



# Solidarity

For a  
workers'  
government

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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[www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)

## Strike to beat low pay!

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**October strikes and after:  
challenge the fall in real wages**

## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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



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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

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

### Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● [solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

The editor (Cathy Nugent), 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

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# The fly in China's ointment

## Chen Ying reports from Hong Kong (30 September)

The current wave of protest has spread like wildfire from the Admiralty area, where the administration centre of the Hong Kong government is located, to Wanchai, Central and Causeway Bay areas on Hong Kong Island, and to Mongkok in the centre of Kowloon.

In short, the major roads of HK's financial district and all key urban areas with the highest population density is occupied 24 hours around the clock by protesters.

The escalation of protest was directly triggered by the police's use of teargas in the Admiralty area. From 6 pm to well past midnight yesterday, the police fired 87 rounds of teargas indiscriminately into crowds of people who were protesting peacefully. They were responding to the Occupy Central leaders' call to bring the civil disobedience campaign forward from 1 October to yesterday, after the police had arrested over seventy students who scaled the government HQ's perimeter walls.

The deployment of riot police and the repeated use of teargas marked a turning point. The TV broadcasts of this heavy-handed move and of heavily clad riot police wielding batons and even raising of armed rifles against a defenceless crowd including families with young children, led to even more people coming out of their homes onto the streets. Rumours started flying that

the police are about to open fire and that the People's Liberation Army were getting ready to come out of their barracks. Even after the authorities shut down Admiralty station, people kept arriving on the scene.

Throughout the days of civil disobedience, not a single shop window in the glittering financial district was broken and not a single police vehicle was touched, even though the protestors had a huge superiority in numbers that surprised and vastly outnumbered the police. Today the police decided to withdraw their riot squads and the crowds continued to bring traffic to a halt at will while interacting with office workers coming into work on Monday.

### DEMANDS

**Tonight there is a mood of celebration as the crowds raised demands for the Chief Executive Leung Chun Ying to resign.**

The depth of feeling is not just against Beijing's election reform restrictions, but also against a very unpopular Chief Executive who was elected by a highly unrepresentative election committee of merely 1200 people in 2012.

Leung had defeated the local tycoon candidate Henry Tang after a dirty campaign exposing Tang of illegally building an underground wine cellar and swimming pool in his residence. It later transpired that Leung's own mansion contained illegal construction which he sought to cover up. Leung's confrontational tactics against elected legislators and his contempt

for public opinion, plus his failure to deliver promised measures such as building more public housing had made him the most unpopular of HK's three chief executives since 1997. Hong Kong has now reached a state of ungovernability.

Xi Jin Ping is in the ascendancy, tightly consolidating his power as China's President and making bolder moves against his factional opponents in the Communist Party. In less than two years he has moved against an unprecedented number of party leaders, charging them with corruption.

Former Party leader Jiang Zemin and his Shanghai gang are Xi's major remaining obstacle to total control of the CCP. This goes well beyond the previous purges by new party leaders of a few factional opponents and the use of anti-corruption as a ploy to boost prestige and to keep party bureaucrats in line.

Xi is already seeking to publish his writings in several volumes to coincide with the 65th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic. Xi's project is to consolidate the party's grip on power at any cost as China continues to develop economically, including even a change of ideology.

In Xi's eyes, both Putin's Russia and Singapore are attractive enough models of de facto one party tyrannical states, while the legacy of Maoism and the inefficiency and corruption of the CCP is increasingly becoming a liability.

To succeed, Xi cannot afford to be derailed by a turbulent Hong Kong spinning out of control. Hong Kong

remains a crucial part of Xi's ambitions for a modernised and strong China, given its global importance as a financial centre. It would not be in his interests to be forced to impose martial law and crack down on Hong Kong in full glimpse of the world's media, 25 years after Tiananmen.

As soon as Xi decides that Leung Chun Ying is a liability he will be removed from office to give Beijing an opportunity to coax Hong Kong into a new deal. Yet Leung must know that his best prospect of surviving is to polarise the situation in Hong Kong until Beijing's heavy hand is forced. Leung is rumoured to be an underground member of the CCP in Hong Kong.

Can the struggle for democracy by a small city of seven million people really have a pivotal effect on a country as vast as China? After all, Hong Kong's populace is not exactly a revolutionary vanguard of worker militants. Yet this is a city where over 1.5 million out of seven million were on the streets 25 years ago in protest against the 4 June massacre — a highly politicised population with a stubborn cultural streak that refuses to be assimilated by China, that despises the vile corruption and trampling on basic human rights that occurs daily on the mainland, and treats the nouveau riche taking their loot out of China with utter contempt.

**China's evolution towards a regime like Russia is by no means assured, and Hong Kong could be the fly in the ointment.**

# Why you should march for free education

By Beth Redmond

**The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts is organising a national demonstration in central London for free education on Wednesday 19 November.**

Other student organisations such as the Young Greens and the Student Assembly Against Austerity are also collaborating. Students will be marching under the banner of “no fees, no cuts, no debt”.

For the first time in several years, this year's annual conference of the National Union of Students (March) voted in favour of free education policy (grants not fees and loans), despite hard attempts from the leadership to get it voted down. The conference was in general more left-wing than it has been in recent years, and as a result many members of the National Executive Council and several of the full time officers consider themselves to be left-wing. A NCAFC meeting in

June – attended by people from all over the UK, as far as Aberdeen and Exeter — democratically decided that we should organise this national demonstration in the first term of 2014-15 student year.

The demonstration now has the backing of NUS National Executive, and the only people who voted against support were members of Labour students.

The number of people being priced out of education is higher than ever; more people are having to pay for further education courses; fees for international students, postgraduates and undergraduates are astronomical and probably going to rise even more; apprentices are having to survive on poverty wages and without the old maintenance grant education is hard going for 16-18 year olds. It isn't okay that education should only be accessible to those with vast quantities of wealth.

The transformation of universities into businesses and

education into a commodity is not only detrimental to the students at the institutions but to society as a whole. Education is a social good, it enables people to research medicine and provide healthcare when people are sick, it allows people to design and then create the homes we live in. If society is benefiting from that education then society should fund that education. And that means taxing the rich as they are the people who can best afford it.

## CULTURE

**When university management look at their students as “customers” or “consumers”, a culture of competitiveness is created.**

Money which is necessary for welfare services or fair pay for staff is taken away and spent on really cool adverts and logo redesigns. Subjects which are deemed less profitable by management get the chop, and money from businesses becomes important. That

gives people who have no right to interfere with our education a “legitimate” say in what kind of things we learn. We can't let these people control what we learn in our universities. Ending the need to pay for further and higher education is not the answer to this problem, but it is a leap in the right direction.

This is also worrying for people who are worse off in society — women and BME people — and have many hurdles to jump over already.

No one involved in organising the national demonstration is under any illusion about how hard this fight is going to be, and we are not expecting to win free education on 20 November.

**This demonstration is the embryo of a movement which has the potential to change the education structure as we know it, and in order for that movement to be effective we need maximum momentum from the get-go.**

# E15 mums lead housing battle

By Michael Johnson

**Activists from the Focus E15 campaign have occupied an empty property on the Carpenters Estate to highlight the mismatch between the empty homes there and Newham's growing waiting list for social housing.**

The campaign started after last year's funding cuts by Labour-run Newham Council, with a group of young mothers fighting eviction from their homes at a hostel.

Their collective fightback against being moved away from their community in east London, to cities as far as Manchester, has been an inspiring battle against social cleaning, privatisation and attacks on working-class women.

Now the mothers have been found temporary private-rental accommodation in London, though the campaign continues to demand decent social housing.

On 21 September, the campaign held a community event on the Carpenters Estate on Stratford. The Estate has been largely cleared of its residents, as the council seeks to flog it off to investors.

The last deal, with University College London (UCL), fell through, after residents linked up with UCL students' union to resist plans to clear the estate to make way for a flashy new campus for the prestigious Russell Group institution.

During the community event, Jasmin Stone, one of the Focus E15 mums, spoke to Solidarity: “We've taken over this empty flat. It's to raise awareness of how many homes are empty when so many people are homeless and on the street. These homes are in perfectly good condition; people could just move in immediately and live in them straight away. It's really upsetting to think that so many

people are homeless or are being sent out of London, to Birmingham and Manchester, when there are perfectly good houses here.

“The community have been wonderful. People have been coming over and donating so many things. We've opened a ‘free shop’ and a foodbank, and people having been writing letters and emails. The community has just been amazing. You can really feel a sense of community here. It's such a lovely place to socialise with people and hear each other's stories, and get a bit of support when you're feeling down.

“From residents we've spoken to before, people said that the Carpenters Estate was a lovely community anyway and we've really felt that. People just want to have a neighbour to say hello to in the morning or somebody to turn to. It's nice. You need to have people around you. It must feel so isolated to wake up to a

boarded-up flat next door to you.

“We want to repopulate and rebuild social housing. Social housing was a system that actually worked. The councils were still profiting from it because people were paying their rent. It's not like they were losing out. Now they're getting too greedy; they're putting profit before the actual people. They'd much rather demolish things that everybody can afford to live in and people can feel secure in, and build luxury apartments that will be left empty to for foreign investors or bankers to buy them as investment.”

**Since the interview (23 September), Newham Council have issued a possession order and cut off amenities to the occupied flat. The campaign is going to court on Thursday 2 October.**

•Solidarity info: [on.fb.me/YN16Cs](http://on.fb.me/YN16Cs)

## Disability news

By Janine Booth, co-chair, TUC Disabled Workers' Committee (personal capacity)

### Defend the ILF!

**The Independent Living Fund provides funding for severely disabled people to live independently in their own homes and participate in society — so it's an obvious target for the Tory-LibDem government to cut!**

Mike Penney, then minister for (attacking) disabled people, announced in March this year that the Fund would close immediately to new applicants and then close completely. Disabled people's organisations and trade unions have campaigned vigorously against this appalling cut.

A legal challenge succeeded in having the government's policy declared illegal under judicial review. But the government has found a way to bypass the judgment and press on. So three of the legal challenges have begun a new judicial review, which will be heard at the High Court on 22-23 October 2014. Supporters will hold a vigil outside the hearing.

**The TUC has produced a new briefing for campaigners, which you can download from its website.**

### Stop student transport cuts!

**Campaigners are fighting Monmouthshire County Council's decision to stop funding transport to college for young people over 16 years old with Special Educational Needs.**

Some of these young people are unable to use public transport, and if parents are unable to pro-

vide private transport, they may not be able to continue in education. Once again, cuts hit hardest the people who need services most.

Monmouthshire Council is run by a Tory-LibDem coalition.

**Campaigners are running an online petition on the 38 Degrees website.**

### Disabled students' allowance win

**Protests have forced the government to withdraw plans to scrap the Disabled Students' Allowance.**

On 12 September, universities and science minister Greg Clark announced that the “changes” would be postponed until the academic year 2016/17. By “changes”, he meant that colleges and universities would have to take over assisting students currently assisted by government grants. The Allowance pays for travel costs, specialist equipment such as computer software, and non-medical helpers such as readers or note-takers. In 2011-12, over £144m was paid in DSA to 61,000 students.

Higher education unions, student unions and others campaigned against the government's attack on disabled students' funding. TUC Disabled Workers' Conference this year unanimously passed a resolution against the cut.

The postponement shows that campaigning pressure can push the Tories onto the back foot. It also enables the government to be elected next year to abandon this attack and confirm decent financial support for disabled students.

**It is one more demand for disabled people and our supporters to place on the Labour Party as the general election approaches.**

# Money for war, but not for those who clean up

Bob Carnegie



In the mid 1990s, Paul Keating's Labor government in Australia decided to outsource work on defence bases to private contractors. This work was overseen by that great excuse for a conservative in hiding, the leader of the Victorian right wing of the Australian Labor Party, Senator Robert Ray.

Formerly jobs which had a high degree of stability became insecure ones. Workers, nearly 4,000 of them, whose jobs were cleaning the toilets, the rooms, and the barracks of defence bases, serving up the meals and pouring the drinks in mess halls, mowing the grass, and doing the gardening, and those working in warehouses, were thrown to the mercy of some of the most ruthless monsters in the corporate world.

Companies such as Serco, Transfields, and Spotless treat workers horribly. Two of them also run detention centres. Spotless has 33,000 employees in Australia and the word decent or generous only applies to their corporate vision, not to the day to day reality of being employed by them.

I knew little or nothing about all this until not quite three months ago, when I started attempting to organise these workers for the National Union of Workers (NUW) in Northern Queensland and the Northern Territory. Now I have seen the exploitation these workers suffer. The story is also one of how when things became difficult, Australian unions for all

intents and purposes vacated the field of battle.

In the last 30 years or so, union density has collapsed from 53% of the Australian workforce in 1982 to 17% in 2014. The hows, the whys, and the wherefores are for other articles, but this collapse in union membership is reflected in the collapse in working conditions and pay for civilian workers employed on defence bases in Australia.

When I first spoke to the civilian workers in North Queensland and then Northern Territory, union density was running at about 5%. Now it is perhaps 10%.

Along with that low level of union density comes a general feeling that things will not get better, only worse. It is based on a large degree of fact. Over the last nearly 20 years conditions and wages have been consistently slashed with no fightback.

Aggressively anti union companies such as Serco have made organising very difficult. Companies continually shadow organisers wherever they go. Due to the security procedures on defence bases you are signed on to each base under the "supervision" of the employer.

The size and remote locations of the bases increase the difficulties. Recently I flew for five hours and then drove a car for six to speak to a couple of hundred workers. For a brief while I thought I was part of the Rolling Stones' latest tour, "I can't get no satisfaction".

In some of the remote areas, there are few other jobs to be had, and any job that pays is better than no job at all.

The contractors prefer to employ partners of serving mili-

tary. Organising workers whose partners are in the military can be difficult.

Another sizeable percentage of the workers are ex-military, and many of them are on some type of military pension.

At interviews the contractors ask would-be job-seekers if they are on such a pension, and use it as way of dampening wage expectations. They want workers to think their jobs are not really worth much, and the wages amount to some "drinking silver".

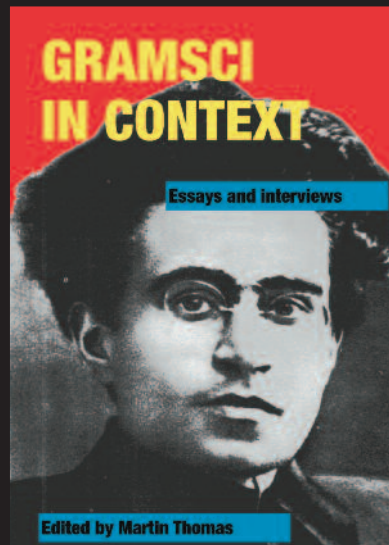
Yet in the brief period of time I have been attempting to organise some of these workers I have been hugely impressed with the proud way they carry themselves as workers and the amazing job they do, day in day out.

For a 38 hour working week the workers in the service lines, mostly mature women, many not having English as their mother tongue, clear after taxes a little over 600 Australian dollars per week or around 420 euros or £310. They work in towns and cities where the cost of living is very high.

**Australia has the dubious distinction of never missing out on a war or skirmish. We follow British and American imperialism to quite literally the end of the earth. Australian governments always find money for war, but cannot find money for those who clean the toilet mess and vomit of the soldiers, who by world standards are quite well paid. It is a situation that urgently needs attention and change.**

• Bob is a union activist in Brisbane, Australia

## GRAMSCI IN CONTEXT



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## Plans for consistent democracy

Letters



**Solidarity 337 was right to pose a plan of consistent democracy in response to the Scottish referendum.**

This is far better than the wrong-headedness of much of the left's "Cuba of the north" fantasies about Scottish independence. It is also the right riposte to the inconsistent and undemocratic response of the mainstream Westminster parties. *Solidarity* was, however, wrong in both its overall approach to the democratic demands raised and the detailed content.

It is fair enough to outline what a new democratic settlement for the UK would look like, but it is also important to identify the agency that will carry out that programme.

It is right to reject the Labour leadership's demand for a constitutional convention which is clearly modelled on the Scottish Constitutional convention of 1989 which included the leadership of the main parties (except the anti-reform Conservatives), TUC, churches, business groups et al. However to call for a constituent assembly is, at best, abstract propaganda.

A constituent assembly (an elected body which draws up a new constitution) is something the left should call for only when it takes forward a struggle to recast a political system. In the absence of any such a struggle it becomes an expression only of the lack of political leadership and political culture in the working class. Like elections for police and crime commissioners, it is an election in a vacuum.

Worse, it would give those views that dominate current political debate (anti-EU, anti-immigrant with a fair bit of anti-Scottish) political form, and it would codify demoralisation and defeat of working-class forces into a constitutional settlement.

The left and the working class movement should take an interest in British constitutional reform and the political system in the way that they have not done for several generations. It is notable that the only recent constitutional reforms

of any note in Britain were those of the Blair governments which saw them as a cost free form of radicalism (although many of them, however, half-hearted, had some positive content). The left and the labour movement should have its own agenda, but at the moment it does not.

And what should the reforms be? The monarchy is of course worth abolishing in itself, but the broader question of an overly mighty executive operating in its name is the key issue (as some campaigners for a republic in Australia recognised in 1999).

The big demand is federalism. But it makes little sense to call for federalism in the UK — federalism cannot operate where one unit (England) is far bigger than all the others put together. It would require that all the units have the same powers. Replacing the House of Lords based on such a four (or five) nation federalism could not work if eighty per cent of the population represented lived in one of the constituent federated states (England). Of course, England could be broken into several federal states, but where is the demand for that other than among a few parochial idiots in Cornwall and Yorkshire?

Devolution is a good approximate answer to the desire of Scottish people to have more say over their own affairs. The West Lothian question is a non-question since it contains the false assumption that the votes in Westminster that affect only England and Wales have no effect in Scotland. They do have an effect. Devolution is a constitutional compromise but a compromise with the least problems.

*Solidarity* says that the Republic of Ireland should consider federating with the UK, that this can unpick the sectarian compromises of the Good Friday settlement. This is an ambitious statement and it needs to be more than an aside.

**It is time that the left and the labour movement took up the question of democratic political power. If this article is perhaps a start, it does raise more questions than it answers.**

Matt Cooper, east London

# Strike to beat low pay!

**Several big unions will strike over public sector pay on 13-14-15 October, but as yet are discussing no follow-up.**

At present inter-union communication happens only between general secretaries, or not at all. There should be a joint meeting of the unions' elected executive committees to discuss further action.

Widely-spaced national one day strikes, by themselves, will not win on pay. Unions should use creative tactics to maximise impact, maximise member involvement, and minimise impact on their members' pay.

Selective and rolling action, financed from strike funds, can increase impact.

On 27 September the Unite union reported that its members in the NHS in England and Northern Ireland had voted 62% for strikes over pay, and would start with a four hour stoppage alongside other NHS workers on Monday 13 October. On 29 September the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) announced an 82.2% majority in its strike ballot, and a decision also to strike on the 13th.

The unions will follow the four hour stoppage with a "work to rule". Sadly, no union has given specific instructions on the "work to rule", apart from an instruction to take the full entitlement of breaks.

Unison's work to rule in England runs to 17 October; Unite's, in England and Northern Ireland, to 9 November. Unite has called an overtime ban in ambulances until 19 October. The uncoordinated nature of this action could leave workers divided within their workplace.

UCATT, representing some maintenance and construction workers in the NHS, has announced that its members voted 77% for strike but has yet to name the date.

Unison, GMB and Unite local government workers will strike on 14 October, and PCS (the civil service union) on 15 October. Members of the lecturers' union UCU in Further Education colleges have rejected their 1% pay offer by 85%. They will strike on 14 October on the authority of a previous ballot. Activists in the rail union RMT are arguing for it to strike on the Tube on 14-15 October in its ongoing dispute over ticket office closures and job cuts.

The breadth of unions who have called action means that, after years of austerity with little fightback, most sections of the public sector will strike. This is far from insignificant. The width and variety of the strikes will signal to many workers that it is time to fight back against falling real wages.

Real wages have fallen by 8.2% between 2008 and 2013. In the public sector, by an average of 15%. The worst-hit have suffered a decline in living standards of over 20%.

On 25 September local government bosses made a "pro-

posal" of an unconsolidated lump sum of between £250 and £100 to be paid in December, and a 2.2% pay increase on all pay points from 1 January 2015, with no further increase until 1 April 2016.

Those on the lowest pay scales would gain only £11 a year. The "proposal" of a 2.2% rise dated from January 2015 would also cost the employer less than the previous definite offer of a 1% increase dated from April 2014.

Unison has decided not to "consult" members, emphasising that the new plan is only a "proposal", not an offer, but underplaying how little it is

worth. Activists in local government unions are lobbying their leaders clearly to reject the proposal. Accepting an offer that covers two years also rules out demands for further improvements from April 2015.

Even in PCS, which promotes itself as "the fighting union", activists report that the union has done almost no campaigning among members over pay since the last strike on 10 July. The pattern of calling national strikes without naming further dates or organising local action in between demobilises workers and signals to the government that it need only wait and sit out the action.

In the NHS, the generally-speaking-reasonable principle of granting exemptions from strikes for "life and limb cover" has been extended to such large sections of the workforce that strikes often have little impact. Many areas considered to be "life and limb" services are so chronically understaffed all the time that running the bank holiday staffing levels considered to be emergency cover means almost no-one on strike.

The unions should organise more creative discussion of strategy among health workers.



Local government and NHS workers face a 1% pay offer

Too often union members are marched up to the top of the hill, and back down again, by union leaders, with little active involvement of the members themselves in the action. Strike committees within and between unions can involve members in persuading others to come out, organising picket lines, challenging bosses who try to open workplaces or use scabs, and discussing what action the union should take next.

Across the unions, meetings of striking workers on the strike days, rather than just passive rallies with "big name" speakers, can enable members to discuss strategy.

Building connections at the workplace level will be more difficult because of the strikes being spread over three days, but activists will organise solidarity visits and help with picketing duties where possible.

Union members should not be left asking "what next?" yet again, whilst they continue to face attacks on their pay and conditions.

**Strike in October; build connections across unions; press for a strategy to win!**

## The rancid party



Protest outside UKIP conference in Doncaster this week

**Holding its conference in Doncaster, and cock-a-hoop about gaining another defuncting Tory MP, UKIP says it is driving into "Labour heartlands".**

The sample delegates whom UKIP served up to journalists keen to get voices from the conference floor included union convenors and former long-standing Labour activists.

Yet UKIP's brief speculation about starting a "luxury tax" was quickly quashed by party leader Nigel Farage.

Tory chancellor George Osborne announced two plans, to allow better-off people with big pension pots to pass on the wealth untaxed after death, and to freeze benefits for the worse-off for two years. UKIP responded by condemning Osborne for not cancelling inheritance tax outright, and made no complaint at the benefit freeze.

UKIP is winning Labour voters by not offering not even a demagogic simulacrum of what those voters might hope a real labour movement party would offer. It assumes that they have just given

up on such generous hopes, bonds people by vague, nostalgic, cultural nationalism.

The front page of UKIP's website is instructive. All the several images there of emblematic UKIP people are of blokes, none young, mostly ageing, all white except one background Afro-Caribbean man in a crowd shot.

Even the Tory party has wised up these days: its website front page presents as emblematic Tory figures three young-ish people, one female, one black, one Asian. The neo-Blairites who run the Labour machine are hot for such symbolic diversity. But not UKIP.

UKIP signals that it stands for a Britain where blokes were blokes, beer was beer, skin was white, the well-off got to enjoy their riches with no-one whingeing, and foreign parts were only for visiting on holiday.

That this outfit can still hope to win Labour votes indicts the Labour leaders.

**To defeat UKIP we need a socialist campaign in the labour movement which couples support for Labour against the Tories with a fierce fight to mobilise the unions for working-class policies.**

# Prospects and the “decisive element”

Extracts from a document to be discussed at the AWL’s annual conference on 25-26 October.

**On average workers' real wages fell 8.2% between 2008 and 2013. The median (middling) worker lost £2000 a year. But for many workers it has been much worse.**

For the 18-25 age range, the average drop was 14%; for 25-29, it was 12%. Public sector wages have fallen by 15%.

Overall price inflation over the last five years has been 19.0% (RPI); 16.4% (CPI). But the income required for a defined minimum living standard has risen, during the period of tiny or zero pay rises since 2008, by amounts ranging from 33% for a couple with an infant child through 28% for a single person to 17% or 18% for other households. A significant number of households must have suffered a real decline in living standards of the order of 20% or 30%.

Even nominal (cash) wages, measured by average weekly earnings, have actually fallen during 2014. Benefit cuts and rent rises have doubled the impact of the downward pressure on wages, particularly for young people.

Between 2008-9 and 2012-3, households privately-renting increased from 14% to 18% of the total, and outstripped social renting. The impact of the Thatcher government’s thorough scrapping of tenant protections legislated after 1965 consequently increases.

The number of owner-occupiers, after soaring under Thatcher, has now decreased since 2008. Those lucky enough to be able buy a home face a market where in some areas prices rise in double digit percentages in a matter of months in some areas.

Capitalism is impoverishing the many and giving rich rewards to those who own property. We will take up the de-

mand popularised by Thomas Piketty for a wealth tax, which should include a tax on real-estate property.

Since trade-union organisation, for all its weaknesses, has not collapsed under the blows of the slump, a backlash against the wage squeeze is inevitable — sooner or later, more explosively or more gradually.

The backlash may take the form of a rash of more local and sectional battles, rather than more and bigger one-day cross-union strikes, or two-day such strikes. Simmer as well as explosion can change the terrain for our intervention in the labour movement, and open up better possibilities for battles on other issues such as cuts, jobs, privatisations, and contracting-out. But we can't know for sure.

## “FIGHTING ARDOUR”

**We do know that, in Gramsci's words: “The decisive element in every situation is the force, permanently organised and pre-ordered over a long period, which can be advanced when one judges that the situation is favourable (and it is favourable only to the extent to which such a force exists and is full of fighting ardour); therefore, the essential task is that of paying systematic and patient attention to forming and developing this force, rendering it ever more homogeneous, compact, conscious of itself”.**

Only with the specifically revolutionary socialist “fighting ardour” which Gramsci called for — which means, in practice, ardour about seeking conversations, promoting ideas, pursuing discussions, reading and circulating our Marxist literature, educating ourselves and helping others educate themselves — can we make a real difference.

Trade-union membership increased slightly in 2012, and decreased slightly in 2013. There has been a small rise in union membership in the private sector, though in the public sector, which accounts for the majority of union members, both membership and even union density fell in 2013 (to 55.4%). This happened although the union “wage gap” (the estimated wage advantage of being unionised) is higher in the public sector (19.8%) than in the private (7%).

This is a less bad result that we might fear given the pressures of the slump and the sluggishness of the union leaders. It surely means that union organisation is not so weak as to stall a pay revolt if some confidence develops in the rank and file.

The task of rebuilding and rejuvenating the trade union movement at all levels remains acute. According to the latest report (by Loughborough University academics, based on 2011 survey data), the total number of workplace reps remains around 150,000, and thus has fallen a bit more since the 1979-80 peak than total union membership (by 60%, cf 50%).

Between 2004 and 2011 the number of workplace reps in manufacturing fell 40%. The big majority of workplace reps are in the public sector, and often in areas where it is harder for industrial action to hit profits fast. The average age of workplace reps is 49, 55% of them are over 50, and only 1% are under 30.

Our efforts for a new “New Unionism” must combine a long-term, strategic argument for union democracy and rank-and-file reinvigoration; efforts to recruit new young people who will generally not be trade-union activists when we first meet them, but can become so; an alert seizing of openings which may be created by a new pay revolt; and a continuous

## Growing into socialism

**How I became  
a socialist**  
By Cathy Nugent



**Many children have an acute sense of injustice, will feel righteous anger when they don't get a “fair go” at an activity or when their opinion is dismissed by an adult. A child's sense of injustice is egocentric but reasonable and it's probably essential if the individual is to develop a wider sense of injustice in the world.**

From as long as I can remember I had that wider view. The root of it is in my family history, and specifically my mother's recollections of her childhood.

My mother's parents were both from well-off backgrounds. Her father's family were North Yorkshire coal merchants, her mother's family were Anglo-Irish, children of a doctor in the British Army. My maternal grandfather and grandmother, or so I understand, met in India, as my grandfather was also in the army. As a child I imagined their meeting was a romantic encounter, a foxtrot round the officers' mess. Why I had this ridiculous idea I don't know. Perhaps it was a way to repress the facts.

After 10 years, maybe less, of marriage, and having given birth to six children (one of whom died in early infancy), my grandmother was dead. She died of motor neurone disease, alone and in a asylum for the mentally ill. My grandfather re-married, and for whatever reason he and his new wife did not look after the children, four girls and a boy. Neither side of the family took the children in, and even before their mother was dead all were sent to (separate) orphanages and

foster care.

Why did these people not want to care for the children? They had money enough. Why are children without parents treated like criminals, herded into big homes and given rough care? These were the big questions I had to ask myself as I listened to our family history. So I grew up being sensitive to the inequality embedded in the world.

Being a child in the 70s also helped me become a socialist. It's the decade everyone likes to make fun of, with its crap fashion and terrible food, but it was a time when class, as an identity really, was clearer. Personal memory is an unreliable facility, often a self-serving edit, but still... I believe at that important impressionable age of seven to eleven I really did have some great stuff to grow up with.

My parents had the *Daily Mirror* delivered, and I always looked for Paul Foot's column which told you about bad stuff happening to good people. I remember lining ourselves up in the playground and having to choose between being a “red” or a “blue”. The power cuts provoked family arguments about how well or badly Labour was doing in government.

All of this grounded me well for the teenage years. Every Saturday we went to the library nine miles away (Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire). Though I would read just about anything, I particularly looked for novels that could tell me about maturity or subversion or both: Edna O'Brien, George Orwell, Graham Greene, Doris Lessing, Carson McCullers and yes, I'm sorry to say now, D H Lawrence.

By the age of 14 my friends and I had discovered punk; it was important to get hold of the most obscure. Crass were unlistenable to — so they were a favourite. Secretly I preferred the more melodic yearning of working-class black



America; I had a big collection of Motown and other soul classics.

These things, the books and the music, were a carapace really against the ordinary hurts and humiliations of teenage years and a way to make sense of it all, and a way to dream of the future.

The books and music also helped me think about the social life of the village I lived in, a place at the edge of the Fens. Its class structure was the source of a lot of my confused angst about the world. I hated the fact that the daughter of our school's chair of governors got to be Head Girl. The prejudice against gypsies. And the materialism of rich farmers and their children.

My friend Clare's dad was the “only Labour Party member in the village”, and being something of an odd-ball she liked to act out authentic socialism. When John Major came to the village to speak during the 1979 election, she forced me to dress head to toe in red and turn up to heckle him. So Clare was a big influence.

By the time I got to college in 1983 I was pretty much ready to find the Real Left in the Big Wide World...

**For me there was never a “lightbulb moment” in becoming a socialist. You could say I simply grew into it.**

advocacy of revolutionary socialist politics.

Labour Party membership (according to the figures which have to be given to the Electoral Commission) was 189,531 at the end of 2013, marginally up on the end-2012 figure (which in turn was marginally down on the end-2011 figure).

There has been a net gain of about 30,000 or 40,000 members since 2010. That is significant in relation to the recent small scale of other developments on the left, but small in broad historical terms. This year's election for the Labour National Executive Committee constituency section showed a better score for what is seen as the "centre-left" than any since the 1980s. There continues to be more ferment on Labour Party conference floor and in CLPs, and much more in Young Labour, than there was pre-2010. But the ferment is still weak, and not enough to budge the leadership.

Battles against the cuts on the sharpest and most widespread front — local government services — have stagnated or declined rather than risen, despite the fact that those cuts have become more injurious. In tune with that trend, the Labour Party leadership has limited its differentiation from the Tories to commitments on the Health and Social Care Act and the bedroom tax, plus vague talk about improving wages and social equality, and committed itself to continuing Tory budget plans at least for the initial period of a Labour government.

## UNION LEADERS, CONFUSED ABOUT CUTS?

**Union leaders, from McCluskey through to Prentis, have made occasional irritated sallies of criticism; but at Labour's National Policy Forum on 21 July 2014 all the major union leaders who make speeches against cuts voted for a new Labour government to continue cuts.**

A motion from a constituency activist said: "We recognise that the cost of living crisis is inextricably linked to government's self-defeating austerity agenda. That is why we will introduce an emergency budget in 2015 to reject Tory spending plans for 2015-16 and beyond and set out how we will pursue a policy of investment for jobs and growth."

The sole speech against the motion, from Ed Balls, consisted exclusively of him reading out a list of those who had withdrawn their amendments in favour of the so-called "consensus wording".

All the representatives of all major trade unions voted with Balls against the motion — and against their own union policies. (We're told the media and entertainment union BECTU voted for the anti-cuts motion).

Decisive for revival will be a socialist force with "fighting ardour" which argues boldly for expropriating the capitalists, taxing the rich, etc., and which digs deep into the unions to revive them and to rouse them to demand working-class policies, in the Labour Party and in broader struggle.

We combat a strong neo-liberal hegemony, but one with fissures and openings.

As we wrote last year: "Neo-liberalism... intensifies competitive imperatives for both firms and workers; increases social inequality and luxury consumption by the rich; increases



**Labour set to continue Tory budget plans at least for the initial period of a Labour government**

insecurity for working-class people; and increases dependence on the market in daily life and reinforces the dominant hierarchies of the world market, with the US at its apex. The ruling-class hegemony which Gramsci wrote of is today organised as much through market transaction mechanisms, shaping people to see life as 'an investment', as through parties, media, schooling, etc.

"[Since] the outset of this crisis in 2007-08 some neo-liberal dogmas have been discredited, but... there is currently no move to a new regime".

## We have to look at this question from three angles.

- The fundamental contradictions of capitalism not only remain, but are being sharpened. Class inequality, capitalist dictatorship in the workplace, and imposition of erratic and inhuman market mechanisms on working-class people, are all increasing. At the same time the working class is growing dramatically in numbers on a global scale, and maintaining its numbers in the earlier-industrialised countries. These fundamental facts make a resurgence of working-class struggle and socialist politics inevitable sooner or later.

- Neo-liberalism remains hegemonic. There is mass disaffection with the established leaders of neo-liberalism; but still neo-liberalism sets the perceived horizons of social and economic possibility.

In the June 2014 Euro-elections, six years into the new great world capitalist depression, the parties of mainstream neo-liberal orthodoxy sank from 75.6% of the vote across Europe in 2004 to 62.4%. Most of the drop came between the 2009 election (which came just after the financial crisis of 2008 had segued into debt crisis for several European states) and 2014. In some countries harder-hit by the crisis, such as Greece and Spain, left-wing forces gained.

But mostly the hard right gained. It did that with largely neo-liberal economic programmes which included relatively little social demagoguery. It gained by offering not social alternatives but a seductive scapegoating side-narrative which appealed to basic feelings of identity and territory.

The hard right was able to do that because the official left has been utterly wretched, and because the radical left has too often been cowed. Too often radical left activists are submerged in detailed campaign or trade union work. Too often our public profile is mediated

through catchpenny campaigns and "fronts". Too often we opt for bland and limited messages for fear that more radical ideas will isolate us.

Likewise, the previous weaknesses of the left have been a factor in the turn for the worse in the outcomes of the Arab Spring of 2011. In Tunisia, and to a smaller extent in Egypt, secular and democratic and labour movement forces remain weighty, but the dominant sequels so far are the imposition of a new military-based despotism in Egypt; the degeneration of the Syrian opposition; the seizure of power across large parts of Syria and Iraq, from the borders of Turkey almost to the borders of Iran, by the Sunni ultra-Islamist ISIS; and the sharpening across the region of Shia-vs-Sunni and other sectarian tensions.

- Ruling-class hegemony builds on structural traits of capitalist society, such as commodity fetishism, but in every specific form is always an activity, not just a condition. It is an activity mediated through specific groups of what Gramsci called, interchangeably, intellectuals or organisers, and groups always with some degree of autonomy within or from the ruling class. It is always a mixture of elements somewhat at odds with each other.

Neo-liberalism has penetrated deep enough that people live it and take part in constructing it, as well as submitting to it. But that does not mean that it is all-overwhelming.

In the 1960s, sociologists wrote that in consumer capitalism working-class people had become more atomised and gave more time and attention to watching TV, buying consumer durables on credit, commuting, etc. It was accurate. Yet elements of that consumer-individualism could be and rapidly were converted, after 1968 especially, into an individualism embedded in raucous working-class militancy.

Neo-liberal individualism can convert similarly. It is not solid and coherent enough by itself to quell class struggle.

Equally, since ideology is fluid, constantly under construction, and criss-crossed by contradictions, an eruption of working-class revolt does not at all mean that conservative strands lose all grip. That depends on ideological and political struggle.

And that, in turn, depends on our "fighting ardour" for specifically revolutionary socialist ideas.

The ideological struggle is the decisive area where organised revolutionary socialists can apply leverage which also changes the political and economic struggle — if we develop enough verve, assertiveness, and outgoingness.

**The key to being able to do that, in turn, is vigour in self-education sufficient to develop in each of us the spirit of Voltaire's motto: "écrasez l'infâme".**



**Come on Len, they're not that hard to understand.**

# Scottish left pulled into SNP vortex

Left  
By Dale Street



**The working class voted “yes”. The Labour Party is finished. And we need a new mass socialist party.**

To one degree or another, and in one form or another, these have been the three main responses of the pro-independence left to the result of the 18 September referendum.

The first element has some degree of truth to it. Three of the four regions which had a “yes” majority (even if not a very large one) are traditional Labour strongholds. The fourth (Dundee) used to be a Labour stronghold, until New Labour decided the sitting Labour MP John McAllion was a liability.

But it is also true that large sections of the working class voted “no”. In any case nationalist separatism stands at odds with the basic labour movement principle of uniting people of different nationalities and national identities.

Any socialist welcoming “the working-class ‘yes’ vote” is welcoming the divisive poison of nationalism penetrating into working-class politics. To try to build on that basis — as the pro-independence left is now attempting — amounts to adding another dose of the same poison.

The demise of Labour? According to the Socialist Party (Scotland):

“13% of USDAW members in Scotland have resigned from the union in protest. Unite is receiving many requests from members looking to cancel their membership because it is affiliated to the Labour Party. Unison is also reporting a series of resignations as workers’ anger over Labour’s role escalates.”

## RESIGN

**Unlike the SPS, the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) has pointed out that resigning from a trade union is not a good idea. The SSP Industrial Organiser proposes a different way to “punish” Labour:**

“We should organise mass withdrawal from payment of members’ fees to Labour in those unions affiliated to Labour. Demand instead that the unions make the break from Labour and help build a mass, working-class socialist party.”

So members of the CWU — which polled its members in Scotland and then adopted policy in favour of a “no” vote at its national conference — should demand that their union disaffiliate from the Labour Party because Labour took the same position on the referendum as their union?

And so too should members of USDAW and GMB who took democratic decisions in favour of “no”?

Labour advocated a “no” vote. The majority of the elec-

torate took the same position and voted against independence. The usual name for something being decided and implemented on the basis of a majority vote is “democracy”.

The call for unions to disaffiliate from Labour because of Labour’s support for a ‘no’ vote amounts to a divisive nationalist attack on the workers’ movement.

No “no” supporter would support disaffiliation on that basis. And it elevates the nationalist demand for an independent Scotland over and above the right of trade unions to base their policy on internal decision-making processes.

The SWP boasts that “we have sold thousands of copies of *Socialist Worker* and recruited dozens of people.” The SPS makes similar claims. The SSP boasts that “2,200 (at the time of writing, over a mere five days) have applied to join the SSP!” That’s nothing compared to the 18,000 new members claimed by the SNP. Not to worry about that. An article on the SPS website explains: They join the SNP. They discover that it does not have a Marxist programme. They quit in disgust. They join the mass socialist party which the SPS is building.

In terms of building something broader than their own organisations, the SPS advocates building its Trade Union and Socialist Coalition:

“TUSC represents the best opportunity to ensure that anti-cuts, pro-trade-union and socialist candidates stand in the elections in Scotland next May.”

The SWP calls for a new, broader party to bring together “yes” supporters: “It can agree on a basic set of anti-capitalist policies, be democratic, grass-roots-based and centred on activity. It would stand in elections but not be obsessed about them.”

Generously, the SWP would allow “no” supporters into such a party. That people voted ‘no’ “doesn’t mean they are scabs.”

But the last attempt to build a united left party in Scotland collapsed when the SWP and SPS split the SSP by backing Sheridan after he walked out of the SSP. And the political fallout from that split continues today.

The SWP gets round this issue by simply declaring: “This party (i.e. the new party) cannot be defined by the splits in the Scottish Socialist Party a decade ago or about splits in the left at some point.”

The SSP has not put forward any proposals for a broad



party of the left. This is because they think that they already are that party, presumably because they are hoping for many more recruits.

The “yes” campaign provided a natural home, playing a leading role in the new mass workers party. Both the SWP and the SPS look forward to Tommy Sheridan for Sheridan’s bandstanding demagoguery.

According to the SPS: “If a political figure with a mass base of support among the working class like Tommy Sheridan made such a call, backed by leading trade unionists, socialists, etc., a new working-class party would become a force of thousands within a couple of weeks.”

The problem for the SWP and SPS scenario is that Sheridan has come out in favour of a vote for the SNP in next year’s general election:

“I suggest that we in the Yes movement promote continued unity by backing the most likely independence-supporting candidate at next May’s election. In concrete terms, that means advocating an SNP vote to try and unseat as many pro-No supporters as possible.”

Despite the entrenched hostility between the SSP and Sheridan, the SSP Industrial Organiser, who carries some weight within the SSP, has come out with a similar position:

“In the 2015 Westminster elections, I personally would support the idea of a Yes Alliance, a pro-independence slate of candidates (whatever the exact name) embracing the three parties that were in Yes Scotland – SNP, SSP and Greens – and others who were part of that coalition.”

That’s one of the things about abandoning class-based politics and selling out to nationalism: it develops a dynamic of its own.

The SSP Industrial Organiser is equally enthusiastic about the prospects for the 2016 Holyrood elections:

“All those tens of thousands who fought for a Yes vote could fix their sights on winning an absolute majority of pro-independence MSPs in 2016.

“Referenda are but one means of winning independence. The democratic election of a majority of MSPs who favour independence in 2016 would surely be equally a mandate for Scottish independence?”

Despite its aversion to an electoral alliance with the SNP, the SPS shares the SSP’s perspectives for 2016:

“If the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections resulted in an overwhelming majority for parties that back independence, it could also be a trigger for a mandate for independence... Or it could lead to an immediate referendum in 2016 or 2017.”

Despite the 55%/45% vote against independence in the referendum a fortnight ago, the pro-independence left wants to keep the issue of independence centre-stage, seeks to win trade union disaffiliation from the Labour Party on that basis, and proposes an electoral alliance with the SNP.

And while denouncing the Labour Party for supposedly “denying the Scottish people democracy”, it also looks forward to, and advocates, independence for Scotland in the absence of any further referendum.

**Is the pro-independence left now politically dead and beyond resuscitation?**

## BDS is a tactic, not a principle

By Omar Raii

**Last month the National Union of Students voted to support the call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel.**

This campaign has seen increases support by student unions around the country, but the controversial vote by the NUS is a major step forward for the BDS campaign.

The regrettable rise of “boycott Israel” politics is due to a confusion that has developed on the left in general. BDS has increasingly come to be seen as a *principle* for activists rather than a *tactic*.

To many, being a supporter of the Palestinian cause means supporting a boycott of Israel and vice versa. But of course boycotting Israel, whether right or wrong, is a tactic, and should be treated as such.

The principle is supporting the right of oppressed people (in this case the right of the Palestinians) to self-determination. Socialists should therefore be seriously thinking about whether or not their tactics are helping or harming the principled cause.

Sincere advocates of an Israeli-Palestinian peace must be

willing to think critically about the consequences of boycotting everything Israeli, from its goods to its universities.

Many students, wishing so desperately to carry on the tradition of the anti-apartheid movement that boycotted South Africa, have ended up seeing links between the two situations. The situations are very different. South African apartheid was based on a narrow white caste holding down a super-exploited black working-class. Israelis are not a narrow caste but a nation with a ruling class and a working class.

As well-meaning as BDS is, it based on false conceptions.

A further example of how badly the politics of the left in the NUS has degenerated is shown by the fact that the National Executive Council also very recently voted down a resolution to support the struggle of the peoples of Iraq against the Islamic State, for the nonsensical reason that this stance could be potentially supportive of western intervention.

**A student movement that finds it easy to boycott a country like Israel (including its trade union movement, peace movement and left) but cannot bring itself to support the Iraqis and Kurds is in a pretty sorry state politically.**



# Men with more money than sense

Beth Redmond reviews *The Riot Club*.

***The Riot Club*, based on Laura Wade's play "Posh", is a parody of the Bullingdon Club — the 200 year-old exclusive Oxford University society for men with more money than sense.**

The Bullingdon Club, as depicted in *The Riot Club*, calls itself a dining society, but it would be more accurate to describe it as a space for toffs to scream "look how much money we've got" at each other, interspersed with insulting poor people and saying "legend" over and over again.

I hated the trailer for the film and I felt nauseous every time I saw an advert for it on the tube, not just at the thought that this club was a real thing, but that the lizards running our country were once members.

We are introduced to a "nice" posh man called Miles, and without any subtlety whatsoever a rivalry is formed between him and a "nasty" posh man called Alistair. Luckily, they have been paired together for their tutorials, so we can see that nice Miles holds socialist values about the welfare state and the NHS, whereas Alistair believes that people like him shouldn't have to pay for the bad decisions of poor people.

Miles' girlfriend, Lauren, whom he meets in freshers' week, is a stark contrast to the Bullingdon boys. She talks, in a strong northern accent of course, about her worries about paying tuition fees and having to do extra work for her tutor in order to earn some more money.

In the next scene, we see Harry Villiers, a prominent member of The Riot Club, abandoning his car in the street and posting the keys through a random letterbox, musing "the ashtray was full anyway".

It is somewhat confusing as to why Miles is giving the gang of useless horrors, AKA The Riot Club, the time of day when he has his head screwed on. But both he and Alistair join anyway. It is also unclear why Miles holds such liberal views (read: common sense) in comparison to his peers, despite having a similar elitist upbringing.

The rest of the film is spent in a family-run, countryside pub, the owner of which is excited at the prospect of hosting young students from Oxford. The Riot Club, dressed in weird, tailored suits, shovel their way through £3000 worth of alcohol and food, their behaviour becoming more and more offensive throughout the night.

The way the men treat people who are lower down in their social league-table reflects, in more extreme form, the way

the Tories run the country and treat poor people today. We are detritus to them.

Alistair texts Lauren, pretending to be Miles, and she shows up to see him. It is hard to tell whether Miles is embarrassed by the Riot Club meeting Lauren or the other way around, but either way he begs her to leave. The rest of the men humiliate her,

offer her money for sex, pin her down and sexually assault her while her boyfriend does nothing. They then trash the room, ripping the wallpaper down and tearing the furniture from the walls, swinging from the ceilings like they are infected with rage.

The owner confronts them, and in an emotional moment he describes how different their lives are, how rich people are capable of destroying something someone has spent their whole lifetime making, so quickly, so easily and without any hint of remorse. The Club are so remorseless that they beat up and nearly kill the pub owner. They shove fifty pound notes down his throat and pour champagne over his unconscious body.

I wanted to leave the cinema at this point. I didn't really



care who got off or who got prosecuted.

Tories destroy the lives of poor people everyday, through their draconian tax policies, cuts to the NHS or stopping people's benefits. They do this because they don't see us as real people, and that is what this film highlighted for me.

Many reviews describe *The Riot Club* as hilarious but I didn't think it was funny at all. It was dark and sinister and it made me so angry that at one point I shouted to the pub owner "Fucking stab him". I got shushed by an usher.

**The only good thing I took away was hearing a group of young women talking as I was leaving, about how much they hate Tories and how disgusting it is that these kinds of people run the country. Maybe it is worth going to see this film after all.**

# Bringing sex out of the closet

Gemma Short reviews *Masters of Sex* (Channel Four)

**A TV drama that combines social commentary about a divided and changing America with fraught relationships, plenty of sex, and 50s outfits, *Masters of Sex* is a gripping watch.**

Now in its second series, *Masters of Sex* is the story of Bill Masters and Virginia Johnson, who in the late 50s embarked on an ambitious and daring study of human sexuality. Initially shunned for their work by most of the medical establishment, the series focusses on the struggles they faced both professionally and personally to get funding and recognition, and how their own attitudes changed along the way.

The Masters and Johnson study once published challenged most of the societally accepted "norms" about sexuality. It debunked ideas about women's lack of sexuality and "rediscovered" the female orgasm (contradicting Freud's work). It talked about sexual orientation, challenged the medical and psychological basis of sexual "dysfunctions" and undermined views still propagated by religious zealots today, linking sexual activity to physiological or psychological harm. It brought sex out into the open, something to be discussed, and something for the medical establishment to take seriously.

The series skilfully depicts individual stories against a backdrop of a changing America. An America on the brink of

the civil rights movement and the sexual revolution of the 60s. Masters, a well to do white obstetrician, finds himself with unexpected friends and allies as he stubbornly follows his study.

Having difficulty finding a home for his study he winds up working out of a brothel and later as the only white doctor at a "negro hospital" (American society was still segregated). He learns a lot from the women working in the brothel, following their suggestion of interviewing gay male prostitutes as well. As a backdrop to the story, his boss deals with the fact that he is gay, and his wife cannot get over her racist attitudes to their black home help.

Virginia Johnson is depicted in an even handed and interesting way. A single mother with no medical qualifications, she gets involved in the study at great personal risk. She is accused by other women of "using her body and charms to get herself ahead". She struggles against their accusations whilst simultaneously resisting the pressure to do that which they accuse her of.

Johnson eventually married Bill Masters (though the program has not got to this yet), after a long period of sporadic affairs. The series does not shy away from showing the nastier side of their relationship. You question the power dynamic at play as you see Masters' continual coldness towards Johnson, insisting that she was merely a participant in the study with him.

Though Masters and Johnson later went adrift with some of their ideas — toying with ideas of a "gay cure" — the significance of their work is not diminished. They brought sex out of the closet and into everyday conversation.

**Most interesting to me is how their story shows the ideological struggle against backward ideas and draws links with oppression in all areas of life.**



# False theories about “Zionist lobby”

By Martin Thomas

**Many of the protests against Israel’s murderous bombing of Gaza in July-August targeted, oddly, not so much the Israeli government as the BBC.**

The BBC was charged with having something different here from its usual bias towards conservatism. And the charge was part of a discourse which claims that the whole of established authority in the richer parts of the world has a special pro-Israel bias.

To unravel the issues, we can best start with the case of a different established authority, the Australian government.

In a batch of votes in the UN in November 2013, Australia was one of only eight states voting against a call on Israel to stop new settlements in the West Bank. It was one of only eleven voting against or abstaining on a call on Israel to abide by the Geneva Conventions.

Most of those other states voting with Israel in the UN are tiny and impoverished states in the Pacific, or sometimes in Latin America, ultra-dependent on the USA. Among relatively large states for whom “foreign policy” has a meaning other than looking for a rich benefactor, Australia stands alone with the USA and sometimes Canada on this issue.

An article by Vashti Kenway in *Marxist Left Review* of winter 2013 records that: “Under the Howard government [1996-2007], Australia’s UN voting record was the most pro-Israel in the world, except only the US and three small Pacific Island countries”, and investigates why.

Kenway reviews three explanations. Rightly, I think, she rejects all three.

The first explanation is Australia’s alliance with the US. But many other states ally consistently with the US without voting with Israel in the UN on Israeli-Palestinian questions. Saudi Arabia, for example. Or Jordan. Or most European states. The second explanation is the most common: “the Zionist lobby”.

## “CONCERN FOR ISRAEL”

**Kenway points out that historically most Australian Jews were wary of the Zionist movement for one of three disparate reasons.**

They were settled conservatives, hostile to a raucous band of agitators who might spoil their standing in the British Empire. They were leftists rejecting the project of settlement in Palestine as a diversion from class struggle in the countries where Jews lived as minorities. Or they just wanted to focus on integration into Australian society.

Today, Australian Jews identify themselves as concerned for Israel, and as “Zionist” (which today, for Jews who stay in Australia, cannot mean anything other than “concerned for Israel”). Kenway reads the shift in attitude as demonstrating a drift to the right among Australian Jews, but still rejects the idea that a “Zionist lobby” shapes Australian government policy.

In fact Jews are less than 0.5% of Australia’s population (according to the Jewish Virtual Library), or only 0.3% if you count only those who ticked a box in the 2011 census to identify as Jewish. Arab-Australians are more numerous, about 1.3% to 1.4%.

On average Australian Jews are better off than Arab-Australians, and on average that will give them more clout. But only by exaggerating that factor in the style of anti-semitic myths about the mysteriously all-powerful rich Jew can you think that the Jewish 0.5%, or 0.3%, or actually a subsection even of the 0.3%, can sway the whole polity. The pro-Netanyahu types do not have the alliance with a strong pro-Israeli-government “Christian Zionist” contingent which the pro-Israeli-government group in US Jewry has.

In most countries outside Israel, Jews are much less than 0.5% today. There are four others besides Australia where Jews make about 0.5% — Hungary, Uruguay, Argentina, the UK — none of which has the same pro-Israeli stridency as Australia. There are three where the Jewish minority is a bit larger — France, 0.8%; Canada, 1.1%; the USA, 1.7%.

Pro-Israeli-government strands among Australian Jews are more mobilised than in other countries where Jews are equally concerned for Israel in general. Pro-Netanyahu people were able to rally 10,000 on the streets of Sydney on 3 August. But that is another component of what we are trying to

explain, rather than an explanation.

Moreover, though Australian Jews have probably, on average, moved to the right as they have become more prosperous, the difference between their concern for Israel today and their lack of interest in the Jewish community in Palestine in the 1930s is not really a matter of becoming more right-wing.

In the 1930s, Jews who could find a fairly safe refuge, as in Australia, were inclined to dismiss those who called for a Jewish state as crazy trouble-makers. Things changed with the Holocaust. Most Australian Jews today will have relatives in Israel, and other relatives who died in the Holocaust. Concern for Israel is an almost inescapable reflex among Jews, and can be, and often is, combined with support for Palestinian rights and dislike of Israeli government policy.

The third explanation examined and rejected by Kenway is Australia’s and Israel’s common roots in settler-pioneer culture.

It is hard to see why vague historic parallels should have continuing grip. And if European settler states were bound to back Israeli government policy, why wouldn’t that apply to New Zealand, Argentina, and Uruguay?

In any case, Australian political parties’ attitude towards Palestine has varied over the long term.

Kenway records that in 1939 the Australian government was lobbying London not to be “unduly favourable to the Jews” in Palestine. It was worried about the threat to “imperial communication” (the sea route for trade between Australia and Britain) if Britain provoked revolt among the Arabs.

In the 1940s, Australian conservatives backed Britain in its war against the Jewish community in Palestine, while ALP leader H V Evatt strongly backed the creation of Israel. The Whitlam Labor government in the 1970s was less pro-Israeli-government than the conservatives had been.

Only today are the big political parties more or less united on this. Julia Gillard, as Labor prime minister, wanted Australia to oppose the Palestinian Authority even having observer status at the UN. She accepted an abstention only after heavy pressure from foreign minister Bob Carr (and from Labor MPs with large Arab-Australian populations in their electorates).

These variations in attitudes to Israel argue against the thesis that the current attitude is a product of deep historic factors long embedded in the country’s culture. And so do the available facts about Australian public opinion, as distinct from the attitude of government and some media, notably *The Australian*, a Murdoch publication which is Australia’s chief newspaper distributed nationally rather than primarily just in one state or another.

## POLLS

**Polls in November 2011 found that when asked “overall, do your sympathies lie more with the Israelis or the Palestinians?”, people replied: Israelis 26%, Palestinians 27%, neither 21%, can’t say 26%.**

That is a different balance from in Britain, for example, where a similar poll by YouGov in 2014 had only 14% saying their sympathies were with Israel; twice as many (28%) saying they sympathised with the Palestinians; 40% neither; 17% don’t know. (Pro-Israeli sentiment is concentrated among older people and Tories).

And in Australia as in Britain, many of those who say in general that they don’t know, or take neither side, back the Palestinians on practical questions. In the UK, only 17% thought that this year’s Israeli attacks on Gaza were justified. 54% said they were unjustified, and 29% “don’t know”. In Australia, when told in 2011 that Palestine was applying for UN membership and that Israel and the USA opposed it, 61% responded that they would back it.

Kenway’s conclusion is to explain the Australian elite’s stance as determined by the fact it “fits with Australian capitalism’s material and geopolitical interests in the Middle East and across the world”.

But she herself points out that Australian trade with Israel has “always been dwarfed by Australia’s extensive trade with various Arab states”.

There is a special “geopolitical” dimension in the USA’s attitude to Israel-Palestine. Since 1967 it has, with good cause from its own point of view, regarded all the Arab regimes as



Australian prime minister Tony Abbott

unreliable allies. Israel is a more reliable ally, and militarily competent. The USA’s backing for Israel enables it to do business in the Middle East through the vexatious but also rewarding trade of being the broker in all negotiations between Israel and the Arab states.

The USA’s long-term interest would be to push on those negotiations to get a workable settlement. But its short-term interest is often to stick with the devil it knows.

No similar “geopolitical” dimension can explain Australian government attitudes. No Arab regime thinks it has to deal with Australia in order to get terms with Israel.

As far as I can surmise, Kenway’s vague talk of “Australia’s geopolitical interests” is informed by the common, but obviously wrong, thesis that Israel is “the watchdog of imperialism in the Middle East”.

Israel has military might, but politically and economically is unable even to get ordinary dealings with most of the Arab states, let alone to dominate them. It could from its current position of strength almost certainly get those ordinary dealings, and security, from a deal which allowed the Palestinians their own really independent state alongside Israel. Criminally it chases not to. But that is another matter.

And when the US sends in troops or planes, as in Iraq in 1991 or 2003 or now, the very last thing it wants is Israeli collaboration or support. The “watchdog of imperialism” in the Middle East is Arab regimes, not Israel.

The idea that six million Israeli Jews dominate 300-plus million Arabs, seventy-plus million Iranians, and seventy-plus million Turks, is an internationalised version of the idea that Jews have demonic powers enabling a 0.3% minority of Jews within Australia secretly to dominate the whole polity.

Even if Israel did have a mysterious power to dominate its region which gave all the world’s richer countries a “geopolitical” interest in backing it, that would not explain why Australia would be more swayed by that “geopolitical” interest than many other states more invested in the Middle East.

Kenway’s “material and geopolitical” explanation is no better than the ones she rejects.

My provisional conclusion is that the pro-Israeli-right stance of John Howard, Julia Gillard, Tony Abbott (current prime minister), and Chris Mitchell (editor of *The Australian*) comes not from some structural basis of Australian capitalism, but from ideological influence and lack of countervailing pressure.

Those people have attitudes picked up from the right wing of politics in the USA. On other questions they are restrained by Australian public attitudes and social structures. They are less restrained on Israel partly because Australia (unlike the European Union) really has no great “geopolitical” role in the Middle East, i.e. for the opposite reason to that given by Vashti Kenway. And partly because pro-Palestinian public opinion in Australia is overwhelmingly passive.

The BBC does not have the same slant as the Australian government and *The Australian*. But if Palestine demonstrators demonise and wish to “boycott” the whole of Israeli society, fail to solidarise with the struggles within Israel which are vital for progress, and mutter darkly about “Zionist lobbies”, then the BBC’s characteristic search for “balance” within a “moderate” spectrum will tilt it pro-Israel.

**A rational argument for Palestinian rights, denouncing Israeli government policy but admitting that Israeli Jews are now a settled nation and have rights of national self-determination alongside a really independent Palestinian state, could mobilise a majority.**

## Outsourced hospital staff to strike action over pay

**200 GMB members employed by ISS at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich, South London, have voted for strikes to end two-tier conditions in NHS.**

The dispute is for the same pay rates, weekend enhancements and unsocial hours rates as the staff directly employed by the Trust.

The GMB members are employed as cleaners, security, ward hostesses, caterers, on the switchboard and as porters.

On 23 September GMB organised a protest outside the bondholders meeting of the PFI operator for the hospital.

ISS workers, which includes cleaners, security,

ward hostesses, caterers, switchboard operators and porters, are paid between £7.10 and £7.32 per hour. The lowest rate for directly employed workers is £7.33 ph which moves in yearly increments to £7.51 and £7.69 under the current NHS pay progression system.

ISS staff at Queen Elizabeth Hospital say they have felt undervalued, bullied and exploited. This happens whilst the PFI contractor for the hospital — Meridian Hospitals PLC — paid a dividend of £2,772,000 last year.

Money that could be used to pay workers a decent wage and improve care in the hospital is being used to line the pockets of private

business owners.

ISS is contracted to provide these services to the NHS by the owners of QEH, Meridian Hospitals plc but claims that the contract is not sufficiently funded to enable the company to pay staff the proper NHS rates.

**Meridian should be force to use some of their large profits to pay staff decent wages.**



## 90% of teachers think of quitting

**By a teacher**

**A National Union of Teachers (NUT) survey reveals 90% of teachers had considered giving up teaching during the last two years because of workload.**

The NUT has had joint action on workload with the NASUWT for the last two years. On paper, anyway. In fact there has been no national push on this for over a year.

Workplace level union or-

ganisation is needed to seriously change workload for teachers.

The union is in a "consultation ballot" (26 Sep/22 Oct) asking members whether they want the union to continue campaigning and whether they will strike for up to two days before the general election.

Activists should campaign for a yes/yes vote. But the NUT leaders' decision not to strike — despite existing ballot

authority — on 14 October makes the "two days strike" question look like a ploy by the union leaders to "prove" members don't want strikes.

**Teachers desperately need their union to show leadership.**



## Tube union reps discuss strike action

**By Jonny West**

**Elected workplace representatives from the Tube union RMT will meet on Thursday 2 October.**

They will discuss the next steps in the union's fight against staffing cuts and ticket office closures.

With the latest figures from London Underground showing that the final extent of job cuts could be over 2,000 posts, many RMT activists will be arguing for the union to escalate its campaign of industrial action and launch more strikes.

## "Night tube" needs more staff, not less

**London Underground has announced the "Night Tube" — 24-hour running on certain Tube Lines — will be operational by September 2015.**

Their announcement coincided with Tube union RMT's exposure of the extent of proposed job cuts — higher than the 953 posts first slated for the chop.

A 24-hour Tube service requires more staff, not fewer, with much greater care and consideration given to the effects of night shifts on workers' physical and mental wellbeing.

**While London Underground plans a recruitment intake of new station staff, their proposed figures hardly dent the job cuts they are already planning.**

## RMT must back cleaners

**ISS cleaners on London Underground returned a 92% majority on 21 September for strikes, and action short of strikes, in their dispute against biometric fingerprinting machines.**

As yet, the RMT's leadership has named no action.

Some ISS cleaners have now been locked out for three months for participating in a union action — refusing to use the biometric machines. They have had to fight to win decent strike pay from the union. Some senior union leaders are now saying there's no more money to fund the cleaners' fight.

RMT prides itself on being an all-grades, industrial union. It needs to fight as hard for cleaners as it does for any other

grade. RMT should activate the strike ballot by calling action-short-of-strikes, then following it up with strikes around 14 October, when we hope London Underground workers may also strike again in their jobs dispute.

If ISS goes after cleaners who've participated in union action, the union needs to back them up, including with funding for tribunals if it comes to that.

**If the ISS cleaners' dispute is allowed to go out with a whimper, it will severely damage the confidence of cleaners, and other workers, in the union.**



## Construction workers' wild-cat action wins better toilets

**By Gerry Bates**

**Construction workers at Ferrybridge power station have taken wildcat strike action over toilet facilities at the site.**

The workers, members of unite, say that the facilities were dirty, blocked and without toilet paper. They also claim there are not

enough toilets for the number of workers.

Around 100 workers picketed the gates of the plant on Tuesday 30 September. Quickly management agreed to provide more toilets, a cleaner and have agreed not to dock wages for the period of the strike.

**Workers will return to work, victorious, on Wednesday 1 October.**

## Support victimised Tube workers

**Solidarity has reported on the victimisation of Tube workers Noel Roberts and Alex McGuigan. They are still fighting for reinstatement.**

A third worker has now been sacked on trumped-up charges, relating to an incident at their workplace. Outrageously, management relied on statements about CCTV footage even though the footage itself had been destroyed and neither the worker nor the rep had been allowed to see it.

In a separate incident, a Station Supervisor was stood down from his duties for participating in a

legal union action after he refused to work through his designated meal break.

London Underground bosses are on the warpath, embarking on a campaign of summary, authoritarian dismissals and disciplinary procedures. Their intention is, undoubtedly, to signal to the workforce to keep their heads down and stay in line at a time when management is attempting to impose drastic cuts and closures.

**Where management victimise workers, Unions must resist.**

• For more information: [rmtlondoncalling.org.uk](http://rmtlondoncalling.org.uk)

## Charity workers pay cut; boss's pay rise

**By Gemma Short**

**Workers at St Mungo's Broadway, a housing charity, are being given a £5000 pay cut whilst their boss receives a £30,000 rise.**

500 Unite members are being balloted over striking against the pay cut.

Management have reduced the pay of new starters and for existing staff being restructured by £5,000-a-year; taken pay out of collective bargaining; imposed new and draconian policies and procedures.

**Unite members have already passed a vote of no confidence in their management.**

## UCU ballot on pension proposals

**By a UCU member**

**UCU will be balloting its members over new government proposals to the USS pensions scheme.**

The proposal would move staff from a final salary pension scheme, to a career average one. Staff could lose between 2% and 27% on their pension depending on when they joined the scheme, age and final salary. The proposal also includes an earnings cap for working out the average and a new defined contribution pot whose income would depend upon investment performance and would not be guaranteed.

The USS scheme covers staff at pre-92 universities. The ballot opens on 1 October

**UCU members are angry about the proposals, and large numbers have turned up to union meetings on the issue.**





Secondary school students have joined the protests

## Hong Kong workers strike for democracy

By Charlotte Zalens

**Democracy protests in Hong Kong are escalating, and the state has responded with severe police repression and brutality.**

The protests are against limitations on candidates for a 2017 election, by universal suffrage, for the next Hong Kong Chief Executive.

All candidates will be vetted by a nominating committee composed largely of Beijing loyalists, making it impossible for genuine radicals and democrats to stand.

Since 1997 when Hong Kong was returned to Chinese rule by Britain, the “one country, two systems” framework has allowed Hong Kong to have relative freedom for the press, courts and trade union organisation compared to mainland China.

The framework stipulated that Hong Kong would exist as a country alongside China for 50 years, until 2047, with its own structures of governance decided by the people of Hong Kong. Before handover Lu Ping, China’s then top official for Hong Kong, said “How Hong Kong develops its democracy in the future is completely within the sphere of the autonomy of Hong Kong...The central government will not interfere.”

But in June of this year the Chinese ruling party released a paper stating that it has “complete jurisdiction” over Hong Kong.

Several large protests kicking back against attempts at repression by China have happened since the handover. This year 180,000 marched in Hong Kong on the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989, and 500,000 took to the streets on 1 July for the annual democracy march. In 2003 hundreds of thousands marched against new security laws, and in 2012 students and teachers pushed back legislation that mandated the teaching of “patriotic education” about China.

The recent protests have mainly been organised under the banner of “Occupy Central with Peace and Love”, a social-media-linked Occupy movement. It is

largely student dominated, and the Federation of Students has been organising a week long boycott of classes. Pro-Chinese organisations have set up hotlines for people to report students taking part in the boycott and in protests, but it has been flooded with prank calls.

Police have responded to the demonstrations with violence. 27 protestors have been hospitalised and over 90 arrested in the first few days. Police have been using batons, tear gas and shields as weapons against unarmed people. As *Solidarity* went to press the riot police were starting to withdraw from the central business district area where most protests were happening.

The Chinese state media has predictably not reported on the protests, reporting that a thousand protestors held a “celebration of China” in Tamar Park. The social network Instagram was banned after protestors shared images of the protests and of police violence.

On 29 September 200 workers at a plant that bottles for Coca Cola struck in support of the democracy protests. They made signs that read: “workers support students” and “democracy and livelihood are inseparable”.

The Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) called a general strike on 29 September. The Professional Teachers’ Union and Hong Kong Union of Dockworkers, members of the HKCTU, have said they will join the strike. The teachers’ union and many university staff have supported the student strike.

The HKCTU has demanded the end to police violence, the release of those arrested in recent actions, the repeal of the “fake universal suffrage”, and the resignation of Leung Chun Ying — the current Chief Executive.

**There is potential for workers in Hong Kong to organise around democratic demands alongside student activists. Such a fightback in Hong Kong could not fail to have an impact in mainland China, despite heavy censorship.**

## Syrian Kurds under threat of ISIS massacre

By Simon Nelson

**Tens of thousands of Syrian Kurdish refugees poured into Turkey at the end of September, fleeing an attack by ISIS on the city of Kobani.**

Kobani is one of Syria’s major Kurdish cities. It is close to the border, in an area which from 2012 until now has been controlled by Syrian-Kurdish forces.

Al Jazeera reported a total of 138,000 refugees from Kobani up to 29 September. At least 105 villages around Kobani have already been captured by ISIS.

The Iraqi Kurdish website Rudaw reports: “Large numbers of Islamic State (IS) militants withdrew from [the traditionally Yezidi] Shingal region [of Iraq] (29 September) and headed to the Syrian border”.

Turkey’s president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said that Turkey’s troops could join battle against ISIS. He demands from the USA that it declare and protect a safe-haven zone on the Syrian side of the Syria-Turkey border, impose of a no-fly zone to protect the refugees there, and organise for Turkish participation in training and equipping the Syrian opposition.

So far the Pentagon has said that safe havens and no-fly zones are no part of its plans.

The resistance to the ISIS attack for now depends solely on the Kurdish nationalist forces of the YPG (linked to the PKK in Turkey). A decisive issue is the arming of the Kurdish forces, who do not have the military firepower of ISIS.

Following the vote in the House of Commons on 26 September the UK has joined, the US, France, and others in air strikes on ISIS targets in Iraq.

The US is continuing, with the support of the Gulf Arab states, also to bomb targets in Syria which it identifies with ISIS or other groups akin to Al Qaeda.

The stated aim of the bombing is to destroy ISIS infrastructure, weapons, and capacities.

The record of the USA’s bomb-

ing against the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the political fact that the USA enters this conflict as the assistant-from-the-air of the Shia-sectarian Iraqi government in Baghdad and of corrupt despotisms like Saudi Arabia, mandates no confidence in the campaign.

A stance like that of *Socialist Worker* of 27 September — describing the bombing as “the imperial powers... reimpos[ing] their hegemony over the region”, and denouncing it under the headline “Say No To War”, as if there would be no war without the bombing — amounts to back-handed complaisance towards ISIS.

However, the bombing so far has come nowhere near to destroying ISIS’s capacities. ISIS has not even been driven onto the defensive, but continues to seek to extend its murderous sectarian rule, as around Kobani.

At Amariya al-Falluja, a town 25 miles from Baghdad, the Iraqi army is reported to be just about stalling an ISIS advance towards Baghdad from Falluja, the first city in Iraq to fall into ISIS control. Air strikes have supported the Iraqi army.

We can have no confidence in the air strikes, or in the political thieves’-kitchen coalition which underpins them, as the effective way to destroy IS. But lead slogans like “Stop the bombing” are wrong.

**They put the focus on negative opposition to the US-led coalition rather than on positive support for the people at immediate risk from ISIS in Iraq and Syria.**



Syrian Kurds flee to Turkey