men and women who think worship is a human ideal, or that women should be defined as good or bad depending on how much of their bodies they allow to be visible. It means also that we recognise where those ideas come from and on whose side we stand.

I believe that there are times when wearing a veil is not appropriate and we should not be afraid to say so: classrooms, hospitals, and doctors’ consulting rooms for example. There are also times when the wearing of the veil has no damaging effect to anyone other than the wearer, and a ban would therefore be wrong.

Going along with the left consensus, based on a bourgeois-liberal “tolerance” of religious ideas and forces that we would do better to challenge, serves no-one.

Jean Lane, east London

Labour’s Bedroom Tax promise: keep up the pressure

That the Labour Party have finally announced they would repeal the Bedroom Tax if elected at the next election is very welcome, but not before time.

That Labour have adopted this is down to pressure from tenants, campaigners and the Labour left.

Much more meaningless was a vote by Lib Dem conference to oppose the Bedroom Tax at the next election. That pledge is worthless while the parliamentary leadership of the party is supporting policies like that are destroying people’s lives now.

It all begs the question for Labour and Lib Dem councils which still control their own council housing. If they are against the Bedroom Tax, why are they implementing it? A number of Labour councils, including Renfrewshire and Bristol, adopted a no evictions policy, though Bristol seems



now to be rowing back from this.

On the other hand, in Barnsley and elsewhere some housing associations and councils are obtaining possession orders against their tenants in arrears. This is the first part of the eviction process. The intervention of the left, unions and campaigners in support of tenants can be decisive in trying to stop these processes, putting massive pressure on social landlords and ready to throw bailiffs off estates if necessary.

If tenants, socialists and unions ratchet up the pressure further we can defeat this unworkable and deeply cruel policy. Let’s make that our mission for the coming months.

Dave Kirk, Leeds

• Scottish Anti-Bedroom Tax conference. Saturday 5 October, 12-4pm, Carnegie Theatre, Glasgow Caledonian University. anti-bedtaxfed@gmail.com

Miliband and murmurs of revolt

At a Q&A in the Labour conference at Brighton, Ed Miliband was challenged by an activist: "When will you bring back socialism?" "That's what we are doing", Miliband replied.

Ed Miliband has, at last, promised to repeal the "bedroom tax".

Miliband's obscure and unpopular plan not to count trade unionists as affiliated to Labour unless they complete a form to "opt in" was soft-soaped at the conference, rather than blazoned as a sign of his will to confront the unions.

After Ray Collins presented a slipperily-worded report, GMB union general secretary Paul Kenny was called to speak. "The removal or sale of our collective voice is not on the agenda", he said. "We are proud of who we [the unions]

are and what we have achieved by way of social justice. We are certainly not going to accept any advice on democracy and transparency from the people who brought us the cash for honours scandals or whose activities are funded by cash from wealthy outsiders who refuse to give to the Party but prefer to lay cuckoos in CLP nests" [i.e. the Labour right-wing faction Progress].

Kenny got a standing ovation. Dave Anderson MP also spoke in defence of an unabridged union link. Jon Ashworth, a Labour whip, was put up to speak from Miliband's office, and later summarised his speech like this: "The priority now is to ensure all parts of our federal party are engaged in this debate and of course we must maintain the collective voice".

Unite union general secretary Len McCluskey, who has

displeased left activists in his union by welcoming the "opt-in" talk, also got a standing ovation.

"If our party is to have a future it must speak for ordinary workers and it must represent the voice of organised labour. Trade unionists are the people in this land who create the wealth of our nation... And everyone in this party — everyone — should be proud of our link with them through their trade unions".

And yet, in its gritty detail, this Labour conference has been as bad as other recent ones for arbitrary ruling-out of motions and rule-change proposals from local Labour Parties. And as dominated by windy front-bench speeches. The Labour leaders remain committed, in general, to keeping Tory cuts.

After the experience of "New Labour" in 1997-2010, a real democratisation, a proper debate, and an effective assertion by unions and local Labour activists of working-class interests, was needed in the Labour Party. With only one more Labour conference this side of the next general election, such transformation before May 2015 is very unlikely.

Despite Ed Miliband's claim that "the era of New Labour has passed", a Labour government after May 2015, if we get it, will be only a modified version of the 1997-2010 regime, not something radically different.

The murmurs of revolt in the Labour and trade-union rank and file, reflected in the blips of leftist talk from the platform, are as yet only murmurs. But they are important. This labour movement, bureaucratised though it is, is the only one we have. The struggle within it cannot be bypassed by instant just-add-water alternative left parties.

Our task is to build a collective of socialists who will work both at fundamental re-education of the movement and at taking forward every struggle, however partial.

A workers' programme to take on the ConDems and Labour leaders

- **Tax the rich. Expropriate the banks**
- **Restore NHS as public service**
- **Renationalise the railways, stop Royal Mail privatisation**
- **Abolish the anti-union laws**
- **Living wage for all. Ban zero-hours contracts**
- **For a workers' government: our class should rule**



Collins: a slippery report

The "interim report" from Ray Collins, presented to Labour Party conference on 22 September, emphasises the role played by trade unions in founding the Labour Party.

It says that the federal structure of the Labour Party "should remain". It promises an ongoing "collective engagement" and "collective relationship" between affiliated unions and the party.

It says that if the Labour-union link did not exist, then it would be necessary to invent it.

It suggests that the scheme to have trade unionists "opt in", floated by Ed Miliband on 9 July, should mean individuals opting to gain "additional rights", or even an effort "to convert as many as possible of the levy-payers of affiliated unions into individual membership of our party".

It states that "this individual relationship with trade union members" should not "damage the collective relationship and the institutional links between the party and the union organisations".

Those who want to wreck Labour's union link are not confident. Serious damage to the link - considered by many Labour leftists in July to be a near-certainty, something they disliked but couldn't stop - can be prevented if the new Defend The Link campaign does its work well.

But the report is slippery. Without a strong campaign, serious damage is still likely.

Collins's language is pointedly vague. He refers to the Labour Party as "an alliance of individuals and organisations", using the vague word "alliance" instead of "federation". He writes about "collective engagement", but not specifically affiliation.

The style of the report is bizarre.

"Ed wants to ... Ed's intention is ... because Ed has said ... that is why Ed has said ... Ed has now said ... Ed wants ... Ed has underlined ... Ed has proposed ... Ed has asked for ... Ed has stressed ... I want to hear your views on how we meet Ed's objective".

It is as if Ed Miliband is a god. His wishes cannot be questioned. Common mortals can have "views on how we meet Ed's objective", but not objectives of our own.

Collins's report was supposedly based on responses by

party members and affiliated organisations.

In fact, the report gives no information about the feedback received. This is particularly ironic in the light of the report's opening page:

"We must go further in letting ordinary people back into our politics ..."

This contrast between the promise of a greater say for "ordinary people" and an exclusive focus on what the party leader has to say reflects a more fundamental contradiction in the report.

Any literal requirement for trade unionists explicitly to "opt in" in order to be affiliated suggests that the "default" status for all trade unionists is to be "opted out", and thus cuts at the principle of collective decision-making (and collective affiliation) by trade unions.

If Miliband or Collins were proposing solid measures to encourage trade unionists to join as individuals - a clear Labour policy against cuts, or to compel bosses to pay a living wage, for example - then that would be good. If they were even proposing reduced membership fees to encourage new members, that would be positive.

PRIMARIES

But the report's support for primaries to select Labour candidates cuts across both collective input by trade unions and the rights of individual party members.

Primaries would mean non-party-members having a greater say in the selection of candidates than affiliated organisations and individual members.

The report is full of praise for collective involvement by trade unions in the Labour Party. But on the other hand it slyly suggests specific plans which would undermine that collective involvement - and presents those plans, not as items for discussion, but as unquestionable since they are "What Ed Wants".

The 'interim consultation' was meant to usher in a 'major consultation exercise'. But the report simply rubber-stamps Miliband's idea and invites further submissions about how it should be implemented, as opposed to whether it should be implemented.

The most revealing sentence in the report reads:

"The changes will be put to a special conference this spring because Ed has said he wants them agreed well before the General Election. They will then take time to implement as we manage the organisational and financial implications."

Worrying for the future is the report's hint that "we need to consider the consequences for other party structures including conference and the rules for electing leaders" after the category of opted-in affiliated member has been created.

Many Labour right-wingers want a drastic reduction in the trade unions' share of the vote at party conference and in leadership elections.

If they can point to a number of "opted-in" trade unionists much smaller than the three million "not-opted-out" at present, then their demands will gather weight.

Defend The Link!

At a meeting on 16 September, "Defend The Link" decided to constitute itself as a broad labour movement campaign to defend the level of trade unions' collective voice in the Labour Party.

Two unions, the Bakers and TSSA, have already endorsed the campaign. Others are expected to follow. The two assistant general secretaries of the public services union Unison who are expected to lead the coming contest for a new general secretary, Liz Snape and Roger Mackenzie, have both recently spoken at Defend The Link public meetings.

With Ed Miliband's office appearing unconfident on the issue, there is scope for "Defend The Link" to win wide support.

In each city activists should set up a "Defend The Link" working group which will get out campaign materials and speakers to CLPs and affiliated union branches.

Contact the campaign's joint secretaries, Jon Lansman and Marsha-Jane Thompson, via defendthelink.wordpress.com.

The fast food workers

In America, fast food workers employed by chains like McDonalds, Burger King, and Pizza Hut have struck back against low pay and bullying managers. Regional strikes in November 2012 and April 2013 were followed by a nationwide strike on 29 August.

The workers' headline demand is a \$15 per hour minimum wage (most currently earn slightly more than \$7). Workers also want union recognition and an end to management bullying. The fast food workers' movement followed a similar, and ongoing, struggle of Walmart workers, the world's biggest private-sector employer.

The movement has a profound significance. Jobs in fast food restaurants are typical of the kind of work most readily available to many young workers — characterised by low pay and insecurity (the increasingly infamous "zero-hours contract"). The workers involved are often young, and often people of colour. Innovative organising methods have been employed, breaking from established orthodoxies and rediscovering the radicalism of earlier periods of labour history.

Prior to the American fast food workers' movement, the most successful experience of workers' organising in the fast food industry was that of the Unite union in New Zealand (no connection to the British union of the same name). Their "Supersize My Pay" campaign in 2006-2007 won huge concessions from fast food bosses, and the union has continued to pioneer radical organising models amongst low-paid, hyper-exploited young workers.

NEW

In Britain, there have been sporadic bursts of militancy and organisation amongst low-paid, precarious workers.

The strikes of cleaners in the transport and education sectors (including the first ever coordinated national strike of railway cleaners, in November 2012), and small-scale but significant attempts at organisation in chains like Pret A Manger and Pizza Hut, give glimpses of the possibilities for what Workers' Liberty has called a "New Unionism for the 21st Century" — a concerted drive, led by radicals in the labour movement, to transform our unions to make them weapons that the most exploited workers can use to fight back, just as the efforts of Marxists like Tom Mann, Will Thorne, and Eleanor Marx helped gas workers and dock workers (who worked under the original "zero-hours contracts") build mass strike movements.

The organisational forms these struggles have taken varies. In America, the Services Employees International Union (SEIU, the American labour movement's largest) has coordinated campaigns at arms length, with union officials running loose campaign coalitions that include activists from other unions and the community. In New Zealand, Unite was started from scratch by leftists.

In Britain, some established unions (like the RMT in its organisation of rail cleaners, and bakers' union BFAWU in its organisation of a Hovis workers' strike against zero-hours contracts) have played a positive role, but elsewhere organisation has been left to independent, minority or syndicalist union projects like the Industrial Workers of the World and the Independent Workers union of Great Britain.

Workers' Liberty wants to spread the stories of these struggles, to help workers learn from each others' experience. Here, we interview Mike Treen, National Director of Unite in New Zealand, about its successes in organising fast food workers.

Ira Berkovic

The "Supersize My Pay" campaign in the mid-2000s established Unite in the fast food industry. We won agreements with the major chains — Restaurant Brands (which owns Pizza Hut, KFC, and others), then McDonald's, and finally Burger King. It was a long and exhausting struggle.

We realised that, given the competitive nature of the fast food industry, we needed an industry-wide approach and a public, political, and social mobilisation to achieve that result. That involved a lot of strikes, including student strikes against youth rates, demos, mass meetings, concerts with supportive bands. It was a major effort.

There was another fight with McDonald's in 2008 to renew the agreement, and in 2012, Burger King also pushed back and tried to deunionise their workforce by forcing hundreds of workers to resign through intimidation and bullying. We've succeeded in defending union contracts and winning modest but significant improvements around workplace issues like guaranteed breaks and security of hours.

We're quite encouraged by the UK unions' new focus on zero-hours contracts. People are aware of that in the New Zealand labour movement, and it's helped raise the profile of the issue. Zero-hours contracts are almost universal in the kind of industries we're organising in and so far, the agreements we've won don't get rid of them.

We've won a lot more transparency and advance notice for workers about rostering, and have stopped bosses in McDonald's using shift allocation as an arbitrary reward-and-punishment system for workers, but we're yet to win guaranteed hours. We had a big campaign in McDonald's to win a fairer rostering system, demanding that shifts were offered openly and there was a fair appeals process. We've given KFC, McDonald's and Burger King notice that we'll be pushing for guaranteed hours and an end to zero-hours contracts in the next round of bargaining in the two years' time.

Rest and meal breaks are another big issue. We have a quite a major court case against McDonald's for failing to guarantee breaks. The company has responded by claiming the collective agreement wasn't lawful. That's ongoing.

From the fast food industry, we've pushed into cinemas. There are three main cinema chains in New Zealand, and we have agreements with all of them and high membership. We have a presence at Skycity Casino in Auckland, which is the largest private-sector workplace in the city. It has over 3,000 workers, of whom a third have part time status with only eight guaranteed hours per week.



Mike Treen was speaking to Ira Berkovic of *Solidarity*

We also have a presence amongst security guards, and in call centres. We have collective agreements with the two main hotel chains in New Zealand — Millennium Copthorne Kingsgate and Accor.

We launched Unite nearly 10 years ago. We currently have 7,000 dues-paying members, but because we operate in industries with 100% staff turnover, we need to recruit around 5,000 new members every year just to stand still. Tens of thousands of workers have been through membership of Unite. It's many young workers' first experience of the labour movement. The average time spent in membership of Unite is one year, and the average time we have a union delegate [rep] in a workplace is eighteen months.

We started Unite as a group of left activists from the Alliance, some socialist groups, along with some anarchists. The Alliance Party emerged from a left-wing split from Labour in 1989-91, and when that project collapsed many of us, including Matt McCarten who had been the president of the Alliance, saw an objective need to reconnect leftist politics with workers' organising, particularly amongst young workers. Starting a union from scratch was a radical idea, and went against some traditional leftist notions.

STARTING POINTS

Some of our starting points were particular to New Zealand. At the time we launched the union, there'd been a period of economic recovery and growth after a period of deep recession in the 1980s and 1990s.

We thought workers might therefore be more confident about taking risks and putting their heads above the parapet. The Labour-led government, which was elected in 1999, had also made legislative changes that made union organising slightly easier.

Previously, union organisers had only been given access to workplaces to talk to existing members, which made organising in currently-unorganised industries almost impossible. A new law meant union organisers had more general access and could talk to non-union members.

The third factor, though, is more general and is one that others could learn from. We simply had confidence that workers, and young workers in particular, would respond to new approaches that gave them the chance to fight for themselves in a militant way.

We always aimed to be a serious operation — we set up an infrastructure and an apparatus with an office, but we operated on the basis of volunteers rather than paid officials. We wanted the union and its campaigns to be open. A number of people have lent money or used personal credit cards to keep the union going. We had no financial or institutional support from other unions. Today we have an annual income in excess of \$1m and our 2013 conference will be the first time the union has been debt-free! The most fundamental element was our confidence in the working class.

Although we were setting up a new union, we were determined to be part of the broader labour movement. We affiliated to the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions [NZCTU, the equivalent of the TUC], and we deliberately chose to organise in industries where no other union was organising.

Unite has also been involved in union solidarity with other workers taking action, with protests against racism, and has taken action in support of workers internationally, especially in Palestine.

The main political change we want is greater freedom to organise — the ability for workers to organise and take industrial action without having to jump through so many hoops. There's severe restriction on the right to strike. That needs to be addressed, and we need to get rid of legislative barriers to organising.

ers' fightback

If there's a Labour government, or a Labour-Green coalition, after the next election, we want to hold them to commitments they've made to the unions. There are obvious limits to that, but those political possibilities shouldn't be dismissed.

Unions need new approaches to succeed in the kinds of industries we're talking about. The "organising model" that came out of the American SEIU [Service Employees' International Union] in the 1990s was turned into a kind of religion in the global labour movement. It was related to as a mantra, in an almost cult-like way, and it wasn't working. An approach of recruiting union members one by one can't work in these industries, because the boss can find out where that's going on and bully people out of it.

ACCUMULATION

People often aren't in these jobs for long enough for that slow accumulation of union members to work or make a difference. In America, even in the places where that slow accumulation has reached the level where it can trigger a ballot for recognition, those ballots are usually lost because employers bring in professional union-busting operations.

You need public, political campaigns that provide protection for workers. It's important to move to public, political, and social movement mobilisation as early as possible in the organising process. That gives workers confidence. The union has to be framework for workers to find their voice and lead struggles.

It has to be all-or-nothing. "Supersize My Pay" was a public, political campaign against the fast food companies which exposed them as exploiters. We went after their "brand", which they value above all else.

The American unions have now taken a new approach more akin to that, which I think is very exciting. Unions like SEIU and the United Commercial and Food Workers' Union [UFCW] are financing and supporting campaigns like Our-Walmart and Fast Food Forward, which organise on something more like a minority-union basis rather than focusing on that slow accumulation of members building up to a recognition ballot. They're bringing the community in — so, when the union members, who might be quite small in number, in a restaurant go on strike, they get community activists and other members of other unions to walk back in with them when the strike's over to give public support and prevent victimisation.

When those approaches gains momentum, workers start to gain confidence that maybe the risk of standing up for themselves is worth it. That's the key question — how do you build that confidence?

Our modern unions, in the UK for example, emerged from new models of industrial organising breaking away from craftism. There are some differences in size between the industries those unions were based in and the key industries in western countries now, such as retail, service, and finance, but a large call centre in New Zealand might have 500 workers or more — which in New Zealand terms is a pretty big workplace.

McDonald's employs almost 10,000 workers — it's one of the biggest private-sector employers in the country. Those workers are young workers, migrant workers, semi-casualised workers. Those are the people producing surplus value in New Zealand today. That's the working class!

Organising in these industries, where more and more of the working class, and particularly the young working class, in western countries is now employed, has to be done — by any means necessary.

• Abridged from bit.ly/miketreen

The fight for \$15

The growing fast food workers' movement in America has brought workers who previously had no engagement with the labour movement into struggle, by building campaign coalitions that put industrial direct action to win immediate demands first — rather than making union recruitment the end in itself.

Here, we collate some quotes from striking fast food workers from the American press.

"People like me, we don't have education to get a better job ... We have to do the fast-food industry. But the fast-food industry [doesn't] pay." — Gregory Renoso, Domino's Pizza, interviewed by Joel Rose for NPR.

"[Organisers] came in and they saw the struggle I was going through ... They spoke about the strike they were planning, and I decided to jump in and fight the fight." — Jose Avila, Subway, in *Socialist Worker*

"It's not just us out here fighting, there are people across the country going through the same struggles, maybe even worse struggles, than us. We're making history right now, we're showing that minimum wage isn't enough, this poverty wage isn't enough." — Andrew Little, Victoria's Secret (the movement has also involved retail workers), quoted in an article on *The Daily Kos*.

"It's hard to find another job. This is why I'm still stuck at Burger King for the past four years. If it was easy to find another job, I wouldn't be out here right now fighting for \$15 an hour and a union." — Tabitha Verges, Burger King, speaking on the "Democracy Now" radio show.

"We deserve better ... I work very hard. I'm a single mom, I have three kids, and on \$7.25 an hour I can't support them, and I can't give them the education I want them to have. That hurts all of us." — Glenda Soto, McDonald's, interviewed by Lauren McCauley for *Common Dreams*.

"Supervisors and general managers automatically assume that they can intimidate workers and make us feel like we don't have the right to organise, when we do. There can be a change now if we keep mobilising. We came a long way by standing together. I don't see any reason why we should give up now." — Kareem Sparks, McDonald's, in *Socialist Worker*

Why I joined Workers' Liberty

Matt Hale, one of the activists who quit the SWP in its spring crisis, explains

In class struggle, politics must always take precedence over any specific organisational matters. This doesn't mean a dogmatic commitment to the details of past or current programmes, but serious consideration of how revolutionaries can begin to forge a mass organisation.

The major problem facing the revolutionary wing of the British left is that we do not have any such organisation that can legitimately claim to be either that party or the base for it. Our organisations are instead largely fractured into numerous different competing sects, most of which at different times have been guilty of setting up barriers to unity despite our differences being little compared to our shared political goal.

The Socialist Workers Party, Britain's largest revolutionary group, is in crisis. The "Comrade Delta" scandal came largely out of the blue for me — then an SWP member of six years. But the SWP also faces a longer-term crisis of orthodoxy.

When the SWP first broke onto the scene as the Socialist Review Group, and later as the International Socialists, it marked a significant break with the "orthodox" Trotskyism constructed after World War Two.

Before the war, Trotsky argued that war would bring either international proletarian revolution or the collapse of the Soviet Union — in either case, the Stalinist bureaucracy would surely be removed. But Trotsky was wrong; instead the USSR went from strength to strength, with a massive expansion of influence. "Orthodox" Trotskyists performed theoretical contortions to make the analysis fit, claiming variously that World War Two had not in fact ended, that capitalism was indeed in decay, and that the Stalinist bureaucracy represented a progressive historical agent against capitalism. This was the orthodoxy from which SRG broke, developing theories of state capitalism and the permanent arms economy.

Today the SWP is largely stale. It acts as a block on the working-class movement, establishing front organisations

(Unite the Resistance, Right to Work, Education Activist Network, etc.) which are then dropped without explanation when the "next big thing" comes along.

SWP members do some fantastic work in the unions and in campaigns, but the lack of an overall strategy for advancing class struggle and workers' self-organisation has tied them to the "lefts" in the union bureaucracy.

Empty slogans, no strategy

For many years, the SWP punched above its weight in terms of profile, visibility, and influence. This much was evident during the height of the anti-war movement, the student protests of winter 2010/11, and to a lesser degree continues to be the case within the trade union movement. Its supporters make two common explanations for its relative successes in the past. Firstly the capacity of the SWP to "bend the stick", (that is, to jump from campaign to campaign or make sharp tactical turns). Secondly, that the SWP adheres to firm "Leninist", democratic-centralist, organisational principles.

But the SWP and its predecessors have never been democratic-centralist. The SWP's version of "democratic centralism" lacks the best bits of both "democracy" and "centralism". It is a caricature of both; the bogeyman of "permanent factionalism" has time and again been invoked against oppositionists, even when no faction exists. SWP leaderships have been willing to act unconstitutionally if the end goal is the defeat of oppositional elements.

Although many on the left feel a strong antipathy towards it, what happens in the SWP still matters. It was perhaps the most promising revolutionary organisation since the pre-Stalinist Communist Party in the 1920s and 30s.

As a result of its crisis, intervention in the outside world has been stifled. On many university campuses, SWP student

groups have defected and re-established themselves as the Revolutionary Socialists (RevSocs). Leading academics refused to speak at their annual Marxism political festival earlier this year, where numbers were significantly down on previous years.

Of course the SWP will not just disappear. Members will continue to do some good work, but as an organisation it has been completely discredited and proved not fit for purpose.

Democratic centralism must be rescued from the SWP caricature. It does not simply mean "unity in practice"; no genuinely democratic organisation should demand of its members to pretend to hold views contrary to their own.

Upon quitting the SWP, I immediately joined the International Socialist Network, which set itself the task of acting as a safety net for those falling out of the SWP and regrouping the revolutionary left. In the six months since then, while the organisation has made steps forward, with many members beginning to re-evaluate aspects of the SWP's politics, some of the old attitudes have persisted.

It is unfortunate the ISN rejected unity talks, or even any discussion at all, with the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

Apolitical claims that the AWL are "pro-imperialist", "Islamophobic" and "Zionist" have continued; in fact, it is an organisation that stresses the self-emancipatory potential of the working class. Against support for reactionaries like Hamas, AWL looks not just to the workers of Palestine but also those in Israel who, like other workers, can break with reactionary ideas. Against claims of being imperialists, the AWL recognises there exist multiple imperialisms; not just the US and its allies but also regional imperialisms like Iran that have their own interests.

The AWL isn't *the* revolutionary party, but believing it has consistent socialist politics and itself being in some senses a product of the International Socialist tradition, has a lot to contribute to the development of a revolutionary socialist working-class movement.

The crisis that emerged in the SWP has opened up opportunities to begin to rethink revolutionary politics. That is why I've joined Workers' Liberty.

Neither Washington nor Moscow

Our Movement By Micheál MacEoin



Third Camp revolutionary socialist Phyllis Jacobson (1922-2010) is best known as the co-editor of the US journal *New Politics*.

Phyllis was born into a working-class New York Jewish family. Her first political activity was in the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL), the youth wing of the Socialist Party of America. Here she met her future life partner Julius Jacobson. Both were involved in the Trotskyist faction of the Socialist Party. After the faction was expelled in 1937, it "relaunched" as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

After a split in the SWP (1939-40), the Jacobsons followed Max Shachtman and Hal Draper into the Workers Party. The organisation rejected Stalinist Soviet bureaucrat collectivism and upheld the revolutionary and self-emancipatory principles of Marxism.

In his appreciation of Jacobson (bit.ly/ph-ja), Barry Finger says it was in this milieu that she "obtained a grueling political education in struggle not only with the much more influential Stalinists who dominated the left landscape, but with the mainstream Trotskyist faction who offered critical support to the Soviet Union long after the revolution was interred."

Neither, though, did Jacobson swim with the current within the Workers Party and its successor, the Independent Socialist League (ISL). Rejecting the drift out of active politics by Irving Howe and the other "New York intellectuals" around the *Dissent* journal, she was too by the mid-1950s, together with Hal Draper, part of the group within the ISL opposing Shachtman's rightwards-moving "regroupment strategy", which wanted to dissolve the group into Norman Thomas's Socialist Party.

Although very briefly the SP's Manhattan organiser, Jacobson saw Shachtman's strategy as cover for abandoning socialist politics in favour of Cold War lesser-evilism and capitulation to US imperialism.

From 1961 the Jacobsons focused on setting up and running *New Politics*. Though central to the journal from the outset, Phyllis Jacobson was finally listed on the editorial board from 1968, and took on much of the day-to-day organising work.

TRADITION

Though open to a broad range of contributors, the journal had kept alive the revolutionary-democratic anti-Stalinist Marxist tradition in unpropitious times.

It brought to wide attention such seminal articles as Hal Draper's *The Two Souls of Socialism* and the Polish Marxists Kuron and Modzelewski's "Open Letter to the Party", as well critiques of still influential apologists for the Soviet Union such as Isaac Deutscher.

Though plugged in to contemporary political developments, *New Politics* was not connected to an organisation and embodied Hal Draper's idea of a "political centre", shaped around an editorial board and journal to which sympathisers could contribute.

In a speech at the "Oral History of the American Left Conference" in New York in 1983, Phyllis reflected on the downsides of this form of political activity, and how it failed to sustain socialist cadre through the downturn following the heyday of the New Left:

"It was the political frustration and apathy that dealt the final blow to *New Politics*. Never an academic publication, although many academics wrote for us, we depended on writers who were committed, often participants in the political struggles.

"The fact that they grew apathetic meant a loss of articles,

financial support, and general interest, all of which are essential ingredients for the maintenance of a lively and meaningful publication. Had there been an organisation to sustain us during the bad times, we would no doubt have continued publication and then would have found ourselves caught up in the political reawakening that occurred just a few years later and continues today."

But by this stage, Phyllis Jacobson had already contributed more than almost anyone to the preservation and elaboration of a consistently democratic current of revolutionary socialist politics in the US. Finger sums up the legacy of the Jacobsons, distinguished both as individuals and as a team:

"They utterly lacked the requisite yearning for peer respectability. They accommodated their views to fit no political fashion; to curry favour neither with academia nor with any left mainstream. They fought against the war in Vietnam, without succumbing to illusions about Ho Chi Minh and the NLF; they struggled against American intervention in Nicaragua, without closing their eyes to the Sandinistas' infringements on democracy; they fought against CIA-inspired overthrow attempts of Castro, while exposing the Castro regime's repressive anti-democratic nature.

"They engaged the struggle for democratic unions, while condemning racism both in the ranks and in leadership policies of the labour movement. And they saw no contradiction in fighting for both at once.

"For that, they did more than most to save the good name of anti-Stalinism from the clutches of intellectual conciliators, apologists and outright propagandists of capitalism and reaction who were to emerge ever more dominant both on the liberal left as well as the neo-con right."

• Tributes to Phyllis Jacobson and selection of her articles: bit.ly/np-pj

Mentally ill pushed to jails or streets

As austerity puts the squeeze on the most vulnerable, many more people are lurching into mental health crisis. At the same time, services are stretched to breaking point. The mentally unwell are having to fend for themselves. Todd Hamer looks at the issues.

NO BEDS

Between 2002-3 and 2007-8 there was a 17% reduction in mental health inpatient beds from 32,753 to 26,928. A Panorama investigation found that there had been a further reduction of 17% since 2008. We have lost a third of inpatient capacity in just 10 years¹.

At the same time the people needing inpatient services is increasing. From 2008/9 to 2011/12 there was a 33% increase in the number of people detained under the MHA at the same time as the number of inpatient beds has decreased. In 2008/9, 32,649 people were detained under the Mental Health Act². This rose to 48,631 in 2011/12³.

A CQC report found that 15% of wards were operating above 100% capacity (which means patients are either sleeping on sofas in the day areas or being shipped out to B&Bs during the night and brought back to the ward during the day.)

The number of informal (or voluntary) admissions has decreased over this time but not enough to compensate for the increased number of sectioned patients. In 2006/7 one third of patients were detained under the MHA.

By 2011 this figure rose to around 40% and it is suspected there will be further increases when the Department of Health releases new data in October. A recent Health Select Committee was told that in some areas "being detained is simply a ticket to getting a bed".

However, this increase in the use of the Mental Health Act also tells us something about the type of patients who are being admitted. Whilst the Mental Health Act can be abused there are good clinical reasons why it is necessary.

If a person breaks their leg then they will suffer pain and seek help. Similarly, if a person is depressed or anxious they will suffer mental distress and seek help. But a person in psychotic crises does not experience this subjective feeling of pain or suffering.

The person who believes that their friend is possessed by demonic spirits may seek help from a priest but is unlikely to present at A&E. The Mental Health Act exists to contain such people whilst they go through these experiences. Such containment can be therapeutic. In any case, it seems better than the alternatives.

The increase in the use of the Mental Health Act suggests that more people are entering psychotic crisis and this in turn is a reflection of broader failure of community services.

POLICE

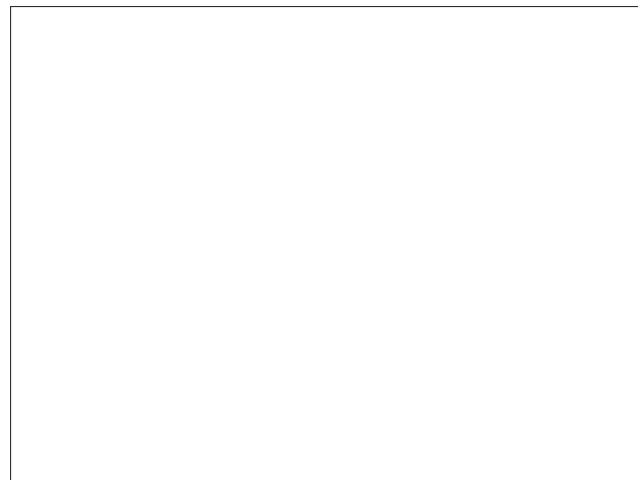
Increasingly Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) are discharging patients to their GPs due to pressure from new referrals.

The GPs do not have the time or specialist knowledge to meet the needs of this client group. In 2009/10 there were 1.25 million users of mental health services. In 2011/12 this number rose to 1.6 million. The CMHTs have not grown to meet this growing demand — if anything they have shrunk.

Many people who have already been through an episode of psychosis will notice relapse indicators (loss of sleep, high/low mood, increased paranoia etc.) several weeks before they enter crisis. It is at this point that they are most likely to seek help. Intervention at this stage can avert a full-blown crisis. The increase in emergency admissions suggests that this intervention is not happening because people cannot access the services they need. Increasingly a person's psychotic crisis is allowed to develop until that person comes to the attention of the police.

The Association of Chief Police Officers claim that 20% of police time is now taken up with dealing with people in mental health crisis. In 2011/12 there were 23,569 uses of section 136 (the police authority to detain people pending a MHA assessment). 37% (8,667) of these people were assessed in a police cell rather than a hospital.

In addition to these problems, specialist mental health services are being cut. For example, almost all NHS drug and alcohol services have been cut and outsourced to the volun-



tary and private sector. The government has imposed a reactionary abstinence focus on drug services, with a funding regime that pays services for getting people off drugs and discharged back to their GPs.

The tried and tested harm-reduction approach that the NHS championed for decades has been sidelined along with the skilled NHS workforce. Gary Sutton, from the drugs charity Release, told the *Guardian*: "A major social experiment is underway, the results of which we cannot predict".

But Sutton underestimates the extent of the social experiment. Unlike the rest of the NHS, where cuts and lack of resources are part of the history, this situation is entirely new for the mental health sector. Before 1948 there were no physical health services for the majority of the population and ill health was treated with prayers and quackery. But "services" for the mentally unwell are much older than the NHS.

The imprisonment and containment of the mentally unwell started in earnest in the 17th century. At that time the emerging industrial capitalist class were pushing the rural poor into the factories and trying to impose some basic capitalist work discipline (e.g. turning up for work on time, working through the winter months etc.). There were many people who did not comply with this new way of working and the authorities responded by imprisoning anyone who did not fit the mould.

Michel Foucault claims that by the mid-17th century over one per cent of the population of Paris were imprisoned. Workhouses and asylums were built and filled with a motley assortment of vagabonds, misfits, prostitutes, drunkards, learning-disabled, and mentally-ill people.

ASYLUM

Over time, and in a fairly arbitrary way, the mentally ill were separated out from the rest and the modern asylum system was born.

Much torture and abuse took place in these institutions. This history may also lead us to question the social purpose of psychiatry for a modern capitalist society. However, these institutions are the ancestors of the modern psychiatric establishment. In 1955, when the asylums were being closed down, there were over 150,000 mental health beds in Britain (compared with just over 20,000 today).

The closure of the asylums was made possible by advances in medical science and by the then-Tory government's desire to cut costs. Initially the closures were complemented by an expansion of community provision. Care in the community was never well resourced, but generally it was a progressive step forward and it did grow to meet the growing demand.

For many years now there has been no growth in services. All services are being cut to levels unseen before in modern history. We are approaching a dangerous crisis point.

For four centuries the mad have either been contained and shackled to live out their madness away from society or, in recent years, for the lucky few, have been aided on journeys of recovery. The best mental health practice combines therapeutic containment in crisis with a hopeful facilitation of recovery for less stormy times.

Increasingly mental health services are not equipped to provide either service. Unless we get organised and fight to reopen the wards and expand the community teams, we face a brave new world where the mentally ill are left to their own devices, live out their madness amongst us, and emergency

containment is provided by police truncheons and CS spray.

While the crisis in the NHS rages, the private sector is experiencing boom times. With more people needing hospital admission for mental health crisis, the NHS is having to ship out patients to the private sector. The number of patients detained in private hospitals (paid for by the NHS) has risen by 21% in 2011/12 alone.

The bed crisis is so grave that it has extended into the private sector. Sometimes finding a private bed is near impossible. In London, there is a growing trend for Trusts to seek cheaper private beds outside of the capital. *Solidarity* has received reports that South Londoners experiencing acute psychotic crisis have found themselves shipped many hundreds of miles to private beds as far afield as Newcastle and Wales.

PRIVATE

Cygnnet Healthcare, a major provider of private mental health beds in London, has seen a 30% increase in the number of NHS patients on its wards in the last year alone.

Some NHS Trusts now have teams dedicated to policing these private sector "partners" to make sure they aren't detaining patients unnecessarily or bumping up their profits with excessive treatments. You don't need to be paranoid to be suspicious of the intentions of a for-profit mental health hospital!

By filling its wards with NHS patients, the private sector is accumulating the cash to expand into other areas of mental health care. Forensic services for people with mental health problems in the criminal justice system offers a promising site for investment. The patients are long-stay and move through the system at a snail's pace. There is also a large potential market.

A 2011 report by the Sainsbury's Centre for Mental Health found that 90% of the 84,000 prisoners had mental health problems and 23% could do with specialist treatment. From 2007/8 to 2011/12 the number of forensic inpatients rose from 1,917 to 2,130.

The private sector absorbed almost all of these new patients. That leaves around 20,000 potential patients in the prisons which are also in the process of being privatised. Companies like Serco, who run prisons and will be looking to run medium-secure psychiatric units, could make a fortune out of this captive market.

PRICE TAG

Mental health services are generally funded by block grants, which makes them easy to cut. For this reason many NHS bosses want to move to the Payment by Results where you get paid per patient.

The problem is how to attach a price tag onto a mental health problem. Diagnosis in mental health is notoriously difficult. Treatment is also quite hit and miss. And what exactly are the "results"?

Brushing these problems aside, NHS bosses have insisted that frontline clinicians use the Orwellian titled "Health of the Nation Outcome Scale" (HoNOS) to provide them with data that they hope they can later translate into cash sums.

Unsurprisingly, the HoNOS data doesn't make much sense. PbR was supposed to be implemented in April 2013 but has been delayed into the distant future. The advocates of PbR believe that they just need "better" data.

But psychiatrist Emma Stanton identified the fundamental problem: "real life is not connected to what the data shows". While it is obvious to most of us that people's experience of mental distress cannot be measured in pounds and pence, this delusion continues to dominate in the minds of NHS bosses.

PbR is the agenda of city accountants who wish to introduce cash payments to every part of human existence.

Mental health workers should stop wasting their time filling out the clinically useless HoNOS assessments, and demand they are given the resources they need to do their jobs.

¹<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23965479>

²<http://bit.ly/community-care>

³<http://bit.ly/mh-report>

Understanding the Arab uprising

Martyn Watts reviews Gilbert Achcar's *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2013)

Unusually for a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies, Gilbert Achcar has become the hate figure for parts of the left over recent months for his perceived support for big-power intervention in Libya.

The nuances and complexities of Achcar's real positions, rather than those attributed to him, have been lost on these commentators. There are real issues with both Achcar's political understanding and his academic analysis. They are just not those thrown at him by those who see "imperialism" (that is, US imperialism) as the main (or only) problem, and have confused the debate by evading the substance of his real and important studies of the uprisings.

The charge of "social imperialism", which created an imaginary bloc of Achcar, the former Euston Manifesto group and Workers' Liberty, has been central to this — as if the escape into some fantastic notion of an axis of evil of social imperialists (socialist in word, imperialist in action) could excuse the lack of even the most basic study of Achcar's politics and research.

Despite the book's subtitle, this is less a generically "radical" analysis of the uprisings of 2010 onwards than a fully Marxist analysis of the political economy of the origin of the upsurge of democratic and working-class militancy.

It pulls no punches in terms of the spelling out the implications of those uprisings and offering prognoses for the future for working class politics in the Middle-East and North Africa (MENA).

The omnipresence of the slogan of "the people want" since the beginnings of the uprisings in 2010 points, for Achcar, to the collective proclamation, and eruption, of the popular will of the Arab masses in states which have been largely tyrannous and oppressive.

REGIMES

The great contribution of Achcar to understanding these developments lies in his outstanding analysis of the nature of those regimes, their relationships with each other, and with their own people.

For Achcar, this is no less than a revolutionary dynamic which is challenging the nature of those regimes equal to the opening moments of the French revolution.

The analogies with bourgeois revolutions are telling. Achcar argues that the uprisings are also about the process of dissolution of the ancien régimes. This dissolution has not, as yet, produced a social revolution but has initiated "a protracted or long-term revolutionary process" (p4). In this sense the uprisings are a kind of prairie fire which will initiate long durational transformations in the social orders in which they emerged in those states already predisposed to dissolution and change.

The similarity of the socio-economic structures of the MENA states lies, for Achcar, in their comparable modes of production or what he calls the specific modalities of capitalism of those states on the peripheries of capitalist globalisation. These specific modalities explain the specificity of the will to social revolution in clear geographical confines even when the states themselves — absolutist monarchies, corrupt semi-democracies, despotic and bureaucratic state tyrannies — seem to widely differ. The elaboration of those specific modalities lies in the MENA developmental crisis and blockage to its capital development.

The demographic revolution in the MENA states and the problem of the GDP average growth rate which Achcar links to substantial questions

Achcar argues that the specific development of capitalism in the Middle East and North Africa made state regimes susceptible to popular uprising.

of inequality and "precarity" are key factors particularly in those states where there is a very high degree of "overconsumption and ostentatious luxury" (p17).

So for Egypt, World Bank data (problematic in itself due to its underestimation of the disparities) points to seven times as much consumption for the top decile as opposed to the bottom decile of the population.

Neo-liberal commentators like Hernando de Soto have argued that Mohamed Bouazizi, who killed himself in Tunisia in December 2010 triggering the wave of uprisings, sacrificed himself for the cause of the "free market" (p22) and that the uprisings signify the final entrance of the Arab states into the neo-liberal economy. In fact it is the very specific modality of neo-liberalism that is itself one of the central factors in the risings particularly around the distinctive ways in which the MENA states interact with the world economy causing precarity and exceptional rates of youth unemployment. Further, specific cultural and economic modalities also have influenced the underemployment of women as well as contributing to their political and cultural oppression and more, to the fettered cultural and economic development of the whole region.

Weak economic growth, itself a product of rentier, state-controlled capitalism and the extraction of natural and labour resources for the hyper-rich of despotic families and the flight of capital out of the region and away from public investment, has led to an intolerable situation for the labouring classes who can no longer "live in the old way". The racketeering and patrimonialism of the states as well as the suppression of domestic discontent through ramping up hostility to outside forces such as the US or Israel has created a political situation in which the state cliques are largely economically independent from the tax revenues of the masses and also become immunised from any sense of political dependence on that population.

The textbook case of this is Libya, as Achcar correctly notes. The state family clique had annihilated even the most molecular form of representative democracy, and oil revenues (although sometimes invested in quixotic state engineering ventures for vanity reasons) were channelled directly into the Swiss bank accounts of the extended Qadaffi clan. In Libya, and elsewhere, the state bourgeoisie was entwined with the inherited, autocratic patrimony of the clan system, even when that patrimonialism was tempered by so-called "republican" rational-legal authority — just as vile and nepotistic as any other form of cliquedom.

Further, because the state clique does not depend upon the domestic market for its own economic sustenance in the same

way as it depends neither on tax revenues nor votes, it was even more entwined with the global market for its own perpetuation. Whether the mafia-like regime of Lebanon, the despot capitalism of Libya, or the military patriarchy of Algeria, the specific modalities of capital shared a predisposition to dissolution at the hands of its own peoples.

The regional political factors of the Saudi "Islamic Texas", its client relationship to the US, its relationship to Salafism, and the Islamic capitalism of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and beyond, have had some influence in shaping both the origins and the course of the uprisings. Itself the political antithesis of social liberation, the despotic monarchy of the House of Saud has acted, with Qatar, as the nanny if not the midwife of large elements of the uprisings.

The co-optation of democratic uprisings by Saudi and Qatari sub-imperialism and their proxies has been a serious challenge to liberatory politics in the MENA states. To a large extent the Syrian tragedy has been shaped by interventions by Salafists within the revolution and against the democratic forces arrayed in the local coordination committees. The marginalisation of democrats and leftists by the Saudi and Qatari proxies on the one hand, and the support of Russian and Iranian proxies on the other, has created a stalemate in which the nascent forces of the third camp, of the aspirations of youth and women, have been largely annihilated.

At the same time, for Achcar, across the MENA states there has been a great display of a universal culture of emancipation, which has nothing to do with the Salafists or the state cliques and everything to do with the opening up of those states to global forms of communication and universal aspirations for freedom of expression and action.

SECTARIANISM

This culture, equally hostile to archaic tribalism and to sectarianism, is in danger of extinction — the populations which sustain it are being physically exterminated in Syria.

Achcar himself clearly retains some faith that the secular, left, and democratic forces organised within the coordination committees can extend the life of those aspirations in the face of the extreme violence of the regime and its "Praetorian guard", and the increasingly Salafist forces arrayed against it. This is optimistic and somewhat Quixotic, but it has its basis in Achcar's unwillingness to surrender the idea of the long-durational implications of the uprisings for a social revolution which will transform the MENA states and which has only just begun.

Achcar argues that it was clear from the beginning that a state regime like Syria could only be overthrown by force of arms due to its tribal and sectarian composition: "The state cannot be 'reformed,' 'partially dislocated,' or simply rid itself of its ruling family by peaceful means. Its hardcore — its praetorian guard, above all — must be completely shattered by force of arms" (p142).

Civil war is the only form that social revolution can take in those states where the masses have no other leverage. Abandoning that civil war means abandoning the social revolution with which it is pregnant. This means that the reversion to absolute barbarism and the absolute ruin of the contending classes is a danger worth facing because only then can the logic of revolution be ultimately fulfilled.

Achcar at this point elaborates the differences between Syria and the Libyan uprising, making the point that any conception of the democracy activists at the beginning that peaceful demonstration would succeed in any way was a grave mistake, citing Babeuf on the necessity of civil war for social revolution and again making the analogy between the third estate and the Syrian rebels at the same time as he recognises how far the uprising has been co-opted by the reactionary forces of clerical fascism.

This failure to recognise the reality of where the uprising has come to in no way undermines the rest of Achcar's outstanding analytic survey of the MENA uprisings and their implications.

It is for the workers now to both survive the catastrophe and give birth to the new society that might emerge from the demonstrations and ruined cities of the east.

Teachers: build in workplaces!

By Patrick Murphy,
NUT Executive (pc)

On 1 October, members of teaching unions NUT and NASUWT will strike for one day in about one third of the country – including Yorkshire, the Midlands, and the Eastern region of England.

This follows a one-day regional strike in the North West on 27 June. The plan is for the two unions to hold a third regional strike in London and the south on 17 October, followed by a national strike before the end of the Autumn term. At that point all members in England will have taken two days of strike action though there will have been four days of action. Beyond November it isn't at all clear what the plan is.

The action aims to stop government attacks on teachers' conditions, including the worsening of pension rights, the substantial deregulation of national pay, and the plans announced by Michael Gove to lift all limits to the working day and the school year.

The high stakes in this dispute are hardly reflected, however, in the seriousness and coherence of the union leaderships' cam-

paign. The date for the promised national strike has very pointedly not been named by the two unions. There are very real and understandable fears that it will either be pushed into January or won't take place at all.

WALES

Wales was to be called out on the October strikes too.

However, members there have been stood down on the basis of talks and some unspecified (but almost certainly very minor) concessions on workload promised by the Welsh education minister. Given that two of the crucial con-

cerns of the dispute are paying more to work longer for a worse pension and the end of national pay, this suspension makes no sense at all. The Welsh government has no power whatever to affect the pay and pension proposals.

One of the dispute's main strengths is also the source of its weakness. NUT, the biggest teachers' union, reached an agreement with NASUWT, the second biggest, last year which promised more effective non-strike and strike action on all these fronts. The idea of such an alliance is a no-brainer in most schools. Together the two unions represent 85-

90% of teachers and have the power to close most schools. The members of each are more likely to come out if they are doing so jointly with members of the other.

NASUWT is, however, one of the most tightly-controlled unions in Britain with no tradition whatever of dissent or independent rank-and-file organisation. The slow pace of action since then reflects the ability of the NASUWT to shape the strategy of the NUT. They are able to do this because of the caution, timidity and lack of boldness of the "left-led" NUT.

If this campaign can be rescued, it will be through a substantial escalation of the current action, the growth of stronger organisation at school level, and the active building of serious action on workload in schools and local branches.

We should mobilise energetically for the strikes, continue to look for a way to turn them into a strategy that can win and build in the workplace to make sure we are stronger, more united and less dependent on the union tops next time.

• Abridged from bit.ly/nut-strike

Higher Education workers ballot for strikes

By a UCU activist

Higher education unions are balloting for strike action after a miserly pay offer of 1% from university employers.

In the past four years pay in the sector has been cut by 13% in real terms, and thousands of workers still receive less than the Living Wage of £7.45 an hour. This is despite a backdrop of strong financial results in the higher education sector, which has benefited from the rise in tuition fees and has a £1.1 billion operating surplus. But less of this income is going to staff: as a percentage of university budgets pay has fallen from 58% in 2001-2 to 55.5% in 2011-12.

Universities can well afford to pay a rise above inflation and UCU, Unite and Unison are all balloting for strike action on pay this autumn. Ballots for Unison and UCU are now underway and Unite follows shortly. A strong Yes vote for both strike action and action short of

a strike is vital to stop this attack on our living conditions.

The last significant pay rise HE staff received was back in 2008. That was the final instalment of a three-year pay deal achieved by industrial action in 2006. But since then proper pay rises have been the preserve of a select few.

There are now over 2500 individuals working in the sector who earn more than £100,000 a year. High salaries are routinely offered as universities poach "star" researchers in an attempt to up their international rankings. Pay is becoming less equal and will stay that way unless staff put up a serious fight to get a decent rise for everyone.

The nature of university work means that action short of strikes – like the 2006 marking boycott – is often more effective than one- or two-day strikes. But the UCU leadership is insisting action can only go ahead with a yes vote for both strikes and action short – so that if gung-ho employers try to impose punitive sanctions for action short we can move straight to strikes without an additional ballot. Last year this position led to the fiasco of staff voting for action short (but not strikes) and the union calling no action at all!

It is essential that this year we get a strong yes vote on both questions – and no more excuses from the union leadership.

Firefighters' nationwide strike

By Darren Bedford

Firefighters in England and Wales take strike action on Wednesday 25 September in response to government attacks on firefighters' pensions, which would see them pay more, work longer and receive reduced benefits on retirement.

The four-hour strike is expected to be solid, after a strong yes vote and turn-

out. The FBU has invited trade unionists and other supporters to visit picket lines and show solidarity. Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary has called it "a warning shot" to the government, implying that further action will follow if no progress is made in negotiations. No further dates have been named.

The action will be the third national strike in the union's history – the 1977-

78 and 2002-03 pay strikes were the other two. However the London FBU, which has been the most vocal in pressing for action in recent weeks, has also expressed disquiet at the decision by the union's executive council to exempt Scotland FBU members from strike action, in order to discuss proposals tabled by the Scottish government.

The London FBU regional committee submitted an emergency resolution, stating that "We believe that now is not the time for a move away from the unified, joined-up, national campaign of the last two years and towards an acceptance that the outcome for firefighters in this dispute will be determined by geography".

They point out rightly that "any local settlement would, in reality, set a benchmark upon which it

might prove difficult for firefighters elsewhere to improve".

The motion adds that devolution "does not have to mean devolution in the Fire Brigades Union. This is not about denying the democratic rights of Scotland FBU members. It is about recognising that we are a national union and this is a national campaign. As such, all firefighters have an interest in recent developments in Scotland and are entitled to take a view on them. It cannot conceivably be right, in a national campaign, for a minority of firefighters, by default, to determine the outcome for everyone else".

These points are important and indicate a potential weak point for further action. The key question firefighters are asking is: after the strike, what next?

Hovis workers win

By Ollie Moore

Hovis bakery workers have ended their strike with an agreement that agency labour "will only be used when there is insufficient commitment by employees to work overtime and banked hours."

The strike had already succeeded in ending "zero hours" contracts among directly employed workers.

Bakers' union official Geoff Atkinson called the deal "a landmark".

• For more info, see bit.ly/bfawu-statement

Oil refinery workers' strike vote

By Dale Street

Unite members in the Ineos oil refinery in Grangemouth, Scotland are voting on whether to take industrial action in defence of senior shop steward Stevie Deans.

Stevie is chair of Falkirk Labour Party. He was suspended in June after national party officials raised allegations against Unite. Ineos bosses

claimed his (alleged) involvement undermined their trust in him, and suspended him from his job. A strike threat forced them to back down, but despite Unite and Stevie having been cleared of any wrongdoing, Ineos are continuing disciplinary procedures against him.

• For more information, see bit.ly/stevie-strike

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Greek workers rally against fascist killers

By Theodora Polenta

At midnight on Tuesday 17 September, anti-fascist musician Paul Fyssas was knived to death in Piraeus, near Athens, by a fascist, Giorgos Roupakas.

Thirty thugs from the fascist Golden Dawn movement were waiting outside the cafe where Paul was watching a football match. They had been mobilised by mobile phone.

Thirty against one! And even then, they relied on their chosen thug, Roupakas, to do the killing.

Then Roupakas's party disowned him. Pretended not to know him!

The internet and the

newspapers carried pictures of the killer hugging prominent Golden Dawn MPs. Golden Dawn leader Ilias Kasidiaris said that who-ever dared accuse Golden Dawn for the murder would be prosecuted.

But the killer had asked his wife to dispose of his Golden Dawn membership card. He was working at a Golden Dawn café. His wife was the cleaner at the Golden Dawn local office.

An interview given by a former member of Golden Dawn to the newspaper *Ethnos* (20 and 21 September), and other reports, revealed that at Golden Dawn offices there is a closed core of activists under military discipline. Such people car-

ried out the attack on Paul, and the attack in Perama, near Piraeus, on 12 September, which hospitalised nine Communist Party (KKE) members who had been fly-posting.

They are equipped with weapons, hidden from police raids thanks to information given them by police who are members of Golden Dawn.

Golden Dawn makes money by selling the clothes that their sympathisers give them as "solidarity for the underprivileged", to Pakistani immigrants who sold them at street markets. They have set up tariffs. 100 euros to break an arm, 200 euros to break a leg, 1000

Left: vigil for Paul Fyssas in Athens. Right: around 300 anti-fascists gathered in solidarity outside the Greek embassy.

The vigil included the London branch of Syriza and Antarsya, the Anti-Fascist Network, Unite Against Fascism and the KKE. Stathis Kouvelakis from Syriza London spoke about Pavlos Fyssas's life as a metal worker, trade unionist and rapper who educated people through his music. He spoke about the need for a unified response to fascism in Greece. Stathis stressed that such unity would not be possible with political parties that are involved in implementing austerity measures which have bred the desperation that has allowed Golden Dawn to grow.

Dan Rawnsley

euros to burn a car, 1500-2000 euros to send someone to the hospital for a month.

On 18 September, thousands of anti-fascists filled the streets of the Keratsini district of Piraeus and of dozens of cities nationwide.

On 21 September, a new demonstration in Piraeus was called by the seafaring and ship-repair unions. Under this pressure, Golden Dawn postponed all its events planned for the weekend.

A big anti-fascist rally has been called by the unions in the private and public sector in Athens on Wednesday 25th, the day of a general strike of public sector workers.

• More, page 3

Islamist atrocity in Nairobi

Islamists stormed a shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya, on 21 September. As we go to press, they are known to have killed 62 people and injured 170.

The killers released people only if they could prove they were Muslims. The events should hammer home three things often denied on the left.

First: Islamists are different from specially religious Muslims.

Islamists are right-wing, fascistic political people who use and abuse Muslim religion for their political ends. They are not primarily religious, any more than Spain's dictator from 1939 to 1976, Franco, was primarily a good Christian.

They are enemies of ordinary Muslims, as Franco was of most of Spain's Christians.

Second: a pretence of anti-imperialism does not make Islamism progressive.

The Islamists were responding to the Kenyan army's action in Somalia. They targeted a posh shopping mall — "a place", as a spokesperson told Al Jazeera (23 Sep) "where there are Jewish and American shops".

But in no way does it contribute to any liberation to kill tourists, or better-off workers, or shopworkers, or children caught up in the gunfire — or people of any sort targeted as being Kenyan and non-Muslim?

Third: the chief victim of the Islamists is not "imperialism", but the ordinary people (including, most often, the Muslim people) of the countries where they are based.

Break the pay freeze!

By Gerry Bates

On 23 September Labour Party conference passed a motion against the public sector pay freeze, which the Labour leaders have promised to continue, and for the Living Wage to be made law.

Speaking for the motion, Dave Prentis, general secretary of the public services union Unison, called for "a clear unambiguous Labour promise to turn a statutory minimum wage into a living wage". He continued: "The pay freeze must end. No ifs, no buts — a clear commitment to end the Tory pay freeze".

The actual text voted on — a composite of motions put to conference on the question — had been made vaguer. Labour officials briefed the media (inaccurately) that "the party's official policies are decided by its National Executive" (not conference) (*Guardian*, 23 September).

But the conference wanted clear commitments. During this crisis, workers in Britain have suffering the longest squeeze on real wages since records began.

Bosses have increased their wealth and income through class struggle. A working-class fightback can shift the balance.

The question now is whether activists can make our unions act on Prentis's declaration, both by organising and supporting workers to win wage rises in our industries, and by using union voting strength in the Labour Party to make a future Labour government end the pay freeze and make the Living Wage the legal minimum wage.

• More on Labour Party conference, page 5