



Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 425 9 December 2016 50p/£1

BREXIT, TRUMP, EU CRISIS: RIGHT-WING SURGE



FIGHT FOR A SOCIALIST ANSWER

Every big economic crisis shifts the terms of politics, with a delay. We couldn't tell in advance what 2008 would do, but now we see a surge of right-wing nationalist, "identity" politics.

We also see a left-wing surge in forms like the Corbyn movement, as yet weaker than the right. The middle-ground, "centre", "centre-left", "centre-right" parties are still strong, of course, but everywhere disconcerted, at a loss, devoid of answers beyond muddling through.

We face worse than the regular grinding-away of social protections by neo-liberalism. Brexit, Trump, Hofer, Grillo, Salvini, Le Pen, Wilders: how far each will go remains unpredictable, but in the current strained condition of global capitalism a further push from any of several quarters could start a spiral into global trade wars and the re-erection of border fences in Europe.

More page 5

**Join Labour!
Momentum:
for unity!**

See page 10

Inside:

**Dakota pipeline
halted**



Pause on Dakota pipeline is a win for campaigners.

See page 2

**UKIP still a
threat**



With Paul Nuttall's election, UKIP will target Labour voters.

See page 3

**Can Socialism
Make
Sense?**



Todd Hamer reviews our book.

See pages 6,7,8

Far right defeat in Austria

By Felix Roth

After almost a year of campaigning, voting, a second ballot, and a delayed re-run of the second ballot, the Austrian presidential elections finally came to an end on 4 December.

With a relatively narrow lead of just 53.8 percent, the Green Party candidate Alexander Van der Bellen was able to defeat the far-right Freedom Party's Norbert Hofer.

This is good, but it is in no way a victory for the left. While the neoliberal economist Van der Bellen was, not unlike Hillary Clinton, supported by a broad coalition reaching from the chairman of the conservative People's Party and several high-ranking representatives of Austrian industrial and finance capital to famous artists and intellectuals, a considerable number of grass-roots campaigns and even parts of the far-left, he was running an extraordinarily conservative and patriotic campaign shifting public discourse further to the right.

The tensions between the two ruling parties — the Social Democratic Party and the People's Party — are growing and snap elections are likely in spring 2017. With the Freedom Party way ahead in the polls and even the Social Democrats discussing a coalition with them, we're almost certainly heading towards a far-right-led government.

The last years of economic crisis and neoliberal politics give no reason to believe in a brighter future for a large part of the population. The presidential elections showed how fed up people are with the status quo.

In the first round the two candidates of the government parties got only eleven percent each. Since the parliamentary left is part of the problem and no independent alternative for the working class being visible, the far-right is the only political camp that's able to take advantage of the common anti-establishment sentiment. Consequently an incredible 86 percent of the private sector blue-collar workers' vote went to Norbert Hofer.

Another interesting detail about the election is the that Hofer is more popular among men than among women. While sixty percent of male voters chose the far-right candidate, only forty percent of their female counterparts did. Apparently his reactionary ideas about gender roles didn't seem too appealing to everybody.

Hofer's defeat may look like a success. But getting almost half of the votes in a national election is actually a great leap forward for the Freedom Party.

The other corporate politicians won't stop them on their way to power. Only a genuine movement of the working class could.

French right promises wave of job cuts

LETTER FROM FRANCE

By Marianne Davin

After many long months the American elections are finally over. In France the presidential campaigns have started to ramp up.

Marine Le Pen from the far right is trying to position herself as the candidate for the working class.

François Fillon is representing the far right of France's conservative Les Republicans (LR), after resoundingly defeating Alain Juppe and Nicolas Sarkozy in a primary.

The current "socialist" president, François Hollande, will not be running.

The French Communist Party has decided by a very narrow margin to support Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the leader of a party he created, "France Insoumise" (Rebellious France).

And Emmanuel Macron, the former Minister of the Economy under Hollande, has also started his own party, En Marche, and is representing the liberal centre.

On the far left: Nathalie Arthaud from Lutte Ouvrière and Philippe Poutou from the NPA will stand.

Here I will write about what is happening on the right: from the far right to the Socialist Party. In a subsequent article I will lay out what is going on with the far left.

"In the name of the people" is Marine Le Pen's, the head of the Front National (FN), slogan. Her politics, however, are in the name of a certain segment of the population. When speaking about her economic position she highlights that



François Fillon

she is talking directly to "industrial workers who have had their jobs stolen... by an organised economic pillage". However, she is quick to remind us that this is due to "an economy that is under control of foreigners".

This stance is totally ridiculous. It is clear she represents the bourgeoisie and will defend the interests of bosses, in the name of "economic patriotism". The solutions she presents are the same as the Republicans or the Socialist Party. By blaming the economic woes on the European Union, foreigners and migrants, she is only dividing our class in the interest of the bourgeoisie.

She hopes to turn our gaze away from the ones who are truly responsible for the terrible situation the working class finds themselves in: capitalists of any nationality. The anger against the current government is being used by the FN to position themselves as the "anti-

system" choice; nonetheless, their politics are defined by implementing austerity measures, xenophobia, islamophobia, misogyny, and various reactionary politics.

LR has just voted in the second-round of their primary, choosing François Fillon. His resume: Minister of Education, Minister of Labor, and Prime Minister in Sarkozy's government from 2007-2012. His plan: try to convince us he has solutions for the country.

Fillon promises to realise several essential things within the first several weeks of his presidency and has no qualms about using the clause in the French constitution enabling him to bypass the National Assembly.

Several key proposals are: bringing the work week up to 48 hours, retirement at 65 years old, diminishing unemployment benefits, decreasing taxes on corporations, increasing the VAT by 2%, stopping the tax on wealth, and cutting 500,000 public servant jobs.

As if his politics couldn't get any worse, Fillon wants to fix quotas for incoming migrants based on where they are from. He believes that France has an "Islam problem", and wants to row back on homosexual couples right to adoption. He also supports Putin and Assad.

Such attacks on the working class will be the worst seen in the last 30 years. His economic and political example is someone well-known to *Solidarity* readers: Thatcher. Fillon claims that unions don't have the power to block the country anymore, thus he will encounter no resistance. If he is elected in May 2017, as seems likely, the working class must be ready to organise and

fight his government every step of the way.

François Hollande announced on 1 December that he wouldn't be seeking a second term as president. This is the first time in the Fifth Republic a president will not seek re-election. Five years of his government has seen attacks on workers, a state of emergency, expulsion of migrants, and billions of dollars given to bosses.

After three presidents from the right, people believed Hollande would be a breath of fresh air and would bring back good old "socialist" politics. However, after five years of his government this fantasy has been firmly shattered. The discontent and anger against the government has forced Hollande to not seek a second term. Most likely his prime minister, Manuel Valls, will take up his mantle and continue pushing the PS further right. Hollande's successor will be decided on 22 and 29 January.

The establishment and bourgeois political parties, whether on the left, the right or the far right, cannot provide any solutions for the working class. Their politics are centred on implementing programs that are violently hostile to the working class, immigrants, woman, youth, and LGBT people.

How should the far left respond to this? Do we fall in line behind Mélenchon? Do we independently organise the class of the exploited and the oppressed, to defend its interests against all these attacks? To find out my answer to this, read my next letter...

• Marianne Davin will report again in the new year.

UK school system bad for children

By a teacher

The Programme for International Student Assessments (PISA) rankings were published on 6 December. These put UK schools in the 20s among the 72 countries surveyed.

Socialists don't put great store by the PISA ratings, which measure different nations academic achievements by testing 15 and 16 year olds in maths, science and reading. However, the UK's poor results do demonstrate that, even by their own standards, the Tories model for education is failing. Whilst not perfect, Finland provides a model that is more effective according to PISA and, more importantly, is less harmful to children.

In Finland children do not start school until seven, children in Britain start at four years old. In 2010, Finnish children aged 9-11 spent an average 640 hours in school a year; in England the average was 899 hours. There are no mandatory standardised tests in Finland, apart from one exam at the

end of students' senior year in high school. In Britain we test children from the moment they enter school, with three sets of tests before the child leaves primary school at 11. The ranking the UK improved the most in was science — where standardised tests at primary school have been dropped.

In Finland, there are no rankings, no comparisons or competition between students, schools or regions. In Britain we have league tables for school performance and grading of, virtually every part of our school-life.

Finland's schools are all publicly funded. In Britain we have private schools.

In Finland there is no expectation for students to do homework. In Britain our pupils suffer with onerous amounts of homework.

PISA reckons Finland's students are more successful. They are certainly less prone to mental health problems and happier than their British counterparts. And socialists care passionately about that.

Pfizer drug scam

By Gerry Bates

Pharmaceutical company Pfizer has been fined a record £84.2 million for overcharging the NHS for drugs.

Pfizer had increased the price it charged the NHS for an anti-epilepsy drug by 2,600%! Though shocking, this is likely to be the tip of the iceberg. Even without irreg-

ular price hikes and "unfair prices" pharmaceutical companies regularly make many millions of pounds by patenting their drugs so cheaper versions cannot be made in competition.

Life saving and preventative medicine, or even just medicines to make our lives easier, are routinely overpriced and out of the price-range of many who need them the most.

Antisemitic blogger jailed

Internet troll Joshua Bonehill-Paine has been found guilty of racially aggravated harassment for publishing a series of antisemitic blog posts about Labour MP Luciana Berger.

Bonehill-Paine published the posts in October 2014 after a fellow far-right activist Garron Helm was sent to prison for tweeting a picture of Berger with a Star of David on her forehead with the hashtag "Hitler was right". Bonehill-Paine posted that the "num-

ber of Jewish Labour MPs was a problem" as well as calling Berger "an evil money-grabber" with "a deep-rooted hatred of men".

The posts were part of the "Filthy Jew Bitch Campaign" orchestrated by US based white supremacist site Daily Stormer.

Bonehill-Paine was already serving a three year four month sentence for trying to incite anti-semitic demonstrations against the "Jewification" of parts of London.

Nuttall's challenge to the Labour Party

By Keith Road

The election of Paul Nuttall as leader of UKIP with the promise to lead his party to a vote share of between 26% and 30% and more than 10 parliamentary seats at the 2020 general election, has provoked dubious reaction from outspoken right-wing Labour MPs.

Right-wing Labour MP Stephen Kinnock used a column in the *Financial Times* to call for Labour to back an implicitly more racist approach to immigration. He said that although immigration may not affect working-class living standards, it is perceived to be negative to many working-class voters. Labour needs to put forward a clear plan for controlling immigration.

Frank Field, a more maverick Labour right-winger, thought Labour needed to be worried by Paul Nuttall as a potentially authentic voice of the working class. Nigel Farage was a straight talker but a stockbroker-cum-country gentleman. Nuttall, on the other hand, is a northern plebeian-seeming voice of racism. Field appears to agree with UKIP on lots of things, arguing that Labour can only accommodate to it or risk electoral defeat.

UKIP polled 3.8 million votes at the 2015 election, topped the polls in almost every region for the European elections, and played a major role in getting an EU referendum called. Its politics were decisive in winning it for a leave vote. But can it be the success Nuttall



wants it to be?

Nuttall's policies are actually a combination of right wing populist social policies — including a return of the death penalty and banning the burka — and a swift and clean “hard Brexit”. He also believes climate change to be a myth.

This week when EU immigration was shown to be at a record high Paul Nuttall said, “after six and a half years of Tory rule, we still have net migration running at more than 300,000. Another city the size of Hull added to our population. More pressure on housing, schools and the NHS.”

Apart from the factual inaccuracy — Hull's population is only 250,000 — this is an appeal to the core Labour vote. The appeal to working-class voters seems rely solely on his Bootle accent. His actual politics — in favour of further privatisation and fragmentation of the NHS — has been rightly been attacked by Labour in a campaign video.

Where UKIP's continuing threat is in its the dangerous hateful rhetoric which they continue to propagate in the wake of Brexit. Strong showings for UKIP in recent council elections and in a series of by-elections last year show that their threat should not be downplayed but neither should it be played to. UKIP have an all or nothing approach to Brexit and the best approach for Labour is to continue to oppose Brexit and hold the government to account on its terms for leaving.

UKIP hope to do well in some of the areas most hard hit by reductions in both freedom of movement and a removal of access to the single market. Manufacturing jobs, which make up a much higher proportion of employment in the north of England, are under threat.

Nuttall received an overwhelming vote from the majority of UKIP members who voted, but only 53% of them chose to do so. The party remains divided and some of its big

donors had previously suggested they would break from UKIP and either support the Conservative Party or campaign solely on the issue of Brexit.

UKIP remains a threat. The Labour Party and labour movement should prepare to confront UKIP, not accommodate to it. We need to pose class politics and fight for a better standard of living for working-class people. Labour cannot trick UKIP's potential working-class supporters into voting for a lighter version with the rhetoric of Field and Kinnock.

Clear campaigns that seek to undermine the material basis for racism and xenophobia, taking up demands that benefit the whole working class and building solidarity between settled and migrant communities, will undermine the racist rhetoric and offer real solutions to those who have been left behind by the Tories.

Dakota Pipeline halted, direct action continues

By Alex Nash

The Standing Rock, Cheyenne River and Yankton Sioux peoples continue their direct action against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL).

On the evening of 4 December, the US Army Corps of Engineers rejected the easement needed for the completion of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

This significant development means that, at least for the time being, the pipeline work must cease and alternative routes must be explored. The Army Corps will now undertake an environmental impact statement, to find a more suitable route for the pipeline. As the news came in of the easement's rejection, there were jubilant celebrations amongst indigenous protesters and their allies.

This very positive news follows months of arrests, intimidation and violence towards local tribes (and their allies), who are fearful that the pipeline could contaminate their water source: the Missouri River.

The proposed route for the pipeline also directly crossed sacred burial grounds, violating the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty which guarantees the Standing Rock

Sioux “undisturbed use and occupation” of the Standing Rock Reservation. The original pipeline plans were redrawn over the reservation, in order to protect the water supply of the overwhelmingly white nearby town of Bismarck.

On the evening of the 20 November, twenty-six people were hospitalized after North Dakota police fired water cannon, rubber bullets and percussion grenades at indigenous activists. The First Nations protesters suffered bone fractures and hypothermia, as a result of police repeatedly aiming water cannon directly at individuals, despite below freezing temperatures.

The US Army Corps had previously issued a warning to the hundreds of remaining activists at the numerous protest camps, to leave by 5 December or face arrest and prosecution.

The threat was yet another example of the state's dismissal of free speech and the sheer contempt it has shown towards the lives, history and culture of indigenous peoples.

Despite numerous pleas for help, President Barack Obama and the Democratic Party had previously failed to intervene to protect the wellbeing of First Nations peoples,

instead serving the interests of capital and the significant profit they expect to make from the pipeline.

Once online, the pipeline was expected to transport 450,000 barrels of fracked and highly volatile crude oil per day, directly underneath the Missouri River. Any spillage would have devastated the main source of drinking and irrigation water for the 8,200 residents of the Standing Rock reservation.

State documents show that between January 2012 and October 2013, there were nearly 300 oil pipeline spills in North Dakota alone. There are genuine and well-founded fears amongst residents of Standing Rock to the threat of spillage, as well as suspicion to the “assurances” they had previously received from the government.

Since the 1960s Standing Rock reservation has lost 50,000 acres of prime agricultural land, after the state Bureau of Reclamation seized land to construct the Oahe Dam. Hundreds of families from various First Nations tribes were forcibly relocated and many still live in abject poverty.

These months of protest cap one of the largest, if not the largest protest in the history of the Indigenous people of Northern America.

It is a rejection of the interests of private capital, white supremacy and the disgraceful treatment of indigenous peoples by the US government.

Allies from across the US and abroad have given their support and solidarity to the protestors, including delegates from Black Lives Matter, Code Pink and the American Postal Workers Union. Despite the recent positive news, some have voiced caution, noting that Donald Trump strongly supports the DAPL and the pipeline company itself could appeal the decision.

“It's a trick. It's a lie. Until that drill is shut down it's not over yet,” said Frank Archambault, a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. “Everybody needs to stay in place.”

The next few months will still be vital in this struggle against corporate power and for the lives of indigenous peoples at Standing Rock.

• To donate to Standing Rock camp, contribute to legal funds or receive updates from activists follow the link below:

<http://sacredstonecamp.org/>

• For global solidarity with DAPL protestors go to: <https://nodaplsolidarity.org/>

Repeal the 8th!

By Elizabeth Butterworth

The fight to repeal Ireland's anti-abortion law, the 8th amendment, has been gathering steam, with trade union leaders gathering in Dublin to start a labour movement campaign.

In 1983 the powerful anti-abortion lobby, working with the Catholic Church, forced the government to hold a referendum on abortion, giving foetuses the right to life.

The minority government, led by Fine Gael, has convened a Citizens' Assembly which will discuss the 8th amendment, among a limited range of other issues including referenda and “super referenda”, over six months.

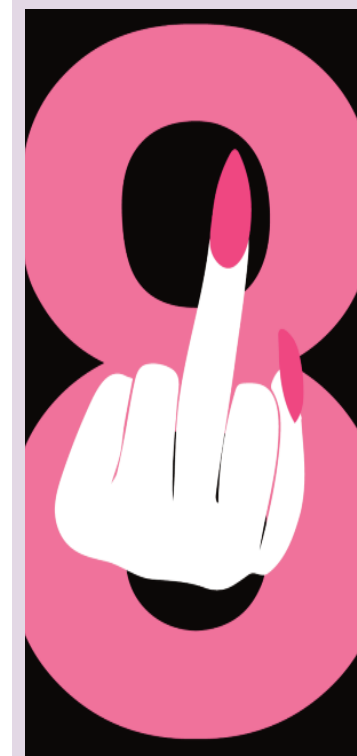
The Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit had won a second reading of a private members' bill but this was blocked as it was said to interfere with the remit of the Citizens' Assembly.

This means that any decision will be delayed by at least a year.

Meanwhile women are unable to seek legal and safe abortions in Ireland, and are forced to go abroad for them, at a considerable cost.

Currently, abortion is illegal in Ireland, including in cases where there is a risk to health, following rape, incest and when there is severe foetal impairment. It includes incidents of child rape.

• Irish citizens and members of the public, including those living abroad, can send submissions to the Citizens' Assembly, on www.citizensassembly.ie by 16 December.



Help us raise £20,000 to improve our website!

By Cathy Nugent

2016 marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the political tendency which is now the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

Over the years, this tendency has broken much new ground in socialist ideas, and rediscovered lost histories of the Marxist, Trotskyist tradition, especially that of the "other" American Trotskyists — the group of comrades around Max Shachtman and Hal Draper. Much of this "Third Camp" literature is available on our website.

From Trotskyists newspapers of the 1940s and 50s, to older Marxist classics, to discussion articles on feminism, important national questions, religion and philosophy and resources such as guidelines for Marxist reading groups — it's all there on our website. But this enormous archive of historical and socialist literature needs to become easier to research and access if it is to be any use to socialist activists today.

Why do socialists activists need this website?

Our tendency was founded in a maelstrom of working-class militancy, industrial militancy the like of which none of today's young activists (or even the creeping-towards-mid-

dle-aged activists) have ever seen. The confident combativity of working-class struggle made many more things potentially possible for socialists and the fight for socialism.

In the 60s and 70s a big united organisation of Marxists could have been built — an organisation capable of providing the labour movement with a basic socialist education, of propagating a socialist working-class interpretation of current events, and of organising militants in struggle.

But that failed to happen for many reasons. One key reason was the left's intolerance for discussion, lack of openness to ideas critical about their own existing beliefs, and a sometimes perfunctory attitude to self-education.

Our archive, with its range, as well as depth of material, can help build a different kind of socialist culture — one where discussion, debate and self-education are actively promoted across the broader labour movement.

To make our archive of real use to socialists activists we need professional help to make all content fully integrated, searchable by date and subject and optimised for mobile reading. We need to finance a website co-ordinator to ensure our news coverage is up to the minute and shared on social media. To fi-

Support the Picturehouse workers' strike fund!

How to support the collection for the Picturehouse workers' strike fund.

Support Crossrail construction workers' strike!

Workers on the Crossrail construction site at Tottenham Court Road are striking to defend victimised rep, following a mass protest at Crossrail's offices to demand a pay increase.

A dwindling share for labour, a rise in inequality

The Chief Economist of Bank England shows that the squeeze on the working class is increasing.

Fidel Castro — no hero of ours

Under Fidel Castro a Stalinist state organised low cost food and welfare but also imposed a repressive regime where LGBT people and dissidents were persecuted.

Milka Tyszkiewicz needs help!

Appeal for help for the Polish socialist Milka Tyszkiewicz, now very ill.

Images from our current website home page. Lots of content but in need of better presentation.

Is Cuba socialist?

Paul Hampton of Workers' Liberty debated the nature of Cuba with Bernard Regan, a leading member of the Socialist Teachers' Alliance.

Blaming The Victims

The Algerian socialist-feminist Marieme Helie-Lucas responds to Deepa Khan's film *Islam's Non-Believers*, broadcast on ITV on 13 October.

John Reed: Soviets in Action: Working Class Democracy in the Russian Revolution

The American Journalist John Reed describes what happened in the Russian workers' revolution of 1917 and after.

Vladimir Lenin: THE SOVIETS AT WORK The Problems of the Soviet Government (1918)

In March 1918 Lenin described the work of the ruling soviets in Bolshevik Russia. It was published as a pamphlet by 'Nicolai Lenin' in Britain by the De Leonist Socialist Labour Party in 1919.

nance this we need your help.

Any amount, smaller or larger, will help. We will update on donations in Solidarity and in due course hope to launch a crowd-funding campaign.

• If you would like to donate by paypal please go to www.workersliberty.org/donate

• Or set up an internet bank transfer to "AWL", account 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, Birmingham, 08-60-01 (please email awl@workersliberty.org to notify us of the payment and what it's for); or

• Or send a cheque payable to "AWL" to AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3DG (with a note saying what it's for).

Take a look at our website: www.workersliberty.org

Thanks

The history of the Progressive Alliance

LETTER

The result of the Richmond Park by-election has encouraged more calls for Labour to enter a "Progressive Alliance" to oppose "hard Brexit" and the resurgent populist right.

Memories must be short, as only last year the Lib Dems were an integral part of a government attacking migrants, the disabled and the poor.

It's not just an alliance with the Lib Dems that should be opposed. The idea of a "progressive alliance" per se should be also opposed.

Labour for all its faults is a mass working-class party. A party that is both structurally and organically part of the broader labour movement. The current fight in the Labour Party and throughout its history is for it to represent independent working-class politics; for Labour to break with the ideology and organisation of capitalist politics.

Against this idea of a workers' party as part of the labour movement, there has always been another conception of Labour as a "progressive" party which should ally itself with other "progressive" parties regardless of their class character. These proposed or actual alliances have had different names at different times, but they all amount to subordinating Labour politically to the politics of "allies" among the ruling class.

In the mid 1930s, after a period of sectarian ultra-leftism, Stalinist Communist Parties around the world followed the Kremlin's direction and started pushing the Popular Front. In the UK the theory was that, to counter fascism, parties like the Labour Party should form a common front, not only with the CP but also bourgeois parties.

The programme that would be adopted wasn't socialism, but one that even Liberal parties and elements of the bourgeoisie would be happy with. The CP even advocated uniting with anti-fascist Tories.

The CP had an increasing influence within the Labour Party. Figures like Stafford Cripps and organisations like the Socialist League pushed the Popular Front line. This particularly intensified after the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936.

However the Labour Party had moved leftward in the period in the same period after being ejected from government in 1931. Invitations to unite with the Liberals and anti-appeasement Tories like Winston Churchill were rightly opposed. The Labour leadership ended up opposing the Communist Party from the left!

At Labour Conference Herbert Morrison pointed out that the CP would admonish him for sharing a platform with a fellow socialist like Trotsky, yet actively pushed him to share a platform with a Tory aristocrat like the Duchess of Athol because she was anti-Franco. Labour conference opposed adopting a Popular Front strategy on several occasions in the 30s.

Trotskyists, who were also active in Labour at the time, responded to the rise of fascism by advocating a United Front of all working-class parties. Rightly they argued the Popular Front disarmed the labour movement in the face of fascist aggression and put faith in bourgeois liberalism to hold the line against fascism and right-wing authoritarianism.

The idea of an alliance revived in the 80s as the left, Labour and the unions received a series of hammer-blow defeats at the hands of the Thatcher government.

Under this pressure, some began promoting the idea of Labour forming an alliance with other anti-Thatcher parties. These ideas were widespread on the soft left of the Labour party. It was given some seeming intellectual heft by the magazine *Marxism Today* and the Eurocommunist wing of the CP.

As early as 1978 Eric Hobsbawm wrote 'The Forward March of Labour Halted,' arguing the working class no longer had the social or industrial power to be the key to any kind of socialist strategy. Implicit in this was

the idea that alliances with other class forces were needed to achieve any kind of social progress at all.

Stuart Hall contributed an article to *Marxism Today* in 1979 called 'The Great Moving Right Show' arguing rightly that Thatcherism represented a new ideological formation that the left needed to recognise. Again implicit was the idea that to fight Thatcherism a unity of all anti-Thatcherite forces was needed.

By the mid 80s the Labour leadership adopted some of this language as leftish sounding ideological cover for the party moving rightwards. *Marxism Today* even talked about a coalition with the SDP, the Liberals and the Scottish Nationalists. This explicitly meant adapting to the politics of parties who supported some of Thatcher's attacks on the unions and opposed the miners strike.

We are in a different situation today from the 1930s or even the 1980s. The Green Party are not Churchillian Tories or the wreckers

who split from Labour to form the SDP.

Social-democratic Greens like Caroline Lucas are often allies on issues like workers rights and migrants rights. The left of the Greens support most strikes although there are also elements within the Greens more hostile to the labour movement. The other putative elements in the "progressive alliance", like the nationalists and the Lib Dems by their very nature hostile to working class self assertiveness.

To defeat the shift to the right we need Labour to mobilise working-class people to fightback, be linking up with workers in struggle and offering a clear alternative to continuing austerity and growing inequality.

A Progressive Alliance will shackle Labour to the politics of the status quo and parties that oppose working-class self-assertion.

Luke Hardy, Leeds

Justice for Seeta

On 31 March 2015, whilst on a family trip to India, Seeta (Saini) Kaur – a 33 year old British national of Indian origin and the mother of four young children – died in highly suspicious circumstances at the home of her husband and in-laws. It is suspected that Seeta was the victim of an honour killing, but the UK police have failed to investigate. Southall Black Sisters launched a campaign for justice for the victims of such suspected honour killings on 7 December. The campaign has been named after Seeta.

Southall Black Sisters said "Seeta's family is desperate for justice: the response of the British authorities has been riddled with indifference, raising a series of questions about the role of the Metropolitan Police and the FCO in such cases."

The UK government has signed the Istanbul Convention which requires the UK to protect potential victims from and prevent violence against women, and to prosecute perpetrators who are nationals or resident in the UK whether they commit the act of violence in the UK or not.

Southall Black Sisters argue that this is not being implemented, and women are being left without justice.

Support the campaign: www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/justice-for-seeta

Fight for a socialist answer

Every big economic crisis shifts the terms of politics, with a delay. We couldn't tell in advance what 2008 would do, but now we see a surge of right-wing nationalist, "identity" politics.

We also see a left-wing surge in forms like the Corbyn movement, as yet weaker than the right. The middle-ground, "centre", "centre-left", "centre-right" parties are still strong, of course, but everywhere disconcerted, at a loss, devoid of answers beyond muddling through.

We face worse than the regular grinding-away of social protections by neo-liberalism. Brexit, Trump, Hofer, Grillo, Salvini, Le Pen, Wilders: how far each will go remains unpredictable, but in the current strained condition of global capitalism a further push from any of several quarters could start a spiral into global trade wars and the re-erection of border fences in Europe.

The left-wingers who backed Brexit on the grounds that it meant disruption, and any disruption must be good, will find out that regressive, reactionary disruption of capitalism is worse than even-keel capitalism, not better.

Left-wing politics just a shade to the left of the conventional "centre-left" — a national investment bank here, a higher minimum wage there, a marginal reduction in curbs on trade unions — will not be enough to regain the initiative. Strident, decisive, courageous socialist answers are needed: expropriate the banks! Restore full freedom to the unions! Tax the rich! Defend free movement for migrants!

RICHMOND

The Lib-Dems did well in the 1 December Richmond by-election against Zac Goldsmith. No great surprise.

Richmond has been Lib-Dem for most of the time since the constituency was created. Goldsmith had discredited himself both by his scurrilous racist campaign for London mayor and by his Brexit stance.

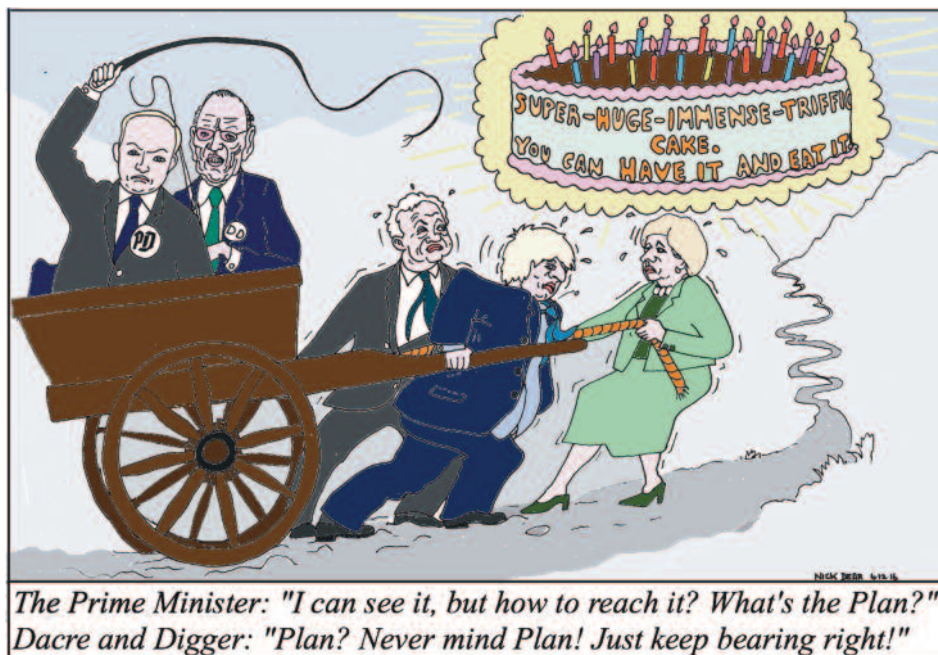
Labour right-wingers, and some soft leftists too, conclude that Labour should sink itself into a "Progressive Alliance" with the Lib-Dems and the SNP. Labour should sink itself into an alliance which will — which cannot but — present "progress" as the status quo plus minor tweaks? Sarah Olney, the Lib-Dem victor in Richmond, has called for Lib-Dems to "get behind" Theresa May's program. For Labour to call such politics "progressive" can only encourage embittered people to renounce "progress" altogether and to opt for overt regression and reaction.

Trump, Hofer, Grillo, Salvini, Le Pen, Wilders, Farage are all called "populist". At times in the past "populism" has been the name of movements with some real left-wing radicalism, though tainted by the illusion that they could speak for the whole "people" (ignoring class conflicts except with an ill-defined "élite") and usually also by anti-semitism.

Today "populism" signifies politicians who will say anything — and different things at different times — to tout for popular support. Like the Brexiters who say before 23 June that they'll put £350 million from EU budget payments into the NHS.

The "mainstream" politicians, figures like Blair, Hollande, Renzi, Cameron, have reduced discourse to such a level that most people take it for granted that all politicians lie and contradict themselves.

The grandees of the capitalist world, the sort of people who will gather at Davos for



the World Economic Forum on 17-20 January, do not mind the "mainstream" lying and contradictions. They know that can all be contained within the predictable.

The grandees dislike Trump, Hofer, Grillo, Salvini, Le Pen, Wilders, Farage, not because they promise to do anything to let the interests of the working class have weight, but because they are unpredictable. We dislike them because they promise to build fences to divide communities and peoples, and to smash workers' rights and social protections.

We can be relieved, for now, that neo-Nazi Norbert Hofer got only 47% of the vote for the Austrian presidency; and that Renzi's resignation in Italy will probably be followed by a caretaker government rather than by an election won by Salvini's Lega Nord and Grillo's Five Star Movement.

But "only" 47%! A "caretaker" government: how will that stem the drift to right-wing nationalism and communalism in Italy? Hofer's Freedom Party has been way ahead in opinion polls in Austria since mid-2015,

and the Social Democrats have invited it into coalition in one province. The Five Star Movement leads the polls in Italy, and (since July this year) Wilders leads in the Netherlands. For now, François Fillon has a large lead over Marine Le Pen for the French presidency. How can that be a relief when Fillon claims to be a French equivalent of Thatcher and boasts that "France is more right-wing than it's ever been"?

Most of the people in the USA who voted for Trump knew that he lied, blustered, and contradicted himself. They voted for him not because they believed him, but because it allowed them to express long-compacted resentment, anger, bewilderment. Much the same with the Brexit vote.

Many on the left has allowed themselves to be driven by demoralisation into a pale, implausible version of the "populism" — saying things randomly to catch votes — which the insurgent right practises so shamelessly. It has backed figures like George Galloway, who got patches of support for a time because people saw his links with Saddam Hussein, or his boast that he "couldn't manage on four workers' wages", as only more exuberant versions of what other politicians do quietly.

Pale, nervous "populism", and a "populism", moreover aiming, only to catch this or that minority fraction of support, cannot serve the left.

We need a left remobilised for self-confidently socialist politics. And time is short.

Labour: resist the anti-migrant pressure!

Jeremy Corbyn has made several statements which imply standing firm in defence of migrants.

His 3 December speech in Prague rejected "abandon[ing] socialist principles because we are told this is the only way to win power... I have every confidence that the principles of solidarity, internationalism and socialism... can [win in Europe]... Our rhetoric cannot be used to legitimise the scapegoating of refugees or migrant workers."

Unfortunately the implication has not been translated into collective Labour policy. Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell has also made pro-migrant statements, but appeared to endorse further limits on free movement. Shadow Business Secretary Clive Lewis told the Guardian that free movement "hasn't worked for many of the people in this country, where they've been undercut". On the Andrew Marr Show, Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry openly backed the false idea that migration has dragged down wages and said: "Do I think that at the moment too many people come into this country? Yes I do".

Even Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, who recently stood out by defending free movement and saying that opposition to it has "become a synonym for anti-immigrant racism", used the last BBC Sunday Politics to wave aside earlier statements from a Corbyn spokesman that the Labour leader is not interested in reducing the level of immigration. Though saying "if the Labour Party starts saying UKIP is right and immigration is the cause of all these people's problems... it gives credence to UKIP", Abbott endorsed unspecified comments by Emily Thornberry about "fair rules".

Clive Lewis has made the gimmick proposal that workers recruited abroad should be legally required to join a union. That would have little impact on the balance of class forces in Britain, but dresses up retreat on migrants' rights in labour movement clothing.

Further to the right, Shadow Brexit Minister Keir Starmer has said there has been "a huge amount of immigration over the last ten years" and called for the level to be reduced.

Blairite MPs Rachel Reeves and Chuka Umunna have echoed forlorn Tory demands to retain access to the European single market while ending free movement from the EU.

CYNICAL

More interesting, however, are the cynical "arguments" coming from Stephen Kinnock.

On 3 December, Kinnock followed up his recent call for Labour to orient to the "white working class" with an article in the *Financial Times*. "The message from the doorstep is clear," Kinnock explains. "[Voters are saying:] 'Immigration may be good for the economy, but it hasn't been good for my economy'."

The statistics show that immigration has had very little to do with the collapse of living standards since 2008, and in fact fiscal experts have calculated that reduced immigration must bring either cuts or tax rises (since migrants pay much more into the public purse than they take out). Well, says Kinnock: "the effects of immigration are not measured, they are experienced. This is vis-

ceral for voters."

So: many people have come to believe something which is not true, a belief which conflicts with their genuine interests. But rather than patiently and respectfully convince them, we should pander to "visceral" prejudice in order to win votes.

For the reasons Diane Abbott has explained, this strategy is not going to defeat the nationalist right. It is also ironic, since Labour itself has contributed hugely to the growth of anti-migrant feelings. A crucial factor in anti-immigration beliefs and arguments becoming so widespread is the Labour leadership endorsing them and backing them up over years until summer 2015. Going further down that road will only make the situation worse.

Labour movement and Labour Party advocates of defending migrants' rights need to get organised. On 3 December the Momentum national committee, with only two votes against, resolved that "the social problems we face are not caused by migrants but by austerity and capitalist attacks on the working class... Labour and the whole labour movement must resist the scapegoating of migrants and campaign for unity of all workers to win more resources and better jobs, homes, services and rights for everyone, regardless of origin".

This could and should be the basis for a campaign to move Labour in the right direction.

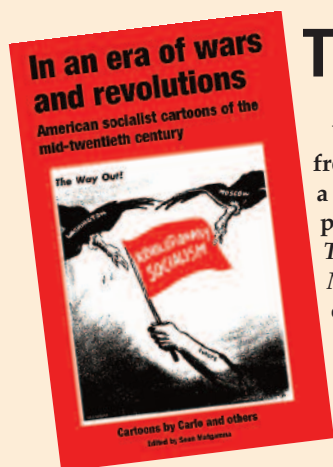
• Solidarity 426 will be out on 11 January. We are skipping some weeks over the Christmas/New Year holidays. Keep up to date via our website, Facebook and Twitter.

'Tis the season for Marxism

Why not buy your socialist friends and family books for Christmas this year? We are doing offers on a whole range of our books, pamphlets and publications until Tuesday 20 December. We'll even gift wrap them for you!

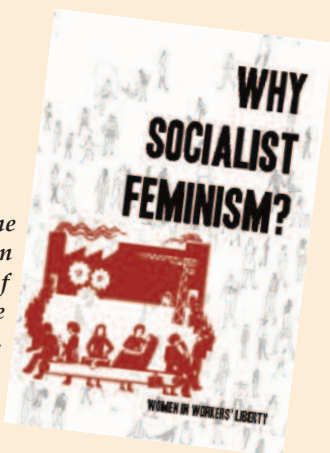
An introduction to Workers' Liberty

Heard about Workers' Liberty but wondering what we're all about? Need to be convinced that socialism is possible? This is for you! For just £30 you get a copy of *Can Socialism Make Sense?*, *Democracy, direct action, and socialism*, *Why Socialist Feminism?*, *How to fight elections*, and *Transform the labour movement*. Plus a year's subscription to our newspaper *Solidarity*!



The Trotskyist bundle

Wondering what all this Trotskyism is? Where did it come from? Why are there so many different Trotskyisms? This is a good place to start for some history. For just £30 (including postage) you get a copy of the first and second volumes of *The Fate of the Russian Revolution — Lost Texts of Critical Marxism* and *The two Trotskyisms confront Stalinism*, a copy of *In an era of wars and revolutions: American socialist cartoons of the 20th century*, and a range of pull-outs on Trotskyism, Stalinism, and the American socialist movement.



Get all of our books for £55!

Get all of our books for just £55! (Save £24!). Includes *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* volumes one and two, *In an era of wars and revolutions: American socialist cartoons of the 20th century*, *Class Against Class: the miners' strike 1984-5*, *Gramsci in context*, *Can Socialism Make Sense?*, *Democracy, direct action, and socialism*, *Why Socialist Feminism?* and *Working Class Politics and Anarchism*.

Four books for £35 or two for £12

Choose from *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* volumes one and two (volume 2 counts for 2 choices in the four book offer), *In an era of wars and revolution*, *American socialist cartoons of the 20th century*, *Class Against Class: the miners' strike 1984-5*, *Gramsci in context*, *Can Socialism Make Sense?*, *Democracy, direct action, and socialism*, *Why Socialist Feminism?*, and *Working Class Politics and Anarchism*.

Order online before 20 December
www.workersliberty.org/xmasoffers

Swimming again

Todd Hamer reviews *Can Socialism Make Sense?*

"One of the most outstanding features of Bolshevism has been its severe, exacting, even quarrelsome attitude towards the question of doctrine."
— Leon Trotsky

According to the common sense, the far left is a place where rows over obscure points of dogma lead to endless arguments, fractures and splits. How else to explain the dozens of tiny grouplets claiming to hold the holy grail of revolutionary wisdom? But seen from close quarters, the opposite is the case.

Generally the different organisations on the left keep to themselves. When they do meet they rarely argue about politics. They might argue about organisational matters: shall we elect a steering committee or have a loose network? Shall we hold our demonstration on a Monday or a Tuesday?

When politics are mentioned it is usually in the form of political slander. Workers' Liberty is sometimes accused of supporting the Iraq war, Zionism and Islamophobia — all absurd lies designed for sectarian advantage rather than political enlightenment.

Workers' Liberty stands almost alone on the far left as an organisation that revels in political debate to the point of being quarrelsome.

Unlike most of the organisations on the left, Workers' Liberty insists that its supporters argue publicly for their views, even (and especially) when they are at odds with the majority line. The organisation energetically seeks out debate not only with the rest of the left but also with the serious right (as evidenced by the debates reprinted in this book). The most ferocious arguments take place within the organisation itself.

The quarrelsome culture of the organisation is no accident. It is something we have learnt from the history of the workers' movement. The quarrelsome attitude of the Bolsheviks was probably the single most important factor in preventing them from degenerating, like the rest of the socialist movement at that time, into support for imperialist war in 1914. It is also this attitude that allowed Trotsky and his comrades to identify

and fight the Stalinist counter-revolution.

It is apt therefore that Workers' Liberty's new book, *Can Socialism Make Sense?* starts with a quarrel between Sean Matgamna and an imaginary bourgeois democrat. The lines of argument will be familiar to anyone who ever argued for socialist politics.

The text not only gives a good introduction to socialist thought but is also a training manual for how to carry out socialist education. All of Matgamna's polemic rests on a detailed understanding of history that cuts through and exposes the myths that compromise mainstream "common sense".

Capitalism is a conflict between two great classes — the workers (proletariat) and the capitalists (bourgeoisie). Under capitalism, workers organise for their own collective interests in trade unions and political parties. "Within these organisations a struggle takes place between the ideas that represent the historic interests of the proletariat — Marxism — and the ideas of the bourgeoisie" (p.337).

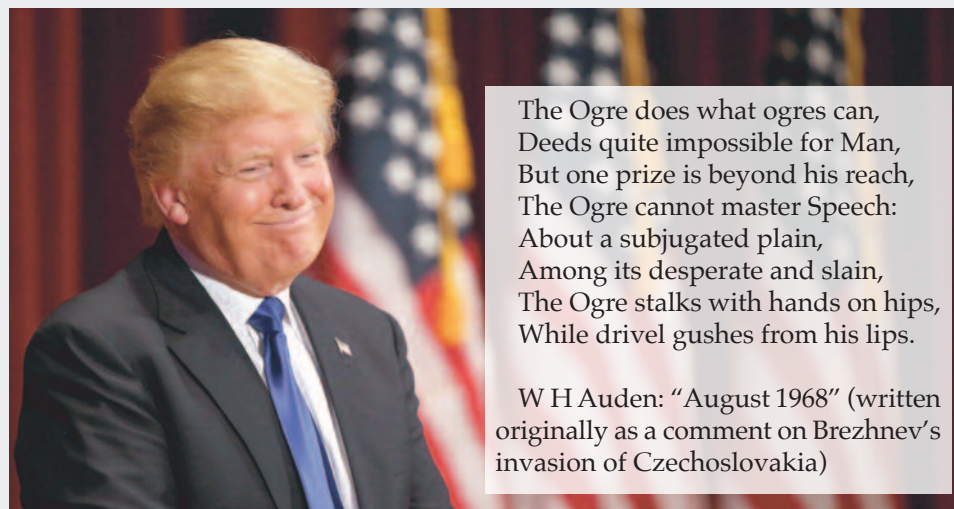
DEFEATS

The level of organisation and political culture in the workers' movement ebbs and flows as our movement wins partial victories and suffers defeats.

The past three decades have been a time of decline and defeat for the working-class in Britain and across the world. Matgamna and his comrades in the AWL have kept the Marxist tradition alive during this long period of defeat through the routines of educating, agitating and organising and through maintaining their quarrelsome culture. As the early Trotskyists before them, the AWL has learnt "not to fall into despair over the fact the laws of history do not depend on their individual tastes and are not subordinated to their own moral criteria... They know how to swim against the stream in the deep conviction that the new historic flood will carry them to the other shore" (p.229).

With the Corbyn surge and similar movements elsewhere, there are signs of a shifting tide if not a full flood. The success or failure of these movements to win socialism will depend on the degree to which these revolutionary ideas gain mass appeal.

There is much work to be done. Paraphras-



The Ogre does what ogres can,
Deeds quite impossible for Man,
But one prize is beyond his reach,
The Ogre cannot master Speech:
About a subjugated plain,
Among its desperate and slain,
The Ogre stalks with hands on hips,
While drivel gushes from his lips.

W H Auden: "August 1968" (written originally as a comment on Brezhnev's invasion of Czechoslovakia)

inst the stream

ing Marx, Matgamna argues “Human beings make their own history, but in conditions they do not choose and usually do not understand... Socialism is about overcoming that limit and introducing conscious control by humanity of itself and its societies. A Marxist party that knows history, knows the experience of the working-class, and knows the options in a given situation, can make the difference between a mass movement blundering into an outcome it would not choose and the same movement achieving the goals it sets itself.” (p.357-8)

The AWL has spent many years studying, debating and interrogating the history of the movement and this book is a condensation of that painstaking work.

It is an attempt, albeit a humble attempt, to do what Engels’ *Socialism Utopian and Scientific* (included in this volume) did for the early Marxist movement. Engels’ short pamphlet outsold everything else that Marx and Engels wrote during their lifetime. It was translated into 10 different languages within the first few years of publication. It was the pamphlet that helped transform the small circles of socialist workers into mass parties across Europe.

Within its pages it describes a vast vision of world history and places the reader, the socialist activist, at the fulcrum of that history with a mission to spread this knowledge and hasten the socialist revolution. This knowledge of human history (itself something that has only become available due to the scientific and material advances of capitalism) is for Marxists the weapon that will allow the working-class to prosecute the class struggle and bring about the socialist future.

As Matgamna explains: “[The natural condition of the working class] is to be dominated by the ideas of the ruling class.” (p.337) Part of the struggle that confronts socialists in the 21st century is a superficial, commodified understanding of history viewed through TV, internet and the heritage industry. As one commentator put it, history nowadays is more “costume dramas and reenactment than critical discourse”. The importance of this book is that it presents a deeply serious and critical history as both an accessible argument that cuts through the dominant ideas of the ruling class and as a method of “how we can map the way from capitalist neo-barbarism to human liberation”.

Matgamna explains that it is only by understanding this history and rooting ourselves in this tradition that we can hope to have the critical understanding to bring about revolutionary change. During the argument with the bourgeois democrat he argues: “we can give a precise account of the evolution of our ideas. You can’t give a true account of the evolution of your bourgeois ideas on democracy.” Equally this charge can be levelled at much of the left today who are blissfully unaware of the fact that their ideas owe much to Stalin’s printing presses.

“Today socialists must live and do their political work amidst the ideological ruins, the discouragement, the revulsion, and the poi-

sonous ideological vapours that constituted the legacy of Stalinism”. (p.16) Only by understanding the history of ideas and developing an exacting, interrogating attitude to our own tradition (and the world about us) can we hope to slough off the poison of Stalinism that has dominated the labour movement in the 20th century.

The book includes a number of articles by Trotsky and his followers that tackle the key myth that Stalinism and Marxism are the same thing and that any future attempt at replacing capitalism with socialism will result in totalitarianism.

As Matgamna points out, “the defenders of capitalism take over, turn around, and use for their own purposes the great lie of the Stalinists. Stalinism, they say, was socialism; Stalinism was Bolshevism; the Stalinist states were Marxism come to life — and therefore socialism, Bolshevism and Marxism are now deservedly dead and rotting. This is the United Front of the Liars against Socialism.” (p.17) The book outlines the history in great detail showing how Stalinism grew as an unexpected counter-revolutionary force from an isolated workers’ revolution in a poor, besieged and war-torn country.

To use the scarecrow of Stalinism to claim that capitalism is the “best of all worlds possible” is crippling self-limiting and potentially catastrophic. The world’s immense productive forces are the private property of individuals, used and manipulated for private self-enrichment. “We see before us a huge community of producers the members of which are unceasingly striving to deprive each other of the fruits of their collective labour — not by force, but on the whole by faithful compliance with legally established rules” (p.308, Einstein).

Matgamna (p. 108) compares this system to a form of cannibalism “What else is it to take someone’s active life, qualities and potential, and to use them to make money for yourself?” The result is an epidemic of mental illness, loneliness, death from overwork and grotesque health inequalities (p. 163-7).

ECOLOGICAL

Human misery aside, the economic dictatorship of capital is destroying the ecological foundations of our civilisation.

An extraordinary potential now exists to create the classless society. But this potential is dependent on us acting quickly before ecological ruination leads to social regression. “There is a serious possibility that capitalism, which first opened up the socialist “option” in history, shifted it from wishful aspiration to practical possibility, will close it again by way of doing irreparable damage to the ecological system on which humankind depends.” (p.126)

Socialism can only be built on a material foundation of relative abundance. Martin Thomas suggests that capitalist technological advances mean that all the necessities of life — food, clothing, housing — can be produced with just 20% of the total labour time of society (p.163). However the floods, droughts, pestilence and species extinction



promised by climate change mean that today’s relative abundance is under threat. There is an urgent need to take the world’s productive forces — the factories, mines, power stations — under democratic control, rather than allow them to be the private playthings of the world’s super-rich.

The seizure of the means of production, under democratic social control is well within the capacity of the international working class. Without workers stoking the power stations, digging the mines, superintending machines, nothing moves and capitalists are powerless. But how do workers come to an understanding of their situation and take power?

The quarrelsome structure of the book suggests an answer. Matgamna, at root, is a radical democrat, in favour not just of the shallow parliamentary democracy but of thoroughgoing economic democracy. All the writers in this collection exude the belief that working-class people have the capacity for self-liberation. In the final analysis, this is a belief that our movement can come to an adequate political understanding, cleansed on bourgeois and Stalinist ideology, through a process of unending criticism, debate and discussion.

Some people will not have the stamina or commitment for such debate. But those who

do should join the AWL, and “make a merciless criticism of the economic, political historical, philosophical, moral and religious ideas of the capitalist class in order to prepare in all spheres of thought the triumph of the new ideology which the proletariat introduces into the world” (p.304).

The alternative is to allow capitalist society to make us obedient wage slaves at work and passive consumers in our free time. Socialism offers a more purposeful existence, one in which we can challenge the powerful and set our shoulders to the wheel of history for the greatest cause in history — the creation of a classless society.

In Matgamna’s (p.371) words: “We will cease to exist very quickly, all too quickly, and we become conscious of the reality that our lives are fundamentally tragic. But what do you conclude from that? Do you conclude that nothing of importance?... What you do say if you’re a reasonable being is that you make this life better, not just better in the sense of better for yourself, but better for human beings in general. You transform this life.”

• Read more reviews of *Can Socialism Make Sense?* and order the book online at www.workersliberty.org/socialism

Dare to hope and fight

In this excerpt from *Can Socialism Make Sense?* Sean Matgamna makes the case for being a socialist activist.

Are we nothing higher than a modern commercially-conducted and regulated rendition of animals, amongst them primitive humankind, spending an entire lifetime browsing and grubbing for food?

That is the “shop until you drop” ethos which this society glorifies and depends on for dynamism. Leavened maybe with a bit of religious uplift, a half-tongue-in-cheek consultation with a horoscope to see what “the stars” are going to do to you? The small bacchanalia of a pop festival once a year or so?

If you are a worker, are you content to spend most of your work doing work you don’t care about — or do care about, but are forced to do in a way you can’t find fulfilling — for an employer whose only concern is to coin profit out of you? If you are a student, what are you going to do when leave college? If you are a one-time left-wing student, now working, what do you do?

Of course, you have to live, and you live in this society, not in the sort of society you might choose. You will have to get a job. If not an ideal one, you may still get a better job than you would have without your studies. Maybe one where (as some people say) you “love your work but hate your job”. But can you, should you, put your best energies into “making a career”?

Will you teach? In a school in a low-income area, where you will participate in the heart-breaking reality of kids going through school and emerging semi-literate? When you know that only changes in society, not just the efforts of individual teachers, will change that?

BOX-TICKING

And where you will have to use more energy on complying with the box-ticking, exam-obsessed, impositions of school management and exam boards than on responding to the needs of your students?

Will you become a university teacher, retailing second and third hand opinion and received capitalist wisdom, with a bit of academic Marxist criticism, perhaps, for leaven and for the sake of your conscience? If you get an academic job with more scope, will you be a left-wing academic consumer of “revolutionary” anti-capitalist theory, but not do anything about it in practice by spreading understanding to the people at large, and helping them organise to fight for it?

Will you be a nurse? A doctor? You’ll see the heartbreak of a National Health Service in chaos, with desperately needed medical care “rationed” by way of waiting times and increasingly by markets, and the enormous and crippling amounts of money paid out to the pharmaceutical companies. Will you become a chemist working for a pharmaceutical company? You might help invent a great medical step forward — and see it used as an expensive commodity, available only to those who can pay, in order to make profit for the bosses and shareholders of the company.

Will you go to a poorer country and make life a little better for people who, in a rich and supposedly civilised world, are dying for lack of money to buy even comparatively cheap medicines? Will you be a social

worker? You will be providing inadequate help to the victims of poverty, poor education, unemployment, and migration far from home. At best you help them organise their lives a bit better with inadequate means and devastatingly arid prospects.

Will you be an immigration official? Help regiment migrant workers and their families; sort out the “legals” from the “illegals”; be part of a system which hunts down, imprisons, and deports the “illegals”?

Be a journalist? You won’t be a privileged columnist, with some right to express a personal opinion (within the limits regulated by the choice of the newspaper and TV owners who can grant you that privilege). There are very few such jobs. As a run-of-the-mill newspaper or TV journalist, you can’t help but contribute in some degree to the selection, slanting, and “balancing” of the millionaire-owned opinion-forming machine in which you will be a voice in a chorus singing what the others sing, what you are told to sing from the bourgeois hymnbook.

You can’t help but participate in a biased selection of what is “newsworthy”, in presenting capitalism and “all its works and pomps” as something immutable and fixed, in suppressing discussion of the socialist alternatives that the crisis of capitalism has given a relevance which they seemed not to have in the days of the long capitalist boom before 2008.

Will you become a professional politician? Go from school and university, perhaps through office in a student union, on to be a “researcher” and maybe then a parliamentary candidate? That is, work to mould and shape yourself to fit into the political machinery that runs the system? The modern mainstream politician is a randic mix of actor, reciting prescribed lines, and lawyer, arguing a brief from whichever side of the issue is indicated, without real conviction or real concern for what is true or best for society.

Will you become a trade-union official? You will be in the labour movement, but “professionally” barred from being able to tell workers openly what you think about the issues that arise and about the union leadership and its policies. Will you limit yourself to helping workers get a little more wages in the labour market — some of the time! — but also helping the union machinery and the top leaders regiment and limit working-class responses to their own exploitation, bamboozlement and degradation? Will you become a civil servant and keep your head down? Become some other sort of official, functioning as a cog in a bureaucratic machine?

You have to get a job. But to put your best



energies into any of those jobs, or similar ones, is self-serving in the narrowest financial and consumerist sense. It would be, for you, self-submerging and self-destroying in the sense of destroying your critical overview of what is right and wrong. It would be, I put it to you, deeply irresponsible. Most students — most rebellious students too — go on as they get older to work an excising operation on themselves so that they can fit in to a career like those I’ve just surveyed. Don’t you think that we socialist militants have a better idea? You have to live in society as it is, but you don’t have to fool yourself and, as you get older, mutilate and repudiate your better, younger self. You don’t have to prostitute yourself.

You can be better than that. You are better than that. You can be an enemy of capitalism and of its political machine and its opinion-industries. You can study the Marxist critique of capitalism — and maybe develop it — and be active, in your workplace, in your everyday life, on the streets, to prepare the working class to rise and make a better society, one free from the evils that make capitalism an abomination, all the more abominable because something better is possible now.

Individual life should not be clad in narrowly personal and familial asbestos-skinned egotism — “I’m all right, Jack, fuck the others” — conscience-salved perhaps with a donation here and there to charitable institutions such as War on Want or Oxfam. Anyway, “society” may not leave you alone. An awful lot of people hypnotised by the values of commercialism have had to wake up from that sleep to the fact that they have been like the legendary St Brendan, the Dark-Ages Irish monk who made his camp on a solid island in the sea, lit his fire to cook, and found it moving under him: it wasn’t an island, it was a whale.

I put it to you that a better philosophy of life than the prevailing one is to face the fact that we are, each of us, part of a broader social entity, and that we should concern ourselves with its well-being as a necessary way of securing our own and our children’s and grandchildren’s well-being. I recently came

across the following words, said to a journalist by the actress Marilyn Monroe, a woman of the left who had had to fight her way through the sewers of capitalist society. She summed up much of what socialists want in words that might have come from William Morris: “What I really want to say is that what the world really needs is a real feeling of kinship. Everybody, stars, labourers, Negroes, Jews, Arabs: we are all brothers. Please don’t make me a joke. End the interview with what I believe”.

We should concern ourselves with the moral climate around us, if only in the interests of our children and their children, and do something to counter the mind-rotting morality inculcated and reinforced by capitalism, for which, as someone well said, everything has a price but nothing an intrinsic or transcendent value. We should not fatalistically settle into accepting that a large part of humanity live in hunger and needless disease. We should not live without doing something about the slaughter of millions of Third World children on the altar of capitalist necessity. We should not be passive consumers only, but also try to create something better, or contribute to its creation.

All that aside, the root argument why you should join us is that you know that humankind lives in a world of savage, needless, shameful, damnable injustice. At stake here is the future of democracy, of equality, of all that is good in the society humankind has so far created, and of humankind itself. Have the courage to hope and to fight to realise your best hopes and desires. Slough off and break your paralysing sense of irony, unworthiness, absurdity, and, as James Connolly used to put it, dare to hope and fight.

Take up the attitude expressed by one of Connolly’s comrades in the 1916 Rising, Patrick Pearse:

**“Did ye think to conquer the people,
Or that law is stronger than life,
And than our desire to be free?
We will try it out with you,
Ye that have harried and held,
Ye that have bullied and bribed.
Tyrants... hypocrites... liars!”**

Remembering those Stalinism killed

By Dale Street

The Russian human rights organisation “Memorial” has published an online database of 39,950 members of the special police force (NKVD) which carried out Stalin’s mass purges of the late 1930s at a cost of hundreds of thousands of lives.

The database does not cover the entire NKVD workforce, which included not just the security services who played the leading role in the purges (the GUGB and UGB) but also border troops, internal troops, the police, and sections responsible for the prevention of economic crime.

Reflecting the contents of the archives used to compile the database, the latter is largely restricted to GUGB and UGB agents who were rewarded with the special ranks for services to the state which the Soviet government awarded from October of 1935 onwards. In that sense, the database lists the NKVD’s “cadre” elements.

The database also contains details of some 4,500 NKVD agents who themselves suffered repression. Around 1,600 of them were executed. Most of the rest were sentenced to spells of varying length in labour camps (although many of them were “released” into the army on the outbreak of war).

The organisation responsible for publishing the database, “Memorial”, dates back to the late 1980s. Its main activities involve research, publications and education about repression in the former Soviet Union, and providing material support to survivors of the repression.

But it is also a campaigning organisation.

The 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Vic-

times of Political Repression and the decision by the Russian Parliament the same year to declare 30 October a Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Political Repression, for example, were both due in part to campaigning by “Memorial”.

According to a spokesperson for “Memorial”, the new database is not just a tool of use to historians and individual Russian citizens searching for information about relatives who suffered death or imprisonment during the Great Terror. It is also a political campaigning act:

“Until now, if anyone mentions the victims, it’s as though they were killed by a natural disaster like an earthquake or a tidal wave. They were victims of crimes and those crimes were committed by people.”

“Our government doesn’t like to acknowledge that the Soviet Union was a criminal state. The criminals’ names are known. Let the ones who carry our orders now know that their names too will be known.

GOVERNMENT

The response of the Russian government to publication of the archive was less than enthusiastic.

According to a government spokesperson: “I will leave this issue without comment. The issue is very sensitive.”

If Putin’s government finds the issue “very sensitive”, then this is solely because the publication of the database is at odds with the Russian government’s ongoing process of rehabilitation — not of the victims of repression, but of Stalin himself.

Putin has described Stalin as “an effective manager” and emphasised his “achieve-

ments” in defeating Nazi Germany and raising the Soviet Union to the status of a world superpower.

According to Putin: “We can criticise the commanders and Stalin all we like. But can anyone say with certainty that a different approach would have enabled us to win?” And, for Putin, the collapse of the Soviet Union was the “major geopolitical disaster of the century, (which) for the Russian nation became a genuine drama.”

Stalin’s purges are largely ignored in Russian school textbooks. So too are the mass national deportations carried out under Stalin’s orders. The deportation of nearly half a million Chechens to Central Asia in 1941, for example, merits just two paragraphs in school history books.

The appointment of Olga Vasilyeva as Russian Education Minister in August ensures that Stalin’s crimes will remain a blank page in Russian schools. Vasilyeva has praised the “efficiency” of the Stalin period, and has described Stalin’s purges as “necessary at the time” and as “exaggerated” in history books.

Other government figures who share Vasilyeva’s admiration for Stalin include the Minister of Culture (for whom Stalin was “the foundation of Russia’s heroic past”) and the Vice Prime Minister (who has advocated that Volgograd be renamed Stalingrad).

Leading figures in the Russian Orthodox Church have also been increasingly vocal in their support for Stalin. According to Archbishop Vsevolod Chaplin, until last year spokesperson for the head of the Orthodox Church:

“He (Stalin) did a lot. At the end of it all,

what’s so bad about destroying internal enemies? There are some people you should kill. Even God, if we read the Old and New Testaments correctly, directly authorised the destruction of a large number of people as a message to others. Not as punishment of revenge, but as edification.”

The official creeping rehabilitation of Stalin has served as a stimulus to his natural admirers in the Russian Communist Party (CP; despite its name, now a profoundly conservative, xenophobic and antisemitic party).

Local and regional CP organisations declared 2016 to be the “Year of Stalin” and have erected statues and opened cultural centres and museums in memory of Stalin. A giant picture of Stalin was a backdrop to the CP’s 2015 conference, while pictures of Stalin are increasingly common on placards on CP demonstrations.

Unsurprisingly, the state-sanctioned rehabilitation of Stalin has changed public opinion. In 2012 public attitude surveys found that “only” 27% of Russians thought that Stalin did more good than bad. Now the figure is 40%.

45% of Russians think that the “sacrifices” made under Stalin were justified. 52% think that Stalin “probably” or “definitely” played a positive role in Russia. The proportion of Russians with a negative view of Stalin has declined from 43% (2001) to 21% (2015). And nearly 50% of Russians think that Stalin’s purges were necessary.

In such a context the publication of the NKVD database by “Memorial” is not just a useful tool for historical research but a challenge to the Putin-driven rehabilitation of Stalin.

When we reassessed the Stalinist states

AS WE WERE SAYING

By Simon Nelson

In 1988 the Socialist Organiser Alliance, a forerunner of Workers’ Liberty, at its annual conference, officially dropped the “degenerated and deformed workers’ states” description of the USSR and similar systems which we had inherited from “Orthodox Trotskyism”. It categorised these states as exploitative class systems not superior to capitalism.

There was a lengthy discussion before and after the conference about more detailed descriptions. The debate encompassed discussion on a number of different theories as to the class nature of these states. Probably a majority thought that the USSR and the Eastern Bloc could be described as “bureaucratic collectivist”. A minority adhered to varied of “state capitalist” analyses. Another minority sympathised with Hillel Ticktin’s thesis of the USSR as a “non-mode of production”. And some disagreed with dropping the “degenerated and deformed workers’ states” tag.

The organisation had long questioned what “defence of the USSR” and “nationalised property” actually meant.

Sean Matgamna would say in a speech to *Socialist Organiser’s* National Editorial Board in 1987: “Essentially, I haven’t thought the deformed and degenerated workers’ state theory was feasible for six or seven years. The problem is, what do you replace it with?”

Sean would go on to look at Trotsky’s writ-

ing on the subject and those of his critics, notably Max Shachtman. It would be some years before you could really describe Workers’ Liberty as encompassing other aspects of the “Shachtman tradition”. The serious re-evaluation of post-Trotsky Trotskyism that this work involved is shown in *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* volumes 1 and 2.

Alongside a more detailed explanation the conference declared:

“The ruling state-monopoly bureaucracies are distinct ruling classes. They have many peculiarities and differences from other ruling classes, but nevertheless they are self-reproducing ruling classes with a distinct relation to the means of production and to the working class.

“Nationalised property alone cannot define a socialist formation as a workers’ state. The vast experience of different sorts of bourgeois states since Trotsky’s time makes this clear, even if the use of nationalised property against the working class in the Stalinist state-monopoly societies had not already done so. Nationalisation is a means to an end — working-class liberation. It cannot bring progress towards that end under the rule of a bureaucratic state-monopoly class system.

“The working class and its allies in the bureaucratic state-monopoly societies must make a new revolution which will, in fact, be as thorough-going as the revolution that the workers in a country like Britain will have to make.

“The bureaucratic state-monopoly systems cannot be considered in any sense transitional form capitalism to socialism. In many



fundamental respects they are further from socialism than advanced capitalist countries are — most importantly, in their uniform and systematic suppression of the working class, without whose activist socialism is impossible and will never be achieved anywhere. The state-monopoly societies emerge in various ways as parallels to capitalism, not as its successor. They have many of the unmistakable features of historical blind allies.

“Socialists in the west must support the working class in the state-monopoly systems in its attempts to organise a free labour movement — support it irrespective of the ideas of such a movement, which, as Solidarnosc shows, develop pro-market-capitalist views in response to the horrors of the state-monopoly system.

“Socialists in the west must support the

movements for national independence in the state-monopoly systems.

“We are opening a discussion. Many questions about the nature of Eastern Bloc remain unanswered. We will continue the discussion in an open and undogmatic way.”

The very next year the East Europe regimes fell; by 1991 the USSR was no more.

Our attitude to this question was not an esoteric hunt for programmatic dogmatism but, as a September 1988 editorial in *Socialist Organiser* said:

“Our concern is first and foremost to develop an exact, concrete assessment of the workers’ struggles and the bureaucracy’s operations in the Eastern Bloc, and to fight for a programme for workers’ liberty East and West.”

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!



Events

Tuesday 13 December

UCL Demo for Education: No Fees, No Privatisation — Stop TEF

1pm, UCL, Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT
bit.ly/2hjQbhr

Wednesday 14 December

Tell Camden Council SAY NO to NHS STP!

6.30pm, Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, London, WC1H 9JE
bit.ly/2gZIxIf

Tuesday 20 December

News from Nowhere by William Morris: Haringey Radical Readers

7pm, Big Green Bookshop, Brampton Park Rd, London, N22 6BG
bit.ly/2go6dVQ

14-15 January

NCAFC Winter Conference
Warwick University
bit.ly/2go6x70

Saturday 14 January

Against Borders for Children Conference
12.30pm, SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, London, WC1H 0XG
bit.ly/2go7o7M

Saturday 4 March

National Demonstration to defend the NHS
London — time and exact starting point to be confirmed
bit.ly/2h9wgBe

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

More online at www.workersliberty.org



Workers' Liberty



@workersliberty

Momentum: for unity!

LABOUR

By Simon Nelson

After the Momentum national committee on Saturday 3 December voted that Momentum should have a decision-making delegate conference — just that was the big controversial decision! — figures on the fringes of Momentum, and some within it, have launched a social-media and mass-media outcry against Workers' Liberty and Solidarity.

This outcry should be resisted with an insistence on unity, a focus on positive campaigning, and a refusal to let the mass media or the Labour machine's notorious Compliance Unit split us.

Although we were only a small part of the 3 December meeting, the whole majority is being denounced as manipulated, controlled, or even bullied by the few Workers' Liberty people there, and the decision to have a democratic conference as a "Trotskyist takeover".

Some people are signalling that they want to split Momentum on this issue. Our reply is clear:

The majority is much broader than us. It is not controlled by us.

We, and as far as we know all the majority, are totally for unity and against a split. Momentum should unite to fight the Tories and the Labour right wing.

We are not even "hard-liners" on the organisational issues. We, and the majority, do want democracy in Momentum: we believe democracy is necessary for stable unity. But we always have been, and are, open to dialogue and compromise about modalities, details, forms.

We have kept our tone comradely. We have repeatedly sought off-the-record discussions with those who led the minority on 3 December to explore adjustments, common ground, maximisation of consensus.

The ones who are reluctant to compromise, and who run their debates in tones of violent denunciation of those disagree with them, are elements in the minority, and, even more, their media outriders, who are not even active in Momentum.

The writer Paul Mason told the BBC Daily Politics on 8 December that, although he had "never been to a Momentum meeting", he demanded a purge. "If Jill Mountford [a National Committee member of Momentum]... remains basically an expelled member of the Party and remains in Momentum, I will not remain in Momentum".

Labour "auto-excluded" 618 members during the Labour leadership contest this summer, and 1038 members are still suspended, according to figures at the last Labour NEC. Thousands more left-wingers (no-one knows exactly) were expelled or suspended during the 2015 leadership contest. Many of those expelled are long-standing Labour Party members, whom no-

one talked of expelling during the Blair, Brown, or Miliband years.

Until now the left has agreed that we do not trust the Compliance Unit's decisions on who should or shouldn't be allowed in the Labour Party. Momentum has voted to oppose the purge. Other left groups like the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy have a long-standing policy of including unjustly expelled left-wingers.

The Compliance Unit wants to split the left. We should not allow them to do that.

Remember: the Compliance Unit could well expel Paul Mason — he is an ex-member of a Trotskyist group, and surely has said unkind things about Labour right-wingers on social media.

Owen Jones, another figure on the fringe of Momentum, another one who could well be expelled by the Compliance Unit if they choose, has used the Guardian to claim that the issue in Momentum is "a takeover bid by Trotskyist sectarians".

Mason, Jones, and others should put aside their megaphones. They should come and discuss the best way to build unity and effective campaigning for Momentum.

Voting was quite closely divided on 3 December, but delegates agreed on a decision-making national conference, to be on 18 February, 25 February, or 4 March. Both local groups and individuals (via the online platform MxV) will be able to submit motions to the conference. The existing Steering Committee will remain in place until after the conference. The 3 December meeting elected a conference arrangements committee.

CONSENSUS

We were not in the majority on everything, but we are confident that the 3 December decisions will command a broad consensus in most of Momentum's local groups.

As Michael Chessum, a Momentum Steering Committee member (and not one of us), has said: "[if the meeting was polarised] The Steering Committee has to accept the lion's share of the responsibility ... By bypassing and undermining the national committee — a body to which it was technically subordinate — the Steering Committee substantially overreached its mandate and infuriated grassroots activists. As a result, attitudes hardened and the regional delegates, who make up a majority of the NC, almost all arrived mandated to vote for a purely delegate-based conference."

More calm, more space for discussion and appreciation of the hard voluntary work of comrades in the national office and in local groups, fewer meeting-cancellations, fewer attempts to pre-empt decisions, would have helped improve the atmosphere on 3 December. Whether it would have stopped the recent Trotskyist-baiting, we don't know.



Lewisham Momentum

In the media storm, our ideas on imperialism, on Israel-Palestine, on Europe have been misrepresented, and the great warehouse of Stalinist slurs against Trotskyists has been called into use.

Yes, we are Trotskyists. We say what we think, and we organise openly for our ideas. We believe Momentum is a tremendous opportunity for the left. We have played a constructive role in it since it started, in local groups, nationally, and in initiatives like Momentum NHS.

20,000 people have joined Momentum as members since it launched. There are 150 local groups.

Those groups must be allowed the means to develop a democracy — a continuously thinking, adjust, rethinking process of debate and decision-making which evolves a collective majority opinion — and that needs a conference, not just decision-making via online plebiscites run by the Momentum full-time staff.

At the 3 December meeting we supported a successful motion from Momentum Youth and Students for a campaign to make Labour stand firm on freedom of movement and to fight against the Tories' post-Brexit plans. Momentum should be uniting to put such policies into action, not using the mass media to stir a storm against the 3 December majority.

Some in the 3 December minority oppose a decision-making conference because they think Momentum should not have policy beyond being generically left-wing and pro-Corbyn. There is a case, and we accept it, for moving quite slowly and gently on many policy issues in a new movement like Momentum. But without policies — on issues like freedom of movement, for example — Momentum cannot campaign coherently in local Labour Parties or on the streets (or, as we found this September, in the Labour Party conference).

Otherwise Momentum can only be a support organisation for the current Labour leadership, a database or phone bank for exercises like the leadership elections.

Let's go forward to build Momentum, build the Labour Party, resist the Compliance Unit's purges, fight the Tories, and argue for socialist policies.

Those who disagree with the decisions at the National Committee should discuss within Momentum: on our side, they will find no closed doors, and a strong will for unity.

Drivers join Southern fight

By Ollie Moore

Members of the train drivers' union Aslef on Southern began an overtime ban on 6 December, and are preparing to strike alongside RMT guards later in the month.

The guards' latest strikes began on 6 December and will continue until 8 December, with Aslef due to participate in further strikes on 13-14 and 16 December. RMT guards will strike again on 19-20 December and 31 December-2 January, and both guards and drivers will strike on 9-14 January.

Southern bosses, who succeeded in having an earlier Aslef ballot declared illegal by the High Court, have again sought an injunction against the drivers' action.

RMT members protested outside the Policy Exchange office in Westminster on 6 December, where Transport Secretary Chris Grayling was delivering a speech on "rail policy in the 21st century". As well



as refusing to consider renationalising the Southern franchise, the government has recently announced plans to explore the privatisation of railway maintenance, currently carried out by Network Rail.

An RMT statement said: "Mr. Grayling and his government are hell bent on ripping to shreds the safety regime on our railway, not just by axing guards, but also by

turning the clock back to the lethal days of the privatised Railtrack on our infrastructure.

"If the Tories think we will sit on the sidelines while they drag us back to the carnage of Hatfield and Potters Bar [fatal train crashes which occurred while railway maintenance was privatised] then they need to think again."

Support Crossrail wildcat strike!

By Gerry Bates

Workers at the Crossrail construction site on Tottenham Court Road, Central London, are striking in protest at the forced displacement of Terry Wilson, their site steward, to a different workplace.

Terry was transferred after 200 workers protested at Crossrail's headquarters to demand increased "second-tier" (bonus) payments, and occupied the site offices of Crown House Technologies and Laing O'Rourke.

The contractor which employs the workers, Crown House Technologies, has refused to meet with Terry since his election as steward, and the decision to displace him following the protest is a clear attempt to victimise a trade union rep and break up union organisation



on the site.

The strike is the latest in a series of flashpoints on Crossrail construction sites over a number of years, which also included the long-running battle to win reinstatement for sacked union activist Frank Morris.

The current strike is a wildcat action. Solidarity, including donations to the strike fund, could help it win.

• Send email messages of support to Terry at terrydw1ilson@aol.com, send cheques, payable to "Unite London Construction LE/0555 Branch" to Unite, 33-37 Moreland Street, London EC1V 8BB (write "TCR Crossrail Strike Fund" on the back), or make an online donation to Account 20276649, Sort Code 608301.

Tube bosses forced to address staffing crisis

By Ollie Moore

An overtime ban by station staff on London Underground has led to the closure of dozens of Tube stations.

Members of the RMT union began the action on 23 November, since which time major stations such as Bond Street and Earl's Court have been forced to close due to lack of staff.

A supporter of the *Tubeworker* bulletin told *Solidarity*: "The closures show that station staffing is in crisis. There are simply not enough of us to do the work. The company is forced to rely on overtime; when we refuse to work beyond our con-

tracted hours, stations close. The key demand of our dispute is for an increase to the staffing level, and following these closures, no-one can argue it's not needed."

London Underground bosses have already made concessions in Acas talks, agreeing to a joint review with the unions that has committed in advance to resource additional jobs. Union sources say there is no intention to lift the overtime ban. An RMT rep told *Solidarity*: "The number of job cuts the review reserves will be directly proportional to how much pressure the company feels under. If we let them off the ropes, the number will be derisory. If we turn up the heat,

it could be much higher."

Tubeworker has called for unions to name strikes to escalate the dispute, possibly in parallel with the next walkouts by guards and drivers on Southern.

Smaller Tube union TSSA, which balloted its members later than RMT, commences its own overtime ban from 8 December.

Meanwhile, strikes by RMT drivers on the Hammersmith and City and Piccadilly Lines planned for 6-7 December were suspended, after the RMT said Acas talks resulted in significant progress. The disputes centre on management abuse of procedures.

No cuts at EHRC!

By Dale Street

PCS and Unite members employed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) will strike again on Monday 12 December.

The strikes are part of an ongoing dispute about cuts in funding, job losses, and a management-driven "internal re-organisation".

Between 2010 and 2016 the coalition government cut funding for the EHRC by 75%. It lost its helpline service – outsourced to G4S! – its conciliation service, and its grants programme which supported local law centres and community groups. Staffing levels fell from 525 to under 200.

In summer 2016 the Tories announced a further funding cut of 25% between 2016 and 2020. This despite an increased demand for the services of EHRC as a result of the post-Brexit 50% increase in hate crimes.

EHRC management announced plans for frontloading the cuts by axing jobs. A "voluntary exit" programme secured enough volunteers for redundancy.

But then management announced an organisational restructuring, under which 26 posts would disappear. The cuts were concentrated in the lowest paid jobs. The PCS union said:

"Nineteen of the first 26 posts due to be axed are held by staff in the three lowest paid grades,

meaning the government body responsible for protecting vulnerable workers is itself disproportionately targeting older, ethnic minority and disabled staff."

While cutting jobs at the bottom end of the scale, management created five new posts at the top end, each on six-figure salaries, and none were advertised externally.

To assist in implementing the organisational restructuring EHRC management also brought in an external consultant – paid at a rate of £250,000 a year.

PCS and Unite members voted overwhelmingly for strike in October. A planned one-day strike in October was called off to allow more time for talks. But a further breakdown in talks resulted in two 24-hour strikes in November.

ACAS talks resumed and seemed close to reaching a settlement last week. But EHRC management is reported to have backtracked from previous commitments.

Unfortunately, while the leaflet produced by the PCS and Unite for the dispute rightly identifies the impact of the proposed cut in jobs, it then demands only "no compulsory redundancies" – even though job losses through voluntary exit would result in the same damage to EHRC services.

• Find out more and support the strike on Twitter: @savetheehrc

Picturehouse rejects living wage

By Gemma Short

Picturehouse has rejected the call of workers at another Picturehouse cinema branch, Picturehouse Central in Soho central London, for the London Living Wage.

The workers' union Bectu has now invited Picturehouse to negotiations with ACAS, but if Picturehouse refuses to negotiate or to offer a pay rise it is possible that workers at Picturehouse Central will be balloted for strikes and join

workers at Hackney Picturehouse and the Ritzy cinema on strike.

Bectu reps lobbied Labour MP Chuka Umunna, whose constituency includes Brixton where the Ritzy cinema is, on 25 November. He gave his support to the dispute.

Workers at the Ritzy and Hackney Picturehouse told *Solidarity* that they may plan their strikes to coincide with première screenings of the new 'Star Wars' movie, which opens on 15 December.

Durham TAs push back council

By Charlotte Zalens

Durham teaching assistants achieved a huge victory on 30 November when Durham County Council announced it was suspending the imposition of their proposed new contract.

The backtracking of the council follows a series of strikes by teach-

ing assistants, a large scale social media campaign and several protests in Durham. It just goes to show that strikes win!

Further negotiations are now scheduled in order to resolve the situation completely but the withdrawal of the threat to sack and reemploy teaching assistants is a huge win.



Solidarity

For a workers' government

No 425 9 December 2016 50p/£1

Aleppo doomsday

By Simon Nelson

With the aid of Russian military jets and intelligence units, Syrian armed forces tightened their grip over eastern Aleppo in early December.

The fall of the whole city to Assad's regime is now increasingly likely. Many more civilians are dying, and thousands are fleeing the city.

Since the latest offensive began last month, the territory under the control of Syrian rebels has fallen by 50%. The combined forces of the Syrian army, Shia militias from Iraq, Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah have made significant and probably irreversible gains. 30,000 people have already been displaced by the ongoing fighting. Operations in Aleppo's crumbling and almost non-functioning hospitals are being carried out without anaesthetic, and many civilians have been reduced to scavenging for food.

The UN has said Aleppo could be turned into one big graveyard if there is no cessation in fighting soon. It is estimated that 10% of the residents of Aleppo have fled since the onslaught increased. 19,000 people have fled to government-controlled areas, 5,000 further into rebel held areas and 5,000 to areas in Kurdish control.

Before the latest offensive 250,000 people were under siege. Russia claims it is helping to evacuate civilians, but that rebels are refusing to allow people to leave. In any case: "Those who refuse to leave nicely will be destroyed," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said.

Russia is interested with target-



Demonstrating against the Putin-Assad war

ing all opposition to Assad under the cover of targeting Daesh and the former Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. Throughout much of the rebel-held area the Islamists — JFaS and the Islamic Front of Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam — are the only groups that provide any sort of defence. The fight is becoming one between Shia militias and their Russian and

Iranian allies on the one hand, and different strands of Islamist and Salafist Sunni groups on the other, backed by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.

With the election of Donald Trump, a "natural ally" as Assad called him, the situation for all sections of the Syrian opposition is bleak. Trump has made it plain that he sees the only real aim of US

intervention into Syria as defeating Daesh and has no interest in removing Assad.

The Russian Defence Secretary has confirmed that Putin and Trump have discussed the war in Syria and the possibility of "uniting efforts in the fight with the common enemy number one—international terrorism and extremism."

In this protracted sectarian war where regional powers vie for control over a devastated nation, both civilians and the possibility of a democratic functioning Syria are being destroyed.

Whatever solidarity we can show — from supporting demonstrations outside the Russian Embassy, through to campaigning for refugees — we need to do it urgently.

Subscribe to Solidarity

Trial sub (6 issues) £7 ☐
Six months (22 issues) £22 waged ☐, £11 unwaged ☐
One year (44 issues) £44 waged ☐, £22 unwaged ☐
European rate: 6 months €30 ☐ One year €55 ☐

Name

Address

I enclose £

Cheques (£) to "AWL" or make £ and Euro payments at workersliberty.org/sub
Return to 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

Or subscribe with a standing order

Pay £5 a month to subscribe to Solidarity or pay us more to make an ongoing contribution to our work

To: (your bank) (address)

Account name (your name)

Account number Sort code

Please make payments as follows to the debit of my account:
Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham, B1 2HB (60-83-01)

Amount: £.....

To be paid on the day of (month) 20.... (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing.
This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date Signature

Contact us

020 7394 8923

solidarity@workersliberty.org

Write to us: The editor
(Cathy Nugent), 20E Tower
Workshops, Riley Road, London,
SE1 3DG

Solidarity editorial: Cathy Nugent
(editor), Simon Nelson, Gemma
Short, and Martin Thomas

Printed by Trinity Mirror