



For a
workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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Confiscate the banks!



**Democratic control
over high finance**

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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



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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

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The £120 billion gap

By Rhodri Evans

If you fail to declare something relevant to a benefits claim, you will be penalised by being cut off benefits.

You may be fined or jailed. 250 people were jailed for benefit fraud in the last year for which we have detailed figures, 2012.

Hundreds of thousands have to appeal to food banks after having benefits cut off, often because of no misdeed at all.

The government estimates benefit fraud at £2 billion a year — and benefits unclaimed by people who find the system too hard to negotiate at £12 billion a year.

The government's official tax collectors, HMRC, say: "The tax gap for 2011-12 is estimated at £35 billion a

year — this is the difference between the amount of tax that should in theory be collected, against what is actually collected. Tax evasion and the hidden economy make up around £10.5 billion". The HMRC workers' union PCS estimates tax evasion much higher, at £80 billion a year, and the tax gap at £120 billion.

Evade your tax, and what happens? If you're unlucky, you may eventually have to pay it. But HMRC says claims only 540 people were convicted of tax evasion in 2012-13 — many fewer than the 6,000 who were sentenced for benefit fraud.

The *Guardian* reports that in the HSBC case: "The UK has recovered just £135m from a list of 6,000 clients in a series of secret deals that kept names out of the public domain. Many evaders were

offered light penalties of only 10% of tax due, plus immunity from prosecution... Only one individual has faced prosecution".

Behind outrightly illegal tax evasion stands a greater bulk of tax avoidance — bending, rather than breaking, tax rules.

Over a third of all world trade is within TNCs. That gives them enormous scope to manage their affairs so that their profits appear, and are taxed, in the lowest-tax parts of the world.

Starbucks, Google, and Amazon all use this scope so as to pay very little tax in the UK.

Law professor Sol Picciotto argues that each transnational corporation should have to draw up a single worldwide set of accounts for its whole business.

Tax on the TNC in each country would be based on its worldwide accounts and the percentage of its operations attributed to the country. (bit.ly/picciotto)

Bill Black is a US law professor who worked as a regulator during the USA's Savings and Loans crisis of the late 1980s and 1990s — the biggest mortgage-finance scandal and crash before the "subprime crisis" of 2006-8 which triggered the global financial crash of 2008.

He sums up the current scandal thus: "Taxes were once termed the price we paid for civilisation, but they now represent the price the wealthy brag to each other about refusing to pay as they pillage civilisation". (bit.ly/b-black)

Liam Byrne "would love free education"

By Beth Redmond

In an apparent bid to stop any more students pledging to vote for the Green Party, Labour's shadow minister for higher education, Liam Byrne, is touring the ten campuses where students have the ability to swing the vote.

I interrogated Byrne at the Kings College London leg of his tour, about tuition fees, living grants and how rubbish his proposal of a graduate tax is. We filmed him contradicting his usual line; he told us that he was in favour of free education in principle, but he wasn't going to make promises he couldn't keep.

Whilst we should not trust anything this man says, the fact that he so openly told us what we wanted to hear shows that pressure from the student movement is working.

We have managed to

change NUS's line on free education, but in order to keep persuading others we need to carry on mobilising on campuses.

On March 28, the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts are organising the next national student demonstration in Liam Byrne's constituency in Birmingham.

We don't think a graduate tax is good enough, nor do we think a reduction to £6k fees will make a difference.

For model motions to pass support for the demonstration, including booking coaches, see [here bit.ly/1L6P9sG](http://bit.ly/1L6P9sG).



Queensland shock

By Bob Carnegie

On 31 January the state of Queensland underwent another seismic political change.

A first-term conservative government which held a record 66 seat majority in an 89 seat parliament was defeated by a not very confident Labor Party whose central program was opposing the sale of state-owned assets.

It was a momentous defeat for the conservative parties, and has had a direct impact on the damaged authority of the conservative leadership at federal level.

Front and centre in the defeat of the conservatives in Queensland was the "Our Assets, Not for Sale" campaign by the Electrical Trades Union (ETU), a union of some 16,000 members; since 2002 it has revitalised itself and has grown some 250% in those 13 years.

What set the "Not for Sale" campaign apart from most union and or political campaigns waged over the last 30 years was that it genuinely engaged the rank and file. Right across Queensland, you would see "Assets Not for Sale" signs in the most remote of spots.

The various state-owned corporations that generate and distribute electricity

employ ETU members. These jobs are well-paid and stable, and workers tended to make careers of them. The conservatives' plan to privatise those state-owned assets would have cut a swathe through those workers, severely disrupting their lives, families, and communities they live in.

The ETU's campaign kept plugging away week in and week out. It developed a powerful presence and became the single most visible anti-privatisation campaign in the state.

The ETU's state secretary, Peter Simpson, was extremely visible and out front and centre fighting for not just his union's membership but for working people and their families at every possible opportunity. No rally was too big or too small for Simpson or any other leader of the ETU to speak at.

The effectiveness of the ETU's campaign meant that, for all intents and purposes, the Queensland election became a referendum on whether state-owned assets should be sold to retire debt or kept in the hands of the state.

The people of Queensland chose the latter — thanks mainly to a five-year campaign by the ETU.

Ukraine peace deal fails

By Dale Street

As we go to press on 17 February, fighting continues in the south-east of Ukraine despite the “peace deal” agreed in Minsk on 12 February.

The “peace deal” had been negotiated by the German, French, Russian and Ukrainian heads of state. Representatives of the so-called Donetsk and Lugansk “People’s Republics” (DPR and LPR) had also been present in Minsk, but not directly involved in the negotiations.

A ceasefire was due to come into effect at midnight on Saturday 14th. On day two of the ceasefire both sides were to begin the withdrawal of heavy weapons, creating a 50 kilometres buffer zone within a fortnight of the ceasefire.

The OSCE was to monitor implementation of the ceasefire.

At the same time talks were to commence between the Kiev government and the leaders of the DPR and LPR about staging local elections on Russian-separatist-controlled territory.

Other elements of the “peace deal” include: no prosecutions as a result of the conflict; all prisoners to be released; humanitarian aid to be delivered without obstruction; and Kiev to end its blockade of the DPR/LPR, resume welfare and pensions payments, and restore banking services.

Following the local elections, control over the Ukrainian-Russian border is to return to the Kiev government. All foreign armed groups and mercenaries and foreign military equipment are to withdraw from

Ukraine. And Ukraine is to reform its constitution to allow for decentralisation.

Much of this is simply a repeat of the “peace deal” agreed to in September of last year.

But the September “peace deal” never became a reality. Although the new version is emphatically backed by the EU and the US, there is little reason to believe it will not suffer the same fate.

The new ceasefire was to come into effect three days after the conclusion of the negotiations. That three-day delay allowed the Russian-separatist forces more time to step up their offensive aimed at seizing the town of Debaltsevo (site of a crucial railway hub).

The Russian-separatist forces also continued their offensive after the “cease-fire”. They argue that the ceasefire only applies to the

frontline, whereas Debaltsevo (still under Ukrainian control) is on the territory of the DPR.

So, the fighting has continued — around Debaltsevo, near Mariupol on the Ukrainian coast, and also in the occasional shelling of Donetsk.

Neither side has yet begun to withdraw heavy weapons. And although heavy weapons are to be withdrawn, ground forces remain in place. This allows the Russian-separatists to keep control of the 500 square kilometres they have seized since the first ceasefire.

OSCE observers have been unable to monitor implementation of the ceasefire. There isn’t one, the Russian-separatist military have refused them access to Debaltsevo and the 350 OSCE observers are too few

to effectively monitor any eventual ceasefire.

Ending Kiev’s blockade of the DPR and LPR makes sense as a step towards reintegration of the “People’s Republics” into Ukraine. But, in reality, it will mean Kiev providing an ongoing financial subsidy while the DPR and LPR leaders press ahead with preventing reintegration.

Other elements of the new deal, such as local elections in the DPR and LPR and the withdrawal of foreign fighters and military equipment, are meant to come into effect in the longer term.

But the leaders of the DPR and LPR showed no interest in implementing such measures when they were agreed to in September. They staged their own sham “elections”, and boasted of the foreign fighters in their ranks.

There any reason to suppose that Russia will not continue to supply the DPR and LPR with state-of-the-art military equipment. The very day the “peace deal” was signed Russia was sending more military hardware across the border, to help the attack on Debaltsevo.

Ukrainian control of its south-eastern border with Russia is scheduled to be restored in late 2015. But the DPR and LPR leaders will have consolidated their control well before then. The last thing they would then do is hand back to Ukraine control of their lifeline to Russia.

The evidence of the first few days is that this deal will prove no more viable than its predecessor.

Support LGBT refugees in Kenya!

Q News
By Paul Penny



32 Ugandan gay men, refugees in Kenya, were arrested in Nairobi on 8 February, were held in a cell at Kabiria Satellite Police Station until being eventually released at 7pm on Monday 10 February, after negotiations with lawyers working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The men were arrested at a gathering they had organised to send-off one of their friends scheduled for resettlement to a safe country, free from anti-gay persecution. Neighbours of the residence where the party took place had called the police, asking them to investigate the “suspicious” gathering of “non-citizens”.

In 2014, following the passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2014 (later annulled on a technicality) many LGBT Ugandans fled to Kenya to escape violence, ill-treatment, and persecution. However, many continue to face as much hostility in Kenya, and although prosecutions are rare in Kenya, severe dis-

crimination and anti-LGBT violence is commonplace.

Kenya is one of 35 countries across Africa that criminalises consensual same-sex conduct, and where LGBT people face relentless persecution. In 2014, a bill was tabled by the Republican Liberty Party in the Kenyan parliament proposing that homosexual acts be punished by life imprisonment for Kenyan nationals and public stoning to death for foreigners.

Typically with little money, Ugandan LGBT refugees register with the UNHCR to wait in Kakuma refugee camp for refugee status and resettlement in a new country. But rather than being safe in Kakuma camp, many have been attacked by other refugees because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. When the other refugees in the camp discover they are Ugandan they know they must be there because they are LGBT.

In June, a Ugandan refugee was hospitalized

after another refugee hurled stones and insults at him. One gay man who was attacked was told, “You gays are not supposed to be with us. We don’t want you here with us”. When he reported the attack to the police, they ignored his complaint and instead extorted money from him with threats to deport him back to Uganda if he did not pay them the money.

The hostility and homophobia in Kakuma camp has forced many LGBT refugees to leave for their own safety. Many are registered for resettlement and desperately struggling to subsist in Nairobi, many living in the Kawangware slum district.

Even in the slums, police continue to target their homes and threaten them with arbitrary arrest to extort money because they are gay. Few employers in Nairobi are willing to hire a refugee. Many have turned to prostitution to survive and share accommodation, keeping a special fund for buy off police if they are arrested.

Recognising the risks for LGBT refugees, the UNHCR said it is prioritizing their cases for resettlement to safe countries.



300 migrants drown in Mediterranean

By Beth Redmond

Over 300 migrants, thought to be from sub-Saharan Africa, drowned earlier this month, in an effort to reach Europe.

It is thought that three inflatable boats each carrying around 100 people, on waters with temperatures barely above zero with waves as high as eight metres, capsized between North Africa and Sicily.

The news came shortly after 29 migrants froze to death trying to make the same journey. There have

been many similar stories over the past months. Last year 3419 migrants lost their lives in this way.

At the end of last year, the Italian government gave in to anti-migrant pressure and ended Mare Nostrum — an extensive rescue scheme, which right-wingers claimed was the reason for the influx of migrants.

It was replaced with Triton, which uses a fraction of the money, resources and patrols a much smaller area than Mare Nostrum. This means ships are left to become wrecks and migrants

are left to drown.

The EU’s foreign affairs chief, Federica Mogherini, has said that Triton isn’t up to the task and is calling for an emergency meeting on migrant deaths.

It is shameful that it takes so many deaths for others to realise how dangerous anti-migrant rhetoric is. The migrants fleeing war and political repression could not get any more desperate, they are literally risking death to leave their homes and make a better life for themselves.

Mare Nostrum was never the problem.

Ditch the pink van, and get some policies!

The Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory



By Kate Harris

Is it magenta? Is it cerise? Is it a “one nation colour”? Does anyone care?

Regardless of how you spin it, the person or people who thought up using a Barbie-pink transit van to try to persuade women to vote Labour is probably kicking themselves — or being kicked by a senior Public Relations person.

The right-wing press has been having a field day about the “patronising” pink minibus, its “Woman to Woman” slogan and its proponents, Harriet Harman, Gloria de Piero and

Lucy Powell. (Deputy Leader, Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities and Vice Chair of the General Election Campaign respectively.)

There are two things going on here, really. If you talk about “women’s issues”, you actually have to talk about the issues that stop us from being equal to men: which include our disproportional childcare burden; the fact that in straight couples, we do much more domestic labour than men; how our work is underpaid, part time and precarious; and the violence we suffer at the hands of men, among other issues.

Harman, de Piero and Powell are hinting at some of those things when they talk about bringing politics to “around the kitchen table”. Unfortunately phrased, but I don’t think it’s meant in a patronising way. But they don’t talk about these oppressions explicitly enough, or offer the radical policies needed to deal with them. Despite various reforms, and despite often having more and better qualifications (beating men at GCSE and A-levels and completing more undergraduate degrees) we still earn way less for doing the same work, and way, way less



for “different” work!

We could start with some pretty basic reformist demands, like a year’s maternity or paternity leave on full pay. We could ban zero hour contracts and make bosses raise wages. We could reverse the cuts and put a stop to austerity.

When the Labour leadership start to promise the above, I’ll start to take their concern for our conditions a bit more seriously.

The Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory combines campaigning to elect a Labour government in 2015 with seeking to put pressure on Labour for clear working-class demands, working to strengthen and transform our labour movement, and arguing for socialism.

socialistcampaignforlabourvictory.wordpress.com

A look at RS21 and ISN

The Left By Sacha Ismail



Two organisations emerged as splits from the Socialist Workers’ Party during its crisis over the Martin Smith sexual assault dispute: the International Socialist Network and Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (RS21).

Neither organisation seems to have engaged, as an organisation, in serious discussion about the theory and politics of the SWP, or the political basis for building something better.

Both have attracted, relative to their size, a fairly significant number of new members who were not in the SWP. Whereas RS21 seems to have integrated them through more consistent activity based on maintaining a modified SWPish line, the ISN as an organisation has failed to develop any solid political positions. The result is repeated splits and withdrawals over odd political issues, and organisational paralysis.

On the other hand, the sheer diversity of political positions in ISN has, as it turns out, made it a home for some comrades who seem to be trying to think critically about the world and appear open to serious discussion.

This is in contrast to ex-SWP majorities of both organisations, who maintain that political discussion with the AWL is out of the question. In RS21, this has the status of a firm official position with at least some sway, both administrative and ideological, over all members — though some individuals have been willing to meet informally to discuss particular issues.

In addition to its ex-SWP majority, the ISN has attracted a few former members of Workers Power — some who split with Permanent Revolution in 2006 and some who left in 2013. It has also attracted a number of younger comrades, students and ex-students, in Birmingham, who organise through a joint local branch with the “autonomist” group Plan C. Other new ISNers include the long-active leftist Steve Freeman, now the loudest advocate of Scottish nationalism within the English left.

Many of these people are very active as individuals or as small groups — the Birmingham people are active in student struggles and in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, and the ex-WP people in the Lambeth labour movement. But unsurprisingly, the ISN has little activity as the ISN.

On many of the big political issues — Europe, Scottish nationalism, the general election, the Labour Party, political Islam, feminism and identity politics — the ISN contains a wild variety of positions. Rather than discussions to sort them through, however, what has happened has been periodic rows and withdrawals, particular in connection with question of oppression and identity. This seems to be a result of two legacies, reaction against what happened in the SWP and the culture of identity politics in the student movement.

Some comrades obviously want more discussion, but the ISN as such does not seem to be providing it.

There also seems to be a tendency for some in the ISN to state political positions in terms of advocating positions for Left Unity. Given the state of Left Unity, this is unlikely to help develop clear or worthwhile strategy or tactics for the organisation. (One element in this may be the fact that a number of ISNers are active in the Lambeth Left Unity branch, which is more healthy.)

At the ISN conference in January, a minority favoured merger with RS21 (and a number have already joined, on paper dual-carding), a smaller minority literally favoured giving up, and a majority voted to continue for now, but without a clear plan of what to do or what to discuss.

FOLD

It seems very likely that sooner or later the ISN will fold, with its members going in different directions.

RS21 is doing better. Through the Defend the Right to Protest campaign, it recently played a central role in organising an extremely successful speaker tour with an activist from the Black Lives Matter movement against state racism and violence in the US. It has at least one large and active student group, at Oxford University. Some of its members and sympathisers there have recently become active in NUS and in the NCAFC.

On the other hand publication of RS21’s magazine, supposed to come out at least quarterly, has stalled. It has had some splits too. The RS21 website prominently advertised the 15 February Greece Solidarity demonstration in London, but RS21 was not visible on the day (or on any other demonstration we can remember off-hand, since the July 2014 People’s Assembly march). So it is not clear that it is flourishing. Unlike the ISN, however, it seems it will be around for a while.

Unfortunately, this stabilisation has been on the basis of maintaining SWP-type politics. On the questions of European

unity and Syriza, the organisation made some tentative steps to begin a discussion, but this seems to have gone nowhere. On Scotland, it has stuck with a nationalist line.

In the wake of the Charlie Hebdo killing, RS21 has taken a comprehensively soft-on-Islamism position, use true facts about capitalism and the big Western powers to present Islamism as pretty much simply a reaction to imperialism and the Paris killers as “individuals... inevitably go[ing] over the edge”.

Knee-jerk anti-AWL stuff, also maintained from the SWP, is frustrating. Nonetheless, what is needed is to more attempts to work and discuss with these organisations and their members.

As far as we can tell, previous “unity discussions” between ISN, RS21 and other organisations collapsed fundamentally because they did not actually discuss the political basis for revolutionary unity. Fundamentally, that is what is needed to sort out the revolutionary left.

Stop whose war?

By Dale Street

The Stop the War Coalition (SWC) and the Solidarity with the Antifascist Resistance in Ukraine (SARU) campaign are staging a protest about Ukraine in London on Sunday 22 February.

In the course of 2014 Russia annexed Crimea, encouraged and organised separatist agitation in the south-east of Ukraine, invaded Ukraine in late August, and consistently provided the separatists with some of the most modern munitions and weaponry available.

SWC and SARU have therefore decided to picket — the US Embassy!

According to publicity for the event, the USA and NATO are “beating the drums of war”. They intend providing weapons to “17 neo-Nazi battalions under the command of Dmitry Yarosh.”

There is “a very real prospect of escalation towards World War Three in Europe.” This is “based on false accusations of ‘Russian aggression’ (inverted commas in original) and media demonisation of Vladimir Putin.”

It is believed that Alexander Litvinenko’s widow will not be speaking at the event.

Confiscate the banks!

A thousand, a million, a billion, a trillion? Paradoxically, one of the ways the HSBC bank can hope to ride out the current storm is that the numbers are so far beyond experience for most of us that we glaze over.

HSBC is under fire because of documents which have filtered through to the Guardian which show that a Swiss subsidiary facilitated, helped, and even prompted tax avoidance and money-laundering.

About £80 billion was held in those Swiss bank accounts. That's the equivalent of £3000 for each household in the UK. If the money had been taxed at a high rate, we'd be visibly better off.

HSBC and other banks have already got into lots of trouble for other shady dealings. Over the five years 2009-13, since the 2008 crash put banks under closer scrutiny, HSBC and three other big British banks, RBS, Barclays, and Lloyds, have paid or set aside £36 billion for fines or settling claims for misdeeds.

That's £1400 for each household in the UK.

These figures are cash wealth — “money in the bank” — which, for most people, is a small proportion of total assets.

Cash wealth is unequally distributed. Consider just notes and coins: about £60 billion worth is held by households. That's an average of £2,300 per household. If you consider that most households will have much less than £100 cash-in-hand at a given time, that tells you how much cash the rich keep. Bank deposits average £23,000 per household, and that is just the money in UK banks, not counting what is hidden away in Switzerland or the Cayman Islands.

On the latest figures, total household wealth in the UK is £9.5 trillion. A large part of that is homes which people own or part-own: the disposable, fluid wealth is only part of it. The £9.5 trillion is an underestimate, because many of the super-rich hold their loot not as “household wealth” but in the formal ownership of companies and trusts which they control.

Even with the underestimate, though, official figures show that the top 10% own 44% of that household wealth. If the wealth of the top 10% were distributed evenly, then the average household would be 60% better off.



Another set of figures shows the total value of different sorts of physical assets. Pro rata for each household in the UK, those are (on latest National Statistics figures, more up to date than those quoted in Solidarity last week) £160,000 worth of housing; £60,000 worth of factory, office, etc. buildings; £28,000 of machinery and equipment.

The financial assets of the banks greatly exceed those totals. Banks hold around £20 trillion in financial assets — enough to buy up all the country's physical assets three times over — or the equivalent of about £800,000 for each household in the UK.

Out of those assets flow huge incomes for individuals. Bankers' bonuses over the five years to 2014 totalled about

£80 billion. Or, to put it another way, over those five years about £3000 was extracted from the labour of the average household to expand the luxury of just a few bankers.

It's not just financiers. Bosses of the top 350 companies average £1.9 million a year each in pay, bonuses, and other deals; bosses of the top 100 companies, £2.8 million.

The banks are the pinnacle of a system in which the majority labour — on a living wage if we're lucky, less if we're not, but in any case no more than we need to keep going — in order to create ever-more-dizzying wealth for a tiny minority.

Seize the billions! Stop the exploitation! Put social wealth under social control!

After Copenhagen: fighting Islamism, the racist backlash and state repression

We join the comrades of the Red-Green Alliance of Denmark (<http://enhedslisten.dk>) in unequivocally condemning the attack on a meeting to debate free speech and a Jewish synagogue in Copenhagen on Saturday-Sunday 14-15 February.

At this time it seems the attack, in which a member of the meeting audience and young Jewish security guard were killed, was the work of an individual, a young man of Palestinian heritage, and impoverished background who had recently spent time in jail. It seems this individual was “inspired” by an Islamist political creed and the murderous attacks in Paris last month.

How should socialists analyse this event, so alarming because it comes so soon after the appalling attacks in Paris, includes another anti-semitic attack, and brings the grim prospect of a right-wing backlash in Denmark and across Europe?

This was an act with a political purpose. To gloss and rationalise, as some on the left did over Paris, by saying that such individuals act out of a distorted sense of social injustice, is irresponsible. It minimises the danger of this form of extreme political Islam. While we should not inflate the danger, exaggerate the degree to which it has a grip on Muslim communities, or see it as equivalent in scale, here in Europe, to the threat of the racist far right, we need to understand why it is a threat.

Extreme Islamism of this type seeks to replace one form

of oppression (against some people of Muslim background) with many kinds of virulent oppression — of non-religious Muslims, Jews, people of other religions, women, LGBT people.

Islamism of this type wants and fights for an extremely authoritarian society.

Extreme Islamists, increasingly allied to or modelled on Daesh (Islamic State), carry out dramatic terroristic actions to polarise debate and provoke a violent reaction by the state. They want to dramatise their own situation and present themselves as underdogs and martyrs. They are a new and particular form of fascism.

What is the democratic and socialist response to these threats?

We fight all forms of fascism, including extreme political Islam. We fight the Islamist ideas which seek to divide and oppress. Our first task is to stand in solidarity with people affected by this political ideology and build a political alternative which preaches equality, humanity, and social solidarity.

We oppose repressive responses by governments: state bans, the strengthening of borders and police powers, the criminalisation of Muslim communities.

We oppose attempts by the racist right and the tabloid press to demonise Muslim communities.

Revenge killings of Jews, and anti-semitic attacks, have absolutely no part to play in getting justice for Palestinians.

We condemn the rise in these attacks and fight all forms of anti-semitism.

We consistently defend the right to debate and freely criticise the role of religion in society, including the right to “commit” what religious authorities and fundamentalists call “blasphemy”.

We defend people's rights to practise their religion, whatever that religion may be. We do not want to oppress religious belief, but we are secularists. Religious institutions do not have the right to impose conditions on the free speech of atheists, free thinkers and secularists.

We stand in solidarity with the marginalised and oppressed people who are the victims of Islamist groups, such as the Coptic Christian migrant workers who were recently murdered by Islamic State. We are with the people who suffer under the influence and violence of religious fundamentalisms.

Our solidarity is fundamentally different to that of the neo-liberal politicians who backed the unity demonstrations in Paris and Copenhagen. Their governments want to further impoverish the whole working-class and weaken working-class organisations.

That drive shapes the conditions which are now fuelling the populist right, anti-immigrant racism, and different forms of right-wing Islamism.

Mainstream economists say: Syriza, stand firm!

A mainstream columnist in the *Financial Times* has advised the Greek government to stand firm, use imaginative financial techniques to get round blackmail from the eurozone and ECB leaders, and to stop payments on debt to bodies like the ECB and the European Financial Stabilisation Fund.

On 16 February, Wolfgang Münchau wrote: "My advice to [Greek finance minister] Yanis Varoufakis," he continued, "would be to ignore the exasperated looks and veiled threats and stand firm. He is a member of the first government in the eurozone with a democratic mandate to stand up to an utterly dysfunctional policy regime that has proved economically illiterate and politically unsustainable. For the eurozone to survive with the current geographic remit, this regime needs to go."

The Greek government, he wrote, "should stick with their position not to accept a continuation of the existing financial support program." In so doing they would no longer be bound by "self-defeating policy targets such as the contractual requirement to run a primary budget surplus of 3 percent of gross domestic product. For a country with mass unemployment, such a target is insane. It would, of course, be better for this nonsense to stop while Greece remains in the euro zone. But the most important thing is that it has to stop."

The "most sensible" evasive option for the Greek government, wrote Münchau, is the introduction of a kind of parallel currency consisting of government-backed IOUs. This might be physical notes, or maybe just electronic credits, circulating in parallel to the euro. He cites other conservative economists as recommending this option.

"Once this system is in place", notes Münchau, "you can default on the official European creditors. What can they do? They cannot eject you from the eurozone. They have no legal means to do so. They cannot kick you out of the EU either".

Münchau concludes that Greece should seek to avoid an exit from the euro zone. But: "The worse-case scenario would be for the Greek government to blink first, and accept defeat... If Syriza were to be co-opted into the policy consensus, the only political party left to oppose these policies would be Golden Dawn, a neo-Nazi party".

Union solidarity

The leaders of Germany's trade unions have put out a statement opposing the attempted "blackmail" of the new Greek government. The statement is blandly worded, but significant from a union leadership which is usually conservative.

"Serious negotiations with the new Greek government must get under way, without any attempts at blackmail, in order to open up economic and social prospects for the country beyond the failed austerity policy... Europe must not persist in pursuing, at the expense of the Greek population, a policy that has been decisively rejected by the majority of Greek voters. Just carrying on regardless is no longer an option!

"The political upheaval in Greece must be turned into an opportunity to establish a democratic and social Europe!"

• bit.ly/dgb-gc

Greece: mass rallies support defiance

By Theodora Polenta

The decent stance of Syriza's government indicated its intention not to betray the people, and the effect on the government of the mass rallies held in all major cities of Greece with the key slogan: "Not a step back!"

Germany's intransigence is grounded in the fear among sections of the ruling elite that if they relent on austerity for Greece, then they will encourage anti-austerity movements in Spain, Portugal, and Italy.

German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble claimed that he "pities" the Greek people for the "irresponsible" government that they have elected. He demanded that the Greek Government humiliate itself by signing a statement to waive the application of its social program.

The driving force here is not so much arrogance and a sense of power, but fear and a nervousness lest developments tend to escape their control. The wave of solidarity with Greece shocked Berlin. German neo-liberal hegemony in Europe has begun to show symptoms of deterioration.

The Syriza government proposals have watered down its commitment to the Thessaloniki declaration and the programmatic decisions of Syriza's conference. The government has abandoned the claim for the cancellation of the majority of the debt and is restricting its proposals to techniques for the relief and lowering down of the annual cost of debt repayments. The Greek banking system remains controlled by the Troika and its major shareholders, and not the slightest initiative has been taken for its transfer under "public control". In the field of privatisation also, the abolition of the privatisation agency Tayped has been "frozen".

So far the government appears adamant on its adherence to the Thessaloniki declarations; but when negotiating with the creditors has been prepared to make concessions which may practically undermine its own commitments.

This is a reflection of the contradiction in the logic of pursuing an agreement that would be "mutually beneficial" for the Greek working class people and popular strata and their creditors.

A short-term "bridge" deal cannot be neutral. It will either be a "bridge" towards the acceptance of cuts and neoliberalism, or it will be a "bridge" to overturn the policies of austerity. Conflict is inevitable: it looks like it will come early and be very hard.

But the mood and confidence of the working class and the mass of the people has been uplifted and is defiant. In Greece, support for the government, provided that it maintains a hard negotiating stance, is now a majority!

That mood is filling the streets and the squares, with four rounds of rallies so far all across Greece, and over 30,000 people in Syntagma square on Sunday 15th.

Not a step backward from the goal of overturning the austerity! We are not negotiating for a limited "relaxation" of the rate of the imposed austerity, but to overthrow austerity.

No to any "bridge" which incorporates memorandum commitments, regulations and policies. The only "bridge" we're discussing is a financial deal to cover the negotiating period.

The symbolic test will be the choice of the President of the Republic. Syriza should avoid a choice from the memorandum politicians of the centre-right, and should select a personality that will symbolize the democratic struggles and the cultural influence of the workers.

If the Germans insist on an ultimatum this Friday (20th), we see no way out other than Syriza's government calling a

referendum within few days with the question whether the Greek people, empowers the government to insist at all costs (including the risk of Greek expulsion from the euro) on the implementation of its programmatic commitments endorsed by the Greek people and approved by the Greek parliament.

The government should also disarm the "internal" allies of the Troika. Immediately place under public control the FSF and the Bank of Greece. Socialise the assets of the tax evading-oligarchs. Immediate establishment of workers' control in enterprises. Every large company that evades taxes should be socialized.

Cease privatisation immediately and initiate the process of recovery of public ownership and control over public infrastructure, goods and services that were privatized.

Fight against corruption and wastefulness in the state, through a thorough control across the range of the state apparatus by the unions and elected committees of workers in government agencies and businesses. The army and security forces should pass under the democratic control of the mass organizations of the workers and for the riot police should be disbanded.

Socialisation of Church and monastery property to finance the necessary social policy.

Reduction of working hours without loss of pay, and a public works program against unemployment.

EUROPEAN WORKERS

Call on European workers for joint struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.

The last few days have shown clearly that the only true partners and allies of the government of Syriza are the Greek and European workers. With dozens of gatherings and acts of solidarity, workers show that they see Greece not as an isolated country, but as a people that dares to go first against the rules imposed by capitalism and the financial oligarchy.

Without the militant and massive activation of Syriza's rank and file organizations without the democratic operation of the collective bodies of the party, the government policies will become uncontrollable, and the politicisation and coordination of the movement, the organisation of international solidarity and a united front of the Left will become unattainable.

It is the duty of the revolutionary Left in and outside Syriza to reconnect with the rank and file of Syriza and with the combative working class movements and other movements from the last five years.

They should not wait passively for the implementation of the Thessaloniki platform by the government, but mobilise to guarantee implementation. They should organise in their unions or create new unions where there are none; conduct meetings and create struggle committees in each area and neighbourhood.

The continuation of the struggle of the ERT workers, the demonstration in Skouries Chalkidiki, and the two-day open conference of the self-organised factory of BIOME are steps towards the right direction.

In parallel, Greek workers should make a clear and specific call for workers across Europe, to support actively their class sisters and brothers in Greece and to fight together for the United Socialist States of Europe.

15,000 march in Rome in solidarity with Greek struggles bit.ly/rome-gr

Hundreds demonstrated in London in support of Greece



Why the talks broke down

The Greek government has called for “bridging finance” while a new agreement is worked out following the expiration of existing arrangements at the end of February.

It proposed to the Eurogroup:

- Scrap 30% of the bailout programme in exchange for ten new reforms agreed with the OECD (meaning 70% would be kept).
- Reduce Greece’s primary surplus target from 3% of GDP to 1.5% this year, and keep it around this level for the medium term (as opposed to increasing it to 4.5% as currently planned).
- A swap plan for the loans to Greece to ease repayments. This is likely to focus around the previous proposals of turning Eurozone loans to Greece into GDP linked loans or bonds and asking the ECB to swap its current holdings of Greek bonds for “perpetual bonds” (bonds which are never repaid).
- Allow Greece to tackle its humanitarian crisis.
- Funding from the transfer to Greece of €1.9bn in profits on Greek bonds held by the Eurosystem and an €8bn increase in the short term debt issued by the Greek government of .
- Other potential funding lines include tapping into the €7.2bn tranche of EU/IMF/ECB Troika funding waiting to be released or using the €11bn leftover in the bank recapitalisation fund.
- The plan would run until September and allow time for negotiations over a “new deal” on Greece’s debt.

Following the “unsuccessful” meeting of European finance ministers on 11 February and the EU leaders’ summit on 12 February, the German government made a tactical manoeuvre. The German government appeared willing to consider the proposals of the Syriza government for the part of the Memorandum that accepts, under a diplomatic formula of a combination of the existing memorandum program with the “bridge” that the government is asking for.

On this basis, a common “technical” committee was established (which worked till Sunday night) aiming to investigate the possibility of a political agreement for Monday 16th.

However, as Alexis Tsipras correctly stated, a technical agreement requires first of all a political agreement. And we don’t have that. The new Greek government, despite some hiccups and setbacks, mainly due to Dragasakis and Varoufakis, held to their red lines: reversal of austerity, eliminating Memoranda, and evicting EU/ECB/IMF Troika from the country. So there was no agreement on 16 February.

The German government used the statement by Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis that “70%” of the Memorandum was “non-toxic”. Of course, how much you count as 70% is open to definition: we can guess Varoufakis thought he was being clever. Nevertheless, Varoufakis’s statement went outside all Syriza’s programmatic and pre-election commitments. And there was no deal.

RULES

The German government and all the other bourgeois governments wanted to send a political message: the rules of austerity and “structural reform” (neoliberalism, reduction of workers’ rights, privatisation) must be respected, regardless of whether they violate the democratic will of the Greek people.

The eurozone finance ministers’ draft document put as priorities for coordinated action a new attack on labour and insurance-pension rights and the selling off of public property. They wanted commitments such as: “to successfully complete the current memorandum program taking into account the new Greek government plans... commitment to refrain from unilateral actions and to work in close coordination with European and international partners, particularly in the area of tax policy, privatisation, labour market and pensions reforms and reforms of the financial sector”.

The Eurogroup gave Greece until Friday 20 February to request an extension of Greece’s current program, stating that “there is no alternative” and the next move must come from Athens. Dutch finance minister Jeroen Dijsselbloem, head of the Eurogroup of finance minister, stressed that the extension of the program involves commitments from the Syriza’s government. He said that there was “some scope of flexibil-

ity within the program”, but it had to be “without unilateral actions or cancellation of measures already undertaken”. He also said that every new proposed measure by Syriza’s government should be fully costed and funded.

“Syriza’s government has one week to decide, but that’s all,” he stressed.

The Greek government stated that they could not accept a document which was in stark contrast to the will of the Greek people:

“It seems that certain circles do not want negotiations and insist to support a program that has failed... Throughout European history democracies rejected the ultimatums. European democracies neither blackmail nor accept being blackmailed”.

Finance minister Yanis Varoufakis stated that he was confident that within the next 48 hours the deadlock would be broken and there would be a “fair deal”. He revealed that before the start of the 16 February meeting he was ready to sign a document presented by the European finance commissioner Pierre Moscovici but eventually withdrawn.

This document was talking about extending the loan agreement for four months as a bridge to a new program. “Unfortunately this good document was withdrawn” by Dijsselbloem, and “an alternative document which talks solely about the extension of the memorandum was presented”.

The European Central Bank will decide on Wednesday 18th whether to maintain emergency lending to Greek banks. Greece faces some heavy loan repayments in March. Deposit outflows in Greece have picked up. J P Morgan bank says that at the current pace Greek banks have only 14 weeks before they run out of collateral to obtain funds from the central bank.

The ECB has allowed the Greek central bank to provide emergency lending to the banks, but a failure of the debt talks could mean the imposition of capital controls. Eurozone member Cyprus was forced to close its banks for two weeks and introduce capital controls during a 2013 crisis. Such controls would need to be imposed when banks are closed. Greek banks are closed next Monday, 23 February, for a regular holiday.

As Paul Krugman correctly points out, the Eurogroup persists on the aim of the primary surplus of 4.5 percent of GDP, which is unrealistic within the context of a country with a shrinking GDP. Krugman reckons “they’ve decided to push Greece over the edge.

“Rather than give any ground, they prefer to see Greece forced into default and probably out of the euro, with the presumed economic wreckage as an object lesson to anyone else thinking of asking for relief”.

A worrying sign

A worrying sign is the Greek government’s choice of people for the “national negotiation team”.

Dimitris Mardas has been made deputy finance minister. He comes from Pasok, and up until recently was a high-up member of Potami. There are articles signed by him on Potami’s site from as recently as 19 January. In his articles he has often criticised the policies of Syriza as “cheap and easy anti-memorandum populism”.

In a radio interview after assuming his ministerial duties, he stated that he had been assured that the government would follow a prudent and modest route during the negotiations with the EU.

The Greek delegation in Brussels also included Elena Panariti, former Pasok MP and special adviser to George Papandreou. She worked for the World Bank on the “rescue” of Peru under the Fujimori dictatorship in the 1990s.

These are not just a few technocrats who are used, under strict governmental supervision, as an interim emergency solution.

A response to John McNally and the Socialist Party

By Charlie McDonald

In a bizarre article published on the Socialist Party website, the vice-president of the civil service union PCS, and leading SP member, John McNally, has attacked the record of Workers' Liberty within the PCS and the wider labour movement (bit.ly/mcnally).

The topic of the article is the latest Tory assault on civil servants. The two largest government departments (Department of Work and Pensions and Revenue and Customs) have been instructed to withdraw "check off". This is the mechanism by which union subscriptions are deducted from salary and given to PCS union. PCS pays a nominal fee for this service.

The attack appears to have caught the National Executive Committee on the hop and led to an emergency National Executive Committee meeting in December 2014. There, a number of emergency financial measures were agreed, which included the sale of our headquarters building and the cancellation of this year's Group and National elections. I think the Executive did not think the withdrawal of check-off would happen so quickly. I also think there was a certain naïve belief that it would be a lot easier to get members to make payments direct to the union, and that members would just oblige.

NUM?

The article begins and ends with delusional comparisons between the attack on the PCS and the great miners' strike of 1984-85.

That was an all-out year-long strike where two pickets were killed, almost 12,000 pickets were arrested, coal fields were turned into virtual police states, and the courts attempted to sequester all of the union's funds. It was a fight for the survival of not just jobs but whole communities. To draw a comparison to what is happening to the PCS is embarrassing.

But this kind of hyperbole fits with the narrative that McNally and the Socialist Party like to promote: that the PCS leadership is the greatest leadership the British labour movement has seen since that of the NUM during the strike. McNally even compares the way the NUM did not call a national ballot during that strike (because, it was argued, it would impede a class struggle) with the PCS not calling internal elections this year!

Exaggeration aside, McNally is right to highlight that the Tories are attacking our union because it is seen by the government as the most outspoken opponent of austerity and that we have been prepared to take action to defend jobs and services. They have an ideological hatred of the organised working class and their unions. His analysis here is essentially correct, if a little anodyne: the Tories are really horrible, and they really hate us.

McNally claims that Workers' Liberty have said the threat to PCS is "overstated". We have written extensively on the financial crisis in the union and the cancellation of elections. Nowhere have we said the threat is overstated. Indeed our activists in PCS are doing much work on the ground defending the union from the very-real attack on check-off.

What we have actually said is that it is difficult to know the full scale of the crisis as activists and members have not been told the details!

TRUST?

McNally and the Socialist Party have put it about that there is a level of information or "truth" that activists and members should not be party to lest the employer catches on is frankly worrying. This is a socialist group who claim to believe in rank-and-file organising.

Socialist Party member Tony Mulhearn has written, "Frankly, when you're in a war to the death, which is what this is, an astute leadership, which PCS is blessed with, cannot reveal its every negotiating tactic, or even its strategic approach to the mass of the membership... membership trust in the leadership is vital".

Whether you believe that you are "blessed" with this leadership or not, excusing the bizarre blanket call for membership loyalty, the premise that a covenant of secrecy within the leadership (and in some cases between the leadership and the employer) should exist is deeply concerning when it comes from a supposed left-leadership.

We should engender a culture of complete openness and trust between an elected leadership and the membership. That includes full disclosure on negotiations, National Executive papers and "how screwed we are".

DEMOCRACY

McNally then goes on to criticise Workers' Liberty for saying that the leadership have used the financial crisis as cover for not calling elections. The fact of the matter is that the union could have found ways to hold elections this year, if democracy was in their DNA, as they claim.

According to the 2014 annual report, National and Group elections cost £590,000. They would cost less this year because we will have fewer members due to cuts and the withdrawal of check off. There is no legal requirement to hold a postal ballot for sub-national elections. The major cost of printing the election address booklet could have been avoided by putting it online.

The union budgeted £700,000 this year for the production of a magazine for activists. That too could have been put online. The union's conference is going ahead this year. The size of delegations could have been cut. Delegate conference costs in excess of £1 million. Our TUC affiliation fees last year were £688,585. If democracy is in our DNA, why couldn't we tell

the TUC that they would have to waive our affiliation fees for a year because of the financial crisis we face?

As we're in such financial dire straits, why are these things continuing to be paid for, but elections must be cut?

Then of course is the vexed subject of Full Time Officer pay. PCS pays salaries to FTOs starting at £40,133 rising to £92,094. We have consistently argued over the last ten years that FTO salaries should be in line with what the vast bulk of PCS members receive (and that they should be elected). Indeed we quite like the Socialist Party's formulation: "Full-time union officials to receive no more than a worker's wage". But we don't add "except in PCS" to the end of that sentence.

McNally says that we had the opportunity to stand against Mark Serwotka (General Secretary) and Chris Baugh (Assistant General Secretary) but we chose not to. He doesn't tell his readers that he virtually begged us not to stand in those elections as he calculated that we could potentially split the left vote in the face of a right-wing challenge. As it turns out, there wasn't a right wing challenge in either election.

Most outrageously he finishes with the claim that "AWL plays the 'left card' in PCS while working with right-wingers in some other unions", and that "its history in PCS and our predecessor union CPSA is one of divisiveness, often splitting from the united left at times exactly when management are on the offensive."

Many of us, dealing with personal case work, have become accustomed (when dealing with managers) to general allegations being made, without any specific information let alone evidence to back up those allegation: Which other unions? And which right wingers?

I joined the union in 1989 when it was the CPSA. I joined the Socialist Caucus faction as they seemed to me the most serious activists with the best ideas. At the time some members of Socialist Caucus were in the Broad Left and some weren't. Those that were tended to be, but not exclusively, members of Socialist Organiser, the forerunner of the AWL.

The Independent Left was established in 2006 when the Socialist Caucus voted formally to split with Left Unity. It is a matter of record that the AWL opposed this decision, not because we agreed with the policies of LU at the time. We just thought it wasn't practical in terms of our numbers.

Perhaps the occasion McNally is thinking is when we did split with LU in our decision to stand Mark Serwotka in the 2000 PCS general secretary election against McNally and the Socialist Party's wishes. If we had have abided by the LU conference decision on the question, we would have supported their candidate, the Blairite Hugh Lanning. It was only when Mark and his campaign managed to secure 50 branch nominations that LU changed its position and supported Mark.

But why let facts get in the way of a sectarian attack?



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Free speech on campus and beyond

By Omar Raii

We are living in a time when freedom of expression is being curtailed on many different fronts.

On February 14 in Copenhagen, a meeting debating blasphemy and the right to offend was cut short by a gunman apparently determined to execute Lars Vilks, a Swedish cartoonist known for his cartoons of Muhammad. The gunman managed to kill a 55 year old audience member and followed this by killing a Jewish security guard outside a synagogue the following day.

Is this going to be the inevitable consequence of doing things considered blasphemous by some fanatics? Will the political and cultural atmosphere be such that self-censorship is the rule over everything critical of religion, any religion? How can any thoughtful person, never mind a socialist, now organise a public meeting in Denmark or anywhere in Europe knowing that the result could be that an inquisitive attendee is killed for simply attending such a meeting?

The person tragically killed may have attended the meeting to disagree with the cartoonist. We will never know because this kind of free and open discussion was exactly what the gunman was trying to stop.

The arena du jour where it has become a regular occurrence for free speech to be curtailed is exactly the place that is supposed to embody the idea of debate and free discussion: the university.

Back in the 70s and 80s, the leading figures calling for bans on certain films or publications were religious conservative groups and figures such as Mary Whitehouse, who would rally against sex on TV or films like Monty Python's *Life of Brian*. Now the main places where you're likely to see songs (like Robin Thicke's 'Blurred Lines') or publications (like *the Sun*) successfully banned is in student unions.

The American comedian Chris Rock has famously stated that he no longer plays gigs at college campuses as students are simply "too conservative". We take his point.

Banning in student unions is usually justified on the basis of wanting the campus to be a safer spaces for students. Hence Socialist Workers Party societies being banned by some student unions because of the SWP's appalling abuse of power over allegations of rape by a leading member of their party. Or, to take another example, at Manchester University last month the Secularist and Humanist Society was told it could not display the front cover of Charlie Hebdo because its depiction of Muhammad would "offend Muslim students".

Such moves may be well meaning, but they contradict fundamental principles (freedom of political association, in the case of the SWP) or are patronising attempts to stop anything that could be remotely regarded as offensive from being seen or heard. A further problem is the inevitable, lack of consistency.

When banning certain speakers, or records, or whatever, for having offensive views, who gets to decide what qualifies as offensive? Should a speaker that supports the right of free abortion on demand for all women be banned from speaking at a campus? There are surely plenty of people who still regard abortion as murder and hence would be offended by such a speaker and their opinions.

Why ban just the Socialist Workers Party from having meetings on a campus? Yes that organisation was involved in an appalling abuse of power over rape allegations, but then the Catholic Church has carried out much more systematic and disgraceful cover-ups of historical cases of child abuse. Why not ban Catholic societies from holding meetings on campus?

And frankly, if we're going to be in the business of guessing what the hugely diverse population of Muslim students are going to be offended by, surely we should ban LGBT societies or drinking societies from campus as some particularly conservative Muslims (and for that matter Christians and Jews) would be "offended" by their presence.

Now as odious as a Robin Thicke song or a Rupert Murdoch publications may be, how do those who favour censorship feel that bans on them will genuinely change anyone's behaviour? The goal of principled socialists and supporters of freedom should be fighting objectionable views by debating them and showing them to be what they are, not by bureaucratic attempts to stop people hearing about these views.

There is an oft-used get out clause to downplay the censorious intent of disbanding SWP campus groups and stopping



A family mourns those killed by a gunman in Copenhagen on February 14

them from meeting and speaking on campuses. This says, "we are not banning anything, we are simply not giving a platform to a group. They are free to go away and have their meetings elsewhere, just not here."

If you were to disallow a group to organise meetings, refuse to allow their speakers and make it altogether hugely difficult for them to meet, you would indeed be limiting their freedoms. But why acknowledge this is true in wider society but not inside the grounds of a university campus? The fact is, all views, including (in fact especially) minority ones, and including views seen as repugnant, should be allowed.

An Islamist preacher who espouses support for Hamas or Hezbollah and believes all the world's problems are the fault of the sinful and decadent West should be as free to declare those views on a university campus as an avowed secularist who thinks religion is the cause of the world's problems and blasphemes by drawing cartoons of religious figures.

DANGEROUS

The anti-free speech attitude which is developing is doing so in a dangerous context, at a time when the neo-liberal university authorities and the state want to clamp down on civil liberties including free speech. We do not want to make their job easier.

Recent examples of such clamping down include the cancellation last year of a conference at Birkbeck, University of London, organised by the Islamic Human Rights Commission (an essentially pro-Iranian organisation) after the university was pressurised by threats from far-right groups that it would picket the event. Surely if one was to argue on safety grounds, then what the university did, bowing down to pressure from right-wing thugs, was sensible?

Universities are both afraid of big confrontations (for fear of the consequences if the students become too rowdy) and are actively opposed to them. They know that one consequence of protest may be a politically active and engaged student population that will challenge the increasing power of university management.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Berkeley free speech movement when students in California demanded the right to have political meetings on their campus, against management's wishes to stop political discussion. From way back to the days of the French Revolution the left has traditionally opposed censorship and limits to freedom of speech both because it championed liberty as a principle and because censorship was usually used to stop radical ideas from gaining ground.

The most dangerous example of the state trying to quell free speech comes from Teresa May's recent Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill which will allow the Home Office to effec-

tively order a university to ban a speaker from events on their campus if they're judged to be an "extremist". The term "extremist" is an absurdly vague one. Those of us who are socialists, who believe in the overthrow of capitalism and an end to the bourgeois state could easily be included in such a definition.

State repression of free speech is much more clearly opposed by students, as it is often clear that the state is not really interested in the safety of anything other than itself. But student activists should be consistent. We should stand up for freedom of speech!

Curtailments to freedom of speech should be regarded as rare events. The general attitude should be to allow all views to be heard as much as possible. The only limits to free speech on campus, as in society, should be where there are organised fascists and where people incite violence against people.

The tactic of no-platforming fascist groups was designed at a time when groups like the National Front would routinely pose a physical threat to oppressed minorities, to the left and to the labour movement. It was developed to stop the growth of the movement due to the physical danger that it posed and it even involved potential physical confrontation to stop fascists marching.

The tactic is now used much more widely to people with objectionable views and even to members of UKIP. That shows just how little the policy is understood in the British student movement.

The idea behind denying a platform to those whose views are "bad" leads to confusion and inconsistencies and doesn't even succeed at stopping those views from gaining traction.

When Jean-Luc Melenchon of the Front de Gauche debated Marine Le Pen of the Front National during the French Presidential elections in 2012, was he wrong to have done that? Should he instead have insisted on her being no-platformed? Maybe.

It could be also be argued that there are times (when no-platforming has effectively failed and the far-right are much more powerful at a time when the left is much less so) when one could envisage debating with the far-right being the best way of halting and defeating them. The point is this is a tactic that must be considered by the left rather than a general approach of refusing to ideologically combat the views of the far right.

Perhaps the most unfortunate thing about the current state of affairs is that the cause of free expression seems to have little support from the British left. The left must regain the spirit of free debate and discussion (and reclaim it from the limited version of liberals). We need free speech to organise and fight for socialist ideas which will create a better world.

Egypt: militancy and Morsi

By Harry Glass

On 25 January 2011, an 18 day struggle began that topped one of the Arab world's longest-serving dictators, Hosni Mubarak, President of Egypt.

Eighteen months later, Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, the founding party of political Islam, was elected president. After barely a year he was deposed by a military coup and the old order was restored under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. In the space of four years, Egypt has traversed from Mubarak's military Bonapartism through the so-called "Republic of Tahrir" to the current "Republic of Fear".

The revival of workers' struggle in Egypt a decade ago paved the way for the downfall of Mubarak. The 12 million-strong waged working class makes up about three-fifths of Egyptian society. Its composition changed as Egypt restructured from the post-colonial state capitalism established by Nasser to the neo-liberal model embraced by Mubarak. The working class has become more diversified, ranging from agricultural labourers and textile workers to car workers in army-run plants, public transport and aviation. Women now make up a quarter of the waged workforce.

The turning point was the December 2006 strike by 24,000 textile workers at Misr Spinning in Al-Mahalla al Kubra. Other strikes followed, including by civil servants, postal workers, teachers, health workers and public transport workers. Strikers were assisted by the CTUWS, a labour NGO headed by Kamal Abbas, who had led the 1989 Helwan steel workers' strike. The number of strikes doubled in 2007 and continued to increase until the revolution in 2011. There were similar increases in workers' sit-ins, demonstrations and other forms of protest.

In 2007 an important strike was organised by tax collectors, and led by Kamal Abu Aita, a long-time Nasserist activist. The tax collectors developed a powerful strike committee, which coalesced into RETAU, the first independent union outside of the ETUF, the official labour front founded in 1957. ETUF officials in the 1960s had to be members of Nasser's sole ruling party, the Arab Socialist Union. They continued as the "union" wing of the state bureaucracy under Mubarak, policing the working class as the Egyptian state reorientated to globalised neoliberalism.

Workers did not detonate the protests in Tahrir Square in January 2011, but the intervention of workers during the revolution was decisive in tipping the balance of forces against Mubarak.

Although there were only four independent unions before the fall of Mubarak, hundreds of new independent unions were formed. On 30 January 2011, the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) was formed in Tahrir Square and soon claimed 1.4 million members in affiliated unions. Strikes broke out in earnest on 6-7 February, spreading across Egypt and involving 300,000 workers. Most were ostensibly fighting for economic demands such as contracts and wage rises, but a small number also pledged solidarity with the protests. They showed the regime no longer had the passive consent of workers.

Between February and October 2011, a great strike wave swept the country. Demands emerged to cleanse ("tathir") workplaces of the old state managers. By September 2011, half a million workers were involved in collective action, including a national teachers strike and sector-wide protests. The CTUWS and other private sector unions broke from the EFITU and formed the Egyptian Democratic Labour Congress (EDLC) in October 2011.

By its founding congress in April 2013, the EDLC claimed 300 affiliated unions. The most powerful working class in the Middle East was beginning to develop the kind of organisation necessary to make its strength felt nationally. This was the great hope of the Arab Spring and one that rightly inspired socialists the world over to learn from and make solidarity.

These events are dealt with in some depth by Anne Alexander and Mostafa Bassiouny in their recent book, *Bread, Freedom, Social Justice: Workers and the Egyptian Revolution* (Zed Books, 2014).

Alexander is an academic at Cambridge University, while Bassiouny is an Egyptian journalist. They are supporters of

the International Socialist Tendency (IST), which includes the British SWP and Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists (RS).

Alexander and Bassiouny argue that the Muslim Brotherhood is a "reformist" movement, akin to Western social democratic parties or Third World nationalist movements. They explicitly take their cue from Chris Harman, who wrote the infamous couplet: "with the Islamists sometimes, with the state never". In Egyptian politics over the past period, this meant an alliance with the Brotherhood (including the infamous Cairo conferences) and support for Morsi in the presidential election in 2012.

This perspective is political suicide for the Egyptian working class. The Muslim Brotherhood's politics have nothing in common with social democratic reformism or with the secular national liberation movements that fought colonialism.

The authors deny that political Islam is reactionary and dismiss the argument that it has something in common with fascism — attributing such an analysis to Stalinism and equivalent to lining up with the Egyptian state's repression of the Muslim Brotherhood.

They conveniently forget that the founder of the IST Tony Cliff described the Brotherhood as "a clerical fascist organisation" in the Trotskyist magazine *Fourth International* in September 1946. They ignore the actual experience of labour movements under Islamist rule, whether it is the repression of the militant Iranian working class since the overthrow of the Shah, or the experience of Palestinian trade unionists under Hamas in Gaza.

BALANCE SHEET

Does the book contain a balance sheet on the political line advocated by the SWP during 2011-13? No.

At best there are some mild reflections — all of which hint that the orientation towards the Brotherhood was wrong and that a "third camp" stance independent of both the old state and the Brotherhood was the right stance. But nowhere do they make an explicit reassessment or draw political conclusions from it.

Alexander and Bassiouny say that from the perspective of the majority of working-class voters "the story of electoral politics in the first two years of the revolution was one of growing disillusion with the Muslim Brotherhood and the increasingly urgent search for an alternative". The Muslim Brotherhood "mounted a ferocious campaign against calls for a general strike against the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces on 11 February 2012".

In February 2012, Muslim Brotherhood MPs intervened in four strikes (by petroleum workers in Alexandria, workers at a fertilisation factory in Aswan, chemical workers in Fayyum and another in Aswan) to suspend the strikes. The Brotherhood collaborated with old state officials to revive the ETUF as a competitor with the independent unions, and from February 2012 began drafting new trade union legislation aimed at stamping out the new independent labour movement.

In the first round of the presidential election in June 2012, there were no workers' candidates. The Nasserist Hamdeen Sabahy most closely identified with the revolution and came third. Morsi narrowly won the first round, ahead of Ahmad Shafiq, Mubarak's last prime minister, meaning a second round would be necessary. The authors admit that in protests just after the elections, the mood on the protests was "violently antagonistic to the Muslim Brotherhood, and many revolutionary activists raised calls for a boycott of the runoff".

Alexander and Bassiouny muse in retrospect on the "difficult dilemma for voters", while claiming the Muslim Brotherhood presented a programme aiming to win the votes of workers and poor with appeals for "social justice". They do not mention, never mind account for, the position they advocated at the time, which was for Egyptian workers to vote for Morsi.

Their tendency has no difficulty in explaining why workers should not vote for either bourgeois party in the US, or indeed in countless other states where no workers' candidate is running. They provide no explicit reasoning why Egyptian workers should vote for an Islamist candidate from a bourgeois party, with a bourgeois programme and at the time in

close coordination with the military.

In light of subsequent events, it is not difficult to see why socialists calling for a vote for Morsi was an epic mistake. They admit that "workers had every reason to oppose the Muslim Brotherhood-led government". Dozens of trade union activists were victimised under its rule. In August 2012, shortly after his accession to power, the Brotherhood intervened in a long-running public transport workers dispute, arresting its leaders. Police dogs were set on a peaceful sit-in by Portland cement workers in Alexandria in April 2013.

BALANCE

Morsi's "Renaissance Project" articulated "a neo-liberal programme clothed in the rhetoric of reform".

The new president rushed through a new constitution, strengthening the powers of the executive, the military and Islamist influence throughout the state. The new constitution was hostile towards the right to organise, expanded the state's intervention into unions and boosted the ETUF labour front. Massive protests commenced, with leading unions such as the EIFTU calling for a vote no in the referendum. The Muslim Brotherhood increasingly used its own thugs to attack anti-government demonstrations.

The end was predictable. The military brutally reasserted its power in a coup, ousting Morsi on 3 July 2013. The military intervened after the opposition Tamarud protest movement collected millions of signatures on a petition against Morsi, with millions of protesters taking to the streets. In a cruel twist, Kamal Abu Aita, the RETAU leader accepted the role of Minister of Labour in the post-Morsi cabinet appointed by the armed forces in July 2013. After repressing the Brotherhood in August 2013, the military has consolidated its rule, with the election of al-Sisi as president in May 2014.

The book rightly criticises those liberals and Nasserists who have allied themselves with the military, repressing not only the Brotherhood but other democrats, socialists and trade unionists. But they do not reflect on the boosterism by the SWP-front campaign MENA for Abu Aita before his betrayal. He is dismissed as a Nasserist and a trade union bureaucrat — criticism that was noticeably lacking when the SWP brought him to Britain in the summer of 2011 and used his denunciations to scupper efforts to build an Egypt Workers Solidarity campaign.

Alexander and Bassiouny argue that the Egyptian working class is socially and economically powerful, but politically weak. They are right that workers in Egypt have lacked a political voice — the problem is that the kind of politics they advocate is partly responsible for this absence of independent working class political representation. Their ideal appears to be a revolutionary organisation that leads "the people", Muslim and Christian, secular and Islamist, against the state, as in January 2011.

They itemise the kind of revolutionary organisation they believe is necessary: workplace organisers; activists who are "revolutionary leaders of the people"; cadres who think like a state (deploying their resources carefully, learning lessons and utilising the balance of class forces to their advantage); activists who think beyond the existing state; and internationalism.

Missing from this entirely is the ideological front of the class struggle, the battle for working class consciousness, for a world view juxtaposed to the various bourgeois and other reactionary ideologies. In Egyptian conditions that would mean clear demarcation from Islamist currents, including the Muslim Brotherhood.

Missing is any real conception of working class consistent democracy, whether it is within the existing labour movement, or the future state or indeed the revolutionary workers' party.

And absent too is the political front, where the worker-revolutionaries intervene in elections to develop an active, educated cadre. Alexander and Bassiouny conceive of the party as an organisational machine, rather than as a democratic collective of self-conscious permanently active worker-persuaders.

The IST botched the test of the Egyptian revolution; this book shows they have not faced up to their failure.

Hope, not strike?

By Liam Conway

On January 29 National Union of Teachers (NUT) National Executive voted 24 to 12 not to call two days of strike action in the run up to the General Election.

In October a survey of members returned 80% in favour of strikes. This despite the failure of the NUT to develop a serious strategy to wring concessions from the Government over pensions, and then pay, since 2011.

At the January Executive we were informed that we could not restate our intention to strike before Nicky Morgan had announced the results of the “work-load challenge” consultation. Nicky Morgan, quite predictably, has offered nothing, so we are left with an incredibly tight time frame to organise any action before the General Election.

At the NUT branch secretaries’ briefing on February 10 we were told that there would be only four weeks following the National Executive meeting on February 26 to organise

strikes before the General Election campaign begins. Considering that the Executive of January 29 defeated a proposal to “develop plans for up to two days strike action” before the election largely on the grounds that we could decide this matter on February 26, one wonders at the logic of delaying the decision in January when there were still nine weeks to prepare and mobilise for strikes.

This illustrates the experience of the last four years in a shorter form, an experience in which prevarication about serious industrial action has led to huge reductions in teachers’ pay and pension and an escalation of workload.

A debate will take place at the 26 February NEC and we should still argue for the strikes voted on by the members.

The alternative amounts to waiting for the outcome of the General Election and chancing our luck on the incoming Government, living in hope that it will not be the Tories. That is simply not a serious trade union response.

Stop evictions!

By Ruth Cashman

Shorthold tenants at the Loughborough Park Estate are being threatened with eviction so that Guinness Trust Housing Association can tear down their houses to build expensive new flats.

There is an occupation on the estate to help build the campaign against the evictions. There are daily meetings at 7pm to organise the campaign and demos at the office at 9am.

On Thursday morning at 9.30am there will be a protest against the bailiffs that are coming to evict someone from their home.

Meet 09.30 at Elveden House, Loughborough Park, Brixton, SW9 8NN.

• More details on the Lambeth Housing Activists website bit.ly/Guin-Occ

• Families in Barnet’s SweetsWay Estate are also resisting eviction see: <http://bit.ly/Barnet-housing>

Other industrial news

Crossrail worker, sacked for raising safety concerns, gets his job back after protests — bit.ly/17kXqvZ

National Gallery workers prepare to strike again for five days from February 22. Sign the petition — bit.ly/Gallery-petition

Unison Local Government Special Conference to debate pay deal — lgworkers.blogspot.co.uk

FBU: “we will not go away”

By Darren Bedford

The FBU has called a further 24 hour strike in England on Wednesday 25 February, starting at 7am, in its long-running pensions campaign. The union has also called a demonstration at Westminster at noon on the day of the strike.

The strike was called after the union exposed a sham “guarantee” given in parliament to enable ministers to force through their unworkable proposals.

On 15 December, the government pushed through new firefighters’ pension



scheme regulations. During the debate, fire minister Penny Mordaunt gave a clear guarantee in parliament that firefighters aged 55 who failed a fitness test through no fault of their

own would receive a full, unreduced pension or a re-deployed role. This guarantee was subsequently confirmed by Secretary of State Eric Pickles.

However employers’ organisations in the fire and rescue service have said they cannot guarantee such an arrangement with firefighters who can’t maintain their fitness. It means firefighters in England still face the prospect of “no job, no pension” as they get older.

The FBU held a special recall conference last week, which voted to continue the pensions campaign. Delegates resolved to carry on with political, legal and in-

dustrial action, telling ministers that firefighters were not going to go away. Although some brigades – particularly London – wanted a more aggressive strike strategy, the majority of delegates agreed with the leadership’s approach.

There was little organised left intervention at the conference. A Socialist Party leaflet called for strikes of 4 to 8 days duration, a long way from where most delegates were, plus the obligatory anti-Labour TUSC call.

Similarly, a half-hearted SWP leaflet called for more strikes and little else politically.

Save Lambeth Libraries!

By Ruth Cashman, Lambeth Unison Shop Steward

Lambeth Council has announced devastating cuts to the Library Service.

The proposals include:

- Closing half of Lambeth’s libraries
- The immediate sell-off of Minet and Waterloo Libraries
- Stopping funding to Carnegie, Durning and Upper Norwood Libraries
- Reducing the size of West Norwood and Brixton Libraries
- Replacing Libraries with bookshelves in pubs

Frankly, it’s a slap in the face to library staff, our Friends of Libraries Groups and the communities we

serve. Labour was re-elected boasting that it kept all our libraries open. Where is that commitment to the services future now?

In November 2011, Councillor Steve Reed, Labour Leader of Lambeth Council said; “I’m excited about the future for Lambeth’s libraries. While other boroughs have been forced to close libraries thanks to Government funding cuts, thanks to Labour in Lambeth our library service is now secure for the future.”

Lambeth Library campaigners are no strangers to fighting for their services. Union and community campaigns defeated two rounds of redundancy proposals since the ConDem government. In the nineties a series of community occupations



Campaigners protesting the last time closures were proposed

defeated planned library closures across the borough.

Join the Lobby Lambeth to Save Libraries at 6.30 at the 25 February Full Coun-

cil Meeting at Lambeth Town Hall.

• Sign the petition — chn.ge/1uA5wM6

Health deal: Vote no!

By a health worker

Ballot papers are arriving with Unison health workers this week for voting on the derisory pay offer from the government.

As discussed previously in Solidarity, the offer for 2014/15 which was the cause of our dispute has not changed at all. The 1% [+£200 for bands 1&2] offered for 2015/16 is still a real terms pay cut for the vast majority and comes with strings attached of negotiating on all our terms and conditions. The fact that our negotiators saw fit to even

present this offer shows the weak state of our organisation.

Health workers must vote to reject this offer if we are to stand any chance of halting further attacks particularly those lined up on unsocial hours payments.

A further strike, to be called if members reject the offer, has been set for 13 March. Even if we win a rejection, we have lots of work to do to build effective strike action for that date.

• Read more on the offer — bit.ly/17dKdW0

Bus strikes suspended

By Gemma Short

On February 11 Unite called off planned London bus drivers’ strikes scheduled for February 13 and 16.

In a press release Unite described this as laying down the “gauntlet” and “challenging the 18 bus companies to enter talks”. Yet there has been no news of these talks actually happening.

Solidarity spoke to drivers at Hackney Central bus depot, run by Arriva — the lowest payer — who have concerns over strikes being called off. One driver believed this was down to a

lack of clear demands from Unite as to what pay they were aiming to win, leading some drivers from higher paying companies to worry they may lose out in any London-wide deal.

Unite also claims that Transport for London has acted in a biased way in the dispute, although how is unclear.

Unite should be clear — pay should be levelled up to that of the highest paid drivers, and the running of the buses should be brought back in house!

• Read more on the bus strikes — bit.ly/1L672II



Copenhagen: Against Islamist terror, against a racist backlash

Bjarke Friberg reports from Copenhagen

The shooting of two people in Copenhagen by a lone terrorist, taking place only weeks after a similar incident in France, raises concerns for the left of a racist and nationalist backlash.

On Saturday 14 February Danish-born Omar el-Husseini cold bloodedly attacked a cafe and a synagogue with an automatic weapon, killing two people and injuring three policemen. Hosting respectively a political meeting and a Bat Mitzvah, the two targets seem carefully chosen — even though the gunman has been identified as a petty criminal and former gang member recently released from a prison sentence. Leaving an obvious trail through the streets of Copenhagen, he was found and liquidated

by the police in the early hours of Sunday morning.

With everything happening within a time span of only 12 hours, in a limited part of central Copenhagen, at night time, the situation did not escalate. Nonetheless the impact on the Danish public has been massive, spurring local gatherings against terrorism in several cities, including 30,000 protesters in the capital on Monday 16th.

Politically the elements of this response are mixed — with establishment politicians insistent on cross-class “national unity” and abstract pro-democracy slogans, flanked by the left and the right wing with their class struggle and hate agendas respectively.

Doubtlessly, the terrorist attacks will be used by ruling Social Democrats to divert attention from the hugely unpopular social cuts and right wing eco-

nomic policies that has characterised the government of Helle Thorning Schmidt since taking power in 2011. The main beneficiary, however, is most likely the right wing social populist Danish People's Party (DPP) — thriving in a political climate focusing on Islamist terrorism as well as on welfare issues.

Even so, there is still room for a socialist agenda if the Red Green Alliance (RGA) lives up to its responsibility. Now the main opposition party on the left wing, with 8-10% of the voters and almost 10,000 members nationwide, the party has an important role in advancing a clear working class agenda, avoiding both fake “national unity” and an apologetic stance towards religious fundamentalism.

So far the RGA has firmly condemned the killings and encouraged members to take part in local solidarity



A placard laid with flowers outside the cafe where one shooting took place

protests. In Copenhagen this will be with all the established parliamentary parties, including the DPP. Certainly this raises the need for a clearer class line from the RGA in the future.

By a twist of fate, the IST section (linked to the British

SWP), having left the RGA in a surprise move earlier this year, is already denouncing the RGA amid calls for a “renewed focus on anti-racism and struggle against Islamophobia”.

The RGA need not cry

over this exit, but the party should definitely take notice of a possible challenge from the left if the pull towards national unity and abstract pro-democracy slogans becomes too strong.

Increased police powers are not the answer

By Simon Nelson

Almost half of Syria's population now requires humanitarian assistance of some kind. Almost three million people have fled Syria, with Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey dealing with increasing numbers of refugees.

Both the Assad government and Daesh (ISIS) in eastern Syria have suffered sporadic defeats. Daesh has come under pressure from other fighters and the US led airstrikes. On Monday 16 February the Egyptian air force began air strikes against Daesh strongholds in Libya, after the group made a gruesome show of

their strength in the country, filming the beheading of 21 Egyptian Christian migrant workers.

Despite the victory of the Kurdish forces in Kobane, and continuing air strikes, Daesh fighters are leading successful actions. For the first time in weeks they have gained a town in Iraq, Al-Baghdad. They made a suicide attack on al-Assad air base, where US and coalition troops are supervising training of Iraqi armed forces.

The Baghdad government is even more fragile; the majority Sunni parties threatened to leave to coalition government following the death of a prominent tribal

leader Sheikh Qaeda Swetiana al-Jania. Along with his son and entourage he was ambushed by Shia militias in a mixed area just outside of Baghdad. Many of these militias still enjoy some degree of government patronage.

The government continues to ignore the humanitarian crisis, preferring to focus (ineffectually) on “deracialising” British youth and stopping them from joining the conflict in Syria, involving themselves with Danes and other Islamist fighters. £40 million a year is spent on the “Prevent” programme which targets 14 specific areas. Data obtained by the *Guardian*

show the targets now include Brighton, Coventry, Portsmouth, Burnley, Calderdale, Southwark and Crawley.

It is estimated over 600 people have gone to Syria to fight, though it is not known how many joined Daesh. It is worth emphasising that most are now returning.

There have been many criticisms of the Home Office “Prevent” strategy. The most common has been that its focus — on stopping the promotion of violence — has meant that radical Islamist and salafist groups who share much of the ideology of Daesh, but are against the strategy of war and territorial expansion,

can still engage with Prevent.

The Home Office decided to revise “Prevent” in 2011, they say “to ensure it challenges terrorist ideology, supports people who are vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism and works with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation. Since then we have seen the terror threat level raised to severe and an increase in police arrests linked to terrorist activity in Syria”.

Bland “anti-terrorist” propaganda and increased police powers are not the answer!

However undermining recruitment to extreme Is-

lamism is vital. The grip of these ideas on some young people highlights the weakness of the labour and socialist movements in many communities. The left can rightly criticise “Prevent” and proposals such as that remove citizenship from fighters returning from Syria. But a better alternative must be posed.

Islamist ideology should be tackled head on, engaging people in basic socialist ideas, opposing root-and-branch the reactionary nature of Islamist ideology and building support for equality, humanity and real democracy. That is what the entire left should now be doing.