



Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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www.workersliberty.org

Workers' unity Secular democracy Socialism

**Our answer to the
Paris and Raqqa
murderers, to the
racist backlash, and
to the big-power
hypocrites**



Kurdish demonstrator in France: "Barbarism kills in France as it kills in Kobane".

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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Tesco takes it out on workers

By Bill Holmes

News that supermarket giant Tesco is to close 43 of its UK stores will come as a devastating blow for the staff in the affected shops when the locations are revealed.

The announcement that the retailer will not be proceeding with 49 other planned stores will also be badly received by communities who were hoping to get the construction and in-shop jobs to help them survive at a time when inflation is outstripping wage increases.

Tesco is not doing badly by ordinary measures of success. The announcement came because the overall group's business profits will "not exceed" £1.4 billion, instead of £2.4 billion it had projected to make.



Tesco boss Dave Lewis

Just imagine how many houses for the homeless, nurses or teachers that profit could pay for if it was used for something socially useful, instead of lining the pockets of fat cats.

Dave Lewis, Tesco's chief operating officer, declared it was with "a heavy heart"

that he made the decision.

But he cannot even begin to fathom the impact that decision will have on the lives of hundreds, or maybe thousands, of workers.

The knock-on implications are also worrying. It is relatively unusual to hear of a supermarket closing down — they are usually the ones moving into other closed down sites, and if a giant like Tesco can make such a decision will it lead others to do the same.

Most worrying, however, is that the affected staff will not have a lot of support.

Retail workers' union Usdaw, which has a sweetheart deal with Tesco which gives it sole recognition in return for being in Tesco's pocket, has a poor track record for defending its members.

A joint statement issued

immediately after the announcement could maybe — just maybe — be forgiven for calling for more time to go through the proposals in detail.

But the absence of any explicit call for the company to reverse its decision and avoid job cuts is outrageous from a union.

Now, over the next few months as Tesco unveils more details about its cuts, is the time to fight for real workers' organisation in the supermarket industry and either revolutionise Usdaw from the inside — unlikely and difficult — or struggle for potentially new, alternative, grassroots and democratic unions to take up the battle.

The working class needs to gain power in this sector.

She was not "asking for it"!

By Rosalind Robson

Should Ched Evans have been given a job at Oldham Athletic Football Club? No, of course not!

Should he have the chance to rehabilitate, be employed, live his life? Yes.

But rehabilitation for a convicted rapist should not mean walking into a £2,500 a week job where he is, because in the public eye, a role model for boys and young men.

If this crime can be so easily forgotten about then it also sends a message that

rape is a trivial matter.

Ched Evans claims he is innocent. On TV, Gordon Taylor, the head of the Football Players' Association, claimed that sometimes people who seem to be guilty turn out to be innocent, and compared Evans to the Liverpool fans at the Hillsborough disaster who were slandered by the Sun newspaper. How crass can you be?!

In fact Evans has been through all the usual legal processes to reverse the decision made by the jury. And juries are generally

very cautious about finding people guilty in rape cases.

Evans says he has been the victim of mob rule. The people who signed the petitions to stop him getting jobs at Sheffield and Oldham were football fans. That's why they signed! They think rapists and domestic violence perpetrators are giving football a bad name.

The only mob rule that has taken place in this case has been against Evans's victim, who has been so systematically persecuted by Evans supporters she has

had to change her identity five times.

Many people would have a different attitude to Evans if he showed some honesty about his crime. But his recent attempt at an apology was not just dishonest, it was deluded. Clearly he believes, and unfortunately many others do too, that because his victim was drunk she was "asking for it."

As lawyer Julian Norman said on the F-word blog, consent is very simple. It "is a meaningful yes, not an inability to refuse".

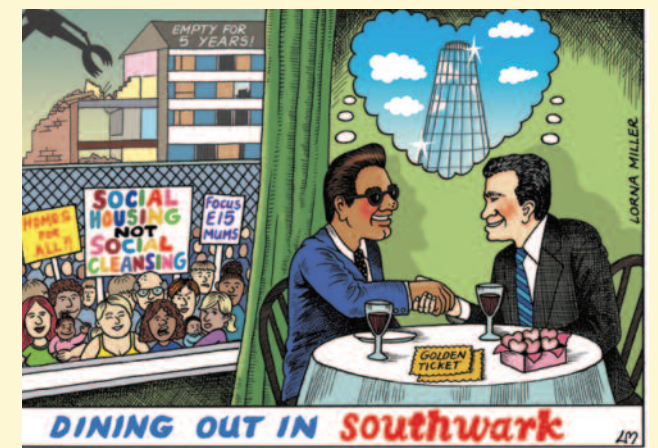
March for homes!

On 31 January marchers from South and East London will converge on City Hall to demand better homes for Londoners and an end to the housing crisis.

The action, called by Defend Council Housing, South London People's Assembly, Focus E15 campaign and Unite Housing Workers branch and others, has published a list of demands:

- Control rents
- Hands off council housing

- Stop demolition of quality council homes
- Affordable and secure homes for all
- Cut rents not benefits
- No scapegoating immigrants
- No racist landlord checks
- End Bedroom Tax and welfare caps
- Build new council houses
- Better pay & conditions for housing workers, better housing services



Saturday 31 January

For South London meet Newington Causeway SE1 6BN, 12:00.

For East London meet Shoreditch Church, Shoreditch High Street E1 6JN, 12:00.

www.marchforhomes.org



Syria: four million refugees

By Simon Nelson

Lebanon has now revoked the six month residency that it granted Syrians and is enforcing new visa restrictions.

Since 2011 four million Syrians have been forced to leave Syria. Almost half Syria's population of 11 million people have been displaced.

Lebanon alone has taken in 1.5 million refugees. Many refugees are now living in only slightly worse conditions than the local population and competition for work, aid and resources is now provoking a backlash among Lebanese; a further 220,000 became unemployed in the last quarter of 2014. In comparison, the UK has taken just 1,500 asylum seekers, with 90 granted refugee status.

Sectarian tensions inside

Lebanon are now spilling across the border. Shia, Sunni and Christian towns are increasingly isolated from each other as supporters of Hezbollah and the Syrian Assad Government clash with Sunni militias and sections of the army. Car bombs have been set off in the Shia suburbs of Beirut.

US airstrike on Syria have continued but they have not made any decisive blow against Daesh (ISIS) infrastructure. As the bombs pick off groups of fighters, more and more come across the borders or are recruited within the territory Daesh has claimed.

The airstrikes have halted Daesh advances. In Kobane, where there has been the fiercest resistance by the Kurdish forces of the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga, 80% of the city has

been reclaimed.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reports that since November IS had repeatedly tried to advance within Kobane — at one time controlling up to 60% — but were repeatedly forced to defend what they had control of. Since January they have been driven out of the centre of the city.

Within Iraq, Shia militias and the Iraqi army are working directly with, and at times under the guidance of Iran, as they attempt to drive out Daesh. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards are the main source of weapons and logistical support for the militias. Iran wants to maintain its influence in a Shia-majority country.

The US insists it does not coordinate military support with Iran, but...

Iran supplies the majority of its weapons as well as its political patronage through

the Shia militias. Such influence is causing tension within the Iraqi "Unity Government" and increases distrust within the Sunni and Kurdish minorities who have been excluded and targeted by sectarian Government policy.

A former leading Taliban commander, Abdul Rauf, is said to have pledged allegiance to Daesh and is now recruiting disenchanted Taliban members to the group. They have clashed with Taliban forces in Helmand province. The change in allegiance seems to have been generated by disagreements amongst the Taliban leadership.

This is the first time Daesh has recruited in Afghanistan. It is not yet clear what level of support they will get or what the consequences might be.

Just two seconds

By Gemma Short

In the first week of January, the full video footage of the police shooting of 12-year-old Tamir Rice was released.

It reveals for the first time the treatment Tamir's 14 year old sister Tajai received. Tajai was in a nearby playground when she heard a shot. She was told by someone that Tamir had been shot. She rushed to his aid. The video shows one of the officers tackling her, handcuffing her and stuffing her into the back of the police car. She was denied the ability to comfort him in his last moments and treated like a criminal.

The footage also confirms earlier evidence that shows that Tamir was shot between 1.5 and two seconds after police arrived on the scene. Yet the officers say that they ordered Tamir three times to put his hands up.

The #BlackLivesMatter slogan is an expression of the social conditions for black people in the US, the politics of police militarisation, and continued and pervasive racism; everything that led Ohio police officers to shoot Tamir after just 2 seconds.

High profile figures including baseball and football players, one CNN anchor team, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, and even various right wing politicians have taken up the slogan or raised ques-

tions about the legitimacy of verdicts not to indict police officers involved in the murder of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. However, the CNN news team who held their hands up and held an "I can't breathe" sign on 6 December were condemned for not being "neutral" and some sports stars were disciplined by their team managements.

Many mainstream newspapers have run extended coverage of the legal cases and protests, and many have run investigations which expose interesting facts. Many of these show what many already know, but discussion at a wider national level is invaluable.

The *Washington Post* ran an investigation of how overpolicing of black communities for minor traffic offences is used to create revenue for the state through fines. The same policy has also been highlighted time and again as a policy of escalation and racial profiling that leads to murders like that of Eric Garner.

The Twitter hashtag, and protest rallying slogan, #BlackLivesMatter, has been voted the word of 2014 by the American Dialect Society, reflecting the effect the protests have had on discussion of race and police violence in the US.

#BlackLivesMatter fundamentally questions how American society is run.

Solidarity with Kobane and Rojava

Dayschool called by Nottingham Kurdish Solidarity campaign

**Saturday 31 January
11am - 5pm**

**The Newton Building, Nottingham
Trent University, NG1 4BU**

**£8/4 Lunch and drinks provided
nottmkurdishsolidarity@gmail.com**

Give them all €10,000!

By Rhodri Evans

The economists John Muellbauer and Willem Buiter have proposed that the European Central Bank fixes the euro-depression by handing out €500 to each citizen or resident of the eurozone.

Wolfgang Munchau, in the *Financial Times* (12 January), argues that a handout of €10,000 per person would be more realistic.

It won't happen, but these

are all conservative, mainstream economists, trying to think outside the box.

Hand out the cash, and people would spend more and be less debt-crippled. Demand would rise, quickly. New jobs and new economic output would be elicited. Price deflation would turn into moderate inflation, which benefits growth and gradually erodes debt. (It was mainly by inflation that European countries after 1945 escaped



Mario Draghi, president of the European Central Bank

their post-war debts).

Munchau calculates his €10,000 by dividing the numbers of eurozone people into €3tn, a total a size equivalent to the QE programme in Britain.

In QE, central banks buy dodgy financial paper (essentially IOUs) from banks and give them hard cash in

return. That too is designed to speed up cash-flow in the economy, but by way of "trickle-down" from banks.

The New Economics Foundation estimates that in Britain QE and similar policies have subsidised bankers by over £30 billion a year (bit.ly/nef-qe).

Crux of complaints?

Letters



Aha! Now Duncan Morrison says what he's getting at in his stream of letters of complaint about Jon Lansman's article in *Solidarity* 343. Or maybe he does.

Lansman's article was "right wing" because it said that "the current Labour leadership shouldn't be got rid of". It was wrong because it "argue[d] that there shouldn't be a leadership election".

So long we could have got up a left candidate, we should have favoured a leadership contest being forced, even if by way of a right-wing surge among Labour MPs to make Miliband resign and was sure to install a more right-wing leader, Alan Johnson or whoever?

I think that is what Duncan is saying. If so, it's wrong. To help along a right-wing surge just because in passing it gives us a chance to get some debates is wrong.

But then Duncan insists that in the British Labour Party, unlike the Scottish, left leadership candidates are impossible. If so, then what was wrong with Lansman's stance? Lansman didn't positively endorse Miliband.

There's a case for reviving the old Campaign for Labour Party Democracy demand that Labour Party leaders should be elected annually. But that's a different matter.

Colin Foster, north London

Books and pamphlets by Workers' Liberty

Class against class: The miners' strike 1984-5

In 1984-5, mining communities all over Britain fought a year-long battle against Thatcher's Tory government. Their fight remains a source of inspiration for the labour movement, and for those who want a democratic socialist world free of exploitation and oppression. This second edition has new items including a review of "The Battle for Orgreave" by the late Rob Dawber, an account of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, and analyses of the strike.

£8.99 €10 US\$15 A\$15

Greece 2012-2014

A Workers' Liberty pamphlet presenting interviews and discussions with many different groups in the Greek left and labour movement, plus an article from 7 January 2015, by Greek socialist Theodora Polenta, explaining the new political crisis there.

£4

www.workersliberty.org/books



The SWP on Charlie Hebdo

The Left
By Omar Raii



Those familiar with the Socialist Workers' Party's politics won't have been surprised by its statement responding to the *Charlie Hebdo* attack. It was the most crude example of the kind of response we have seen from parts of the left in the UK.

The SWP's statement included one line implying opposition to the killings and nothing at all about the basic principle of the right to free speech.

The group's claim that *Charlie Hebdo*'s "provocative" and "racist" cartoons provide essential background to the attacks is pure obfuscation. But if the Islamist killers had been outraged by racism, then they had plenty of targets in France (such as the Front National).

They attacked the cartoonists of a left-leaning paper (and a kosher shop) because this suited their own Islamist politics and in particular their attitude "blasphemy" and Jews.

The idea that imperialism creates "deep hatred" is no doubt true, but the use of that argument in relation to these killings is part of the lazy assertion that attacks like these are simply a knee-jerk response to Western imperialism, com-

pletely denying the role of Islamism as a functioning ideology.

Billions of people, and millions of Muslims, face oppression and hardship but do not go onto murder people, and would not thank the left for making excuses for those that do.

People set out to murder in this way because they are guided to do so by a particular ideology, where targeted killing is a strategic policy.

The left should organise to defend Muslims against an inevitable right-wing backlash. But the left has a duty to combine that with defence of basic freedoms, support for secularism, and opposition to the self-evidently reactionary politics of Islamism.



Attacks on kosher shops are shaped by the ideology of Islamism, not just by generic "anger"

Scots, Wha Hae Wi Murphy bled!

Scotland
By Anne Field



Newly elected Scottish Labour Party (SLP) leader Jim Murphy has produced his own version of a new Clause Four for the Labour Party in Scotland.

(To be more accurate: he claims that it is all his own work. In fact, it reads like an entry in a primary school competition ("Write your own clause four and win a gold star!") which has been pulled out of a hat at random.)

The first part of the new, Scottish, Clause Four is the verbose and vacuous Blairite Clause Four adopted by the Labour Party in 1995, albeit with a reference to Scottish Labour and "the people of Scotland" thrown in.

A succession of additional clauses adds to the verbosity and vacuousness of the original version, peppered by all manner of references to things Scottish.

Thus, the SLP "works for the patriotic interest of the people of Scotland." It will work for "the advancement of Scotland's interests." It will work "with the Scottish people to create policy in Scotland for a just society."

"On the basis of these principles" (! — Murphy probably had to consult a dictionary to learn how to spell the word), the SLP "seeks the trust of the Scottish people to govern."

The SLP will seek to



achieve its aims "with trade unions and the co-operative movement, and also with voluntary organisations, consumer groups and other representative bodies." For "other representative bodies" read: the Scottish CBI.

In his spare moments between rewriting Clause Four in his own image, Murphy has found time to give jobs to his friends.

The right-wing non entity Brian Roy (whose main connection to politics is the fact that his father is an MP) has been appointed SLP General Secretary. The political corpse of John McTernan (formerly Blair's Political Secretary) has been exhumed and appointed SLP chief of staff.

And Kieron Higgins has been brought in to deal with the media. Higgins was one of the architects of the disastrous "Better Together" campaign, which succeeded in frittering away a 20 point lead in the run-up to last year's referendum.

More likely than not, Murphy's strategy to reverse the collapse in electoral support for the SLP will simply give another boost to the spiral of decline.

Appealing to "Scottish patriotism" will play into the hands of the SNP. Giving jobs to Blairites and wasters from "Better Together" will remind ex-Labour-voters why they stopped voting Labour. And so too will Murphy's contempt for democracy.

No amendments will be permitted to the new Scottish Clause Four. The role of the special conference to be held in the spring will simply be to rubber-stamp it (on the basis that a defeat for the SLP leadership would supposedly undermine the SLP's credibility on the eve of a general election).

"Go back to your constituencies and prepare for government!" was David Steel's message to the Lib-Dem party conference in 1981.

Murphy's message to SLP members at last month's rally where the result of the SLP leadership contest was announced should have been: "Go back to your constituencies and prepare for oblivion!"

Autocollants: the public face of the activist

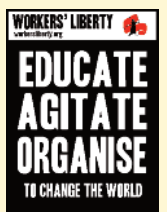
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Ideas for designs and slogans to

bethredmond93@gmail.com.

Order from workersliberty.org/autocollants



Paris, and other atrocities

After the murder on 7 January of twelve people at the offices of the French satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, and the shooting of four people in a Parisian kosher grocery store, we are once again facing questions of free speech, the growth of extreme Islamism, and reprisal attacks by the neo-fascist far-right.

The first job of any principled socialist should be to unequivocally condemn these murders and, with the killing of *Charlie Hebdo* journalists, the attack on free speech. Some have accused the newspaper of being needlessly provocative or even Islamophobic. But the cartoonists who were murdered at their place of work were killed for no other reason than they drew images that were considered blasphemous by the killers. The right to blaspheme is an integral part of the right to free speech.

Right across Europe we have seen both Islamist militancy and anti-Muslim far-right movements surge.

Of the two reactionary movements, it is clear which is the larger. When hundreds or thousands of violent people are mobilised on the streets of European capitals, it is almost always the work of the far-right. But the Islamist violence, while much more minority-based, is more intense.

Anti-immigrant bigots and racists attribute the new Islamist militancy simply to the rise of immigration in Europe and an Islamic culture that is somehow “alien” to Europe. But Islam is no more alien to Europe than algebra or alcohol. For much of the past millennium Islam has been present in Turkey, Spain, Portugal, Italy, the Balkans and even France (due to its colonial history). Political Islamism is a modern phenomenon.

GAINED

Its reactionary ideas have gained ground in Europe because they have gained ground in the Muslim world – where ordinary Muslims are the chief victims, in Pakistan, in Afghanistan, in ISIS-ruled Iraq and Syria – and because the left has not done enough to challenge them and offer an alternative.

As France is a country of five or six million Muslims, more than can be found in Lebanon or Palestine, it is particularly important that the left can engage with the Muslim population, who are particularly hard hit by racism, by unemployment... and by the Islamists’ hostility to democratic and secular-minded Muslims.

The rise of Front National in French politics shows just how difficult it has been for the left to win ground for a militant anti-racism combined with anti-clerical ideas. More and more support has been going to the demagogic forces of the FN racists. The latest attacks in Paris are likely to lead to an

increase in support for the far-right party. In fact, the whole record of the supporters of ISIS and Al-Qaeda shows that they welcome and deliberately seek to incite such a backlash, on the calculation that a polarisation will bring them more support.

The clash of these reactionary forces has consequences not just for France’s Muslims. We have seen in the past year and in the past decade as a whole, an increase in anti-semitism and anti-Jewish attacks in Europe. Just two years ago, a young French-Algerian man killed seven people, including three children, at a Jewish school. Last summer, following the Israel-Gaza war, assaults were unleashed on several synagogues, a kosher supermarket, and a Jewish-owned pharmacy.

As horrific as the attack in Paris was, most murders by Islamists are of ordinary Muslims, in Muslim countries. On 3-7 January perhaps as many 2,000 people were killed in an attack by Boko Haram in Baga, Borno, a north-eastern state of Nigeria. In places like Raqqa and Mosul dozens of people are killed daily for acting contrary to the Islamists’ special version of Islam.

In parts of Pakistan, Yemen, Libya and Afghanistan, car-bombs and suicide attacks are common. For this reason the fight against Islamism is one which has wide reaching consequences well outside of Europe. The European far-right is a threat to Muslims, but the biggest threat to Muslims worldwide, along with repressive governments, is the Islamist clerical-fascist far-right. In Saudi Arabia and Iran repressive government and clerical-fascism combine. The left too often fails to remember that.

Charlie Hebdo is not a socialist publication. But it has always been a left-leaning anti-racist paper that was as firmly opposed to the Front National and anti-immigrant rhetoric growing in France as it was to blasphemy laws and theocracy. In its last issue before the attack, it ran a strip mocking French writer Michel Houellebecq and his alarmism about



Spot the hypocrite

France becoming dominated by Islam.

Try as we might to insist that this attack must not allow us to be afraid, it is simply impossible to see how it won’t. The instinct to self-censor for fear of offending is bad enough, without the threat of death being shown to be so graphically real in the 11th arrondissement. But this is a constant battle that must be fought. Freedom of speech is too often taken for granted, to the point where we forget about how many people have to suffer every day in order to protect this right.

SECULAR

Socialists must not let views on immigration become conflated with the need to discuss what we mean by and how we defend secularism; what we mean by and how to oppose Islamism.

We need to do this because for too long the anti-Muslim far-right set the political agenda on these issues, allowed to do so because the left ignores the issues.

We oppose the far right’s bigoted zeal in opposing “Islam” in Europe, their condemnation of immigration by people who are often migrating to flee Islamist terrorism and their physical threats on immigrant communities.

In contrast we support free immigration; we defend civil liberties; we resolutely oppose clerical fascism; we defend freedom of speech and freedom of association; we oppose racism; we support the right to criticise religion even if it means offending religious sensibilities.

Journalists repressed the world over

Every year Reporters Without Borders produce a **World Press Freedom Index**, looking at how 180 countries rate on press freedom and the degree to which journalists and bloggers are targetted by militias, criminal gangs and the armed far right (both fascists and extreme Islamists). It is a window on how dangerous and unfree the world is.

The 2014 Index highlights the effects of the Syrian crisis. 130 journalists were killed between 2011 and the end of 2013; more since then have been killed, arrested or intimidated by Bashar Al Assad, ISIS and Kurdish PYD militia.

In the last two years there has been an escalation in the US, Europe and elsewhere of “national security” legislation, surveillance and interference in the press. Dozens of journalists have been jailed in Turkey.

Reaction against the possibility of an “Arab spring” continues to influence attitudes to the media in the Arabian peninsula, where there has been a relentless crackdown on internet, blogging and information sharing.

In May 2013 Raif Badawi, a liberal blogger, was sentenced to 10 years in prison and 1,000 lashes in Saudi Arabia. Last week he was received the first 50 of those lashes in a public display. The same government which imprisoned Badawi for speaking his mind also condemned the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* as “cowardly”.



Raif Badawi, Saudi blogger

Non-state groups are the biggest source of physical danger to journalists.

Al Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, M23 (Congo), ISIS all use lethal violence against journalists, targetting them as obstacles to gaining territorial control.

Organised crime kills journalists in Latin America, Pakistan, China and the Balkans.

The best place in the world to be a journalist? Finland and the Netherlands. The worst place? Eritrea and North Korea. And there is every kind of threat and danger everywhere else.

- Sri Lanka: At Tamil-language daily *Uthayan* six employees have been killed in anti-Tamil attacks in recent years.

- Mexico: 88 journalists killed between 2000 and 2013 by criminal organisations.

- Russia: defamation criminalised, websites blacklisted. “Traditional values” are used to justify new restrictions on freedom of information, including the criminalisation of “homosexual propaganda” and “insulting the feelings of believers.”

- Uzbekistan: campaigning journalists and netizens in jail.
- Indian sub-continent: biggest rise in violence, eight killed in India, seven in Pakistan during 2013. Journalists under threat from criminal organisations, security forces, and armed groups.

In Bangladesh bloggers covering the trials of former political leaders accused of war crimes during the 1971 independence war were physically attacked or killed.

• More information: rsf.org

The issues after *Charlie Hebdo*

By Yves Coleman, *Ni patrie ni frontières*

This article will not deal in detail with the facts about the two murderous attacks, on 7 January at the headquarters of the weekly *Charlie Hebdo* and on 9 January in a Parisian kosher supermarket, which have been widely explained in the media; but with some of the problems and discussions inside the radical left and anarchist circles

Most of the left and the anarchist groups, in France, as in other countries, have adopted one of two opposite and wrong attitudes.

One part of the left sees “Islamophobia” everywhere. It has closed its eyes when it has faced antisemitism. That is shown by their reactions to the murder of Jewish school children and others by the Islamist Mohammed Merah in Toulouse in March 2012 [1] — and by their refusal to criticise religion (or, at least, refusal to criticise Islam, because these activists are always denouncing the American Tea Party and its... Protestant supporters; and criticising the Jewish-orthodox colonialist movement in Israel, etc.)

This underestimation of antisemitism in France has been justified in the name of “anti-Zionism”. The refusal to criticise Islam has led some militants to present all religions as inherently progressive, or to defend the myths of Islamic feminism or liberation theology.

A famous anti-racist intellectual (Pierre Tevanian) has written a book denouncing “the hate of religion” supposedly propagated by the left, even falsifying quotations from Marx and Lenin to prove his point.

These groups or activists tend to present “Zionists” as a lobby which controls the French media and supports Sarkozy and Le Pen because “Zionists” are supposedly all anti-Arab and anti-Muslim, etc.

This deep political confusion inside the radical left led a party like the Trotskyist NPA to cooperate with pro-Islamist groups during the last murderous Israeli offensive against Gaza in July 2014, and it has had disastrous consequences.

Most left groups are unable to fight antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism at the same time. They are unable to criticise the conservative social and political role of all religions, including Islam. Therefore they have not been at ease to clearly denounce the Islamist murders in Paris without either overstressing the importance of “Islamophobia” — or overstressing the reactionary character of Islam (as if the three killers had anything in common with the millions of French Muslims [2]).

Thus, some on the French left have dealt with Islam as the workers’ movement dealt with Catholicism or Protestantism a century ago in Europe. They have presented believers as backward, ignorant, and stupid people. They have cited the examples of Islamist rule in Iran or Taliban rule in Afghanistan as the future awaiting us in Europe [3].

This has led some groups or individuals to support the anti-hijab law in France, and to make alliances with so-called secular groups or intellectuals who criticise Islam in the name of atheism or of the Enlightenment tradition but who, at the same time, express very dubious (not to say racist) feelings about Arabs and migrants.

These left groups or activists have rightly supported feminist movements in the Arab-Muslim world and Islamic reformers, but refuse to criticise their very moderate political positions. In France, for example, several Muslim intellectuals who want to reform Islam were (or are) quite silent about Ben Ali’s dictatorship or the corrupt Moroccan monarchy.

What will be the immediate consequences of these attacks?

The first immediate consequence has been a massive brainwashing operation by the government, politicians and mass media in favour of police efficiency, democracy, the virtues of the French Republic, freedom of expression, civilization and national unity.

The Socialist government called all French parties (except the National Front) to demonstrate together to “defend the Republic and democracy and to denounce terrorism” and numerous chiefs of State came on Sunday 11 January... just after a meeting of eleven European ministers of the interior to “fight terrorism”, by which they surely mean more limitations to the freedom of circulation in Europe.

Hundreds of thousands if not millions of marchers applauded the police, shouted “I’m a cop, I’m Charlie, I’m a Muslim”, sang the national anthem, and waved national flags.

President François Hollande and his government were very unpopular before these attacks, and they used these events to regain popularity. Public transport in Paris was free on Sunday 11 January... at least until 1.20pm.

The French Socialists, with the help of the right and far right, will try to impose new anti-terrorist laws.

These murderous attacks will be used by the National Front, who want to stop immigration and strip some recently-naturalised French people of their citizenship. This extremist populist party propagates racist ideas in the name of the “freedom of expression” and “secularism”.

The murders will also be used by intellectuals who claim that “Islam is incompatible with democracy”. Their essays and novels are quite popular for the moment in France, and they appear often on TV.

The murders will also be used by all those who don’t like “Arabs” and disguise their racism under the pretext of a fake defence of the “unique” French form of secularism.

In general these attacks may unfortunately contribute to dividing workers and unemployed in France along religious or “ethnic” lines, and to transforming French society into religious so-called “communities”.

What will be the impact of the governmental campaign for national unity and the media manipulation of fear and anxiety after the attacks?

It’s too early to tell. Nevertheless, if we look at past experience, such campaigns for national unity led by the Socialist Party have had no long-standing effect.

The antiracist campaign “Don’t touch my pal” (which started in 1985); the campaign against the National Front after the profanation of Jewish tombs in Carpentras cemetery (1990); the French victory at the World Cup promoting the “Black / White / Arab” integration model (1998); and the anti Le Pen-campaign before the second round of the presidential election which led most of the Left to vote for... Jacques Chirac in 2002 - none of those mass mobilisations stopped the rise of the National Front.

In interviews outside mosques and schools, some Muslims were reluctant to support the freedom of expression of “*Charlie Hebdo*” even if they were absolutely horrified by the vile murders. “Do you think that having the same skin colour and same name as the killer of the kosher supermarket will help me find a job even if I marched for several days?”, remarked a young Malian Muslim named Coulibaly.

This reluctance, although understandable, is not a good sign. It may be exaggerated by the media and politicians, but it was not denied by Muslim religious leaders.

If this is really a significant trend, it shows the left has so far not been able to make itself heard and understood by part of the Muslim youth, probably because its fight against institutional racism has not been consistent enough and its presence in working-class districts is too weak. It shows also that the necessary critique of all religions and defence of materialist atheism have to be renewed, rejuvenated, and based on a deeper understanding of how religions, and specifically Islam, shape the attitudes and values of their believers.

If not, if we leave the ideological initiative to the ruling classes and their opinion-formers, future struggles will be impeded or at least slowed down by growing ethnic and religious divisions which will prevent common political battles

by all the exploited against the ruling classes.

What have been the main slogans launched by the bourgeois parties, from the Socialist Party to the National Front?

They have obviously promoted “national unity”. They have denounced “terrorism”, which is formally correct — but French elites can’t be trusted when they invite the Israeli foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman or representatives from Qatar to the “Republican march” in Paris, when French businessmen massively sell weapons and military airplanes to all sorts of undemocratic regimes, and when French governments keep permanent troop presences in Africa.

Defending “freedom of expression” is a good slogan, but then it has to be explained (specially for all the millions of people who watch Dieudonné’s racist videos or applaud his shows) why prosecuting this antisemitic stand-up comedian or putting in jail a Holocaust denier like Vincent Raynaud is right.

I don’t defend the fascists’ freedom of expression. Let’s recall that even the US government, which lets fascists and Nazis publish and meet freely on its territory, criticised the French government because *Charlie Hebdo* republished the cartoons depicting Muhammad which brought Danish journalists death threats in 2006.

“Freedom of expression” is not a miracle slogan.

“We are at war” is probably the most dangerous of all the concepts propagated in the public sphere. The word “war” is aimed to produce a total alignment of the population behind the State authorities and the leaders of the armed forces.

“We” certainly do not have the same agenda as the Socialist Prime Minister Manuel Valls, who wishes to “integrate people and transform them in soldiers of the Republic”!

“We” have not forgotten where the wars in Vietnam, Algeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, etc., have led us and who it has benefitted to. “We” know the barbaric acts which have accompanied all these wars and how Western armies killed millions of civilians and were not even able to install or restore bourgeois democracy.

We must fight this ideological offensive, whose main themes are shared by the “reformist” Left, the Conservative Right and the Far Right. Sunday’s demonstrations show that a long and difficult job lies ahead of us.

What is *Charlie Hebdo*?

***Charlie Hebdo* is the heir of a monthly called *Hara-Kiri*, describing itself as “dumb and nasty”, created in 1960.**

At the beginning, it mainly published satirical drawings and (vulgar) photos and photo-montages; but then it published more and more “political” texts expressing various left sensibilities.

It violently denounced the French armed forces, popes, presidents, generals, CEOs etc. It promoted ecology when being green was not trendy at all. It was anti-Stalinist (although some caricaturists also worked for the Stalinist press), very critical of social-democracy, and ferociously hostile to all the right-wing, conservative and fascist parties.

It has survived with difficulty since 1991 — after being shut down for ten years after 1981— even though it tripled its sales when it reproduced the Danish “Muhammad” cartoons in 2006 and when it produced a special anti-sharia issue (in 2011, when Ennahda, the Tunisian Islamist party, was in power, and the adoption of sharia law was being discussed in Libya). After that issue, the magazine headquarters were burnt down. *Charlie Hebdo* had received many death threats before the 7 January killings.

It is absurd to say that *Charlie Hebdo* is a racist newspaper.

However, it has published more caricatures with an “Islamophobic” trend — while at the same time always defending migrant rights and denouncing all the nationalist propaganda of Sarkozy or the National Front. It has also been criticised and sued for being anti-semitic because it published



Aspects of *Charlie Hebdo*: Clockwise from, Marine Le Pen lines up people disappointed with Sarkozy and Holland; the Pope tries to reinvent himself and goes too far (holding up a condom, saying “this is my body”); cartoon by Cabu criticises French military, saying that French independence day (14 July) is “the killers’ holiday”; depicting all religious leaders as wanting to veil *Charlie Hebdo*.

Some people think this Franco-French humour is a colonialist or neo-colonialist humour. In the case of *Charlie Hebdo*, at least, this accusation is false : they have been hostile to all French military interventions since the Algerian war. (One exception was the war in Kosovo, but that created many internal problems.).

What has changed in the situation of Muslims in France?

A process began more or less 30 years ago, between 1982 and 1984, when several minority strikes for dignity, and against sackings, occurred in the automobile sector.

These migrant strikers asked, among other things, for prayer rooms inside their factories and were attacked as “Islamists” by the Socialist government... They were also physically attacked by some of their Franco-French workmates (organised in a scab trade union) who shouted “Arabs in the oven, Blacks in the Seine, we want to work!”

Today French and foreign Muslims living in France are not only car workers, street cleaners, or low-wage workers; they are also doctors, lawyers, teachers, executives, etc. Today a significant fraction (at least 30%, certainly more than a million people) of Muslim migrants (foreigners with a stay permit, recently naturalised French and their children) want to practice their religion in normal conditions like any other believers.

They want their democratic rights to be respected in the public space. Their demands have faced many obstacles. In France it’s difficult for Muslims to find pieces of land to build mosques, or to buy buildings for that purpose. Physical attacks on Muslim women wearing the hijab (or the tiny minority wearing the burqa) and racist slogans painted on mosques and Muslim cemeteries are becoming more common.

Charlie Hebdo and, more broadly, many French left anti-racists have not fully understood the political implications of this new situation. They maintained the same anti-religious and anti-clerical credo which was prevalent in the early 20th

century, inside the workers’ movement but also inside the bourgeois republican parties hostile to the Catholic Church.

They believed that they could (in the name of atheism and of a fully justified critique of all religions) treat believers of a relatively recent religion in France like Islam in the same way as believers of much older religions (Protestant and Catholics) who had painfully learned to stop fighting bloody religious wars and (to some extent) respect the separation between religion and state.

Muslims are more “touchy” than the other believers of other religions because all the media (not only *Charlie Hebdo*!) attack them all the time and because they are physically attacked in the streets and harassed by the cops, which never happens to Catholics or Protestants in France.

In addition, as we know, young people of African or North African origin, practising Muslims or simply “racially profiled” Muslims, are discriminated against at school, on the labour market, in the media and in social life.

It should not surprise us that reactions against institutional

racism take different forms: traditional democratic protests against police violence and harassment; involvement in left and right parties, local associations and trade unions — but also politico-religious forms: sympathy for the religious forces fighting Bashar Al-Assad, sympathy for the prosecuted Egyptian Muslim Brothers, for Hamas or Hezbollah, etc.; religious forms (salafist separatism); and even, for a tiny handful, jihado-terrorist criminal actions.

The situation requires tact, intelligence and sensitivity. The use of gritty, vulgar, provocative, blasphemous humour has had disastrous political effects in the recent years, especially after the “Muhammad cartoons” business in 2006. To the great misfortune of the *Charlie Hebdo* team, their jokes have also been well received by truly “Islamophobic” people (i.e. anti-Muslim racists) and extreme right-wingers.

If we don’t recognise this fact, we can’t understand why Marine Le Pen wanted so much her xenophobic and racist party to be accepted on the 11 January march and why, in many towns outside Paris, the National Front has participated in marches honouring the journalists of *Charlie Hebdo*...

A publication which always denounced them as fascists, and was sued several times by Le Pen and its lieutenants. A magazine which collected 350,000 signatures to ban the National Front!

• Other texts in English related to this article: bit.ly/yc-refs

1. Will the far left learn from the Toulouse murders? (2012) bit.ly/yc-toul.

2. It’s worth noting that several hostages were saved in the kosher supermarket on 9 January by a Malian Muslim worker who hid them, escaped and... was handcuffed for 90 minutes by the cops when he escaped! In 2011, this wise and brave young guy had led a struggle for his right to stay in France with the support of the RESF network.

3. I can’t find a better (worse) example to illustrate this attitude than Mansoor Hekmat’s “Islam and De-Islamisation” (bit.ly/hekmi). This interview contains useful remarks but tends also to present Islam as the main danger in the world today, as a religion worse than all the others. “These people [living in ‘Islamic’ societies] like all others are yearning for freedom, equality and an end to discrimination, (...) the strongest characteristic of these people, despite all the pressures, is their desire for a western type of culture and lifestyle”. As if Western culture could offer “freedom, equality and end of discrimination”!

anti-Zionist caricatures with dubious “jokes” about Jews (for example, one drawing of an orthodox Jew kissing a Nazi soldier).

What’s special — and can be sometimes shocking — about Franco-French humour when it deals with religions and specially ethnic issues?

There is an old tradition of Franco-French humour which uses racist stereotypes (for example a so-called “Arab” or “African” accent; a specific body language ; popular words mainly used by young working-class migrants, etc.) in order to ridicule these stereotypes and fight racism. Unfortunately good anti-racist intentions are not enough and the humour often misses its target.

This humour can be perceived as patronising by non Franco-French and is certainly disconnected from the reality and diversity of origins of France’s population today.

The Franco-French stand-up comedians who use this form of humour pretend they are “only joking” but at the same time they often want to deliver a humanist political message: no to racism. The coexistence of these two explanations is quite confusing for those who are not familiar with Franco-French humour.

Charlie Hebdo’s journalists and caricaturists have always practiced this humour without questioning its ambiguities. They thought they were right because they made fun of every institution and religion, and because they did not want to produce a serious political newspaper. The cartoonist Luz, one of the rare survivors from 7 January, says in a very interesting interview translated into English : “We work on details, specific points in correlation with French humour and our way of analysing things à la française” (bit.ly/luz-iv).

The Greek left outside Syriza

On 25 January Greece elects a new parliament, and the left-wing party Syriza leads in the polls. Theodora Polenta discusses the attitudes of Antarsya, a major left grouping outside Syriza.

Antarsya — the Anti-capitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow — is a coalition of left organisations founded on 22 March 2009. The Greek word Antarsia (pronounced the same as the acronym Antarsya) means “mutiny”.

The currents inside Antarsya range from ex-Communist Party (KKE) and KKE-Interior splinters to Maoists and Trotskyists. Antarsya got 0.36% of the vote in Greece’s 2009 election, and 0.33% in June 2012.

Antarsya has now formed an electoral alliance with Mars (United Radical Left Front, which includes the Plan B group led by Alekos Alavanos, a former KKE and then Syriza leader who split from Syriza because he favours Greek exit from the euro). The alliance will participate in the 25 January election with ballot lists all over Greece and 369 candidates.

Its campaign has three main themes:

1. Euro-exit. “It is clear that today neither the immediate relief of the working class people and popular strata, nor, much more, an opening to another way for society and an alternative model of development towards the socialist direction, can be realised within the monetary straitjacket of the euro and EU guardianship”.

2. To proclaim a revolutionary pole and a workers’ and left opposition whatever government that is formed, Syriza or ND. They say that a government of the Left, with Syriza at its centre, is certain to degenerate into a centre-left social-democratic type of governance within the constraints of austerity capitalism, and that they are not “trapped in the pseudo dilemma about which prime minister will better manage the crisis: Samaras [ND] or Tsipras [Syriza]”.

3. To proclaim a third pole (that of the revolutionary left) against Syriza’s “governmental proposal for the management of capitalism” and KKE’s “deadlock politics”.

The Antarsya/Mars manifesto is almost a photocopy of Antarsya’s electoral manifesto of 2012, but two of the groups in Antarsya, SEK [linked to the SWP in Britain] and OKDE-Spartakos [linked to the NPA in France] opposed an electoral alliance with Mars.

They argue that the cooperation with Plan B means that the election leaflets and posters of Antarsya/Mars “conveniently” omit the task of revolutionary rupture and anti-capitalist struggle and centre only around the opposition to the memoranda [the cuts packages imposed by the EU/ECB/IMF Troika], the debt, the EU, and the eurozone.

As I understand it, the main issue for SEK and OKDE Spartakos was not so much the content and framework of the electoral agreement but mainly the fact that Plan B has high profile members such as Alavanos who can get much more media coverage, thus potentially distorting the Antarsya/Mars message.

The politics of Plan B can be summed up as a “Greek road to socialism”, outside the EU and by way of a new international alliance with capitalist countries such as Russia and China and with the drachma as currency. SEK and Okde-Spartakos see Plan B as a group of the patriotic left confined

to the goal of productive restructuring of the Greek economy, control of the national currency and a Keynesian management in response to the crisis of the system.

Antarsya made calls not only to Mars, but also to the Trotskyist groups OKDE and EEK, and the Maoist KKE (ml) for a broader electoral and political front of “anti-capitalist, anti-EU, anti-imperialist and radical left”. “Rupture and exit from the Eurozone/ EU and other targets of the anti-capitalist program under the weight of the working class/popular strata movement are the starting point and the links making it possible to unleash global confrontation with capital and imperialism”.

OKDE turned down the proposal and is standing independently at these elections. It prioritises “party building” before “front building”. It is uneasy with some of the Antarsya and even more the Mars components and their ideological origins, and their positive reference to KKE, EAM, ELAS and a “left” history antagonistic to OKDE’s Trotskyist references.

Furthermore, OKDE believes that Antarsya’s Mars electoral front shifts towards reformist politics. OKDE codifies their main differences with Antarsya as being about “the slogan of workers’ government, which is key to the program, the policy and practice of OKDE. The slogan for a ‘Europe of Workers’, i.e. a united socialist Europe”.

EEK also refused the proposal from Antarsya and is also standing autonomously at these elections. The rejection of Antarsya’s proposal was based on EEK’s revolutionary internationalism and its stand against “economic nationalism” even with a ‘left sign’.

REFORMIST

EEK believes that the Antarsya/Mars slogan of exit from the Eurozone and EU is devoid from its revolutionary content and converges with versions of “economic nationalism” if not linked with the slogan of the “United Socialist States of Europe”.

“The salvation of the people requires a social revolution. The revolutionary struggle can begin in Greece or in another country but the victory can only be completed within an international scale, by uniting all social subversive struggles for socialist unification of our region and Europe on the ruins of the imperialist EU”.

KKE(ml) criticises Antarsya’s electoral proposal as motivated by “Antarsya’s drive for electoral survival” and describes Antarsya’s proposed program of anti-capitalist transitional demands as utopian and reformist, playing an “auxiliary supplementary role to Syriza”.

In fact euro/drachma is a pseudo-dilemma.

Euro is the currency in which the working class people and popular strata in Greece count their poverty. Euro is the currency in which Greece went bankrupt in 2010.

Drachma is the currency in which Greece went bankrupt in 1893 and 1932. Drachma was the currency when Andreas Papandreu’s government was making “the new layers” of the oligarchy, imposing a freeze on wages and pensions for the majority of the people.

The currency is an important economic-policy tool. But if the problem in Greece — and the world — was monetary, then things would be relatively “easy.” We would find the best currency and “free” capitalism from crisis. But in Greece — and everywhere — the problem is not monetary. It is not even economic. It is deeply political.

Many on the left seem to “forget” that with the drachma, from 1833 to 2000, there was nothing “left” in capitalist



Antarsya members marching in July

Greece. They make the wrong assessment by focusing the issue of the currency as a “link” from which will supposedly follow the whole “chain” of transitional demands for the working class.

The “national” currency in a country made up of “two nations” will never be the currency in the service of the “nation” of the working class as long as the power remains in the hands of the “nation” of capitalists.

The crucial, decisive factor is to work towards the overthrow of the system of exploitation and brutality. Since what we are experiencing in Greece and in the world is a crisis of a systemic character, then the solution can only be through challenging the system. The warning of Trotsky in the 1930s to the Greek communist rebels remains timely: “In the Balkans, you will either be an uncompromising internationalist or you will degenerate to a chauvinist.”

On 25 January, the question for the working class and the wider population is whether the destructive memoranda policies will continue, or we will attempt a first “rupture” with the election of a left government around Syriza.

The victory of the left government on 25 January is neither guaranteed nor given. The enemy has enormous political reserves, hidden in the “deep state”, which may be used to prevent this victory.

A defeat of the left on 25 January, and a consolidation and fortification of memorandum politics, will mean a setback and despair for the movements. Today we have to fight for the victory; tomorrow we need to organise the opposition to Syriza’s climbdowns, as and when it is needed.

The inhabitants of Halkidiki, fighting against the gold diggers of Eldorado Gold; the ERT workers who keep alive the spark of public broadcasting; the BIOME workers, a living example of how workers can run a factory without the boss... the arrival of the left in government will mean an uplift for all the workers’ movements who want to take their lives in their hands.

The ruling class of Greece, and the Troika, will urge the leadership of Syriza to the right; but the movements from below will press Syriza to the left, through the daily demands for wages, work, extension of workers’ and civil rights, respect for the environment, against the selling off of public wealth, etc. And if the revolutionary left can intervene in that struggle in a principled but patient way, from inside the movement, then it can help the workers’ movement go beyond Syriza.

It is the task of the revolutionary left to prepare politically and psychologically the working class movement and popular strata to be able, through their own structures and on the streets, to defend a left government against the Greek oligarchs and the Troika.

As John F Kennedy, not suspected of being a leftist, said: “Whoever makes reform impossible, makes revolution inevitable”!



Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras speaking to ERT workers

Homophobia and Russian nationalism

By Dale Street

Attacks on LGBT people in Russia have increased as much as tenfold since the Russian Duma voted in June of 2013 to outlaw “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations among minors.”

A recent Human Rights Watch report documented physical attacks, abductions, aggressive harassment and verbal abuse of LGBT people and activists in 16 Russian cities. LGBT employees working with children were routinely sacked from their jobs if their sexual orientation became known.

Another report, by a Russian LGBT-rights group, reported 300 homophobic attacks during 2014, a tenfold increase compared with the survey they conducted in 2013.

Most attacks go unreported. Where attacks have been reported to the police, the response varies from indifference to blaming the victim. Only three prosecutions for anti-LGBT hate crimes took place in 2013, resulting in two convictions (and light sentences).

Attacks on individuals have been accompanied by organised attacks on LGBT events, such as QueerFests and Gay Parades, and on the premises of LGBT-rights organisations.

These attacks are the most visible, and most violent, expression of a much broader homophobic campaign which the Russian media and authorities have not only failed to challenge but have positively encouraged.

Reports about LGBT people on the television channel Rossiya 1 increased from 11 in 2011 to over 160 last year, almost all either negative or hostile.

According to the channel’s “reports”: LGBT people are “an aggressive minority” opposed to “parents who give their children a healthy upbringing”; 40% of children brought up by gays have venereal diseases; and Russia is in danger of being engulfed by “a homosexual sodomite tsunami.”

News reports have also linked Islamist terrorism to homosexuality. According to one report about an alleged Islamist bombing in Volgograd:

“In the Wahhabi underground homosexuality is a very widespread phenomenon. Homosexuality literally penetrates the Wahhabi organisations. Their secret hideouts are veritable gay clubs. The autopsy carried out on one of them showed that he was an active (more accurately: passive) supporter of ‘non-traditional relationships’.”

On Twitter the use of the terms “paedo” to describe gays increased from 7,000 a month to over 70,000 a month between 2011 and the end of 2013. Over the same period of time the use of the term “sodomite” to describe gays increased from two or three times a day to over a hundred times a day.

BANS

While mainstream and social media have stepped up their homophobic content, Russian politicians have promoted homophobic legislation.

A bill to outlaw “gay propaganda” was proposed four times in the Duma prior to its eventual adoption in June of 2013. By that time, similar bans had already been imposed by local parliaments in a dozen of Russia’s federal regions.

Different versions of the local bans variously outlawed propaganda about “homosexuality and paedophilia”, “homosexuality, bisexuality and transgendering”, and “homosexuality and bisexuality”.

In St Petersburg the ban on “gay propaganda” was an initiative of Vitaly Milonov, a member of the city council and Putin’s United Russia party. According to Milonov, homosexuality is a sin which is encouraged by the West in order to weaken Russia, and is also a manifestation of the decline and decadence of the West.

Milonov’s views on homosexuality reflect a more fundamental linkage between homophobia and a resurgent Russian nationalism, in which the most far-right and xenophobic versions are also the most homophobic.

Vladimir Tor, a founding member of the National-Democratic Party (party-slogan: “Russia for the Russians!”) has called for “the elimination of all gays”, has equated homosexuality not just with paedophilia but with bestiality, and has likened the impact of gay marriages on Russia to that of an atomic bomb.

The “Night Wolves” (a politicised bikers organisation which backs Putin and others politicians much further to the right) has called for the defence of Russia against Gay Pa-



rades, “so that Russia does not become a sewage drainpipe for all the shit coming to us from the West.”

Sergei Kuryaginyan’s “Essence of Time” movement (which campaigns for the restoration of the USSR) had identified “feminisation” as one of the supposed threats to the very existence of Russia, with homosexuality identified as a form of “feminisation”.

The pro-government organisation “Russian Mothers”, originally launched to campaign against a separate judicial system for juveniles, has evolved into a campaign against supposed homosexual violence against minors (which, it claims, has become a “tradition” in Norway).

The film commissioned by “Strength in Truth” — a pro-government organisation launched to counter foreign criticism of the banning of “gay propaganda” in 2013 — was billed as “a shocking film about the crimes committed against children by homosexuals.”

“Strength in Truth” described itself as “a mass asymmetrical response to the international homosexual hysteria and calls for a boycott of the Olympics in Sochi because of Russia having adopted a law banning the propaganda of homosexuality among minors.”

According to the “Will of God” (a mixture of Russian-Orthodox bigotry and Russian-xenophobia), “homosexuality is a real plague, a real virus, which must be destroyed. It must be stoned to death, as God has said.”

Placards produced by the “Will of God” read: “The More Churches, the Less Sodomites” and “The More Churches, The Less Paedophiles”.

The Union of Russian-Orthodox Standard-Bearers (slogans: “Moscow is not Sodom” and “Russian-Orthodoxy or Death”), along with United Russian-Orthodox Youth, has a record of physical attacks on LGBT events, as well as public book-burnings, marches against science, and pickets of western consulates in Moscow.

According to its leader, Igor Miroshnichenko: “The LGBT movement spells death for all humanity, the end of demographic growth (obviously, a reduction in the number of ordinary people is what those who run the world behind the scenes want), and this, in turn, is a breach of the divine commandment: Go forth and multiply!”

Although the radical-nationalist wing of Russian paganism and neo-paganism is anti-Christian — a “Jewish religion” which is automatically unacceptable to their anti-semitism — they share the hostility of Russian Orthodoxy to homosexuality.

According to one of their websites (“Midgard-Info”): “Sexual minorities are a breeding ground for paedophiles who commit acts of violence against children, and for sadists and other maniacs who rape and kill their victims. ... All unnatural phenomena (drug-addiction, homosexuality, etc.) are to be condemned in the ruthless manner.”

For the pagans and neo-pagans gay sex fails to fulfil the basic purpose of sexual activity: “Every Russian woman — from the Tsarina to the peasant — should have an average of

seven children. Let this be an example to our contemporary ‘Russian’ feminists.”

(Inverted commas in the original. To be a feminist, in the eyes of pagans and neo-pagans, is simply not Russian.)

In part, the homophobia of most currents of Russian nationalism is a by-product of their shared admiration of Stalin’s Soviet Union: admired both as a world power with Russia at its centre, and also as an authoritarian state which clamped down on homosexuality, with a causal connection drawn between the two.

Homosexuality was outlawed by Stalin in 1933. According to Yagoda, then head of the secret police, homosexuals had organised spy networks and “paedophiles were involved in seducing and perverting healthy Soviet youth.”

In an article published in *Pravda* the writer Maxim Gorky wrote that proletarian humanism demanded the destruction of “homosexuality” as it was, he claimed, a cause of fascism.

(During and after Stalin’s rule, the term “homosexuality”, not “homosexuality”, was used. Contemporary Russian nationalism uses the same expression, reflecting their “understanding” of homosexuality as a pathological condition.

Until the formal de-pathologisation of homosexuality in 1999, Stalinist and post-Stalinist medical dictionaries included “homosexuality” in a list of “sexual perversions”, defined as “illnesses which conflict with sexual orientation or the conditions of its satisfaction.”)

NATIONALISM

More fundamentally, homosexuality is seen by Russian nationalism as being at odds with its basic goals:

It contributes nothing to the reproduction of the population, needed to save the Russian people from extinction and to protect its borders. This view of homosexuality as an existential threat explains the constant amalgam of homosexuality and paedophilia, given that children represent “the future”.

Homosexuality is also understood as something intrinsically anti-Russian and non-Russian:

Gay rights are a European phenomenon, and Europe, in its current form, is hostile to Russia (even before the imposition of sanctions). And the incorporation of a homophobic Russian-Orthodoxy into Russian identity results in a counterposing of the “true” Russian identity to homosexuality.

Like any other national identity, there is nothing intrinsically anti-LGBT about being Russian. What is involved here is an attempt by far-right and even some mainstream versions of Russian nationalism to construct a Russian identity in which homophobia is a constituent element.

Denunciations of gay rights as a western plot to undermine Russia are no reason for socialists and LGBT activists in the west to hold back from campaigning in solidarity with LGBT activists in Russia.

In fact, the level of hostility and violence which they face on a daily basis makes such solidarity all the more important.

BENEFIT NIGHT FOR RAINBOW INTERNATIONAL LGBT ACTIVIST SOLIDARITY FUND

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The Rainbow International Fund organises political solidarity and practical support for LGBT struggles across the world.

Tax the rich to save the Health Service!

By Sacha Ismail

Spurred by waiting times in Accident & Emergency departments which are the worst since records began in 2004, the Tories have promised an extra £2 billion a year above inflation for the health service.

Labour says it will go £2.5 billion a year above that (funded by a mansion tax, a levy on tobacco companies and closing tax loopholes). Both are completely inadequate

NHS boss Simon Stevens says that the NHS will need at least £8 billion a year above inflation even with dramatic “efficiency savings” – by which he means at-

tacks on NHS workers.

“Efficiency” could have a different meaning however: clearing out the tangle of market-driven bureaucracy which sprouted under New Labour and burgeoned under the Coalition’s Health and Social Care Act.

We need to challenge our trade union leaders’ reliance on the Labour leaders to save the NHS. The labour movement must demand a thoroughgoing reversal of marketisation and privatisation, and adequate funding to rebuild the NHS as a comprehensive public service. The money is there, in the hands of the rich.

Tax the rich – equalise the wealth – save the NHS!

• labournhslobby.wordpress.com

Hinchingbrooke privatisation ends in fiasco

Three years ago Hinchingbrooke hospital, in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, became the first NHS hospital to be handed over to private management.

On 8-9 January 2015 it became the first NHS hospital to be put into “special measures” by the Care Quality Commission, on grounds of being “inadequate” for patient safety; and the private contractor, Circle, walked away from its contract, accepting a heavy loss.

No other hospital should be contracted out in the same way. The process of contracting out Hinchingbrooke began under the last Labour government, although it was completed under the Cameron regime.

Protests at Hartlepool hospital closure - bit.ly/har-hos

A&E crisis leads bosses to attack ambulance union agreements - bit.ly/ambuhours



Win on pay will help our fight to restore the NHS

By an NHS union rep

It's not easy for NHS workers to go on strike. The union leaders and many of the members are fearful of negative publicity and harm to our patients.

The unions spend so much time portraying themselves as an insurance service, and are so poorly organised, that many members hardly understand that there should be reps, let alone who they are. So why would they give up their salaries for a third day of industrial action, just to try to get a one per cent pay rise?

Yet the NHS pay dispute is escalating. It started timidly

with two days of four-hour strikes. But now there will be a 12 hour strike on 29 January, followed by a 24 hour strike on 25 February involving most of the unions in the NHS.

There were problems with the two four hour strikes, in some areas unions scuppered their own action by granting lavish “exemptions”, encouraging many members to go to work.

But outside the hospitals there have been union flags of different colours combining with local NHS community campaign banners, and constant beeping from local traffic to signal support for the NHS and its workers. Often the picket lines have been mini demonstrations. On some level the strike has had an effect.

The next strike action is for 12 hours, so those on the picket lines won't have to dismantle their rallies and run back to their clock-watching manager in the middle of the morning. This time we'll have the whole day to plan the rallies and marches.

But a strike is supposed to be the withdrawal of labour. Unions should aim for solid strike action in all areas where they have members. If they find that would make crucial clinical areas unsafe, then local discussions and decisions on how to ensure patient safety should be organised locally, preferably by the workers in the clinical area who understand the service.

Workers run the NHS every day. By and large managers have little idea about the practicalities. On strike days, wherever possible, workers should be in charge of deciding what if any service needs to be provided.

Members need workplace meetings not just to elect reps, but to guide the reps. Every rep should take advantage of the ongoing dispute to organise meetings, to discuss how the day should happen, and feed this back into the union. In the areas where there is no rep, the branch should encourage someone to take charge at least for the strike days. After the strikes an increasingly organised union can be in better shape to continue to take on issues as they arise locally and nationally.

The fight for the NHS is mostly being done by community campaigns. But there is an army of workers who are experts in knowing what is needed for our patients. Workers in the NHS hold the keys to its survival.

We need to use the current dispute not just to defend our terms and conditions – starting with the measly one per cent – but most crucially to advertise, recruit to and organise our unions. Once organised the unions will be fit to take on the life-saving task of fighting to save our NHS!

If you work in the NHS, get involved in the union, and be part of this fight. If you do not, then support us please. We will not achieve the level of organisation we need by 29 January, but help us have vibrant day long demonstrations to support the NHS outside every hospital!

Behind A&E queues: a joined-up crisis

By a doctor

Northumbria Healthcare Trust recently asked patients to attend the Accident and Emergency only for serious health emergencies and life threatening illness.

Across England, at least eight hospitals have declared “major incidents” to block the influx of patients to A&E departments. “Major incident” declarations are usually reserved for natural disasters or major accidents.

Accident and Emergency admissions were up by approximately 5% over the holiday period. But that is roughly comparable to previous years. Attendances are actually down compared to July and August this year. Even hospital admissions are down compared to the summer months.

There are fewer patients turning up at A&E, and fewer needing to be admitted, than in July. Why is there a crisis? If the statistics show that the pressure on Accident and Emergencies has not been building through the front door, then we must look elsewhere for the cause.

There are thousands of people (usually elderly) who have recovered from the ailment that brought them to hospital

but are not yet ready to return home. That is the direct cause of what we now see front-of-house in our A&E departments.

This is a problem which has been growing every year. There were 30,000 more delayed discharges last winter than the year before. The problem now appears even worse. Some hospitals even talk about using the law to evict patients.

The number of over-65s getting publicly-funded social care has fallen 30% since 2009. Despite what most accident and emergency staff might feel on a busy night shift, drunks and time wasters have not caused the crisis. The systematic destruction of the welfare state has.

Solutions are not going to be simple. Systemic problems require a systemic solution. More beds, more staff and better funding of our NHS will help lessen the burden, and might stop a crisis becoming a catastrophe.

A long term solution requires us to throw out the misguided and dangerous austerity drive, remove the damaging healthcare market that this government has created, and provide a proper funding system for hospitals, general practice and social services.

Buses strike to level up pay

By Gemma Short

As *Solidarity* went to press on 13 January, bus drivers across London were staging a 24 hour strike in a bid to level up pay across the capital.

London's bus network is outsourced to 18 different companies. Each one of these companies has their own pay scales and the union Unite must separately negotiate pay with all 18 companies. As a result pay differs by up to £3 an hour across the capital for drivers doing the same work. Unite is calling for a London wide pay scale.

Solidarity visited picket lines on Tuesday 13 January. Each one had upwards of 20 pickets in a lively mood. In many depots no or very few buses were being moved.

Strikers at Holloway told *Solidarity* that fewer than 15 of their 200 services were

being moved. Management driving a small number of rush hour services or to ferry them to scab drivers waiting down the road.

Unite has not yet called further strikes. Workers on picket lines felt sure that more strikes would be necessary to beat Transport for London and the bus companies, and that Unite would call them.

Last year the capital's bus operators made a combined profit of £171.1 million, with directors' pay totalling at least £7.24 million a year. On Monday 13 January a survey of over 1,600 members of the public showed that over two thirds supported the campaign to end pay disparity.

Creative industrial strategy, combined with a public political campaign against private profiteering and for a publicly run transport service, can win.



Pickets at the Metrolink Holloway bus depot

Essex firefighters' strike on cuts

By Darren Bedford

Firefighters in Essex are preparing for strikes on 14-16 January in a dispute over frontline cuts and staffing conditions.

Essex fire and rescue service want to cut 179 firefighters and control staff — a 25% reduction in full time uniformed firefighters. Almost one hundred firefighter jobs have already been cut in Essex since 2010.

The strike includes nine-hour strikes from 09:00 to 18:00 on all three days as well as one hour strikes



from 06:30 to 07:30 on the Thursday and Friday. After the strikes, industrial action short of a strike kicks in.

The FBU's pension cam-

paigned reached a turning point in December. The union had campaigned to get a motion to revoke the firefighters' pension

regulations. It won support from the Labour leadership and ended up with 280 MPs opposing the regulations — the highest EDM this parlia-

ment. However the government whipped its supporters into line and most Liberal Democrats voted to impose the regulations. The vote was lost 313 to 252, so the regulations became law.

The union is now pursuing the promises made by the fire minister that no firefighter will be sacked on fitness grounds as part of the new pension scheme.

Although the political and legal fronts of the campaign are continuing, no new pension strikes have been called.

Sign or be sacked says Barbour

By Gerry Bates

Workers at clothing company Barbour are on strike for four weeks over a "sign or be sacked" ultimatum on new terms and conditions.

Workers struck for six days in December before starting the month long strike on January 5. The strike will be from 07:00 until 13:00 every day.

The Gateshead-based clothing company wants to impose new working conditions that remove unsocial hours payments and

would see workers working until 23:00.

Union Unite says that workers are facing a "sign or be sacked" ultimatum, and management are bullying workers into taking the new terms and conditions.

On Friday 9 January workers marched to the company headquarters where they handed in a letter for Dame Barbour, company chairman, asking for her to intervene.

As *Solidarity* went to press Unite was still in discussions at ACAS with Barbour, which started on Monday 12 January.

College cuts mean job losses

By Charlotte Zalens

UCU members at Sheffield college have voted for strikes in a dispute over job cuts.

86% voted for strikes after management announced that 75 jobs are at risk, and that it is looking to cut back on staff costs by a further £3.7 million to build up reserves. The UCU union is concerned this may mean sacking some and downgrading pay and conditions for others.

As well as striking, UCU members will be boycotting

systems being used by the college to target staff for redundancy.

UCU members at Lambeth college continue to fight contract changes.

Workers struck for two days in the week 5-9 January and three days in the week 12-16 January in the lead up to an indefinite strike due to start on Monday 19 January.

- Sign the petition against job cuts at Sheffield College — bit.ly/1CdIo5c
- Messages of solidarity for Lambeth to mandybrowncow@yahoo.com

Haringey council cuts

By Micheál McEoin

Over 60 trade unionists, community campaigners and local residents met in Wood Green on 12 January to oppose Haringey Council's £70m cuts proposals.

Called by Haringey Union, with Haringey Alliance for Public Services (HAPS), the meeting resolved to continue as a united effort bringing together campaign groups and local unions.

Consistent with the Ed Balls' insistence that austerity will continue under a Labour government, the Blairite leadership of Haringey Council is insisting on voting through a three-year budget, locking in cuts until well after the General Election. This £70m follows more than £100m of cumulative cuts over the previous three years.

633 directly employed workers could lose their jobs — 22.8 % of the workforce — not including those in Homes for Haringey, or in partner providers who receive reduced funding.

Proposals also include the closure of children's centres, three of the four day centres for adults with autism and learning disabilities, a day centre for

elderly people with dementia, and Pendarren House outdoor education centre, a retreat centre providing an opportunity for young people from Haringey to leave London to visit the Welsh countryside.

A 100% cut in Youth Services is disguised by merging the budget with the Youth Offending budget — though these have been two separate budgets. The youth service budget this year is £2.1m and the proposed cut is £2.1m.

A lobby of the council cabinet meeting has been called for 10 February at 17:30 outside the Civic Centre in Wood Green. On 23 February, a demonstration will assemble at 17:30 at Ducketts Common near Turnpike Lane tube station, and march to the Civic Centre for a 18:30 rally.

Local government unions should prepare their members for strike action. Unions affiliated to the Labour Party should pass motions through the local Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) calling on Labour councillors not to pass on cuts, and should hold local councillors to account through Labour's ward branches.

Sacked rep reinstated!

By Tubeworker

RMT has won its campaign to secure the reinstatement of London Underground Customer Service Assistant Vicky Hayward.

A disciplinary panel sacked Vicky last September for allegedly dishonestly reporting an accident at work, but it relied on "evidence" consisting of what managers said they had seen on CCTV footage which was not available for Vicky or her reps to scrutinise.

Tubeworker commented, "It's nice to see senior management see sense. But for-

give us if we think that the persistent, active, rank-and-file-driven RMT campaign also had something to do with it.

"The key features of this campaign were: early on, recognising the broader principle involved and raising it at the highest level of the union; pushing and arguing the case in detail at every level, both in the disciplinary process and legally; publicising and explaining the case to Underground workers, through leaflets and visiting workplaces; and preparing for industrial action should that have been necessary."

Where next for Unison democracy and local government pay?

Fringe meeting at Unison Special Conference called by Lambeth local government Unison
Monday 23 March, 6pm

Archaeology G6, UCL, Gower St, London WC1E 6BT



Tories plan new law to cripple strikes

Britain already has “the most restrictive trade union laws anywhere in the western world”, as Tony Blair complacently told the *Daily Mail* in 1997.

If the Tories win in May 2015 the laws will become not just “most restrictive” but crippling, or least crippling for national strikes. The Tories will ban public service strikes unless at least 40% of the workforce vote for the strike in a ballot.

Only 23.5% of the electorate voted Tory in 2010, but they think that’s enough to decide the government!

Wherever a union has less than 40% density, it will become impossible for it to call a lawful strike even if every single union member votes for the strike.

Ballot votes for strikes should follow the same rule as other votes: those who don’t take part aren’t counted. Also, there is hard evidence that postal-ballot votes understate support for strikes.

Strike turnouts in the public services are better than ballot turnouts: that is, workers are willing to lose pay to join strikes which they don’t even vote for. Why? They lack confidence,



Banned from striking?

and, tacitly or deliberately, prefer to see whether more confident workmates return a majority for the strike, in which case they’ll join it.

The Tories would count all those workers as anti-strike, even if they’d be willing to lose pay for a strike.

Workplace votes, rather than ballot papers sent to home addresses, would get a better turnout in strike votes. But laws made by the

Tories in the 1980s already ban that.

The Tories will also, if elected in May 2015, allow bosses to use agency workers to break strikes, repealing laws which ban that strike-breaking.

The Tories have already said that they will ban all strikes where fewer than 50% of union members have voted. They also suggest, now, that they may legislate

to compel workers to provide “minimum service levels” even during a lawful strike.

Solidarity supporters will campaign for a Labour victory in May 2015 — and also for the unions to force Labour to repeal the Thatcher anti-union laws of the 1980s, shamefully left in place for 13 years by Blair and Brown.

Vote Patrick Murphy in NUT election

According to an National Union of Teachers (NUT) survey, 30% of teachers have been denied pay progression this year under new performance related pay rules brought in from September 2013.

The survey also found that denial of pay progression was higher in primary schools than in secondary schools, and was higher for black and minority ethnic teachers. 90% of those denied progression reported that there was no indication in the year that this was a possibility.

More than three quarters said they were not planning on appealing the decision, despite NUT advice to do so. Appealing pay decisions is an individual and isolating process, and requires the teacher to stand up to management alone. The NUT has so far failed to organise an effective industrial dispute on pay, and delayed fighting the proposals until after schools had to put them in place in September 2013.

Teachers, or indeed groups of teachers in schools, should not be left

isolated to fight denial of pay progression. An offensive to reinstate national pay is needed.

The NUT should go beyond that to make a pay claim for a £2000 increase for all teachers to recoup losses through pay freezes and inflation. Every year the union should negotiate a pay increase, at least in line with inflation, with the government.

Workers’ Liberty member Patrick Murphy is standing in the Deputy General Secretary election on the basis of these policies. As a support of the Local Associations National Action Campaign, he has argued for a strike strategy for the union which didn’t delay and leave gaps between strikes, which names dates in advance, and which involves members in deciding the future of the dispute.

Vote in the election closes on January 26, at 12 noon.

• More: electpatmurphy.blogspot.co.uk/

Free Shahrokh Zamani and Reza Shahabi!

On Saturday 10 January over 40 people came to hear poets speak out for Shahrokh and Reza and a fundraising gig.

The gig raised £200 for legal defence funds for jailed Iranian trade unionists as well as attendees taking away petitions to gather signatures. Morad Shirin of the Iranian Workers Solidarity Network spoke about the situation for Shahrokh and Reza as well as for the Iranian working class generally, and poet Janine Booth performed a sonnet for Shahrokh and Reza.

In other campaigning, bus workers on strike on 13 Jan-

uary signed petitions on picket lines, and put petitions in their union office for other workers to sign.

On Friday 16 January (5pm) we will be holding a protest outside the International Labour Organisation (ILO) office, Milbank Tower, London SW1P 4QP. The ILO gives cover to Iran’s crimes against workers by allowing Iran to be a signatory to several of its conventions and inviting delegations from Iran’s state “unions” to come to its conferences.

On 11 February we will be protesting outside the Iranian Embassy and handing in petitions.

All the rage!

Socialist feminist conference organised by women in Workers’ Liberty

Saturday 28 February

Cruciform, UCL, Gower St, London WC1E 6BT

11:30 - 17:30

£4/6/10 - Free creche

Women workers fight back! • Feminism and queer politics in India • What sort of feminists are we? • Fighting sexism at work and more.



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