

# workers power 5



Students and youth fight back



Spanish struggle hots up



Free Russia's Pussy Riot

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Monthly paper of the British section of the League for the Fifth International

*With millions on the dole and a lost generation...*

# 2.5m reasons to fight the coalition

HALFWAY THROUGH its term the Tory-Lib Dem coalition has failed – even by its own standards.

Nick Clegg recently said that the “short, sharp recession is clearly turning into a longer-term process of economic recovery and fiscal restraint”.

See – even Clegg admits the coalition’s economic policy isn’t working.

Sacking half a million workers, £20 billion cuts to the NHS and the tight squeeze on pay, pensions and benefits have all depressed the economy.

But this was Clegg and his puppet-master David Cameron’s intention: make the workers pay for the crisis; destroy jobs while cutting the wages of those in work; break up and privatise health and education services; demonise the disabled, young and unemployed, docking their benefits and putting them to work for the minimum wage – or for free.

Having smuggled their way into Downing Street by lying in their election campaigns, this austerity government is continuing to lie.

## Recession deepens

Back in 2010, Chancellor George Osborne promised that his £85 billion cuts package would not put millions on the dole because the private sector would “pick up the slack”.

LIES. Unemployment has risen to 2.5 million, with a million young people under 25 not in education, employment or training. With just 400,000 vacancies, six people are chasing every job.

Nearly all new jobs are part-time, while almost all those destroyed were

full-time. The massive rise in “self-employment” masks under-employment and people earning less than the minimum wage. The only age group registering an increase in employment is the over 65s – workers forced to stay on because they can’t afford to retire.

Far from private companies picking up the slack, they are more likely to be cutting jobs and closing workplaces. Britain is in a “double-dip” recession: the longest and deepest for a century.

## Ballooning debt

David Cameron and Nick Clegg boasted that they would abolish the budget deficit in just four years, bringing down the state debt.

LIES. This year the government has already spent £67 billion more in the first half of this year than it has received in taxes – a bigger deficit than in the same period last year. The national debt – what Britain owes in total – officially broke the £1 trillion mark this summer. But if you take into account all the money handed over to the banks in bailouts, the country is in fact £2.3 trillion in debt.

So if the money hasn’t gone on house building, schools or the NHS, where has it gone?

The banks have done well, receiving another £400 billion of our money, “lent” to them on the cheap in the form of “quantitative easing”. The major companies all enjoyed a big tax cut, as did top earners – CEOs and the like.

Of course paying out more in ben-



Hundreds of thousands demonstrated on 26 March 2011. Now we must turn the coming 20 October march into action to defeat the Coalition

efits as jobs are axed costs money too. But instead of borrowing to stimulate the economy, the coalition is spending to keep people out of work!

## Mind the gap

Which brings us to the third big LIE: that “we’re all in this together”.

While the super-rich are richer than ever – the wealthiest 1,000 Britons saw their fortunes increase

by 5 per cent to a record £414 billion – average wages have plummeted in real terms: by between 3 and 7 per cent last year alone.

This inequality is even greater when you consider that the cuts in benefits, the NHS and council services hit poorer families far harder than the rich who don’t rely on them.

Make 20 October huge  
The message is clear: this is gov-

ernment by the rich for the rich. Only around 6 per cent of planned cuts have been implemented so far.

Forget Clegg’s fluff about “mansion taxes” and “wealth taxes”. That is only to placate his middle class supporters, not serious policy. The Lib Dems won’t change course – they are too entangled in the austerity measures to jump ship now. They must be booted out along with the Tories.

Last year, 2 million struck against severe cuts to public workers’ pensions. We saw hundreds of thousands of young people mobilised to halt the rise in tuition fees and the abolition of the EMA. Thousands more exposed Britain’s tax dodging corporations, and occupied city centres.

On 20 October we will march again in the TUC’s demo for “A Future That Works”. We must demand that the union leaders follow this up with strike action – coordinated wherever possible and not just for a day, but for as long as it takes to win.

But most of all, we need to propose to all those fighting the cuts and their leaders that we form a new working class party. Not one like Labour, which began the privatisation of our schools and hospitals and now refuses to support strikes or reverse the damage.

But a genuine working class party dedicated to each and every struggle against austerity, determined to make the bosses and bankers pay for their crisis, and committed to building socialism, a society where hunger and want are abolished for good.

## Build for TUC demonstration on 20 October



# Editorial

## An autumn offensive

WE ARE halfway through the Tory-Lib Dem government. David Cameron and Nick Clegg have orchestrated an enormous onslaught on the working class, aiming to dismantle all of the gains we have made since 1945.

But how has our side fared?

Certainly there have been encouraging signs. Thousands of students brought central London and quite a few other cities to a standstill in November 2010, nearly defeating the government. The partial general strike a year later mobilised 2 million workers. New movements, like Occupy and UK Uncut, have inspired a new generation of class fighters.

But anti-climax followed each time.

Workers Power has participated in all these struggles, sometimes from the front. But we are not a mass party – even though we aspire to build one. We cannot simply change the course of a whole movement.

However, as Marxists, we can analyse the class struggle and fight for tactical changes that could bring victory closer. Here are three.

In the unions, we need to build a **rank and file movement**, bringing all the best militants across the unions together to hammer out a plan to smash the coalition.

For decades, left groups have sought to win control of the unions through elections. While this got rid of some of the worst bureaucrats, it has not got rid of sell-outs.

Only a rank and file movement, rooted in the workplaces, and geared towards fighting every single cut – with the officials where possible, without them where necessary – could reverse the trend of retreats and defeats.

Such a movement could do away with the rule of fulltime officials on fat salaries and replace it with the control of mass meetings, whose elected and instantly recallable reps are the servants of the movement, paid the average wage of those they represent. Such a movement would not cow before the courts every time an employer uses the anti-union laws, but would defy orders to return to work or suspend strikes, calling on other unions to come to their defence.

Related to this, we also need to **unite the anti-cuts campaigns**. We now have four anti-cuts umbrella groups: the National Shop Stewards Movement, Right to Work, Coalition of Resistance and the latest, without a shred of irony intended, Unite the Resistance.

The main purpose of each of these fronts is to promote the policies and profile of the sponsoring left group – Socialist Party, SWP or Counterfire. They may claim to emphasise different aspects of the struggle, but so what? This could be done better in a single campaign. They may have different policies – but what use are any of them without a united movement to implement them?

Who really benefits from these separate campaigns? The government certainly, but so do the union leaders who are frittering away our forces in stop-start strikes, and the Labour Party that does not have to defend its position in front of a mass movement.

In contrast a united movement would be able to swing all its forces behind any group of workers in struggle at a moment's notice, would be able to recruit more members to unions and more activists to lead struggles, and would ultimately have the authority to call actions of its own whenever union leaders betray.

Last but not least, all the unions, campaigns, socialist groups and individuals fighting austerity need to come together to launch a **new working class party**.

Greece recently showed us how quickly such a party could grow – if launched in time and open to all anticapitalist tendencies. Syriza grew from 4 per cent of the vote in 2009 to 16 per cent in April 2012 and 27 per cent in July.

How? By involving itself in all the struggles and hosting mass meetings to discuss ways forward. By declaring itself against all the cuts. By proposing to cancel the debt, and use the money to rebuild the country.

We believe that such a new party would have to adopt a revolutionary action programme in order to carry out such measures. It would have to seize capitalists' finances and factories, and start to break up the police and army, if it were not to find its work sabotaged. But that is for debate inside the new party we are fighting to build.

## Spanish miners and farm workers take on bosses and the state



Andy Yorke

SPAIN IS THE new Greece, the latest country to fall victim to the bond markets and Eurozone bailout conditions. With its banks weighed down by €184 billion in toxic debts and in a double-dip recession since last Autumn, in June Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy had to go cap in hand to Eurozone finance ministers for a €100 bank bailout.

The price – as usual – was an austerity package of €65 billion with VAT tax hikes, cuts to unemployment benefits, slashed pay for public sector workers and attacks on union rights. And things are poised to get worse. Spain's regional governments are bankrupt too. Catalonia, Murcia, and Valencia are begging for bailouts.

A series of austerity packages have wrecked the economy and driven it deeper and deeper into recession.

Spain now tops the Eurozone's jobless list with 27 per cent unemployed – and 53 per cent of young people without a job. After four years of nearly constant recession, one in five people have fallen below the poverty line – while a recent Caritas report says that another 11 million are “on the cliff edge”. Over half a million have no income whatsoever. Tens of thousands have been evicted.

But Spanish workers and youth have not taken this lying down. Mass demonstrations and occupation with militant actions by some of the hardest hit have made this a hot summer for the Rajoy and his right wing government. Miners and farm workers have been in the forefront.

### Miners and farm workers

Ministers decided to force the closure of Spain's coal mining industry with 60 per cent cuts. These plans threaten 40 mines, a blow the industry would not recover from, throwing 8,000 miners on the scrap heap and devastating the communities.

In May the main unions, the CCOO and UGT, called strikes which turned into an all-out struggle from 1 June. For weeks miners occupied pits and blockaded roads and railways, defending their actions from police attacks with burning barricades and homemade rocket launchers. General strikes called on 18 June in the mining districts in Asturias, Leon and Palencia were solid.

A miners' “Black March” on Madrid ended on 10 July in a 150,000-strong solidarity demonstration. Police charged the protesters and fired rubber bullets.

Their own union leaders, who wound up the strike without a victory, ultimately betrayed the miners but the lessons of rank and file initiative and militant action remain.

In August the baton passed to unemployed farm labourers in Andalucia, who occupied the estate of the Duke of Segorbe. Led by United Left mayor for Marinelda, Sánchez Gordillo, they have moved on from occupying unused land to raiding supermarkets to feed the hungry.

Diego Cañamero, the leader of the Andalusian Union of Workers, said that European subsidies pay big landowners not to grow crops: “There is zero incentive for these already wealthy owners to grow anything.” A third of local workers are unemployed in one of Spain's poorest regions. The workers plan to farm the land as agricultural collectives.

### United Left

In a parallel with Greece, opinion polls show Spain's Socialists well behind Rajoy's Popular Party. This is no surprise as between May 2010 and its electoral catastrophe in December 2011 the Socialists also carried out savage cuts. At the same time the United Left – led by the Communist Party – is rising steadily in the polls.

But the United Left is now in coalition in Andalucia and making cuts. The alternative it faces is whether to follow the road of *Die Linke* in Germany, enter regional coalitions and make cuts or take a more intransigent line, like *Syriza* in Greece. *Die Linke* has suffered humiliation in recent elections whereas *Syriza* came within a whisker of forming an anti-cuts government. In the present crisis intransigent opposition to austerity pays in terms of popularity.

But elections, critical as they can be at key moments are in the end a reflection of the balance of class forces. And this is established on the battlefield of the class struggle in all its forms – strikes, occupations and demonstrations – including the ability and willingness to take on the thugs of the *guardia civil*, the living legacy of Franco's dictatorship.

If these struggles intensify in the autumn then Rajoy could find himself with his back to the wall. This will require all-out national strikes, culminating in a general strike to bring down Rajoy and the regional austerity governments. To achieve this – against the obstruction of the trade union officials and the reformists – requires building popular committees to mobilise workers, youth and the poor in a wave of occupations, the imposition of workers control.

The only way out of the terrible crisis and crushing debt in Greece, Spain and ultimately Britain too is to fight for an alternative to the capitalism – socialism.

To develop and implement this strategy will require a new party to turn resistance into revolution, and establish a workers' and small farmers' government and an economy planned democratically to meet the needs of the 99 per cent not the greed of the 1 per cent.

Eurozone bureaucrats are hell-bent on “solving” the crisis at the expense of the workers. Therefore we too need to combine our forces across Europe and build solidarity. The European Social Forum, planned in Florence for 8-11 November, could be the place to do this if activists from around Europe gather there, determined on action.

### workers power

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Editor: Jeremy Dewar  
Deputy editor: KD Tait  
International editor: Dave Stockton  
Political editor: Richard Brenner  
Staff writers: Marcus Halaby  
Sally Turner  
Joy Macready  
Andy Yorke  
Art & Design: Sean Murray

Printed by:  
Newspaper Club  
www.workerspower.co.uk  
paper@workerspower.co.uk  
+44 (0) 20 7708 4331

# Disabled activists expose Paralympic hypocrisy

By Rebecca Anderson

DISABLED PEOPLE Against Cuts organised a week of protests in the run-up to the Paralympic Games to highlight attacks on people with disabilities. In particular, they are targeting the disgusting role of Atos, a major sponsor of the Paralympics as well as the government's main weapon against those claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

Atos was awarded a £400 million government contract to cut spending on disability benefits by 20 per cent, or £3.5 billion. This is equivalent to half a million disabled people losing their income and huge cuts for many more. Atos achieves this by setting ludicrous and humiliating "tests" for claimants to "prove" they are in need – and failing them on the slightest technical grounds.

Hundreds took part in the "Closing Atos Ceremony" on 31 August, which started outside the company's HQ before moving on to the Department of Work and Pensions. They demanded to speak to Iain Duncan Smith and the Minister for Disabled People, Maria Miller. Right on cue, police attacked the protest, breaking the shoulder of a wheelchair user – proving once again whose side they are really on.

Put simply, the government is trying to make the poorest and most



vulnerable in society pay the cost of the economic crisis.

It is introducing Universal Credit, which will replace a number of benefits while reducing the income of disabled people. An arbitrary target of a 20 per cent cut to disability benefits means that the DWP, Atos and other private companies have been tasked with throwing genuinely disabled people off benefits and into absolute poverty.

In reality, only 0.4% of Disability Living Allowance claims are fraudulent but the government has conducted a hate campaign against those

in receipt of this benefit in order to justify scrapping it.

#### Tested to death

Since testing began, 1,100 people have died soon after being declared fit for work. One person in a coma had his benefits withdrawn because he was declared fit for work. Some have committed suicide after having their claims rejected.

The government's guidance on who should be declared fit for work is harsh, but ATOS has gone further. Over 30 per cent of appeals against the ATOS decisions have been suc-

cessful, rising to 80-90 per cent if advice is obtained.

Disability Living Allowance, mobility and carers' payments all contribute to providing a minimum quality of life for disabled people. The government claims that the cuts will help disabled people find work, when the reality is that unemployment already stands at 8 per cent and disabled people face routine discrimination.

#### Keep Remploy open

The government's hypocrisy is exposed further by the fact they are actually throwing disabled peo-

ple out of work through the planned closure of 54 Remploy factories specially fitted to employ disabled people. Their very existence recognises the fact that employers refuse to take on disabled workers.

However, after two brilliant days of action, Unite and the GMB called off the national Remploy strike – although Glasgow and Chesterfield factories have held a further four-day strike and are starting a weeklong stoppage on 3 September.

Other Remploy employees should follow their example and call further action. DWP staff should also strike to stop jobs being outsourced to disgusting outfits like Atos. A well-unionised public sector workplace is far more accountable for its actions than a company like ATOS.

Disabled People Against the Cuts has touched a public nerve with their protests. Their campaign will neither stop at the Paralympics nor be limited to Atos – there are many companies profiteering from the attacks on disabled people.

The combination of industrial and direct action can challenge the government over their welfare "reforms". Paralympic athletes at the have supported the campaign – but if these Games are to have a lasting legacy then we must help Remploy workers and disabled protesters win this fight.

## Workfare extended to prisoners

By Sally Turner

THE WORKFARE system sees multi-millionaire companies such as Tesco, McDonald's and Asda exploiting workers by forcing them to take part in "work experience" in order to receive their meagre Job Seekers Allowance.

These companies are raking it in – McDonald's UK saw an 11 per cent rise in profits in the last three months of 2011 to £886 million and made a fortune out of the Olympics – yet they are using unpaid labour while the taxpayer picks up the bill.

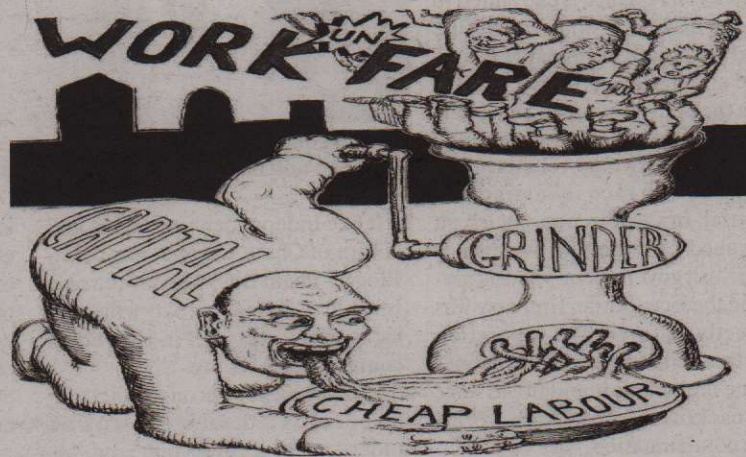
The scheme means that workers already on minimum wage could be sacked in favour of workers who cost nothing at all. These people then end up being on Job Seekers Allowance, put on the scheme and the cycle continues.

#### Prisonfare

We have also seen in recent months that it isn't just the retail industry taking advantage of such schemes, nor only the unemployed who are being exploited. A Cardiff solar panel company, Becoming Green, has sacked workers in favour of getting prison inmates to work for just £3 a day – 6 per cent of the minimum wage!

The Ministry of Justice confirmed that dozens of workers from Prescoed prison in South Wales have done "work experience" for at least two months at the rate of 40p an hour in the company's call centre.

A hospital trust is also using work-



fare to deliver patient care on wards. The jobs include "general tidying, welcoming visitors, serving drinks to patients, running errands, reading to patients and assisting with feeding patients". It is worrying that untrained people are being allowed to assist in aspects of patient care which should involve a high level of training.

#### Slave labour

A jobless graduate recently went to court, rightly claiming that the unpaid schemes violated Article Four of the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits forced labour and slavery. The judge dismissed the claim, saying Ms Reilly had obviously misunderstood that the scheme was "voluntary".

But the only options available are: do workfare or lose your benefits. In other words, workers are "free" to

go on these schemes or "free" to starve to death.

As Karl Marx pointed out, workers under capitalism are free in a double sense: free to choose their employer and freed from any other means of surviving because they own no property. Although we appear free, we are in fact no freer than prisoners or slaves.

Workfare makes this fact more visible than at any time since the days of the Victorian poor house.

We need to force companies to drop out of the schemes and demand the government to scrap workfare altogether. It is no surprise that an upper class judge ruled in favour of workfare – but direct action by unemployed groups, unions and young people can make these schemes unworkable and unite to demand union rates of pay for all.

## Sean Rigg: why did it take four years to get to the truth?

By Jeremy Dewar

THE FAMILY, friends and supporters of Sean Rigg, a black musician from Brixton, have finally heard some of the facts surrounding his death at the hands of police officers in August 2008.

It has taken four years of hard work – against official indifference and cover-up – to secure a verdict that the police used "unsuitable" force to detain Sean. The coroners' jury overturned the "findings" of the Independent Police Complaints Commission that whitewashed the officers. The IPCC has now reluctantly agreed to a review of its original investigation.

#### Make officers accountable

The family said in a statement after the verdict:

"For the IPCC to conclude in their findings that 'the officers adhered to policy and good practice by monitoring Mr. Rigg in the back of the van' is absolutely absurd, flies in the face of the evidence and clearly contradicts the jury's narrative verdict... However, we absolutely insist that the review is a root-and-branch examination of the IPCC's investigation and that it is transparent, robust and effective, so that officers are made accountable for Sean's death."

The urgency of this was cruelly underlined just a few days later when

police arrested and detained another black man, Freydoon Baluch. Luckily this time a passer-by filmed the incident, while others came to his assistance. One of them said:

"Three officers were holding this man. They pushed him to the ground. One officer choked him by holding his forearm across the man's throat. Then another officer stamped on him. The foot was on his face and then the man passed out – we kept telling them to call an ambulance."

Footage shows that the man offered no resistance and was immobile.

#### Police immunity

These assaults are no random coincidence. They form a pattern of behaviour. Ian Tomlinson, Smiley Culture, Christopher Alder, Anthony Grainger... and many more have all died at the hands of the police. Yet not a single officer has been found guilty, few have been disciplined, a couple promoted.

What kind of democracy systematically allows a section of the population to kill people with immunity?

Slow justice is no justice! We demand that truly independent inquiries – answerable to local communities, the families of those who have died, and the labour movement – are set up with full powers to interrogate officers and sentence those found guilty of racism, bodily harm or murder.



# Bolshie Women

## Free Pussy Riot

Sally Turner and Joy Macready

THREE MEMBERS of the Russian radical feminist band Pussy Riot have been sentenced to two years in prison after being found guilty of "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred". The verdict is grossly out of proportion to the collective's "crime" of singing a rowdy anti-Putin song in a Moscow cathedral two weeks before his re-election as president.

Their real crime – in the eyes of the Russian state – is exposing the unholy alliance between Putin and his ex-KGB colleague Kirill, now head of the Russian Orthodox Church. Patriarch Kirill threw the weight of the church behind Putin's campaign for a third term and called on Russians to stay away from the anti-government protests that erupted in December 2011. He pronounced the Putin era as "a miracle of God".

But God has nothing to do with it. Putin has systematically maintained his iron grip on political power by installing puppet president Dmitry Medvedev for four years, while at the same time working hand in fist with the bastion of conservatism and reaction – the church.

Putin and his cronies have made themselves exceedingly wealthy through rampant capitalist exploitation in Russia. They have used treachery, deceit, bribery, hypocrisy, greed and lawlessness to line their own pockets, and brutal repression to maintain their grip on power.

### Repression

Since 4 March, two weeks after their 'punk prayer' went viral on YouTube, Yekaterina Samutsevich, Maria Alyokhina and Nadezhda Tolokonnikova have sat in pre-trial detention, repeatedly being denied bail. The state launched a massive public smear-campaign against the "moralising slut" and "blasphemous women".

The band members' lightning-quick trial, marked by procedural violations and absurdities, has revealed Putin's determination to strangle dissent.

In June, the Duma (parliament) passed a series of draconian laws to rein in an opposition movement that has brought tens of thousands of people into the streets, and tens of thousands more into critical forums online. The new laws have dramatically raised fines for illegal protest and another law has created an internet blacklist that will censor online content.

Pussy Riot dared to challenge Putin's monopoly and are being made an example of by his regime. Their sentence is a direct warning to the mass movement that protested against the ballot rigging and fraud in the last presidential election.



Maria Alyokhina, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, and Yekaterina Samutsevich in court

### Bolsheviks

Almost 100 years ago the revolutionary government of the Russian Bolsheviks introduced free abortion on demand, instant divorce and equal pay. They opened up areas of industry that had previously been closed to women. They provided free childcare and socialised housework and dining, which freed women to participate in society as equals with men. In this way they removed the material basis for women's oppression – as slaves within the family.

Despite many of these gains being rolled back during the Stalinist regime, Russian women are much worse off today. Carrying the double burden of work and raising children, the majority of Russian women are trapped in low-wage ghettos, such as healthcare, education, and clerical jobs. On average women are paid between 33 per cent and 50 per cent less than men. Women make up 45 per cent of the unemployed, while more than 450 occupations are closed to them.

Young women are discriminated against when applying for a job because they may get pregnant and many fall prey to trafficking schemes. The unleashing of market forces brought terrible consequences alongside the 'freedom' to choose between competing sets of corrupt political gangsters.

But women are fighting back. Samutsevich said the guilty verdict handed to her and two other group members has strengthened her resolve to fight for Putin's downfall. The three women have turned the show trial into a political platform, effectively putting the state and the capitalist system in the dock.

In her closing statement Tolokonnikova laid the blame squarely on the capitalist state: "It is the entire state system of the Russian Federation which is on trial and which, unfortunately for itself, thoroughly enjoys quoting its cruelty towards human beings, its indifference to their honour and dignity... The authoritarian political system is to blame." Their performance, she said, "is a form of civil action in circumstances where basic human rights, civil and political freedoms are suppressed by the corporate state system."

## ★ CLASS JUSTICE

# Julian Assange must face justice and be protected from US imperialism

Julian Assange has been granted political asylum by Ecuador, in a move which has divided opinion amongst those who support the work of the Wikileaks website. Is the move a justified act of self-defence or is it simply a ruse to evade answering the rape charges levelled against him by two Swedish women? Dave Stockton looks at the case

THERE CAN be little doubt that the USA wants to silence Assange and Wikileaks and exact a revenge that will deter future whistle blowers. Wikileaks has exposed US crimes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo Bay as well as its intimidation and suborning of foreign governments.

Whatever the outcome of any trial in Sweden the probability must be high that Assange will face a US request to extradite him. This might have to go through a lengthy legal procedure but it's likely that a court in Sweden, no less than in Britain, would eventually grant this request.

In the US he would face a long prison sentence at the very least. In a US jail he might well suffer the "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment" that Bradley Manning, the US soldier accused of passing information to Wikileaks has endured for over two years according to a UN special rapporteur on torture.

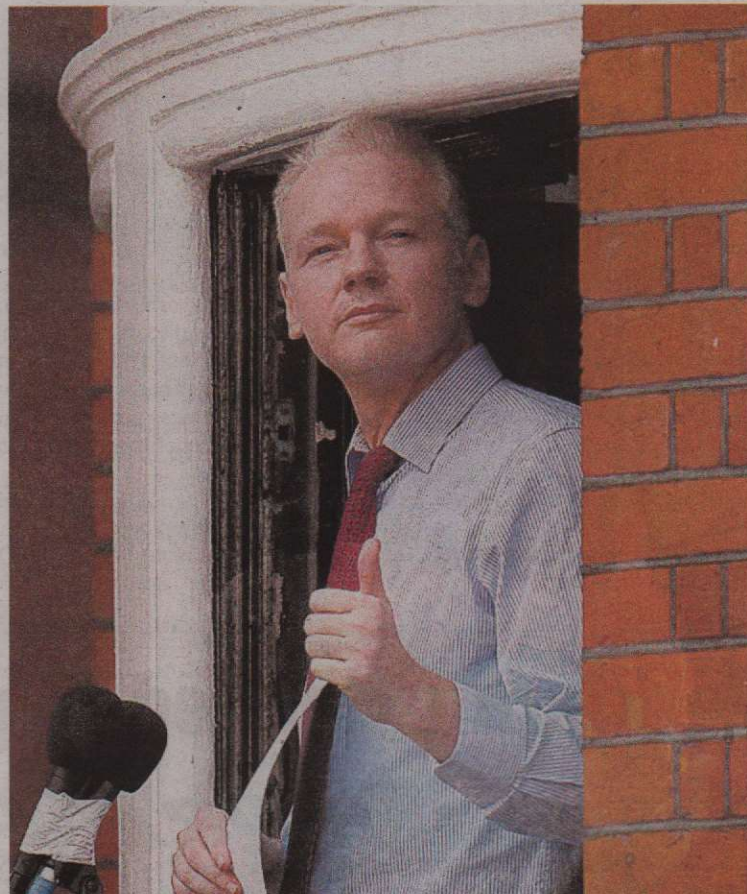
In short if Assange is extradited to Sweden his liberty and even his life could eventually be in danger.

He and his lawyers have made it plain that, if he were given an assurance that he would not be extradited to the USA, he would voluntarily go to Sweden to face investigation and trial. In the absence of such an assurance, by either the Swedish or the British government, seeking asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy was perfectly justified. The suggestion that the British government would violate diplomatic immunity to seize him backfired – provoking worldwide condemnation.

However some of the supporters of Julian Assange have denigrated the two women. George Galloway, John Pilger, Tariq Ali and some of Assange's lawyers and the Ecuadorian government have suggested the women are witting or unwitting tools of a US and UK plot. To suggest that the charges are "concocted charges", only (a "breach of sexual etiquette", "a honey trap", or "hilarious") demonstrates a scandalous lack of concern for woman's right to say no at any point in sexual relations.

It's scandalous to hear supposed socialists and progressives trotting out the reactionary argument that, if a person agrees to sexual relations and then changes their mind, then 'it's not rape'. It is admirable that Salma Yaqoob, chair of Respect, unequivocally condemned Galloway's remarks as did Respect candidate Kate Hudson.

On the other hand those on the



British police have laid siege to the Ecuadorian Embassy – no wonder Assange and his supporters feel the US will seek extradition

left like Independent columnist and author of Chavs, Owen Jones, or US Blogger Pham Binh who say the only issue at stake is the two women's right to see Assange in a Swedish court, are also wrong.

Owen Jones relies on the fact that Sweden "is a democracy with an independent legal system, and it is a signatory to the European Convention of Human Rights," concluding that Ecuador was "wrong to offer Assange political asylum. Assange should go to Sweden to face the allegations."

The comrades are relying on "lawyers' arguments" to assert that the due process of bourgeois law means there is no danger of extradition to the US. By defending the alibi of the two imperialist states that claim they can't (or at least won't) interfere with the legal process of a sovereign state, they end up obscuring the fact that bourgeois law exists to defend the class which applies it – not to treat all equally.

It is not just a matter what British or Swedish law says: it is a matter of the class nature of law and how it operates whenever major issues of power and property are concerned.

Consider the massive sentences handed out by the courts to "rioters"

last summer. Consider the systematic failure of the state to treat police officers, accused of the assault and murder of black people, in the same way it would treat ordinary citizens. Consider the systematic failure of the police and the courts to treat many rape accusations seriously.

Consider too that it is the state that has to carry out court judgements. Consider that using the royal prerogative of pardon the state can set aside court sentences. Can any Marxist believe that bourgeois justice stands above politics – the politics of the ruling class?

We absolutely support Manning and Assange's actions in publishing the secret documents that exposed US war crimes around the world. We don't believe he should be extradited to face criminal charges for this act, and we demand the immediate release of Bradley Manning.

Does this mean that the right of the women to justice in this case must be set aside or subordinated? Not at all. But all those who care about these rights should address their indignation to the ones responsible for obstructing justice for the two women – the Swedish and UK governments and their transatlantic puppet masters.

# TUC: call a general strike!

Rebecca Anderson

UNION LEADERS are planning neither to change their strategy nor to lead an effective fight to stop the Tory-Lib Dem cuts at this month's Trades Union Congress.

Although the coalition has started to privatise the NHS and education, devastated public sector pensions and pay, cut hundreds of thousands of jobs and systematically attacked the most vulnerable in society, the worst is yet to come. At most only 20 per cent of their planned cuts have been made so far.

Despite this, the motions to the Congress are vague and non-committal. Not one seeks to make the TUC the organising centre for action and protest that we so desperately need.

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) calls on the TUC to "support coordinated strike action against cuts in pensions, pay and jobs this autumn," while the Prison Officers Association says, "Congress accepts that the trade union movement must continue leading from the front against this uncaring government with a coalition of resistance taking coordinated action where possible with far reaching campaigns including the consideration and practicalities of a general strike."

Even this, the best motion, does not commit the TUC to actually doing anything. Worse, it implies that it is already "leading from the front" and it only wants "consideration" of a general strike.

## Lessons of 2011

Last year's TUC took place against a background of coordinated action by teaching and civil service unions against pension cuts. A motion was passed that called on the TUC to coordinate and support further action. This could have been the starting point for the kind of action

necessary to defeat the government.

Instead the TUC interpreted the decision in the most minimal way possible. It called the one-day strike on 30 November – and then did nothing.

The response showed what was possible – two million workers went on strike and across the country we saw picket lines and mass demonstrations. But almost immediately after this show of strength, the leaders of the Unison and GMB began cutting rotten deals.

Other unions, like the PCS, National Union of Teachers and University and College Union, took a more militant stand but relied on the TUC to lead and failed to call on members of other unions to fight on.

The PCS motion to this year's Congress shows that no lessons have been learnt. Once again, the call is for the TUC to support co-ordinated action. This would be great of course, but the PCS has no strategy to make it happen, no way to prevent another sell-out.

One-day strikes, separated by months of inactivity, are not enough to beat the government. They can be useful as warning shots that demonstrate the power of the workers. But this is not how union leaders use them. It's no warning if your enemy knows you are bluffing.

## Stopping the cuts

Important as pensions are to the public sector workers affected, last year's TUC decided to campaign on that issue as an alternative to defending the NHS. Strike action in defence of the NHS would have brought out many millions more because everyone depends on the NHS at some point.

That was precisely why the union leaders opted for the pensions issue. Calling on workers to take action to defend the NHS would have meant defying the anti-union laws. It would have been a political strike and in

our supposed democracy that is unlawful.

The decision not to lead a fight for the NHS was a green light for the coalition to press ahead. Already treatment options are being withdrawn on cost grounds and hospitals are threatened with bankruptcy. For all the talk of the labour movement's commitment to the NHS, the truth is it is being dismantled without a finger lifted in its defence.

What was needed this year was a motion instructing the TUC to call a general strike against all cuts and privatisations. That strike should be called for 22 October, straight after the TUC's mass demonstration on Saturday 20th. And it should be an all-out strike that does not end until all sections have won.

As it is, even if the best of this year's motions are passed, we will still be a long way short of what is needed. We should continue to demand that the TUC call a general strike – it is recognised as the leadership by millions of workers, has the constitutional right to call a strike and has the responsibility to defend the working class as a whole.

However, we cannot rely on the TUC. Its leaders would only call a general strike under extreme pressure – we need to build that pressure through anti-cuts committees, rank and file organisations, strike action against specific attacks, and the TUC demonstration on 20 October. This organised resistance could go further than just pressing leaders into action. It could have the potential to organise and control the action itself.

The potential we saw in 2011 still exists. A strike by teaching unions against the pay cap this autumn could lead to another strike like 30 November. This time we need to prepare to stop a sell-out, and to develop a public sector strike against that specific attack into a general strike to stop all the cuts.



## Sparks target blacklist



Sparks hold up traffic outside the Olympics site in Stratford last year

Jeremy Dewar

"EVERY TIME – we beat 'em then walk away. Let's get some blacklisted guys and shop stewards in and hit 'em!" said Kevin, an electrician, or "spark", from the floor of the Unite Construction Rank and File conference. Suddenly everyone was alert; hands shot up to speak on this key issue: how to make the militant building workers' victories stick.

The sparks' campaign to rip up the Building Engineering Services National Agreement (Besna) ran for seven months last year. Flying pickets, walkouts and occupations forced eight of the biggest construction companies to back off.

It was a defensive struggle: defeat would have led to a 35 per cent drop in pay and opened the door to deskilling. But it was won with rank and file organisation and militant tactics. While the officials eventually issued a last-minute ballot for strike action – they did so reluctantly, and even then nearly cocked it up by refusing to defend the union against an injunction in the high court.

That was February. Since then some important developments: on the positive side, walk-outs have secured improved weekend breaks and reinstated shop stewards, while rank and file organisation has spread to other building trades and the construction union, Ucat; on the other side, it is proving hard to hold bosses to their word.

Now Crown House Technologies has withdrawn from the Joint Industry Board (JIB) agreement, leaving sparks in limbo and at the whim of the contractor. Weekly protests and a unionisation drive have begun in London and Leeds with more to follow.

But construction workers know the problem runs deeper:

"Crown House is the symptom, blacklisting the disease. If we don't tackle blacklisting, then we'll have a Besna every year," explained a militant from Portsmouth.

## Blacklist

A recent successful unofficial strike at Ratcliffe-upon-Soar in Nottinghamshire was undermined a few weeks later when militants were refused jobs, while at Fawley near Southampton, bosses caved in to demands to lift the blacklist when militants confronted them over the

issue, only to lay them off a few weeks later.

Activists are demanding a register of labour and to tell the bosses: "this is the list you recruit from; if in doubt, we'll tell you which employee you will hire."

In effect, this is like the old National Docks Labour Scheme. If controlled by the rank and file, not union bosses, and as long as it is not camouflage for a chauvinistic "British jobs for British workers" policy, then it could be a step in the direction of workers' control over hiring, challenging the bosses' right to manage.

The issue of the blacklist is crucial. Whether the fight is over agency working, recruitment and union density, or seeking an industry-wide agreement for all trades – getting the best militants and organisers back on site is a unifying demand.

## Who controls our strikes?

But even more important for the future of this exciting initiative is the relationship between the rank and file and the union bureaucracy. After all, the blacklist doesn't only help employers – it also serves the union officials' interests. Remember, it was Unite who agreed to the sacking and blacklisting of its own shop stewards at British Airways as part of the deal to end the Gate Gourmet strike in 2005.

But here much of the left is vague. Ray Morrell of the SWP summed up the confusion at the conference: "We are at our strongest when we combine official and unofficial action. They organise ballots, we organise walk-outs and occupations."

Of course we should demand officials do their job; the real question is who controls the strikes? Who controls negotiations and signs deals? The bureaucrats or the members?

Every rank and file initiative has to face this question, as does every "left wing" official. For Workers Power the answer is unambiguous: forget fluffy phrases about officials and rank and file working together; full time officers should do what workers tell them to do or make way for someone who will. Our aim is a cross-union movement in which workers' direct democracy rules and there is no need for an unelected, unaccountable and overpaid bureaucracy.



500,000 marched with the TUC in 2011 – let's make 20 October even bigger and follow through with strike action

# STUDENTS ALL

## London Met: Thousands face deportation in racist crackdown

KD Tait

JUST WEEKS after London was touted as a multicultural paradise during the Olympics, international students at London Metropolitan University have been told to find a new university place or face deportation.

Around 2,600 non-EU students have had their education thrown into jeopardy by the decision of the UK Border Agency (UKBA) to strip London Met of its right to issue visas to students from abroad, its Highly Trusted Status (HTS). They will be unable to renew their visas or continue their studies past September and could be forcibly removed from the country in December. Both the students' union and University and College Union branch condemned the move.

The government said, "Allowing London Met to continue to sponsor and teach international students was not an option." The Tories are trying to achieve their racist election pledge of slashing immigrant numbers.

For many universities, foreign students are treated as a cash cow. They are charged much higher fees, and their dependence on the University for visas means an insecure existence. In 2010-11, 15 per cent of London Met's income came from foreign students.



No surprise then that the pro-fees university bosses' organisation, Universities UK, condemned the decision. But they are motivated more by fear it will put off lucrative foreign students than any concern for equal access to education.

### Racism

It's no coincidence that the government's attack on foreign students came on the same day its immigration statistics were published. These

figures showed a decline in the numbers of immigrants – mainly due to a 20 per cent cut in new student visas.

But the Con-Dem government is determined to distort our understanding of immigration – by blaming poor immigrant workers and students for the social problems caused by a system which exploits millions for the profit of a few.

Student visas account for 40 per cent of all immigration into the UK. The majority are paying vast sums

to study with very little security. In 2008, one of the first cuts made to pay for the bailout of the banks was state funding for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. This mostly affected poor and female immigrants.

Now the students at London Met are being penalised for the failings of the university bosses and UKBA.

### Defend education

Education is a right that should be

provided, with free and equal access to all. The barriers to education are used as a weapon to separate the skilled from unskilled, men from women, and white from black.

The rich have no barriers to moving their fortunes to tax-havens – yet their racist border laws impose controls over the freedom to find work or education. They should all be abolished.

We reject any attempts to turn people against immigrant students and workers. They face the same cuts and social problems as their neighbours, along with the racist violence of the media and police.

Anti-racists, the NUS and teaching unions should immediately launch a campaign to get the students' visas immediately reinstated.

We call for citizenship rights for all undocumented workers, with no penalisation.

We stand for equal access to education for all, free and paid for by raising taxes on the banks and capitalists.

Workers Power supports a statement of solidarity with the students, calling for the government to reinstate London Met's HTS status and stop the persecution of foreign students.

You can sign the statement at [www.anticuts.com](http://www.anticuts.com).

## Where next for the student movement?

Sally Turner

IF YOU ARE a new student reading this there's a good chance you've started a course that will see you graduate with around £50,000 worth of debt. Two years after hundreds of thousands took to the streets against the tripling of tuition fees, the student movement is on life-support; its campus anti-cuts groups diminished, its national campaigns fractured and divided.

But fear not! The Tories plan to impose cuts until 2020, providing each new intake of students with plenty of opportunities to reinvigorate our campaigns and turn to face the new struggles thrown up by the politics of permanent austerity.

### Hands off our education

The example of London Met shows how real the danger of privatisation is for dozens of universities which don't rely on big private research funding.

Privatisation of university serv-

ices is simply privatisation of education by the back door. As public universities go bankrupt because of declining student numbers, private universities will seek to cut costs and maximise profits. This means overcrowded courses, reduced one-to-one teaching time and a worse student experience.

From school academies to universities the profit vultures are circling our institutions, ready to grab profitable parts and toss aside the rest – like support services for disabled, poor and international students.

### Unite students and workers

But unlike pensions, privatisation is an issue affecting students and staff in equal measure. Non-lecturing staff face huge cuts in jobs, pay and working conditions when they are contracted out to private companies. Lecturers face widespread sackings as "unprofitable" courses are cut and class sizes increased.

The student unions and anti-cuts

groups are the key to forging unity in struggle. We need to fight for a return to the democratic general assemblies which can decide policy and hold leaders of campus student unions to account.

Where our unions lack democratic structures we should rebuild the anti-cuts groups to mobilise students to rid our unions of the influence of university bosses.

These groups should exchange delegates with the branches of workers' trade unions – UCU, Unison, GMB and Unite – and carry out joint actions.

But local activism won't be enough to win. Our most urgent task remains overcoming the senseless national divisions undermining our movement.

We want to organise a national conference to unite the three different education campaigns on a democratic basis.

A united campaign could start to organise school and college students who have few rights and no representation.

#DEMO2012  
21.11.12

### All out for 21 November

The NUS has called a national demonstration on 21 November. We should organise to make sure our local student unions organise their own transport and demand the NUS puts its money where its mouth is – and mobilises on a grand scale.

We want the non-education trade unions and anti-cuts campaigns to support the demo too. A big and militant demonstration against privatisation could be the launch pad for a national campaign fighting for free and equal access to education for all.

The explosive struggles of students in Chile and Quebec over the last year shows that radical, united action is the way to win mass support and throw the government onto the defensive.



Art by  
Chris Bird

[workerspower.com](http://workerspower.com)

# AND YOUTH

## At the sharp end of the crisis

KD Tait

YOUNG PEOPLE in Tory Britain are caught between a rock and a hard place. Youth unemployment stands at over 20 per cent – over one million people. For young black men, the rate is a scandalous 50 per cent, revealing that racism is still experienced by the younger generation.

Most of the jobs that young people get are insecure and poorly paid. Now there's real slave labour. The massive insult of workfare – working for your dole stacking shelves for the billionaire supermarket owners or flipping burgers – has provoked outrage.

The choice between working a 40-hour week unpaid, or losing your unemployment benefit is really no choice at all. But for the bosses of Britain's richest companies this is a chance to make millions of pounds' profit – while taxpayers foot the bill.

The increasingly high number of jobless youth is very useful to bosses trying to cut costs. Intense competition for jobs drives down wages and undermines collective struggles to defend conditions.

In fact high quality training for those trying to get into industry is a rarity. British capitalists have always jibbed at supporting a serious state apprenticeship system, involving the unions, such as exists in Germany, where there are 1.5 mil-

lion apprentices.

University fees of up to £9,000 a year have seen applications drop by 10 per cent, but with over one million 16-24 year olds not in education, work or training, the prospects of finding a job are slim. Those who make it to university face rising costs of living, rip-off accommodation, reduced course options and larger class sizes.

The situation is little better for university graduates. Nearly 20 per cent of students who graduated since 2010 are still unemployed. The headline 85 per cent employment figure for all graduates in the last six years masks

the fact that more than a third of these are still working in low-paid unskilled jobs in retail, bars and cleaning.



Police target youth systematically in the service of capital. Thanks to Chris Bird for artwork

For school and college students the situation is even worse. The government and exam boards have been involved in a giant conspiracy to rig this year's GCSE results – downgrading exams to look tough on results – sabotaging the future of tens of

thousands of youth. The scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in 2011 has increased the burden on poor families as young people struggle to meet the spiralling costs of education.

To the attacks on education we can add the many attacks on the social and economic rights of young people. A new law means young people will not be able to live on their own and claim Housing Benefit. When the minimum wage was raised by a measly 11p earlier this year, it was frozen for the lowest band – 16-18 year olds. Councils up and down the country have had their budgets for youth services – from GUM clinics to youth centres – slashed by 75 per cent.

The state knows that this level of oppression could not be maintained without force, which explains the police and courts' attitude to young people: constant harassment through stop-and-search, intrusive anti-drugs laws and raids and physical violence of beatings, restraint holds and shootings.

No wonder there was a youth uprising against all this last summer.

But why are young people at the sharp end of the crisis? Partly it's because many young people can't vote, are financially dependent on their parents, have no work or wretched insecure jobs, are paid a pittance and have little power in the workplace.

But the student walkouts of 2010 and the anti-police revolts of 2011 reveal that the explosive material for a massive youth revolt is already building.

## Lessons from the 2010-11 student struggle

KD Tait

THE ACTS of resistance taken by thousands of young people during the student movement of winter 2010-11 shook the government and sparked months of mass opposition to cuts.

Democratic general assemblies uniting students with workers and young people, militant demonstrations using self-defence against police violence, and nationally coordinated waves of direct action including boycotts, walkouts and occupations formed the backbone of the biggest, most radical youth movement since the Iraq war.

But the movement was beaten, with parliamentary votes to triple tuition fees and cut EMA demoralising many activists and isolating local struggles.

Now as we enter the new academic year, with the most expensive fees ever, we must prepare for fresh struggles thrown up by government cuts and privatisation. Our aim must be a successful defence of education – abolishing fees and kicking out the private speculators.



To do this means learning the lessons of 2010-11.

### Key players

The NUS, who organised the 50,000-strong protest on 10 November 2011, quickly became an obstacle to building a successful fight against fees. After denouncing "violence" they collaborated with the police to shop students, and refused to join any further protests.

For some months the National

Campaign Against Fees and Cuts proved how useful a successful united front can be.

By drawing in education activists from a range of political backgrounds, it called for walkouts which mobilised 100,000 young people across the UK.

But unfortunately we failed to unite all the different campaigns like Education Activist Network and Youth Fight for Jobs into a single, democratic movement, which could develop an effective strategy.

It's important to acknowledge the failure to develop lasting structures which could continue to organise people on the principle that "what parliament can do, the streets can undo".

### Lessons

Students were absolutely right to use the most militant tactics available to them. The symbolic trashing of the ruling Tory party HQ was a decisive turning point that swung public opinion behind the students. Likewise the rapid spread of direct action and grassroots democracy radicalised huge numbers of young people who are now searching

for an alternative to endless cuts and austerity.

The most radical students called for an alliance between students, workers and the unemployed. The Consumer Spending Review and council cuts were sparking widespread protests from hard-pressed workers.

Students took the lead in organising action against tax-dodging companies like Vodafone and banks – making the link between the rich who profit from the crisis and ordinary people who have to pay for it.

Where our movement was isolated and defeated we can learn a powerful lesson from the months of struggle by students in Chile and Quebec, who have succeeded in forming close links with trade unions and winning massive popular support.

Their struggle demands nothing less than the fall of the pro-austerity government.

Students in Britain can play the same role in raising the banner of struggle to draw a broader, more powerful social force – the working class – into the struggle.

## Young Blood

### SOLIDARITY WITH GREECE

WHEN IT IS 38 degrees in the sun, not much stirs in the centre of Athens. But on 24 August 10,000 mainly young, male migrant workers from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan took to the streets after months of escalating attacks by racists and fascists.

Joining this demonstration was the highlight of REVOLUTION's recent international solidarity visit. We distributed hundreds of copies of our paper and leaflet calling for the coordination of international action to oppose crisis and austerity.

Over the days we were there we saw plenty to expose the foul lies spread by the millionaire media to discredit the Greek people. There's no doubt that a social catastrophe is emerging in Greece. HIV rates have shot up nearly 1,500% in a year as social programmes have been stripped to the bone.

Many Greeks are preparing for a "hot autumn" of mass strikes and protests – and with the German banks refusing to negotiate on the terms of the next bailout, it looks like resistance is inevitable.

But Greece is just the weakest link the Eurozone chain that is breaking in Italy, Spain and Portugal. It's obvious that the crisis which started in 2008 was not solved by pouring billions of euros into the banks. Neither has it been solved by throwing millions of workers out of their jobs.

The next European Social Forum will be held this November in Florence, Italy. There has been no better chance since 2008 to make and win the argument for coordinated EU-wide resistance.

REVOLUTION has published an Appeal for a Youth Assembly to take place at the ESF. Young people are on the frontlines of opposition to cuts in every country – we want to ensure our experiences and tactics can be combined in a democratic debate.

By getting the widest possible representation from youth struggles across the continent, we hope to win a call for a European day of action and the creation of structures to link up and coordinate regular joint action.

You can sign the appeal and find out more about REVOLUTION at [www.socialistrevolution.org](http://www.socialistrevolution.org).



At the Athens polytechnic

## Imperialism in the dock



# Why the West is not bombing Syria

Marcus Halaby

THE AMERICAN Zionist scholar Daniel Pipes recently wrote an article in *The Washington Times*, with the title “Stay out of Syria: Intervention is a trap”. Arguing that “Bashar al-Assad’s wretched presence” in power may “do more good than harm”, he added that Assad’s “non-ideological and relatively secular” regime is at least staving off “anarchy, Islamist rule, genocide, and rogue control of Syria’s chemical weapons”.

### Better the devil they know?

In a previous article on the same theme, he argued that “protracted conflict in Syria offers some geopolitical advantages”, amongst which it prevents Syria from threatening Israel, and that it “foments Middle Eastern rage at Moscow and Beijing for supporting the Assad regime”.

Another US Middle East pundit, Gary Gambill, has also argued for “a strategic non-intervention” in Syria, asking: “What’s wrong with the status quo of an Iran chained to a Syrian corpse?”

### War as social work

Pipes meant his words as a criticism of what he sees as “a sentimental U.S. foreign policy of ‘war as social work’”, which places the welfare of peoples with a “wretched record as American allies” above “national interests”. But anyone who has watched the Obama administration’s behaviour on Syria – its actions, and not US State Secretary Hillary Clinton’s hypocritical words about peace, democracy and human rights – might be forgiven for thinking it had taken his and Gambill’s advice.

The fact is that Pipes – a racist who has made a living from cheering on US imperialism’s military adventures – is probably right to think that it is not in the Western ruling classes’ interests to intervene in Syria. That is why it has not happened yet, and probably isn’t going to.

For those on the anti-war left who patiently await a Western military intervention to justify their equivocations or lack of support for the Syrian revolution, this might come as a surprise. But the Syrian regime – the Arab dictatorship that US and Israeli politicians once loved to hate – at least understood the rules of the global game and played by them. The same cannot necessarily be said of anything that might replace it.

Israel in particular prefers a weakened Assad regime over what Israeli defence official Amos Gilad called the “devastating crisis for Israel” of an “Islamic empire” controlling the whole region.

### A system of global rule

Why the reticence to intervene? One answer is that the neo-conservative faction of the US ruling class that pushed for war in Iraq and Afghanistan is now out of power, discredited by its failure to prevent a post-Saddam Iraq from becoming an Iranian satellite.

And Obama’s hasty and improvised intervention in Libya – intended to undo the damage done by US support for Egypt’s Mubarak and Tunisia’s Ben Ali – is unlikely to be repeated in Syria, even if it has strengthened the ideology of “humanitarian war” previously used by Bill Clinton’s administration to justify bombing Serbia in 1999.

But also, it is wrong to regard imperialism as simply being a policy of governments – of wars, invasions, aerial bombing and “regime change” promotion. Imperialism is primarily a system of global rule, one in which rival imperialisms compete and sometimes fight each other (directly or through proxies), and sometimes co-operate.

### Decline and cooperation

And of course, the United States is not the world’s only imperialist power. It has had to recognise that Syria sits in the sphere of influence of its Russian and Chinese rivals, who feel sorely cheated by the overthrow of Libya’s dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

The West has common interests with Russia and China in Syria – even if Hillary Clinton and William Hague host and give publicity to a few media-friendly Syrian bourgeois exiles to discredit Vladimir Putin and Hu Jintao; and even if they let their Saudi and Qatari allies provide their favoured Syrian rebels with a drip-feed of black market semi-automatics smuggled through Turkey and Lebanon.

What they all fear above anything else is the collapse of Syria’s repressive state apparatus and the self-arming of the Syrian masses, in a way that prevents them trying to control the outcome of the regime’s downfall, the way that they have tried to in Egypt and Tunisia.

# Cynics and cowards: the left on Syria

Marcus Halaby

If you made a rogue’s gallery of the opponents and critics of the Syrian revolution on the Arab and international left, you would come up with a range of positions and emphases.

You could start with the outright supporters of the Assad regime, like Respect MP George Galloway, US-based David North’s World Socialist Web Site, French conspiracy theorist Thierry Meyssan (who also defended former Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic), or the British pro-Gaddafi Press TV and Russia Today correspondent Lizzie Phelan.

These voices simply repeat the regime’s lies, that it is not putting down a popular revolt, but defending the country’s independence against an externally inspired and imperialist-sponsored aggression, like former US president Ronald Reagan’s “Contra War” in Nicaragua in the 1980s.

### A bastion of resistance?

But this regime has not fired a single shot over the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights since 1973. Worse still, Hafez al-Assad originally sent troops into neighbouring Lebanon in June 1976 to support the rightist Christian president Suleiman Frangieh, against the Palestinian-Muslim-leftist coalition that had come close to overthrowing him, and who constituted Syria’s historic allies.

The then serving Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin even boasted in his memoirs that the Syrian army killed more Palestinian fighters in Lebanon “within a few months” than Israel had “over the previous thirty years.”

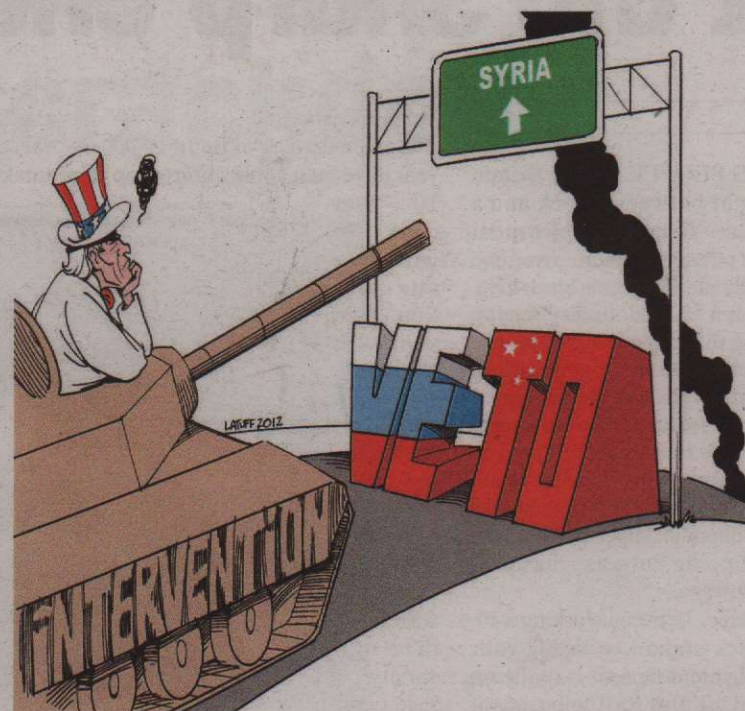
### Syrian interference in Lebanon

Despite his “resistance” rhetoric and the collapse of his alliance with Lebanon’s right-wing Christian Phalange movement, Assad senior also failed to protect Lebanon from Israel’s invasion in 1982, and later rehabilitated Israel’s Lebanese collaborators like Elie Hobeika, a leading participant in the infamous Sabra and Shatila massacre.

Hafez al-Assad would also promote Saudi Arabia’s favoured Lebanese politician, Rafic Hariri, and supported the US-led coalition that fought against Saddam’s Iraq in 1991. In return, the United States allowed Syria to impose a fragile political settlement to Lebanon’s civil war that gave it a mandate to keep its troops there.

Hariri would become prime minister in a Syrian-dominated post-civil war Lebanon in the 1990s, before falling out with Bashar al-Assad in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq war, leading to his assassination by Syrian agents in March 2005.

More recently, Bashar al-Assad’s regime was involved in the “extraordinary rendition” of alleged terrorist suspects on behalf of the United States under George W Bush.



### Pacifist phobias and “militarisation”

In addition to these voices, however, there are figures that, without supporting Assad’s regime, have become alarmed by the “militarisation” of the Syrian uprising, and with it the risk of Western military intervention. These include the popular Lebanese blogger As’ad AbuKhalil, Palestinian professor Joseph Massad, Guardian columnist Seumas Milne, and veterans of the global anti-war movement like Tariq Ali and Sami Ramadani.

Often having initially supported or sympathised with the uprising, they now regard it either as having been hijacked by the West and its Turkish, Qatari and Saudi allies, using the Syrian battleground to wage a proxy war against Iran; or they regard it as being near-irretrievably on that road.

Others, like Counterfire’s John Rees and Chris Nineham, have noted the emergence of these voices and are adapting to them, to hold together a Stop the War Coalition that came into existence a decade ago and in very different circumstances. They now hedge their support of the Syrian revolution with equivocations and conditions that undermine any effective expressions of solidarity with it.

### Geo-strategic “blanket thinking”

What all of these voices have in common is a tendency to view the Syrian situation solely or primarily in geopolitical terms, as if there were no revolution happening, as if the insurgent masses were not also wise to the machinations of the great powers, and as if the ability of the West to influence events on the ground without troops there were so strong that the merest hint of self-interested Western “support” denies the masses any agency to resist the takeover of their struggle.

For the Stalinists and their imita-

tors, this attitude is second nature. Artificially dividing the world into “progressive” and “pro-imperialist” camps, they have slandered popular revolts that transgressed the boundaries of these camps as far back as the 1953 East German workers’ rising and the 1956 Hungarian revolution, through to the struggle of the Polish workers’ union Solidarnosc in 1980, and the collapse of the East European Stalinist regimes in 1989.

However, for those like Rees, Nineham and Tariq Ali, who come from the anti-Stalinist left, this position requires them to close their eyes to the fact that the Western powers, for all their words of “support” for a selected part of the Syrian opposition, are not at all raring to go into Syria as they did in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

Either, like Sami Ramadani, they have to descend into a poor analysis verging on conspiracy theory; or, like Joseph Massad, they conclude that the revolution has already been lost, on the basis that the popular movement has become strong enough to excite the inevitable interest of external parties, but not yet strong enough to take power.

### An unrepresentative minority

John Rees, however, is right on one thing – that there certainly is the danger “of an unrepresentative minority arising within the revolution and coming to dominate it”. But this is not primarily, as he puts it, a matter of the imperialist powers promoting and arming those “that they can rely on to do their bidding”, but of a section of the opposition coming over to the much-touted idea of a “Yemeni-style” transition, tasked with restoring capitalist order and reflecting the balance of forces between all the imperialist powers involved in Syria, Russia and China included.



# South Africa: Marikana massacre exposes the betrayal of the ANC

Keith Spencer

SOUTH AFRICAN state prosecutors tried to charge 270 miners with the murder of 34 of their fellow workers. To do this it used a piece of Apartheid law called “common purpose”, which was designed to prosecute enemies of the white supremacist state, who were often ANC members.

The miners were actually shot dead by the South African police – in the worst massacre in the country since the fall of Apartheid in 1994. The outrage was caught on film; there is no denying that police killed the 34 miners and wounded many more. The initial claims that the police were under attack by armed strikers has been exposed as a lie.

Outrage at the charges has led to their being dropped. But the police who actually killed the miners have not been charged.

## Massacre at the Marikana mine

A rash of strikes have erupted in mines demanding improved pay and conditions of work.

The miners at Marikana had been on strike demanding a wage rise from 4,000 rand a month to 12,500 (about £1,000) at the Marikana platinum mine, owned by the London-based Lonmin mining company. The price of platinum has soared by about 400 per cent in the past decade but miners’ wages have stagnated.

The ANC government has done nothing about successive complaints over pay and conditions. Also, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), which organises about a third of the workers at the mine, has been accused of being in league with



the bosses and of intimidating activists. The NUM is part of the union federation Cosatu, which in turn supports the ANC government.

One striker told the *New York Times*: “NUM has deserted us... it is working with the white people and getting money. They forgot about the workers.”

In order to pursue their claim, a third of the miners joined a break-away union, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU).

The strike lasted for a week before the massacre on the 16 August. Lonmin did a deal with the NUM, which then urged strikers to return back to work.

On the day of the massacre, 3,000 miners from both unions were picketing the mine as Lonmin had just reneged on a deal that would have

ended the dispute. The police, clearly intent on breaking the strike, fired rubber bullets, teargas and water cannon into the strikers and tried to force them into a barbed wire compound.

Strikers resisted, some armed with sticks and machetes for self-defence, and the massacre occurred. The South African website *Daily Maverick* alleges that the police shot many as they fled or hid, and killed others by driving over them in vehicles.

The NUM leadership defended the police. “The police were patient, but these people were extremely armed with dangerous weapons,” said general secretary Frans Beleni.

The government and most of the media have followed the NUM in shifting the blame for the deaths on militant miners and the AMCU.

The regional South African Com-

munist Party even called for the arrest of the AMCU leadership and a “presidential investigation” into the union’s “anarchic” activities.

## The ANC’s betrayal

The massacre exposes all what is wrong with the ANC and the union leaders.

For years, the top ranks of the government enriched themselves while the mass of the population continue to live in poverty. Leaders such as Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma have pursued neoliberal policies of deregulation and privatisation, doing nothing to implement the ANC’s slogans of “A Better Life for All” and “Black Empowerment” – except for themselves.

Cyril Ramaphosa was the leader of the NUM in the late 1980s when it led 300,000 workers on strike

against Apartheid. Now he is a multi-millionaire, sits on the leadership of the ANC and on the board of directors of Lonmin.

Another mine, Aurora – which still owes its workers compensation after going into liquidation – was jointly owned by president Zuma’s nephew and Nelson Mandela’s grandson.

One senior member of AMCU told the *New York Times*: “We made the ANC what it is today, but they have no time for us. Nothing has changed, only the people on top, and they just keep getting more money.”

The ANC led the struggle to overthrow Apartheid. The mass “stay-aways” of the black trade unions grouped in Cosatu made the racist state unviable. But the South African Communist Party with its Stalinist theory of two-staged revolution determined the strategy of the movement as Apartheid collapsed: get rid of Apartheid first and then achieve socialism at a much later stage.

As a result ANC presidents and governments from Nelson Mandela to Jacob Zuma haven’t challenged the power of big capital to exploit the South African economy nor have they brought about a more equitable society.

What is needed is a new party, made up of the rank and file union activists, the anti-privatisation groups and community organisations. It needs to fight for the unions to break from the ANC, for picket line defence, and better housing, education, welfare and social services. But at its core must be the fight for revolutionary socialism to overthrow the capitalist state and deliver the South African workers and poor from exploitation.

# China cracks down on workers’ centres

Peter Main

While the world’s media has been concentrating on the trial of Gu Kailai for the murder of her “business” partner Neil Heywood, a crack-down of a different sort has been underway in the southern province of Guangdong.

In the last five months, seven NGOs that provide advice and support for workers have had their offices closed and activists intimidated.

The first was the Spring Breeze Labour Disputes Service in Shenzhen. In February, despite a recently agreed contract and three years’ rent paid upfront, the landlord removed their signboard and cut off the water and electricity. In April, workers at the Dagongzhe Centre complained of intimidation by the authorities. Police broke up their May Day protest and in June they were closed.

Chen Mao of the Shenzhen Migrant Workers’ Centre, which

deals with some 300 individual cases per month, reported similar harassment and closure in May.

Across Guangdong province, there are about 30 such centres. They provide legal advice and assistance to migrant workers. To comply with the law, centres must either be registered with a “business supervisory unit”, regulated by the government authorities, or as private companies.

On 1 July Wang Yang, the provincial Communist Party chief, introduced new rules, supposedly to make it easier to set up new centres. Activists have been quick to point out the contrast between what the authorities say, and what they do.

The trial of Gu Kailai and the apparently contradictory behaviour of the Guangdong authorities might seem worlds apart but they are two faces of the same coin. Given China’s one party dictatorship, political conflicts, which would otherwise be reflected in the programmes of dif-

ferent parties, have to be fought out within the ruling party.

Gu Kailai’s case is one example of this. The details, as presented to the court, may be no more accurate than the original account of Heywood’s death: self-inflicted alcoholic poisoning. This has now been denounced as a cover up, orchestrated on behalf of Gu’s husband, Bo Xilai.

Bo came to national prominence as the Party chief in Chongqing, one of the fastest growing of all China’s cities. Chongqing had a reputation for corruption and gangsterism until Bo initiated a much-publicised clean up campaign. This combined legal proceedings with popular mobilisations around slogans condemning inequality and corruption made famous during the “Cultural Revolution” of the 1960s. This established his image as a radical “leftist” at a time when the ostentatious wealth of senior officials was bringing the Party into disrepute.

This reputation, coupled with a policy of providing more “social housing” in Chongqing than in many other boomtowns, put Bo in a strong position for promotion to the Politburo. In the factional jockeying ahead of November’s Party Congress, Bo represented those who want to preserve the role (and privileges) of the bureaucratic state apparatus against those who champion the growing capitalist class.

Gu’s arrest, trial and imprisonment have put her husband Bo back in his place – an indication of where the Party leadership will turn after November.

Similar factional manoeuvring lies behind the apparently contradictory treatment of the labour NGOs in Guangdong. China’s most populous province has long been at the forefront of capitalist development in China and Wang Yang is regarded as a moderniser.

The activities of the NGOs may be

an irritant to employers, but not a serious threat. By allowing them a relatively free reign Wang could enhance his credentials at the expense of his Party opponents in the state-controlled trades unions.

Against this background, the clampdown on NGOs may represent a rearguard action by Wang’s rivals, who see the need to turn the unions into “negotiating partners” with sole rights to represent – and sell out – workers.

Whatever the intrigues, revolutionaries in China will oppose the clampdown on NGOs. Although restricted in what they can do, some of them advocate the establishment of factory-based rank and file controlled trade unionism.

Supporting that form of trade unionism should be at the heart of revolutionary activity across China. It is a strategic necessity that can strike at the roots of all the factions in the Party as well as at the increasing power of the capitalists.

# Pentonville Five: when dockers fought the law and won

Forty years ago, four London dockers were arrested and held in north London's Pentonville Prison. The next morning a fifth was arrested outside while protesting at their arrest. Yet within five days the Pentonville Five were freed by a wave of unofficial action and the threat of a general strike. **Dave Stockton** looks at the lessons for today

IN 1970 THE TORIES under Edward Heath won a shock election victory over Harold Wilson's Labour government. In the preceding years, thousands of youth and militant workers, politicised by the Vietnam War, had joined far left groups: Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League (SLL), Tony Cliff's International Socialists (IS), and Tariq Ali and Pat Jordan's International Marxist Group (IMG).

But the biggest force among union militants was the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). With around 40,000 members, it stood at the centre of a network of convenors, senior stewards and regional officials.

The CPGB had built the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU) to resist Harold Wilson's attempts to shackle shop stewards, then at the height of their strength and militancy, launching several days of political strikes in 1969 and 1970.

## Kill the Bill

The new Heath government's anti-union proposals, the Industrial Relations Bill, abolished the legal immunity from damages for strike action enjoyed by unions since 1906, and pre-figured many of today's anti-union laws. The National Industrial Relations Court (NIRC) could impose ballots before strikes and a 60-day cooling off period before or during them. It outlawed the closed shop (compulsory union membership) and secondary picketing (pickets of any employer not directly involved in a dispute), and obliged unions to submit their rulebooks to a registrar for approval.

It allowed courts to seize union funds if they failed to implement its rulings. And it allowed the arrest of shop stewards or union officials for contempt of court.

The LCDTU campaigned against the proposals under the slogan "Kill the Bill", holding shop stewards' conferences of over a thousand and calling days of action, including one held in October 1970 when 250,000 went on strike. This did not prevent the Industrial Relations Act from becoming law, but did bring together a movement of shop stewards and rank and file militants.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) leadership had rejected "political" strike action against the Bill. Right-wing union leaders like EETPU electricians' leader Frank Chapple argued that it was the law and must be obeyed. However AUEW engineer's leader Hugh Scanlon, and TGWU transport union leader Jack Jones pushed the TUC to opt for passive resistance, ordering its unions to refuse to cooperate with the NIRC.



Jones and Scanlon had both been elected with support from the CPGB's "Broad Left".

## The dockers take on the law

Dockers, led by unofficial shop stewards' committees in Liverpool and London, had been waging a battle against containerisation, the stuffing and stripping of containers at depots often distant from the ports, by non-union labour on worse pay and conditions.

The NIRC issued an injunction against London dockers picketing the Chobham Farm container depot in Newham, but picketing continued in defiance of the law. The NIRC then issued arrest warrants for five stewards (Bernie Steer, Tony Merrick, Cornelius Clancy, Derek Watkins and Vic Turner), and they were imprisoned on 21 July.

Michael Fenn, then a leading CPGB shop steward, and secretary of the National Port Shop Stewards movement, later recalled:

"When it [the arrests] happened we immediately decided to shift the centre of our picketing to Pentonville prison and make that the organising centre for our operations. The docks had come out immediately they heard about the warrants, and this went for all the docks all over the country."

As the news spread, 44,000 dockers and 130,000 other workers downed tools, bringing docks to a standstill at London, Liverpool, Cardiff, Swansea, Glasgow, Bristol, Felixstowe, Leith, Chatham, Ipswich, Middlesbrough and even King's Lynn.

Rank and file militants understood that they were not simply waging a sectional industrial dispute but a class-wide battle, and looked for solidarity from every other section of workers. Dockers picketed Fleet Street's newspapers with the slogan, "Five Trade Unionists Are Inside - Why Aren't You Out?" Within four days, 250,000 workers were on unofficial strike.

At this point the crucial task for

revolutionary socialists was to agitate for an all out general strike to smash the Act, and for local councils of action to coordinate a developing general strike from below; but also to demand that the TUC itself call a general strike. Only one small Trotskyist group, Workers Fight (predecessor of today's Alliance for Workers' Liberty) did this clearly and unequivocally.

The International Socialists (today's Socialist Workers Party) played an important role in the strikes, but abandoned its previous call for councils of action just when they were needed, tailing the existing movement instead. Opposition to this would play a role in the formation of the Left Faction of IS, which later became Workers Power.

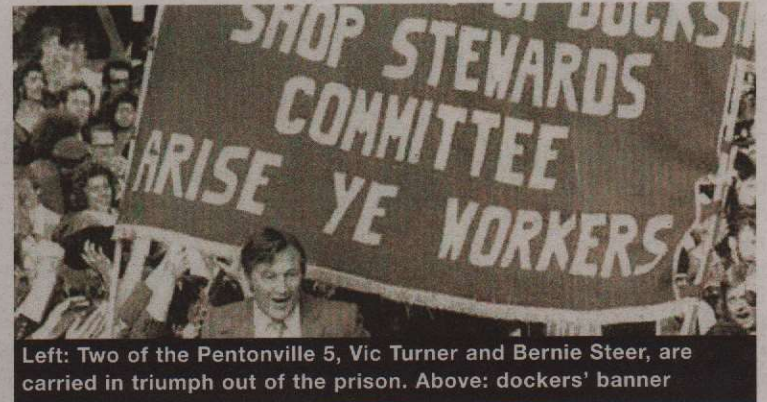
## And win in the short term...

Nevertheless pressure mounted on the TUC to call a general strike. The Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGPC) of the TUC General Council met on the Wednesday, and Hugh Scanlon moved a resolution for a one day strike and demonstration for the dockers' release for the next Monday.

Jack Jones moved to extend the strike's demands to the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act, only to withdraw faced with the right wing union leaders' opposition. A one-day general strike was called for 31 July, embarrassing TUC general secretary Vic Feather. He had previously said that "no responsible trade unionist" wanted a general strike, and that one would be harmful to the country, and "to the trade union movement itself."

In fact this atypical act of courage by the TUC leaders was not quite what it seemed. Knowing that the government was about to execute a U-turn, Jack Jones later recalled that they moved a resolution for a general strike "in the knowledge that it wouldn't be necessary."

A hitherto little known government official called the Official Solic-



Left: Two of the Pentonville 5, Vic Turner and Bernie Steer, are carried in triumph out of the prison. Above: dockers' banner

itor rushed to the High Court, successfully arguing to free the dockers on a technicality. They were carried from Pentonville shoulder high.

The mounting wave of unofficial action, and the union leaders' inability to control it, forced the Tories to surrender whilst there were still "responsible" men in charge. The end of the summer holidays in a few days time could also have brought miners, engineers and car workers into the fray.

## ...But lose in the longer term

A national dock strike began the next day, ironically putting power back into the union officials' hands. After three weeks, Jack Jones struck a deal with employers' federation leader Lord Aldington, over the heads of the rank and file dockers. While it preserved the conditions on the docks for another decade and a half, unregistered ports and containerisation were allowed to continue, undermining the unionised character of the industry as a whole.

Militants were furious at this sell-out. At a press conference in Liverpool, when Jones refused to explain himself to demonstration of 8,000 dockers outside, a group of them burst in, tore up his papers and poured a jug of water over him.

The limits of the "left" union leaders were now clear, but the rank and file had no means to take the leadership themselves. The LCDTU, while it organised the rank and file, was not controlled by them, and played no direct role in the dispute after a 10 June conference where delegates were prevented from putting amendments to a CPGB-supported motion.

Faced with technological change, the dockers really needed to extend union membership and conditions to all the unregistered ports and container depots, to preserve the gains they had made during and after the Second World War, as well as to the transport system connected to it.

This would have extended to all of these workers the best conditions thus far won: control over the jobs, safety and working conditions, reduced hours and increased pay. The position of a powerful and politically

conscious battalion of the British working class would have been defended and enhanced.

Similar things could have happened in the struggles of all the powerful detachments of the labour movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Miners, steel workers, and car and print workers all suffered defeat, not only or mainly because of some inevitable de-industrialisation, but because the unions under bureaucratic leadership failed to counter these moves by management and governments with a fight for workers' control of industry.

Moreover, even the greatest workers' victories cannot prevent a ruling class comeback and revenge if they fail to realise their full potential. And revenge came in the form of even heavier anti-union laws, imposed in stages before and after Thatcher defeated the miners in 1985.

These laws hamper effective strike action to this day. The lesson of 1972 is that these shackles can only be broken by defying them, defying jail and repression and taking class wide action up to and including a general strike.

Union leaders, even the most left wing, need to be under the control of a powerful and organised rank and file movement, one willing to act with the officials when they fight, and without them when they do not.

But the lessons of 1972 also show that if decisive moments and golden opportunities are not to be lost or frittered away, then we need a centre to develop a political strategy for the struggle - a leadership as clear headed and ruthless as that deployed by the ruling class, and able to stand against existing leaderships like that offered by the CPGB.

In short, this means a new workers' party, one willing and able to organise against and criticise the vacillation of left leaders like Jones and Scanlon, and to give a political alternative to the programme of relying on Labour to reform capitalism in government: a party committed to directing workers' resistance towards the revolutionary overthrow of the system.

# Four immediate steps against the crisis

In an extract from Workers Power's forthcoming programme, *Beyond The Crisis – Beyond Capitalism*, **Richard Brenner** sets out our key measures against the capitalist crisis through putting the working class in control of society

TO TAKE society out of crisis, the workers' movement needs to break with the profit system and advance a programme for socialism. To popularise it, socialists should focus attention on four key measures to end austerity and unemployment.

- Nationalise the banks – merge them into a state bank.
- Fund services by taxing corporations and the rich.
- Cancel state debt – renounce the government debt to banks.
- 30-hour week – jobs for all by sharing the work with no loss of pay

## Nationalise the banks

In the 2007-08 crisis, the state took on the liabilities of HBos, RBS, Northern Rock and Bradford & Bingley, while hiving off their assets to the rich. This socialisation of the banking debt is the real policy of the capitalists in a banking crisis. They perfectly happy to see the state intervene to rescue their profits, and force everyone else to pay the price.

Our answer should be the exact opposite: socialisation of banking wealth. State ownership should be used not to rescue profits but to confiscate them; not to impose cuts in jobs and services but to increase them; not to slash people's living standards to raise them.

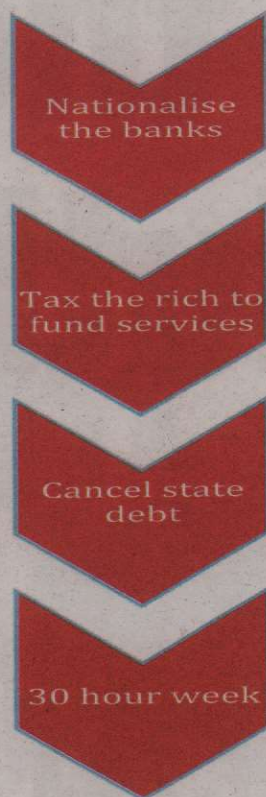
The Bob Diamonds, Stephen Hesters and Fred Goodwins made millions in salaries, share options, pensions and bonuses. This is not because of weak regulation, but the basis of the banking system under capitalism, in which banks compete for revenues ultimately drawn from corporate profits (investment banks) and people's wages (high street banks).

The union leaders and the Labour left call for tougher regulation, and for state encouragement of lending to cash-strapped businesses. But these demands contradict each other. Banks are insolvent because they made loans that went bad because firms' profits and workers' wages were stagnating. So:

- All banks and financial institutions should be nationalised without compensation.
- They should be merged into a single state bank, run not for profit and under democratic control.
- Investment priorities should be decided by public voting and discussion on the socially useful services and projects we want.
- Their managements should be elected, subject to recall and paid the average wage of a skilled worker.

The uncertainty and insecurity facing homeowners and small businesses could be ended with an interest moratorium on current loans, and cheap new loans from the state bank.

The economic data held by the banks would be opened up for public examination. Through televised and digital voting, the working class majority can then control the decisions of the state bank and direct resources where they are needed.



- Nationalise all banks and financial institutions without compensation
- Banks to be merged into a single state credit bank, run not for profit
- State bank to be under democratic control
- A democratic plan of production to meet public need not private greed

- End cuts to jobs, welfare and services - stop privatisation
- Fund services by taxing the rich and the corporations
- Stop funding wars of occupation and weapons of mass destruction
- Confiscate the property of tax exiles

- Cancel the UK government's debt to the banks and bondholders
- Renounce all austerity treaties with EU and global financial institutions
- Cancel third world debt to British institutions
- State guarantee to protect pension funds

- Create full employment by cutting the working week to 30 hours
- Share out the work with no loss of pay
- For massive public projects expanding homes, NHS, schools, transport
- Nationalise all firms declaring redundancies and all big corporations, without compensation and under workers' control

## Tax the rich to fund services

Labour Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls, echoing Tory Chancellor George Osborne, tells us that there have to be cuts because the deficit means the state "can't afford" to pay for the health, education and benefits we had in the past. He promises much the same cuts, only slower.

But the deficit exists in the first place because of massive bank bailouts, plus falling tax revenues brought on by recession and rising unemployment.

The rich demand lower taxes, to encourage investment and "create jobs", even though tax cuts compel them to do neither. And the Tories oblige, slashing corporation tax and preparing to lower the 50 per cent income tax rate for those on more than £150,000 a year.

Rather than demand taxing the rich, the TUC and the union leaders focus on illegal tax evasion, and on the legal tax avoidance schemes organised by accountants and lawyers in the pay of corporations and the rich. These structure companies, funds and deals to minimise their clients' legal obligations to pay tax.

It is right to demand the closing of every loophole. But new loopholes will spring up as soon as each old one closes. We can oppose offshore tax havens, but in a global capitalist economy the rich can still move their money around to take advantage of different tax laws.

So we should go beyond TUC calls to limit tax evasion and demand:

- A very high tax on corporate profits, inheritance and high incomes
- Capital controls to restrict export of funds

Companies unable or unwilling to pay should be nationalised without compensation, and individuals caught evading tax should lose all

their property. Present day tax rules are extremely complicated and hit the poor far more than the rich. Income tax should be reduced to zero for all low paid workers. Local taxes should be steeply progressive and related to income and wealth.

## Cancel state debt

Faced with falling tax revenues and mushrooming unemployment, the British government, like every other state, turns to the banks once again. It borrows huge sums on the international bond markets, which it has to pay off – with interest – to powerful bond holders: banks, pension funds and billionaire private investors.

These then exert huge pressure on governments to secure their ability to repay, by cutting welfare, privatising services, and slashing pensions and pay. Private credit rating agencies assess the credit-worthiness of whole nations, influencing the interest rates that governments have to pay, and with them the pace of austerity and cuts.

Whenever workers oppose the cuts, or call for the rich to pay more tax, austerity politicians immediately insist that this would "spook the bond markets" and threaten Britain's credit rating. The Labour and union leaders have no answer to this.

In this way a system of private financing for state debt drives a global transfer of wealth from the poorest to the richest in every downturn. This is true not only in very poor countries in Africa and Asia, or in weak intermediate countries like Greece and Ireland, but in the most advanced capitalist countries, including Britain and the US.

- To prevent jobs, pensions, health-care, education and benefits from

being sacrificed for the profits of billionaires, the national debt should be cancelled, and not a penny more paid to the bondholders.

Repudiation of the state debt would of course spark a furious reaction from the bondholders and international financiers, preventing the British government from day-to-day borrowing on the bond markets. But so would any serious attempt to transfer wealth and power from the rich to the poor.

The answer is to boost revenues by taking control of the wealth of the rich, and by putting millions of jobless people back to work.

Debt repudiation would encourage other countries to renounce their crippling debts and trade with one another, despite any bankers' boycott of them. The people of Greece, Spain, Italy and beyond would see an alternative to austerity open before their eyes.

Some protection would be needed to prevent debt cancellation affecting workers' pensions. Pension funds that invest in government bonds would be nationalised and pensioners would be indemnified. And Third World countries that owned British government debt would be compensated by aid payments and by the cancellation of their debts to British banks and institutions.

## For a 30-hour week

As profits fall, the capitalists try to control their costs. This means cutting pay, closing plants and offices and throwing workers onto the scrapheap.

Unemployment soars in every downturn, but the current crisis sees a sharp rise in joblessness with no prospect of quick relief, as banks withdraw investment and employers

prepare to cut back across the board on the eve of a triple-dip recession. Those new jobs that are announced are mainly part-time, precarious or even "zero-hours", with no guaranteed work and therefore no guaranteed pay.

The Tories have their eyes fixed on employment law, and are aiming to "liberalise" it – by which they mean stripping away even the limited protections of the unfair dismissal and redundancy rules and letting bosses sack at will, with no compensation.

Meanwhile those out of work struggle to get their dole, with new restrictions and checks, compulsory work-for-dole schemes and sick changes demanding that disabled claimants work. Benefits have been slashed along with the free services that the poorest access the most.

But unemployment could be ended at a stroke. We could share all the available socially necessary work among all the adults able to do it.

- Reduce the working week to a maximum of 30 hours
- For a sliding scale of wages and hours, sharing the work with no loss of pay

• Work or full pay: benefits at the level of the average wage in the industry you worked in or the minimum wage, which should be set at £10 an hour for all, young and old.

• Nationalise firms refusing to pay the minimum wage or respect the maximum hours.

• All part-time, casual and zero-hours jobs to be made permanent and protected; abolish the qualifying period for employment protection.

• For a massive programme of state spending on sustainable public works.

• Retirement at 60 on a full final salary pension guaranteed by the state.

A 30-hour week could be a six-hour day across five days, or a shorter week. It could be introduced flexibly to benefit workers with families, with disabilities or with other responsibilities.

And in a socialist society, the productivity of labour would be measured not by private profit but by the shortness of the working week. The fewer hours a worker works in a day, the more they get done in each hour, and the more time they have for other things: family, sport, culture, art and public affairs, including engagement in politics and the running of society.

The shorter the working week, the higher the level of civilisation and the closer the working class is to complete freedom.

The fact that under capitalism rising productivity reduces the number of people in work rather than the length of the working day is the clearest possible sign that it is a system in decline, blocking humanity from realising its potential.

## Victory to the Syrian Revolution!

Marcus Halaby

AS WE GO to press news is breaking of 400 dead bodies, mainly civilians, being found in Darayya. It could turn out to be the most deadly massacre yet in Syria's bloody confrontation.

Darayya's fate falls into a well-established pattern. The Syrian regime's air force and artillery bomb and shell a rebel-held area for several days or weeks, then the army or civilian pro-regime death squads go in to conduct house-to-house searches and kill at close quarters.

This civil war has brought with it a refugee crisis, with hundreds of thousands of fleeing the country. And yet the revolutionary forces keep returning to the battle. In Aleppo and Damascus, the regime seems unable to defeat the Free Syrian Army, despite far superior firepower.

### From uprising to civil war

The Syrian uprising began in March last year, barely a month after the downfall of Mubarak, and a fortnight after the Libyan uprisings in Benghazi and Tripoli. A group of schoolchildren in the impoverished rural border town of Daraa had been caught spraying graffiti with the slogan of Tunisia's revolution repeated in Egypt's Tahrir Square: "the people demand the downfall of the regime".

Their arrest and torture sparked mass protests, which were immediately met by savage violence. But in less than a month, the protest movement had spread across the whole country, forcing the regime to rescind a four-decade state of emergency law and promise reforms while continuing to shoot at its own people.

This failed to bring the movement to an end. Resentment at a decade of neoliberalism, bringing with it unemployment, environmental disaster, poverty, acute inequality and massive corruption, combined with the bottled up frustration at forty years of dictatorship and exploded onto the streets.

As in Egypt and Tunisia, the movement began with unarmed mass demonstrations demanding democratic rights – to assemble, to associate, to write and speak freely, to have a say in the government of their



Syria's revolutionary fighters  
Neither Islamist terrorists nor Western mercenaries but a risen people

country. And, unsurprisingly given Syria's ethnic and religious diversity, they also loudly opposed sectarianism, chanting "One, One, One, The Syrian People Are One".

But eighteen months have passed since then, and a mortally wounded regime has plunged the country into a protracted and bloody civil war. Civilians were forced to arm themselves in defence of their communities, a trickle of soldiers defecting from Syria's conscript army turned into a flood, and Syria's mass street-based movement has been partially transformed into a military struggle for control of the country.

Most of the armed opposition took on the name first used by a small group of officers who defected to Turkey – the Free Syrian Army.

They face in battle a regime that has flattened Syria's third-largest city Homs, that has killed 20,000 people (according to conservative UN estimates), that has fired missiles at civilian homes, that has bombed and shelled bakeries and bread queues, that has thrown university students out of dormitory windows, and that has sent thugs armed with knives and clubs to

slaughter whole families in their homes.

Some on the left, claim this revolution is different and, incredibly, less deserving of support because it has turned into a civil war.

But did they really believe that a near-totalitarian regime like that of the Assads would simply eject its figurehead, as Ben Ali's and Mubarak's did?

Over decades their regime had built a sizeable social base, one with a disproportionate composition of religious and ethnic minorities; and a massive apparatus of repression, one that it had previously used to massacre the people of Hama in 1982, when up to 40,000 were killed.

The directing figures of this regime could not step down without facing the threat of revenge. It social base also faced the loss of its extensive privileges. This regime would therefore fight to the last drop of blood of its people to survive.

But there was another reason it would fight to the death – it is the asset of two growing imperialist powers, and of the tyrannical but dangerously isolated Iranian clerical dictatorship.

### Russia, China and the United States

The peoples of the Middle East are not only burdened with one imperialist power – the United States – plus its European allies and its Israeli regional gendarme. They now also face Russia and China.

When capitalism was restored, Yeltsin and Putin inherited a world class military, nuclear weapons and a veto in the UN Security Council, and also a series of geo-strategic assets – one of the most valuable and reliable of which was Syria. Iran – a target of Israeli attention because of its potential to challenge the only nuclear power in the Middle East, and of the US because of its unwelcome influence in Iraq – was also obliged to seek shelter under Russia's veto.

China – a dramatically expanding new imperialist power, with interests of its own in checking and reversing US influence across Asia – was also willing to shield Syria and Iran. Thus the Middle East has developed into an area of inter-imperialist conflict. This in turn has given states like Saudi Arabia and Qatar, but also Egypt and Turkey, a new freedom of maneuver with regard to

the United States.

But despite their rivalries, the US has a common stance with Russia and China. They do not wish to see a victorious people's revolution in Syria. The US would much prefer what is being called a "Yemeni-style" transition. For this, they need Russia and China's grudging acquiescence; but Russia and China expect some guarantees of their interests in the Middle East in return.

In this vein, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said on CNN that Assad's army must remain intact after his departure to "preserve stability", and that people should hope that it "will transition to a democratic form of government".

This idea would see the Assad clan and the immediate circle around it go, but leaving behind them an officer caste stained with the blood of its own people. Some figures from the old regime, in coalition with a few pro-Western exiles, would have a UN mandate to continue to repress popular protests in the name of a firmly policed "democratisation process".

### Workers' power

But between this pro-imperialist outcome and the present stands the Syrian people. And to prevent it, it is vital that the mass of the revolutionary youth and the workers should take advantage of any weakening of the regime's repressive power, arm themselves, and turn the Local Coordinating Committees that exist in liberated districts into a nationwide network of delegate councils.

The most immediate demands must be that the entire regime goes, that all political prisoners are released, that all the torturers high and low are imprisoned and put on trial; and that neither Islamists, nor pro-Western exiles, nor figures from the old regime take hold of power behind the backs of the people.

The popular committees and militias that have forged this revolution should call and take control of elections to a sovereign constituent assembly. And within this process, the left wing forces will have to fight not for a more democratic capitalism, but for the permanence of the revolution – a workers' government struggling for a socialist federation of the Middle East.