



& Workers' Liberty **Solidarity**

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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RESIST THE “TRUMP” SURGE IN EUROPE

It is conceivable that within a year or so there will be no European Union, or not much of an EU, for Britain to quit.

In Italy, Salvini's right-wing nationalist and anti-immigrant Lega Nord may be able to seize the initiative after the likely defeat on 4 December of prime minister Matteo Renzi in Renzi's referendum on increased executive powers.

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Police fail children



The IPCC is investigating 187 cases where police failed children at risk of abuse.

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Castro: not our hero



Solidarity discusses the legacy of Fidel Castro.

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Greece: Syriza's record



Dora Polenta dissects the downfall of Syriza, once the great hope of the European left.

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Join Labour!

**Digital democracy
for Momentum?**

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Why police failed to catch “Grindr serial killer”

QNEWS

By Stephen Nelson

The conviction of Stephen Port for the murder of four young men has raised a number of questions over the Metropolitan Police's investigation into the deaths.

The police failed to link the deaths of the men, two of whom were found in the same place in a Barking Graveyard a few weeks apart. The police also failed to properly investigate the earlier case of student Daniel Walgate, who was found dead outside Port's flat.

Port was questioned by police, but his explanation that Walgate had taken drugs and died and that in a panic, Port had put him outside of his flat, was accepted. Police only considered charging Port for perverting the course of justice.

During his trial it was revealed that friends and family of the victims, the local newspaper for the area and the website *Pink News* had all tried to find out more about the deaths of the men, believing there could be a connection.

The Metropolitan Police has said 17 police officers are now under investigation.

It seems clear that homophobia played a negative role in the investigation; police saw that deaths as isolated drug overdoses, and in the case of two of the victims, a sex game gone wrong which had killed one and driven the other to suicide.

SUICIDE

The body of Daniel Whitworth which was left in the same place as Gabriel Kovari's had a “suicide note” with it.

This note expressed regret for the death of Kovari due to drugs taken during sex and said guilt had driven Whitworth to end his life. But the note made no mention of any family or friends. It also said, “BTW, please do not blame the guy I was with last night, we only had sex, then I left. He knows nothing of what I have done.” The note was treated at face value despite the family questioning the hand writing and other information that they did not feel amounted to a coherent story.

People connected to the victims contacted Galop, the anti-LGBT-violence organisation, who contacted the police, only to be told there was no connection between the deaths. Only after a police officer recognised Port with his final victim, Jack Taylor, in CCTV footage, was Port finally arrested and his flat properly searched.

Despite the coroner recording an open verdict in the death of Daniel Whitworth and requesting



that the items found on his body should be tested, this was not done until Port had murdered again. Throughout, the police had access to Port's DNA, yet none of the items found on the victims, including Port's own bed sheet used to wrap the body of Daniel Whitworth, were checked against his record.

Port met his victims using websites and social media like FitLads and Grindr.

The police have a terrible record of not treating crimes seriously when they have occurred after an arrangement for casual sex has been made. The view seems to be that if strangers engage in casual sex they should accept the risks. Attitudes like this cost these young men their lives.

A public appeal for information was made following Port being charged, but for the 15 months that he was attacking young men no warning was put out in Barking or East London. Following his arrest others have come forward to say they met Port and found themselves unwittingly drugged and raped or assaulted.

Port has now also been convicted of drugging seven other men. But there are a further 58 unexplained deaths on record and these are all now being reinvestigated.

For those involved in sex work there is an added stigma to reporting the kinds of crimes Port perpetrated — Port offered Daniel Walgate payment to stay with him. They face threat of not being taken seriously, being prosecuted or just judged by the police by their own twisted morality that devalues sex workers and criminalises their work. The police should not be allowed to police our bodily autonomy and the choices we make in our sex lives.

The growing culture of chem-sex, an undoubtedly high risk activity, cannot be used as a cover to dismiss the complaints of victims of sexual violence or to treat victims as culpable for the crimes that are committed against them.



Children from settler families play in Amona settlement outpost

Trump win emboldens Israeli right wing

By Ira Berkovic

Ministers in Israel's hard-right government have voted unanimously for a bill that seeks to retroactively legitimise settlement outposts built illegally on Palestinian land in the West Bank.

It then passed its first reading in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, by 58 votes to 50.

A 25 December deadline for the evacuation of the Amona settlement outpost, northeast of Ramallah, still stands, after courts rejected a government bid to delay it, but if the new bill becomes law, between 2,000 and 3,000 settler homes built illegally on private Palestinian land, including Amona, could be legitimised.

The bill, which requires three Knesset readings to become law, proposes to offer compensation to Palestinian landowners who can prove their ownership of land on which settlements were built. Mariam Hammad, a Palestinian from Silwad, near to Amona, said: “I don't want any money. I want the land I remember from when I was seven years old and would help my family harvest the potatoes and tomatoes we used to grow.”

Israeli Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit made clear that the bill contradicts international law, and that he would be unable to defend it in the High Court of Justice.

The debate around the bill has accentuated some strategic differences of approach within Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing coalition. Netanyahu himself, vociferously pro-settlement but perhaps fearful of further international isolation, sought to postpone both the Amona eviction and the vote on the legalisation bill. Education Minister Naftali Bennett has positioned himself as more explicitly pro-Amona, speaking directly to settler protesters, and arguing for an earlier vote on the bill as a potential way to

stave off the evacuation of Amona.

Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman, politically one of the most rabidly ethno-nationalist figures in the coalition but a key ally of the Prime Minister, have accused Bennett of reckless posturing. Netanyahu had previously said his government would “examine the possibility of evacuating [Amona] with responsibility”.

Lieberman has said that the government's main aim should be to ally itself closely to Donald Trump. Many Israeli chauvinists see Trump's election as a green light for an expanded settlement-building programme, which Barack Obama's administration opposed, albeit mealy-mouthedly. However, they are concerned not to be seen to be reckless, and are eager to work out an agreement with Trump. Lieberman said: “Anyone who fears for the future of the Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria [the Israeli nationalist right's term for the West Bank] understands that at this moment the most important thing is to coordinate positions with the new American administration. This is the first time there's a right-wing government in Israel, a Republican president and a Republican majority in the Senate and Congress, so facts on the ground must not be created and the incoming administration must not be embarrassed”. Lieberman has also opposed those who have urged physical resistance to the Amona evacuation.

The dispute in the coalition, then, is essentially over how quickly and aggressively to accelerate the colonial occupation of the Palestinian people.

Although figures like Lieberman have flirted with genocidal discourse and come close to advocating ethnic cleansing, the pragmatic strategy of the Israeli nationalist right is not to exterminate the Palestinians, but to use settlement expansion as a means to establish a “Greater Israel” as a fixed reality,

and snuff out any possibility of an independent Palestinian state.

Those Palestinians who do not wish to be second-class citizens in a Greater Israel will need to be subjugated into acceptance.

Trump's election gives them a huge boost, although Lieberman and Netanyahu's caution shows that the Israeli government does not yet have a clear strategy for how to capitalise on that opportunity.

Meanwhile, the Israeli left and peace movement, embattled and marginalised by Netanyahu's increasingly authoritarian, Putin-esque regime, is attempting to resist the settler movement. Zehava Galon, chairperson of the soft-left party Meretz, said: “The government gave in to the extreme right, and is enacting a law bypassing the High Court that is meant to legitimise a theft that has already taken place, the robbery of land belonging to Palestinians. The formalisation bill isn't meant only to regulate Amona, if it passes — illegal construction of more houses built on private Palestinian land will be legitimised in the same way. The Israeli government's ministers don't give a damn, not only for the High Court, but also for the prime minister, only to carry favours with a group of law-breaking settlers.”

Ayman Odeh, a Knesset member and leader of the left-wing party Hadash, said: “The government ripped off its mask and has begun the process of annexation of the West Bank, thereby sending a clear message to the world that it does not see the occupation as a temporary situation and is not looking towards a solution.”

Gush Shalom, the anti-occupation campaigning organisation, used its weekly full-page advert in Israeli liberal newspaper *Ha'aretz* to proclaim: “Not only Amona — All settlements are illegal. No ‘legalisation bill’ could possibly whitewash them.”

Ofsted prefers middle-class schools

By Elizabeth Butterworth

Research on Ofsted points to endemic problems in the schools system and inspection regime

Last week the Education Policy Institute (EPI) released important findings about the fairness of Ofsted reports in England.

They found a “systematic negative correlation” between schools with children from poorer backgrounds or lower prior attainment and positive Ofsted judgments.

In other words, schools with children from better off backgrounds are more likely to get Good or Outstanding judgments and schools with children who have previously achieved well are also more likely to get Good or Outstanding judgments.

Schools with less than five per cent of students qualifying for Free School Meals were three times more likely to be rated Outstanding; schools with twenty-three per cent of pupils qualifying for Free School Meals were highly likely to be rated Inadequate.

It was also easier for schools with students from better off backgrounds to improve from Good to Outstanding.

It is significant the EPI has pointed this out, as it puts Ofsted under some pressure to review its working practices and justify itself to the Department for Education.

On a local level, it may lead to parents, governors and community groups putting less store by Ofsted judgments or even disputing Ofsted judgments.

Do we need Ofsted to tell us that schools where the students' parents are professional and middle class are successful, while schools with “deprived” cohorts do not?

According to the EPI report, “Ofsted has not been as effective at consistent recognition of deteriorated academic performance as it has been at ensuring schools are inspected regularly.” Meaning Ofsted is better at inspecting regularly than it is at recognising when a school has gotten worse and updating judgments accordingly.

NO TRUST

It's no surprise to schoolworkers that Ofsted's judgments can't be trusted.

Far from reflecting normal performance or school experience, schools and colleges bend over backwards trying to do what they think Ofsted want or want to see.

This changes every few years, as a new Chief Inspector is appointed or the goalposts are changed by new criteria, new judgment outcomes and new government guidelines. This is on top of a changing curriculum, changing exam systems, not to mention a recruitment and retention crisis.

Inspectors have an idea of what

they are looking for in a school. Particularly the Chief Inspector, Michael Wilshaw, whose infamous emphasis on discipline is clear in the ban on talking in the corridors in his old school.

Desperate to get out of special measures, the Heads of schools deemed Inadequate try to “turn around” schools in one or two years, changing uniforms, curricula and behaviour systems at the drop of a hat, with varying levels of success. Parents of students at Stockley Academy in west London recently protested at the Head insisting on expensive branded school bags. The Head was soon on his way, replaced by the third Head in a year.

This is disastrous for children. The lack of stability, the obsession with results and the exam regime: compounded by a lack of oversight from weak Local Authorities and governors, coupled with over-zealous Executive Heads and academy sponsors.

But more than anything else, schools need money. Schools across England are facing 8% cuts, or 15% in some inner city areas, and despite valiant campaigns from a few, the fightback against these is nowhere near big enough to succeed.

The schools system has been hollowed out by the Tories, and schoolworkers, parents and students must work together to get back some control.

Football abuse: overturning a culture of silence

By Gerry Bates

More than 20 ex-football players have come forward with reports they were sexually abused as children by coaches.

The revelations have sparked an investigation by five police forces, as well as an internal investigation by the Football Association.

An NSPCC hotline has already received over 100 calls.

The scandal unfolded after former Sheffield United player Andy Woodward waived his anonymity and told the *Guardian* that he had been abused by coach Barry Bennell while a youth player at Crewe Alexandra.

Woodward's testimony prompted other former players to come forward with allegations against Bennell, as well as others who had been abused by other coaches at different clubs.

Gordon Taylor, boss of the players' union, the Professional Footballers' Association, told the BBC that sexual abuse had taken place around at least “six or seven” clubs, including Blackpool, Leeds and Stoke. Operation Hydrant, the police operation investigating historic sex abuse claims, is currently investigating 17 sports people.

Barry Bennell was sentenced to four years for the rape of a boy at a football camp in Florida in 1994, and then in 1998 was sentenced to a nine year sentence for 23 offences against boys in England.

According to his victims, Bennell exploited his power over the young players under his care, threatening to end their footballing careers if they spoke out. Woodward told



Andy Woodward

BBC's 5 Live: “It was that control — that all I wanted to do was be a footballer.”

Other victims say that Bennell also threatened boys' families and with slandering them to their peers. The testimony of those who suffered his abuse paints a grim picture of a power relationship in youth football and broader society which makes it extremely hard to report an abuser.

“Back in that day and age if you came out with accusations, would anybody believe you?” said ex-Crewe player Steve Walters. Paul Stewart, former England player and victim of Bennell, added that “it was a taboo subject, nobody spoke about it. It was brushed under the carpet if it was happening. I don't think there was anywhere to turn in those days.”

The many players who have come forward have done a great service to football and society by forcing a discussion about a culture that has provided very favourable conditions for abuse and exploitation.

It is shocking that it took so long for the various authorities to investigate.

187 complaints against cops

By Charlotte Zalens

18 UK police forces are being investigated by the Independent Police Complaints Commission over 187 complaints related to child sexual exploitation cases.

The IPCC says some of the complaints involve what it considers to be “high-level corruption”.

More than a quarter of the complaints relate to South Yorkshire Police over its failing of young people in Rotherham between 1997 and 2014.

The 2014 Jay Report into child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham found police had repeatedly disbelieved young people and in many cases arrested young girls found with much older men for being “drunk and disorderly”.

The allegations against South Yorkshire Police range from failing to investigate cases properly to corrupt relationships between police and offenders.

Allegations against the Metropolitan Police account for 46 of the investigations; a separate investigation by Her Majesty's In-

spectorate of Constabulary examining a sample of 384 CSE cases and found 75% revealed serious police errors.

Many of the allegations follow the same pattern — of police investigations being shut down prematurely or prosecutions not pursued because the suspects were politicians, or well known; or of evidence being suppressed, not taken seriously and discarded.

Out of the 27 investigations into complaints that have concluded 15 officers face disciplinary action. No criminal prosecutions have been made.

These complaints may be just be the tip of the iceberg. The forces with the most complaints against them are those where recent high profile cases have uncovered an underlying problem — South Yorkshire and the Metropolitan.

How much is as yet uncovered? There is no reason to believe these police forces are unique.

• Solidarity on Rotherham: bit.ly/2aBOHfE

An appeal for Miłka Tyszkiewicz

By Marek Krukowski and Józef Pinior

Iwona Bogumiła Tyszkiewicz, or Miłka, was sentenced for the first time in 1982 in Elbląg when she was still a schoolgirl to three years imprisonment for smuggling Solidarnosc leaflets and underground opposition journals.

In the following years she was watched and threatened by the security services and sacked from a series of workplaces.

In Wrocław she was one of the activists of the legendary Orange Alternative. She also co-operated with the printing network associated with Fighting Solidarity, the Regional Strike Committee and the Freedom and Peace movement. From 1987 she took part in building the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the Polish Socialist Party – Democratic Revolution (PPS-RD).

Owing to her involvement in the Orange Alternative and the PPS and PPS-RD, she was repeatedly detained for 48 hour periods. In 1988 she was sentenced to a fine of 10,000 złoty or three days imprisonment.

After 1989 Miłka was active mainly in creating non-governmental organisations in Poland. She was involved in human rights work and in 1991 co-organised the



first congress of organisations working on human rights. She created one of the first internet journals *Posłaniec* (Messenger). She was active in the creation of the Green Party.

In 2004-15 she worked with the Council of Europe's Commission for Human Rights, as well as Józef Pinior's offices in the European Parliament and the Polish Senate.

Miłka Tyszkiewicz is now ill with a brain tumour — fortunately not aggressive and possible to operate upon. Her prognosis is relatively good. On this basis Miłka has recently been recognised as a “grade 1” disabled person and so gets a modest monthly benefit

payment.

Miłka's treatment requires money for things like medicines, rehabilitation, medical appliances and quite a specific diet. She is currently using a borrowed walker and wheelchair. Miłka's present condition makes it completely impossible for her to do paid work.

We appeal to people of good will for help so that Miłka can get the medicine and rehabilitation that she needs.

Owing to the kindness of the Foundation for Freedom and Peace (Fundacja Wolność i Pokój) you can provide support by paying into its account no 14124061751111 00103789.

Please add the reference (in Internet banking after you have specified the amount) that this is to help Miłka Tyszkiewicz (“na pomoc dla Miłki”).

International transfers require the IBAN Code: PL14124061751111001037894118 and the Swift or BIC Code: PKOP-PLPW.

The Bank is PEKAO SA in Warsaw, ul. Jasna 1 00-013 Warszawa. The account belongs to Fundacja Wolność i Pokój, ul. Gwiaździsta 5 C m.7, 01-651 Warszawa.

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Kimber's contradictory consciousness

THE LEFT

By Liam Conway

The Brexit vote was “a bitter blow for the establishment, big business, the international financial institutions, the rich and the politicians” says Charlie Kimber, writing for *International Socialism* journal.

This gives the impression, “with minor exceptions”, that the ruling class was united in their support for remaining in the EU, which is clearly a fantasy.

Cut through the pseudo sociology in Kimber's analysis and you are left with two points. The leave vote was primarily a revolt against the establishment and was not dominated by racism or hostility to migrants.

What evidence does Kimber give for either of these conclusions? For the latter a little. For the former, none at all.

Kimber quotes studies by professors and commentary by Labour politicians to justify the purely Kimber view that the leave vote was anti-establishment. Kimber writes that Professor Jennings of Southampton University found that “workers perceived politicians as arrogant, boorish, corrupt, creepy, devious, loathsome, lying, parasitical, pompous, shameful, sleazy, slippery, spineless, traitorous, weak and wet.” But how is this specifically related to the EU? Most of the sleaze that dominated the press was rooted

in the British Parliament, not the European.

Kimber says that the Leave vote “was driven by such factors as the MPs' expenses scandal, the decades-long sense that the political parties are now all the same, the widespread contempt for the ‘pillars of society’, the lies told to launch the Iraq war and the resentment that comes from sensing that a tiny group at the top of society are making millions while you're suffering — and they are also laughing at you.” But Kimber produces no evidence at all that the groups he cites as most likely to vote Leave — some of the poorest and least formally educated in society — did so because of class hostility to the elites in Britain. And even if the poorest of the poor were bitter and chaffing at the bit because of their mistreatment by the British establishment, why would they blame the EU?

DISLOCATION

Jennings' study is nothing to do with the EU, it is about dislocation with British politics and politicians.

Where is the sociological research that shows workers voted to leave because of “lies told to launch the Iraq War”? This is just political wishful thinking to justify the line of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP).

Kimber re-states the three reasons for SWP support for leaving the EU. The EU is a “capitalist club”. The EU is a racist fortress. The EU is part of the imperialist world order. What Kimber fails to do is explain how leav-



ing the EU gets you out of the “capitalist club”, undermines racism within Europe against EU nationals, or weakens the imperialist world order. Kimber accepts that racist incidents have risen since the referendum but there is no mention of EU nationals, such as Polish workers, seriously considering returning to their homelands because of increased racism after the referendum.

Kimber tries to get around the clear rise in racism and anti-immigrant sentiment by banging on about the contradictory or uneven nature of working class consciousness, but he only succeeds in demonstrating the uneven nature of his own consciousness.

I suggest the SWP, and Kimber in particular, re-read the Communist Manifesto where they will find Karl waxing lyrical about the

progressive, as well as the reactionary, nature of capitalism:

“The bourgeoisie keeps more and more doing away with the scattered state of the population, of the means of production, and of property. It has agglomerated population, centralised the means of production, and has concentrated property in a few hands. The necessary consequence of this was political centralisation.

“Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments, and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of laws, one national class-interest, one frontier, and one customs-tariff.”

What response did Marx recommend for this tendency in capitalism to break down “independent or loosely connected provinces (nations)”? Was it a reversal of the process? Not at all.

“This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another. It was just this contact that was needed to centralise the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes.”

Kimber replaces solidarity with the interests of the working class with pandering to the current consciousness (of some) on the EU.

Why we shouldn't go for “left Trumpism”

By Michel Husson*

On 23 January 2015, several days after being named as the Finance Minister of the new Greek government, Yanis Varoufakis answered questions from Channel Four.

His first objective, he explained, was to take emergency steps to reduce the social effects of the crisis, and the third was to re-negotiate the debt. Between these two, and before even getting to the question of the debt, Varoufakis named as his target the system of oligarchy: “We are going to destroy the Greek oligarchy system”.

These intentions were not followed through with, but Varoufakis clearly understood that a double rupture was needed in order to provide an alternative to economic and social disaster: not only a break with the austerity imposed by the Troika, but also, within Greece, a break with an oligarchic system made up of absentee ship-owners, predatory CEOs and financial speculators.

What is the relationship here with Brexit, the election of Trump, or the rise of the [French] National Front? Perhaps it can be found in the fundamental asymmetry of the anti-system discourse which contributes to their success. The method consists of subordinating the social question to the national question, or more precisely, to the way that the nation is inserted into the world economy. Concretely, this consists of instilling the simple idea: all our problems, including social problems, come from outside. The people responsible for all our problems are strangers “by nature”: that is, globalisation, China, Mexico, refugees, the European Commission, etc.

Certainly, at home, this anti-system dis-

course opposes the parties “of the system”, but the main objection to them is not so much that they serve the interests of banks and multinationals and to have therefore acted in a socially regressive way. To be sure, establishment parties have been accused of being responsible for unemployment and inequality, but only insofar as they are allied to Brussels, or the World Trade Organisation, and therefore subject to the whims of the global system.

“We are going to take back control of our country and make America great again”. That was the fundamental theme of the Trump campaign, and we heard its partisans acclaim it during his first declaration of his candidacy with cries of “USA! USA! USA!” Re-establishing the USA in its role as the world's uncontested primary superpower, or to reclaim the benefits of British insularity, this is the background music for the anti-system proclamations.

Ignacio Ramonet [a left-wing journalist, editor of the Spanish edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*] recently unveiled “Donald Trump's proposals that the mainstream media is hiding from us”. Alongside Trump's narrative of victimhood vis-à-vis the media (a classic), two main propositions take centre stage in Trump's program: denunciation of the ills of globalisation, and protectionism. Five million industrial jobs have been lost in the USA and, says Trump, this is due to relocations, free trade, and Chinese competition. Therefore, he promises to increase duties on Chinese and Mexican products and to denounce free-trade agreements which have been concluded (NAFTA) or which are being negotiated (TTIP).

In a recent comment piece, Antoine Bevort and Philippe Corcuff denounce the “confusionist fog on the left”. Even if the title of

their piece, “Ignacio Ramonet Trumpified?”, might seem too much, their criticism nevertheless indicates a real problem. Ramonet's article really reads like a list of themes which we ought not cede to the right. His list continues with “refusing neo-liberal budget cuts to social security”, the increase of taxes on traders and the re-establishment of the Glass-Steagall law which was repealed in 1999 by Bill Clinton. In short, Trump is setting himself up as the defender of the middle class and the poor: the enemy of finance, so to speak.

For Trump, as with Sarkozy, Juppé or Le Pen, the social rhetoric is really pure decoration.

It is this aspect of Trump programme which “the mainstream media is hiding from us” and which we should take into account. That is certain. But Ramonet “is hiding from us” the fact that Trump's project is also to privatise Obamacare. And above all, how can we take seriously the demagogic refrain (“we will cut taxes but without touching social welfare”) which we know so well in France thanks to the rightwing Presidential primaries?

For Trump, as for Sarkozy, Juppé or Le Pen, the social rhetoric is really just decoration: it covers over what lies at the heart of their discourse, which is the assertion of sovereignty



The left should not turn to a form of left “Trumpism”

or an identity (which is more or less under attack). The strength of this discourse rests on a simplistic representation of the world, which is to say, primitive, or even tribal: all our ills come from elsewhere, from abroad. It is possible to construct a mass psychology with its basis on the fear of the future and of the other. The long shadow of the national question falls across and obscures the social question.

We must not, we are told, allow the right to monopolise the “national” question: the left should develop its own sovereignty narrative — a left-wing one of course — for which quitting the Euro should be the central plank.

If that is the lesson that we draw from Trump, then the identitarians and the xenophobes are in for a great time.

• Originally published in *Alterecoplus*, 10/11/2016. Translated by Edward Maltby.

Fidel Castro: not our hero

Fidel Castro, one of the last remaining leaders of a Stalinist state, died last week at the age of 90.

Among sections of the left there is near-hysterical outpouring of eulogy, while bourgeois commentators blithely dismiss him as a communist despot. A third camp socialist assessment of Castro's politics is needed.

Fidel Castro was undoubtedly the central historical figure of modern Cuban history. The 1959 revolution that brought his 26 July Movement (M26J) to power was a bourgeois political revolution which smashed Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship, but replaced it with their own Bonapartist regime. Half driven by US hostility and half by choice, the Castroites opted to create a Stalinist state in 1961, adopting the model of the USSR, China, North Korea and (North) Vietnam at the time. Castro ruled until 2006, when he handed power to his brother, the current president Raúl Castro. Over the past 25 years, Cuba has taken faltering steps towards capitalism, while the ruling bureaucracy has maintained its iron grip.

How was Cuba ruled under Fidel Castro?

Fidel Castro established a bureaucratic collectivist class society in Cuba. The surplus was appropriated directly, through the state's control of the economy. Cuban workers and peasants received their means of subsistence most as non-monetary rations — low cost or free food, housing, education, health and other welfare facilities. However the surplus product pumped out of the direct producers was controlled and allocated by the ruling bureaucracy, while independent trade unions and civil liberties were suppressed.

Under Fidel Castro the state owned the means of production and the bureaucracy owned and controlled the state, ruling through the myriad of state-sponsored "mass" organisations. The bureaucracy, armed forces and security services he headed had privileged access to consumer goods through special stores, separate hospitals, recreational villas, and trips abroad.

Raúl Castro has summed up the political ideal of the Cuban ruling class as "monolithic unity". Although there is enforced mass participation in Cuba's polity, democratic control is absent. The Communist Party, formed in 1965 has only held seven congresses in nearly 60 years. The Popular Power assemblies were not established until 1976 and allow only vetted candidates to stand on their biography, with those "elected" able only to rubber stamp decisions taken elsewhere by the bureaucrats.

Fidel Castro's politics originated in the Latin American populist nationalism. He came from an upper-class Cuban background. He emerged politically during his

five years at the Law School of the University of Havana, between 1945 and 1950. Fidel Castro was involved in the anarchist group UIR as a student, enrolling in an ill-fated attempt to overthrow the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic in 1947. He was in Bogotá during the riots in April 1948.

By the early 1950s Castro was a young lawyer and second-rank leader of the bourgeois Ortodoxo party, founded by Auténtico Eduardo Chibás in protest at the latter's corruption. Castro was on the party's slate as a candidate for Congress in elections scheduled for June 1952, which were aborted by Batista's coup in March that year. Castro revered Jose Martí, who fought for Cuban independence against the Spanish. He upheld a morality of "honour" in contrast to the gangster politics that prevailed in Cuba. But as late as March 1956, in his resignation letter from the Ortodoxo party, he remained a mainstream Cuban politician, writing "for the Chibasist masses, the July 26 Movement is not something distinct from the Ortodoxia".

ORGANISATION

What distinguished Fidel Castro was his emphasis on political control from the top down and his obsession with organisation.

In his book, *My Early Years* (1998) Castro claimed to have devised a middle-way strategy in the context of the Cold War. He put particular emphasis on what he called "chief-tainship", or what Marxists have regarded as Bonapartism, where the leadership, balancing between contending classes and organisations, establishes a strong state to direct development. Castro's approach stands in contrast to the kind of collective, democratically elected leadership group found in a genuinely Marxist organisation.

Was Fidel Castro a Stalinist from the start?

Fidel Castro claimed he supported and was strongly influenced by Marxist-Leninism before the revolution. Certainly key people around him were connected to the Stalinist movement. Raúl Castro joined the youth wing of the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP, as the Cuban CP was called) in the 1950s, while Che Guevara was also committed to Soviet Stalinism. However the clashes within the M26J and differences between the M26J leaders and the PSP do not suggest Fidel Castro was fronting for Stalinism at the time. The assessments of the US and Soviet governments, and of the PSP do not suggest Castro was a Stalinist in 1959.

Fidel Castro became a vocal Stalinist after the US government became hostile to his regime, imposing its blockade and sanctions. Cuba's much heralded achievements under



"Fatherland or death" a Castroite slogan

Fidel Castro depended in part on the receipt of massive Russian aid from the early sixties to the end of the eighties. Between 1960 and 1990, Cuba received about 65 billion dollars of Soviet aid on very favourable terms. Under Fidel Castro, Cuba supported the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 and the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989.

The idea that Cuba under Fidel Castro was some kind of "workers' state" is ridiculous and destructive. Some workers did help overthrow the Batista dictatorship in 1959. But it was not a socialist revolution, where the working class self-consciously establishes its own organs of struggle. There were no soviets, no big working class mobilisations, no workers' control and no Marxist party at the helm. Fidel Castro was candid enough to admit as much on numerous occasions.

Supporters of the M26J ousted pro-Batista trade union bureaucrats immediately after the revolution and elected more authentic representatives. But at the tenth congress of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC) in November 1959, Castro intervened and imposed his own leadership slate. After the congress concluded, the Labour Ministry assisted by the Stalinist union leaders and their allies purged a large number of trade union leaders who had resisted their influence. There were no new elections and no more union autonomy.

At the eleventh CTC congress in November 1961, unanimity replaced controversy. With no contest allowed for the leading positions, all leaders were elected by acclamation. The old Stalinist leader Lázaro Peña regained the position of secretary general that he had last held in the forties under Batista. The unions became state labour fronts. In 1961, Guevara argued that "the Cuban workers have to get used to living in a collectivist regime and therefore cannot strike".

Under Fidel Castro, new labour laws strengthened labour discipline. They punished workers who displayed signs of "laziness, vagrancy, absenteeism, tardiness, foot-dragging, or lack of respect for superiors" through wage cuts, job transfers and sackings. The Castro government imposed labour files on Cuban workers and incarcerated "non-productive" workers in labour camps. In 1983 a Solidarnosc-type independent union was suppressed by Fidel Castro's

government.

Fidel Castro was not an advocate of human freedom or an opponent of oppression in other respects.

On coming to power the regime set up the Federation of Cuban Women, but it is not independent nor committed to women's liberation. The majority of Cuban women have ended up with a "double burden": working many hours outside as well as inside their homes. For many years Cuban law denied the legal concept of "marital rape". At the beginning of Castro's rule, the Cuban government strictly enforced the existing anti-abortion legislation, though this was liberalised in 1979.

LGBT

Cuban LGBT people suffered greatly when Fidel Castro was in charge.

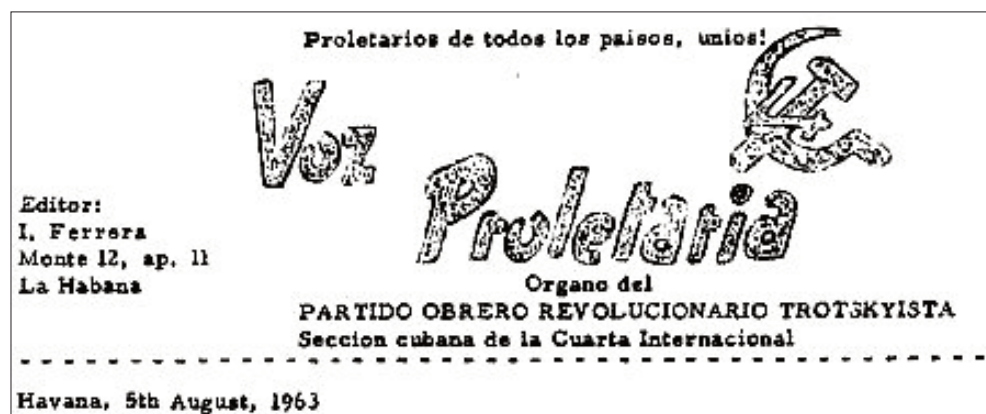
In the 1960s the regime routinely harassed LGBT people and published homophobic literature. In 1965 the government erected the UMAP camps, where for some three years gays, along with Jehovah's Witnesses, some Catholics, members of Abakúa and other black secret societies, and other "deviants" were forced to provide cheap, regimented labour. Mandatory screening for HIV infection began in 1986. HIV-positive people (900 cases in 1993) were quarantined in sanatoriums and once they developed full-blown AIDS, transferred to hospitals. The quarantine policy was used as a substitute for serious educational programmes on AIDS.

If the future of socialism is modelled on Fidel Castro's Cuba, then there is no possibility of socialism. Fidel Castro contributed nothing to working-class socialism. He is no hero of ours.

But real socialism does have a future. Our socialism — meaning the self-emancipation of the working class — is not obsolete, is not a relic of the past, but the very real alternative for the present.

Our socialism is based on the actual tendencies in the world today and on the real forces of the working class, the social agent we look to in Cuba and everywhere else as the progressive agent of change.

• Sam Farber's work, including the books, *Cuba since the Revolution of 1959: A Critical Assessment* (2012) and *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered* (2006) provides the best understanding of Castroism.



Voz Proletaria, the newspaper of Cuban Trotskyists until they were suppressed

The consequences of Trump

By Colin Foster

Newly-elected US president Trump will surely hack back migrants', workers', women's, and civil rights; speed environmental destruction; and raise risks of war, especially with Iran. He may also disrupt the large trends which have allowed capitalist growth for 60-plus years.

A trade-liberalising, world-market-boosting trend, embedded in institutions keystoned by the USA, was launched in 1947 and has emerged from five major convulsions since then strengthened or intact. It survived the US dollar's breaking of its link with gold, in 1971, and the crises of the 1970s: in fact, global financial flows zoomed in that decade. It was accelerated by the global shift to neoliberalism in the late 1970s and the 1980s. When most of the Stalinist states collapsed, and China and Vietnam shifted to "market Stalinism", from 1989 onwards, the institutions set up to order the affairs of the "Western" side of the Cold War adapted smoothly to draw in new territories. Where the Kennedy Round of GATT in 1964-7 had included only 62 countries, the World Trade Organisation, GATT's successor from 1995, had 128 countries subscribing to the 1994 Uruguay Round, and has 164 today. China joined in 2001. In 2008, the first G20 statement after the crash stressed above all avoiding protectionism; and on the whole that has held. Between 2008 and 2016 many new trade restrictions were introduced, but none huge, and almost as many trade liberalisations.

Since 2008 world trade has grown slower than world output for the first extended period since World War 2, and global capital flows have slowed, too. Even that, however, does not necessarily signify a solid trend of "deglobalisation". Global trade is mostly in raw materials and (increasingly) manufactured and semi-manufactured goods. In most economies "services" dominate output (about 80% in the USA), while in global trade they are an increasing part but still only 21%. In an era where manufacturing employment is declining not just in the old industrial countries, but in Brazil, South Korea, China, etc., the relative decline of manufacturing value-added can outstrip the relative increase in trading of services for a while without this signifying a general turn inwards and away from world markets.

The world's governments have been unable to reach comprehensive new global trade agreements since 1994. The "Doha round" of WTO negotiations has produced nothing but the relatively slight "Bali Package" of 2013. The US-European TTIP, and the US-Asian TPP, looked unlikely to get concluded even before Trump's victory. And yet: further trade agreements would always be harder to reach once tariffs on most trade had been reduced to single-figure percentages (latest average applied tariffs on WTO figures: USA 3.5%, Japan 4.0%, EU 5.1%, China 9.9%: in 1931 the average applied tariff in the USA was 35%). About 80% of world trade is now transfers within the supply chains of multinational corporations: they show no wish to do other than keep those chains expanding. Long-entrenched, deeply-

embedded interests sustain the world-market-oriented order, with all its inequities and instabilities and horrors and also with all its erratic dynamism.

And yet, and yet... Donald Trump, as John Weeks puts it, represents not so much a rejection of neoliberalism as a climax of its drive to remove restraints on the abuses of capital. Trump says he favours free trade, he objects only to poorly negotiated trade agreements, and that, if left free to swagger and threaten, he, with his "art of the deal", can do better. But what does this bluster mean?

Trump has been specific about imposing high tariffs on the USA's main trade partners, Mexico and China; less specific, but threatening, about US withdrawal from the WTO. Even if more mainstream Republicans in Congress are horrified, he has much wider legal scope to impose tariffs and disrupt trade than presidents Obama and George W Bush had to push through tariff-reduction deals. Possibly Trump's administration could produce what has been called an "aborted trade war", in which Trump's first protectionist measures produce such backlash and disruption that he quickly retreats, something like an enlarged version of Reagan's initial protectionist lurch. Possibly it could produce a still-largely-globalised world in which the USA is an exceptional rogue state, a counterpart to China, which, though the world's largest exporter, still has large (mostly non-tariff) barriers to trade.

ROGUE

Those limited outcomes, however, presuppose a controlled reaction by other states, in other words by a world system of states in which the keystone for decades, the USA, has gone rogue.

The EU's difficulties in dealing expeditiously even with its own internal problems make it unlikely that it could become an alternative keystone. They presuppose that the Trump precedent does not snowball; yet his victory has given a boost to the Front National and Marine Le Pen in France. In April-May 2017 Le Pen will almost certainly enter the run-off vote for the French presidency, and current opinion polls are close enough that she could win. She promises a referendum to take France out of the EU, and in June 2016 polling showed 61% of the French (a greater percentage than of British: Pew Research 2016) had an "unfavourable" view of the EU. If France withdraws from the EU, nothing like the current EU's level of capitalist integration can survive: only some loose trade area, and maybe a much-reduced tighter eurozone.

A global slump, and ugly, regressive politics almost everywhere, would ensue, and probably strengthen the protectionist trends. And suppose that weighty "globalist" interests do deter or limit Trump, and Le Pen fails to win in May 2017. Even then a new crisis (which is likely to come soon for other reasons, independent of Trump or Le Pen) would find a political establishment whose repertoire of anti-crisis measures has been exhausted and discredited, and thus vulnerable to new and more aggressive right-wing surges.



The USA has always been an exception within the capitalist world order it has promoted and keystoned. Because of the USA's size, its relatively small (though increasing, from 10% in 1970 to 25% now) ratio of trade to GDP, and its status as home to so many multinationals, one expert remarks that: "The United States has not historically worried much about how to make itself an attractive location for investment geared towards exports", though most other governments have worried greatly and increasingly about that.

Brexit sentiment in Britain has been mostly about immigration, not trade: most Brexit voters (according to surveys) and Brexit leaders (according to their statements) want the UK to stay very open to trade, only they dislike immigration more than they like trade. In the USA it has been different. There is much anti-immigrant sentiment there, but it is not overwhelming nor even necessarily increasing: as of 2016, 61% supported a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants, and that percentage had been stable for some years (Jones et al 2016). Skepticism about trade has been on the rise since the 1990s, both in public opinion and in Congress.

Both George W Bush and Obama had to battle and cajole Congress for trade deals. The "fast-track" authority of the presidency to do trade deals, in effect from 1975, lapsed in 1994, was restored from 2002 to 2007 and then lapsed again; was restored in June 2015, but to little effect. By September 2010, in a poll 53% said free trade agreements "hurt" the USA, and only 17% that they "helped", where in 1999 there had been a majority for "helped" (Card et al 2011 p.28). The USA has simultaneously been the keystone of a relatively free-trade world-market system, and often the most reckless and narrow-minded about the necessary capitalist give-and-take. This contradiction could now become deadly.

Reliance on the system remaining stable, or on a mild dose of kindness and generosity to rally a sufficient alternative to the new surge of the right, is foolish. Only an assertive, energetic, sharp-policy'd mobilisation by the left can do that.

Trump win was a revolt of the NCOs

By Barry Finger, New Politics (USA)

Online at bit.ly/2fMqzbj

Resist T

By Martin Thomas

It is conceivable that within a year or so there will be no European Union, or not much of an EU, for Britain to quit.

In Italy, Salvini's right-wing nationalist and anti-immigrant Lega Nord may be able to seize the initiative after the likely defeat on 4 December of prime minister Matteo Renzi in Renzi's referendum on increased executive powers.

Or it may be the Five Star Movement of Beppe Grillo, who has tacked left sometimes but who greeted Trump's election with right-wing bombast. Trump, Grillo said, had defeated the "journalists and intellectuals of the system, serving the big powers. Trump has screwed over all of them — Freemasons, huge banking groups, the Chinese".

The Lega Nord wants Italy to quit the euro, though not the EU; so does Grillo; so does Silvio Berlusconi and his Forza Italia.

In Austria, also on 4 December, neo-Nazi Norbert Hofer may win the presidency.

Next March and April, Marine Le Pen of the Front National could win the much more powerful French presidency. She is way behind in the polls at present, but then so was Trump for a long time. She wants France to quit the EU as well as the euro.

Her likely second-round opponent, François Fillon, is not quite a "call out the border guards" type, but he is a social conservative, a Thatcherite, who rejoices that "France is more rightwing than it has ever been".

NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands also has elections in March 2017.

Since Britain's Brexit vote, Geert Wilders' anti-immigrant PVV, which wants the Netherlands to quit the EU, has usually led the opinion polls.

Maybe none of these dislocations will happen. 65 years of European capitalist integration, since the Coal and Steel Community of 1951, have created a web of connections with staying power.

But even one upset, in Italy, France, or the Netherlands, could unravel an already-shaky EU. Probably, in the short term at least, a looser free-trade area would survive, rather than a full return to frontier fences, heavy tariffs, and high military tensions, but "Brexit" as such would dwindle to a detail.

If the EU survives on present lines, its anxieties and tensions will work against easy terms for Brexit. They will make "hard Brexit" probable whatever the Tories want. Already many of the Tory ministers positively want "hard Brexit".

That will be regression. A break-up of the EU would be worse regression. It would increase divisions between the working classes of different countries. It would threaten the rights and security of 14 million people in Europe who live, currently as EU citizens, outside their countries of origin. The new border barriers would make things even harder for refugees from outside the EU.

The break-up would sharpen competitive pressures on governments to squeeze their

Trump surge and Brexit



working classes, and reverse the mediocre and patchy, but real, processes of social levelling-up which have come with the EU. It would expose each country more to the gusts of the world markets.

Foolish is the idea, circulated in some parts of the left, that a break-up or partial break-up of the EU would be good, because all disruption of the existing system must be good. Salvini, Grillo, Hofer, Le Pen, Wilders will not replace the EU's neoliberalism by anything more generous. They will only add anti-migrant and nationalist venom.

The mainstream left, the "centre-left" as it shyly says these days, is alarmed, but unable to respond with flair. In Austria, the Social-Democratic SPÖ has a coalition government with Hofer's neo-Nazi Freedom Party in the Burgenland province.

In Italy, the Democratic Party, the main remnant of the once-huge Italian Communist Party, is led by Renzi, whose drive for strong executive powers and anti-worker policy has given the right their opening. In France, on 25 October a poll found only 4% of voters "satisfied" with the record of Socialist Party president François Hollande, whose latest move has been to slash workers' rights with a new "Labour Law" (bit.ly/holl-4pc).

The choice, not just between progress and stagnation, but between progress and rancid regression, depends on the clumsily-emerging new forces on the left, like the Corbyn movement in Britain.

We must stake out political ground, win arguments, rally people to principles, remobilise the labour movement at ground level, pull together into political effectiveness young people who still overwhelmingly reject the new nationalism and racism.

Neither the Corbyn-McDonnell leadership of the Labour Party, nor Labour's biggest left grouping, Momentum, is doing well on this.

In the run-up to the June 2016 Brexit referendum, John McDonnell said, rightly, that: "One of the fundamental rights the EU protects for its citizens is freedom of movement. I think this is critical. The right of working people to live and work where they choose is a hard-won gain of the labour movement...

We should stand foursquare for freedom of movement in Europe. The right to travel and seek employment is a fundamental one".

Now McDonnell suggests that freedom of movement is a curse, but one worth tolerating as a price for free trade. "Labour will insist that any deal with the EU includes, at least as an interim, tariff-free Single Market access... Full Single Market access implies freedom of movement, as in Norway's European Economic Area deal... There is a robust economic case to be made for the benefits of free trade over the perceived costs of migration. Labour is prepared to make that case".

And not even that. Labour is not making that case.

After the 3 November High Court ruling that the Tories cannot use the "Royal Prerogative" to start Brexit proceedings by "Article 50" without debate in Parliament, Jeremy Corbyn rightly said that Labour would vote against "Article 50" unless the Tories com-

mitted to single market access.

Right-wing deputy leader Tom Watson then said Labour would refuse to take advantage of the Tories' difficulties. Labour would vote for "Article 50" regardless. Corbyn deferred.

The available report of the 22 November meeting of Labour's National Executive records no dissent from the claim that: "our party must not try to subvert the decision of the British public (as the Liberals seem to be planning). This would play into the hands of the Tory government" — i.e. that Labour must give the Tories a blank cheque for a Tory Brexit. The one and only thing Theresa May has made clear about the Tory Brexit is that it will block freedom of movement.

APPEAL

On 5-8 December the Supreme Court will decide on the government's appeal against the 3 November court ruling.

This time the Scottish government will join in, arguing that the Scottish parliament too must be consulted. A third angle has been raised by a pro-EU pressure group basing itself on a plausible argument by George Yarrow that the "default" form of quitting the EU is to fall back to European Economic Area status (like Norway: EU semi-membership, including freedom of movement), and it requires a further specific decision to quit the EEA. (47 years ago, as it happens, Yarrow was the person who convinced the present writer to join the revolutionary socialist movement, then in the form of the IS, today's SWP. Since then he has become a neoliberal professor of economics at Oxford University).

Meanwhile the Tories' own Office of Budgetary Responsibility estimates the costs of Brexit to the government budget at £6 billion a year. The Financial Times estimates the residual payments which Britain will have to pay into the EU budget, to cover commitments already made but not yet paid for, at £20 billion. We are a long way from the Brex-

iters' promise of £350 million a week extra for the NHS from savings on payments to the EU, a promise dropped as soon as they won the referendum.

The 23 June vote represents no fixed-forever "decision of the British public" which obliges Labour to give away the rights of migrant workers (and British workers and young people who want to work, study, or live in Europe) by abandoning freedom of movement. In fact, since some Leave voters wanted something like EEA status, even on 23 June there was probably a majority for keeping freedom of movement.

Plebiscitary democracy — democracy via referendum snap votes, on questions shaped and timed by the established powers — is the thinnest form of democracy. Usually it just serves those already in office. This time a strong sub-section of those in office (Johnson, Gove, etc.) were able to surprise Cameron, in a public debate which was essentially Johnson-Tory plus UKIP versus Cameron-Tory, with Labour voices neglected by the media (Corbyn) or silent (Alan Johnson, the Labour right-winger supposedly leading Labour's Remain campaign).

That does not make it more democratic. The referendum excluded 16-17 year olds, excluded EU citizens living in the UK (though they can vote in local authority elections), was run on poor registers missing out seven million people; and such a narrow snap vote is no democratic authority to deprive millions of freedom of movement and probably impose new borders between England and Scotland and between Northern Ireland and the South.

All but the thinnest democracy includes a process of the formation, refinement, revision, and re-formation of a collective majority opinion. Without such a process, and without organised democratic political parties which collectively distill ideas and fight for them, democracy means only rule by whatever faction of the rich and well-placed can sustain itself through judiciously-chosen successive snap popular votes. It has almost no element of collective self-rule.

Labour should fight for freedom of movement, for substantive democracy, and against "Article 50".

Will Italy shift right in an election?

By Hugh Edwards

The world's leading financial media have recently sharply turned their attention to the critical consequences of Italy's constitutional referendum on 4 December.

What stirs these experts is the significance of the vote for the country's notoriously precarious banking system and the effect of a rejection — the no vote is 5-7 points ahead in the polls — for political stability in Europe.

Prime Minister Renzi wants to transform the elective Italian Senate into an apparatus of the ruling party or the government, composed of 100 senators, selectively picked from Mayors and councillors from the regions. They would be both unaccountable and enjoy the immunity of parliamentary deputies.

Thanks to Renzi's proposed new electoral law, the majority of those elected to the Chamber of Deputies will be nominees of

the respective political party. In addition recourse to the referendum will become more difficult, as will laws via popular initiative.

But the icing on the cake will be the enormous prize bestowed on the party receiving most votes. If no one gets a 40%+ vote, then in the run-off between the two top contenders, the winner will get many more deputies.

The precedent is Mussolini's law that assigned to the list that had got 25% of the votes two-third of all the seats in the Chamber of Deputies, from which he proceeded to construct his totalitarian regime.

Renzi's real object here is a fundamental reordering of the country's economic, political and social fabric, pivoted critically on a historic subjection and domestication of the working-class movement.

But notwithstanding the inevitable support from those among the country's most privileged and powerful, the price he is now paying for the unending austerity is an un-

containable anger and hatred that most probably will see his defeat.

The growing and palpable fear among the bourgeoisie is mounting instability and the possibility of an election if Renzi fails. Already Berlusconi — who when Renzi assumed office privately concurred with the decision to bulwark executive power — has declared his support for the no vote, aiming to rebuild his split forces with Salvini's Lega Nord to outface the real possibility of Grillo's Five Star outfit emerging as the real contender for political power. However Salvini is showing his independence and has been hosting Le Pen, no doubt eagerly fuelling the burgeoning fantasies of "doing a Trump".

Tragically the liberal and would-be radical forces are nowhere likely to play any significant role as a coherent mobilising force of attraction against the miasma of racist, xenophobic poison that will be unleashed if Renzi is defeated.



Changing through struggle

Bruce Robinson reviews 'Cart' (2014)

Sun-Hee works as a cashier in a large supermarket in a South Korean town.

She is just about managing, working unpaid overtime she hopes will earn her the permanent position she has been promised which would enable her to satisfy some of her children's wants. Shy and passive, she watches as a colleague, Hye-mi, is humiliated by being forced to apologise on her knees to a customer. Then all the non-permanent staff are sacked by text message as the company wants to outsource their jobs because, as one manager says, everybody's doing it.

The women meet secretly and set up a union. Sun-Hee reluctantly gets involved and is cajoled by her friends into becoming one of the negotiators with the management. When they are ignored, the women strike. As scabs are brought in, the women occupy the supermarket and the rest of the film follows the course of the strike which is finally broken by the use of company goons and riot police.

The key theme is how Sun-Hee changes as a result of her central involvement in the

strike, becoming more confident and assertive. Her relationships also change, particularly with her son, who resents her absence but comes to respect her when she sticks up for him against his own abusive employer, but also with Hye-mi who is forced back to work after her young son is seriously injured by the thugs. The film ends a bit like a Western with Sun-Hee on a doomed mission to take on the riot police armed only with a shopping trolley.

'Cart' is based on a real strike of workers at the E-Land Home-ever supermarket in 2007 which ended with some of the workers being reinstated. The reality of the awakening of low-paid and precarious women workers is also echoed in the Grunwick strike and more recently in the struggles of cleaners. The only part of the film that grates with this is the ease with which the women strike leaders were prepared to hand over the leading role to a man, a supervisor who joins the union after the strike started. (Perhaps this reflects Korean culture.)

But the film gives a realistic view of how people change and learn in struggle.

• 'Cart' was shown as part of the 2016 Korean Film Festival. Versions with English subtitles can be found online.

Syriza: dark at the

By Dora Polenta

Participants in the Second Congress of Greece's once-left party, Syriza, on 13-16 October, were reduced in the role of applauders of the Syriza-Anel government's memorandum doctrines.

Reminiscent of the Tory Prime Minister Samaras, who defended the implementation of the second [2012] Memorandum by saying that "there is light at the end of the tunnel", Alexis Tsipras claimed the third memorandum could bring a new dawn. "We continue to implement a fair deal and we expect from the institutions and our partners to meet their obligations ... The deepest darkness is before dawn," he said.

There was no serious opposition at the conference. Despite "murmurs" prior to the conference, no candidate challenged Alexis Tsipras for the Syriza presidency. He was elected president by 93.54%.

OPPOSITION

The supposed left opposition within Syriza is the "movement of 53", nominally led by finance minister Euclid Tsakalotos and by Thodoris Dritsas, who has served as the Minister of Shipping and Island Policy and signed off (albeit, if we take his words for it, in a pool of tears and guilt) the sale of the port of Piraeus to the Chinese corporation Cosco.

The "movement of 53" did not raise a "no to the memoranda". It said there was no other way but to continue on the memorandum, but Syriza should explain to the working class that the implementation of austerity is a result of enforcement action by the creditors and not Syriza's choice.

Katerina Knitou said: "we must avoid the perception that the defeat and compromise is our strategic choice and we must clarify that the memorandum is not ours."

The first conference of Syriza, in 2013, committed to abolish all memoranda, and that fundamental commitment was at the centre of Syriza's rise to lead Greece's first-ever government of the Left. That has been replaced by the realpolitik of a continuation of memoranda and drip-by-drip release of the bailout doses.

The first conference had the potentially subversive position of "no sacrifice for the

euro", but that position was eliminated from the second conference.

The programmatic position of Syria against privatisation and for renationalisation has been abandoned for the vague promise of "recovery of the public wealth from the neo-colonial super-fund" (to which the Syriza-Anel government has transferred public assets in preparation for privatisation).

The Syriza conference in July 2013 reflected the great wave of mass struggles during the 2010-2012 period. Also the relative lull of the struggles during 2013; but it was framed around the political objective for a united subversive government of the left, which was presented as a break with the memoranda years. The revolutionary left, inside and outside Syriza, was wary of the risk of entrapment that the slogan of a government of the left might entail, but convinced that a political solution was needed.

Its political deficiencies were a lack of strategy and a lack of preparation. There was no "Plan B" to deal with the prospect of black-mailing (in the form of class war, capital flights, threatened bankruptcy) by the EU-ECB-IMF "Troika". Despite Syriza's loose connections with the anti-globalisation and anti-austerity movement in Europe and worldwide, there was no attempt at a pan-European mobilisation to defend the in-waiting government of the Left.

The ideological framework was an attempt at synthesis between the traditions of left Eurocommunism (strategic structural changes) and a more "Third International" perspective of transitional program and transitional politics. The emphasis was on a rupture with the modern "experiences" of the centre-left in Europe. It described the radical left as a political project hostile to the class interests of European social democracy.

Tsipras and his circle of top advisers successively chopped away that framework. First they must address the "humanitarian crisis". First they must have a national salvation government. At the first conference of Syriza, according even to Tsipras, political alliances should be limited to the left of the political spectrum. But even then, central officials of Syriza said that "a national salvation government" required a broader consensus, excluding only Golden Dawn and Samaras's Tories.

A spiral of poverty

Since the eruption of the financial crisis in 2008, Greece's economy has shrunk by almost 30 percent — a decline unparalleled in peacetime, outside the collapse of the economy of the former Soviet Union amid the restoration of capitalism in the 1990s.

The three austerity programmes imposed on Greece since 2010 have led to a 40 percent cut in pensions and wages, as taxes have been hiked by around 25 percent. Now, 30 percent of Greeks report that they cannot afford to heat their homes in winter.

A Doctors of the World report states that budget cuts to health care have led to 25 percent of Greeks no longer having health coverage and a 51 percent increase in infant mortality in the last three years.

The country's unemployment rate is 28 percent overall and 50 percent for youth under 25. This has slashed social security payments to Greece's contributory-based

public health system. Fully 45 percent of Greek retirees live below the official poverty line, and the average monthly pension in Greece has fallen from €1,350 in 2009 to €833 this year. Retirees often provide the only income in entire families.

The OECD has found that average Greek household income has fallen by 27.5 percent since 2007.

The *Financial Times* notes that the "bleak draft budget for 2016" predicts that the economy will shrink by 1.3 percent overall next year on top of a projected 2.3 percent decline this year.

Greece's foreign debt is more than €315 billion and rising. The *New York Times* comments: "The draft budget also expects the central government's debt to rise to 198 percent of gross domestic product next year, from 187.6 percent now.

"The new bailout loans account for much of the increase."

VERSE

Take Back Control

Janine Booth's pick of news-related poetry is this by Attila the Stockbroker

You tell me how you've suffered since the closure.
I see the pain and sadness in your eyes.
I feel your anger at our country's leaders
Who offer only platitudes and lies.
At gigs I hear so many of these stories.
All different, but the message is the same.
You're sick to death of scheming politicians.
No longer going to play their poxy game.

The referendum was your chance. You took it.
They told you we'd be taking back control.
Control of jobs and factories and borders:
A revolution wrapped up in a poll.
The EU is a ghastly corporate bully.
Cheap labour and big profits at its core.
I understand why you voted for Brexit:
One chance to strike a blow in the class war.

But it wasn't the EU who shut your pit down
And sent Met thugs rampaging through your street.
They didn't close your hospitals and workshops
Smash down your union to brave defeat.
No EU diktat caused the housing crisis
The poll tax, bedroom tax or zero hours.
No, all of these were brought in by the Tories -
And soon those bastards will have brand new powers.

So let's take back control with strong trade unions
And let's take back control and organise
Take back control of pub and school and workplace
And counter all the endless media lies.
Take back control as we all stand together
No scapegoating and no divide and rule.
The future is unwritten, and it's daunting.
Please don't let Farage take you for a fool.
• www.attilasthestockbroker.com

end of the tunnel

A big portion of Syriza then was ready to prepare for conflict and rupture with the national and international capitalist class, with the financial oligarchy and political establishment, with the deep state. But the top echelons already sang other songs. "First we will seek an exit from the crisis, then we will consolidate productive development and investment, and then redistribution will follow".

The Left Platform warned that Plan A — rational negotiations and reasoning with the lenders, "Merkel will accept and everything will be bright" — was doomed to lead to a humiliating defeat. Proposals for a Plan B and the necessary preparations for a collision with the eurozone leaders were a central point of confrontation at the congress, deflected by the slogan "No Sacrifice for the Euro". What was at stake and the intensity of the confrontation were underestimated by sections of the radical left outside Syriza.

By now, Syriza is a completely different party. Exit from the crisis, according to the October 2016 conference, will come through a development law to attract investments, utilisation of the EU ESPA funding, restructuring of the debt, entry into the Quantitative Easing program of the European central bank, and the fight against corruption! It is a typical social democratic answer in the era of the social-liberal degeneration of social democracy. Alexis Tsipras has been visiting the congresses of European social democracy, and apparently aiming for the assimilation of Syriza into the degenerated centre-left neoliberal European social-democratic family.

Meanwhile the cuts in pensions, the neoliberal reforms in the pension system, the tax increases, the house repossession, the threats to further dismantle worker protection laws and trade union rights, build up rage among the working-class majority cancel all hopes of an "exit from the crisis" grounded in the masses.

REFUGEES

On the issue of refugees, despite the anti-racist credentials of the majority of Syriza members and of some of Syriza's cabinet ministers, such as Tasia Christodouloupoulou, Syriza members were invited to support the agreement between Greece, the EU and Turkey.

A country that every summer "welcomes" over 21 million tourists, considers "intractable" a human welcome of 60,000 refugees.

NATO has installed a fleet in the Aegean and is discussing the relocation of its base at Incirlik, in Turkey, to Greece under the "left" government! The Syriza government has not even verbally condemned (as most of the EU states and USA has done) Erdogan's clampdown and jailing of the leadership of the left-pro-Kurdish HDP.

Another key issue of the 2013 conference was the character of the party itself. An invocation of "direct democracy" which supposedly had emerged from the occupations of the city squares as an alternative model to outdated democratic centralism, the ideas and tactics of the Latin American "left populist" movements, and a heightened emphasis on tactics and communication, were used to set up a completely unaccountable leadership structure.

At the October 2016 conference, to further tame the Syriza central committee, an amendment was proposed to Syriza's constitutional clause that only 25% of the CC members can be salaried government officials. The proposal was for MPs to be excluded from the 25% quota.

The conference voted for MPs to remain part of the 25% quota. Alexis Tsipras stepped into the conference floor to challenge the outcome: "If you understand what you have just voted against, that is ok. But if you do not understand, there is a problem because you have just voted against my proposal!" Tsipras proceeded to request an immediate re-vote, which he won!

Euclid Tsakalotos, from the "movement of the 53", won first place in the vote for the CC; Nikos Filis, minister of education, who earned credit from fighting the church in favour of the abolition of religious education, second; and Panos Skourletis, who got credit by protesting against the privatization of DEH, third. That reflected a timid attempt by the delegates to voice some criticism. In a government restructuring following the conference, Alexis Tsipras removed Filis from the ministry of education and demoted Skourletis from the ministry of energy to the ministry of "citizen protection".

Meanwhile, the leading core of Popular Unity, the former Syriza left which quit in July 2015, has chosen to focus on the national currency. The Popular Unity has politically self-identified as the "drachma party", instead of a workers' party of the anti-memorandum struggle for the socialist reorganisation of the Greek economy, which would imply a conflict with the European institutions, and not vice versa.

The focus in the national currency reflects a false, non-Marxist understanding of the causes of the crisis. The priority is the overthrow of the memoranda, which are the tools of profitability of the Greek and European capitalism under the context of global capitalist crisis, and the social transformation, rather than the concentration on a monetary fetish.

Popular Unity remains within a Keynesian logic of "productive restructuring" and "ra-



tionalisation of production". Since when has the radical Left's aim be the "reconstruction" of the capitalist economy, and not its socialist transformation? Popular Unity has in avertedly abandoned any references to the crucial goal of a radical redistribution of income at the expense of capitalist class and in the interests of the working class. The antidote to memorandum, degradation of working and living conditions and unemployment will come through the productive development.

From a Marxian perspective, the struggle for the overthrow of the memoranda under the hegemony of the revolutionary left is not with the aim of launching an elusive insular and utopian road to national capitalist development with the drachma. The first priority should be the imposition of "memoranda" on the rich (radical redistribution of income, workers' control expanding to all sectors private and public of the capitalist economy).

The dismal failure of Syriza, the re-orientation of Podemos and Portugal's Left Bloc into collaborationism, the defeat of the radical movements of the Arab Spring, the setbacks of the promising albeit populist movements and experiments in Latin America, and the

shrinkage of the once strong radical Left in Europe, with the rise of the xenophobic far right, raise questions for the tactics and strategy of the Left.

There are specificities by country and region, but also common themes: the strong reactionary shift of the capitalist class, the strengthening of the extreme right in the conditions of crisis, the global economic crisis. The contradictions of the capitalist class are exacerbated. This makes radical change more difficult radical change but also urgently necessary, due to the worsening conditions of all subordinate classes.

The revolutionary left should reach out to all the ideological and political currents that have differentiated or seceded from the ranks of Syriza, aiming to advance a united front. The Syriza-Anel government will continue their anti-working class attacks. The exodus of the remaining rank and file from Syriza cannot be halted.

The revolutionary left should converse constructively with all these forces in order to embolden the anti-capitalist front.

Timeline

January 2004: formation of Syriza as a coalition around Synaspismos, a continuation of the left-Eurocommunist strand.

October 2009: Pasok wins big majority in Greek election (Syriza on 4.6%). Pasok announces that it has found government finances much worse than it thought; imposes cuts and then in May 2010 enters the first of a series of "Memoranda" with the EU, European Central Bank, and IMF, spelling out cuts in return for bailouts (in fact bailouts of the commercial banks which had lent to the Greek government)

May and June 2012: After the fall of the Pasok administration, and some months of a caretaker regime, two general elections. Syriza wins 17% in May, and 27% in June, but the right-wing party New Democracy narrowly wins.

July 2013: first congress of Syriza as a party rather than a coalition. Commits to reversing cuts; abolishing or defaulting on the "illegitimate" bulk of Greece's debt; public ownership and public control of the banking system; taxation of domestic big capital; against privatization and in favour of renationalisation.

September 2014: Syriza leaders replace (de facto) the Syriza congress policies by the "Thessaloniki declaration", promising to renegotiate a better deal with the EU and distribute the proceeds in welfare measures.

January 2015: Syriza wins election under the leadership of Alexis Tsipras. Forms a

coalition government with the right-wing populist Anel. The activists of the occupations of city squares, the anti-austerity movements, and the 30-plus general strikes since 2010 are asked to sit back and play a supportive role.

February 2015: Despite a high-profile tour by Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, eurozone finance ministers refuse to give Greece a better deal. Syriza extends the Memorandum; pledges to cut spending on health care, education, mass transit, local government, and other essential social services. Utilises all reserves in order to meet debt payments.

July 2015: In a referendum, called by the Syriza government, on EU austerity terms, 61% vote "Oxi" (no). Massive rallies all around Greece, 500,000 in Athens. But over the next weeks, Tsipras pushes through approval of EU austerity terms, sacks left cabinet ministers, and asks all MPs who do not vote for bailout measures to resign. Syriza leftists quit to form Popular Unity.

September 2015: Syriza wins narrow re-election and forms a new coalition government with ANEL. Voter turnout at 56.6%, is the lowest recorded since the fall of the military junta in 1974.

November 2015: Syriza government passes a new austerity budget and expels deputies who voted against the measures. The budget is passed just days after the outgoing president of parliament, Zoe Konstantopoulou, issues the final report of the "Truth Committee on the Greek Debt." The report notes that: "The Third MoU [Memoranda of Understanding] that accompanies

the August 2015 loan agreement, just like the previous ones of 2010 and 2012, transfers the weight of structural adjustment to Greek society. As a result, the Third MoU will increase poverty, class polarization and social exclusion". Its measures "are of equal or greater social and fiscal impact, compared to the preceding ones."

March 2016: Syriza-Anel government and Tsipras act as the gatekeeper of fortress Europe. At the Brussels EU summit; Alexis Tsipras signs a bilateral agreement with Turkey which stipulates that "irregular" migrants must be deported with greater speed back to Turkey. (Following legal studies, the UN has designated the deal between Turkey and Greece as illegal).

October 2016: Syriza agrees to further austerity measures. The Eurogroup of eurozone finance ministers approves the release of €2.8 billion to the Greek government, after the Syriza-led coalition has met the deadline for implementing austerity and privatisations. Legislation earmarks a series of state-owned companies for privatisation, including the Thessaloniki and Athens Water Supply and Sewerage Companies, the Public Power Company, the Athens Metro and ELVO (a bus and army vehicle manufacturer). The sale of these assets will be overseen by the Hellenic Company for Assets and Participation, a "super-fund" to which all Greek state assets to be sold off will eventually be transferred. The super-fund is to have a life span of at least 99 years; half of all its revenues are to go to service Greece's debts.

Where we stand

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production.

The capitalists' control over the economy and their relentless drive to increase their wealth 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 must unite to struggle against capitalist power in the workplace and in wider society.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty wants 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 trade unions and the Labour Party to break with "social partnership" with the bosses and to militantly assert working-class interests.

In workplaces, trade unions, and Labour organisations; among students; in local campaigns; on the left and in wider political 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 domestic labour. For reproductive justice: free abortion on demand; the right to choose when and whether to have children. 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.
- 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!



More online at www.workersliberty.org Workers' Liberty @workersliberty

Digital, but not so democratic

LABOUR

By Simon Nelson

Momentum MxV is an "innovative new digital democracy platform." So said an email on 24 November, signed just "Momentum", to Momentum members.

MxV claims to be a "space to submit proposals for Momentum's conference, discuss the proposals and decide which ones you support". About 125 proposals had been submitted as of 28 November, attracting between 176 and two "support" clicks each.

Without the knowledge of the National Committee, due to meet on Saturday 3rd, it appears that those around the national office of Momentum who are pushing the model of "clicktivism" have tried to create a "fait accompli".

Online communication has a role to play, but to bypass local groups and their elected national committee in favour of whoever can stay online the longest submitting proposals or clicking "like" is no democracy.

Some proposals submitted were removed from the website with no explanation and no recourse other than emails and social media to question what had gone on.

A later statement on the website, cryptically signed "Momentum Digital", then said;

"These proposals were hidden because they did not fit into any of the conference's category areas, for example because they are about public policy issues rather than Momentum, or because they are meta-discussion about the MxV platform itself..."

"However Momentum members have made it clear that they do not want to see proposals removed for being 'off-topic', and would prefer a looser approach where the incipient community here on MxV can self-regulate, and work collectively towards developing fuller proposal documents for the conference."

It still remains unclear who will decide the moderation of the proposals and how they will be formed into motions for the conference. The National Committee should insist on proper oversight of MxV and a full explanation of how it was launched without the en-

agement of members.

Having a forum to see all the motions put before conference, to comment on them, and to discuss ideas is great, if it goes alongside physical meetings that allow Momentum members to have proper discussions — and such basic things as publishing the minutes of meetings online, notifying agendas well in advance, and not waiting seven months between National Committee meetings.

Momentum could also have a telephone number for people to call to contact the office rather than a series of email addresses with little explanation as to what each one is for. The elections for liberation places onto the National Committee and for regional delegate places for those not covered by groups has been haphazard, and a lesson in how not to have a democratic election.

Some members, in fact some candidates, did not get their e-ballots. Members who didn't checked their email within a 72 hour period missed the opportunity to stand. At least one person ended up running in the wrong region!

Momentum meets on 3 December

Momentum's National Committee will meet after an enforced seven-month hiatus on 3 December.

Motions are going to the meeting from Momentum Youth & Students, defending free movement, and from the North West, on exclusions and suspensions from the Labour Party.

The North East has submitted a motion that highlights the lack of democracy and shambolic roll-out of the MxV platform and handling of OMOV elections for some places on the National Committee.

The London Region should have

its motion calling for the National Committee to re-elect the Steering Committee at this meeting heard early in the agenda.

The largest number of proposals are on decision making structures and the running of Momentum's conference, due in February.

Our view remains that decisions should be taken by a delegate-based conference. That will allow proper debate and discussion and empower delegates to go back and build activist groups that carry out the policies decided. A series of online OMOV ballots with limited debate is not a real alternative.

The conference is still mooted for

February, but no date has yet been set.

Some in Momentum are worried that the fractious nature of debate about OMOV vs delegate representation may cause Momentum to split, and sections of the leadership will walk away from the existing groups, taking the database, affiliated unions, staff and volunteers with them. This would be very damaging and any attempt made to divide Momentum or exclude a part of it should be resisted.

There remains a great deal of potential in Momentum, and this National Committee is a chance to start realising it.

Events

Saturday 3 December

We Are The Lions — The Grunwick Strike 40 years on
1pm, Working Class Movement Library, 51 The Crescent, Salford, M5 4WX
bit.ly/2fjO0WU

Saturday 3 December

Momentum Northern regional conference
9.30am-8pm, The CastleGate, Melbourne Street, Newcastle, NE1 2JQ
bit.ly/2gF3Mvi

Monday 5 December

Democracy, Europe and the deal we need
7-9pm, Emmanuel Centre, 9 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 3DW
bit.ly/2gFv1r9

Wednesday 7 December

Fidel Castro's legacy: is Cuba a model for socialism? Lewisham Workers' Liberty meeting
7.50pm, The Rose Pub & Kitchen 272 New Cross Road, London, SE14 6AA
bit.ly/2gCINhJ

Sunday 11 December

Defend Democracy in Turkey national protest
12 noon, Turkish Embassy in London, 43 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8PA
bit.ly/2gFy56C

Got an event you want listing?
solidarity@workersliberty.org

Activists rally against purge

By Will Sefton

The first national meeting of Stop the Labour Purge, on 26 November, had almost 70 people there, with a considerable number of branch and CLP officers as well as individuals unfairly expelled and suspended.

Aslef (train drivers' union) president Tosh McDonald lambasted the affiliated unions for not doing enough to challenge the Labour leadership in the past. Even after the election of Corbyn, he said, the Party has still tried to stop its members challenging decisions and fighting for socialist politics in the party. He and his wife have found themselves threatened with disciplinary action in their own CLP.

Christine Shawcroft, a member of Labour's National Executive

Committee, gave interesting insights into how the NEC functions. The Compliance Unit, she said, had dug itself into an ever-deeper hole as it suspended or expelled thousands in instant response to the first set of complaints from Labour members, mostly from right-wingers and about posts on social media, and has then felt it has to continue suspending or expelling people as it is flooded with more and more "evidence."

Shawcroft confirmed there is no proscribed list, and continues to call for the end to the "auto-exclusion" of activists associated with groups like Workers' Liberty and Socialist Appeal.

Richard and Peter Shield, from Wallasey, told how party activists are responding to the continuing suspension of their constituency.

North West Momentum has demanded that Momentum nationally campaign on the issue.

John Dunn got a standing ovation as he closed the conference with a politically sharp, amusing and passionate speech about his lifetime of work for the Party.

He described his challenge to Owen Smith at Orgreave, the challenge that led to his expulsion.

• Email: StopTheLabourPurge@gmail.com. Web: stopthelabourpurge.wordpress.com

At the 22 November meeting of Labour's NEC, the latest figures on the Disputes Panel from the leadership contest this summer showed 1,038 members still suspended and 618 "auto-excluded".

Southern war continues

By Ollie Moore

Guards on Southern Rail struck again from 22-23 November, with further strikes planned for 6-8 December, 22-24 December, and 31 December-2 January.

Despite widespread calls to do so, government ministers are refusing to meet with the guards' union, RMT, directly. Instead, the government has handed Southern bosses a £20 million payment in an attempt to improve their service.

For Southern to meet the union's demand for a second, safety-critical member of staff on board each train would involve filling 20 guard vacancies (which it promised to do in January, and then reneged), with a total cost of less than £1 million, according to RMT estimates. This figure barely dents the £20 million handout, or the £157 million that the Go-Ahead Group, the parent



company of Govia Thameslink Railway, which owns Southern, has in reserve.

On 28 November drivers, who are members of Aslef, voted by 87% for strikes in a third ballot. Their first ballot was declared illegal after

Southern bosses sought a High Court injunction, and the union cancelled the second, citing "technical difficulties".

They will strike on 13-14 December, 16 December and 9-14 January.

Tube workers fight job cuts

Station and revenue staff on London Underground began an overtime ban from 23 November, as part of a fight against job cuts.

The workers, who are members of the RMT union, are demanding the reversal of job cuts made as part of the "Fit for the Future" programme, a radical restructure of Tube station staffing which saw nearly 1,000 frontline posts axed.

Figures obtained by the RMT showed that London Underground spent nearly £700,000 on overtime payments just in August-September 2016.

Some stations have been forced

to close for periods due to staff shortages resulting from the overtime ban, and union activists suggest the company is cutting corners to keep stations open. A supporter of the *Tube worker* bulletin told *Solidarity*: "We have evidence that the company has kept stations open despite not having the legally-stipulated minimum numbers of staff on site. Elsewhere, they're using managers to make up the numbers even when it's not clear they have the correct licences and qualifications."

"It shows clearly that the staffing level is far too low, and that London Underground would appar-

ently rather gamble with passenger safety than take the financial hit of a station closure."

Members of smaller Tube union TSSA are expected to join the dispute, with their ballot due back as *Solidarity* went to press on 29 November.

RMT station staff reps met on 28 November to discuss ongoing strategy in their dispute, including the possibility of striking in parallel with RMT drivers on the Piccadilly and Hammersmith and City Lines, who will strike from 6-7 December in disputes over victimisation of union reps and management abuse of procedures.

Local CLPs back Durham TAs

By Gemma Short

Durham teaching assistants stuck again on Wednesday 23 and Thursday 24 November.

Teaching assistants are fighting the imposition of term-time-only contracts which would see them lose up to 23% of their salary. The Labour council plans to sack 2700 teaching assistants and employ them on the new contracts in order to force through the change.

Teaching assistants picketed open schools and managed to turn away some students. Many parents have expressed their support for the strike. After picketing teaching assistants and their supporters marched through Durham.

Many local Labour members are unhappy with the way the council is treating the teaching assistants, but Labour councillors appear to be trying to block attempts to have open debates on the issue. Despite this so far four Durham Labour



CLPs have voted to support the teaching assistants — City of Durham, Darlington, North West Durham and Blaydon.

As *Solidarity* went to press on Tuesday 29 November, Durham County Council has agreed to meet the teaching assistants' union Unison

Teaching assistants plan to strike again on Thursday 1 December, and Tuesday 6 — Thursday 8 December.

• Send messages of support on Twitter: @TAS_Durham or Facebook: www.facebook.com/TAS-DurhamValueUs



Workers from Yorkshire Ambulance Union in Sheffield protested against the potential privatisation of patient transport services, joined by local Labour Party activists as part of their activities for the national day of action on the NHS.

Cinema strikes grow

By Gerry Bates

Picturehouse Cinema workers at the Ritzy cinema in south London and Hackney Picturehouse in north east London are planning further strikes, likely to be in mid-December, in their battle to win living wages.

Five days of strikes from 19-23 November disrupted premieres of new Harry Potter movie 'Fantastic Beasts and Where To Find Them', and although Picturehouse bosses did keep the cinemas open for periods, lively picket lines at both sites succeeded in persuading many customers to turn away.

A strike fundraiser on 23 November raised over £1,000 for the

workers' strike fund, with further events planned in the new year.

Activists told *Solidarity* that they may plan their strikes to coincide with premier screenings of the new 'Star Wars' movie, which opens on 15 December.

Workers at the Ritzy and Hackney Picturehouse are also making links with staff at other Picturehouse sites in an effort to spread the dispute.



King's cleaners protest

By Adam Marshall

On Friday 25 November around 150 cleaners at King's College London and their supporters protested outside KCL against overwork, lack of cover staff and the threat of redundancy.

Servest, to whom KCL outsourced the contract after the cleaners' successful campaign for the Living Wage in 2014, has consistently paid staff late and refused to pay for cover or overtime, forcing huge workloads onto cleaners when colleagues are ill. Previous redundancies meant that workers had increased workloads for the same pay. Supervisors have not received the pay increase in line with the Living Wage that was promised in April.

The protest was energetic and noisy, with almost constant chanting, and the workers seem more than ready for a fight. Around a third were workers, and more were

at the protest before starting work, and the rest students. There were supporters from LSE and SOAS Justice for Cleaners.

The size of the demonstration was impressive considering the short notice and the decline of activity, particularly among students, since the Living Wage victory. It was loud and lively.

KCL, which outsourced the contract after conceding the Living Wage in order to distance themselves from corner-cutting, is complicit in these labour abuses. Last Monday, all staff were sent a letter about contract restructuring, threatening them with redundancies and significant cuts in hours. Unison has balloted for industrial action, with 90% voting for. We are now awaiting the announcement of strike dates and picket lines.

An effort must now be made among student activists and the Labour club to mobilise support for them.



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For a workers' government

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Brexit will mean record wage squeeze



By Gerry Bates

Workers in Britain face the longest squeeze on their pay since reliable statistics started, according to the government's own Office for Budget Responsibility.

The OBR projects that by 2021 mean average earnings — pay adjusted for inflation — will not have recovered to their 2008 level. Average real earnings fell by 9% between 2008 and 2013.

The situation is getting worse because of Brexit. The *Financial Times* reports the same picture, "Before the Brexit vote [the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR)] had been expecting slow earnings growth over the next few years, with average wages finally returning to their 2008 level by 2020. [Brexit] will hurt productivity and wage growth, while the drop in sterling that followed the vote will push up inflation... real wage growth will stall next year and even by 2021 average earnings will

be below their 2008 level."

Working-class living standards, from both wages and benefits, are certain to decrease without action being taken by the labour movement. Inequality will also grow. Cuts in means-tested benefits are likely to mean a widening disparity between the income growth levels of the richest and poorest households, particularly working-age households.

The income of those aged 60 and over was 11 per cent higher in 2014 than in 2007. In contrast, the income of households aged 22-30 in 2014 was 7 per cent below its 2007 level. The average income of households aged 31-59 was the same in 2014 as in 2007.

The TUC's response has been completely inadequate: "Today's OBR forecast shows that the average annual wage will be £1,000 lower in 2020 than predicted at the Budget. And this is on top of wages still having not recovered to their 2007 levels."

Also stating the obvious but offering no prospect of a fight to

change anything, Unison General Secretary Dave Prentis said; "Aside from those on the very lowest wages, the pay misery for school, hospital and town hall staff goes on. The government's stubborn refusal to end the [public sector] one per cent pay cap means wages are lagging way behind rising food and fuel prices, causing real financial hardship.

"And with the Brexit storm clouds gathering, the grim economic outlook can only spell more despair for public services."

We are all too aware that wages are low and prices are rising, but we have seen a series of failed attempts by all the major unions to push back against this reality since the crisis of 2007. A series of one-day strikes with no strategy to win followed by a failure to push and coordinate industrial action on pay has allowed the government and bosses to continue to drive down real wages.

Only a resurgent fight in the trade unions and in the Labour Party will reverse this.



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