



For a
workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 346 3 December 2014 30p/80p

www.workersliberty.org

New Era scandal highlights landlord rip-offs



Control rents!

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:

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● Printed by Trinity Mirror

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UN suspends refugee food aid

By Simon Nelson

The UN World Food Programme has suspended the food aid scheme for the 1.6 million Syrian refugees now living in the Iraq and Jordan until new funding is secured.

The suspension of the programme, costing £41 million for December alone, could create a crisis for refugees.

More than 3.2 million Syrians have become refugees since the beginning of the conflict with President Assad; a further 7.6 million have been internally displaced. 200,000 Syrians have been killed, 60,000 civilians.

The death toll in Kobane continues to rise with casualties on both sides. 11 Kurds and 50 ISIS ("Islamic state", Daesh) supporters have been reportedly killed in the very recent past. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights Islamic State deaths would be from suicide bombings,

clashes with Kurdish forces or the US airstrikes.

Coalition airstrikes in Syria are said to have killed 600 ISIS fighters; large concentrations of fighters heading to Kobane make it easier for them to be targeted. Despite the apparent success of some airstrikes, ISIS are still in control of large swathes of territory and Kobane remains besieged by their forces.

ISIS have been targeting the border area in an attempt to disrupt the small numbers of Kurdish fighters that manage to cross over the Turkish border. Turkey has again attempted to restrict further Kurdish forces going to Kobane but has tried to impose free passage for the Free Syrian Army (FSA) into the area.

The Turkish Government backs the FSA in its continuing fight against the Syrian regime and FSA fighters have joined the People's Protection Units (YPG) and



Iraqi Peshmerga forces in fighting IS. However the FSA remain largely hostile to the rights of autonomy and self-determination for the Kurds. At its founding it rejected the demand for Kurdish self-determination. It has an Arab chauvinist outlook and include groups within its ranks who are strongly opposed to the largely secular Kurdish forces.

The Kurdistan Regional Government has confirmed a further 150 Peshmerga fighters will be joining the YPG forces in Kobane. Unlike the YPG, the Peshmerga

are able to respond to ISIS attacks with artillery and other heavy weapons.

The Peshmerga have also claimed some success in Iraq — they say they have taken over five villages from IS fighters. The villages, which are south of Erbil, have been controlled by both government forces and IS on several occasions. The Iraqi army has also recaptured towns in the Diyala province between Baghdad and the Iranian border.

Whether these gains will be maintained is not easy to predict.

UKIP reveals anti-gay bigotry

By Kate Harris

The former deputy leader of UKIP, Lord Christopher Monckton, has said that gay men have "20,000 sexual partners" and "lead miserable lives".

While he is obviously a total clown, he is also a hereditary peer and used to advise Margaret Thatcher. It is worrying that someone who still has some power, and used to have a lot, would say such blatantly absurd garbage about

LGBTQ people.

Nigel Farage has distanced himself from Monckton by asking: "How many other parties have an MEP who describes himself as 'spectacularly homosexual' and a 'great big screaming poof'?" David Coburn MEP's words — not mine!

The same David Coburn MEP described same sex marriage proponents as "equality Nazis" "... trying to give Christianity a jolly good kicking ... it's false bollocks, the lot of it."

"It's just for some queen

who wants to dress up in a bridal frock and in a big moustache and dance up the aisle to the Village People."

The same David Coburn MEP allegedly called Scottish Tory leader Ruth Davidson a "fat lesbian".

Monckton's comments were not out of the blue. In 1987 he said "There is only one way to stop AIDS. That is to screen the entire population regularly and to quarantine all carriers of the disease for life."

"All those found to be infected with the virus, even if

only as carriers, should be isolated compulsorily, immediately, and permanently."

Farage has not addressed these comments, and worked with Monckton until last year.

This, together with Coburn's vile remarks, shows the true face of UKIP. UKIP is not for equality.

It is opportunistically accepting of some LGBTQ people but cannot represent us or our interests in any real sense.

Support Gahyun Lee!



Gahyun Lee was dismissed from her job at a McDonald's outlet in Yeokgok, Gyeonggi Province, South Korea following her visit to Los Angeles earlier that month to support the national action by US fast food workers.

Management had previously warned her about union activity in May — citing a phone call from the head office — after she denounced wage and scheduling manipulation and unsafe workplace practices at a May 15 Seoul rally in support of global fast food workers.

Management refused to provide her with an explanation of why her contract was terminated, instead telling her to reapply for the job. Her application was rejected.

Send a message to South Korea McDonald's management: bit.ly/Gahyun-Lee



To register visit
anticuts.com/register-2014/

Stop landlord rip-offs: control rents!

By Colin Foster

The tenants' campaign on the New Era estate in Hoxton, east London, has spotlighted the rise of a fight back by private tenants.

"When our estate was bought by new owners", say the New Era tenants, "we were given rent rises of 10% and told to expect greater rises next year, as the new owners wanted rents to be at 'market levels'. In Hoxton... this means over £500 a week".

Current rents are about £160 a week, so most tenants face being forced out of their homes (bit.ly/n-era).

Three trends have come together.

Firstly: between 2008-9 and 2012-3, households privately-renting increased from 14% to 18% of the total, and outstripped social renting.

The number of owner-occupiers, after soaring in the Thatcher era, has decreased since 2008. Social housing has been cut back by government-imposed "right-to-

buy" for tenants and by an almost total block on councils building new dwellings.

Secondly: most private tenants now have an "assured shorthold tenancy". This means that they have little security, and little legal redress against high rents.

Theoretically tenants can appeal to a tribunal for rent disputes during the first six months of their tenancy. But the tribunal looks only at whether the rent is well above other market rents in the area, not at whether it is reasonable or affordable.

In the late 1950s tenants agitated against "Rachmanism", so called after the notorious landlord Peter Rachman. In 1965 they won a Rent Act which gave some security of tenure and "fair rents" set so as to disallow rent rises based solely on the market.

The 1965 law was undone by Housing Acts of the Thatcher government in 1980 and 1988. The impact then was limited, since relatively few people rented privately. Now they have their full impact.

Thirdly: since October

2011, the government has limited the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), the maximum rent level which can be covered by housing benefit, to a level calculated so that 70% of rents in the area are higher and 30% lower. Since April 2013, not even that 30% level has been allowed. LHAs will increase only in line with the Consumer Price Index.

According to government figures, rents have been rising, but only modestly — by 8.5%, on average, between January 2005 and May 2013. But rents for new private tenancies have risen much faster than that.

In the three months to October 2014, average rents for new tenancies were 7.8% higher than the same period last year (£906 per month compared to £840). The average rent for new tenancies in London was £1,411; this when real wages have been squeezed longer and more than ever previously recorded.

Tenants' woes are increased by big charges made by letting agents, and by some agents refusing to deal



Residents stage demonstration at office of their new landlord, US investment firm Westbrook

with tenants on housing benefit.

Social housing should be re-expanded by authorising councils to take over empty or underused properties, and to build new dwellings.

In the meantime, the London Renters' campaign, an alliance of private tenants' groups in several areas, demands:

- Action to bring down rents and keep them under

control

- Longer secure tenancies
- An end to fees, and proper regulation of letting agents
- No discrimination against housing benefit claimants (bit.ly/p-rents).

The writer Danny Dorling repeats the call for rent controls, and also proposes:

- Extend the current council tax bands up to band "Z" with a view to

transforming the tax into a fairer national land and property tax

- Second homes, holiday homes and empty commercial property to be included into a fairer property tax system

- **Squatting and other acts done to seek shelter should again be a civil, not a criminal offence.**

Limited tax powers for Scotland

By Dale Street

The cross-party Smith Commission on further Scottish devolution — set up following the "No" vote in September's Scottish referendum — published its report last week.

The Scottish Parliament will have the power to set its own income tax rates and the income levels at which these are paid. Around half of VAT receipts will be allocated to the Scottish government's budget. Control over Air Passenger Duty will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Although the Smith Commission proposes that the Barnett Formula (used to calculate the block grant paid to Scotland by the UK government) will continue, it also proposes "an updated fiscal framework."

In effect, this means that the greater the income raised by the Scottish Parliament (e.g. from income tax, or from VAT receipts), the less it will receive as a block grant.

The Scottish Parliament will have increased borrow-

ing powers and control over local and Scottish elections (including extending the franchise to 16/17-year-olds), albeit only if approved by a two-thirds majority in Holyrood.

The National Minimum Wage and all elements of state pensions remain under Westminster control, as too does Universal Credit (UC). But the Scottish Parliament will have powers to: tinker around the edges of UC; control some non-UC benefits; and create new benefits in areas of devolved responsibility.

For supporters of independence, the Commission's proposals are inadequate. For opponents of independence the Commission's proposals are "a promise delivered".

It is certainly true that some of the central demands raised in trade union submissions to the Commission have been ignored: employment law (including anti-union laws); powers to take industries into public ownership; all welfare benefits (including UC); Employment Tribunals (including fees); and the HSE.

Sunday's Scottish press carried reports that an earlier draft of the Commission's report included proposals for devolution of effectively the entire welfare benefits system to Scotland, including UC.

The Commission's proposals provide a focus for continued agitation for independence.

Their inadequacies, runs the argument, mean that only independence can meet Scotland's needs, despite the clear majority against independence in the referendum held just two and a half months ago.

This results in a political "discourse" in which all social and economic problems are portrayed as the result of "Westminster rule", while Holyrood and the SNP, supposedly lacking "real" powers, are beyond criticism.

While the pro-independence left transforms itself from being class-struggle activists into latter-day Scottish Walter Bagehots, the actual agency of social change — the working class — is sidelined by this "discourse".

Dutch anti-racists ask for help

Ninety demonstrators were arrested in Gouda, in the Netherlands, on 15 November, when they peacefully protested against a "Black Pete" show.

The Netherlands celebrates a Sinterklaas (Santa Claus) day on 5 December, and since the middle of the 19th century the figure dressed up as Santa Claus is often accompanied by another, "Black Pete", who is "blackened up" to represent a Santa Claus's servant or slave.

Campaigners have leafleted and protested, saying that "White people painting their faces black and behaving according to colonial stereotypes of 'niggers' is condemned and seen as racism almost everywhere".

They are asking for support from other countries on 5 December.

- bit.ly/s-klaas

Occupy needs politics

By Andy Forse

After being evicted by the police from their nine day occupation of Parliament Square in October, a new movement called "Occupy Democracy" attempted to reclaim the Square on Friday 21 of November.

Police repressed the direct action. The former deputy chairman of the Liberal Democrats, Donnachadh McCarthy, was arrested.

The demonstration continued nearby, with speakers including NHS campaigner Lucy Reynolds and the Green Party's Natalie Bennett and a total around 200 people participating. One protester chained himself to the railings of parliament.

The movement is attempting to challenge "corporate influence" and the "democratic deficit". Their core messages and provisional demands are vague and diffuse, essentially a slate of social-democratic reforms with no mention of capitalism.

The movement has some new participants as well as original Occupy people. A

couple of Socialist Worker placards were visible. It seems like there's a visible simmering of activity, with activists employing a persevering strategy that entails inevitable confrontation with the police. Occupy say they will return to Parliament Square on 20/21 December to "take back the square".

Since its inception 3 years ago, Occupy has dispersed into a network of autonomous groups, which includes an economics working-group, an environmental working group, and a free, well-produced quarterly publication *The Occupied Times of London*. The latest issue includes headlines such as "Boycott Israel" and "From the River to the Sea", and articles on climate disaster, plus general reportage on global capitalism. With its populist slant, it is noticeably lacking in critical discussion or debate about direction on these issues.

There is space for interventions to be made concerning the centrality of class-struggle politics to achieving their desired aims.

SWP: more than abuses of power

Letters



Martin Thomas objects to my use of the term “rape apologist” to describe the SWP’s behaviour over complaints of rape and sexual harassment, which eventually led to the group’s implosion (*Solidarity* 346).

He says the term is inaccurate. The SWP’s real crimes were various abuses of power by the leadership and the party machine.

I accept that the accusation needs further explanation and the sentence in which I make the accusation was sloppily written, but I think the substance of the accusation makes sense.

I take rape apologism to be a spectrum of ideas and practices which relate to the structural and ideological marginalisation of the importance of sexual abuse in society especially against women. So it might not be blatant statements like “she asked for it”. Indeed, very few people would be that blatant. Martin might reasonably object to the tenor of the language in the term, “rape apologism”, but the phenomena exists and takes a number of forms.

In the SWP marginalisation of the importance of rape and

abuse were surely bound up with abuses of power, manipulative behaviour and bullying. But if the outcome was the covering up of complaints of sexual abuse, there is a problem right there.

Granted, the starting point for the SWP was to save one of the leading members who had highly useful connections to the great and the good in the union movement. And they would have made similar attempt to brush aside complaints if he had been accused of bullying, stealing from his comrades, and so on. Similar, but not the same.

The point is that once most of the SWP’s leadership decided they really wanted to keep Martin Smith in their organisation, that necessarily involved denying the possibility that he was guilty. That led to behaviour from themselves, and which they encouraged in others, that really can be described as rape apologism.

The evidence for this comes from people who observed it first hand. While this is not conclusive proof, I am convinced by many of these observations.

Dave Renton: “Among the SWP majority, a belief is prevalent that nobody can ever really ‘know’ what happens in the privacy of a relationship between a man and a woman. It follows that in the context of multiple allegations of sexual abuse, the party is the only thing that counts.”

Comrade X (who made a complaint of sexual harassment): “Obviously there are instances where people may come for-

ward with malicious intent, so it’s right to investigate claims. However in our tradition we argue that women do not come forward lightly in cases like these. We should start from that belief and attempt to substantiate the woman’s complaint. I don’t believe that the Dispute’s Committee in my case shows this to have happened.”

Comrade X reporting on Comrade W’s hearing: The questions ranged from a supposed relationship she had had with an older comrade in her district to asking why she had gone for a drink with M and about her previous boyfriends, with specific people named and whether the relationships had been full sexual relationships.

Could this form of questioning have been “necessary” for the investigation. Really? No, it’s a fault of a particular type, one that is been systematically repeated with complaints of sexual abuse in the bourgeois criminal justice system!

Comrade W was also had her general character publicly and semi-publicly smeared and this too, all too neatly follows a depressingly familiar pattern.

It does us no good to inflate our analysis, but even less good to minimise or fail to face up to the kind of obnoxious ideas that come to the surface when organisations put their own interests above the principles which they formally adhere to.

Cathy Nugent, south London

Is technology to blame?

In her claims that exposure to Facebook is the cause of changes to the brain and thus at the root of a range of behavioural and social problems, Susan Greenfield adopts positions that regularly reappear as science and technology develop (discussed in *Solidarity* 342 and 343).

There is a tendency to blame new technologies for whatever social worries happen to be top of the agenda of social conservatives. Greenfield contrasts internet use with watching television in a group, perhaps forgetting that fifty years ago excessive television watching was being blamed for similar problems to those she attributes to the internet.

Of course, anything excessive can harm — by definition. And it is doubtless true that using technology, whether computers or TV, as a substitute for social interaction, can affect children’s development.

But many of the ills which Greenfield ascribes to the internet have other causes which are directly products of social change.

The growth of individualism precedes the internet — remember the supposed “Me Generation” of the 70s? — and has clear roots in the decline in many collective institutions and the dominance in neo-liberalism of an ideology that undermines social solidarity and emphasises individual solutions to problems, often through competition and self-assertion.

Increasing demands on attention, which may or may not lead to a shorter attention span, have followed not just from a vast increase in easily accessible information but also from a speed-up in the rhythms of everyday life which has its roots in the demands of capital.

If it has any real point beyond a vague correlation of different phenomena happening at the same time, Greenfield’s explanation must be that changes in brain structure have a direct effect in producing these forms of behaviour. This is to ignore that both individual psychology and societies have their own distinct role in explaining behaviour that are not reducible to brain functioning or other physical systems.

This type of reductionist explanation becomes more frequent when disciplines such as neuroscience or genetics make major steps forward. Some scientists then “imperialistically” extend the range of their claims beyond the realm within which their discoveries are valid. Greenfield seems even to lack much scientific grounds for her claim.

The left should combine a scepticism about theories that explain social problems in physical terms with a respect for real scientific advances.

Bruce Robinson, Manchester

Stop our rightward drift!

Colin Foster’s letter “Hyping it up” (*Solidarity* 345), in response to my initial letter, is peculiar, evasive and defensive.

The backdrop to this is an ongoing discussion in Workers’ Liberty about the emphasis of our approach towards Labour in the general election. Colin was amongst the majority who supported a Socialist Campaign for Labour Victory, I was in a minority (albeit a significant one) which supported a Campaign for a Workers’ Government. The minority also argued for beginning to seriously re-visit standing candidates against Labour.

Colin starts by correctly pointing out that Miliband is partially responsible for the rise of UKIP, which Lansman seemed to deny. But even here Colin feels it necessary to defend Lansman by arguing “He probably meant that no other halfway-likely leader ... could have stopped a rise of UKIP, wither, which is true.”

He argues that Lansman’s “article is a guest article and doesn’t reflect our line”, but with the corrective outlined above he defends the article. The fact that it was a guest article doesn’t really deal with my criticism, that the article does not inform us of anything most *Solidarity* readers would not be aware of already (by just following the news), it gives us no guide to action, it doesn’t present a view that would not be widely held by anyone to the left of the Blairites, nor does it even give us a position clearly to differentiate ourselves from.

So what was the purpose of running the article? It wasn’t as though we had commissioned it and that Lansman would have been offended had we not run it. This was my point when I argued “... what do we propose that activists should do about it? Move motions of support in their labour movement bodies extolling the virtues of the current leadership?” I thought that was self-evidently ridiculous. That Colin takes it at face value is telling of a rightward drift within the organisation.

Colin says I “censure the article for including its anti-cut call only in the headline”. In fact all I said was that “it should be noted...” which is actually just pointing out the truth. He then goes in to slightly paranoid speculation of whether I thought the *Solidarity* office had added the headline to “smarten the article up.”

I had no idea who had written the headline when I wrote my letter. It was simply the case that the article did not mention anti-cuts or indeed anything else political other than Miliband’s leadership, no matter who wrote the headline.

I don’t recognise the criticism that I am hyping up how bad the Labour Party is at present. I really don’t need to do that when Miliband is on the television saying that Cameron can’t be trusted to keep immigration numbers down, or my local Labour council is pursuing the academisation of secondary schools, just because it agrees with it not under pressure from



John Smith, Margaret Beckett, and John Prescott at the 1993 Labour conference

the Tories.

In my recollection in 1994 during the Labour leadership campaign we made an effort to draft a genuine left candidate. We then supported Prescott whilst recognising that Beckett’s election would also represent a brake on the rise of what would become “New Labour”. We certainly didn’t oppose a leadership election, as we are doing now, not least because it made no sense: the previous leader was dead!

In fact the 1992 leadership election is a better case for Colin to cite. It was run between two right-wing candidates, John Smith and Bryan Gould, again in my recollection we tried to draft a genuine left candidate and when this failed, we refused to support either candidate. However, even then we didn’t oppose a leadership election, because again the party was without a leader, Kinnock having resigned.

We could argue for drafting a genuine left candidate in an upcoming leadership election, this would allow us to raise, the arguments for working-class socialism. My assessment is because of the state of the Party this would be futile. Does Colin agree?

I didn’t argue that Miliband “could be summarily replaced by Labour MPs”. What I pointed out was that if Miliband was to be forced out it would be through the MPs and that the Party and the labour movement could do little to affect that. If that isn’t the case, is there a widespread feeling in the Party and the movement that Miliband should be got rid of? I think not.

What can the Party and the movement do to stop Miliband being toppled? Virtually nothing, or can Colin or Lansman or indeed anyone else tell us what they can do?

Duncan Morrison, Deptford

Mobilise against council cuts!

The Local Government Association, which represents local councils, warned on 19 November that “services will buckle under the strain of further cuts”.

Back in July it had already warned: “The funding gap is growing at an average of £2.1 billion a year, adding up to £12.4 billion by the end of [this] decade”.

The National Audit Office has estimated (1 November) a 37% real-terms reduction in government funding to local authorities between 2010-11 to 2015-16.

Local authorities with the highest levels of disadvantage are facing the greatest cuts.

Councils have been projecting drastic cuts for 2015-6, partly in the hope of scaring the government, and partly in the spirit of softening up communities and local government workers’ unions to accept similar but maybe marginally-smaller cuts.

Manchester City Council plans to cut £60 million. It says it will axe school crossing patrols, cut nearly £2 million from youth services, end free swims for children and the elderly, stop all community grants, close nine homeless hostels, and end support for respite for carers.

600 jobs could go. Not even children’s social care and safeguarding are safe. The council proposes to cut £10 million cuts from these services.

Birmingham plans £200 million cuts for the next year alone, chopping 6,000 jobs in the next three years on top of 7,000 already lost since 2010.

Newcastle, which has received much coverage about its cuts after the council leader threatened to cut all arts funding and 50% of the libraries in 2013, plans to cut another £90 million in 2015-8, after cutting £37 million in 2013-4 and £38 million in 2014-5.

It has already cut all play and youth services, closed and outsourced pools and leisure services, and cut children’s centres and family services by nearly £5 million.

Where is the opposition? Neither Labour-run councils — like Birmingham, Manchester and Newcastle — nor the big public sector unions like Unison and GMB have challenged the government.

The Labour council leaders generally say that central government budgets give them “no choice” but to make the cuts, and appeal to communities and to unions to join the councils in blaming the Tory-led regime.

But they are not campaigning to get Labour leaders to restore local government budgets if Labour wins the 2015 election. The Labour leaders say they will continue cuts (though a bit less harshly than the Tories), and talk of increasing public spending only (and by relatively tiny amounts) on the NHS. Labour is on track to continue the squeeze on local services only a bit less harshly than the Tories.

Instead, 65 Labour council leaders joined with 40 Tory council leaders, 10 Lib-Dems, and one independent, to write a letter to the *Observer* (30 November) calling for councils to have more local tax-raising powers.

RICH

They are right to complain about the excessive central government control over local budgets, enforced since the Thatcher government and increased by the current administration’s measures to make it almost impossible for councils to raise council tax.

But we need a labour-movement campaign to get resources by taxing the rich and expropriating the banks, not a joint Labour-Tory plea for adjustments.

Although union leaders have accepted another year of less-than-inflation pay raises, as well as cuts of hundreds of thousands of council jobs, things could be changing in the biggest local government workers’ union, Unison.

Unison branches from some of the councils facing the most



significant cuts (including Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Nottingham) have won support from 30% of the union’s branches for a special conference to debate strategy over this year’s pay dispute.

The fight against cuts and the fight for decent pay are inextricably linked. The unions fail to defend local services for the same reason that they fail to deliver a strategy to win decent pay.

Unions and Labour Parties should demand that Labour councils refuse to make cuts. Unions should support their members who are local councillors in making a stand against cuts.

And if Labour councils won’t fight the Tories, then unions and communities must fight the Labour councils.

Solidarity with migrants against Tory and Labour attacks

Last month Labour said they want to increase the time new EU migrants have to wait before claiming in-work benefits — to two years. Not to be outdone in a disgusting competition to be toughest on migrants, Cameron announced he wanted EU migrants to work for four years before being eligible to claim.

Both parties want to restrict child tax credits and child benefit. The Tories also want to restrict access to social housing. They say they will deport all EU migrants who do not find a job within six months and introduce stronger laws to allow EU migrants sleeping rough or begging to be deported and refused re-entry.

Labour and the Tories are scrambling to out-do each other but also UKIP. Pandering to UKIP will only help UKIP grow. And it contributes to a general ratcheting up of anti-immigrant rhetoric.

The left has an urgent duty to reiterate the facts and step up our arguments against the rhetoric.

According to the Office for National Statistics only 2.5% of all those claiming Job Seeker’s Allowance in 2014 were EU migrants. European migrants pay more in taxes than they receive in benefits, a £20 billion net contribution between 2000 and 2011.

Cuts in tax credits hit the lowest-waged. Thinktank Open Europe calculates that if tax credits are withdrawn a single earner on the minimum wage will see their income drop by £100 a week, taking their pay close to the Spanish minimum wage. The policies of both Labour and the Tories are designed to reduce the disparity between the take-home pay EU migrants home get in the UK and in their country of origin.

Ironically Labour’s Rachel Reeves, making the policy announcement, said “the European single market should not be about a race to the bottom on working conditions”. But in-



stead of arguing for the levelling up of conditions across the EU, and for regulations to prevent British employers paying migrant workers less, she advocated attacking the lowest paid and most vulnerable.

Labour’s Yvette Cooper said: “In terms of the migration that happens every single year, I think there is a problem with low skilled migration because of the scale and pace of it.” Yet recent research by University College London shows that 60% of migrants from western and southern Europe, and 25% of those from eastern Europe have a university degree, compared to 24% of the UK-born workforce.

Attacking the poorest does nothing to prevent the race-to-the-bottom on wages and working conditions. Level up across Europe!

Detainee protest: stop this violence!

Protests have erupted at Campsfield immigration removal centre after a detainee was reportedly beaten up and put in hospital by a detention guard.

Between 60 and 100 detainees have occupied the courtyard to protest against the violence and the inhuman living conditions.

They are demanding: permission to see their friend; release of the (at least three or four) people forced into solitary confinement; punishment for the guard who beat up the detainee; an end to inhuman treatment, deprivation of freedom and separation from families.

As part of the detention drive, the government plans to double the size of Campsfield.

A national demonstration has been called for Wednesday 3 December.





ROSA LUXEMBOURG
(Fiche anthropométrique de la prison de Varsovie)

Proletarians of all countries, unite!

Rosa Luxemburg

Into the disillusioned atmosphere of pale daylight there rings a different chorus; the hoarse croak of the hawks and hyenas of the battlefield.

Ten thousand tents, guaranteed according to specifications, 100,000 kilos of bacon, cocoa powder, coffee substitute, cash on immediate delivery. Shrapnel, drills, ammunition bags, marriage bureaus for war widows, leather belts, war orders — only serious propositions considered.

And the cannon fodder that was loaded upon the trains in August and September is rotting on the battlefields of Belgium and the Vosges, while profits are springing, like weeds, from the fields of the dead.

Business is flourishing upon the ruins. Cities are turned into shambles, whole countries into deserts, villages into cemeteries, whole nations into beggars, churches into stables; popular rights, treaties, alliances, the holiest words and the highest authorities have been torn into scraps; every sovereign by the grace of God is called a fool, an unfaithful wretch, by his cousin on the other side; every diplomat calls his colleague in the enemy's country a desperate criminal; each government looks upon the other as the evil genius of its people, worthy only of the contempt of the world.

Hunger revolts in Venetia, in Lisbon, in Moscow, in Singapore, pestilence in Russia, misery and desperation everywhere. Shamed, dishonoured, wading in blood and dripping with filth, thus capitalist society stands.

Not as we usually see it, playing the roles of peace and righteousness, of order, of philosophy, of ethics — as a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as a pestilential breath, devastating culture and humanity — so it appears in all its hideous nakedness...

Capitalist politicians, in whose eyes the rulers of the people and the ruling classes are the nation, cannot honestly speak of the "right of national self-determination" in connection with such colonial empires. To the socialist, no nation is free whose national existence is based upon the enslavement of another people, for to him colonial peoples, too, are human beings, and, as such, parts of the national state.

International Socialism recognised the right of free independent nations, with equal rights. But socialism alone can create such nations, can bring self-determination of their peoples. This slogan of socialism is like all its others, not an apology for existing conditions, but a guide-post, a spur for the revolutionary, regenerative, active policy of the proletariat.

So long as capitalist states exist, i.e., so long as imperialistic world policies determine and regulate the inner and the outer life of a nation, there can be no "national self-determination" either in war or in peace.

In the present imperialistic milieu there can be no wars of national self-defence. Every socialist policy that depends upon this determining historic milieu that is willing to fix its policies in the world whirlpool from the point of view of a single nation is built upon a foundation of sand...

Historic development moves in contradictions, and for every necessity puts its opposite into the world as well. The capitalist state is doubtless a historic necessity, but so also is the revolt of the working class against it. Capital is a historic necessity, but in the same measure is its grave-digger, the socialist proletariat. The world rule of imperialism is a historic necessity, but likewise its overthrow by the proletarian international.

Side by side the two historic necessities exist, in constant conflict with each other. And ours is the necessity of socialism. Our necessity receives its justification with the moment when the capitalist class ceases to be the bearer of historic progress, when it becomes a hindrance, a danger, to the future development of society. That capitalism has reached this stage the present world war has revealed...

This madness will not stop, and this bloody nightmare of hell will not cease until the workers of Germany, of France, of Russia and of England will wake up out of their drunken sleep; will clasp each other's arms in brotherhood and will down the bestial chorus of war agitators and the hoarse cry of capitalist hyenas with the mighty cry of labor, "Proletarians of all countries, unite!"

•From the *Junius Pamphlet* (1915)

Those wh

By Jim Jepps

Every time I see the establishment line up to commemorate the "glorious" dead of the First World War I can't help but think of Siegfried Sassoon's words; "The Great Ones of the Earth approve, with smiles and bland salutes, the rage and monstrous tyranny that they have brought to birth."

The official celebrations of the Great War treat the conflict like a great patriotic tragedy. However even at the time hundreds of thousands refused to go along with the war. Risking their lives, liberty and the hatred of others they raised their voices against the killing, and those voices only grew louder as the war went on.

In Britain conscription was introduced in 1916 and more than 20,000 men refused the call, declaring themselves Conscientious Objectors (or COs). Many organisations helped to oppose the war including those on the left and Quakers. This being Britain each CO had to fill in a form and tick a box as to whether they were objecting on religious or political grounds. Around half ticked religion and the other half politics — although in truth for many it was a bit of both.

Those who applied for CO status weren't always granted it. First they had to convince the magistrate at a specially convened court, who was rarely sympathetic. Anarchists began organising what we'd call "solidarity actions" today, filling the court with supporters and then creating mayhem when proceedings began. Socialists would sing red or anti-war songs.

It's sometimes argued that Britain was particularly lenient in not shooting those who refused to fight. This needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. One of my relatives on my father's side, Arthur Sowter, was a conscientious objector and sentenced to hard labour, and was then sent to France to work as a grave digger at the front.

Physically broken and suffering from shell shock, he died in his twenties, for the crime of refusing to pick up a gun for his country. We were only lenient if it is kinder to break someone on a wheel than execute them outright. These men were far from cowards for refusing to take up arms.

VILE

It was far from an easy course of action, COs faced jail, social exclusion, violence and vile treatment.

They had no idea what might happen to them and the threat of execution (and even fake firing squads) was used to intimidate COs in an attempt to crack their resolve — which must have broken some.

My grandmother remembered having bricks thrown through her windows as a child during the war, and COs suffered violence and scorn from prison guards and other soldiers alike, aside from the gruelling duties of hard labour, stretching-bearing or the degrading conditions of prison.

Some COs, nick named Absolutists, refused all orders, up to and including wearing the uniform. George Dutch recalled his experience; "They stripped me of my own clothing and put the uniform down beside me and said 'Now you've got to put it on'. I said 'Well, I will not put it on'. 'Alright, you've got to sit there'.

"I sat there for a day or two and the whole camp was interested. Everybody knew what was going on. Soldiers used to come and say 'Go on, stick it boy, stick it if it kills you'. The major was very much disliked and I can understand that. I can see what type of person he was. He must have noticed it, because after a day or two suddenly my tent was taken up and taken right up on top of the cliff overlooking the sea. This was in November and it was pretty cold, misty weather.

"And I was taken up there and my uniform put beside me again by the tent pole, and just to make things worse than ever they rolled the tent walls up so that the wind came right into the tent, all round, and I could sit there and freeze.

no refused to fight

Which I did. And the orders were that no one was to come near me until I dressed and came down.

"Well, I didn't dress and I didn't go down and I stayed there and I'm not quite sure how long it was, but I think it must have been at least ten days — and nights — in just my singlet and pants and socks. Just sitting like that in the tent and before I'd been there many hours I was frozen right through with exposure.

"Then suddenly a whole group of them turned up. The medical officer, the doctor, and the NCOs that had put me up there and rolled the tent walls up. The doctor was very angry. So he said to his men, 'Get him down to the tent, down to the medical tent.'"

One leading anti-war organiser, Fenner Brockway, while imprisoned in Walton Prison, Liverpool, began the first illicit anti-war newspaper in prison, *The Walton Leader*.

Carefully written on toilet paper it was distributed cell to cell, man to man. When it was eventually discovered and he was punished, the jail erupted in a ten day prison strike until he was transferred to Lincoln jail (and solitary-confined for around the next two years).

Brockway later became a recruiter for volunteers to fight in Spain through the ILP and wrote a recommendation letter for George Orwell when he set off to Barcelona.

With most of its male activists arrested, the No Conscription Fellowship continued its activities run almost entirely by courageous women. Those women who resisted the war are often written out of history. Of course, because they were not subject to conscription, they had fewer opportunities to get arrested but they were part of and led the movement none the less.

During the war Sylvia Pankhurst was sent to jail for five months (not for the first time), on this occasion for sedition. Editions of her paper were suppressed for calling on soldiers not to fight.

She described Labour politicians, who had opposed the war before it started and then voted for war credits once it had begun like this: "Some Socialists tell us that the floor of the House of Commons is a splendid platform for propaganda; but the trouble is that when they get into the House, their courage seems to evaporate like a child's soap bubble. We have heard of Labour Members of Parliament being ready to do and say all sorts of heroic things, and to get themselves put out of the House, to arrest the world's atten-

tion on some appropriate occasion. That is not much of course, as compared with running the risk of death in the horrible trenches or with being incarcerated for years in prison."

It wasn't just small groups of activists that opposed the war. While we shouldn't pretend there was any shortage of patriotic pro-war fervour, we know that a large minority were downright opposed. This has some reflection in the music hall, despite the fact that it was difficult to legally voice outright opposition.

One popular song, first written for the US music hall, became an international anti-war anthem. It's not difficult to see why when we look at the lyrics of "I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier";

"I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier / I brought him up to be my pride and joy / Who dares to put a musket on his shoulder / To shoot some other mother's darling boy? / Let nations arbitrate their future problems / It's time to lay the sword and gun away / There'd be no war today / If mothers all would say / 'I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier'."

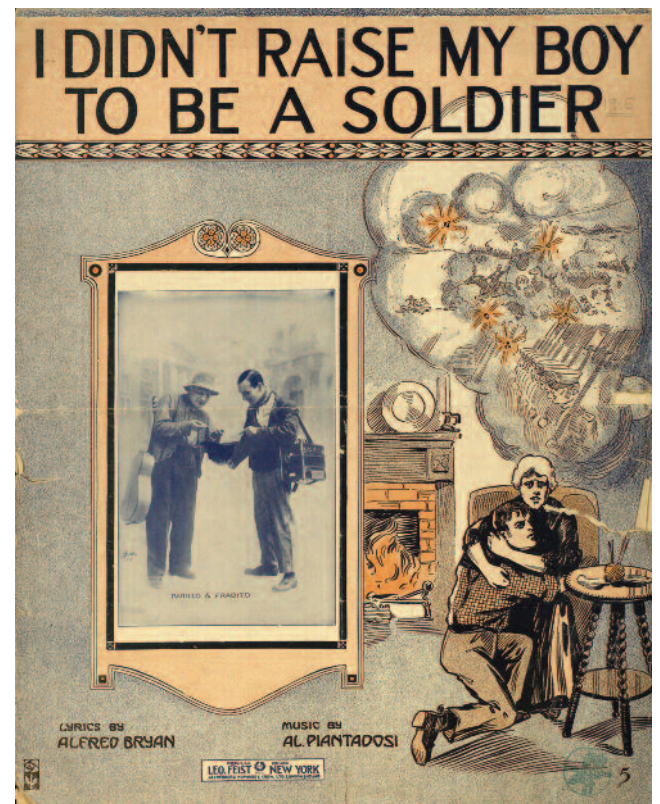
CHORUS

The song "A Conscientious Objector" is, on the face of it, a wry attack on those who refused to fight as effeminate cowards, but scratch the surface and it's far more complex.

Audiences would enthusiastically sing the chorus "send out the bakers and blooming profit makers but for Gawd's sake don't send me." In an era where bakers (and some other professions) were seen as explicitly exploiting the war to fill their pockets, there is a definite popular anti-war angle here.

Australia is probably a helpful example because, unlike in Britain, they held a referendum to introduce conscription and so many arguments illegal here were part of the legitimate debate there. Posters showing the Labour Party making coffins declared those in the party advocating conscription were both betraying workers who would be sent to die and would kill the party. Others showed the figure of death canvassing for a yes vote, or men voting yes to put their head in a noose. The Blood Vote poster described the ballot box as a "box of blood".

Those campaigning against conscription in Australia narrowly won the vote, which outraged the authorities. They



promptly arrested the leaders of the movement and held the referendum again — which returned a no vote with a wider margin.

Many of those who refused to fight did not label themselves conscientious objectors. By the end of the war around a third of the French army had deserted, and there were many forest camps populated by deserters from armies from both sides who were simply sick of the war.

The famous football match is a wonderful image, but it's also the officially sanctioned ceasefire where soldiers still, literally, played by the rules. Far less famous are the unofficial ceasefires where whole stretches of the trenches refused to fight, or would simply agree to fire to miss, or only throw bombs at allocated times of the day.

The General Staff were firing off frustrated orders and memos to each other trying to solve the problem of an army that refused to fight, or seemed to be on positively friendly terms with those in the opposite trenches. In the end whole aspects of military strategy was designed in order to ensure soldiers would have no option but to kill the enemy.

KILLING

In Mark Thompson's brilliant *The White War*, which details the Italian / Austrian front, he describes how even officers more than once ordered a ceasefire simply to stop the killing.

"On one occasion, the Austrian machine gunners were so effective that the second and third waves of Italian infantry could hardly clamber over the corpses of their comrades. An Austrian Captain shouted to his gunners, 'What do you want, to kill them all? Let them be.'"

The Austrians stopped firing and called out; "Stop, go back! We won't shoot any more. Do you want everyone to die?"

Other more individualist solutions included shooting the officer who was responsible for ordering a charge, deserting or simply wandering across no man's land and giving yourself up to the enemy, knowing that there was no war in the prison camps.

The Conscientious Objectors of the First World War were courageous and principled. Whether motivated by religion, political principle, or a simple sense of common humanity, they were prepared to suffer the most terrible consequences in refusing to take part in a bloodbath that left millions dead across Europe.

They were also the tip of the iceberg of many tens of thousands of others who refused to fight in other, subtler ways. We'll never know the truth about the mutinies that did take place in the British Army and Navy, but it's clear that those who wanted no part of someone else's war were far from alone.



Irish workers and the First World War

By Sean Matgamna

“The trenches in France are healthier than the slums of Dublin”!

British army recruiting poster, 1916

The big, framed, multi-coloured certificate on our wall in Ennis, in the West of Ireland, puzzled me for a long time when I was very small.

To the left of the fireplace, near the picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (in which Jesus Christ displayed his wounded, thorn-bound, bleeding heart outside his shirt), it was decorated at the top by a semi-circle of little flags of different sorts. The inscription was what I could not make sense of. It testified that John O'Mahony “had given his life” in July 1916 “to defend the liberty of his country”.

It was not my uncle's name — my own name, too, in English, in memory of him — that confused me, but the reference to “his country”. Which country? John was in the English army. England was not his country, or mine; and England's army was not the army of Ireland, his country.

I could not identify the Empire flags on the certificate, but I knew the Irish tricolour, and that was not there.

At first I was just puzzled; later, as I learned official 26 Counties history at school, I became vaguely ashamed, even angry. My uncle John died “defending his country” just a few weeks after the English army burned the centre of Dublin and killed 15 of their captured prisoners of war. These were the heroes who, with the earlier Republicans and the Irish saints and missionaries of ancient times and of our own time, were held up to us as embodying the highest ideals of Catholic Ireland.

I was uneasy, but pitying too. I knew John's face. On the staircase there was a big framed old-fashioned sepia picture of a couple posing in a photographer's studio. The man, though he had a broad mustache and was in uniform, looked a bit like my father. The woman was bareheaded, in a long-skirted tight-bodied dress. Good-looking people in their twenties, both of them looked out at you boldly, seemingly afraid of nothing.

It was a wedding picture. John and Bid were married, then John's leave was up, and he was gone, for good. I knew Bid. The handsome, bold-eyed woman in the photo was a tall, strong-boned, gaunt-faced old woman, one of the few women in the town who still dressed not in a coat but in the old-fashioned long black tasseled shawl. She never remarried. She had had a husband for one week.

PRESS-GANG

As I got older, I could make more sense of my father's stories. The high-spirited John got drunk one evening, broke some windows, in a fight perhaps (I can't remember), and the magistrate press-ganged him into the army.

But the magistrates and the others who wielded the pressures of the established order to herd men into the Army did not press-gang the hundreds of thousands of Irish men who joined up.

Sometimes it was “economic conscription”. In places like Ennis, a market town with little industry, the town poor eked out a living as best they could, hiring out as drovers at fairs, doing building work, cutting firewood in the woods outside the town and hawking it, cutting hazel saplings (“scollips”) and selling bundles (“barths”) of them for use in thatching houses.

John's brother, Bob, joined the British Army too. He was carrying an enormous bundle of scollips from the woods on his back down miles of country road into the town one day, and having a back-breaking time of it as always. He stopped to rest against a wall, and there and then decided that the army was “better than this”. He survived, shell-shocked.

A younger brother, Patrick, followed after them and went through the war unscathed, only to be crippled by a hand-grenade when fighting, probably for mercenary reasons, on the wrong side, the government side, in the Irish civil war of 1922-3.

Another force, the force of family tradition, also pulled them and, I guess, many others towards the British Army. Three of their uncles, and namesakes, John, Bob, Patsy, had been professional soldiers. Two of them, I think, went to India. From

all over Ireland the class of town labourers, victims of perpetual underemployment and the half-starvation that went with it, had for generations supplied recruits to the British Army.

My father and another brother escaped the pull to go too only because they were still children. But they did not escape the pull of inbuilt, albeit conflicted, loyalties. To my childish exasperation, not even the struggle for Irish independence and the terrorist campaign of the Black and Tans to suppress the elected Irish parliament, which declared Ireland a Republic in January 1919, eradicated those loyalties. My father would tell stories about the Black and Tan terror, as my mother would, but the ordinary British soldier, my father would say, was decent enough, and would try sometimes to stop the Black and Tans ill-treating people.

He would tell a story about himself aged 14 and his half-blind father being cornered and bullied by sportive Tans on a country road, and “rescued” by ordinary soldiers. Apparently this was a not uncommon experience, and a common feeling about the soldiers.

Nor was it only for economic reasons that men went off to kill other “young men they did not know” and with whom they had no real quarrel. Everywhere in the armed camps of the nations — in Germany, Britain, France, Austria — there was delirious enthusiasm for the war.

It was a break in the dull routine. Men who were to be destroyed in the clash of enormous de-personalised military machines, who would go out “over the top” for as long as they lasted against machine guns which scythed them down like corn standing in a field, went off to the army with images of war as gallantry, adventure, and personal initiative. They died in their millions.

COLOURS

In Ireland people of all sorts and classes flocked to “the colours”. By April 1916, when the Rising in Dublin led by Connolly and Pearse began to change the course of Irish history, 150,000 Irish men were in the British army.

By the end of the war, over 200,000 Irish were fighting under British flags.

The historian Roy Foster sums up some of the reasons why. “Town labourers predominated over agricultural labourers, often encouraged by unemployment at home and the prospect of a generous separation allowance for their families; Belfast provided a higher proportion for reasons of proletarianisation as much as Protestantism”.

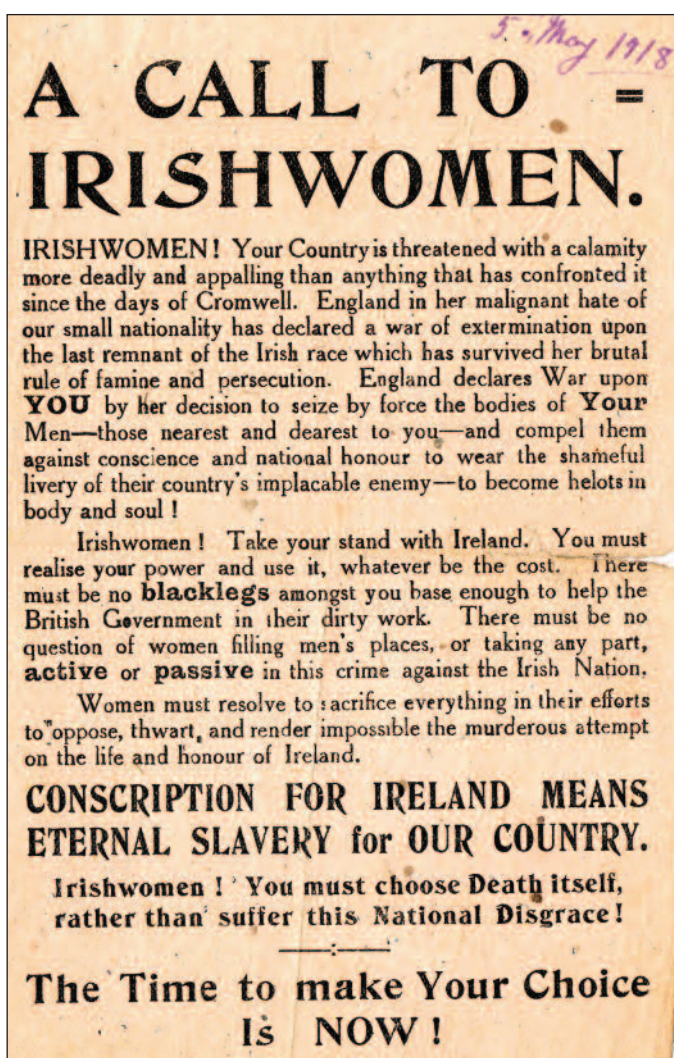
In the north of Ireland, the men who had organised in the Ulster Volunteer Force and armed themselves with imported German guns on the eve of the war to resist the British Liberal Government if it tried to coerce them into a united Ireland, joined up en masse. In Catholic Ireland many thousands had organised and armed themselves in the Irish Volunteers to back Home Rule, and if necessary fight the Northerners' and their Volunteer Force. They joined the British Army too, in their big majority, to prove that a Home Rule Ireland would be “loyal” to the Empire. That is what their leaders told them to do.

They met, Northerners and Southerners, Catholics and Protestants, Nationalists and Unionists, far away in France, and found that they could after all unite — in the mass graves of places like Ypres and the Somme.

Orange and Green were united not in the fraternity of an all-Ireland national identity, and not by the benign white with which those who designed the Irish tricolour in the 1840s had linked the Orange and the Green, but by the red, white and blue of the UK flag and the red of their own blood.

Over a million men, including my uncle John, died in the battle of the Somme, in July 1916, most of them workers from the slums of Berlin, Paris, Manchester, London, and similar places. Many thousands of them were Irish. A great compact mass of them, 12,000 strong, were Ulster Protestants. The men who had first come together to fight Home Rule, and if necessary England, perished en masse fighting Germany on behalf of England.

Yet that great slaughter helped to transform Ireland. It was not only, perhaps not even mainly, the 1916 Rising that changed the course of Irish politics. It was the attempt to force conscription (introduced in Britain in 1916) on to Ireland which united Catholic Ireland behind the coalition that regrouped under the flag of the newly Republican Sinn Féin



A leaflet from the anti-conscription campaign of 1918

party — it was a monarchist party until 1917 — which won the November 1918 election on a platform of secession from the United Kingdom.

In the last half of the war, recruitment in Ireland fell off dramatically. According to Foster, “By 1917, figures prepared for the Cabinet showed that the percentage of the male population represented by enlistment was down to 4.96% in Ireland, compared to 17% in England, Scotland and Wales”.

The Rising, with the cold-blooded killing afterwards of some of those who surrendered, was no doubt one reason for this. The great campaign against conscription, in which the Catholic Church and its organisations were central, completed the alienation from the United Kingdom.

TURN

The young men of Ireland turned from “defending the liberty of their country” to attempting to win it from those with whom they had far greater reason to quarrel than they ever had with Germany.

Some of them helped drive Britain out of Southern Ireland: the most successful Republican field commander in Ireland's war of independence, Tom Barry, had gone through the entire World War in the British Army.

John O'Mahony crawled out of a trench and hoisted a wounded comrade crippled in no-man's-land on his back to bring him in. They were both cut to pieces by machine gun fire. The officer who wrote to tell his wife that he was dead (part of whose letter was printed in the local paper, the *Clare Champion*, from which I take this information) said that he had been “mentioned in dispatches”. He was 25 years old.

Everywhere in Europe, soldiers returned embittered. Many of them turned to communism, elaborating a new definition of freedom.

One of the millions who died in the great imperialist slaughter, my uncle John was past learning.

Against the Tide column in Socialist Organiser, July 1991

How China's economic wobbles hit workers

At the end of November, two Chinese government researchers published an estimate that over the past five years US\$6,800 billion of investment in China has been wasted on bridges to nowhere and homes and offices with no one in them.

The estimate is disputed, but few doubt that huge excess capacity has been built. The Chinese government is trying to slow down the investment surge gently, and producer prices in China have been deflating since mid-2011.

The Chinese economy has a big build-up of debt, including debt whose counterpart is assets currently unused and maybe likely to be unused for some time. Some economists think that this accumulation of debt poses the risk of an economic crisis in China.

What would a crisis — or even a government-planned slowdown — mean for the greatly-expanded Chinese working class?

Anita Chan, a researcher into Chinese labour conditions and author of *China's Workers Under Assault: Exploitation and Abuse in a Globalizing Economy* (2001), spoke to Martin Thomas.

AC: The construction sector has been booming for 20 years. Look at the highways, look at the express trains — they have all been constructed in the last ten years. Look at the new commercial and residential buildings over the last 30 years. China has been a leading builder for a long time.

In 2008, as part of the “stimulus plan”, China invested a lot of money. To offset the economic crisis, money was allocated to lower-level state and regional governments. These lower-level government authorities just keep on building!

The construction sector is staffed by male migrant workers. They come in groups from the villages, they do construction projects, then they go back. They are being terribly exploited. Occupational health and safety is almost non-existent.

The pattern has been for construction workers to be owed a lot of back pay. They would regularly have protests about back pay in the couple of months before Chinese new year because they are often paid at the end of the year. There were many cases of construction workers climbing to high places and protested by threatening to commit suicide.

The government responded to this by cracking down on non-payment. They didn't want the bad publicity. The situation has improved moderately in this respect because of government intervention.

MT: We don't see many reports of strikes in construction. Why is that?

AC: Construction workers are very mobile. They are usually peasants coming out in gangs headed by a relative or friend. Even if they stop working, it will be only a very localised incident, on a construction site. Research on strikes in China tends to focus on south China. For one, that's because lots of the researchers are based in Hong Kong, close to Guangdong.

Guangdong province also has the highest concentration of foreign-run factories and supplier factories for multi-national companies. The Asian foreign-funded sector tends to be the most exploitative. You get this phenomenon in Vietnam too, in the supplier factories in Ho Chi Minh City.

Labour unrest is disproportionately concentrated in the supplier factories for multinationals. Researchers cannot keep up with the number of incidents and statistics for this unrest. Workers on one or two production lines can go on strike for a couple of days. Is that a strike? Local governments do not release figures on number of collective protest actions. Even if they have some figures, they are not reliable since they may not be aware of a strike unless employers called them or workers began taking street action. So there is no real way of knowing all the facts. Local government has no incentive to record protests, because it does not reflect well on them to upper level governments.

Are protests in the construction sector included in the government figures? I don't know. You can't trust the figures.

MT: Economists are discussing the government's attempt to restrain the growth of credit, and the possibility of a crisis developing if that restraint bursts the bubble of expanded credit from recent years. Either of those factors could lead to a big slowdown in construction and huge lay-offs among China's 45 million construction workers.

AC: The size of local government building projects and con-

tracts is vast. Yet lots of these buildings are empty.

All universities now in China have new campuses outside the cities — enormous, unbelievably large campuses. They get the land for free, and the bigger the project, the more corruption money you can get from a building project.

Many empty buildings have been thrown up for no purpose. Whole ghost cities have been built that no-one lives in.

The money comes from the banks. So if the government says to the banks, “don't give money to local government to build useless things”, there will be a slowdown.

MT: And the 45 million construction workers?

AC: They are peasants. They will go home and work the land. While working on the projects they live on the construction sites or nearby ramshackle structure. When there is no work, they go home. To the government, that is not a big issue.

In the past 15 years, the Chinese government has started to take better care of the countryside. They have instituted a series of reforms. Since the mid-2000s, there have been no tuition fees, no agricultural tax, and social insurance and medical insurance — on a low level, to be sure — have been offered to rural people. By rural standards, this is good. The situation in the countryside has improved.

For some peasants, going to look for work isn't always the best option. They weigh the pros and cons to see whether they can really make money by joining a construction gang. Rural poverty is less visible and not as desperate as urban poverty.

MT: Some reports indicate that construction workers are low-paid compared to factory workers.

AC: If the wages are really paid, and not owed, as is common with sub-contractors, then the wages are not terribly low in comparison. Per day, some construction workers make more than many factory hands.

It is hard work. But it is seasonal. Building workers are quite used to that. They get tired, they go home to their village for half a year take a rest and then they come out again.

AGENCY WORKERS

MT: In recent years, there has been a big rise in the number of agency workers, to something like 60 million. Where are they found? What are their conditions? If there is a crisis or a planned economic slowdown, are they likely to be the first in line to lose their jobs and suffer?

AC: I would say yes, especially in the state sector. They hire a lot of agency workers. So you have core workers, and then more-flexible agency workers. These days, it is like in the USA.

In China, there is a tradition about providing for the workers, a legacy from the previous era. Politically, things were bad — but workers did enjoy benefits. Many “core” workers continue to enjoy those benefits.

Agency workers do not. They are the flexible ones. When times are bad, they go.

In the non-state sector, they maintain a core of workers in certain positions. But generally agency workers are hired everywhere.

In banking, they hire so many agency workers — tellers, cashiers, those who do the routine work — that can be up to 80% or so in some banks.

It's different in different sectors. In the private manufacturing sector, there are agency workers. In Guangdong province, since the majority of the workers, often 100%, are migrants, employment is already quite flexible. They sign one or two-year contracts.

Employers don't need to hire through agencies because these contracts are so short-term anyway. They can recruit directly by sticking up hiring notices outside the main gate of the factory. If there is a shortage they can go to the agencies. Some use both methods.

A few years ago the ACFTU did some research and found there were 60 million agency workers. That was the official figure several years ago. By means of the revised labour contract law, the government tried to control the number of agency workers. But in fact employers have wound up employing more agency workers.

Agency companies have to function like an ordinary company. If a worker signs two contracts, the third contract must be permanent. Obviously agency firms avoid that. And the government doesn't really monitor agencies, so the problem

is not really resolved.

MT: Are agency workers used to break strikes?

AC: Not that I have heard of. Strikes in China are not like strikes in Australia or England. It is very spontaneous. 10% or 20% or 50% of the workers go on strike but the others don't want to. There is no such thing as a picket line or collective bargaining. There are no rules about picketing or whether a strike is protected or not protected. Legally, strikes are not illegal. It is not mentioned in the labour law. A worker cannot be charged for going on strike. If strikers are arrested, it is for other reasons, like obstructing the street or instigating trouble. But they these are universal excuses in all countries to suppress strikes.

You have a strike, after a while everyone goes back to work, they fire the leaders if they can find them, and that's the end.

The way that factories used to hire in Guangdong was to stick up a poster at the main gate, and people would come every day. That's still how they are able to recruit at Foxconn.

MT: So they wouldn't need to deploy agency workers — they could just hire replacement workers directly. Construction workers in the cities have no status under the household registration system. What about agency workers?

AC: Agency workers can be locals. It depends on the place.

MT: You have researched Wal-Mart's operations in China. How have things changed in recent years with that?

AC: Things have got worse. Wal-Mart stores have over-expanded. In some cities, some stores have never really made money in recent years. Wal-Mart are closing stores, and are trying not to pay compensation. There have been some issues over that.

Wal-Mart workers just don't have overtime. Not that overtime is great! But when wages are very low, and you don't have overtime, you cannot make a living. Overtime rates in China are quite high — 100% more than the normal wage for weekends, and three times more for holidays.

There are a lot of part-time workers, who cannot enjoy the same benefits. Wal-Mart will make you work up to a certain threshold of hours, but not beyond, so that you are not considered full-time and you are exempted from benefits.

Wal-Mart saves money by not having overtime, and by having a lot of part-time workers. There is a lot of casual work. The shifts are very irregular at Wal-Mart.

On paper, Wal-Mart pays minimum wage. But after certain deductions, it comes out as lower than minimum wage.

A lot of housewives who cannot work full-time because of children take jobs in Wal-Mart as part-time workers. But the hours are very irregular.

In factories, wages are higher and you get a lot of overtime. On the other hand, Wal-Mart will not owe workers wages and fail to pay them on time, like construction employers might. Wal-Mart will pay medical insurance, and so they don't break the law in that respect.

MT: There have been reports of the ACFTU being more willing to assert itself, in particular in foreign-owned enterprises. Is that the case?

AC: I came back from a conference with NGOs in the Shenzhen region three weeks ago and the situation is very bad. They think that the ACFTU is not doing much. The ACFTU has set up a legal aid office in the trade union building, but the workers generally don't trust it. If you go to the ACFTU, they don't do anything. That's what the NGOs told me.

The Guangzhou trade union was generally seen as quite good because they had quite a reformist chairperson, Chen Weiguang, who you will hear a lot about, but he retired a year ago and nothing is happening now.

Because Wal-Mart tries to avoid violating the law, some Wal-Mart workers are quite old — they are in their 40s. I recently met some of them in South China. Wal-Mart is trying to get rid of them so that they will not have to pay social security. The workers are trying to get organised over the internet, in order to fight Wal-Mart.

Some of their activists are in touch with American Wal-Mart workers, which in China is a very dangerous, very risky thing to do.

Density and decline

Bob Carnegie



The crisis in Australian unionism is one of great concern to all working-class activists. In a series of articles I will criticise some of the current trends and try to show that there are ways out.

The main tools I have at my disposal are nearly 40 years of militant trade union and working-class activism and wide (but not deep) reading of socialist theory. I hope these articles are of interest. Whether they are instructive and helpful, that is for others to decide.

If a union movement's societal influence is primarily based on relative union density, the current state of unionism in Australia is the lowest at least since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Is it just a case of economic structural adjustment moving across the developed world?

Is it the aggressive stance of right wing governments since the 1980s?

Is it a problem in trade unions themselves being unable to adapt to changing circumstances?

In reality, particularly in Australia, it is a combination of all three. However in Australia the leaders of many of the larger unions have played a role in their own collapse.

In 1974, 55% of the work force were members of unions. Twenty years later, in 1994, the figure was 42%. In 2014 the figure is approximately 17%.

This is a collapse of immense importance. Proportionately it is a greater collapse than in the United States, where private sector unionism sits around 6.5%.

In Australia there has been a marked decline in the manufacturing base. A once quite strong car-making industry (I worked in a Ford factory for a couple of spectacular months in the early 80s) will turn off its last light in 2016. Australian steel making of any type on a large scale is almost non-existent.

Textiles, clothing and footwear are now almost cottage industries.

The push by big business has been into service industries and mining. Australia's two major export earners are iron ore and coal. The third largest export earner is education. Universities in Australia can charge exorbitant fees for overseas students.

MINING

If we look at the hard rock and coal industries, we can observe some of the strategies big business has used in its attempts to "free" itself from the restraints imposed by a unionised workforce.

In the late 1980s transnational mining houses, led firstly by Rio Tinto and more lately by the world's largest mining house BHP Billiton, have carried on an assault against organised labour.

In hard rock mining (particularly iron ore and bauxite) workers' collective agreements have been replaced in the main by non-union agreements.

The mighty Pilbara unions were shattered in less than five years. 90% plus union density was reduced in a brief period to less than 10% of the workforce. Unions became fundamentally powerless to defend the few remaining members.

In coal mining the assault has included virtually all of the big mining houses, including once "union friendly" BHP Billiton.

Coal miners had a long history of militant unionism. Up to the early 90s, not an ounce of Australian coal was dug non-union.

Things began to change quite abruptly after Rio turned a massive underground coal mine, Gordonstone, into a non-union mine named Kestrel. In around 15 years non-union coal mines accounted for 40% of the nation's coal output.

Companies in the vastness of the Queensland West make it difficult for the miners' union to organise.

Companies use fly in / fly out miners. They tend to do 7x12 hour shifts and then get flown back to their homes on the coast. The miners live in camps.

Mining companies have a policy of not hiring relatives of miners, thus further avoiding union influence.

The coal miners' union has been slow to respond and in collapse in numbers, although bad, has been until now been offset by a coal boom.

A cheap shot from Ofsted

By a Tower Hamlets teacher

Ofsted has put seven schools in Tower Hamlets into special measures, saying that they have "not put in place steps to ensure that students, staff and governors understand the risks posed by extremism".

Six of them are Islamic private schools, and one is a Church of England secondary foundation school.

The left should not defend the private faith schools which have been found to teach a very narrow curriculum, excluding the arts, and fail to challenge prejudiced attitudes towards women and people of different sexualities. Such schools should be abolished.

The seventh school, Sir John Cass Red Coat, is a faith school — "a Church of England school that actively encourages a religious commitment from all faiths in the student community".

Despite that, the information we have suggests a case for defending John Cass. It suggests that Ofsted has acted against John Cass as a cheap way of showing that it is "doing something" about Islamism.

A real challenge to religious extremism would be to put an equalities agenda at the heart of the curriculum — both formal and hidden. If Ofsted and the government were serious about gender equality (which they now describe as a "British value"), they would make sex and relationship education a statutory provision, disallowing parents the right to remove their children from those lessons.

If Ofsted and the government were serious about democracy, they would see to it that all our schools were taken back into local authority control and made democratically accountable to the communities they serve.

Our schools need to embody the richness of inner-city life. They should be places that open children's minds to a whole world of ideas and options, and that patiently guide children on a journey of self-discovery and show no tolerance of prejudice or bigotry.

The subtlety and skill needed to teach values-based education stands in stark contrast to the crass patronising interventions of Ofsted. There are rumours that Ofsted inspectors have recently asked primary schools in Tower Hamlets where they hang their Union Jack and whether all the children know the words to the national anthem.

There should be no place for religious indoctrination in our schools; and there should also be no place for nationalism.

John Cass was "inadequate" for two main reasons. Firstly, a link from a sixth-form society social media page led to some material from an Islamist preacher. "One posting states that any sixth form students who attended a 'leavers' party' and engaged in 'free-mixing' or 'listening to music' would face 'severe consequences later'." Secondly, the social spaces within the school are segregated according to gender.

The head teacher may have shown some hubris in not seeking advice on the issue of internet safety with regards to religious extremism, but it is difficult to monitor the internet use of hundreds of students.

Asking schools to be responsible for teaching and facilitating internet safety is not unreasonable. But for Ofsted to downgrade a school from "outstanding" (in its last Ofsted report) to "inadequate" because it failed to pick up on the posting seems unreasonable.

According to teachers at the school, the separate playgrounds and common rooms for boys and girls came about 20 years ago when there were very few girls at the school. It seems reasonable to create some girl-only spaces to help girls grow in confidence as a minority in the school.

But that was 20 years ago. Surely 20 years is enough to achieve the higher goal of students of different genders enjoying one another's company within a culture of respect.

However, John Cass has been graded as "outstanding" by Ofsted in two previous inspections, with exactly the same social provision for its children — separated according to gender. Tower Hamlets has several schools that are not co-educational. This is not unusual, and not usually an argument for putting a school into special measures.

So what exactly is going on here?

One reason Tower Hamlets is a target is because it has very few academies and yet achieves good results in relation to the national averages. So far, it has not fallen victim to the



John Cass Red Coat: made an example?

government's agenda of privatising the education system. It demonstrates that success is possible without it.

Perhaps more importantly, after the Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham, and with the ongoing war in Syria, Tower Hamlets is an obvious place to come looking for children at risk of Islamist radicalisation. Tower Hamlets is the only local authority in the country where Muslims are the largest single religious group, so schools in Tower Hamlets have additional challenges in terms of safeguarding against Islamist influence.

And as Tower Hamlets teachers, we have additional responsibilities to make sure our young people grow up feeling respected and understood despite widespread anti-Muslim racism.

We know that Islamists pose a direct physical threat to the safety of others, especially other Muslims, in our community.

SECULAR

Teachers in Tower Hamlets are in a highly-charged political situation and need to know how to respond to it. Key to navigating this political terrain is a commitment to secularism.

The government's contribution here is to promote faith schools on the one hand and impose the "Prevent Strategy" on the other.

The Prevent Strategy is supposed to stop people becoming "violent extremists" capable of "mass murder". It sets out guidelines for monitoring the public and highlighting those at risk of "radicalisation". One aspect of its work in schools is the teaching of "British values" across the curriculum. British values as defined by this government apparently include "democracy" and "equality".

Prevent has hired specialists to design resources for teachers to help them discuss controversial issues in an effort to guide the workforce into tackling extremism in the classroom.

But the target-driven culture of education embraced by this government, even more than those before it, has led to a narrowing of the curriculum and the squeezing of opportunities for discussion and debate of matters relevant to our students' lives. The culture of suspicion and fear propagated by Gove, more than any other Secretary for Education before him, has left teachers feeling paralysed when faced with difficult conversations.

For a small number of our students, the risk of Islamist "radicalisation" is real. It needs a more sophisticated response than either Ofsted or the government's Prevent Strategy is providing.

An education that has the universal values of equality and democracy at its core; that provides children with opportunities to debate, discuss, explore and listen to a wide range of experiences and opinions; that is comprehensive and secular — that gives the best chance of helping young people avoid religious extremism and deal with nationalist and racist bigotry.

College staff set to strike

By Gemma Short

Following a re-ballot which returned 83% in favour of strikes on a 58% turn out, Lambeth College UCU will be on their first day of new strikes on Thursday 4 December.

The dispute is over changes to contracts which see two weeks cut off annual holidays, a massive reduction in sick pay entitlement, and extra hours of teaching with no extra pay. UCU members at Lambeth college were re-balloted following a court injunction against their previous indefinite strike plan.

Mandy Brown, UCU branch secretary, said "The strike action taken so far has resulted in some small improvements to the offer made by management. But they do not go far enough. If there is no acceptable offer from management, the action will escalate with two further days on Tuesday &



Lambeth college UCU members on strike in June

Wednesday 9 and 10 December, then three more days on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday 15, 16 and 17th December. The action will continue after the Christmas break if necessary."

Recent communications from the college Principal states there will be no imposition of the new contract for

existing staff. However UCU members are determined to make sure there is no new contract for any staff, new or existing.

A similar restructure of contracts is happening at Barnsley college. UCU members there were on struck on 26 and 27 November.

There will be a rally in support of Lambeth UCU at the Clapham centre between 12 and 1 on 4 December.

• Messages of support to: mandybrowncow@yahoo.com (lambeth) and l.short@barnsley.ac.uk (Barnsley)

Lewisham: hands off our schools!

By a Lewisham NUT member

Over 50 activists met on Monday 17 November to discuss how to prevent a large number of Lewisham's secondary schools becoming academies.

The activists were predominantly school workers, both teachers and support workers. The NUT and GMB both gave commitments that they would ballot workers for industrial

action, in schools in the borough, where the governors of the school refuse to rule out going for academy status.

The schools we know are discussing academy plans are Bonus Pastor, Hilly Fields, Ladywell Fields, Prendergast Vale and Sedgehill. There are rumours that other schools may also be considering trying to become academies.

The fact that so many schools in the borough are planning to attempt to convert at around the same

time suggests some co-ordination. It also presents those of us who support democratically controlled, accountable, education coordinated across the borough with a significant challenge but also an opportunity. If these initial schools are successful then surely more will follow in their wake and the effectiveness of the Local Education Authority will be smashed, leading again to more schools to consider converting.

However, the fact that so

many schools are considering it at the same time give us the opportunity to unite workers and parents at schools across the borough. In Lewisham a massive local campaign stopped the closure of the A&E and maternity wards at the hospital.

We will need a similar campaign to stop the academies, but this time the labour movement will be more central.

• More information: www.facebook.com/1vbpG3P

Tube strikes for sacked workmate

By Tubeworker

Rail union RMT reps and activists were feeling rightly chuffed with themselves on the picket line at Morden train crew depot on Monday 1 December.

A majority of members of both RMT and drivers' union ASLEF showed support for the strike for the reinstatement of sacked train driver Alex McGuigan. Alex failed a breathalyser test, but the company is refusing to take into account circumstances like Alex's diabetes, which could give false positives. They also flouted stan-



dard procedure by only testing a urine sample for drugs, rather than alcohol, and then destroying a second sample.

London Underground (LU) has carried out a spate of unjust sackings — Vicki Hayward, Noel Roberts and

Alex McGuigan amongst them — indicating that LU feels it can get away with bending its own rules while unions battle job cuts and station closures as part of the "Fit for the future on stations" plan. Whilst unions must not take their eye off

the fight against station job cuts, we must also make sure unions fight effectively against these unjust sackings.

The support for the Morden depot strike provides a good basis to escalate the fight against unjust sackings.

Rail union RMT should step up the fight to reinstate Alex to include all drivers on the Northern line. Strikes to reinstate CSAs Vicki and Noel should also be co-ordinated.

• More information: bit.ly/12kxJsS

Firefighters battle government austerity

By Darren Bedford

Firefighters showed the government the depth of their anger over pensions and cuts last week when they successfully disrupted a planned media event around a new fire station in south London on 25 November.

Fire minister Penny Mordaunt was met by 200 angry firefighters when she arrived at the new West Norwood fire station, blocking the entrance and preventing the car from getting in. As the vehicle sped away, cries of "1-0 to the FBU!" rang out.

After police reinforcements arrived, the minister returned and managed to get into the building. However she was met with loud booing on the outside and the refusal of firefighters to meet with her on the inside.

Firefighters were protesting about the government's imposed pension changes that would see them forced to work to 60 or lose nearly half their pension. During this government over 5,000 firefighters' jobs have been cut and 39 fire stations closed. The FBU (Fire Brigades Unions) has refused to accept these austerity measures and continues its industrial, political and legal campaign. Firefighters in England today will strike again for 24 hours from 09.00 on Tuesday 9 December, while firefighters in Scotland and Wales will take action short of a strike after concessions there.



The FBU has also been vindicated by new figures in London, which confirmed that response times slowed by half a minute as a result of Boris Johnson's fire cuts came out.

The union also won a legal case against the London Fire Brigade, after it docked crew managers pay during a period of industrial action over shift patterns in 2010. Fire commissioner Ron Dobson docked the wages of around 370 firefighters, some losing up to 40% of their income, for not "acting up" to watch manager during the dispute — work they were not contractually obliged to do.

These battles are far from over, and solidarity is needed from other workers.

• The FBU has called a demonstration in support of victimised Bucks FBU member Ricky Matthews in Aylesbury on 9 December, assemble 11.30am Oakfield Park Road.

QEH strikers in talks

By Charlotte Zalens

Talks between the GMB and management at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Woolwich, are due to take place in December in the dispute over a two-tier workforce.

Strikes on 24 and 25 of November were well supported. GMB organiser Nadine Houghton said "The few workers who didn't feel

able to strike last time decided to join GMB and come out this time because they found out that ISS workers are paid more on other sites and that other sites are also better staffed."

Solidarity will report on progress in the talks and news of more strikes as we hear it.

• Read an interview with strikers: bit.ly/QEHstrike



Solidarity

No 346

3 December
2014

30p/80p

Protests continue as killer cop rakes it in

By Ira Berkovic

Yet more evidence has emerged which highlights the shocking injustice committed by failing to indict Darren Wilson, the white police officer who killed black teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, USA.

A report by Lawrence O'Donnell, an MSNBC journalist and broadcaster, showed that St Louis County prosecutors supplied the Grand Jury with outdated information about the law on police officers' rights to use deadly force. They only corrected their mistake three days before Darren Wilson testified, and then without substantial explanation or elaboration.

Much of the Grand Jury's deliberations were based on an outdated and as it turned out unconstitutional interpretation of the law.

Meanwhile, 20-year-old DeAndre Joshua, thought to be a friend of Dorian Johnson, who was with Michael Brown when he died, has been found dead. Joshua was shot in the head before his body was covered in gasoline and incinerated. His body was found near Canfield Green Apartments, the same housing complex where Brown was killed.

Darren Wilson has now resigned from the police

force. Although he will not receive severance pay and his pension, he has become a millionaire, receiving \$500,000 in media fees and the same again in supportive "donations", presumably from racists sympathetic to his cause. Not only has the American justice system failed to punish him for the killing, he has effectively been rewarded.

The Grand Jury's decision not to indict him sparked huge protests in cities across America. Thousands of protesters in New York stopped traffic on the Manhattan Bridge, and attempted to dismantle police barricades to cross the Williamsburg Bridge between Manhattan and Brooklyn.

CHICAGO
Protesters in Chicago held a sit-down demonstration inside Mayor Rahm Emanuel's office.

Demonstrations have also continued in Ferguson, with activists travelling from across the country. One group of over 300 met in St. Louis to vote on a list of demands, which included the sacking of Ferguson Police Chief Tom Jackson.

Other planned actions included a 120-mile march from Ferguson to Missouri Governor Jay Nixon's man-

sion in Jefferson City, scheduled to begin on 29 November. Nixon's response to the demonstrations has been to call for greater funding for the National Guard, a reserve military force the American state uses to quell social unrest.

In the days preceding and following the Grand Jury's decision, American police shot and killed at least

two more young black people – Akai Gurley, 28, killed on Friday 21 November in Brooklyn, and 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, gunned down on Saturday 22 November. The NYPD has said the killing of Gurley was an "accident", committed by a rookie cop. Police in Ohio mistook Rice's BB gun for a real weapon, despite the 911 caller who reported seeing him saying the gun was "probably fake".

The killings, along with

similar incidents in recent years such as the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012, amount to what many in black communities feel is a declaration of war on black children and youths by the American state.

The persistent failure to punish any of the killer cops sends the signal that the police are authorised to carry out summary executions of black youths if they suspect them of the least wrongdoing or feel in the least bit threatened by them.



Black Friday strike in retail

By Ollie Moore

Retail workers in America struck on Friday 29 November, the "Black Friday" shopping day when stores offer huge discounts, as part of an on-going movement against low pay.

In the run-up to Black Friday, workers held protest to build for the strike, with one sit-in at a Los Angeles Walmart resulting in 23 arrests.

Strikes are organised locally by community action groups and workers' centres, backed by the United Food and Commercial Workers union.

The strike follows similar walkouts called on "Black Friday" in 2013 and 2012, coincided with a consumer boycott called in protest at the Grand Jury's decision not to indict police officer Darren Wilson for killing black teenager Mike Brown

in Ferguson, Missouri.

There has already been significant crossover between America's growing low-paid workers' movement and the protests against police brutality and racism in Ferguson.

Many Ferguson fast food workers involved in the "Fight for \$15" movement also participated in protests following Mike Brown's killing in August, and workers from the local branch of

fast food chain Chipotle delivered over \$1,000 worth of food to demonstrators.

The fast food, retail, and service sectors are significant employers of black workers.

The convergence of the movements against low pay and against police brutality and racism highlight the twin struggles of America's black community against class exploitation and racist oppression.

On Wednesday 26 November thousands of protesters marched through London demanding justice for Michael Brown and other victims of police racism.

Organised by London Black Revolutionaries (LBR), the protest started as a rally at the US embassy before marching down Oxford Street, stopping the traffic, and continuing on to Parliament and Scotland Yard.

The demonstration was lively, with chants including "from London to Ferguson, no justice, no peace!" and "Who killed Mike Brown? Police killed Mike Brown!" . This was no quiet vigil out of the way of the public. As the march progressed down Oxford Street shoppers joined. Bus and taxi drivers hooted horns in solidarity.

After London Black Revolutionaries had called this demonstration, SWP front "Stand up to racism" called another at the US embassy for a few hours earlier. The SWP refused calls from LBR to combine the two demonstrations. The "stand up to racism" demonstration was much quieter and less political, with organisers discouraging protesters from removing the police barriers in front of the embassy to get closer.