

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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MURDERED FOR PROFIT!

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.
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Spanish workers resist cuts

By John Cunningham

Despite the return to work by Spanish miners, resistance to the government's austerity measures continues.

The decision by the Spanish miners' unions to call off their strike came as a surprise to many observers (including the writer of these lines). Nevertheless, in the coalfields and in much of the rest of Spain, the situation can hardly be described as "normal".

In announcing the end of the strike, Felipe López, the General Secretary of the Industrial Section of the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), stated: "We are going to do what will hurt them [the government] most, where it hurts them

most and at a time when it will hurt them most."

As if responding directly to these words, miners and their supporters have continued their militant tactics.

On 9 August there was a large demonstration of women from the mining region in Oviedo, Asturias, while the blocking of roads in certain places has continued.

In one incident, miners intercepted a convoy of lorries carrying coal for a power station and dumped their loads on the motorway.

In some localities strikes have resumed, with miners working for the Uminsa group walking out over the cutting of their wages as management announced a 200 Euro cut in the monthly wage due to the drastic re-

duction in subsidies announced by the government earlier in the year. This has affected the Santa Cruz and Alinos pits, the open cast site at Jarrinas, and a major coal washing plant at Alicia de Fabera (all in León and Castile). In total some 400 workers are involved.

In much of the rest of Spain unrest continues almost daily as workers resist the austerity measures imposed by the government in Madrid.

All eyes are currently on the small town of Marinaleda in Andalusia where the mayor, Juan Manuel Sanchez Gordillo, has earned the wrath of the government (who can't touch him because his mayoral office confers legal immunity) for encouraging

organised groups of trade unionist to take food from supermarkets to distribute to those worst hit by the recession. Dubbed the "Robin Hood Mayor" by the Spanish press he is now organising a march on Madrid.

Whether or not the miners' unions, having taken their men out and then returned to work, can mobilise them again for another all-out strike remains to be seen.

However, we can be certain that there is no shortage of anger about the austerity programme which has already inflicted on the people the highest unemployment rate in the whole of Europe.

Further action by miners and other sectors of workers is certain.

Pakistan: abolish the blasphemy law!

By Dan Katz

A young Christian girl, Rimsha Masih, has been arrested and her family placed under protective custody after a Muslim mob in a poor part of Islamabad threatened to set her alight for allegedly burning pages of the Koran.

Nine hundred Christians living in the slum neighbourhood, where they have lived for almost two decades, have been forced to leave. A local Mullah told reporters: "We are not upset the Christians have left and we will be pleased if they don't come back. They have done this to provoke the Muslims, like they have with their noisy banging and singing from their churches."

A large group of bigots had surrounded the police station and blocked major roads demanding Masih be charged under the state's blasphemy law.

Islam is the state religion of Pakistan, and although the country's blasphemy law is supposed to uphold offences against all religions, it is used disproportionately against non-Muslims. Over 95% of Pakistanis are Muslim, but 50% of cases are brought against non-Muslims.

This law is draconian. The penalty for damaging a copy of the Koran is life in prison. A Christian

couple was sentenced to 25 years in 2010 after being accused of touching the Koran with unwashed hands.

Someone convicted of denigrating Muhammad can be sentenced to death. Although the death penalty has not been carried out, at least 20 people who have been accused of blasphemy have been murdered.

Last month, in southern Pakistan a man accused of blasphemy was dragged from a police cell and burnt alive by an angry crowd.

In January 2011 Salmaan Taseer, the governor of Punjab, was murdered by his bodyguard because he supported Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death under the law (her case is still going through higher courts).

In March 2011, Shahbaz Bhatti, a Catholic, and a People's Party politician and Minister of Minority Affairs, was also assassinated for his support of Asia Bibi and his prominent opposition to the blasphemy law.

Religious intolerance is increasing in Pakistan. Last week, gunmen executed 25 Shiites after taking them off a bus near Mansehra, north of Islamabad.

On Saturday, Hindu leaders in Sindh, in the south of Pakistan, called on the government to protect their community from forced conversions by Muslim extremists.

Tunisia: Islamists attack artists

By Mark Osborn

In June Salafists — hard-line Islamists — attacked a Tunis art gallery, sparking riots that left one person dead and more than 100 injured. During the riots trade union buildings, courts and police stations were also attacked.

The government then banned Islamist marches apparently organised by the groups Hizb ut-Tahrir and Ansar al-Shariah.

Salafists are now systematically attacking cultural events they regard as "un-Islamic". Five people were injured on Thursday 16 August when Islamists armed with swords and clubs disrupted the Bizerte music and theatre festival. Eventually the thugs were dispersed by police using tear gas.

Other shows have been

cancelled. Last week the well-known actor, Lotfi Abdelli, was prevented from performing his comedy act "100% Halal" by an occupation of the auditorium.

Salafist organisations were prevented from participating in last year's October election. However a Salafist party, the Jabhat al-Islah (Islamic Reform Front), was officially recognised in May. It is campaigning for the introduction of Sharia law.

The leading party in the government is a less-extreme Islamist party, Ennahda.

"The [aim of the] Salafists try to push us," say Rachid al-Ghannouchi, founder of Ennahda,

Obligingly Ennahda has drafted a law, yet to be debated in parliament, which could see anyone convicted of violating religious values jailed for up to two years.

Support Iranian labour activists

Alireza Asgari and Jalil Mohammadi, labour activists and members of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organisations, were arrested when Iranian security forces raided the annual general meeting of the Committee on 15 June.

Asgari has now been sentenced to serve a year in prison. Mohammadi, suffering from a deteriorating physical condition sustained during his interrogation, was given a three-year suspended sentence. He must report regularly to authorities.

The International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran is organising protests against these sentences.
● More details: tinyurl.com/8wllbsg

Julian Assange, free speech and rape

By Mark Osborn

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange is now holed up in Ecuador's Embassy, west London, having been granted political asylum by Ecuador's president, Rafael Correa. Correa says he granted asylum to prevent Assange being extradited to a "third country", meaning the US.

There is now a stand-off between the British state — which wants to send him to Sweden, where he faces allegations of rape and sexual assault, following a completed process in the British courts — and Assange and his protector, Correa.

There are two questions here about Assange.

First, the issue of the charges he faces in Sweden.

Second there is his fear — probably he is correct to fear this — that the US will, at some point, attempt to get him extradited to face charges that WikiLeaks published secret US documents, and that if the Americans succeed in getting their hands on him they will lock him up and throw away the key.

Solidarity considers Assange innocent of the rape charges until proven guilty. We do not know if he is guilty or not, and we know he denies the charges. But we certainly think he should go to Sweden and answer the allegations.

Secondly, whether he is guilty or not of publishing US secret documents, we

are against him spending time in jail for it. We do not regard the printing of such documents by WikiLeaks as a crime. (In power this is something a workers' government would do, on a much grander scale, as a matter of course).

The problem now is that the way Assange and some of his supporters are presenting themselves minimises the importance of the sexual allegations against him, treating them as either minor details or as part of a conspiracy by the US to discredit Assange and/or make it easier for the US to extradite him. (Or, in the case of George Galloway, treating the alleged rapes as both minor matters and as part of a US conspiracy).

The Swedish state's legal system is independent and does not simply deliver verdicts at the whim of Swedish politicians or, still less, Washington. Swedish law requires evidence showing "probable cause" for believing the crime was committed, before any extradition request can be

made. In other words we have every reason to believe Assange has a serious case to answer.

In fact so do his lawyers. At Assange's extradition hearing one had this to say: "Nothing I say should be taken as denigrating the complainants, the genuineness of their feelings of regret, to trivialise their experience or to challenge whether they felt Assange's conduct was disrespectful, discourteous, disturbing or even pushing the boundaries of what they felt comfortable with."

Moreover, while the threat to Assange of serious US jail-time is real, it is probably the case that he will be safer in Sweden than in the UK (Swedish legal safeguards against unjustified extradition to the US are stronger than Britain's). So it is difficult to take seriously the link being made by his supporters between extradition to Sweden and possible future extradition to the US (in other words the legal proceedings in Sweden are not a pretext to make it easier for Assange to be whisked off to America.)

Last Sunday Assange made a statement from the embassy balcony, to waiting media and supporters. He failed to mention the case he faces in Sweden, concentrating instead on the US threat to WikiLeaks. That underlines the suspicion that Assange fails to take the charges seriously. And he should. And so should the left.

Of course George Gal-

loway is not on the left. It is unfortunate that there are still a few that think he is (or pretend to for opportunistic reasons). Nevertheless there is something to shock everyone in Galloway's remarks in defence of Assange: "[Even] if these allegations made by these two women are true... they don't constitute rape... I mean not everyone needs to be asked prior to each insertion." Galloway's remarks brought this rebuke from Katie Russell for Rape Crisis, "It is staggering how ignorant, factually and morally incorrect George Galloway can be."

And Rafael Correa is not the perfect ally either. He is one of a series of South American leaders who combine radical rhetoric with local repression and is using the Assange case for self-promotion. Correa has a poor record on free speech at home. In 2011, he closed a string of radio and television stations in a bid to silence critics. According to Human Rights Watch, five journalists were jailed for "disrespecting" the government between 2008 and 2011.

Of course Julian Assange might argue he is little choice in the friends he chooses. In 1937 Trotsky took refuge in Mexico, run by a radical and repressive nationalist regime.

A difference, of course, between Trotsky and Assange is that Trotsky was trying to stop Stalin silencing him, (eventually killing him) — and Assange appears to be trying to avoid a rape case.

Fight imperialism, denigrate women...

By Gerry Bates

The Assange case has shone a light on the degree of the political degeneracy of parts of the left.

Women's rights, and regard for the rights of victims of rape and sexual assault have fallen by the wayside in the Assange case. Put aside because of a perceived conflict with principles of "anti-imperialism". Facts and politics are interpreted through the lens of conspiracy theories.

The limited legal protections against sexual abuse, often won through struggle, can be dismissed as "capitalist justice" and therefore grounds for dismissing the allegations here!

Many "left-wing" commentators are employing the traditional tools of misogynists against the women in this case, seeking to undermine their credibility by analysing their behaviour at the time of the

attacks (as if women who have been sexually assaulted are obliged to behave in a particular way); seizing on their every delay in bringing the case and forensically examining every conceivable discrepancy in their stories.

Apart from the well-known reactionary George Galloway's claim that "not everyone needs to be asked prior to each insertion", perhaps the worst behaviour in this regard comes from the maverick former British ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray.

Murray even named one of Assange's accusers on the BBC show *Newsnight*, a shocking breach of the woman's right to anonymity.

But for many defenders of Assange, these women are simply elements in a CIA plot and therefore do not deserve the rights and protections that other women do. How do they know this? Because they are accusing their anti-im-

perialist hero, Assange.

Alan Woods of the International Marxist Tendency has written a long article denouncing a CIA plot against Assange. Woods dismisses the idea that the Swedish government might want to extradite Assange because he has a case to answer in court: "The Swedish Tartuffes try to mask their treachery with a 'progressive' colouring. Their persecution of Assange, you see, has nothing to do with his anti-American activities. Oh no! It is to do with the defence of 'women's rights'."

Woods writes reams of conspiracy-theory shtick dressed up as international political analysis. Smears like this are "the oldest tricks in the arsenal of the CIA"; and "the government of Sweden is in the pockets of the Americans. A single phone call would suffice to obtain the most enthusiastic participation of Stockholm in this disgusting witch hunt."

The possibility that a bourgeois state might wish to try Assange for a serious crime appears not to have occurred to Woods — perhaps it is just not as attractive as his conspiracy theories.

More ludicrous still, Woods claims that the defence of Assange is crucial to "the defence of democratic rights" against capitalist attempts to "put the clock back a hundred years".

But the right to pursue a rapist through the courts; to remain anonymous; and to be taken seriously is also a democratic right, won through struggle, which should be defended — even under a severely limited capitalist justice system.

In fact it is so-called "leftwingers" who defend Assange by wrapping the facts up in conspiracy theory who want to turn back the clock on these hard-won rights.

Circle sacks Hinchingsbrooke workers

Stop these parasites!

By Todd Hamer

News of potential job losses at Circle-run Hinchingsbrooke Hospital has come as no surprise to campaigners who opposed a controversial franchise deal.

Six months into the deal, which was seen by many as a testing ground for the future of the NHS, it is rumoured that 50 nursing and nursing assistant posts could go as part of efficiency savings. It is also believed that £500,000 has been cut from the cleaning budget with staff facing cuts and redundancies.

When the management of Hinchingsbrooke Healthcare Trust was taken over by Circle in February ministers declared it was a 'financial and clinical "basket case"'. At the beginning of August Circle's ex-banker boss Ali Parsa announced that he had turned the hospital around, reducing waiting times and improving patient satisfaction.

The Tory press went wild with joy citing private sector management as the saviour of the NHS. However, as Hands off Hinchingsbrooke campaigner, Steve Sweeney, Secretary of Huntingdonshire Trades Union Council points out: "Circle made a loss of £2.3 million in the months up to June 2012 and is believed to require a loan to meet its

cost improvement plans. Circle seem to have a very effective PR machine that has managed to spin what is looking more and more like the disaster we feared it would be into a success.

"Many of the so called successes at Hinchingsbrooke seem superficial. As predicted, the so called efficiencies in reality mean cuts to services and loss of front-line jobs in nursing and cleaning staff."

Parsa says: "we believe our partners — the doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals — should run their own hospitals." But that begs the question: what role is left for management? And would a truly workers-led hospital consider cutting 46 nursing posts and placing an additional burden on the remaining staff?

An article in *Health Service Journal* reveals that Circle is targeting 32 hospital trusts in what it sees as an £8 billion "NHS growth opportunity"

The George Eliot Hospital Trust in Warwickshire may be next in line for the Circle treatment with the Department of Health set to announce soon on whether it is suitable for private franchise management.

We must link up the battle for a publicly owned, funded and accountable NHS and kick out these private sector parasites.



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The riots, one year on

By Tom Harris

Now, as at the time, much of the political establishment and media has marked the anniversary of the 2011 riots with moralism and shrill denunciations, but very little in the way of objective analysis.

In contrast, the journal *Race and Class* published an article by Warwick University academic Lee Bridges examining the evidence. It draws a markedly different set of conclusions.

Bridges' account places the riots in context: the killing of Mark Duggan by the Metropolitan Police in Tottenham took place in an area of long-standing tension between the local community and the police.

Tottenham MP David Lammy made much of supposed improvements in relations, but statistics suggest otherwise. 6,894 stop and searches had taken place in the local borough of Haringey in the three months preceding June 2011; only 87 resulted in arrest and conviction.

National statistics show police stop and searches have increased in recent years and continue to be disproportionately targeted at black and Asian youth. Many of the young black people targeted by police today come from families where parents and grandparents suffered similar discrimination.

Police harassment has not been limited to black communities in London.

When the London School of Economics surveyed those involved in rioting, the complaint of regular police harassment, "humiliation, unjust suspicion and lack of respect" was made in every city in which research took place, "by interviewees of different racial groups and ages".

This sense of resentment and injustice was exacerbated by the nature of Mark Duggan's death. Following his shooting by the Metropolitan Police, his family were not contacted by either the Met or the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) for several days.

There was no explanation or apology and no senior police officer visited Tottenham.

Popular anger in Tottenham was further stoked by a lack of police response to stories in the press. Newspapers described Duggan's death as having followed a shoot-out with police, one officer supposedly having been hit.

This, it later emerged, was false, but no denial was made by either the Met or the IPCC. Reports of Duggan having been "a well-known gangster" (a claim denied by the community and family), and even a claim that he had been dragged from his minicab, held down and shot, all met with silence.

A peaceful protest was staged, the plan being to march to the local police station and demand information on the killings. The

Met report says the demonstration was to be policed in "facilitative" manner, but with a Tactical Support Group and anti-knife unit held in reserve. Neither the duty inspector nor the chief inspector were able to answer the demands of the protesters, and a call was made to a senior officer to come to Tottenham.

THROWN
As darkness fell, anger boiled over and by the time the officer had arrived, missiles had already been thrown at police lines and police vehicles had been set alight.

The Met/IPCC report of this first night of rioting shows that the narrative provided by politicians and the mainstream press is not accurate.

The next day, local MPs blamed the riots on "mindless, mindless people", fuelled by "nihilism" and "hedonism". And yet the Met's own report does not describe a mass outbreak of theft but a lashing out at the police. Looting of shops was primarily to get bottles and other objects to throw at the police.

After the riots had ended David Cameron described them as "criminality, pure and simple", Nick Clegg inveighed against "needless and opportunist theft and violence".

More awkward was the position of Labour politicians, eager to jump on a moral band-wagon, but also aware that racist polic-

ing and social inequality were things they were meant to acknowledge and condemn.

Lammy got round this contradiction by seeking to draw a line between the past, where racist policing and social exclusion did take place, and the present, where, those factors having vanished, rioting must be the product of "sinister elements" with "mindless" impulses.

The Tottenham riots were different from the Broadwater Farm riots of 1985, Lammy explained, because while the 1985 riot (sparked by the death of a black woman during a police raid of her home) was sparked by racial tensions and abrasive policing, this had since "improved immeasurably", leaving very little reason for grievance. The testimonies of many residents of Tottenham contradict this claim.

None of this is to deny that looting and theft did make up a larger element of the rioting in other parts of the city and the country. Or to imply that that burning down homes, or the other hurt people suffered when the looting occurred

is morally defensible. But there is more to say.

As *Guardian* journalist Gary Younge has argued, "insisting on the criminality of those involved, as though alone that explains the motivation and the context is irrelevant, is fatuous."

The problem for the Tories and other bourgeois politicians was they felt compelled not only to denounce the violence and to promise to restore order, but also to provide some explanation for what had taken place.

ENRAGED
Why had so many people felt so enraged and disenfranchised that attacking the state, as well as burning down portions of their own neighbourhoods, had seemed like an attractive idea?

Any serious answer, that takes into account poverty and unemployment, racism and disenfranchisement, would require a change of policy to address these issues. Since such policies run counter to the interests of the Tories, a different explanation had to be found.

Examples of such explanations, and suggested remedies, could be found in the report of the Riots Communities and Victims Panel (RCVP).

The RCVP, set-up on a cross-party basis in place of a judge-led inquiry, produced conclusions Victorian in their outlook. While the riots were indeed linked to poverty, this

poverty was blamed on a lack of "moral character" and family break-down. Impoverishment had less to do with a 50% unemployment rate among black youth, and more to do with a lack of father figures. The solution? Councils should encourage community volunteers, "local uniformed organisations" such as scout groups and girl guides.

Failing schools, rather than needing support, should be penalised. These same schools should be monitored for "building character" in their pupils. The grotesqueness of these suggestions contrasts with the grim reality of Britain's poorest areas.

In Haringey eight out of 12 youth groups have been closed due to Tory austerity, with the rest under threat. Social support and employment services have been slashed, with replacement Youth Work Promise schemes not guaranteeing employment until two years of a candidate not having work.

The Tories tell poor young people to buck up their ideas, that poverty is their own fault, while simultaneously cutting any means for the same people to improve their situation.

The left must provide an alternative to this driveline. A world free of these miseries is possible, and the rage of the riots can be channelled into a militant and transformative political struggle.

Organising postgraduate workers

Jenny Thatcher from the Postgraduate Workers' Association spoke to *Solidarity* about the campaign.

At first I saw PhD students working for free as a local, internal issue at my university, University of East London. But when I set up a Facebook group, "PhD students should not work for free", I started to get emails, first from people at University of London universities, and then from across the country.

There was a general feeling that we needed a national campaign, and the Postgraduate Workers' Association (PGWA) came out of that.

We had our first meeting on 28 April, and a bigger meeting, more of a conference, on 26 May, which was covered by the *Independent*. It was there that we formally launched the PGWA.

I think UCU were worried initially, but they

quickly realised that we wanted to work with them. Their anti-casualisation committee has been really helpful and we've worked together very closely.

The biggest issue facing postgraduate research students is not being paid for much of the work we do. Most of us have contracts, fixing how much we are paid per hour, but these contracts make assumptions about how much time we need for preparation and marking, assumptions which drastically underestimate. It means we are generally very low paid. The British Postgraduate Philosophy Association did a survey which found that the average rate per hour, in real terms, at one university was £4.79.

The Philosophy Postgraduate Association did some research; they divided the amount postgrads were paid by the amount of hours they were working, and found an

average of something like £4. Quite a few were paid as little as £3!

Then there are related issues linked to casualisation, like the demand for sick pay and holiday pay.

That's if postgrads are lucky enough to get paid teaching work at all. There's an assumption that you'll get teaching, but with funding cuts, more and more work is being piled onto established lecturers and there's less and less for postgrads – just as in society as a whole there is more unemployment and simultaneously workers are working harder and longer. In other words, lecturers and postgrads are sharing the fate of the broader working class.

I understand why some lecturers, under more and more pressure, welcome postgrads working for free, helping them with marking and so on. But that is more reason why everyone has to be organised to resist.

There are particular issues facing international students: when they arrive they often find there is no work. Some are given bursaries for their fees, but in return have to work for free a number of hours, which means that they can't do any other jobs.

I've also heard of PGCE students – people training to be school teachers – being told they have to do university teaching as part of their training. This is a very worrying development.

What I think we'd like to see from UCU is a higher profile campaign to recruit and organise postgraduates. Often now people come to me with their problems, but they're not part of the union and often resist joining. That's not surprising when PhD students have been threatened, when they're afraid they won't get jobs if they join.

Obviously we have to

persuade individuals but a higher profile and more active union presence and campaign would help a lot. Hopefully, our work with the UCU anti-casualisation committee will raise the union's profile with postgrads.

We also need to think about the issue of what postgrads do and what universities try to force them to do during strikes. At UEL, where the unions are well organised, the uni has simply shut down, but in other places it may be more of an issue.

From student unions, the first thing I'd like to see is some detailed research on the situation at their institutions, followed by local campaigns. At UCL they already had a good campaign when we started, but many SUs still don't. At UEL the SU has been quite reluctant to get involved.

I'd like to see the PGWA grow and draw in many more activists, as a broad,

welcoming, non-sectarian campaigning organisation.

I'd like to see a good gender balance among our activists, and more students from "non-traditional backgrounds", for instance student parents, mature students, and students from ethnic minorities.

We need to expand the range of subjects we are working in, and do research and campaigning in those areas. We also need to move beyond academic study and help organise vocational postgrads in areas like teaching and social work.

We have plans for a national conference in the autumn and for a postgrad bloc on the NUS national demo and maybe the TUC demo too.

I also hope we will bring about a change in the way postgraduates are viewed, so it is understood that we are workers facing exploitation and not just students.

Pussy Riot: performance and protest

By Saraid Dodd

Nadya Tolokonnikova, Maria Alekhina and Yekaterina Samutsevich, three members of Russian punk band "Pussy Riot", have been sentenced to two years in jail for "hooliganism" for performing their "Punk Prayer" at Christ the Saviour Cathedral, Russia's main Christian Orthodox place of worship.

As part of their trial on 8 August, the women read testimonies out in court. When each speech was met with applause, the Judge (Marina Syrova) responded: "We are not in a theatre."

It was an apt response, therefore, for London's Royal Court Theatre to stage readings of the testimonies, translated by Sasha Dugdale, on the day of the verdict, 17 August. Three actresses performed these testimonies with humility. They read directly from the scripts, retaining an appropriate distance from their speeches so as to remind the audience that they were simply vessels for the words. The readings were free and performed in the theatre bar, which was packed to capacity.

This event was a wel-

come accompaniment to the protest at the Russian Embassy and other solidarity actions that took place around the world, not least because these women embody political theatre. If a theatrical institution claims to be political, it should pay tribute to and agitate for these women. Despite the name, the Royal Court is a political theatre.

POLITICAL THEATRE
The Royal Court Theatre was born in 1956 in direct response to the staid and archaic theatre of the time.

Its early productions, including Edward Bond's "Saved" and John Osborne's "Look Back in Anger", presented a direct challenge to the state; particularly the official censors of the London stage, the Lord Chamberlain's Office.

It was the healthy movement of playwrights, directors, actors and, most important, audience behind this theatre that eventually led to the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, and subsequently theatrical censorship at large, in 1968.

Defending Pussy Riot chimes well with the Royal Court's *raison d'être*: freedom from censorship and interference in art.

Pussy Riot defendant Nadya Tolokonnikova

There was something uncomfortable, however, about the air of self-congratulation among some audience members at this event. It struck me that, like Madonna, Paul McCartney and David Cameron himself, it is a trend among liberal pockets of society to pat themselves on the back for being successfully "free".

Mainstream responses to the Olympics opening ceremony were a perfect example of this. We are happy to celebrate our multiculturalism and equality within the safe parameters of performance, but less willing to protest against Olympic security providers, G4S, over their racist murder of Angolan refugee Jimmy Mubenga.

It is with this in mind, that I am somewhat cynical

about the patronage of political causes within theatre establishments. Do we have a right to "observe" such politics through the refracted process of performance without then following it up with action? Or even turning our minds to millions of similar instances over which people are saying nothing at all?

Why are we not hearing about the three-year jail sentence handed (the day before the Pussy Riot trial) to Bahraini Nabeel Rajab for three peaceful protests against the oppressive Sunni al-Khalifa dynasty? Where is Madonna's anger over that?

In Tolokonnikova's testimony, she decries the "low level of political culture" in her society. She labels the mainstream media outlets of Russia as scandalous in

their manipulation of material.

These women, by their own description, are activists and artists. In their testimonies they make it clear that they are disciples of the Russian absurdist poets of 1937, purged under Stalin.

ENVIRONMENTAL
They also refer to their own environmental activism, they criticise the role of corporations in their country's governance, and they seek to expose the hypocrisy behind the Kremlin's manipulation of Russian Orthodoxy for political ends.

Although they acknowledge the support of Madonna, and even David Cameron, in their testimonies, I believe they would prefer for their trial to illuminate injustices against protesters worldwide; from Nabeel Rajab to the 182 cyclists arrested for protesting peacefully outside the Olympic Stadium on 27 July.

I'd like to believe that Nadya, Maria and Yekaterina, were they London residents, would be just as active against the "low level political culture" that prevents the majority from

defending our existing freedoms and public services and fighting for freedoms not yet won, such as those of migrant workers on less than a living wage. It is in this vein that we should support Pussy Riot.

So, is a reading in the Royal Court, whose sponsors include Moët & Chandon, likely to provoke any real sense of solidarity beyond champagne anarchism? Yes, I think so. In bringing those words to light, for free, they have delivered the women's words with integrity and authenticity. It is what we do with these words that matters beyond the performance.

We, as audience and activists, must force theatres to respond to the politics around them. Perhaps the Royal Court's commitment to a "Pussy Riot" season will provide an opportunity for work that breaks down the division between art and activism.

If the working class cannot force this, Pussy Riot fever will fade into artistic insignificance.

● Pussy Riot testimonies here: tinyurl.com/csdmo8u
● Pussy Riot lyrics here: tinyurl.com/cd3ba8g

The bases of Putin's popularity

Pussy Riot have garnered international support, but ordinary Russians have been less sympathetic. Vicki Morris looks at some of the political background to the story.

THE CHURCH
Pussy Riot's "Punk Prayer" criticised the close political relationship of President Putin and the head of the Orthodox church, Patriarch Kirill, in what is supposed still to be a secular state.

The state grants a role for the Orthodox church — along with the other "traditional" religions of Buddhism, Islam and Judaism. It suits the state to manage relationships with a few faiths. The Orthodox church guards its position against other Christian denominations. It is the Russian nature of the church that is its strongest suit.

In 2010 70% of Russians declared themselves to be orthodox — more than believe in God — compared to 44% in 1996. Russians who describe themselves as "not religious" have decreased from 43% in 1996 to 21% in 2010. Church attendance has increased but

is still low. "Confidence" in the church has risen from 39% in 1996 to 52% in 2010.

The Orthodox church was not outlawed under Stalinism, but there were not enough churches to cater to all Russians. With the programme of political reform opened by Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s, which included granting freedom of worship, the church was always likely to grow.

Many Russians have been shocked by what they saw as Pussy Riot's lack of respect to the Church, and now Putin is using the Pussy Riot case to try and discredit dissent in general.

INTERNATIONAL OPINION
Putin doesn't much care about international opinion and makes the case to Russians that the west is trying to meddle in a country that it doesn't understand.

His room for independence in international affairs is large. Depending on the measure, Russia is either the world's sixth or ninth biggest economy; the importance of Russia's oil and gas reserves were shown

when it cut off the gas supply to Ukraine (and hence to much of Europe) in winter 2005-6.

In recent years Russia forms part of the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) group of economies that are expected to dominate in the 21st century.

Other signs that Putin feels he enjoys freedom in international relations include the Litvinenko affair; and supporting the Assad regime in Syria. He is likely to brazen out the furor around Pussy Riot.

This cocksureness generally plays well with the Russian public, many of whom resent Russia's fall from superpower status.

Former KGB man Vladimir Putin was made Prime Minister under Russia's first post-communist era president Boris Yeltsin in 1999.

Putin was in turn elected president in 2000 and then again in 2004. Since Russians are not allowed to serve as president for more than two consecutive terms, he next filled the post of Prime Minister in 2008 while his younger protégé Dmitry Medvedev took a turn as president. In March 2012 Putin was re-

elected president for the new longer term of six years. If he stands again in 2018 he could be Russian president until 2024.

After 1993, when president Yeltsin staged a semi-coup against the Duma (Parliament), Russia became a "super-presidency", with massive powers including to appoint all ministers. The president controls much of the media. International observers describe Russia as an authoritarian state.

The Duma's influence is small; arch-criminals have got themselves elected to the Duma just to enjoy immunity from prosecution.

Party politics in Russia is under-developed. People do not vote according to left/right political cleavages. In a 2008 survey only 28% of Russians could place themselves on this spectrum, and only 36% were interested in politics.

Most Russians preferred "The current system" (36%) to "Democracy as in the Western countries" (15%) or "The Soviet system as it existed before the 1990s" (24%). Another survey, in 2010, however, saw Russians favouring "a more democratic Soviet system" (33%) over "the political system that exists today" (25%), "the Soviet system as it existed before *perestroika* [economic restructuring]" (14%) and "Western democracy" (14%).

In 2008, Russians preferred an economic system "based on state planning and redistribution" to one based on "private property and market relations."

And, for all Putin's popularity, in 2008 Russians still preferred a system with a Duma and elections (58%) over "a single, strong leader" (32%).

ECONOMY
Putin has presided over increasing prosperity, albeit from a catastrophic base in the 1990s.

After breakneck privatisation and economic liberalisation, GDP in 1999 was 55% what it had been in 1989. In 1993 a third of the population, 50 million people, lived below subsistence.

Surveys show that Russians worry about rising prices, poverty and unemployment more than anything else.

Russia's economic position improved in the 2000s

with higher prices for oil; Putin has laid out plans to diversify the economy so that its prosperity depends less on energy exports.

Continued acquiescence in Putin's reign will depend on acceptable economic performance.

OPPOSITION
Putin has also won support for clamping down on the rampant criminality that has burst out in the post-communist era; but the repressive state apparatus can be used against political opponents as well as against criminal gangs.

Putin's critics must be very brave. There have been unpunished murders of investigative journalists, for example, Anna Politkovskaya in 2006.

There were large protests in December 2011 against unfair Duma elections, and again around the presidential election in 2012. And now there is Pussy Riot...

● Figures cited are from Stephen White, *Understanding Russian Politics* (2011).

Assange, Assad and anti-imperialism



Dave Osler

I don't quite know where to start unpacking the claim that socialist feminists who feel that Julian Assange has a case to answer are really "liberals" who "don't mind being raped by imperialist ideology".

Yet such a contention — which would have been inexcusably offensive even if there were any indications that it was meant sardonically — was recently advanced in all seriousness by a Trotskyist bloke on an AWL woman member's Facebook page.

Although I have to confess that a shameful lack of knowledge of feminist theory leaves me open to much gentle ribbing from female comrades, even I was taken aback by the obvious sheer odious sexism inherent in such a sentiment.

If nothing else, there's more than a nod here to the disgusting stereotype that "girls", to use the term the interlocutor deployed, all secretly harbour rape fantasies.

That AWL women elected to continue the debate, rather than simply clicking the "defriend" button, is a credit to their patience.

But while most Assange supporters thankfully have the tact not to express themselves quite so clumsily, the belief that anti-imperialism represents a get out of jail free card is frighteningly widespread on the left.

For instance, one Trotskyist group in the US is holding a series of student meetings under the title "imperialist diplomacy exposed: behind the witch-hunt of WikiLeaks", while leftist blogs freely pronounce that "WikiLeaks faces persecution for exposing US imperialism".

Even the *Guardian*, while arguing that Assange must indeed face his accusers in Sweden, argues with implicit approval that in offering him asylum, "Ecuador has found a way to tweak the tail of the imperialist lion".

In other words, US complicity at the highest level is taken as read. The chance that this might be a legitimate accusation of serious crime rather than a circuitous plot to get Assange banged up in a US military base is ruled out a priori.

At first sight, any connection between the Assange affair and the civil war in Syria would seem tenuous. But inevitably it again raises the same question of relevant prism.

A number of prominent leftwing figures — including George Galloway, Tariq Ali and John Rees — are withholding support from all or part of the Syrian opposition, on the grounds that their victory would work to the advantage of imperialism in the Middle East.

In an online article titled "Syria, the left and a revolution divided", Rees even raises the matter to the level of philosophy, appealing to what is known in the work of Lukacs as "the standpoint of the totality".

Just as the disembodied notion of imperialism is for some the primary consideration in deciding whether Assange should face trial for rape, so the prospect of imperialist intervention decides whether any given set of insurgents taking on the Assad regime can be considered progressive forces.

ASSAD

I don't quite buy the logic here. For starters, Assad's anti-imperialist credentials are pretty dubious. He was entirely ready to line up behind Washington in the 1991 war on Iraq, for instance.

Prior to the uprising, Syria was just another readily-compliant petro-tyranny, happily pumping crude to anyone prepared to pay for it, and no special irritant to the global hegemon.

Assad is a brutal dictator, and socialists should be entirely happy with the prospect of his overthrow. Rees, to give him his due, states that he feels that way too. The trouble is, he is somewhat picky about who can be entrusted with the task.

The Syrian opposition is deeply divided, of course. Most reports indicate that Islamism is the dominant strand, although other currents are Kurdish nationalist, liberal-secularist or ostensibly socialist in orientation.

How some people can consider the Muslim Brotherhood as a manifestation of anti-imperialism in the Egyptian context, and quite the opposite when it comes to Syria, I am not quite sure.

What seems to differentiate these currents in Rees' mind — although he is careful not to specify which ones he likes and which ones he doesn't — is not ideology as such but

whether or not any given group is being armed by the West.

That Rees describes as imperialist intervention, defined here not as boots on the ground, or even the imposition of no fly zones as cover for rebel actions, but the supply of weaponry.

Not only is Britain putting up £5 million-worth of what is officially described as non-lethal aid to opposition forces, but the rebels are being openly equipped by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, presumably with the State Department giving the nod.

Yet the reality is that fighters locked in life or death combat are going to take arms from wherever they can source them. They would be mad not to; it really is ludicrous to make support conditional on them turning down guns tainted by imperialist provenance.

It does increasingly look like Assad is doomed. At this stage, no one can say for certain what will emerge from the wreckage. It won't be socialist, and it may well be some form of government that neither the international left nor the White House will find congenial.

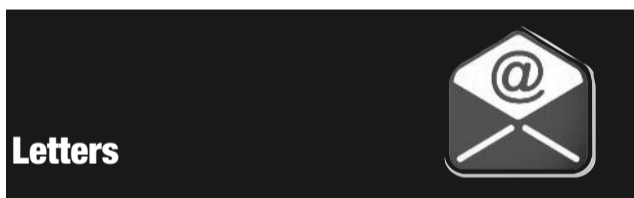
On the other hand, the demonstration effect of how a murderous regime can be taken on and beaten will prove inspirational at a global level. Conversely, defeat will demoralise many other struggles.

Meanwhile, the Assange case has brought to the fore numerous arguments concerning the niceties of the Swedish legal system; are the offences of which he has been accused rape within the meaning of that term under English law? Has he actually been charged with rape or not? Hey, maybe this was all a CIA honeytrap?

Much of the quibbling is by way of obfuscation. Even those of us entirely without legal qualification can grasp the basic point that forced penetrative sex without consent is rape in any moral or common sense meaning of the term. None of this is to presume Assange's guilt; it is merely to state that what he is said to have done cannot be shrugged off as irrelevant.

The mistake in both instances is to imagine there is a simple read-off from a macro level analysis of imperialism to reaching conclusions on a practical course of political action, leaving every other consideration out of the equation.

The left should simultaneously oppose imperialism, extend critical backing to the Syrian revolution and uphold a woman's right to say no. The three are in no way contradictory.



Letters

A defeat?!

20,000 London bus workers win a clear-cut victory in the first London-wide bus strike since 1982. Unite's demand was for a £500 bonus payment to compensate for the increased workload caused by the Olympics and they finally won £577.

What is the response published in *Solidarity*? Not to celebrate the victory — oh no! That would be too simple and waste the opportunity to attack the London leadership of Unite. So the unnamed author of the piece that *Solidarity* published belittles the result as "a very minor and limited victory" and even dismisses the campaign for the bonus as a "diversion." (*Solidarity* 253, 'London bus workers' victory is bittersweet'.)

The ostensible "reasons" for this extraordinary piece of chemically-pure sectarianism are 1. that "those off sick, or on holiday or having rest days will lose out" (yup: that's usually the way with bonus payments), 2. that Unite won without defying the anti-union laws (ultra-left lunacy not worthy of replying to), 3. that the demands of the strike should have been changed and the action continued into the Olympics themselves so as to win back "all we lost in recent years" (did I say that point 2 was "ultra-left"? Not in comparison with point 3, it isn't!).

Actually, it is perfectly obvious that the anonymous author's real reason for disparaging the outcome of the action is a personal grievance against the London Unite leadership, including the lay leaders of the dispute (the reps who agreed the demands and recommended calling off the dispute). That's why they cannot bring themselves to acknowledge that a real victory was achieved one that can and must provide the basis for further united action including an all-London pay claim next year.

What shocked and disappointed me wasn't just the negative, carping tone of the piece, but the fact that it represents a real departure from *Solidarity's* (and the AWL's) long-standing tradition of combining sharp criticism of the union

bureaucracy when they sell out, with a willingness to give due credit to them when (as sometimes happens), they do, broadly, the right thing. It's called honest accounting and it's a lesson some of us learned from reading Farrell Dobbs' invaluable books (notably *Teamster Rebellion*) about the Minneapolis Teamsters union when it was led by Trotskyists.

At one point the Trotskyists recommended calling off a strike when the central demand (union recognition) had been met, but with a concession on the question of accepting arbitration (a much more serious concession than anything accepted by Unite during the bus dispute, by the way). The Stalinists opportunistically seized upon this concession to accuse the strike leaders of "selling out". The US Trotskyist leader Jim Cannon replied in scathing terms that could be applied to the author of the *Solidarity* article:

"This [ie arbitration] is a serious concession which the union officials felt it necessary to make under the circumstances in order to secure recognition of the union and consolidate it in the next period... The board will meet under the direct impression of the 10-day strike and with the consciousness that the union is strong and militant. That, in our opinion, is the fundamentally decisive feature of the results of the Minneapolis strike — the indubitable establishment of a new union where none existed before. All the plans of the leaders and organizers were directed to this end as the first objective in a long campaign. The struggle was centered around the issue and was crowned with success. On that basis further steps forward can be made. To speak of such an outcome as a 'defeat' is simply absurd."

Okay, the author of the *Solidarity* piece didn't use the word "defeat", but he might as well have done given the negative, carping (and none-too-honest) tone and content of the article.

We belong to the serious industrial tradition of Dobbs and Cannon, not the destructive tradition of third-period Stalinism and ultra-left posturing that permeated everything in the *Solidarity* article.

Jim Denham (Unite member)

Editorial note: the piece Jim criticises was originally a interview with a long-time Unite member and bus driver who is not an AWL member and who requested, as often happens, to remain anonymous. The piece was not the "position" of *Solidarity*, and as a general rule not all articles in the paper reflect our policy. We stand by our decision to elicit the opinions of this driver but accept it would have been better to have clearly indicated this was an external contribution, and presented it as such.

The riots and the left

Despite the politics behind the riots it was frustrating that many on the far-left disregarded or tried to lessen the significance of how ordinary working class people had been affected by the riots. In particular the SWP who more or less poo-pooed peoples' homes being burnt and said that the amount of people being evicted because of Tory cuts more or less cancelled that out.

The SWP in particular showed themselves to be very out of touch with working-class people many of whom were angry about the riots and did not feel that much of what was taking place, particularly the muggings and the burning of homes represented them and their feelings towards the cuts or the police.

Also many middle class anarchists lumped small shops in with big corporations arguing both are guilty of property theft and therefore both justifiable targets for burning and looting. Many of these shops are owned by Asians.

Dan Factor

I was in Chapeltown in Leeds on the Tuesday night when the riots almost spread to Leeds. The reason it didn't is partly down to the actions of working-class people in Chapeltown. There was a march by local women calling for peace. I talked to some older black men who said they were going to patrol the area and send the youths home if they were out on the street. Politically problematic no doubt but these were working class people organising for themselves.

They were much more on their way to conscious working-class politics than many of the rioters. If I had approached them telling them that a potential riot in their community was good because it was a "insurrection" against cuts they would have rightly told me where to go.

Anger at oppression is the start of working-class fightback but we should always argue for that to be channelled into conscious political action and not be afraid to oppose forms of that anger that harm working class solidarity.

David Kirk

(Both contributions from website discussion)

Discussion about same-sex marriage
<http://www.workersliberty.org/node/19326>

Murdered for profit!

34 striking miners were killed when police opened fire at a Lonmin PLC platinum mine, Marikana, South Africa on Thursday 16 August. Nearly 80 have been reported injured. Over 250 people were arrested on the same day.

This is a shocking event, reminiscent of how the apartheid police “shot to kill” at protests. It has rightly been condemned by the labour movements around the world.

Workers at the platinum mine had been on strike for a decent wage and a week earlier 10 people had been killed (including two police).

The strike was initiated by rock drillers, under the leadership of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU). The rock drillers undertake the most difficult and dangerous work at the mine and earn just R4,000 a month (£305). They were demanding R12,500. One striking miner told Reuters news agency: “You work so very hard for very little pay. It is almost like death.”

Lonmin plc is the third largest global platinum producer. Under a former incarnation, as Lonrho plc, the company benefited hugely from the apartheid social conditions which made it easier for them to hyper-exploit black labour. They are in the same game today. Its operating income for last year was \$300 million.

But the global economic crisis has hit the platinum industry; low prices have followed a slump in the auto industry as platinum is a key ingredient for catalytic converters. As in South Africa’s gold mines (where the workforce has been halved), platinum bosses want to put the screws on the workers.

Prior to the shooting, Lonmin had threatened to sack the workers. Thursday 16 August was earmarked by both the company and the bosses as the day on which the strike would be broken.

Afterwards Lonmin disingenuously characterised the assault on the miners as “just a police operation”, as if their attitude to the workers had nothing to do with it! They have blood on their hands for this massacre, and blood on their hands for all the miners who have been maimed and killed in their mines down the years.

President Jacob Zuma’s immediate reaction to the killing (before he got wise and proposed a commission of inquiry)? “We believe there is enough space in our democratic order for any dispute to be resolved through dialogue without any breaches of law or violence.”

What democracy would that be? The one he would like to see in South Africa, where no opposition is brooked? A democracy where workers striking for decent wages are gunned down?

And whose violence is to blame? The self-defensive actions of a group of highly-exploited workers who want jobs which pay, who want to survive in the horrifically unequal society of South Africa?

Or the violence of cops, endorsed by the capitalists and their state, meted out in order to make sure capitalist production and the creation of profit goes on

One factor in the tragedy is a bitter rivalry between the AMCU and the much larger ANC-led National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) which also organises in the platinum belt. And in the background, for many in South Africa, the ANC stands in the way of raising living standards and is responsible for the growing inequality. Mass demonstrations against the government are commonplace.

In recent years the NUM has said to have worked closely with the bosses. Cyril Ramaphosa, the first NUM leader (who is now a business tycoon), is a non-executive director and “chairman of the transformation committee” at Lonmin.

The NUM — which had negotiated a two-year wage deal at the plant — had previously dismissed the miners as uneducated migrants from rural Lesotho and/or vulnerable to manipulation by unscrupulous “leaders”; the NUM dismissed the R12,500 demand as “unrealistic”. The South African Communist Party which has long allied with the ANC and has a huge influence in the trade unions has even called for the leaders of the AMCU to be arrested! Every socialist trade unionist will find such behaviour depressing the complete opposite of our basic duty here — one of solidarity.

Forty-four people are dead. The hundreds who were arrested are being quickly brought before the courts. Some of them — but not the police! — have apparently been accused of murder and attempted murder. The company is still threatening to sack miners who do not return to work.

Whatever the exact details of the inter-union rivalry the basic story here is clear.

The women of the mining community asked the question in a protest song in a demonstration on Friday 17th: “What have we done?” The platinum miners of South Africa have done nothing more than demand the right to be treated like human beings. In this profit-hungry world that is a crime and that is all it takes for you to be killed by the pistols and rifles of state-sponsored assassins.

The gold mines of today’s South Africa

The Socialist Party of Azania argue that when apartheid ended South African bosses “won” the unimpeded right to exploit the working-class and to strike-break, locking-out workers, as a matter of course, when they have a dispute. That settlement, CODESA [Convention for a Democratic South Africa], is in large part to blame for the tragedy at Marikana they say. To help our understanding of the events we reprint an extract from their statement on the massacre.

The Marikana massacre is the direct outcome of CODESA, where workers are first expelled from the premises of the mines where they are employed and further forcefully removed from wherever they choose to assemble. Any resistance is thereafter met with absolute brute force and sometimes by deadly force like it is in the case in Marikana. Protection of property is always placed way above any interests including human life.

Marikana has poignantly raised two issues: one is the “Lock-Out clause” itself, but the other is the issue of the independence of the labour movement, which ought to be free from both the bosses and the government.

In this particular case this involves the historical union which is a friend of the government [NUM] and in past instances has shown itself to be sympathetic to the bosses and has a result lost considerable confidence of the workers. Rather than seeking its soul and breaking from the subordinating interests that are holding it in a deathly embrace, it has found solace in the bosom of its class enemies.

DEMOCRATIC

It is therefore not surprising that it is accused by the workers that rather than stand by their democratic demands, the union finds itself settling for far less than what workers expected.

We as the Socialist Party of Azania do not advocate divisions in the labour movement, we however believe that their interests will be better served by a united labour movement. The way to unity is through independence from the bosses and government. Every time the labour movement is subordinated, it always works to its own detriment.

Today, the platinum mines have become what gold mines were to the economy of our country. South Africa is the leading platinum producer in the world, and platinum brings unbelievable wealth to their white owners and token blacks.

Despite this great wealth they continue to exploit workers who to date have not made any unreasonable demands. However, the mine bosses continue to pay them less than a living wage. Their demand for R12 500-00 a month is reasonable and will not leave a hole in the pocket of the bosses.

For the demand of R12 500-00 a month, they have had to pay with lives. Even the extremely repressive apartheid regime would have thought twice about such prospects.

The very fact of being locked out is provocative, and it gets worse when there are those who remain buddy-buddy with the bosses who have locked you out. It is those who, for political and dubious economic interests, are very often willing to lay prostrate on the ground to allow the bosses to have their way with them. We reject any intention that wants to put blame on the workers who have legitimate right to fight and defend for their interests. Had the mine bosses heeded the demands of the workers, had the government and its law enforcement institutions listened, the massacre could have been avoided — but then in a capitalist state such as ours profit is everything and there is no sanctity for human life.

We believe this crisis represents in its full extent how imperialism and its interests continue to place enormous burdens on the lives of workers and the black majority. We once more appeal to the labour movement to take its full responsibility to defend and advance the full interests of the working class.

17 August 2012

• Full statement: bit.ly/OrzaI9

AWL fund: the final score

The final total raised in our fundraising drive was £18,096.

We didn’t raise our £20,000, but have no doubt the money readers, supporters and members have generously given us over the year has made it possible to keep on producing this paper this year. Thank-you.

The fundraising AWL branches to make plans to raise money through into the autumn. And London for instance we plan to put on a fundraising gig in October. We will report on this and other plans soon.

You can continue to help us by:

- Taking out a monthly standing order. There is a form at www.workersliberty.org/resources and below Please post to us at the AWL address below.
 - Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to “AWL”) or do it online at www.workersliberty.org/donate
 - Organising a fundraising event
 - Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.
 - Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL.
- More information: 07796 690 874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Rd, SE1 3DG.



**Total raised:
£18,096**

We raised £296 in the last two weeks in new standing orders and donations. Thanks to Saraïd, Joe, Pat McC, Pat S, Mick.

The political crisis in Greece

By Mark Osborn

Two or three square kilometres in northern Athens look like no other place in Europe. The sidewalks are filthy and the paving stones are mostly broken. The roads are in disrepair. Most walls are wholly covered with graffiti or posters.

Around 10 or 11am, people can be seen climbing down the scaffolding outside derelict or half-finished buildings where they have spent the night. People — and not just the obviously destitute, but tie-wearing OAPs and mothers — rummage through bins for food scraps.

The amount of human misery concentrated here is staggering. Next to the National Archaeological Museum, near the Polytechnic, there are fifty addicts injecting. A hundred metres north of Omonia Square, round the corner from the police station, there are 30 prostitutes. The police themselves are elsewhere, enthusiastically busy carrying out the government's policy of mass detentions and expulsions of immigrants. Hundreds of cops have flooded the streets, with their riot gear and dogs, persecuting the local Pakistanis, Chinese and Bangladeshis. Half the city's police voted for the fascist Golden Dawn party at the last election, on 17 June.

The *New York Times* reports that 4,500 police were used in these raids during the first week of August. Others have been sent to the Turkish border, where people smugglers regularly pass through. Nikos Dendias, the Minister of Public Order, stated that 6,000 people had been detained, of whom 1600 had not got the correct documents. The government had chartered planes to remove the "illegals". At least one flight took 88 people to Pakistan. Dendias claimed an "unprecedented invasion" of immigrants was threatening Greece's stability. He stated that the failure to end the influx of immigrants would lead Greece to collapse.

IMMIGRATION

The right-wing politicians who have made immigration a focus are also those that have legislated enormous cuts to public spending. It is a cynical combination which plays into the hands of Golden Dawn.

In the area around Victoria metro station, a little north of Omonia, Golden Dawn is active, attacking immigrants. Although their stunts — handing out food, but only to those who can show Greek identity papers — are relatively infrequent, they have significant symbolic importance. They strike a chord with a section of impoverished Greeks.

During the first election campaign, in May this year, Golden Dawn's appeal was: "So we can rid this land of filth". The party won 7% of the vote at the June election and has 18 MPs. One of those MPs is Artemis Matthaopoulos who fronts a Nazi punk band called Pogrom. Pogrom's songs include 'Auschwitz' with the lyrics, "fuck Anne Frank" and "Juden raus".

Members of the Greek Trotskyist group, Kokkino, a split from the SEK (aligned with the British SWP) spoke to Solidarity about the fascist threat.

"The immigration that happened in London over one century happened here in one decade. In 1990, for example, there were no immigrants here at all. The Greeks used to say: here in Greece, there is something in our DNA that means we are not racist. But in 1990, Antonis Samaras — the current prime minister, who was then Minister of Foreign Affairs — wanted to open relations with Albania, and with the Greeks of Albania. He opened the border with Albania. In two or three years one million Albanians came to Greece. That was a shock for the Greeks — it happened suddenly and they came in huge numbers. After that there was a big wave of immigrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kurdistan and Bangladesh.

"And this was a big shock for the Greek left too. We had a policy from the years when there were no problems. It was easy in the time when even the reformists were calling for the abolition of all borders. Now it is hard.

"The people in these neighbourhoods have said they are afraid of immigrants who have no jobs and no food. In the past we have answered that the people should not be afraid and that workers should unite. But is no adequate answer to people who are afraid.

"The left has treated the anti-fascist struggle as being iden-

tical to the anti-racist struggle. You can find working class people, with left family backgrounds — whose grandfather, for example, fought in the Greek civil war — who are completely against Golden Dawn, who will come with us to smash fascist heads. But they are not very clear on the issues of racism. It is not true that to be an anti-fascist you have to be anti-racist."

The dire, orchestrated economic collapse is now in its fifth year and the Greek economy is contracting by 6-7% per year. In August the official jobless rate climbed to 23%, with nearly 55% of those aged 15-24 out of work. In fact the position is worse than that, because many people now go to work and are not being paid, or not being paid regularly. A recent poll suggests that 91% of Greek workers feel their job is not secure.

Additionally the minimum wage has been cut by 32% for workers under 25, and 22% for all other workers. GSEE trade union leader Yannis Panagopoulos says government policy has had a "huge impact on wages and employment levels, but has barely affected prices of goods and services."

Some of the poverty and homelessness is hidden by close family networks that have soaked up a little of the deprivation. People sleep on relatives' floor space; one wage now feeds six or eight mouths.

The sense of hopelessness, unfairness and lack of control felt by a part of the population has led to a sharp spike in suicides. Since 2010, more than 2,500 people have killed themselves in Greece — occasionally publicly, as an overt political protest.

At the beginning of August the coalition government agreed €11.5bn in new spending cuts in order to qualify for the next €31.5bn instalment of the €130bn loan from the 'troika' of international creditors, the EU, IMF and European Central Bank.

Samaras, the New Democracy (Tory) prime minister, is now asking EU leaders for more time to make cuts. Samaras came to power following the 17 June general election heading a three party coalition. The smaller two parties in the coalition are PASOK and New Democracy, both nominally on the left. The government is supported by 179 MPs in the 300-seat parliament.

SQUABBLING

The coalition is weak and has been shaken by open squabbling. PASOK leader Evangelos Venizelos and Fotis Kouvelis of the Democratic Left have objected to proposals to cap pension payments at €2,200-€2,400 a month, and slash healthcare spending to €1,500 for each person registered with the state system.

Senior members of the coalition have already voted against attacks on education. Former prime minister George Papandreou and five other PASOK MPs voted against it — against a relatively minor reform, given the scale of the austerity the government is seeking.

The bulk of the new cuts will come from state salaries and pensions, and up to 40,000 public sector sackings.

PASOK, one of the two big mainstream post-military dictatorship (1967-74) parties, was put into government with 44% of the vote in 2009. However it cut jobs, wages, pensions, health care, put up taxes on workers and privatised state property.

PASOK's attacks on the working class were met by wave upon wave of mass, street opposition, twenty general strikes, and innumerable grass-roots committees, initiatives and self-help organisations. PASOK suffered an electoral meltdown this year.

Panagiotis Sotiris, from ARAN (Left Recomposition), one of the groups in the revolutionary left, 3,000-strong, Antarsya coalition explains: "For 30 years PASOK actually represented the majority of the working class in a very strong way. They seemed impregnable. This is an earthquake to see PASOK at 12%."

Antarsya is a gathering of revolutionary groups. The three largest are ARAN, influenced by Maoism, the SEK, and NAR which was formed from a large left split from the Communist Party (KKE) when it entered the government in the late 80s.

Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left), led by Alexis Tsipras, rose spectacularly (to 27% and 71 seats in June) taking not

just PASOK votes, but those of the very strong Greek Communists (KKE), too. As Syriza's vote went up rapidly, Antarsya's fell (from 1.3% at the May election, to 0.3% in June).

Panagiotis explained why people voted Syriza: "Over the past two years we have had an enormous sequence of mass strikes, street protests, occupations — perhaps the biggest period of sustained struggles in recent European history. Syriza realised that many people didn't want another opposition, they wanted their own government. People were saying they had tried everything else, now they wanted their own political power."

Syriza is an open, rapidly growing left party. At the core is Synaspismos, a reformist left-Euro Communist organisation.

Vangelis, from Kokkino explains why his group is in Syriza. "There are a lot of platforms inside the organisation. From Trotskyists on the left, over to people who believe capitalism can be peacefully reformed and transformed. Synaspismos has 16,000 members, although I have never seen more than 5000 — a lot of their members are not active.

"Syriza had about 25-30,000 members. But membership has exploded. There are many, many thousands of applications to join.

"Syriza is now in the process of changing — becoming one party from a coalition of groups. Now local branches are being formed. Normally a Syriza branch has between 50 and 120 members, in a small area. These are now all over Greece. In Athens there are about 100 branches of Syriza."

SECTARIAN

Kokkino also say that their rationale for working in Syriza is also that the Communist KKE is so sectarian and closed it is impossible to enter or easily work with their members.

Despite losing votes to Syriza (they were down to 4% in June, which came as a serious shock to their party) they still have a formidable grip in the Greek working class. Vangelis says, "If they chose to they could put 30,000 workers in Omonia Square tomorrow afternoon."

Panagiotis is a thoughtful, interesting comrade, who is right when he says that, "the political and strategic choices made by the left, here, now, will affect the course of European history."

He adds, "We have an organic political crisis. And we have a particular quality — almost insurrectionary — set of expectations here. People are willing to consider ideas they would have found unthinkable even a few years ago — this is as far as things have got, in Europe, for many years.

But he is unconvincing when he makes the case to stay outside Syriza. His focus is on developing a left programme and maintaining a rigid focus on opposition to the EU. But one place to fight for a left programme is inside Syriza.

In fact Syriza's refusal to go along with standard anti-Europe 'leftism' is one of its more encouraging features. It is not the left's job to attempt to destroy capitalist progress — and the integration of Europe and European capitalism is, in general historical terms, progressive. Moreover 80% of Greeks oppose this sort of anti-Euro policy, rightly assuming it will impact badly on them.

It is now very important that the Greek left intervenes in Syriza. The outcome of the political struggles inside Syriza could be the difference between victory and defeat in the big battles that are coming.

Is workers' revolution on the agenda? Perhaps. The conditions are being prepared. But there is still some way to go. The classes polarising and parties are assembling: on the right around New Democracy, on the left Syriza.

The questions now are: can the Greek far left help to prepare the ground for the emergence of workers' committees which can act as the basis for a workers' government and their future power; can the workers defend their movement from fascist and state violence by developing their own militias?

These are the questions in the background of every struggle in Greece, now.

• For a longer version of the interview with Panagiotis Sotiris, see bit.ly/NE4Knp

• For a longer version of the interview with the comrades from Kokkino, see bit.ly/NefnSp

Fighting the fascist threat

By Martin Thomas and Ed Maltby

Vicky Karafoulidou and Yannis Karliamos, Syriza members, spoke to us in a personal capacity and told us that Golden Dawn is quite strong in Thessaloniki, especially in the peripheral areas of the city where people have never seen an African or Asian immigrant.

Racism in Thessaloniki is not quite as bad as in Athens, but even in Thessaloniki immigrant workers are too scared to take part in neighbourhood assemblies, for example.

Albanian and Russian immigrants to Greece, from the 1990s, have become quite well-integrated; but then many of them are racist towards the more newly-arrived African and Asian immigrants.

Syriza, said Vicky and Yannis, is for "social defence" against fascism, not "physical defence". Yes, they would support protecting immigrants - and also prostitutes, sometimes also targeted by the fascists - against Golden Dawn attacks, but they didn't want to get into the sort of activity done in Athens by anarchist groups who dedicate themselves to physical combat with the fascists over the heads of the local communities.

Miltos Ikonou spoke to us more officially, from Syriza in Thessaloniki.

"[In Athens] we have to go into the neighbourhoods, and tell people the problem is not immigrants. It is the government, poverty and so on. We have the same problems as the immigrants.

KILLERS

"Golden Dawn is strong in some very poor neighbourhoods. The problem is that we are absent from those neighbourhoods. We have to explain that Golden Dawn are killers, neo-Nazis".

And of what happened to the Jews? (Thessaloniki is the only city in the world known to have had a Jewish majority for many hundreds of years of the modern era, from about 1500 to World War Two. Few Jews remain there after the Nazi occupation of Greece in World War Two).

"The young people of Thessalonik think that's a big problem. Not just the left, *all* the people!"

Should the left organise community self-defence against the fascists?

"No. I think that's a mistake. It's wrong to get involved in a street fight with these killers".

But if the fascists attacked the Syriza office, for example?

"That's another case. We are against making counter-demonstrations. Those will make people think we and Golden Dawn are the same. But if it's necessary, yes, we can defend our offices and the immigrants".

Spiros, from OKDE in Thessaloniki, said Golden Dawn is "brutal against immigrants", but what Golden Dawn does against immigrants "is a small percentage of what the police and the state do.

"We want to build self-defence committees against the police, against the army, and against Golden Dawn, but Golden Dawn is the easy part. We want to build solidarity of Greeks and immigrants.

"It is not about throwing stones and bottles, but about solid organisation. In Athens, the main thing is not the anarchist actions featured in the media, but activity in the unions and communities.

"SEK demands that the state outlaws Golden Dawn. Antarsya has no clear view. There is one other group which has a similar position to OKDE, the Network of Social Rights, which came from a split in OKDE in the 1970s and is now in Syriza".

COMPONENT

Nikos from DEA said that the issue of fighting fascism was a component of the left's general political tasks within the popular movement and should be understood in that way rather than as a special separate activity.

"The ideological struggle comes first. Neither KKE nor Synaspismos have taken this seriously. There is a need for a clear statement that all migrants should be legalised, that they are not the problem but that their illegality is the problem.

"If you build self-organisation in the neighbourhoods then the question of self-defence will arise naturally. There is already a move to develop a network of people to physically defend meetings, rallies and so on. So, if you call a rally and 20 fascists turn up, then you will need some people who know what they are doing, otherwise a big rally could simply be broken up. So, many people in Syriza want to see the development of such a mechanism.

"However, such a mechanism would be purely defensive - not offensive. The problem is political, to do with the broad spectrum of people who organise around the fascists, not the core."

I asked Nikos what he thought of the demand recently raised by the SEK that the state should ban Golden Dawn. In the UK, Workers' Liberty opposed a similar call raised by the SWP-controlled Unite Against Fascism campaign, for the government to ban an EDL march in East London - because we say that state repression used against the right can just as easily turn on the left. As we predicted, the ban on the EDL march in East London turned into a more general ban on all protests over a wide area for a number of months.

Nikos was vague in his answer. He said Workers' Liberty's point of view was "interesting", but that calling on the state to ban the fascists was "potentially useful as when the state fails to ban them, that will expose to people the collaboration of the police with the fascists". He said that DEA's slogan was that the offices of Golden Dawn "should be closed" but they were deliberately ambiguous as to who should close them.

For Kokkino, the question had less to do with "exposing" Golden Dawn and more to do with the political struggle to ensure that Syriza was able to fulfill the tasks that the movement had entrusted it with. Xaris explained that:

If Syriza cannot protect people against the state, the police and the fascists, then Syriza will fall from 27% to 2.7%. People want radical solutions and if Syriza cannot provide them, the fascists will... What is particularly dangerous is that Golden Dawn is a party of young men. A common saying among young people is, "who should I vote for, Syriza or Golden Dawn? There is no-one in between.

"Golden Dawn is already intensively organising solidarity food distribution, volunteer healthcare provision, home help for the elderly and so on - but all for "Greeks only"."

"The police's collaboration with Golden Dawn is clear. There are two police unions - one is far right, the other is extreme far right. Almost all the police special forces are in the extreme far right union. Whereas 50% of the police vote fascists, I doubt if 3% of police vote Syriza. They can be no help, no defence.

"We need to fight the fascists ourselves - with knives, and maybe soon, with guns. The philosopher of Golden Dawn, Plevris, says that Hitler was wrong because he did not kill all the Jews, and that Golden Dawn can do it better and kill them all.

"They want to kill all the Communists, Egyptians, migrants and so on. If things go badly, perhaps people like us will have to get a passport and flee abroad."

• Abridged from bit.ly/O1phVO

A united front with the *Financial Times*?

By Mícheál MacEoin

The tiny group Socialist Action (still formally Trotskyist but in practice highly Stalinist) has recently published an article, 'Two classes, two responses to the crisis' which purports to offer a working-class alternative to austerity. It does no such thing.

After decades of “entryism” into the Labour Party so deep that it has become indistinguishable from careerism, Socialist Action have long dropped any attachment to revolutionary socialism. What they offer here is a sort of reheated national-Keynesianism with a working-class gloss. It contains nothing in the way of working-class struggle, democracy or international socialism.

The article begins by offering a summary of recent Keynesian critiques of British Government economic policy from the chief economics commentator of the *Financial Times* Martin Wolf, the director of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research Jonathan Portes, and the Noble-prize winning economist Paul Krugman. All argue that the Government is intensifying the crisis by cutting its investment during the current recession.

Socialist Action correctly point out that certain sections of capital are also clamouring for an increase in infrastructural investment, citing the “multiplier effect” that this would have on economic activity (adding extra demand by creating jobs in capital projects). However, the bosses’ lobby-group the Confederation for British Industry (CBI) and the Institute of Directors (IoD) are, according to Socialist Action, advocating “a broadening of the reactionary agenda, not a retreat from it.” This is evidenced by calls for greater financial deregulation, further cuts to social expenditure and the bonfire of employment rights contained in the Government’s own Beecroft Report.

This is all true but Socialist Action’s criticism that capital’s plan for the crisis “is not ‘investment, not cuts’, which summarises the necessary strategic response to the crisis [but] ‘investment plus more cuts’” draws a false dividing line which only serves to obscure an alternative working-class policy.

For Socialist Action, the “class” dividing line is “investment not cuts” versus “cuts not investment”. If this is the case, only by churlish arbitrariness can Socialist Action exclude Wolf and Portes from the “proletarian” side, even though Wolf is a keen supporter of German-style “flexible” labour markets (ie. limiting workers’ rights, mini-jobs etc) and even Krugman has no ideological objection to austerity measures besides their obvious economic inefficacy. In short, the watchword “investment, not cuts” does nothing to distinguish a working-class socialist policy from the left-wing of capital.

THE STATE

Another false dividing line drawn by Socialist Action concerns the question of the state.

The problem with capital’s solution to the crisis, we are told, is that despite their arguments in favour of investment, the CBI, the IoD and others “remain utterly opposed to the state itself leading that investment.”

The second dividing line is thus “state-led investment” versus “state inducement towards private investment.” The solution of the “working class and its allies” (who? Martin Wolf? the Chinese Government?) is “state-led investment, taking sectors of the economy out of the hands of the capitalists in order to provide what is socially and economically necessary, large scale investment in key sectors such as housing, transport, infrastructure and education.”

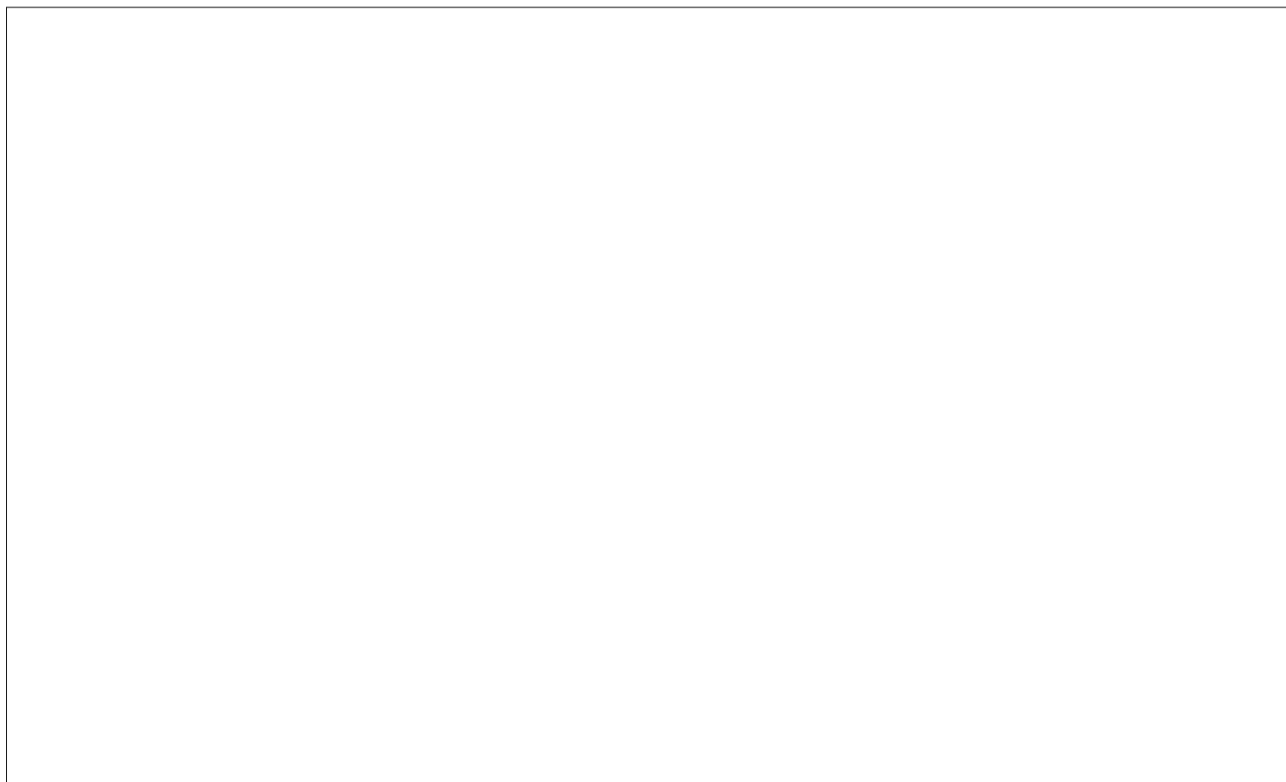
It is clear that Socialist Action means state-capitalist investment by the capitalist state. Clearly this would be preferable to austerity in the sense that capitalist growth can give better conditions to workers than capitalist slump but it has nothing necessarily in common with socialism.

As Marx wrote in Chapter 25 of *Capital* of the increased demand for labour power which accompanies the accumulation of capital: “just as little as better clothing, food, and treatment do away with the exploitation of the slave, so little do they set aside that of the wage worker. A rise in the price of labour, as a consequence of accumulation of capital, only means, in fact, that the length and weight of the golden chain the wage worker has already forged for himself, allow of a relaxation of the tension of it.”

In other words, while better than austerity, state-capitalist investment is not a working-class alternative to capitalism.

Although the statification of particular sectors of the economy would take certain industries from the hands of particular capitalists, nationalisation itself is not anti-capitalist and does not necessarily challenge the rule of capital in general.

This was the case in Britain after the Second World War when the Labour Government of Clement Attlee nation-



Striking workers in Shanghai. China is Socialist Action’s favourite state capitalism.

alised gas, coal, electricity and the Bank of England. Industries functioned in more or less the same way, often with the same managers, and the Government was no more strike-friendly than any other, using the army to break strikes on the docks in 1948 and 1949.

A second problem with calling merely for state-led investment and nationalisation is that there is no necessary role for democracy, let alone a socialist revolution to overthrow capitalism and create a workers’ state.

As James Connolly wrote in a polemic against Fabianism, “state ownership and control is not necessarily Socialism — if it were, then the Army, the Navy, the Police, the Judges, the Gaolers, the Informers, and the Hangmen, all would all be Socialist functionaries, as they are State officials — but the ownership by the State of all the land and materials for labour, combined with the co-operative control by the workers of such land and materials, would be Socialism... To the cry of the middle class reformers, ‘make this or that the property of the government,’ we reply, ‘yes, in proportion as the workers are ready to make the government their property.’”

DEMOCRACY

The means by which workers “make the government their property” is through working-class democracy at every level of society.

As the American “third camp” socialist Hal Draper explained, against the idea that the USSR was a “workers’ state” on account of having state-owned property but applicable here too: “The working-class is not by its nature, and never can be, an owning class like previous ruling classes. It can ‘take over’ the economy in only one way: collectively, through its own institutions. It can exercise economic power only through its political power. The expression of this proletarian political power can be given in two words: workers’ democracy.”

Being charitable, it could be said that Socialist Action missed this point having imbibed much Fabianism after years of swimming amongst the currents of the Labour Party bureaucracy. This would be tenable if it were not for the group’s favourable opinion of the viciously anti-working class state-capitalist dictatorship in China and the group’s description of the fall of the USSR and the Eastern Bloc police states as “the greatest defeats suffered by the working class since World War Two and overturn the post-war world order.”

It is indicative of a deeper problem with Socialist Action’s politics. Socialist Action represent a toxic mix of reformism and Stalinism which explains the complete absence of democracy from this “alternative” and the patent lack of radicalism inherent in its state-capitalist Keynesianism.

There is a historical precedent. In many ways Socialist Action are reminiscent of those in the British labour movement such as Sidney and Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw who lauded the Stalinist USSR for its anti-capitalist and “rational” organisation of society whilst opposing more left-wing revolutionary forces at home — “socialism in one country; just not this one.”

In a critique of Shaw’s conception of socialism written in the 1920s for the Independent Labour Party’s newspaper

The New Leader, the socialist journalist H N Brailsford explained that the difference between reformist Fabianism and working-class socialism amounts to democracy. If, as Shaw held, “Socialism means equality of income, and nothing else”, it has no necessary democratic component. If income equality was the essence of the system, argued Brailsford, “it might be set up and administered by a benevolent despot.” However, “if it is concerned primarily with the question of power, it cannot have a non-committal attitude to the issues of democracy. Aiming at a transfer of power to the workers (and, therefore, eventually to the whole community), democracy must be its foundation.”

As well as not challenging capitalism, Socialist Action’s “alternative” is national in scope and does not challenge the myopic failure of European social democracy to look beyond its own national frontiers. The only criticism of the Labour leadership is that it is not Keynesian enough, that its plans would not stimulate enough demand.

The crisis of capitalism we face is global in scope and the crisis of the Eurozone is particularly sharp and immediate. In narrow bourgeois terms, stimulating British household demand in the name of classless categories such as “the economy as a whole” (the reproduction of capitalist accumulation on an extended scale?) would indeed improve one problem.

As Larry Elliott has commented, “a breakdown of GDP from the Office for Budget Responsibility showed that weak private consumption shaved 0.5 points off growth and lower government consumption a further 0.3 points” in 2011, and that declining overall output was only saved by an increase in net trade. However, the British economy is not isolated and we must take into consideration the performance of the overall world economy. As of May 2012, UK trade with the EU fell to 45%, its lowest level since 1988, and a stronger pound vis-a-vis the euro will depress British exports.

Even if British capitalism could save itself in isolation from the world economy, socialists should not advocate that it does so.

The interests of the working-class are in breaking down national barriers to create larger units in order to increase the general level of the productive forces and unite the working-class across borders; we have no interests in tariff barriers, sharpened national competition, internal devaluation through crude cost-cutting and repressed wages, and the drive to war stimulated by inter-imperialist rivalry.

The working-class solution to the present crisis is to fight at home for a workers’ government and at the same time to unite the struggles of the working-class across Europe for a democratic, republican and socialist United States of Europe. We must fight for the levelling up of pay, conditions, workers’ rights and pensions, and for the taking of high finance across Europe under workers’ control.

This can only be done if we break from the national-Keynesian perspective of the social democratic bureaucracy and advocate a revolutionary programme to overthrow capitalism at home and across Europe.

• socialistaction.net/Economics/Two-classes-two-responses-to-the-crisis.html

The Bane of Batman's existence

because you saw Batman as the underdog. It made it more of a fight and less clichéd than the good guys always winning.

Gotham was in real trouble for most of the film — it was only in the last few minutes that the good guys finally won. So, Christopher Nolan did a fantastic job with crafting it as a triumph of the human spirit (and having the good guys finally beat out the bad).

To look at the sub-text of this newest blockbuster, you can see more to it than just a Batman movie. It deals with an induced economic crisis and national panic, discusses the role of a hero, and takes a closer look at the human spirit and what inspiration, determination, and will can achieve. Obviously, Batman is seen as a hero, but his unofficial sidekick "Detective Blake" (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) was a more relatable hero.

As always, Gary Oldman put on a great performance as "Commissioner Gordon"— especially when he was in the hospital and he took down those two guys without breaking a sweat.

[Spoiler warning here!] Full points have to go to Marion Cotillard "Miranda" for playing an innocent and then turning out to be a villain in league with Bane! That was a twist I hadn't seen coming.

Other notable performances were "Alfred" (Michael Caine) who you can't help but love and support; and "Mr. Fox" (Morgan Freeman) who had some seriously amazing gadgets and vehicles.

I was a little apprehensive going into the movie because Anne Hathaway didn't seem right to me as "Selina/Catwoman", but she pleasantly surprised me. All the actors and actresses involved did an incredible job.

Another joy of this movie was the advances in technology, especially automobile related. I'm yet to see a motorbike that can trump Batman's. There's nothing like an action movie with cool gadgets.

All in all, The Dark Knight Rises somehow manages go from terrifying to amusing, awe-striking to sweet. It is a fantastically crafted film with twists and turns that constantly keep you at the edge of your seat. I give it five stars.

Daisy Thomas reviews *The Dark Knight Rises*

Some of us have been waiting patiently for four years, but now the newest Batman franchise has come to an end. Despite the other major blockbusters of 2012 (*The Avengers* and *The Amazing Spider-Man*), *The Dark Knight Rises* still drew major crowds and induced great excitement and expectation.

Tom Hardy's Bane from this latest instalment was actually more terrifying than Heath Ledger's chilling Joker, purely through his eerie semi-calm and less overtly crazy and wild behaviour.

He was a harder villain to outsmart because he had so many safeguards and tricks and structure to his plans. It was an attack from all sides. To make things worse, he seemed like an invincible giant, a strange feeling since Batman is extremely imposing himself. So, while it was distressing seeing Batman get literally beaten by Bane, it was good in a way

Racism has not been "kicked out"

As a new football season begins, can the sport get to grips with a renewed reputation for racism? Sam Gilbert reports

Many within British football claim the problem of racism has gone. Within European football virulent racism is still displayed in stadiums.

Before the European football championships in Poland and Ukraine, the BBC aired "Stadiums of Hate" a Panorama documentary, featuring Polish fans giving Nazi salutes and a group of Asian fans getting attacked at a match in the Ukraine. "We are not like that" is the strong message the programme gave out.

In the 70s and 80s racist abuse from supporters was common place and the far right had a strong foothold on the terraces in the UK. Paul Elliot (the first black captain of Chelsea): "When I started my career at Charlton Athletic, there was a very strong National Front presence at stadiums all over the country...There was monkey chanting, banana throwing and other abuse".

Kick it Out, the anti-racist campaign set up in 1993, aimed to tackle racism and remove it from British football. It works with various charities and with clubs on policy to try and increase inclusiveness within football. Kick it Out has been seen as a success by the football authorities; racist chanting and abuse from the terraces has declined sharply since the campaign started and more black footballers are playing for football teams.

But such things cannot be taken as proof that racism is longer as issue within the sport, as the FA would have you believe. In a recent BBC3 documentary Clarke Carlisle (chairman of the Professional Footballers Association) spoke to many ex-professionals who had experienced racist abuse. Tottenham and England player Jermaine Jenas said he had been regularly racially abused by supporters during his career. The documentary also showed racist chanting of supporters at football matches, including anti-Semitic abuse aimed at Tottenham Hotspur.

Ex-footballers such as Sol Campbell have also spoken to the media giving accounts of abuse and racial stereotyping that they have suffered, not only from fans, but their own clubs and managers.

During the 2011/12 season the issue of racism became a central issue in the Football Association (FA) and more broadly within the sport. Luis Suarez was banned for eight matches after racially abusing Patrice Evra, John Terry (England captain at the time) was accused of racially abusing Anton Ferdinand on the pitch and Oldham player Tom Adeyemi was abused by Liverpool supporters during a

match. These high profile incidents were not handled well by either their clubs or the FA.

In the aftermath of the Suarez/Evra incident, Liverpool responded by defending Suarez uncritically, and instructing the players to wear pro-Suarez T-shirts whilst warming up for the next game.

Chelsea similarly backed Terry, as did Fabio Capello, the England manager who refused to take the captaincy away from him. The FA eventually sacked Terry as captain, but he was permitted to play at the recent Euro championships for England.

The FA's and individual clubs' responses to these racist incidents hardly suggests that they are determined to remove racism from football. The Professional Players Association (PFA) called for racism to be classed as gross misconduct and thus become a sackable offence, however the decision whether to terminate a player's contract will be solely with the player's club. Judging by the reactions from Liverpool and Chelsea, that would not have happened nor will happen in the future as football club owners would rather keep hold of their prize assets (Suarez cost Liverpool £23 million). Getting in the highest possible revenue is of prime importance.

When you dig a bit deeper the commitment from the FA to rid racism from the game begins to look non-existent. The Kick it Out campaign is funded by both the FA and football clubs. Its annual budget of £500,000 is dwarfed in comparison to the £3.1 billion football clubs were given under the last deal done with TV stations. Kick it Out only employs three full-time and three part-time staff.

The underlying lack of understanding of the issues involved has been staggering and explains a lot. The President of the world football's ruling body FIFA, Sep Blatter stated that racism was not a problem in football, "Maybe one of the players has a word or a gesture which is not the correct one, but the one who is affected by that, he should say that 'this is a game, we are in a game, and at the end of the game, we shake hands'."

The ruling elites within football seem unwilling and unable to tackle racism. Racism must be tackled by supporters refusing to tolerate racist abuse towards players and other supporters.

The PFA must start taking a far more active role in fighting for equality within football, getting more black players involved in the union, and engaging with supporters to try and make it clear that racism within football is not acceptable and will not be tolerated at any level.

Matzpen is one of the subjects of *Rebels Against Zion*

The incoherence of anti-Zionism

By Harry Glass

Rebels Against Zion, edited by August Grabski is a collection of Jewish left "anti-Zionism" essays that ultimately shows the descent into incoherence of anti-Zionism over the twentieth century.

The sheer panorama of perspectives in the book renders a consistent thread of anti-Zionism implausible. And the closer one gets to today, the clearer it becomes that much of anti-Zionism is merely a cover for left anti-semitism.

The principal virtue of the book is the long essay by Workers' Liberty member Stan Crooke, which forensically deconstructs the politics of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign in the British labour movement.

If anything illustrates the reductio ad absurdum of "anti-Zionism" uncoupled from any positive political programme, then it is BDS. Supporters are expected to unite around tactics laid down by a noisy but unrepresentative group of Palestinian NGOs, while ignoring other more representative Palestinian voices. BDS is premised on deliberate silence over the political solution, while smuggling in a one-state utopia. But it explicitly requires acceptance of conditions — principally of the right of return — which render any democratic solution impossible. In the rush to "do something", BDS supporters end up doing something really reactionary — painting all Jews in Israel as the enemy and appealing to outside pressure to enforce a politics far from democracy, never mind socialism.

Other essays examine different historical strands of "anti-Zionism" and some are very interesting.

Ronnie Gechtman writes a good account of the Second International debates on the Jewish question. The majority view was assimilationism, i.e. that Jewish people should be integrated into whatever society they lived in with equal rights. This might have worked had the Jewish question simply been about religion. But the growth of virulent racial anti-semitism during the 19th and early 20th centuries rendered the assimilationist perspective redundant. Whilst the Bund grasped the national status of the Jewish people and were able to deconstruct the dominant view, it was Trotsky within the classical Marxist tradition who finally broke decisively with assimilationism and came to engage with the idea of a territorial solution i.e. to with the rational kernel of Zionism as Jewish national self-determination.

Whilst Rick Kuhn and Jack Jacobs discuss non-Zionist and anti-Zionist Jewish organisations in Europe, it is not clear what this tradition might represent had it survived until today.

Henry Srebrnik discusses the Bolshevik government's attempts to resolve the Jewish question within the narrow confines of the USSR and how these efforts were mangled by Stalinism in the form of a territorial settlement in Birobidzhan. The merit of these essays is to indicate the wide variety of political assessments by Jewish socialists in the pre-Second World War period.

The essays on the period after the Holocaust and the creation of Israel are generally much worse, with only a couple of notable exceptions.

August Grabski's essay on the Israeli socialist organisation Matzpen (1963-72) demonstrates the heroism of its militants under very difficult conditions, as well as the limitations of their understanding of Lenin's consistent democracy on the national question.

Philip Mendes' essay on the Australian 3CR community radio station in the 1970s shows how anti-Zionism in the post-war period became anti-semitism, using many of the tropes (such as equating Israelis with whites in apartheid South Africa) that are propagated today.

However much of the rest of the book is simply risible. Uri Davis promotes the one-state solution, which satisfies the national aspirations of neither people.

Ilan Pappé writes about opposition groups such as Hadash, Peace Now and Gush Shalom, sneering at those who advocate two-states while flattering Islamists like Hamas.

However this only goes to prove where incoherent anti-Zionism leads in current conditions. If this book inoculates readers against the dominant, negative, nonsensical anti-Zionist politics of the left, then it will have served a purpose.

The ghost of Roger Casement

Songs of Liberty & Rebellion



Roger Casement was a former British diplomat and anti-slavery campaigner who became an Irish revolutionary nationalist. He was arrested in April 1916, three days before the Easter Rising was due to begin, and tried and hanged for treason.

William Butler Yeats, perhaps Ireland's most famous ever poet and certainly the best-known poetic chronicler of the 1916 movement, wrote this piece to demand that his remains were returned to Ireland.

Yeats' politics – about Irish national liberation, and pretty much everything else – were shifting, and often confused. But this poem finds him at perhaps his least esoteric, in a much simpler “protest song” register than much of his other work on the subject, which is characterised by a romantic Celtic nationalism and a frequent use of imagery from Celtic mythology.

The poem's simple refrain (“The ghost of Roger Casement / Is beating on the door”) helps develop this tone, which provides a visceral condemnation of the globe-straddling dominance of British imperialism (“John Bull”) in its high-colonial pomp.

The Ruby Kid

O what has made that sudden noise?
What on the threshold stands?
It never crossed the sea because
John Bull and the sea are friends;
But this is not the old sea
Nor this the old seashore.
What gave that roar of mockery,
That roar in the sea's roar?

The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door.

John Bull has stood for Parliament,
A dog must have his day,
The country thinks no end of him,
For he knows how to say,
At a banquet or a banquet,
That all must hang their trust
Upon the British Empire,
Upon the Church of Christ.

The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door.

John Bull has gone to India
And all must pay him heed,
For histories are there to prove
That none of another breed
Has had a like inheritance,
Or sucked such milk as he,
And there's no luck about a house
If it lack honesty.

The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door.

I poked about a village church
And found his family tomb
And copied out what I could read
In that religious gloom;
Found many a famous man there;
But fame and virtue rot.
Draw round, beloved and bitter men,
Draw round and raise a shout;

The ghost of Roger Casement
Is beating on the door.

Why American unions support Obama and why they're right to do so

Eric Lee



Every four years, an odd little debate occurs on the left.

Here is what happens: An American presidential campaign begins. Someone on the American left will write an article saying that there is no real choice between Democrats and Republicans and that workers need their own party.

Then left-wing papers around the world will reprint the article, or quote it, and agree with the comrade that workers have no real choice in America and need a class party, a labour party.

Some of those who make the case here in Britain will go further and say that British workers face the same predicament, that the Labour Party hasn't really represented them for decades and is “Labour” in name only. They will call on those workers to create or support alternative parties such as the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC).

But there are also those on the British left who say that Marxists belong in the Labour Party as a pressure group, and must be active where the workers and their unions actually are, not in some tiny, marginalised group with no influence.

They acknowledge that for decades that party has not been the kind of Labour Party we'd like, that its leaders no longer question capitalism, support privatisation and cut-backs in public services, won't support strikes, and so on.

But it's the only game in town, and that's why of course we revolutionary socialists must support it, be involved in it, and pressure it to change.

The exact same arguments were made more than a generation ago by Max Shachtman and his small band of third camp socialists regarding the Democratic Party.

When Shachtman first made the case for the strategy known as “realignment”, many unions were not particularly interested in national politics. The AFL-CIO maintained a formal position of neutrality — one which stretched back to the days of Samuel Gompers, who insisted that unions would support their friends and reward their enemies, regardless of party affiliation.

That meant that some unions sometimes supported Republican candidates. The Teamsters were, a generation ago, rather chummy with Richard Nixon (and other unsavoury

characters).

To be fair, a generation ago there were such things as “liberal Republicans” in the US who were not particularly anti-union or even anti-welfare state.

And 40 years ago, the AFL-CIO — for the last time — took a position of neutrality in a presidential election, not willing to back the liberal Democrat George McGovern against Nixon.

But over the last three or four decades, there's been a seismic shift in the American labour movement and unions have become the backbone of the Democratic Party.

In November, it will be union members in their hundreds of thousands providing the bulk of the volunteers in the Obama campaign.

Unions will give many millions of dollars to support that campaign, and the campaigns of Democrats across the country in the hope that their party will win control of both houses of Congress.

And union members will vote overwhelmingly Democratic — even though their counterparts in the working class who are not union members will tend to vote Republican.

The right in America is acutely aware of this and regularly accuse the Democrats of being in the pocket of “special interests”. (For them, unions representing millions of workers are special interests, but oil companies are not.)

The American right has declared war on public sector workers and their unions, and has attempted to pass anti-union legislation, with varying degrees of success, in a number of states.

One of the reasons for this ferocious attack on those unions is their ongoing support for the Democrats.

As the Republican reasoning goes, if you can weaken the public sector unions, you weaken your political opponents.

The Democrats are far from being the kind of social democratic party that American workers need. But in that sense, they don't differ all that much from moderate social democratic parties anywhere else in the world.

Obama didn't pass the labour law reform that American unions demanded and so desperately need. But the Blair/Brown government didn't repeal Thatcher's labour laws either.

If we can understand the importance for revolutionary socialists to engage with the Labour Party in this country, with all its flaws, surely we can understand why the vast majority of America's socialists have long been active inside the Democratic Party there.

They're in that party for the same reason we are in Labour here: because they're serious political people who want to work in the real world.

A pioneer for Russian Marxism

Our Movement Micheál MacEoin



Vera Zasulich (1849-1919) was a revolutionary and an early Russian Marxist.

Born in Mikhaylovska as one of the daughters of a minor noble, she was brought up by wealthier relatives following her father's death, and found her first job working as a clerk in St. Petersburg at the age of sixteen.

It was in the Imperial capital that Zasulich first became involved in the kaleidoscopic revolutionary milieu of Alexander II's Russia, associating with the group around the “nihilist” Sergey Nechayev and, later, with the Kievan Insurgents, who were supporters of the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin.

Zasulich first came to public prominence during the “Trepov Incident”. In 1877, a political prisoner, Alexei Bogolyubov, refused to remove his cap in the presence of Colonel Theodore Trepov, the butcher of the Polish rebellions of 1830 and 1863.

In an act which outraged revolutionaries and the radical intelligentsia, Bogolyubov was flogged for his supposed insolence. A group of six revolutionaries plotted to kill Trepov; Zasulich acted first, shooting and seriously wounding the Colonel with a revolver on 24 January 1878.

Zasulich, with the help of her skilled legal counsel, turned the trial on its head, effectively putting Trepov in the dock. She was found not guilty by a sympathetic jury and became a hero to the Russian “populist” movement, fleeing to Switzerland before she could be rearrested.

After some correspondence with Karl Marx on the nature of the peasant commune in Russia, she became convinced of Marxist ideas and co-founded the Emancipation of Labour

Group with Georgi Plekhanov and Pavel Axelrod in 1883. Her translations of Marx's work contributed greatly to the spread of Marxism in Russia and laid many of the foundations for the formation of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) in 1898.

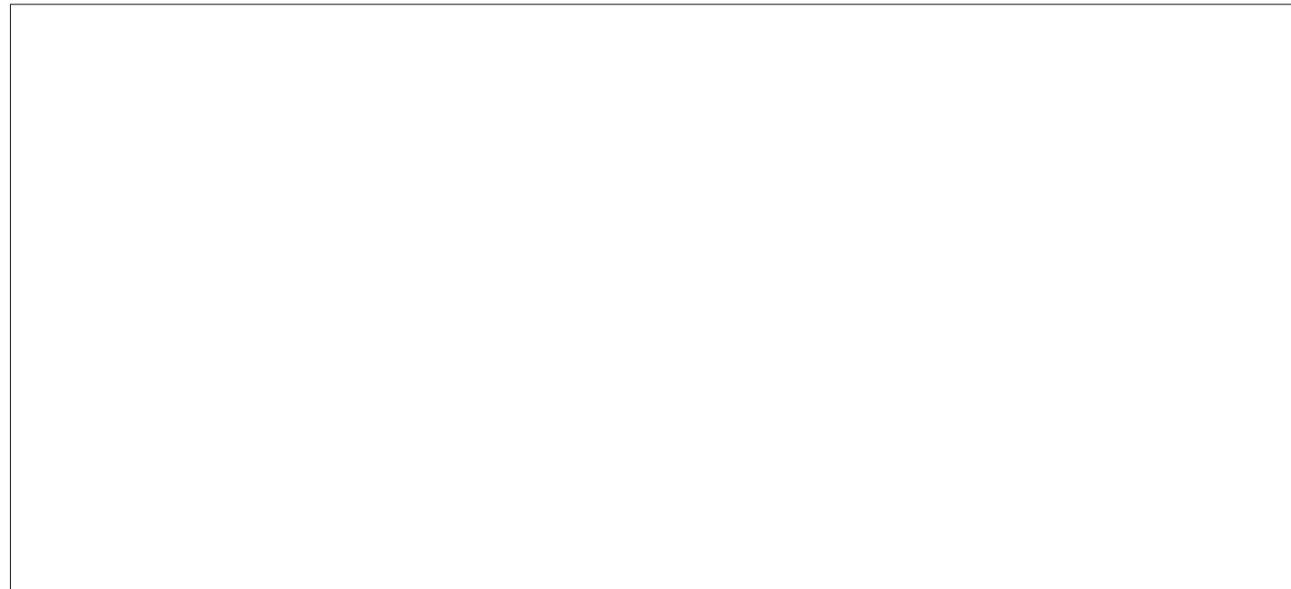
Zasulich, Plekhanov and Axelrod were soon joined by the leaders of a new generation of Russian Marxists, including Julius Martov, Vladimir Lenin, and Alexander Potresov in Switzerland, and founded the revolutionary newspaper Iskra. The Iskra group was successful in opposing more moderate factions such as the so-called “legal Marxists” around Peter Struve, who became sympathetic to the German theoretician Eduard Bernstein's “revisionism” en route to an eventual embrace of liberalism.

However, the editorial board of the paper split at the Second RSDLP Congress in London in 1903, and Zasulich sided with Martov to form the “Menshevik” wing of the party. Although returning to Russia after the 1905 Revolution, she gradually lost interest in revolutionary politics, and supported the Russian war effort in 1914. An opponent of the October Revolution, she died on 8 May 1919, in the newly renamed Petrograd.

Recalling Zasulich some years after her death, Leon Trotsky, with whom she had been friendly in London in 1903, wrote: “She remained to the end the old radical intellectual on whom fate grafted Marxism. Zasulich's articles show that she had adopted to a remarkable degree the theoretic elements of Marxism.

“But the moral political foundations of the Russian radicals of the 70s remained untouched in her until her death.”

Robert Hughes' Australia



Robert Hughes, the Australian art critic died on 6 August. We reprint this review (from 1988) by Belinda Weaver of his important history of Australia, *The Fatal Shore*, as a tribute.

It's chic now in Australia to claim convict descent. Everyone wants to get in on the act. Tracing family history is now a national obsession. The convict past, no longer the shameful stigma it was, seems just another lovable aspect of Australia's history.

Aussies are supposed to be raggedly independent, jovial, anti-authoritarian, loyal to their mates, fond of the outdoor life. The popular image of the convict — a republican out-cast in British society, or an early trade unionist — chimes in with this “typical Aussie” image.

Hughes' book answers many questions — the who, what, why and how of Australia's founding. For too long, Australian children learned only British history. Our own past was taboo, dealing as it did with the convicts, the suppression of the Aborigines, the bushrangers and the split from Britain's rule. The Australian past was too close for comfort. Better the recital of far away kings and queens than an investigation of the fatal shore.

The current tide of nationalism in Australia bends the stick too far the other way. Far from being shamed or worried by the past, Australians want to celebrate it, get drunk on it. Both approaches end up hiding the truth.

Hughes has ripped open the past. This is no anodyne history aimed at pleasing the world. It is raw truth and history, bloody, violent and savage. It gets at the real beginnings, not simply with the first white foot on Australian soil in 1788. It tells us where that foot came from and why. It also describes Australia before the white man. No Garden of Eden, peopled with noble savages but a harsh, dry land with a stone-age people with little culture, living a hand-to-mouth existence with no agriculture, no domestic animals, no permanent structures. Hughes romantacises nothing.

CONVICTS

The British convict experiment was a desperate solution to a desperate problem. A whole continent would become a jail.

Georgian Britain was a cruel society. Those with money and position clung grimly to them, with the law firmly on their side. Crimes against property were punished more severely than any other, often ending with hanging. The ruling class believed in the existence of a criminal “class” — a set of bad apples who would turn the rest rotten. The need was to punish them, and if possible, to segregate them for the sake of the “good”. Can anything have seemed more futile than this experiment?

Attacking the symptoms of extreme poverty couldn't cure the cause. People stole to stay alive in a world which denied them a living. Laws and punishment could not deter the starving from stealing food or money to survive. In many cases, the amounts stolen were pitifully small, but the punishments were heavy — long imprisonment or death.

Yet Georgian Britain lacked the prisons or the police to manage its criminal problem. Many convicts had previously been sent off to America at the expense of colonists for whom they were forced to work on arrival. This form of slavery was closed after the American War of Independence. A new solution was needed. Many prisoners were locked up on rotting hulks, but this was only temporary. The hulks themselves were overcrowded and were so unsafe that many sank with all aboard. They were filthy and hotbeds of crime. They provided no real answer.

So the Australian experiment was tried. Luckily, this new venture was so far away that few convicts would ever re-

turn. 14,000 miles — the end of the world. To many convicts, the mere thought of it evoked death. It was simply unimaginable.

The Marines who sailed with the First Fleet were also anxious. They were sailing into a complete unknown. Letters and supplies could take six months or longer to arrive. Many would not see families and friends for many years, if ever. Australia seemed worse than death. Death could be imagined, Australia could not.

The First Fleet was lucky to survive. Its journey was horrendous. The victualling of the ship had been done by crooked merchants, so many supplies were rotten. The rigors of the journey killed many. The Fleet sailed with no special precautions against scurvy; the weather was bad; convict insubordination was rife; and morale was low in the crew. Their arrival at Botany Bay was a letdown. Though glad that the journey was finally ended, they were appalled to discover the Bay unsuitable for settlement. A further search found Port Jackson just a few miles north; a natural harbor, teeming with fish and with rich soil and abundant water. The site of modern Sydney was eagerly settled.

But it didn't live up to its early promise. The soil was poorer than expected, seeds failed to thrive, the rain came down in buckets or not at all. The Fleet faced starvation years until the Second Fleet could arrive to succor them. Bad beginnings.

“ON THE STORE”

Convicts were fed “on the store”. The government was the main supplier of all food and goods. Convicts were set to work building shelters and tilling the soil.

No need for a prison here; the whole country was one. No convict could escape and hope to survive. The Australian bush was inhospitable to all but the Aborigines who could find waterholes and live off the native animals and insects. Totally ignorant of geography, many convicts fled, hoping to find China or some other hospitable land. All they found was a lonely death.

After the starvation years, the convicts could hope for a better lot. Instead of being stuck in prison, they were assigned to work for free settlers. In time, they could hope to get tickets-of-leave, and become free settlers themselves, though they could not leave the colony. For many, this was the road to a respectable living, the living that “old England” couldn't provide. But many convicts met a harsher fate. Assigned to brutal masters who worked them to the bone and flogged them at will, many convicts preferred death itself.

Many convicts, usually the “hardened criminals”, were not assigned, but worked in government chain gangs doing the hardest work, such as road building.

Life in the gangs was grim. Heavy irons weighed them down. The legs of many were open sores from the incessant chafing. The work was punishing, their overseers were cruel and arbitrary, often stealing the food meant for the convicts.

There was no thought of rehabilitation for criminals. The system had to be cruel if it was to deter the criminal back “home”. Thus punishment and work was the never ending round, with special pieces of punishment created for persistent offenders,

In places like Macquarie Harbour, men often worked knee deep all day in freezing water, building pylons for a bridge, and spent sleepless nights on a windswept, rocky island with no blankets and with empty bellies. For whistling, smiling, singing or loafing, endless lashings were given. Talking was frowned upon, as all were suspected of plotting some crime. The system brutalised because it denied any humanity to the convict. He had to be crushed absolutely so that he could never commit a crime again. Such

was the system on the fatal shore.

The special hells created included Norfolk Island, Moreton Bay and Port Arthur and Macquarie Harbour. Run by sadistic men who were beyond the control of any government, they were precursors of the 20th century gulags. They aimed to break men utterly, by consistent hard work, by flogging and by crushing discipline. Men were given thousands of lashes. The faces of spectators would be splashed with flesh and blood. The cat o' nine tails frequently wore out. Blood would slop in the shoes of the lashed men. One man had so little skin left on his back from incessant floggings that his shoulder blades showed through.

In creating these special hells, the system was fulfilling its deterrent role. Men would rather die than go there; many killed themselves or killed others in suicide pacts to escape.

The Fatal Shore is living history. It could have been just a catalogue of horrors, or a list of numbing statistics. But Hughes has found the language to touch our hearts and minds. He has made the unimaginable imaginable

He has also touched on three taboo areas in some detail — the treatment of women, the existence of homosexuality and the fate of the Aborigines.

PROSTITUTES

The “popular” view of convict women is that they were all prostitutes. This is shown to be false. Many, like men, simply stole to survive.

Many had been seduced and abandoned, but not all had turned to prostitution as a result. Some had been Irish nationalists or agitators of one kind or another. The colony's treatment of them was shameful. In the Female Factory at Parramatta, men could come to feel the merchandise before choosing a wife. When a new ship arrived, men turned up to take their pick of the women; the rest were sent to the Female Factory. Most needed a man's help to get on.

The “curse” of homosexuality was decried by all managers of the convict system. The jailers were surprised that locking men up together, far from any women, should result in homosexuality. It was rife throughout the colony, especially in the hellholes like Norfolk Island. The prisoners took what solace they could from each other. Yet the official reports drip with loathing and contempt for these “unnatural practices”. It had to be stamped out. But floggings had no effect, though the punishment was severe.

The official policy towards the Aborigine was always one of peaceful coexistence. All the same, the advent of the white man was an unmitigated disaster for the Aborigines. In Tasmania, they were completely wiped out; their numbers today on the mainland are still small. They could never defeat the white man militarily, and they succumbed in huge numbers to two imported evils, disease and liquor.

The spread of white settlement forced tribes out of their natural hunting grounds and into conflicts with other tribes. The convicts hated them. Themselves the lowest on the white ladder, they longed for someone they could beat down. The Aborigines became their victims. When convicts became free and got some land for themselves, they kept their mistrust of the Aborigines, who had often helped to track down escaped convicts for the government. As more of the country became settled, white settlers killed off Aborigines rather than live in fear of attack. Poisoned flour was given out, along with tobacco and rum.

Aborigines had no settled religion or gods, but they did have an almost mystical attachment to their land. Certain sites were sacred to them. In driving them off, settling on these sacred sites, and barring them from their traditional grounds, white settlers destroyed the Aboriginal relationship with the land, and thus their whole way of life. This fact must stand with the other facts of disease and drunkenness as one of the destroyers of Aboriginal life.

For many convicts, arrival on the fatal shore had been utter misery. But others had prospered, had made a living, and could call themselves free. This fact led many criminals in Britain to petition for the chance to be transported. They too hoped to finally reach a better life. Even free settlers were becoming more numerous. Some settlers talked of independence from Britain and the end to transportation. Free, waged workers would be better value than convicts.

The colony was developing its own life and politics different from that of England. England wanted things to be tightened up, with more Moreton Bays and Port Arthurs to deter the criminals at home; many colonists wanted a free Australian society, rid of the convict stain. By 1840 transportation to New South Wales had officially ended.

• From *Workers' Liberty* 11, April 1988

• Bill Douglas' film *Comrades*, (about the Tolpuddle Martyrs) is a fine, and very moving depiction of the Australian convict system.

Call centre workers strike

By a PCS rep

Jobcentre Plus call centre workers were on strike over working conditions on Monday 13 August.

Regular readers of *Solidarity* will know that Jobcentre Plus workers in DWP Call Centres have been part of the PCS union's "Contact Centre Campaign" since as early as 2009, in the fight for improved working conditions. Just some of the conditions that workers have taken action against include oppressive management practices, time and target driven working,

monitoring of staff movements and whereabouts, and high stress levels (often due to all of the above), which has led to a draconian attitude to sickness management in these offices.

In one office of around 350 staff, there are currently 80 workers undergoing disciplinary action for sickness, and local union reps make quite clear that a large proportion of this sickness is either down to either work-related stress, or sickness from members of staff with disabilities that the Contact Centre cannot, or refuses, to accommo-

date.

In addition, as explained in *Solidarity* 253, Jobcentre Plus management have begun to privatise contact centre services, removing work from public sector staff and outsourcing to private companies like

Capita, who are planning to pay workers around £3,000 less per year for the same role, on worse terms.

The frustration and anger at the longevity of these problems and the refusal of the management to admit to their failings

meant that the strike was extremely well supported in most sites, with many members joining picket lines who had never done so before. Management's tactic of holding staff meetings prior to the strike to try and appease staff and convince them of what a great place the Contact Centre Service is to work apparently backfired.

One worker in an affected JCP call centre said: "Having worked in Sheffield Contact Centre for over three years, I've experienced several changes of both teams and service lines, the most recent of

which enforced due to the privatisation of my job role. Management's constant demands to meet unrealistic targets seem to lead not only to low morale, but affects the staff's health and well-being."

Due in large to pressure from members in affected branches, PCS is now willing to take further action on this campaign if management do not buckle over any of the demands of the strike.

PCS negotiators have been in talks since the strike day and are meeting DWP management again this week.

Unison bullies members in pensions vote

By a Unison rep

I am in a local government Unison branch which has a firm branch position of opposition to the pension offer currently on the table.

The deal is not that different to what was on offer prior to our industrial action on 30 November. We will all be working longer, paying more, and getting less.

How has our union ended up recommending acceptance, and indeed threatening any branch that has a different position? The undemocratic way in which this has been handled has shocked many ordinary members and reps and given us all a lesson in the nature of bureaucracy and the lengths they will go to silence dissent.

This "deal" was offered to the union leaders by the government shortly before Unison conference, and yet the Unison leadership only released the details of the deal when they were worried "rival" union GMB might release them first. Unison's top leaders got

the local government Service Group Executive (SGE) to agree that conference shouldn't be allowed to decide our recommendation because conference was "unrepresentative". In reality, the bureaucrats were rightly worried that conference would, given the opportunity, recommend rejection.

OFFICER
A regional officer came to one of our branch meetings and weakly tried to argue the above point while denying she was doing so.

The idea that *our* conference, which is supposedly our highest decision making body, couldn't make this recommendation is outrageous.

Unison then ran a postal ballot to decide which recommendation the union should make on a very short timescale (less than two weeks) The turnout was predictably poor; our branch was one of the best in London with over 10%. The literature in favour of the LGPS deal was ridiculously biased, and peppered with arguments

based on completely different figures to those used initially. A regional officer shouted at me when I pointed out how unfair a career average scheme was for women (or anyone taking a job break) by saying it was "only women who have children" who would be affected.

Ultimately, though, London region returned a vote to recommend rejection of the deal. Despite this, two of our three reps on the SGE voted to recommend acceptance.

THREATENING
Since the decision to recommend acceptance was taken, the actual ballot on whether or not to accept the deal began, and the Unison machinery has been threatening branches that are campaigning for a no vote, saying we are against Unison policy.

This is completely wrong, as the union cannot have formal policy until the ballot ends (only a "recommendation"), and branches are allowed to organise around their own recommendations until the

union has formal policy. Despite support for the deal not being agreed policy, big advertisements have been paid for in papers like the *Evening Standard*, *Guardian*, and *Metro* encouraging Unison members to vote yes. This has all been paid for with members' money, of course.

Unison leaders have learnt a lot from the ballot on the NHS pensions scheme, where they made no recommendation and members voted to reject the deal. They completely ignored that democratic decision, but have made sure there is little possibility of members exercising this kind of oppositional instinct again.

From the beginning, there was no say from ordinary members and reps in how the local government pensions dispute was organised.

We need to hold our current leaders to account, fight to replace them, and make sure rank-and-file union members are organised independently of the bureaucracy.

Autumn strikes in Higher Education pay fight

Members of the public sector union Unison working in Higher Education have rejected an employers' pay offer and are building towards strikes. A Unison rep from a London university spoke to *Solidarity* about the campaign.

HE employers offered a 1% pay rise for this year; how have Unison members responded?

Our branch has had a consultation on the annual pay offer. We do this every year. Usually most people vote in favour of accepting the offer, rather than take industrial action. This year members voted overwhelmingly to reject the offer, understanding that this would probably mean being balloted for industrial action. This is a big change and shows members are finally getting fed up with below-inflation pay offers.

Nationally, around two thirds of Unison HE voted to reject, but in the London HE branches I have been in touch with, it was 90 - 100% voted to reject.

What are the next steps following rejection and the indicative ballot?

The latest news is that the HE Service Group Executive (SGE) have announced that unless the

ACAS talks result in a big improvement from the employers' offer of 1%, Unison HE members will be balloted in September.

Despite the result of the consultation, it is going to take a lot of work to make sure that we get as many members as possible to take part in the ballot and to make the case for voting yes to industrial action. We have begun organising meetings to get the word out to members, and we'll be producing our own leaflets and posters. The most important thing to do is to talk face to face with co-workers, letting them know that you're in favour of taking action and why. This should be a dialogue between education workers, not just a top-down recommendation from "the union".

According to reports from the SGE meeting, a strike could take place around the time of the TUC demo on 20 October, and possibly also around the time of the National Union of Students (NUS) demo. The idea of timing action around the NUS demo is to make the link between students' and education workers' struggles, and to get as much student support for our strike as possible.

Locally, we are having joint meetings with the other unions, as we are working on the assumption that we will get balloted at the same time. We'll be holding an open meeting at ULU on 12 September from 1-2pm.

• Abridged from bit.ly/NDTyb

Parking attendants strike

By Darren Bedford

Parking attendants employed by contractor NSL in Camden, London, will strike again on 9 and 10 August.

Workers are fighting for the London Living Wage of £8.30 an hour, as well as for sick pay. They also have other grievances

around terms and conditions.

Unison has 80% density amongst NSL workers in Camden and has had strong turnouts in previous strike days. Workers fought hard to win recognition. Despite these achievements, they have found it difficult to get Unison officialdom to

sanction further strikes.

The dispute has a significance beyond the borough of Camden, as many London boroughs outsource their parking services to NSL.

In Islington, Unison has 50% density amongst NSL workers and is pursuing a recognition fight.

Off The Rails



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rail workers.

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Tyne and Wear Metro cleaners fight on

By Ed Whitby

On 6 and 7 August RMT members employed by Churchill to clean the Tyne and Wear Metro struck again for 48 hours.

The long-running dispute has now seen cleaners take five days of strike action.

They are demanding living wages (they are currently paid minimum wage, and have not been offered a pay rise for this year), free travel passes, access to a pensions scheme, and an end to victimisation.

The action on 6 and 7 August was described as rock solid. Workers also organised a lobby of Nexus, the Tyne and Wear transport authority (made up of local councillors).

The local anti-cuts network also continued its involvement in the campaign. They have organised a number of direct actions in solidarity with the dispute, including mass leafleting sessions, street parties, and other actions. Their role is a good example of how anti-cuts groups and working-class community campaigns can build solidarity with industrial struggles. For this strike, the networks distributed thousands of leaflets to each borough

naming their local councillors on the transport authority, and urging residents to contact them and ask them to speak out for the cleaners.

Their silence has been deafening. While a number of local Labour MPs have signed an Early Day Motion in support of the cleaners, and while Dave Anderson (MP for Blaydon) visited recent picket lines, Labour councillors - including those on the authority - have said nothing.

MANAGERS

Worse still, it appears managers from the authority and DB Regio (who won the contract to run the Metro and sub-contracted cleaning to Churchills) are in fact helping to break the strike by doing cleaning work on strike days (and taking home much more money than the cleaners get).

It appears councillors and DB Regio fear that a victory for the cleaners could lead Churchills to walk away from the contract, forcing DB Regio or the council itself to directly employ the cleaners if another contractor cannot be found.

A recent Employment Tribunal for an RMT member sacked in the run up to the dispute found he had

been unfairly dismissed and victimised. This will certainly give members a boost.

The campaign needs continued direct-action solidarity, as well as to develop links with workers on the Deutsch Bahn network in Germany. DB Regio is a state-owned

company which runs regional trains in Germany, where it has a history of subcontracting cleaning services to exploitative employers. It is also in the process of privatising the Berlin S-Bahn metro system which it runs. Workers in both countries could learn from and support

each others' struggles.

More strikes are planned, as well as a fundraising social on Friday 24 August, 7.30pm, at the Tyneside Irish Centre with bands and music. Contact 07740099479 for info.

Tube cleaners strike to win dignity at work



By a cleaning worker

I'm employed by ISS [one of the main cleaning contractors operating on the Underground] on the Northern Line.

The strikes have been good so far; we need to keep building and raising awareness of the dispute, including getting more publicity and press coverage.

The strike hasn't been strong everywhere. Managers have been phoning individual workers telling them not to strike, telling them that the strike won't win. They've been intimidating workers and it has an impact on the number

of people prepared to strike.

The cleaning companies have been flooding the stations with extra agency staff to undermine the impact of the strike. They're not legally allowed to hire scab labour just to break a strike but they used the cover of the Olympics to hire a lot more agency staff than they would have to make sure they've got cover during the strikes.

We want an Olympic bonus but people feel more passionately about the wider, general issues - the living wage, staff travel passes, sick pay, and pensions. Not having travel passes kills us; fares

have gone up, but our wages haven't.

We're striking for dignity and respect at work. Cleaners are the bottom of the pile on the Underground. At some stations we're not even allowed to sit in the mess rooms with the other workers.

We need to keep our strikes going, and build political pressure too. **We should be taking direct action against Boris Johnson, and against the fat cat bosses who run the cleaning companies. It's time to take the fight to them.**

• Cleaning workers are fighting for Olympic bonus, living wages, staff travel passes, pensions, and sick pay. For more on their dispute, see workersliberty.org/twblog and rmtlondoncalling.org.uk

Union officials scupper drivers' pensions fight

By an ASLEF member

*"If I'm being held by terrorists who are threatening to kill me, for f**k's sake don't send in any ASLEF negotiators." - Anonymous mess-room wit*

Sabotage by three full-timer officials from drivers' union ASLEF killed off the pension dispute on East Midlands Trains.

Hours before the Olympics were due to start, they suspended strikes set to take place during the games so that the Executive could consider another deal they had negotiated. The new deal contains little except promises of further talks and reviews. The document in which ASLEF District Organiser Richard Fisher talks up the new "deal" contains no mentions of the Nottingham branch meeting he attended in July where he witnessed the strength of feeling amongst the members for action during the

Olympics, or the fact that again in July three branches representing the vast majority of EMT members voted for strike action during the Olympics. Also absent is any mention of the fact that not one of our lay reps were asked for their opinion on the deal.

Why did negotiators call off our strikes for this shoddy deal? One possibility is that there was some third party with an interest in getting the strike pulled who had more influence over our elected representatives than we have. Maybe a quiet word from the TUC or Labour Party, who would want to avoid at all costs having to talk about workers striking during the Games?

No-one is saying that we weren't in a difficult position on pensions, what with all the other unions accepting the changes, but this outcome is confusing and debilitating.

• Abridged from bit.ly/OobHyr

New battles for Southampton council workers

Mike Tucker, secretary of Southampton District Union, spoke to Solidarity about the situation for workers in the city following the election of a Labour council in May.

Since the change of administration in May, we've been negotiating to secure the reversal of the pay cuts made by the previous Tory council.

We've made significant progress there and the deal will be made public within the next weeks.

There's been a general improvement in industrial relations at the council. Management engage with unions now and the normal channels of consultation are being respected again. The new administration has also withdrawn proposals to evict the unions from the offices and to make myself and my colleague from Unite redundant.

Soon after taking power, the council introduced a mini-budget that included

some cuts. There was particular opposition to the proposal to cut the subsidy to a local swimming pool on a working-class housing estate. We have members working at that pool and are opposed to that cut. Two councillors voted against the budget - an action we supported.

We've been working with those councillors since then to maintain a campaign against the closure of that swimming pool, including building a mass meeting on that estate and a lobby of the council meeting on 12 September which is due to ratify the cut to the subsidy. It's unfortunate that one of the Labour council's first actions was to propose a cut that would hit our members and working-class communities, but it's important to note that the councillors' revolt was around this specific issue rather than something more general.

Southampton council is the only local authority

where pay cuts are on the point of being reversed. In conditions of austerity that's hugely significant and we believe a validation both of the sustained industrial action we took and the work the unions did to help elect a Labour council. We reject entirely the notion that there is no difference between Labour and Tory administrations, and the progress we've made since Labour took office proves this very clearly.

However, the economic situation remains unstable and we're well aware that at some point in the near future, Labour will make proposals that will negatively affect our members and which we'll oppose.

We support the election of a Labour council but our fundamental role is to help our members defend their pay, conditions, and jobs, and we'll continue to do that regardless of which political party has power in the council.

John Lewis strikes make gains

By Ollie Moore

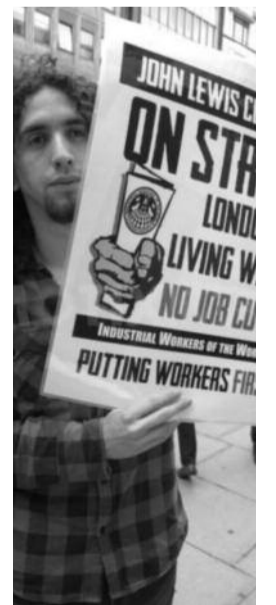
A strike campaign by cleaning workers at John Lewis' flagship store in London's Oxford Street has forced bosses to back off from a cuts plan, as well as winning wage increases for workers.

Cleaning contractor ICM (part of the Compass Group) had been planning to make compulsory cuts to cleaning workers' hours, meaning a loss of pay, as well as making compulsory redundancies. The workers' strikes have succeeded in halting the cuts plan. Not a single worker will now face redundancy.

Although the key demand of the strike, to win a pay increase to the London Living Wage of £8.30 per hour, has not yet been met, the cleaners have won a 10% pay increase.

Their union, the Industrial Workers of Great Britain (an offshoot of the Industrial Workers of the World), says that winning the living wage remains "the key objective".

The union hopes that the confidence and momentum gained from the victories over cuts will help galvanise an ongoing campaign against poverty pay.



Call centre exploits prison labour for £3 a day

Using prisoners as nearly-free labour in call centres is an import from the US.

By Ira Berkovic

Becoming Green, a company which markets environmentally-sustainable energy to homeowners, has been exposed using prison labour on slave wages in its Cardiff call centre.

Almost 20% of the call centre's staff in July and August were inmates from Prescoed prison in Monmouthshire, around 21 miles away from the centre. The prison workers were paid just £3 per day for their work.

Becoming Green had been employing the prisoners for 40-day periods, but as there is no centralised regulation on how long external employers can employ prison labour on "training contracts", Becoming Green could keep employing prisoners on similar wage levels for much longer.

Although the Ministry of Justice claims it sought assurances from Becoming Green that prison workers would only be used to fill "genuine vacancies", there is substantial evidence to suggest that the company has been exploiting prison labour in order to allow them to sack existing workers. A former Becoming Green worker told *The Guardian* that staff were informed in November 2011 that the company planned to begin taking on prison labour. Shortly afterwards, 17 workers were dismissed.

The former employee said: "As they started bringing more and more [prisoners] in, they started firing people ... They would have kept their jobs if it wasn't for the prison thing. They'd passed their

probation period, they'd been there for several months. They'd maintained the level they were — that had been perfectly acceptable at that point. Then they [got] these people in for nearly free.

"Everyone was pretty miffed because at the end of the day there's no way you can compete [with £3 a day]."

Andy Richards, Welsh secretary of the Unite union, said: "This looks like a disgraceful and worrying development which follows the UK government's already discredited Workfare scheme.

"It is nothing short of Dickensian to exploit prisoners by paying them just £3 a day while Cardiff call centre workers lose their jobs."

The levels of exploitation in this case are manifold. Prisoners, forced to work for illegally low wages, are victims. Even within the framework of retributive models of "justice", their prison sentences constitute their "punishment"; there is nothing in British law that says prisoners must become slaves as well. And Becoming Green's full-time staff are victims too,

as their bosses use the opportunity to hire nearly-free labour as a means of undercutting them.

This is the model of employment relations that the Tories would like to impose as widely as the can. These are politics of the workhouse, a race to the bottom where workers are coerced into some of the most exploitative, oppressive conditions of labour which exist in the modern British economy.

Increasingly, the fight against the government is a fight for our basic human dignity.

Activists shame "workfare" employers

By a Boycott Workfare activist

"Workfare" — forced unpaid work for people who need social security — can now be found on every high street.

Charities — which really should know the difference between forced labour and volunteering — are helping the government roll out workfare on a massive scale: British Heart Foundation's policy director has stated for the record that every one of their 700 stores has Work Programme placements. To their shame, many other charities are also involved.

In August, a new workfare scheme was announced which will compel people to work without pay for so-called "community benefit". In other words, community service-style sentences are being meted out for the

crime of being unemployed. This comes on top of the plan to put 1.06 million people onto six months' workfare, mainly in charity and public sector organisations.

Our actions have pushed back the spread of workfare on the high street, now it's time that charities respond to the call.

Plans for a national day of action against charity involvement in workfare are brewing. Already, Liverpool has announced an action with others in the pipeline in Edinburgh and Brighton. London also has

plans for the day. The London action will take place from 11.30am on Saturday 8 September, meeting outside the Nat West opposite Camden Town station.

Come along to this walk of shame to learn who's in and who's out and to step up the pressure on the charities which claim to help people but are pushing the unemployed into further poverty and exploitation.

• More: boycottworkfare.org

27-31 August: join the Atos games!

Atos is the company hired by the government to help them throw disabled people off benefits. Disgracefully, they are also a prominent sponsor of the Paralympic Games.

The Disabled People's Action Coalition is organising a week of action against Atos across the country, and calling for the support and involvement of the whole anti-cuts movement. For information on how to get involved, see tinyurl.com/atosgames.

Syria at the edge: for freedom and secular democracy!

By Dan Katz

The people of Syria face a humanitarian disaster. The state is responsible for most of the estimated 23,000 deaths since the uprising against Bashar Assad's police state began in March 2011.

The regime has now lost control over large areas of the country and is resorting to the use of attack helicopters and fixed-wing planes against its own people.

Over a quarter of a million people have fled the country and 1.2 million are internally displaced. The UN states that 2.5 million are in need of food and other aid.

Basic infrastructure is breaking down. For example, sewage-contaminated water has led to a diarrhoea outbreak in the countryside around Damascus. Power cuts take place for hours each day, in many areas.

The regime is unable to retake much of Aleppo in the north west and rebels are perhaps close to over-running the airport which has been used as a base

for air attacks. The rebel militias, mainly the Free Syrian Army are going through a reorganisation, merging and attempting to build an effective central command.

In the Kurdish north east of Syria the state has abdicated allowing the PKK to take control. The PKK is a repressive Kurdish group that has fought a long war with the Turkish state.

This seems to be part of the Syrian strategy. Rather than give up power Assad's regime seems willing to allow Syria to collapse into warring fiefdoms, similar to those that existed in Lebanon, during their civil war in the 1970s and 80s.

The fragmentation at the top of the regime continues to indicate the extreme pressure they are under.

Prime minister Riyadh Hijab escaped and join the opposition two weeks ago; the state was denying yesterday that Vice-President Farouq al-Shara, who has not been seen recently, had also defected.

Syrian refugees. About a quarter of a million people have fled the country