



For a
workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 339 8 October 2014 30p/80p

www.workersliberty.org

Our aim: **END LOW PAY**



Our method: **INDUSTRIAL ACTION**

March with TUC 18 October • Britain needs a pay rise!

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

- 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

- Printed by Trinity Mirror

Get Solidarity every week!

- Trial sub, 6 issues £5
- 22 issues (six months). £18 waged
£9 unwaged
- 44 issues (year). £35 waged
£17 unwaged
- European rate: 28 euros (22 issues)
or 50 euros (44 issues)

Tick as appropriate above and send your money to:
20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG
Cheques (£) to "AWL".

Or make £ and euro payments at workersliberty.org/sub.

Name

Address

I enclose £



Rousseff wins first round in Brazil's elections

By Raquel Palmeira

In the first round of the Brazilian presidential elections the incumbent Dilma Rousseff (Workers Party) took 41.1% of the vote ahead of Aécio Neves (pro-business social-democratic party) on 34.2%.

They will now face each other in a second round of voting on 26 October.

Socialist Party candidate Marina Silva got only 21.3%. This is surprising, as Silva had been favourite to win at one point. However it is unusual for a candidate to come close to challenging the two main parties.

Protests in June and July expressed growing disillusionment with the main two parties. Many talked about not voting for either. Silva gathered supporters with



Most expected a run off between Silva and Rousseff

her "new politics", which while having a large green and anti-corruption element, pandered to both left and right. Silva is contradictory, changing her platform to fit who she's talking to. That's why she found it difficult to

maintain votes. Many people demanding political change ended up being polarised into the usual camps and therefore voting for either Rousseff or Neves.

Rousseff is regarded by many as "bad but not as bad

as the others". Many trade unions actively campaigned against Neves, implicitly calling for a vote for Rousseff as a less bad option. Rousseff has a history of some dialogue with the labour movement.

Neves represents a neoliberal agenda, and has called for new laws to curb the rights of unions.

Neves is anti-choice and anti-same-sex marriage. However, despite Rousseff having a history of being more pro-choice and for marriage equality, she has not taken up these issues during this election campaign.

She has stayed quiet in order to pacify and pander to the church organisations backing her candidacy.

FREE SHAHROKH ZAMANI AND REZA SHAHABI!



Jailed for fighting for workers' rights in Iran.

Trade unionism should not be a crime!

<http://chn.ge/1vMfs9F>

Student rent up by 5%

By Omar Raii

At University College London students face constant increases in rent.

The average rise of a basic room at UCL accommodation has gone up by 5% since last year (higher than inflation!) while student loans have gone up by a measly 1%.

Though increased marketisation of universities across the country is ensuring university halls are becoming more and more expensive everywhere, UCL seems to have a particular problem with giving its students decent and affordable rooms to live in.

A year ago, upon its completion, UCL's newest hall (appropriately named New Hall) was voted the worst new building in Britain, with many commenting that

rooms in nearby Pentonville Prison are likely to be nicer. HSBC (not known for its caring attitude towards students) recently accused UCL of having the priciest halls in the country, with an average room costing £157 a week. For comparison, the cost of a standard room at nearby King's College London is £127.50.

This year however, students are organising a fight back. The first step will be a motion to the student union General Assembly to demand that UCL lower its rents and commit to no above-inflation rises in rents year by year.

If UCL continues to ignore students' welfare then activists should argue for and plan an organised student rent strike.

Students will only be able to stand these absurd rents for so long.



These homes need people!

Activists from the Focus E15 housing campaign who occupied an empty flat on the Carpenters estate have now ended the occupation. Earlier this week they won a fight against forced eviction from the flats. As they left they published photos of the good condition these homes are in. As social tenants are forcibly moved out of London, these flats stand empty. The campaign will continue.

Tory plan to scrap Human Rights Act

At Tory Party conference Cameron pledged to repeal the Human Rights Act and change Britain's relationship with the European Court of Human Rights.

The Tories wish to avoid "inconvenient rulings"

which may effect their intentions to tighten up anti-terror laws, and to do some political posturing to win over UKIP voters.

• Full article: bit.ly/1EpUbQD

Next steps in Hong Kong

By Chen Ying in Hong Kong

The protest movement in Hong Kong has been forced to retreat in the face of orchestrated violent attacks by Beijing-funded triad gangs, with the complicity of the police force.

The gangs began their attack in Mong Kok, a high density urban working class district with a high concentration of organized crime.

The spontaneous occupation of Mong Kok on 29 September — in response to the deployment of teargas — was initially hugely successful and took the police completely by surprise.

By 1 October, with the protest movement highly mobilised over two public holidays, the student leaders called for the Chief Executive Leung Chun Ying to resign, or else they would escalate the action.

On 2 October, the government building which accommodates the Chief Executive's office was completely surrounded. The police had to negotiate for

water and food to be let through the cordon of protesters to reach those police officers on duty inside the besieged building.

Leung refused to resign, but appointed his deputy to meet with student leaders.

In response, on 3 October, Leung and the local pro-Beijing forces counter-attacked.

Hordes of burly men wearing blue ribbons — symbolising support for the police — waded into the protesters in Mong Kok, with very few police on duty. Videos widely circulated in Hong Kong showed police arresting some of the thugs but releasing them almost as soon as they were brought back to Mong Kok police station.

Some reports claim rent-a-mob adverts on Facebook offer between \$500 to \$1000 (£40 to £80) to thugs to attack protesters.

While the Mong Kok occupation initially put pressure on the government and forced them to refrain from further attacks on the occupiers in Admiralty, the prolonged blockage of daily life at street level began to affect local traffic and small busi-

nesses, probably eroding the income of the triads' protection rackets as well.

On 4 October, while the government denied claims of any collusion with triad gangs, and while university leaders urged students to disperse to avoid bloodshed, the Federation of Students, Scholarism and the Occupy Central leaders held a defiant anti-violence rally in Admiralty, albeit with a much smaller crowd of several thousand.

THUGS

The Federation of Students, having refused talks on 3 October, decided to meet with government negotiators on condition that the police do not exercise force and that triad thugs are stopped from further attacks on protesters.

By 5 October, with the threat of the police using force to clear away protesters, the movement's leaders called for protesters to disperse.

On Monday 6 October the siege of government headquarters was partially lifted to allow civil servants to go

to work. The numbers surrounding the Chief Executive's office reduced to a token presence. Talks about talks continued between student leaders and government negotiators. Secondary schools reopened in the Central and Wanchai districts.

The Occupy Central leaders' stance throughout is based on the model of non-violent mass civil disobedience as practised by Gandhi and Martin Luther King. However the government has avoided arresting the leaders to make them martyrs, but outmanoeuvred them with greater tactical skill.

The huge mass of protesters in the early days showed a high level of self-organisation and discipline, but in the end they could not sustain the level of protest in the absence of clear resolute leadership.

The bravery of students had earned them a huge degree of support from the public, as well as some one day stoppages in some workplaces. However, the movement's leaders did not issue a call for further work-



Pro-China thugs attacked occupiers

place strikes to support them.

Given the intransigence of the government, with clear backing by Beijing, the mass movement is lacking the political leadership to maintain the pressure to force the Chief Executive to resign or achieve their demands that the Chinese Government reverse their decision on the composition of candidates for the Chief Executive 2017 elections.

It is important that activists and students regroup and seek to establish a broadly representative campaign group with a clear programme and an elected leadership to rally support and continue the use of civil disobedience.

Such a campaign should fight for; the resignation of the Chief Executive; calling to account those responsible for instigating violent attacks; legislative councillors to vote against the adoption of the electoral package proposed by the HK government; the Chinese government to review their previous decision; the occupation of Admiralty to continue until these are achieved and workplaces in Hong Kong to take appropriate action to support the campaign.

The government remains fragile and unpopular, and the movement still has great reservoirs of support for the key democratic demands.

Left to stand in Ukraine polls

By Dale Street

Campaigning is now underway for the Ukrainian parliamentary elections on 26 October.

According to a recent interview with Ukrainian Left Opposition (LO) activist Nina Potarskaya, the LO will be standing candidates in the elections, to "use the campaign as an instrument for mobilising and organising people around us."

It seems likely that the only candidates standing in the elections on a platform of working-class unity and mobilisation against oligarchic rule and the whipping up of nationalist antagonisms will be those put up by the LO.

The latest polls show President Poroshenko's "Pyotr Poroshenko Bloc" as the front-runner, on 27%. Ex-Prime Minister Tymoshenko's Fatherland Party stands at 5.5% and current Prime Minister Yatsenyuk's People's Front at just under 4%.

The once powerful Party of the Regions, formerly led

by the ousted ex-President Yanukovich, has collapsed, with support standing at just 0.9%. Deprived of its bedrock support in Crimea and south-east Ukraine, support for the Ukrainian Communist Party now stands at just 3%.

The two political parties which have been the main focus of the "anti-fascist" propaganda campaign conducted by the separatists, the Russian media, and their western "left" bag-carriers — Svoboda and Right Sector — stand at 3.3% and 0.9% respectively.

But Lyashko's far-right Ukrainian-chauvinist Radical Party currently stands on just over 6% in the polls and is expected to win around 10% of the vote.

Fascists are becoming increasingly active on the streets of Ukraine's cities, carrying out physical attacks on their political opponents and anyone deemed to be a supporter of the separatists.

Meanwhile, despite the ceasefire agreement signed on 5 September, fighting continues in the south-east

of Ukraine.

The main focus of the fighting has been the ongoing offensive by Russian-backed separatists around Donetsk Airport. At the time of writing, the separatists claim to have seized control of the airport, although this is denied by the Ukrainian authorities.

Fighting has also occurred near the coastal city of Mariupol and the inland towns of Debal'tsevo, Schastye, Adayevka and Popasnaya, as the separatists attempt to push westwards and increase the area under their control.

ACCUSED

Separatist forces have accused the Ukrainian military of breaching the ceasefire agreement by continuing to shell towns and villages near the frontlines, especially various regions in the city of Donetsk.

According to the latest figures issued by the United Nations, by the end of September 3,627 people had

been killed and another 8,500 wounded in the fighting. This is likely to be an under-estimate.

Out of the total population of around five millions in the conflict zone, nearly 400,000 have fled to other parts of Ukraine, and over 400,000 to neighbouring countries, mostly Russia. This figure does not include refugees from Russian-occupied Crimea.

Leaving aside those armed units, the so-called "Cossacks", which operate independently of the military command structures, the separatist military commanders and their political supporters appear to be split three-ways over the ceasefire.

One faction is simply against it and has denounced it as "treachery".

A second faction amongst the separatists seems to have accepted it, a third faction, possibly reflecting the majority view, sees it as a temporary measure.

The third group believes that social unrest will explode in Ukraine during the winter months, under the

impact of collapsing industrial output, growing unemployment, cuts in social spending, falling living standards, an ongoing slump in foreign exchange rates, and disruptions to gas supplies.

The separatist forces will then "link up" with this unrest and resume their offensive, seizing the entire territory of historical "Novorossiya" and possibly advancing into Kiev itself.

An additional factor in the calculations of this faction is the difficulties likely to be faced by Crimea's population over the winter months (unless a land bridge can be established between the peninsula and Russia) and by the populations of the two "People's Republics".

The parliamentary elections will not be taking place in the Donetsk and Lugansk "People's Republics". Instead, elections for a "People's Soviet" and a President in each "People's Republic" are to be held on 2 November.

The staging of these elections has triggered further divisions in the ranks of the

separatists and their supporters.

Igor Strelkov-Girkin, the former commander of the separatist forces, advocates, as an alternative, rule by a military council, with all civilian structures subordinated to the military.

In the 2 November elections just one candidate has put himself forward for President of the Donetsk "People's Republic": the incumbent Alexander Zacharchenko, who was imposed in place of Alexander Borodai just before Russia launched its major military offensive in late August. But the name of a token "competing" candidate may also end up on the ballot paper.

Only one candidate has so far put in nomination papers for the position of "head" of the Lugansk "People's Republic" — not the incumbent Igor Plotnitsky but the previously unknown Victor Penner, described as a graduate in management and "active for many years in entrepreneurial activities."



Why a democratic federal republic?

Letter



Matt Cooper (Solidarity 338) objects to our calls for a democratic federal republic and a constituent assembly on three grounds:

One, that to call for a constituent assembly is “abstract propaganda”, or would “give those views that dominate current political debate... political form”.

Two, that a federal system is impossible “where one unit (England) is far bigger than all the others put together”.

Three, that devolution (the status quo? or Cameron’s increased devolution?) is the “good approximate answer”.

His third point seems to contradict his opening lines, that we were right to “outline what a new democratic settlement would look like”. If the good approximation is the status quo, or the already-promised amendments to it, then there is not much point *Solidarity* pursuing the question.

Our ideas on “a new democratic settlement” are not “realistic” in the sense of being what might win consensus in the current balance of forces? But as revolutionary socialists we also build forces and opinion for the future.

A constituent assembly would, of course, be shaped by current public opinion. But we seek to transform public opinion through opening out democracy, not to sidestep it by having arrangements imposed from above.

A federal system does not require units roughly equal in size. It would be easier that way, but neatness is not indispensable.

The federal republic which our movement set up in 1922 — the USSR of Lenin’s time — had one unit (the RFSFR) bigger than the others combined. With the Stalinist counter-revolution, its democratic provisions soon became null, but until now none of us thought that the federal set-up should have been opposed outright because of the RFSFR being so big.

The federal united Ireland which we in AWL have proposed since the late 1960s would have one unit much bigger than the other. The Protestant-majority area in the north-east counts only 1.5 million of Ireland’s 6.5 million people if we measure it as four counties, and not much over a million if we take out the Catholic-majority border areas of south Armagh and Derry City.

Germany’s Weimar Republic came to a bad end, but we’ve never thought that was because its federal system was made unworkable by one federal unit (Prussia) having over 60% of the total population.

If one unit is much bigger than the others, then the decisions of the federal authority will be heavily influenced by that unit. That may be difficult. But between England and Scotland, long closely integrated, it could be workable.

Small areas within a state — like, say, the French-speaking area and the German-speaking area of Italy — can be accommodated by autonomy without federal structures, essentially special expanded local government powers.

Is Scotland small enough, and is the agitation about Scotland’s status small enough, for that to be sufficient? I think not. *Solidarity* and Workers’ Liberty started to revive Engels’s call for a democratic federal republic in Britain 12 or 13 years ago, when agitation for Scottish independence mounted in the activist left, notably in the then-strong Scottish Socialist Party (bit.ly/ssp-dfr). Now Cameron has been forced to offer more radical devolution, and the SNP is well-placed to hold him to it.

That is bound to open new questions.

Martin Thomas, Islington

FireChat: another spurious techno-panacea

Eric Lee



Hardly a day doesn’t go by when we don’t hear about some new “revolutionary” technology that is going to make the world a more open, transparent, and better place.

There have been a few high profile ones in recent days, including the new social network Ello, which is being pushed as the “anti-Facebook” (it’s nothing of the sort). Ello claimed that 30,000 people per hour have been trying to sign up to be users of the beta version of its software.

And the mass street protests in Hong Kong have focussed attention upon an app for smartphones called “FireChat” which is, apparently, going to bring an end to totalitarianism, create an open and transparent world, and so on.

The *Guardian*’s reporting on FireChat is just a tiny bit over-excited.

In an article subheaded “The internet is vulnerable to state intervention, but demonstrators have found a way around it”, journalist Archie Bland concluded: “If the Communist party isn’t quite reeling, its opponents’ lives have at least got a little easier.”

The BBC begins its report on FireChat by noting that “news about the protests in Hong Kong have been suppressed in mainland China, where the picture sharing site Instagram has been blocked. Messages posted to Sina Weibo, a Chinese microblogging site similar to Twitter, are being blocked in far greater numbers than normal. And on Sunday, rumours reportedly circulated that the authorities in Hong Kong might shut down the city’s cellular networks.”

In response to this state censorship, hundreds of thousands of people, including many of the demonstrators, have downloaded FireChat and are using it to communicate, as did protestors earlier in the year in Taiwan, Iran and Iraq. They’re avoiding government censorship, and have no need for wi-fi or even a cellular phone signal.

So what does this amazing new app do?

Essentially, it allows people to communicate with others using smartphones via Bluetooth.

Bluetooth, as you may know, is a way for devices to com-

municate over very short distances — up to around 10 meters. If you’re using wireless headphones for your phone, you’re probably using Bluetooth.

So what FireChat might be good for is sending a text message to people standing right next to you. Or the people behind them.

These are the same people you could probably get a message to by ... talking.

Yes, the technology could be useful in places where talk is impossible (e.g., loud concerts).

But to pitch it as an alternative to the Internet or cellular phone networks is absurd.

And another thing: Governments are able to listen in to Bluetooth communications in the same way they can listen in to any radio communication. So FireChat by definition is not secure.

Micha Benoliel, whose San Francisco company makes FireChat, admits that his software is not secure, telling the *Guardian* that he “recommends people avoid real names; this is, he says, for information-sharing, not for secrets”.

So much for FireChat being a way around state snooping.

This is not to say that “mesh computing”, which is what FireChat does, is not interesting.

As the *Guardian* article explains, “Every new participant increases the network’s range and strength.” Imagine people passing a message through a crowd; that’s how it works.

Benoliel put it this way: “Usually, the more people there are in the same location, the less connectivity you get. But with our system, it’s the opposite.”

The uses of a tool like FireChat would appear to be limited to a very small area -- for example, groups of people who are already attending a demonstration to communicate with one another.

But it could not be used, as the BBC suggests, to spread word that protests are taking place to people who are not actually there. FireChat cannot be used to inform people on the mainland what is happening in Hong Kong. It cannot even be used to spread the word in Hong Kong beyond the group of people already attending the protest.

For that you need a network with a range greater than 10 meters — a network of real people who use any and every technology to spread the word.

Unfortunately, there are no technological shortcuts.

Scotland: time to move on

Left

By Colin Foster



After the 18 September referendum in Scotland, the battles against low pay, inequality, and cuts remain to be fought there, pretty much the same as in England.

The issue of NHS cuts in Scotland was raised as a scare just before the referendum, but the Institute for Fiscal Studies (conservative, but with no special axe to grind over Scottish separation) found that spending on the NHS in Scotland would fall by 1% in real terms, between 2009-10 and 2015-16, and rise by about 4% in real terms in England.

Overall public budgets in Scotland have been cut a bit less than in England, thanks to the “Barnett formula” for funding — about 8% rather than 13% — but SNP rule is no shield against cuts.

The Scottish government’s own figures show “relative poverty” as 20% of the urban population, and increasing. The Gini coefficient, a summary index of inequality, is a bit lower in Scotland than in Britain overall (because of the concentration of the rich around London), but has risen in Scotland just as in England.

Socialist Worker of 27 September quoted a “yes” activist, Caitlin Rennie, as saying that: “The referendum highlighted [social] issues that No voters have an interest in changing,

and we can use that to unite us and push for change in Scotland together”.

Absolutely! That is the only basis for real struggle on the social issues. A mindset which identifies Yes (to Scottish separation) with “left”, and No with “right”, will divide and cripple the labour movement and the working class.

The SNP will want to focus political energy on its efforts to get as much as it can out of the promises of greater Scottish autonomy made by prime minister David Cameron shortly before 18 September.

Working-class unity on social issues should be the priority for socialists. When an important economic centre like Aberdeen votes 59% No, and 18-24 year olds vote 52% No, it is nonsense to dismiss No as a right-wing vote.

Some on the left in Scotland want to continue to focus on separation. Former Scottish Socialist Party leader Tommy Sheridan, has advocated an SNP vote in 2015, and a leader of the current SSP has recommended for 2105 a “Yes Alliance, a pro-independence slate of candidates... embracing the three parties that were in Yes Scotland – SNP, SSP and Greens”.

Socialist Worker of 6 October reports with apparent approval that “people are determined to continue the Yes campaign by any means necessary” and that “some Yes campaigners want to go further and argue that the main fight is to secure a second referendum. Others are demanding a recount and are convinced the vote was rigged”.

It’s time to move on to class politics.



Strike to end low pay

Public sector workers from health, local government and civil service will strike over pay in the week beginning 13 October.

Unison, GMB and Unite local government workers (and some school workers) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will strike on 14 October.

The Local Government Association (representing councils) and the unions meet on 8 October, with officials saying "an offer is expected". Activists worry that union leaders may call off the strike in return for little. This would undercut the whole fight against low pay.

PCS (the civil service union) are to strike across Britain on 15 October. Members of the lecturers' union UCU in Further Education colleges in England have rejected their 1% pay offer by 85%. They will strike on 14 October, on the authority of a previous ballot.

RMT members on London Underground will strike over job cuts on 14-16 October.

Health workers in Unison, Unite, and Royal College of Midwives in England (and, for Unite, in Northern Ireland) will strike for four hours on Monday 13 October. A "work to rule" will follow. Sadly, no union has given specific instructions on the "work to rule", apart from to take the full entitlement of breaks.

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

The Society of Radiographers announced on 3 October that its members have voted 53.3% for strikes. Their leaders will decide action on 8 October.

In Scotland Unison members in local government have voted by 53.5% in favour of strikes over a 1% pay offer.

Unison in Scotland is considering a programme of industrial action to include a day of action and geographical and selective action.

A big industrial fight will be needed to win wage increases and drive down inequality.

Political action - organised pressure by the unions within the Labour Party - and ideological battle against neo-liberalism are also necessary, but without industrial action will lack weight.

It is good that most public-sector unions are striking in the same week, in England at least. Yet communication between unions at the level of rank and file members remains low.

Most inter-union communication is between general secretaries. For a start, there should be a joint meeting of the unions' elected executive committees to discuss further action.

Strike committees within and between unions can involve members in persuading others to come out, organising picket lines, challenging bosses who try to open workplaces or use scabs, and discussing what action the union should take next.

On strike days, strikers' meetings - rather than passive rallies with "big name" speakers - can enable members to discuss strategy.

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

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

Organise for industrial action; organise for union democracy; end low pay!

• For information on the local government pay proposals see: bit.ly/1BMUYqJ

The rich up 15%, the rest down 15%

Real wages in the public sector went down 15% between 2008 and 2013. Across the economy real wages have fallen by 8.2%.

Across the economy the average wage rise last year, concentrated in manufacturing and financial services, was just 2% in money terms. Price inflation was 2% (CPI) or 2.7% (RPI). Over half of the wage rises were below RPI. In a sample survey of wage settlements for six million workers between August 2013 and August 2014, 13% faced a wage freeze and only 8.3% had a wage rise above 3%.

In July this year the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted that Britain will be the fastest growing advanced economy in 2014. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) declared the economic depression over. This is an economic recovery for the rich.

Britain's richest people are wealthier than ever before, with a combined fortune of almost £520bn for just the top 1000. According to the Sunday Times Rich List the total wealth of the richest 1000 individuals, couples or families jumped 15% between May 2013 and May 2014. Philip Beresford, who compiles the list, said he had never before seen such a "phenomenal" rise in personal fortune.

However most people have suffered a significant drop in living standards. The worst hit have suffered a decline in living standards of over 20%. According to the TUC, full-time UK workers are earning, on average, £2,084 less a year, in real terms, than they were in 2010. That equates to 36 shopping trolleys of food, 28 tanks of fuel for the average car, or a year's energy bill for the average household.

The Tory government feels under very little pressure to raise wages. Instead it intends to improve its image by managing low pay with tax cuts. The Tories have promised to raise the personal tax threshold from £10,000 to £12,500 per year by 2020. That is a 3.8% per year rise. The usual increases in the threshold with inflation (at 2.5%) would take it to £11,600. The Tories say that full time workers on today's minimum wage will not pay income tax in 2020.

But a minimum-wage worker on 40 hours per week gets £13,520 already. With just a 3% per year increase in the minimum wage she or he gets £16,144 gross by 2020, and pays lots of tax.

The lowest paid workers, who are usually part time, are already under the personal tax threshold.

The government has also announced a two-year freeze on working-age benefits.

No Lib Dem-Labour coalition!

In the first of the Mr Bean movies, the protagonist accidentally sneezes on a priceless painting that will soon be the centrepiece of a grand exhibition.

Keen to keep the painting clean, he takes a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe away the snot. Unfortunately, a pen has leaked in his pocket, and the handkerchief inadvertently smears blue ink on the portrait.

Ten agonising minutes follow in which each of Mr Bean's efforts to hide the damage makes the situation immeasurably worse, and by the time he abandons the effort, the face of the portrait has been bleached white and scrawled over with a cartoon smiley face. That's what Liberal Democrat party conference has been like: hapless, nonsensical and doomed.

There is a howling contradiction in the Lib Dems' pitch for

votes. On the one hand, they know that they need to distance themselves from the right-wing, regressive policies of the government they have participated. On the other hand, they have to justify their participation.

Danny Alexander decries the "heartless, soulless measures of "this government" in one breath, and brags about how the Liberals "are at the heart" of it in the next. He also criticised excessive austerity while claiming that "Liberal Democratic economic ideas" were "delivering success for all of our people."

If they hadn't been in coalition, so the Lib Dem argument runs, the Tories would be even worse. But if it wasn't for Lib Dem support, the Tories wouldn't even have a majority! Rather than acting as a brake on austerity, the Lib Dems are enabling it.

In the event of another hung parliament, there may be calls for a Labour-Lib Dem coalition. Socialists and trade unionists should fight hard against this idea. The Labour Party, for all of its many faults, at least has structural and political roots in a workers' movement. The same is not true of the Lib Dems. They are a thoroughly bourgeois party that is committed to anti-working class cuts and privatisations. They would pull a Labour government even further to the right.

The Lib Dem conference is a miserable sight. Hated government ministers deliver half-hearted entreaties to a public that isn't listening and doesn't care. The Lib Dems have dug themselves into a deep, deep hole.

After the election, the Labour Party must not make the mistake of helping them out of it.

Talking, explaining, and telling the truth

Mick O'Sullivan remembers Tom Cashman, socialist trade unionist and long-time associate of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who died in August.

I knew Tom as a friend and comrade since the early 70s.

Tom was someone who had a hinterland; his interests spanned good whiskey, particle physics, a love of Sean O'Casey's plays, modernist architecture, and an encyclopaedic knowledge of schisms in the Catholic Church, which quite frankly bemused me. Tom was a very rounded person and a very humorous one.

But I want to say something about Tom the public man. Tom was a Marxist, an atheist and trade unionist who dedicated his life to the working class and had an unwavering conviction that socialism was the only hope of humanity.

Tom's main arena of activity was within the unions and in particular the T&G [later Unite].

Although he was active in the 1970s, his misfortune was to come of age when the union movement was in decline. That, however, was the movement's gain. It meant much of his activity was about holding the line; he did this by explaining to those who had forgotten, and those who had never known, what a trade union should do, and how a trade unionist should conduct themselves.

He often made the point to me that there were no shortcuts, no tricks to this, all we can do is talk and explain. What I think gave his approach such a sharp edge was his decision to consistently tell the truth. Now some may say so what, what's the big deal about telling the truth? Well, all I can say is, you try it inside a trade union.

Talking, explaining and saying what needs to be done next is what Tom did, and others will testify to his importance within the T&G and its left.

However Tom was also vilified for his views. While we often joked about this, the wellspring of this enmity towards him arose from what he stood for.

If you think about it, there were always going to be those who did not like the fact he was principled, that he fought against Stalinist influence within the union, that he was incorruptible; the idea that a trip to Cuba or America would turn his head and him into someone's creature was never going to happen, although I have seen people try. On the most mundane of levels there were those who resented him because he always turned up to meetings have read the paperwork, and they had not.

For all these reasons people kicked against Tom, yet in all the years I knew him I never once heard him get angry about such people; his duty was to explain. His political enemies and comrades were a different matter. He was always ready to have the argument.

Of course there are many trade unionists with similar qualities. However no-one exhibited these qualities in quite the same way or with quite the same mix as Tom.

In our world where we measure our actions and our victories in a lower case, Tom played a huge role in holding the movement together and provided real insights in how we should rebuild it.

I cannot think of anyone who has acquitted themselves in our cause with greater dedication. As for me I have lost a dear friend and the staunchest of comrades.

Why we should oppose British exit from EU

An abridged version of a document to be discussed at the AWL's annual conference on 25-26 October.

"...The slogan of the United States of Europe will in all cases retain a colossal meaning as the political formula of the struggle of the European proletariat for power. In this program is expressed the fact that the national state has outlived itself — as a framework for the development of the productive forces, as a basis for the class struggle, and thereby also as a state form of proletarian dictatorship."

Trotsky wrote about the United States of Europe in 1915, refining his ideas in 1917, after the February Russian Revolution, in the midst of the First World War. Almost a century later, a century of war, we are still for the Socialist United States of Europe (SUSE)!

It was a policy for the socialist movement; Trotsky did not believe that the European ruling classes could unite Europe, although capitalist economic development was clearly outgrowing its national boundaries. That Europe is now belatedly being united piecemeal and bureaucratically by the bourgeoisie, rather than in a democratic, socialist way, is because of the weakness of the socialist movement and its failure to overthrow the bourgeoisies, to prevent two world wars, and to build the Socialist United States of Europe.

The current European integration project, with the European Union (EU) at its core, is a capitalist project, not our project; the capitalists are uniting Europe in their own way for their reasons. We resist the many anti-working class elements in their project, including its overwhelmingly pro-capitalist ideology, bureaucratic structure, and the way the ruling class can use it to over-ride democratic and working-class achievements. Nevertheless, it features elements that are important for our own project:

- Development of the economy, thus developing the basis for socialism;
- Lowering of barriers of all kinds, development of a transnational political terrain;
- The gradual weakening of nationalism, peace between European nations;
- Development of the working class across the continent and bringing them together, evening out the disparities in their lifestyle and culture — our task is to fight for levelling up rather than down.

It will not be possible to reform the EU to such an extent that we can transform it into the SUSE. However, our fight to reform it, waged simultaneously with our fight to reform the nation states that compose it, is an important part of our fight to create what will replace both: at the national level, the workers' government, at the European level, the SUSE.

The failure of or destruction of the EU before we are in a position to put something better in its place will create a situation less favourable for the realisation of socialism. We do not hope or work for the demise of the EU. A return to a situation like that before the current epoch of capitalist integration, one of fiercely competing nation states, would be an historic setback for the socialist goal, implying renewed prestige for nationalism; hostility between nations and thus between workers of those nations; trade wars; and economic regression.

Support for European unity does not have to imply backing what the dominant capitalists and their servants do, or the way that they do it. It does, however, commit us to European unity and to opposing politically all those who advocate the break-up of the EU and the restoration of the old, long-bankrupt, European bourgeois national-state system. It does commit us to counterpose working-class measures on a European scale to the bourgeois system. Socialists and work-

ing-class forces must resist neoliberal/pro-capitalist aspects of the EU; build cross-border links between workers and begin to fight on the European terrain; and campaign for more democracy in the EU.

To some extent, working-class organisations are already forced to do this, whatever their attitude to the EU. Since they are not strong enough to stop it happening, they must fight to make the best of it. This parallels the situation of the working class at the national level. To the extent that capitalist nation states have been civilised, it has been as a result of the action of the working class — nothing was given at the start.

The prevailing views about Europe on the left are Europhobic. Left Europhobes oppose capitalism expanding beyond national borders because, they say, it will entail us "starting again from scratch" on the project of democracy. They are mistaken — we are not starting at zero.

We have developed many tools to help us fight on the European terrain:

- Bourgeois democratic norms (some championed by the EU itself, where different bourgeois and even social-democratic views compete — for example, the EU is an important arena in the struggle against discrimination);
- Organisations (trade unions, parties — some with strength within EU institutions);
- A rich historic experience of international cooperation against nationalism and war.

RESULTS

Concerted effort at a European level has already had results. For example, between 2005 and 2009, a Europe-wide campaign by trade unions and NGOs drew much of the sting of the so-called Bolkestein directive which aimed at increasing the marketisation of public services.

There are many aspects integral to the EU that we can take advantage of, for example, organising together of workers in multinational companies — just as much as at the national level, the capitalist class at the European level creates its own grave-diggers.

The labour movement and socialists are not making the most of the opportunities. In addition, they downplay the enormity of the task of reforming the national states, and often scapegoat the EU as the source and seat of power of neoliberalism. Left Europhobes erroneously characterise the EU as being little more than a conspiracy to rob the labour movement of the gains it has made at each national level.

Of course the bosses will take advantage of any opportunity they get to push back workers' organisations and take away the gains workers have won through struggle. But the *raison d'être* of the EU is primarily something else: a reflection of the capitalist economic system outgrowing the bounds of the nation states. This is not something that workers have an interest in stopping.

Of the many objections Left Europhobes raise to the EU, the most sinister is their hostile attitude toward workers migrating, in search of work and a better life, from poorer areas of the EU toward richer.

They echo the far-right, either saying that migrant workers are displacing settled workers — "taking jobs" — or undermining the gains of British workers by accepting lower wages and conditions — "social dumping".

There is little evidence of migrant workers displacing settled workers but, in any case, our answer to unemployment is the creation of enough jobs for all, through, for example, rebuilding public services, paid for by tax on wealth.

Where bosses attempt to employ migrant workers on lower wages or conditions, our answer is to organise those



On 14 November 2012 there was a general strike in southern Europe against cuts. More co-ordinated action is needed

workers and insist that they are paid the same wages and enjoy the same conditions as settled workers.

We are for freedom of movement and for equality: all should have access to jobs and services. If migrants put pressure on public services in some places, the answer is to campaign for adequate public services! These are the campaigns that the left needs to fight, rather than opposing freedom of movement.

We are internationalists; we fight for the interests of the entire working class, not the working class of one or a handful of countries. We say the British labour movement needs more migrant workers! It needs to be invigorated by the spirit shown, for example, by the “3 Cosas” workers at the University of London, almost all of whom are migrant workers.

The left in each country has a responsibility to think critically about its own national history and to reflect on the extent to which the dominant ideas of its society, which are those of the ruling class, have infected their own thinking and those of the working class.

PHOBIC

For historic reasons, the British working class tends to be more eurosceptic/phobic than the working class in most other European countries.

That is not because they are more social-democratic, on the contrary, it more reflects the history of British imperialism. We need to be aware of the forces that have influenced thinking on the left, including the utopian/dystopian British Communist Party tradition that advocated “Britain’s Road to Socialism”, separate from Europe. We need to warn against chauvinism, and root it out, in whatever guise it hides itself.

Running scared from UKIP, the Tories have promised an in/out referendum on the EU if they win the general election in 2015. Significant sections of the labour movement are pushing Labour to offer a referendum.

Reflecting the boost in the fortunes of right-wing populism across Europe, UKIP came first in the British European Parliamentary election in 2014, promising to take the UK out of Europe. The Tories and UKIP, reflecting the range of views

across the bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie, are divided between those who believe they can better exploit workers outside the EU, and those who believe they can better exploit workers inside the EU.

The labour movement and socialists should not politically side with, or take responsibility for, the policy of either bourgeois faction. We are not “for” the EU any more than we are “for” the British state.

However, we recognise that, after decades of integration (both of capital, and, to an extent, social integration, due to the freedom of movement), a UK withdrawal from the EU, under pressure from the Tory right and UKIP, would be reactionary, and would predominantly benefit the far right and racists.

In the past, we have raised the idea of an “active abstention” on referenda concerning particular projects within the EU framework — the single cur-

rency, or the European Constitutional Treaty. An “in/out” referendum on UK membership of the EU is not the same. In this situation, our general stance is to oppose withdrawal.

The UK left is in general Europhobic rather than Europhile, and we have a particular duty to warn of the dangers of that prejudice. The road to the SUSE has to be the road of building European working-class unity, the road of class struggle, the road of fighting one’s own bourgeoisie and one’s own nationalism and chauvinism, in the spirit of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, who raised the cry in 1914: “The main enemy is at home.”

Socialists that oppose the EU will boost the fortunes of the nationalist right.

While it is possible to be organisationally separate from Right Europhobes (though Left Europhobes often fail to manage even that), to the ears of most workers, a “left-wing” “no to the EU” (e.g., No2EU, “Non de gauche” [French far-left slogan in the 2005 campaign against the proposed European Constitutional Treaty]) sounds no different to a right-wing “no to the EU”. Particularly since the Left Europhobes often deploy right-wing arguments, for example, they can be found defending “sovereignty”, sowing illusions in the British state, or opposing “social dumping”, which sometimes amounts to little better than opposing immigration.

On the issue of whether we support the holding of a referendum at all, we say, while socialists are not in principle against a referendum, we see the Tories’ call for a referendum for what it is: a ploy to boost their chances in the General Election.

We say: In or out, the class fight goes on, but rather EU membership than withdrawal.

Our attitude in a referendum would be on the lines of:

- Oppose withdrawal from the EU
- Reduce borders, don’t raise them
- Support free movement across Europe
- **Oppose the present neo-liberal and bureaucratic regime of the EU, support workers’ unity to fight for democratic reforms, for social levelling-up, and for a socialist Europe.**

For a workers’ Europe!

- For a republican United States of Europe! Scrap the existing bureaucratic structures and replace them with a sovereign elected European Parliament with full control over all EU affairs.
- Fight to level up working-class living standards and conditions. For a common campaign for a legal 35-hour week.
- Fight for a guaranteed decent European minimum wage.
- For a Europe-wide emergency programme of public works to tackle unemployment and social exclusion. Workers’ control of the big multinationals, to steer production toward need and to guarantee every worker the right to a decent job.
- For Europe-wide public ownership of the big banks, and democratic control of credit and monetary policy.
- For the replacement of the Common Agricultural Policy with a plan worked out by workers’ and small farmers’ organisations, based on the public ownership of land. Food production should be geared to the needs of the world’s hungry people.
- For the abolition of VAT and the financing of public services by direct taxation.
- Stop state hand-outs to big business — subsidies, tax concessions, reductions in employers’ contributions for social security — and use the money to create jobs in public services.
- Prioritise rebuilding good public services, halt all privatisation plans.
- For free abortion facilities, freely available, everywhere.
- For a Europe which respects the environment, putting controls on industries which pollute. For social ownership and workers’ control of the major energy firms; for a rapid transition away from dependence on fossil-fuel-based energy sources, and toward renewable and sustainable sources.
- For a Europe open to the world! Free movement of people into the EU; free access for Third World exports to EU markets; a big EU aid programme without strings to the Third World.
- For the right to vote of all residents of EU countries.
- For the replacement of all of the EU states’ existing military hierarchies by people’s militias. For a Europe free of nuclear weapons!
- For a united working class. For Europe-wide shop stewards’ committee in all of the big multinationals and all of the major industries!
- Fight to rebuild a European international socialist movement.
- For a Socialist United States of Europe!

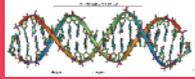


We need to defend and extend abortion services around Europe

What is Ebola virus, where does it come from?

Science

By Les Hearn



From a scary but rare problem, Ebola Virus has exploded into public consciousness as a real disaster in West Africa and a potential threat to anywhere else connected by any means of travel.

The problem has been exacerbated by the lack of local health care infrastructure, distrust of aid agencies and lack of help from the richest countries. Where has the virus come from and why is it now such a problem?

Back in 1976, a new virus was discovered in a group of villages in the equatorial forests of Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo). Victims suffered fever, pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, and massive internal bleeding (haemorrhage): 70% died.

A young Belgian microbiologist, Peter Piot,* examined blood samples from an affected woman, a nun from a mission, and found large worm-shaped viruses of an unknown kind. It was similar to Marburg virus (discovered 1967), which also caused a haemorrhagic fever with high mortality. They were both members of the Filoviridae family of the order Mononegavirales, most of which cause serious plant and animal diseases.

Piot went with a team to Zaire to find an epidemic that was out of control. To stop it, they needed to know how the virus was spread. Mapping the distribution of cases implicated the local hospital: the fact that many victims were women who had attended the antenatal clinic was even more suspicious. It turned out that they had received routine injections but with re-used needles: the virus thus spread in blood or body fluids. Other cases were among attenders at funerals who had taken part in washing or preparing bodies for burial.

Stopping transmission of the virus was simply a matter of quarantining cases, closing the hospital, and informing people of the need to avoid touching victims' bodies. Piot's team was near River Ebola, hence the name Ebola Virus.

But where had the virus come from? Obviously not the hospital. It was likely that the normal host was a forest-dwelling animal not greatly, if at all, affected by it. In fact, it seems to be carried by fruit bats which are eaten as a type of "bush meat". It's also found in gorillas and perhaps other an-



imals eaten as bush meat. These healthy carriers would not carry great numbers of virus so transmission to humans would normally be rare.

Outbreaks are in fact rare, with many years free of cases. Up to this year, the average number of cases reported per year has been 63, with a mortality of two-thirds. Outbreaks have become more frequent since 2000 but the average has still been well under a hundred with a mortality of three-fifths (perhaps reflecting an improvement in supportive care).

The recent outbreaks in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia have affected over 6500 people, 100 times the average of all previous outbreaks and more than ten times the previous worst. The reasons for this are not clear. Population growth, with greater overcrowding, has been suggested as a factor, as has increased consumption of bush meat, but these cannot have been much different during the previous six years when there were 32, 1, 0, 0, 88, and 0 cases, respectively.

Victims should be isolated and contacts traced.** This is difficult when people flee affected areas. Hygienic practice should be enforced and funeral practices modified to avoid contact with virus-laden bodies. A large number of cases have been among healthcare staff who need to take special precautions to avoid contact. Researchers have to wear pressure suits to avoid any chance of touching or inhaling virus

particles: these are expensive and not widely available in West Africa. Surfaces and instruments need to be sterilised and it should go without saying that needles must not be re-used. Unfortunately, these precautions are difficult to take in remote areas or in countries with poor health services.

Viruses are not affected by antibiotics so most treatment is palliative or supportive (pain management, anti-nausea drugs, rehydration).

Early rehydration may reduce mortality. In a positive example of military intervention, US and UK armed forces are setting up field hospitals in Liberia and Sierra Leone, with France doing the same in Guinea. In the first instance, they will concentrate on treating medical personnel.

The ideal would be a vaccine and safety tests on candidate vaccines using healthy volunteers have been accelerated. This will not prove that they work since it would be unethical to try to infect volunteers with Ebola Virus. However, animal tests are promising.

ANTIBODIES

The theory is that they would stimulate the immune system to produce antibodies that would stick to the virus particles and prevent them infecting more cells. Vaccines have been outstandingly successful, most notably against smallpox which no longer exists.

The experimental antibody treatment ZMapp has been given to Western medical workers and some African doctors, most of whom survived. Unfortunately, supplies of ZMapp have run out. It is not clear that it works in humans though it is very successful in monkey tests. The theory is that the antibodies, produced in large amounts by immune system cells extracted from mice infected with Ebola virus, will stick to virus particles in the blood, preventing them from infecting more cells. This supplements the victim's immune response to the virus.

Another suggestion is to extract natural antibodies from the blood of survivors (who presumably had a good immune response to the infection) and inject them into other victims. It is not clear that this would supply anything like enough antibody.

A further development is TKM-Ebola which contains "small interfering RNAs". These are complementary strands of RNA that would bind to some of the genes on the virus's RNA genome, preventing them from being translated into proteins. This would prevent new virus particles being formed. It is not clear if it would work but it is certainly worth a try!

Notes

* Peter Piot was inspired to go on studying diseases in Africa, re-searching the AIDS epidemic and later becoming the first executive director of UNAIDS. He is Professor of Global Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. He has recently become involved in the Longitude Project, looking for solutions to the problem of drug-resistant microbes.

** The recent case in Dallas, Texas, appears to have been completely mishandled. Thomas Duncan had just arrived from Liberia and went to hospital when he felt unwell. They failed to realise the significance of these facts and sent him home with antibiotics (for what they thought was a virus infection?). Two days later, he was taken back to hospital in a serious condition, having potentially infected his family and the ambulance staff. You couldn't make it up!

What do viruses do?

Viruses have a rather sneaky way of behaving which makes them very difficult to combat.

They consist of a genome (instructions for making a new virus) and a protein coat that helps them invade cells which can be plant, animal, fungi or bacteria. They do not contain the other components necessary for life so are often not considered to be living in the normal sense. Instead, they hijack the host cell's life support system and use it to reproduce.

Their genomes can be made of double-stranded DNA shaped like a spiral ladder (the double helix), like that of every type of ordinary cell, single-stranded DNA (which still contains all the information needed), double-stranded RNA (a related compound) or single-stranded RNA.

DNA genomes can be used straightaway to make messenger RNA for each gene, then to make protein using the host cell's protein-making apparatus. The genome is copied and the coat proteins wrap themselves round this, making lots of new virus particles to be released, killing the host cell.

RNA retroviruses transcribe their RNA into DNA which is then incorporated into the host cell DNA. Then it carries on as for DNA viruses, making more virus particles.

The Filoviridae (worm-shaped viruses including Ebola, Marburg) and their relatives in the Mononegavirales (including flu, mumps, rabies, distemper, and measles), with a single strand of RNA, form a matching strand of RNA which is then used to make proteins, as well as copies of the original RNA strand. New virus particles are formed and released. This kills the host white blood cells (harming the immune system), liver cells (causing liver damage), and

endothelial cells, which line blood vessels and other tubules (explaining the bleeding that occurs in later stages).

One of the most fascinating discoveries from the human genome studies is that about 8% of our DNA is of viral origin in the form of endogenous viral elements (EVEs). Many of these are the remains of retroviral DNA that mutated and couldn't replicate any more. Smaller amounts come from many other types of virus, including ancient Filoviridae. It's not clear how this happened but happen it did, probably some 40 million years ago. For these viral fossils to have survived, it may be that they confer some protection from filoviruses.

Most of these EVEs probably do no harm or good, though some may predispose to cancer. However, there is one viral "fossil" that is a functional gene and plays a crucial role in mammals with a placenta. It produces a protein, syncytin, which originally made host cells fuse with each other, helping viruses spread. In placental mammals, it makes the placenta fuse with the uterus, allowing the foetus to gain more nutrients from the mother and become much more mature before being born. By contrast, in marsupials, the young are born tiny and very immature, while monotremes lay eggs.

A very exciting theory (but just a theory) is that the nuclei of protozoa, animals, plants and fungi are descended from a giant virus that took over an ancestral bacterial cell and never left. Its genome would have captured genes from the host cell, becoming the main store of hereditary DNA.

Giant viruses exist now and have some similarities to the nucleus, including a double membrane and linear DNA, unlike the circular bacterial DNA molecule.

A political alternative to “the one percent”?

Matt Cooper reviews *Inequality and the 1%* by Danny Dorling

The idea of “the one per cent”, the richest one percent who take a grossly unfair share of the income and wealth in advanced capitalist society, was first popularised by the 2001 Occupy Wall Street movement. Occupy Wall Street declared, “We are the 99 per cent”. Danny Dorling seeks to build on this anger to stoke a mood for redressing that imbalance.

Dorling is well aware that the one per cent is an arbitrary figure, but believes is a better way of talking about wealth inequality than statistical constructs such as the Gini co-efficient (which represents the income distribution of a particular nation).

To say Britain has a Gini coefficient of 0.45 will create little shock. To say that in 2013 the average household income of the one per cent is £368,940, and that is fifteen times the income of the median household in Britain of £24,596, creates a palpable sense of the inequality.

It turns out that the one per cent also offers a rough-and-ready dividing line of the rulers and ruled in British society.

The entry point into the one percent is an income of around £160,000 a year. It is beyond what a senior professional such as a doctor or a teacher would earn, unless they are among the small group profiting from the privatisation of public services.

This group includes the lower echelons of business owners,

lawyers and senior managers of the corporate world. It is itself highly unequal. At the bottom end the “ordinary rich” might struggle to pay private school fees but at the top, wealth reaches stratospheric heights. The top five families in Britain own the same wealth as the poorest 20 per cent (that is, 12 million people). The richest of the rich are the group which has become increasingly detached from the rest of the society and has driven the rising inequality.

Equality within the remaining 99 per cent has actually increased.

The bulk of the book involves an excellent in-depth description of inequality and its consequences in the age of government programmes of austerity. Inequality began to rise significantly in 1978 (interestingly, under a Labour government, a year before Thatcher’s Conservatives came to power, a point that Dorling does not pursue). In the early 1980s the polarisation of wealth between the one per cent and the rest began to increase. These differences are now being ratcheted up with the coalition’s austerity drive. The spending cuts affect the poorest. The only groups in society who have benefited are the top 10 per cent.

The book is much weaker when it comes to politics. Dorling points out how Britain is more unequal than most other states in Europe, but has little explanation as to why this is so other than the rich seized control of the political process in the early 1980s. I would argue that Britain is so much more unequal than Germany, the Netherlands or Finland because the British working class faced more serious defeats in the

class struggle, particularly in the 1980s.

The gap in understanding causes problems in the book.

First, European states with less gross inequality are held up as good examples, yet the working class across Europe has faced defeats and been weakened in recent years (although perhaps not on the scale that we have seen in the UK).

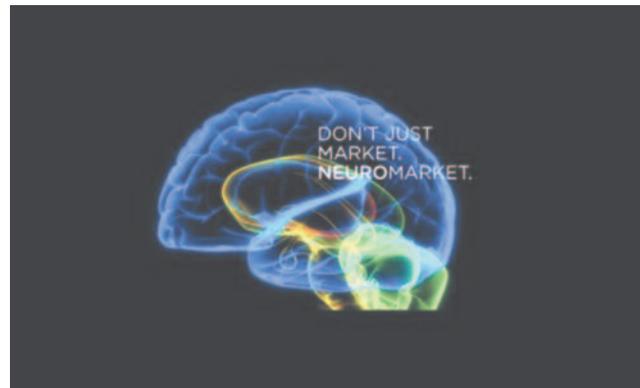
Second, by removing the notion of class, the “We are the 99 per cent” slogan has serious weaknesses. Dorling repeatedly suggests that it is middle class opinion that will drive change towards a more equal society.

Lastly, and most importantly, he suggests that what is needed is not a political movement but a move in *sentiment* towards greater equality. He suggests that has already arrived with the 2008 crisis. With the banking crisis many people became more critical of the free market status quo. We have a movement, only inchoate, unstable and lacking in the self-confidence to carve out a political space in society.

To see the problem, one need only look at the inability of the leadership of the Labour Party to maintain support even for the most timid of proposals, and the success of the Conservatives conference in rallying support behind a nasty right-wing package of benefits cuts and reduced tax.

Dorling demands that we be angry, and there is plenty in his book to encourage this. But anger is not enough. We need to rebuild a working-class movement that argues for a coherent alternative to the greed of the one per cent.

Between art and activism



Luke Neal reviews *Politika: Art & the Affairs of the City* (Upper Space collective)

As the Labour and Conservative parties staged their annual conferences, an exhibition entitled *Politika: Art & the Affairs of the City* was staged in a former cotton mill in Ancoats, Manchester.

Curated by the “insurgent art activist” collective Upper Space, 20 artists put on a programme of workshops, speakers and activities “to generate starting points for an answer, another view, in order to sustain another ideology against consumerism and the disempowerment that it represents”.

Perhaps the best element was *Politika*’s attempt at engagement with the residents of Ancoats, who have been involved in a fight to save the Ancoats Dispensary, the only surviving Victorian hospital in the country. *Politika* worked with them to create a banner celebrating the community securing £770,000 to regenerate and turn the Dispensary into a community centre.

Most of the artistic content was overtly political and loosely leftist.

Steve Lambert’s towering, illuminated structure bearing the words “capitalism works for me!” featured prominently, each edge adorned with true/false score boxes which the viewer was invited to vote on. Lambert says, “we need the courage to begin discussions [of the alternatives to capitalist crises] in order to move on to a better vision of the future”.

He is right, asking these questions is crucial. Yet a recurring trait of this show was a reluctance to go beyond merely framing the question of an alternative future. It is, however, possible to say more about that future without being either prescriptive or utopian. And this requires class politics.

Other featured projects included the Helsinki based Robin Hood Minor Asset Management Co-op, which speculates in the world of financial capital then distributes the revenue amongst “radical projects” and the co-op’s members. Its inclusion reflects the sentiment, popular amongst certain sections of the left, that we are in a new age of “informational” or “cognitive” capitalism where the antagonism between labour and capital is no longer the fundamental dynamic which governs social relations. These projects promote the idea that if only financial capitalism can be used in a more ethical way, we might be able to redistribute wealth on a mass scale. They fail to understand the tendencies of capital accumulation.

In their piece “Act of Parliament”, Manchester based interventionists Shift//Delete turned the Gherkin building in the City of London into “a 180m high erection for deregulation and global capitalism” projecting lasers on to the tower to add further phallic features. They claimed this was in response to “Parliament’s failure to criminally prosecute the financial institutions and employees that caused the financial crisis”.

While the spectacle is admirable, taking the most reckless bankers to court is no solution. Our maladies are systemic, not individual, and necessarily require an equally systemic response, going beyond a few creative individuals. It requires an organised revolutionary socialist and labour movement.

In response the corporatisation of public space, there was the Brandalism project, an “unauthorised exhibition” to “facilitate the reclamation of our right to the city and the unfinished project of the revolution of everyday life”. Brandalism reappropriates public space from corporate advertisements. Their approach strikes at authentic concerns: the enclosure of public space, mass alienation, the abstracted predicate of modern consumerism — i.e. labour. As Marx long ago said in *Capital* Volume 1:

“It is now no longer the labourer that employs the means of production, but the means of production that employ the labourer. Instead of being consumed by him as material elements of his productive activity, they consume him as the ferment necessary to their own life processes.”

This point is useful for considering our own place in cultural production and social change. While, advertisements, for instance, are a visual embodiment of the hegemony of capital, momentarily reclaiming the space they occupy with our own propaganda treats the symptom but not the root cause. Paints and lasers alone cannot compose the obituary of capitalist society.



Save the People’s History Museum!

When I was a young boy, my grandfather told me a story of a bus depot, a mass picket line, and a scab bus being turned on its side by an angry crowd. Later I realised he was telling me about his highlight of the 1926 General Strike.

A union railwayman all his working life, he never made it into the history books, nor did his wife’s twin children who, born a year after the strike, died because no doctor could be afforded. My family’s history is nothing out of the ordinary for working class lives — the sort of lives you can see reflected in the halls and archives of the Manchester People’s History museum (www.phm.org.uk).

In a country awash with stately homes, museums covering everything from pencils to witchcraft, the government can no longer find £200,000 to fund the Manchester People’s History museum, one of the few institutions in Britain dedicated to telling the history of ordinary people’s lives and struggles.

The government has said a number of museums will face cuts. But the People’s Museum, with its programme of exhibitions reflecting the struggles of ordinary people, especially attracted the ire of the Tories. One exhibition, “A Land Fit for Heroes”, looked at lives in World War One, and included pacifism and conscientious objectors. For the Tories that is clearly off message when we are expected to be solely reminded of the historic sacrifice of the fallen dead, and not of those who opposed the barbarous war.

The labour movement needs to fight this cut. If it is not possible in the short term to reverse the cut, then the trade union and labour movement should find extra resources to support the museum.

The People’s History Museum tells an important story that of the struggle of ordinary people who have fought, lost, and sometimes won, but above all fought.

Mark Catterall

• www.phm.org.uk

Care UK: staying strong against low pay

On Friday 10 October Care UK workers will be striking for the 81st day in their campaign for a Living Wage. Stewards David Honeybone and Diane Marsden spoke to *Solidarity*.

What led to you taking industrial action?

It started in 2012 when Doncaster Council put our service [supported living for adults with learning disabilities] out to tender. Care UK won the bid and took over in September 2013. Under the NHS we were paid a basic rate and an enhancement for anti-social hours and sleeping over. Care UK tried to cut this and vastly reduce sick pay, maternity leave and annual leave. We rejected this offer and struck for the first time in February this year, taking 13 weeks of action. Care UK came up with a settlement offer, which was really just a bribe, where staff would receive a lump sum amounting to what they would be losing over a twelve month period. For most people this was around £2000-£5000, and many took the money.

Our current strike demands a living wage for new staff and a pay rise for existing staff, to make up for what we have lost. In some cases people have lost up to 40% whilst the managers have seen a £2000 pay rise. Care UK offered a 2% rise for new staff and nothing for existing staff except a promise to match any NHS pay rise next year. We have not had a pay rise in three years and with the cost of living going up all the time this isn't an acceptable offer.

How did you persuade the membership to strike?

In the first ballot 96.6% voted "yes" to strike action, but now around half of the workforce have gone back or found other jobs. In a lot of cases this is due to money. People were forced back to work, or to take other jobs when they couldn't pay their bills. But there are around 60 workers who are in this to the end. We have also seen first hand how when the NHS is sold off profit comes before care. Care UK is the worst possible name for them, they only care about profits. We work with vulnerable adults and we have been told we don't care about the service users if we strike. That is not true. Some people have worked here for decades and have built really strong relationships with service users. We want to protect

the level of care they receive and are fighting to defend the NHS.

How have you found the experience?

In the beginning it was mind blowing. People were asking us to speak all over the country everywhere from Glasgow and Brighton to London. We were even on Norwegian TV at the front of the Stand Up to UKIP March. We have gone international now. We even met Brian May from Queen, when he drove past us protesting outside Bridgepoint (Care UK's parent company) head quarters in London. He tweeted his support for us, which got us more publicity. It's little things like that that make a little dispute a big one.

We've had a lot of support from Unison as well as other organisations and local activists, we've had lots of messages of support from around the country and people have had collections for us. That has been brilliant.

How have you organised the strike action?

We have a strike committee of around half a dozen people who meet regularly and plan what we will be doing that



week, whether that is visiting another town to speak somewhere or organising leafleting in town. We also hold larger meetings for everyone involved in the strike to vote on decisions and plan larger events.

What advice would you give to other people thinking of taking similar action?

Stay strong, stay focused and don't let other people wear you down. We have all had down periods, but we pick each other up.

It feels like we are all one big family now. People have even found love on the picket line. I think it's important to believe in your cause and remember what you are fighting for.

Ritzy: "I hope our struggle inspires others"

Workers at the Ritzy Picturehouse cinema in Brixton, South London, voted on 12 September by a big majority to end their dispute over the London Living Wage, accepting a deal that moves them closer but falls short of their goal. A Ritzy worker who was active in the dispute spoke to *Solidarity*.

I had no doubt I'd vote against the deal, but I wasn't surprised most of my comrades voted for.

From the many conversations I'd had, the opinion against seemed stronger than it was in the vote, but I was pretty sure



the majority would be in favour. In the first vote [a few weeks before, prior to Picturehouse management making a slightly improved offer] the majority against was only one.

We didn't win our basic goal of the Living Wage, at least not right away, so why did people vote to accept? It's the obvious stuff. Lots of workers were tired; it was a demanding campaign. Lots of people said they wanted to fight on but couldn't afford to. In some cases it was a question of priorities, but some people were genuinely struggling.

Then management threatened us with "dire consequences" — I'm not joking — including making us deal directly with Cineworld [the bigger cinema company that now owns the Picturehouse chain]. In my view that would have been a good thing, but it made a lot of people feel under pressure.

Very possibly if we'd fought on we could have won more. But it's not all bad. We made real progress and we'll continue to organise and campaign.

We'll continue to fight for the Living Wage, though not having new pay negotiations until 2016 is a problem. While they're less spectacular than strikes for the Living Wage, there are plenty of other issues we need to organise around in our workplace. In the bar, for instance, there's a crap dishwasher that breaks down all the time, and they just won't replace it. That's not a massive thing but it makes life a misery, and there are loads of things like that.

During the dispute, our branch meetings were always completely taken up by the Living Wage campaign. Now we'll have more time to discuss other things, and I think people will feel confident to challenge management over them when we've had such a good fight.

For sure we'll also continue to support other disputes, including the wider campaign for the Living Wage. A big part of that will be continuing the work to unionise other Picturehouses and cinemas more generally. Progress has been slow, but then it usually is when workers start to organise. For us

at the Ritzy, moving at such a pace, it was sometimes hard to remember that. We need to keep going. I think we need to make some direct links with other cinemas, rather than relying on BECTU officials, and now we'll have more time to do that.

Not as many people will be as active now, but that's inevitable. A strong core will continue to be very active.

BECTU was very supportive of us, and for most of the dispute we made our own decisions pretty freely. Towards the end, however, there was a bit more of a drive coming from the union for us to accept. It made very positive public noises about the offer, and maybe as a result there were stories in the media that we'd accepted. We had to put our own statement out to clarify. I think some of the problems were not to do with BECTU being particularly bad, but just about how unions work at the moment. There's a need to change unions to make them more democratic and member-led, and more determined to win.

It's been a pretty intense nine months, and I'm still letting things settle and working out what I think about it all. I feel very pleased that we voted to reject the first offer and squeezed out a bit more, if only a bit. When that offer was on the table, a group of us were getting ready to go and see *Pride*, and I felt like we'd be letting ourselves down if we accepted and then went to watch a film about the miners' strike! I'm sorry we voted for the second deal, but I feel like we saved our honour as strikers. When we went to see the film we were pretty loud and bolshy!

The really positive stuff, the dynamics of the struggle, of how our relationships strengthened and changed as we organised during the strike — all that remains. So do the lessons for other workplaces.

The Ritzy's a very particular place, but if we can do it, anyone can do it. I hope our struggle inspires other people to get organised and fight.

Tube strike called for 14-16 October

By Ollie Moore

London Underground workers will strike on 14, 15, and 16 October.

Tube union RMT is fighting to stop management imposing massive staffing cuts and the closure of every ticket office on the network.

The cuts would see a reduction of nearly 1,000 posts, with some stations set to lose more than 50% of their staff.

Major stations will lose significant numbers of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts from their rosters, with Oxford Circus set to lose 5.2 FTE posts, King's Cross St. Pancras 7.6, Paddington 8.4, and Victoria 8.2. Barons Court, in West London, will be hardest hit, with a 58% cut to its staffing level.

The cuts will also see lone working introduced at over 50% of Tube stations, and although every existing ticket

office on the network is slated for closure, LU plans to only install 150 new automatic ticket machines to replace them.

Tube workers struck in February and April against the cuts, forcing concessions from management on issues like salary and location. But the RMT remains opposed to the entire cuts plan itself.

Phil Hufton, London Underground's Chief Operating Officer, hired specifically to implement these cuts, is leaving LU for a job at Network Rail.

Labour Greater London Assembly members like Val Shawcross have asked questions in the Assembly about how staffing cuts will affect local communities.

Smaller Tube union TSSA, which joined RMT in the February strike but which has since held back from calling further industrial action, has indicated it will not

be participating. Drivers' union ASLEF has not supported any RMT strike on this issue, although ASLEF reps in some locations have respected RMT picket lines.

The Tube strike coincides with strikes by workers in civil service union PCS on the 15 October and forms part of a week long series of strikes in the public sector.

A Tube worker told *Solidarity*: "Like the public sector pay strikes, our strike is about the government's austerity project. The Coalition's 12.5% cut to Transport for London's central government funding has been passed onto us by our employers. We're saying: fund public transport properly, don't cut jobs. Our strike isn't just an industrial battle between us and our bosses, it's a fight for what kind of Tube service we want in London – one run where staff and passengers' inter-



London Underground plans to close all ticket offices

ests come first, or a system where every corner is cut to save money."

The rank-and-file bulletin *Tubeworker*, produced by Workers' Liberty members who work on London Underground along with other socialists and radicals on the Tube, is pushing for more strikes to be called to follow up the October action.

•For more information, visit workersliberty.org/twblog

Disability fightback

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

MENTAL HEALTH PILOTS

Campaigners fear that government "pilot schemes" to "help unemployed people with mental health problems find work" will lead to people being bullied off benefits and will not address the causes of mental ill-health.

Some Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants will be offered employment support and "psychiatric help". It is ironic that the government is willing to provide such help to get people off benefits while many people who want and need therapy have to wait months or even years on waiting lists.

The BBC illustrated its report on these pilot schemes with the case of a chef who has been unable to work recently because of

mental health problems. The hospitality industry is poorly-unionised and kitchens are notoriously high-pressure, stressful places to work.

Mental health problems do not just prevent people from working, they are often caused or exacerbated by work.

Tackling workplace bullying and stressful working conditions would be a much more effective way to address mental health problems than cranking up the pressure on benefit claimants.

DEFEND THE ILF!

We reported in the last issue of *Solidarity* that activists are pursuing a court case against the abolition of the Independent Living Fund (ILF).

There will be a vigil in support of the legal challenge outside the court hearing at the Royal Courts of Justice on the Strand, London, on Wednesday 22 October from 12:30.

CONFERENCE CUTS

Party conference season has seen the announcement of more attacks on disabled people.

The Tories' Iain Duncan Smith heads the pack with

plans to tax disability benefits and to pay welfare benefits not in cash but on smartcards which can only be spent on certain products.

We can not confirm rumours that MPs will have their expenses paid on smartcards that can not be used to pay for unnecessary second homes, duck houses or porn channel subscriptions.

Meanwhile, coalition partners the Liberal Democrats voted down an amendment to a resolution at their party conference that called for the scrapping of the "bedroom tax".

TUC DEMONSTRATION

The TUC's 'demonstration on 18 October will include facilities and arrangements to enable disabled people to take part.

Government austerity policies are hitting disabled people hard, and employment discrimination against disabled people is endemic and widespread.

It is essential that the workers' movement makes itself accessible to disabled people, including on major national mobilisations such as this. Access details: bit.ly/ZQ9ltp

ISS cleaners settle dispute

By Jonny West

Tube cleaners employed by contractor ISS have returned to work, after a months-long lock out.

Workers were locked out of work without pay for refusing to use biometric fingerprinting machines.

ISS, which has a history of using immigration law against its mainly-migrant workforce, had openly admitted that the data collected would be shared with the UK Border Agency.

The locked-out cleaners have been given a number of options, including returning to work on alternative contracts without biometric fingerprinting.

Tubeworker called for a cleaners' strike, voted for by ISS RMT members, to be called at the same time as LU staff struck against cuts and closures.

NHS service saved from privatisation

Older People's and Adult Community Services in Cambridgeshire have been awarded to an NHS bid after a campaign to prevent them being privatised.

Virgin Care and a consortium led by Care UK both had bids which would have seen them in control of nearly £1 billion worth of NHS services.

The campaign collected signatures from 5,500 and held several demos and stunts to raise awareness.

Despite keeping the services in NHS hands the campaign is still highly critical of the Clinical Commissioning Group's (CCG) process. They claim over £1 million has been wasted on the unnecessary

exercise.

A campaign spokesperson said "However, we believe the competitive procurement process was both unnecessary and highly wasteful."

The campaign is also calling for other services to be brought back in house and for the CCG not to open up other services to bidding from private providers.



No cuts to Sure Start!

By Dave Pannett

100 parents, children and Sure Start workers in Newcastle presented a petition of almost 4000 signatures against cuts to the service.

The proposal sees £5 million lost from Sure Start children's centres and wider family services in Newcastle.

The campaign has brought together trade union members from Unison as well as parents groups.

Councillors are under

pressure over the nature of the consultation process, which only asked how to cut the £5million rather than whether to do so.

A final decision on carrying out the cuts will be made as part of budget round in February 2015.

Campaigners hope that Labour councillors will take a stand against closing centres and cutting staff and services.

If the cuts go ahead they will be implemented just a month before a general election which could return a Labour government.

Construction workers' pay ballot

By Gerry Bates

UCATT members at crane company HTC Plant Ltd are being balloted in a dispute over pay.

Steve Murphy, General Secretary of construction union UCATT, said: "Crane

drivers are fed up. They have endured years of pay cuts and seen their pay fall in real terms. The industry is booming but their employers are not prepared to pay up."

The ballot closes on 27 October.



Syrian Kurds face ISIS massacre

By Simon Nelson

Tuesday 7 October: Forces of the “Islamic State” movement (ISIS) have entered the Kurdish city of Kobani on the Syrian-Turkish border.

After taking a hill commanding the city on 5 October, ISIS has now begun to enter at ground level.

Kobani had taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees and was touted at one time as a safe haven for those escaping IS.

Previous incursions of IS members into Kobani had been quashed by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG), but it looks like street by street fighting will now see the city taken, leading to a massacre of Kurds and other minorities who have previously fled the ISIS. Something over 180,000 have fled onwards into Turkey.

ISIS has continued to bombard the area with artillery and fire power that is way beyond the light arms and machine guns of the YPG and other Kurdish fighters.

Reports of individual bravery from the Kurdish forces include Arin Mirkin from the YPG Women’s Protection Unit, who died in a grenade attack which also killed ten IS fighters.

Turkey remains a barrier to an effective fight against ISIS in the region. Troops have massed on the border

with Kobani in order to stop aid, people, and arms going in both directions.

The Turkish government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan has ensured that some parts of the border have been permeable for Syrian opposition forces since 2011, but areas directly neighbouring Kurdish controlled territory have been severely restricted.

On Thursday 2 October the Turkish parliament voted 298 to 98 to authorise the Turkish military to enter Syria or Iraq in action against ISIS, and to allow foreign troops to launch operations from Turkey. The parliament previously authorised Turkish military operations to enter Iraq or Syria to attack Kurdish separatists, or to thwart threats from the Syrian regime.

But it looks as if Turkish military action will come, if at all, only after the Kurds have been crushed and massacred, leaving Turkey able to control territory it takes from ISIS without any Kurdish challenge.

Turkish academics protesting against their government’s stance have written:

“In expressing our solidarity [with Kobani], we need to stress the fact this statement is not a call for any military aggression or occupation, including that of the Turkish military. We encourage the Turkish government to negotiate with



the Kurdish representatives in good faith to ensure the ongoing peace process, which holds much promise.

“As Kurdish political representatives of Rojava [Syrian Kurdistan] have repeatedly declared, if they are recognised as a legitimate authority and provided with the needed weaponry and other support, they are capable of driving away the threat of ISIS.”

Erdogan’s Government has called on the Kurds to join the official Syrian opposition to Assad, and suggested that they will get Turkish support if they do that. Because of the increas-

ingly fractured Arab-chauvinist colouration of the opposition, Kurdish groups have refused to do so, and Turkey continues its long held opposition to Kurdish autonomy.

Turkey’s intransigence stems from its campaign against Kurdish rights and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

When 49 Turkish hostages were captured by ISIS, Turkey entered into negotiations for their release and reached a bargain meaning that ISIS members held by anti-Assad forces that have a relationship with Ankara released their prisoners and allowed them

to return to ISIS-held positions.

Turkey maintains it will not participate in the US-led airstrikes over Syria or Iraq.

Socialists can have no confidence in the US-led coalition: its bombing in Afghanistan over nearly 13 years has allowed the Taliban to rebuild a political base, and in Iraq it intervenes on the side of a Shia-sectarian Baghdad government and in league with such powers as Saudi Arabia.

Campaigners are calling for:

- Solidarity with the forces in Kobani and Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) against

ISIS;

- Open criticism of the Turkish government for its repression of its own Kurdish citizens and Kurdish refugees from Syria;

- A demand on all countries in the region that they allow arms to flow to the Kurdish fighting forces (YPG and others);

- An end to British and Western military alliance with Turkey unless it allows arms and Kurdish fighters back into Syria to defend their people from ISIS.

The US led airstrikes against ISIS, which continues also to make advances in Iraq.



KURDISH SOLIDARITY

A Kurdish Solidarity Campaign has been launched in Nottingham. Contact it via Pete Radcliff at peteradcliff@gmail.com.

The Worker-Communist Party of Iraqi Kurdistan are also campaigning for defence against ISIS, and can be contacted via dashtyjamal@gmail.com.

They demonstrated outside the Turkish Embassy in London on 7 October with the demands “Kobani Must be Free. No to ISIS! No to Islamic Fascism!”