



& Workers' Liberty

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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CATALONIA: RIGHT TO CHOOSE YES, NEW BORDERS NO!

As *Solidarity* goes to press on 10 October, Carles Puigdemont, the president of Catalonia, has announced his response to the referendum on independence in Catalonia his government called on 1 October.

The Spanish government declared the referendum illegal, and deployed heavy Spanish police force to try to stop it, but it largely went ahead. 92% voted yes, on a 43% turnout.

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Daesh driven out of Raqqa



Ralph Peters reports on the defeats for Daesh in northern Syria.

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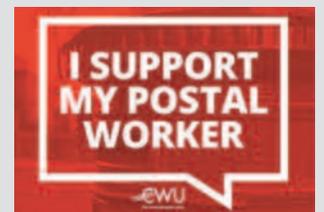
The life of Ernest Mandel



Martin Thomas reviews *Ernest Mandel, A rebel's dream deferred* by Jan Willem Stutje

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Royal Mail tries to stop strikes



Royal Mail applies for a High Court injunction to stop strikes called for 19 October.

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Join Labour! Scottish Labour lags behind

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Domino's at large, socialism popular too

By Ruaridh Anderson

Stalls handing out free Domino's pizza remain by far the most popular on campus during university students' union welcome fairs.

They have also been a fuel for socialist activity, proving a reliable source of free food for Workers' Liberty students as we spent the last three weeks at fairs around the country.

Following the general election, many more students and young people are engaged by left-wing ideas. This was reflected partly by the popularity of our stalls. We spent days in long conversations about current political issues, selling literature and advertising our meetings.

We raised the call for a democratic student movement, centred around key ideas like fighting climate change, and campaigning for freedom of movement, free education and socialist feminist politics.

The AWL's *Why Socialist Feminism?* book was the most popular of our publications — after *Solidarity*. A good sign because AWL students are planning significant feminist activism in the year ahead.

We also played a key part in Labour Society stalls. These clubs have seen a huge surge, often with hundreds more sign-ups than last year. This is a direct result of the way students engaged with Labour's bold, left wing manifesto commitments of free education, £10 per hour wages and rent caps.

New, left wing clubs are rising organically across the country. Many are finally in the position to pull off regular activity. We want Labour clubs to be centres of activism, fighting for students rights on campus, organised democratically with a healthy culture of discussion and debate.

We also promoted the "Free Education Now — Tax the Rich" demonstration in London on 15 November, organised by the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts. It is staggering how popular this demo has been amongst students.

Gone are the times when promotion would take the form of long debates with students sceptical of scrapping tuition fees. Now it's about how many people these students can bring along to the protest. Or sharing ideas about what a free education system might actually look like.

These are exciting times in student politics. Through activism on the streets, and discussion of left wing ideas, the student left will grow in the months ahead.

• Demonstration details here bit.ly/2ye7S9V

Trump, Iran and the nuclear options

Morad Shirin of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxist Tendency spoke to *Solidarity*.

Under the Iran Nuclear Review Act, the White House has to certify the agreement every 90 days. He's done it twice so far but he is saying he may not do it this time.

As far as anybody else is concerned — because it's not a bilateral agreement — the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, between five permanent members of the Security Council, plus Germany, plus the EU, has been voted on by the Security Council, and is part of international law.

The IAA says that Iran is complying with the technical side of the deal. Trump wants to get more out of the deal; they want to get Iran to stop supporting Hezbollah in Lebanon, to stop intervening in Syria, Yemen and so on.

If Trump doesn't certify complying with it, that gives the US Congress 60 days to do something about it. That will be mainly in the Senate where the Republicans have a majority. They won't ditch it totally as that will involve bigger



problems. What they'll do is try to tie some things up to put pressure on the regime.

Iran has signed a \$4.8 billion gas deal with France to develop South Fars gas field; this is alongside all the Airbus deals and so on. Iran and Britain would like to expand relations as Brexit happens. No-one is looking to ditch the deal. They might cite other things, like developing ballistic missiles, supporting terrorism, to add more conditions to the deal.

It is possible that Trump will have a change of personnel. Tillerson has been criticised for failing to come up with any evidence that the

regime is not complying with the deal.

Sanctions were choking off oil exports in Iran. Since sanctions were lifted, oil exports have been doubled. This has allowed other foreign companies from around the world, especially France and even the USA, to make deals, to look at investing in Iran. It has saved the regime from collapse.

Economically, the sanctions made the situation much worse and there was a long recession. But the working class has yet to make any big gains. Standards of living have got worse. There have been lots of strikes over the last year and

a half, across many areas. The regime has not been able to address the basic problems that not only workers but also ordinary people face.

The deal has raised expectations but hasn't delivered in the way that it should. The deal allows the regime to throw its weight around more in the region. Now that Trump is talking about not recertifying the deal, this situation has allowed different wings of the regime to unite around a national interest — the Pasdaran, Khomeini, Rohani and the so-called "moderates".

It is likely that Trump will say that the Pasdaran, or a part of the Pasdaran, are a terrorist organisation and there will be certain targeted sanctions against them.

If the sanctions "snap back", it will take 60 days, so effects will take a while and it's unlikely that they'll be fully reinstated anyway. But it seems possible that the USA might impose additional sanctions to punish the regime for its interventions elsewhere in the region.

The regime would use any renewed sanctions as a pretext for a lot of nationalist rhetoric, cracking down on workers, minorities, Kurds and so on.

Mehmet Aksoy

By Gerry Bates

Mehmet Aksoy, a London-based Kurdish socialist activist, has been killed by Daesh while volunteering with the Kurdish YPG national liberation forces.

Aksoy, a trained film-maker, was volunteering as a press officer with a unit of the YPG when a Daesh unit attacked his position a short distance from the front line in Raqqa.

Aksoy had been active in the Kurdish national liberation movement in London for some time. An editor of the Kurdish Question website and Director of the London Kurdish Film Festival, he stepped up his activity following Daesh's massacre of Yazidis at Sinjar in 2014 and their incursion into the Kurdish canton of Rojava in Syria.

Aksoy led Kurdish protests in London at that time, including blockades of train stations and marches.

In April 2017, Turkish warplanes bombed a YPG headquarters in Qereçox in Rojava, killing members of the YPG Press Corps. After this attack, Aksoy was determined to join the YPG as a press officer, reporting in English and making films to support the YPG's fight against Daesh and for Kurdish national liberation.

He chose the nom de guerre Fîraz Dağ in honour of his uncle Fîraz, who was killed by the Turkish state fighting with the PKK in the 1980s.

Workers' Liberty send their condolences to Aksoy's family and his comrades.

• <http://kurdishquestion.com/>



NZ schools go gender-neutral

By Colin Foster

New Zealand's secondary school teachers' union has called on all schools to offer gender-neutral uniform, toilet and changing-room options.

All students should be able to "choose from a range of shorts, trousers, skirts of different lengths and styles, with both tailored and non-tailored interchangeable shirts... access to specific uniform items [should not be] not limited on the basis of biological sex or perceived gender identity".

The union also calls on schools to provide "individual toilet and shower units with lockable doors and floor-to-ceiling divisions" and "options for students to change and shower in privacy".

The school principals' federation president Whetu Cormick has backed the teachers' union call, and the country's Ministry of Education (under a conservative government) has also backed gender-neutral uniforms.

70 per cent of NZ schools have a

uniform. Of them, 77 per cent let girls wear shorts and 36 per cent said boys could wear skirts.

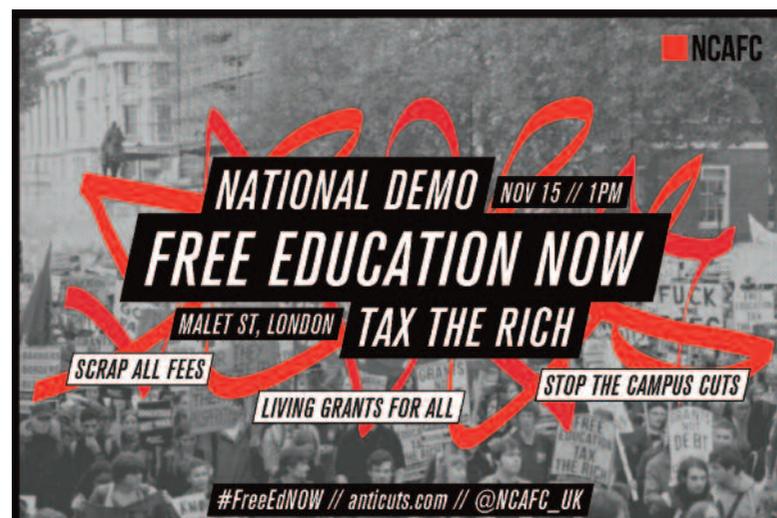
Some schools have gone further. Dunedin North Intermediate School in the South Island, a year after saying girls could wear trousers, moved on to say explicitly that all students can choose between shorts, culottes, a kilt, and long trousers, and gender makes no difference to uniform.

Head teacher Heidi Hayward says that students have welcomed the new options: in fact the shift came as a result of pressure from the school's students, aged 10 to 13.

"The kids weren't really fussed about it. It's adults that have taken a while to get their heads around it — they've asked lots of questions".

On the latest figures, some 80 state schools across the UK, including 40 primaries, have introduced gender-neutral uniform policies.

As one deputy head teacher says: "It's about recognising the rights of students who feel they might not fit into the binary genders. It's less of a big deal to the students than you might think".



Daesh driven out of Raqqa

By Ralph Peters

The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) have scored remarkable victories over the last three years against Daesh in northern Syrian.

The YPG was created five years ago. Assad withdrew from Kurdish areas in north west Syria to concentrate his offensive in more central areas. The YPG became the army of the cantons formed in what Kurds call Rojava, "the West" of Kurdish territory.

It made its female units (YPJ) every bit as prominent and effective as the male units. It rejected religious sectarianism and nationalism. It armed those it liberated like the Yazidis, and helped them organise in their self defence. It allied with some Arab fighters in the Syria Democratic Forces (SDF).

It beat back Daesh, a force formed from experienced officers of Saddam's Iraqi army, and financed with millions of dollars from Saudi and Qatar.

Daesh had made a blitzkrieg advance across Iraq and Syria in June-August 2014, seizing heavy armaments surrendered by 30,000 Iraqi army soldiers as they fled. Daesh had also acquired arms and finance from Wahhabist forces in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

In its new "Islamic State", Daesh launched terror against minorities. The more than 40,000 Yazidis in Northern Iraq faced the execution of all males and the selling of their young women into sex slavery.

The forces of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraqi Kurdistan had left the Yazidis to their fate. For four months the YPG fought virtually unaided against Daesh.

KOBANI

When Daesh attempted to take Kobani, a Kurdish town on the border with Turkey, bloated to about 200,000 people by refugees fleeing Daesh, the battle was fierce.

The Turkish regime did little to stop Daesh trading oil for money and arms. It stopped volunteer Kurds and arms from Turkey getting to the besieged YPG forces in Kobani.

The US were in a quandary. Obama had pledged US military force to defeat Daesh. But Turkey was the USA's most powerful ally. The US deferred. As US warplanes began sorties into Syria, they spared the large concentration of Daesh military forces outside Kobani.

After six weeks of Daesh's onslaught on Kobani, the US changed tack. They started bombing the Daesh forces around Kobani and worked with YPG forces on the ground. The siege of the town was broken.

The YPG's defeat of Daesh round Kobani, with the help of US air cover, became a model which over



the last three years has advanced and now pretty much destroyed Daesh in their "Islamic State" capital of Raqqa.

To keep Erdogan happy, the US had long maintained a ban on the Turkish-Kurdish PKK as "terrorists". That ban, also implemented by Turkey's other NATO allies in Europe, has caused great distress to the families of YPG volunteer fighters, usually from the Kurdish diaspora.

Erdogan also locked up members and leaders of the pro-Kurdish HDP party in Turkey.

The US simultaneously allied with Erdogan and armed and supported the Rojavan militias YPG/YPJ, which were politically dominated by the sister party to the PKK, the PYD in Syria.

Some on the left put a simple minus where the US put a plus. The Kurds fighting against Erdogan in Turkey were considered good, because Erdogan was an ally of the US. The same Kurds fighting Daesh with US support were thought not

so good, or ignored.

A simplistic "anti-imperialism", reduced to anti-Americanism, was unable to recognise that it is the right of an oppressed people to take military support from whomever they can when fighting forces like Daesh.

A confused mosaic of conflicting positions on Syria has become commonplace. Pacifistic outrage at all military action; refusal to fully acknowledge the barbaric crimes of either Assad or Daesh; ludicrous conspiracy theories in which the independent agency of militias and communities in Syria is denied and they are demonised as tame tools of imperialism.

Both Russia and Iran, in support of Assad, and Saudi and Turkey, against Assad, have promoted and financed sectarian forces in Syria for their own ends. The US has needed the Kurds probably as much as the Kurds have needed the US, but the US, too, puts its own imperial interests first.

The US made many efforts to

nurture forces which might serve it as a reliable alternative to Assad in Syria. Most ended catastrophically. The alliance struck up with the YPG at the battle of Kobani continued to have successes against Daesh.

Turkey and Saudi Arabia also had difficulties.

The Islamist militias those governments financed were often at each other's throats, and often lost support to more extreme Islamist militias. Assad was saved by Russian air power and massive Iranian military intervention. He also gained from the elimination of the initial democratic ethos in the Syrian opposition and its replacement by the armed religious and ethnic sectarianism promoted by the Turkish and Saudi allies of the US.

Now alliances in the region are changing fast.

Assad's chief protector Russia is sending warplanes to support pro-Turkish forces in Idlib province, the very same forces that have been fighting Assad since 2012. Turkey and Assad's Syria are edging towards a greater common purpose, which will be defined against their common foe, the Kurds and other communities in liberated Northern Syria.

Despite Trump's announced policy of greater disengagement, the US military high command seems stronger now than it was in Obama's day, and the US alliance with the Kurds is as strong now as it ever was.

There has been horrendous destruction across much of Syria. The reconstruction bill is estimated at over \$3 trillion.

Assad's artillery and aerial bombardments have created huge damage, and so has Daesh's preparedness in northern Syria to have every civilian, every building destroyed, as well as themselves, rather than surrender. As early as January 2017, 17% of housing in the town of Raqqa had been destroyed. But that was only after 2,000 bombing raids on the town. There have now been nearly 5,000.

Commentators such as Joshua Landis and Hassan Hassan) argue that the US will continue to support Rojava and the Kurds there, if only as its only way of making sure that Russia and Iran do not become stronger in Syria.

US

Aid from any imperialist power always carries the risk of leverage. Washington sees the Rojava Kurds' policies of gender equality and secularism as useful, but worries about the PKK's militant "Communist" (in fact, Stalinist) history.

In Rojava the US wants a "business-friendly" and US-friendly government with no radical vagaries.

If the US continues to support the Kurds and their allies in Rojava and Raqqa, it will attempt to moderate YPG policies.

The key problem at the moment is that the democratic structures of Rojava have yet to function properly. And there is little mass production in the region, never mind an organised, powerful working class.

There is a powerful army with some secular, pro-gender-equality, social-egalitarian ethos — about 50,000 in the YPG/YPJ units, and up to 50,000 from other ethnic groupings in the wider SDF. The SDF was formed on the model of the YPG but incorporated fighting units with different histories. How much the multi-ethnic, secular, gender-equal principles of the YPG have been taken up by the SDF is difficult to judge.

The military forces of the YPG/YPJ and the SDF are clearly where the real power lies in Rojava. A radical army cannot substitute for a radical working-class movement. And there is always a danger that the military discipline needed on the battlefield carries over into unquestioning obedience in social and political life.

Everywhere you go in Rojava, on demonstrations, at meetings, in the command rooms of the YPG, you will find pictures of Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK leader who has been in Turkish jails since 1999. It is not surprising that the YPG honours a jailed leader, but this looks very much like a living residue of the PKK's Maoist and Stalinist past.

If political disputes arise, those who can claim to speak in the name of the leader will have great advantages. Think of how the personality cults around Lenin (after his death), Stalin, Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Tito, etc. were used to silence dissent.

Despite that, the growth of Rojavan radicalism nails the lie that politics there needs to be based on a religious or a narrow nationalist identity. It makes clear that the sexist, sectarian and dictatorial methods currently prevalent elsewhere in the Middle East are no more inevitable there than anywhere else.

YPG in liberated areas

A returned YPG fighter recently spoke to *Solidarity* about how the YPG and the SDF have dealt with communities previously under ISIS (Daesh) rule.

He denies the reports of the YPG pursuing an austere policy of distrust towards the liberated populations.

"Family names are very important", he said, "so when the head of a family is against ISIS they will most likely be killed and their family forced to join ISIS. Most of those forced to fight will be left to defend losing villages and towns".

Many young men were forced into ISIS and fed lies about the YPG being "infidels and Western pawns", but ended up joining the SDF with genuine desires for democracy and freedom. "For

every one we convert [from awe of jihad to secularism] at least 20 more surrender".

Villagers are prompted to organise themselves democratically and elect from their ranks those required to police checkpoints. The YPG and SDF militias are given clear instructions to keep out of the villages to ensure there are no fears or claims of intimidation.

Through empowering local democracy in the liberated populations, through gaining their trust of them, says the YPG volunteer, the SDF appear to have been able to create a system where the democratic people have been empowered and the brutal jihadists best identified.

Not all wisdom in the workplace

LETTERS

Colin Waugh's review of *The Russian Revolution: When Workers Took Power* is right that Marxists must learn from the experience of workers' struggles: revolutionary socialism certainly is dialogic. The Bolsheviks followed those principles and this helps explain their success in 1917.

However I disagree with Colin's critique of Kautsky and Lenin about the relationship between socialism and the working class. Colin claims Kautsky asserted that "Marx and Engels created their conception of socialism in isolation from workers" and that Kautsky assumed "the essentials of modern socialism were defined once and for all at one point". I don't think Colin accurately represents Kautsky's view, nor does he do justice to Lenin's position.

Kautsky argued that "socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian class struggle from without and not something that arose within it spontaneously". Lenin quoted this passage in *What is to be Done* (1902) and also argued that socialist consciousness among the workers "would have to be brought to them from without". In the book I've tried to explain what "from without" meant in its historical context.

First, Lenin argued that systematic socialist ideas originated with bourgeois writers, (such as Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen etc). Similarly, Marx and Engels, who theorised socialism as working class self-emancipation, were bourgeois intellectuals in their social origins. This is a straightforward empirical claim about the origin of socialist ideas emerging outside the embryonic labour

movements in early nineteenth century Europe.

Second, Lenin was fighting a battle in his time with "economistic" thinkers who seemed to elevate the economic front of the class struggle above other tasks such as party-building. Struggles at the point of production – as important as they are – do not provide the entire wisdom of socialist thought. Conflicts between wage labour and capital in the workplace do not resolve questions of the state, or of national, sexual, racism and other forms of oppression. A fully rounded socialist world view requires an assessment of every aspect of social reality. The expression "from without" also means that some socialist ideas developed outside and beyond the fundamental wage labour/capital antagonism.

SPONTANEOUSLY

Third, Lenin recognised that workers will organise unions and demand reforms to counter the exploitation, but will not automatically, spontaneously generalise this resistance into an overall coherent socialist world view.

Lenin posited the possibility of organised labour movements where pro-capitalist, reformist ideas dominate, not simply at leadership level but also widely among the rank and file. Such movements were evident at the time in the Catholic trade unions in Europe and within the AFL in the US. There are innumerable examples from the present. Labour movements can evolve separately from socialist ideas, unless Marxists intervene consistently. To put it more tersely: there is nothing inevitable about labour movements coming to socialist conclusions about taking power. By "from without" Lenin

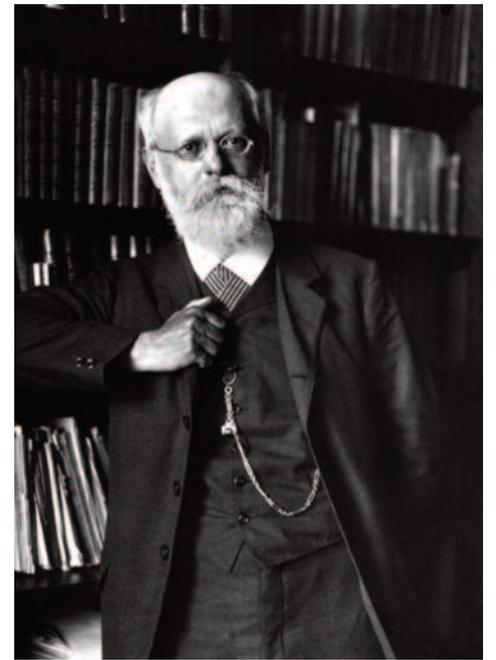
means that socialist ideas can come from outside of the regular, often bureaucratised channels of the labour movement.

Lenin also took from Kautsky (and from Engels) the expressions about the "merger" or "fusion" of Marxist ideas with the organised labour movement. Lenin understood that without organised, active Marxist intervention, even militant workers' movements will not organically lead to the overthrow of capitalism. The history of the last 100 years proves this proposition beyond doubt. Rather Marxists have to fight other tendencies (bourgeois, reformist, anarchist etc) to win the labour movement for socialism.

Lenin's honest realism about the difficulties of developing socialist class consciousness was refreshing at the time and still prescient. He rightly believed the ideological front of the class struggle was decisive for workers to win on the economic and political fronts. Marxists had to (and still have to) combat the influence of bourgeois ideas in wider society and within the labour movement.

Lenin was not saying socialist ideas should for now (or forever) develop apart from the existing labour movement or only be articulated by intellectuals. He assumed Marxists would be rooted in actual workers' struggles, would learn from the workers and that the party was endeavouring to create a cadre of worker-intellectuals. He had spent a decade trying to do those things before he wrote *What is to be Done?* But he recognised that building a party around a coherent Marxist programme required tenacious ideological combat.

Working out a consistent, class-based world view (while actively intervening in today's struggles) is an irreplaceable task for



Karl Kautsky

Marxists. The vehicle for this is a working class party that takes up all matters of politics. The essential tools are publications articulating these socialist ideas for propaganda and agitation.

Lenin's conceptions, derived from Kautsky were vital for making the RSDLP a party capable of leading the majority of Russian workers to power in 1917. And Lenin's warnings still resonate for today's working class struggles.

Paul Vernadsky, London

The dangers of Corbyn fandom

I agree wholeheartedly with Simon Nelson's comments about "adulation and hero worship" that is developing around Jeremy Corbyn, and his calls for it to stop (*Solidarity* 449).

It's not yet a personality cult, but the signs are there. One of the most important and damaging aspects of personality cults is the way they work against constructive, critical thinking.

It's not just the T-shirts, the mugs, the inane chanting of names; most of this is just silly and people ought to grow up. What is more insidious, when a personality cult has developed, is the way that once the great person has spoken — that's it. No further discussion is needed.

Black is white or white is black, it doesn't matter and woe betide anyone who dares to stand up and disagree. You are, automatically, a traitor, an apostate, beyond the pale, fit only to be transported (preferably in irons) to some ideological Van Diemen's Land.

In the early 1980s a personality cult of sorts developed around Arthur Scargill, President of the National Union of Mineworkers. As far as I could gather Scargill loved this and did nothing to dispel it. In 1981, Scargill spoke at a rally in Worksop (one of a number held around the coalfields at this time).

The branch committee at the pit where I worked filled a coach to attend the rally. Scargill, then at the height of his popularity spoke brilliantly and roused his audience in



no uncertain terms. Credit where it is due — it was a good night. On the return journey I remember one miner standing up and stretching out his right arm intoning that he had "shaken hands with God" (i.e. Scargill). Again, this in itself is fairly innocuous. No harm was done. Why be a killjoy when the rally had achieved its aim and everyone was fired up for the strike we all knew was coming at some point in the near future?

It was only later that the detrimental effect of this creeping personality cult would become apparent. In the months prior to the strike Scargill would make frequent references to the "Triple Alliance" (borrowing the terminology of the 1920s) — a coming together of the miners, railway workers and steelworkers (the original Alliance consisted of dockworkers, railway workers and miners).

Clearly, it was central to the success of any national miners' strike that railway workers and steelworkers were "onboard" and co-operating to halt the distribution and industrial consumption of coal and coke. There was, however, a massive problem. The Triple Alliance did not exist. It was a figment of Arthur Scargill's imagination. Yet, paradoxically it did exist, Scargill had said so, therefore all was well.

The personality cult had blotted out a fundamental truth: solidarity isn't a tap you just turn on when you need it. It has to be nurtured and developed; in short you have to work for it.

In 1983 myself and Rob Dawber (a prominent railway worker in South Yorkshire who sadly died of mesothelioma in 2000) tried to organise a meeting to discuss the idea of a Triple Alliance but no-one turned up. My guess is that the meeting was "nobbled" by Barnsley (but I have no concrete evidence of this) and the ultimate existence and effectiveness of the Triple Alliance was tested in the white heat of the 1984-85 strike.

Sections of railway workers performed miracles to try and stop the movement of coal, but the response of steelworkers can only be described as patchy, while the activity of the leader of the main steel union, Bill Sirs, was treacherous in the extreme. The Triple Alliance never materialised and is now, like Shelley's Ozymandias, lost in the sands of time and forgotten — I can't even find any reference to it in the literature devoted to the strike which sits on my bookshelves.

Herein lies the lesson for us all. At a certain point a personality cult ceases to be just amusing: T-shirts, mugs, key rings and chanting names and so on. There's a serious and potentially damaging side to all this apparently harmless frivolity.

Look at history: Trotsky hated the idea of "Trotskyism"; Lenin was appalled that anyone would contemplate plastering his images all over the place. As for Stalin, and Pol Pot, Ceaucescu, Peron, Franco, Enver Hoxha, Mao Zedong, Mussolini, where did their personality cults lead? To the stifling of opposition, oppression, persecution, censorship and the imprisonment of dissidents.

I'm *not at all* saying that Jeremy Corbyn would go along with any of this. He certainly wouldn't, but we, as a movement, need to be on our guard.

Let's have an end to this adulation and fandom before it starts to do some real damage.

John Cunningham



How to get the Tories out

After May's woeful Party conference speech, the Tories are more divided than ever. But their conference has also left them in an impasse.

They can't easily sack Theresa May because she was the unity candidate for Leader and the Tories who supported her don't yet have a plan B. There is no sign of an acceptable alternative to May. The underlying struggle for dominance between soft and hard Tory Brexiteers has not resolved itself. At some point, most likely now in the medium term, those divisions will come to head, and May will be ousted.

As the Tory internecine struggle becomes more infected by jealousy at Labour popularity, especially among young people, it is impossible not to feel a great deal of schadenfreude at their chaos. But it would be a mistake to act as if either Tory implosion or a Labour victory were inevitable.

For all their new Labour-lite policies and talk of being the party of working people, the Tories have indefatigable ruling class instincts. They can and will band together against Labour, show their contempt for, and act to undermine Corbyn.

It is good that the Labour leadership has gone on the offensive since June's general election. But Labour now has two additional reasons to mount an unrelenting fight against the Tories.

As we said in *Solidarity* 449, Labour still requires wider electoral support. Only a further shift in voting patterns, or a fuller activation of its support among younger voters, can ensure an overall majority. To be left without that majority would open the door to a

Labour-SNP-Lib Dem coalition. And such a coalition would kill off all of the radical political promises made by Labour since the general election.

Secondly, the victims of Tory policies cannot, as all Labour leaders in the past have advocated, "wait for a Labour victory". Inflation is rising, economic growth is slowing down, real wages continue to fall.

Labour conference passed policy on workers' rights which gives the Party and the labour movement a clear mandate to organise and deepen a left-wing, class-struggle fight against poverty and inequality.

In the first place the Labour leadership should actively mobilise support for current workers' strikes, such as the McDonald's workers and Picturehouse workers, who are making a stand against poverty wages and insecure contracts. Messages of solidarity, the encouragement of MPs to visit picket line are welcome, but a much stronger mobilisation could secure a victory for these workers. Their cause is both popular and gives hope and strength to other low-paid and precarious workers.

A Labour campaign of street stalls and meetings, arguing for a £10 per hour minimum wage and scrapping of zero-hours contracts, a campaign which fought against bad employers in every town and city, would build the kind of support Labour needs to win at the next election.

Local Labour Parties are starting the preparatory work for the next election canvassing support. Labour can only build confidence among working-class voters by raising a socialist banner against capitalism and its Tory servants.

We have a new website!

Workers' Liberty has a new website!

Our 30,000+ articles not only have a clean, nicer-looking layout but are also better organised for you to access. So how can you find what you want on the website?

The new website has a cleaned-up and more focused front page. You can find the latest articles that we want to feature in the carousel on the left (and you can also swipe through these quickly). For the latest news, try looking at the latest issue of *Solidarity* on the right hand side. Below this you can find our bookshop, as well as links to a selection of more in-depth coverage picked by us to cover the biggest issues of the day.

Our website is an important resource of articles from the history of the socialist movement, particularly the Trotskyist tradition, and towards the bottom of the homepage you can find our suggested reading from our archive as well as links to more articles.

At the top of the homepage are tabs that direct you to information about our local groups, our group in Australia, resources (including how to join, and study courses), *Tubeworker* bulletin, events, and about how to donate to help us continue to improve the website.

There are other ways that you can find articles on the topic you want. The search function on the top right of every page searches internally to the website by keyword. The site map, which can be found at the very bottom of the homepage, uses our "taxonomy terms" to give you lists of articles related to each topic. Each article also has taxonomy tags listed on the right hand side of the page which you can click to find out more. We are



aiming to keep improving and refining these taxonomies into the future.

We have added an important new feature to articles — a suggested reading list. On the right hand side of every article there is now a list of suggested other things to read based on the taxonomy tags. We hope this will allow you to find other relevant articles to find out more.

We publish, and have published, a wide variety of books, magazines and pamphlets. We have collected these all together in our bookshop now so you can find them all in one place.

We welcome debate on our website, and on social media. Anyone can sign up for an account on the website and comment. All of our articles have a tool for sharing on a variety of social media platforms at the end of the article.

We plan to continue improving the website and welcome your comments. Building the new website cost a lot of money, and more improvements as well as increased staffing in order to maximise the use of the website will cost more money.

Please donate to our ongoing fundraising effort.

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For the right to decide! Against new borders!

By Martin Thomas

As *Solidarity* goes to press on 10 October, Carles Puigdemont, the president of Catalonia, has announced his response to the referendum on independence in Catalonia his government called on 1 October.

The Spanish government declared the referendum illegal, and deployed heavy Spanish police force to try to stop it, but it largely went ahead. 92% voted yes, on a 43% turnout. A series of opinion polls carried out by the Catalan government since 2011 has in recent years shown a slight majority against independence, most recently 49%-41% in July this year.

Puigdemont asked the Catalan parliament, where he leads a coalition government, for a mandate to declare Catalonia an independent state.

He proposed “suspending the effect” of the independence declaration “for a few weeks” and seeking talks with the Spanish government and exploring international mediation.

The Spanish government had warned that it would suspend Catalonia’s autonomy and impose direct rule from Madrid if Puigdemont went for independence. It may still do so, though the immediate call by EU chief Donald Tusk for Madrid to negotiate makes that less likely.

Judging from the failure of the Spanish police to stop the 1 October referendum, such an attempt by Madrid could not go smoothly, and might lead to a low-level civil war between Spanish and Catalan police.

The European Union and neighbouring France have said that a Catalonia which declared itself independent could not expect to

be admitted to the European Union, implying that it would face a degree of economic blockade, with serious trade barriers surrounding it.

It is conceivable that the stand-off could be resolved by the reintroduction of a 2006 law ceding more autonomy to Catalonia, which was approved at the time both by a referendum in Catalonia and by a vote in the Spanish parliament, led at that time by the social-democratic PSOE. The current People’s Party (conservative) government in Madrid got that law annulled by Spain’s constitutional court in 2010, starting a process towards the current crisis.

Democratic principle mandates concessions by Madrid to Catalonia. The people of Catalonia have the right to a proper referendum on separation, and to be allowed to separate without sabotage or disruption if they vote for separation.

It is, however, good that Puigdemont called for negotiations rather than immediate separation. To denounce restraint as a sell-out would be wrong for three reasons.

Firstly, there is no solid evidence of a majority for separation. That 40% of the electorate voted yes on 1 October is not solid evidence.

Secondly, many socialists in Catalonia oppose separation, and for good reasons. Catalonia was an oppressed nation under Franco. Today, better-off than the rest of Spain, it is not. Or not to any large degree. Maybe not under the current PP government



Carles Puigdemont

in Madrid, but in moderate time, there is good reason to suppose it can win whatever additional degrees of autonomy it wants to satisfy remaining national grievances. The social resentments generated by the Madrid government’s aggressive social cuts since the 2008 crash and the eurozone crisis cannot be remedied by separation.

Thirdly, disruption, violence, and economic damage caused by separation will tend to harm the solidarity of the working class across the Spanish state and across Europe.

The idea, promoted by some left-wingers, that anything which messes up the established order must be good for socialism, is false.

In one of his articles during World War One, Lenin wrote:

“Let us assume that between two great monarchies there is a little monarchy whose

kinglet is ‘bound’ by blood and other ties to the monarchs of both neighbouring countries. Let us further assume that the declaration of a republic in the little country and the expulsion of its monarch would in practice lead to a war between the two neighbouring big countries for the restoration of that or another monarch in the little country.

“There is no doubt that all international Social-Democracy, as well as the really internationalist section of Social-Democracy in the little country, would be against substituting a republic for the monarchy in this case. The substitution of a republic for a monarchy is not an absolute, but one of the democratic demands, subordinate to the interests of democracy (and still more, of course, to those of the socialist proletariat) as a whole...” (bit.ly/dsdsu16)

The analogy is not exact. But Lenin’s argument suggests that even if socialists were in principle for Catalan independence (as of course we are for replacing monarchies by republics), they should not push for it to go through in a way that is sure to cause damage greater than any near-term gain from the independence.

The supreme value here is the unity and solidarity of the working class, across the Spanish state and across Europe. That is best served by support from workers elsewhere in Spain and Europe for Catalonia’s right to decide, and opposition by workers within Catalonia to destructive separation.

The 3 October strike

The left and the trade unions CGT, COS Intersindical-CSC, and IAC called a general strike for 3 October to protest the repression and call for a guarantee of independence. Sectors like the port workers boycotted any movement of police forces and their vessels.

Firefighters stood between the voters and the forces of repression at various polling stations. In the face of the strength of the call for action, the trade union bureaucracies of the UGT and the CC OO came to an agreement with the Catalan government and employers’ organisations to call a “country-wide stoppage”, intending to reduce the radical content of the general strike call.

The day of 3 October demonstrated once again the power of the workers and the popular masses. Dozens of roads and avenues were blocked, over 700,000 people took part in the demonstrations in Barcelona, 60,000 in Girona, 45,000 in Lleida and 30,000 in Tarragona.

The national police and Guardia Civil sent from Madrid were mobbed and driven from the various hostels where they were billeted.

• From the socialist group UIT-CI, bit.ly/uit-ci

Misrepresenting Catalan nationalism

LETTER

By Jamie Sims

Tony Holmes (*Solidarity* 449) is correct to condemn the Spanish state’s violent response to the recent Catalan independence referendum, which involved calculated police brutality against people simply attempting to vote. However, he adopts a “plague on both their houses” approach to Catalan and Spanish states and nationalisms which obscures the reality on the ground.

It is right that socialists should be highly suspicious of nationalism and work towards a world without borders and nations; it is also right that socialists should be alert to the possibility that nationalism will promote class collaboration and substitute national for class questions.

However, socialists have historically recognised that not all nationalist movements have the same political character and that unionist and imperial nationalisms may be just as, if not more, toxic than separatist ones. Of course socialists should argue for “working-class unity that crosses borders and national divides” but that does not simply mean favouring the consolidation and territorial unity of bourgeois states as an end in itself.

The mass, pro-independence mobilisations and strikes — supported by mainstream and more radical trade unions — represent one of the most powerful challenges to the post-dictatorship settlement in decades, a settlement which was based on “forgetting” the crimes of Francoism and failing to deal with the legacies of centralisation, Spanish nationalism, authoritarianism, and oppression of minority nationalities left behind by the Franco regime.

Holmes questions the democratic legitimacy of the referendum as a basis for declaring independence. The recent independence referendum, whatever its flaws (which are primarily the fault of the Spanish state’s campaign of repression and obstruction), represented a massive act of collective civil disobedience by millions of Catalans.

Pro-independence Catalans have patiently worked through democratic and constitutional channels, they have mobilised en masse for huge street demonstrations, the 2014 consultation, and the election of pro-independence parties. When the constitution, courts, King, and main political parties are all committed to the indivisible unity of the Spanish state — rejecting even moderate forms of devolution and backing massive repression — it is understandable that Catalan separatists feel they must act decisively.

As some pro-independence campaigners have argued, given the authoritarian and

unitary nature of the Spanish state it may be necessary to first of all be pro-independence, to challenge to the legitimacy of the Spanish state and its exclusionary construction of national identity, in order to make a federal, multinational, Republican Spain a possibility.

Further, Holmes gives an entirely one-sided account of the pro-independence movement — effectively reducing the movement to its right-wing and its most reactionary arguments. Significant sections of the Catalan left support independence, including the CUP — an anti-capitalist party which has maintained its autonomy from the pro-independence coalition government.

The last 15 laws passed by the Catalan parliament have been overturned by Spanish courts; these include banning the police from using rubber bullets, preventing evictions, increasing the minimum wage, and other progressive measures. The independence movement has gained traction due to the economic crisis and austerity due to repression by the Spanish state; to reduce the argument for Catalan independence to “Spain robs us” is inaccurate.

The movement is broadly anti-austerity, Republican and — at its best — anti-capitalist and internationalist. To equate this nationalism with that of pro-unity Spanish nationalists wrapping themselves in the Spanish flag and singing Francoist hymns is myopic.



3 October general strike

Good is more than “bad for Rajoy”

By Tony Holmes

Socialists and consistent democrats are for the right of nations to self-determination. We oppose state violence and repression against those attempting to use their democratic freedoms.

So the British left has, rightly, condemned the violence of the Spanish government last week in Catalonia. It has called for the Guardia Civil to be withdrawn, for democratic rights to be respected and for Catalonia's institutions of self-government to be not tampered with by Spain.

But favouring a nation's right to self-determination, and positively arguing that in that self-determination it should go for independence, are two different things. Many socialist groups in the UK, including the Socialist Workers' Party, the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal, have gone from one position to the other, calling for an independent Catalan state.

In general, socialists have historically have favoured bigger, more integrated states, with fewer borders which divide workers and impede economic life.

In some circumstances, working-class unity is better served by a country's independence than by unity. If a national group is being held within the borders of a state against its will, and its economic and cultural development stunted by alien rule, then the oppression of that national group by the dominant nation within the state will be a constant source of poison and resentment.

Under the Franco regime, Catalonia's regional autonomy and cultural and linguistic freedoms were harshly repressed. After the fall of Franco, those freedoms began to return and flourish. Today, Catalonia enjoys very devolved local government and the Catalan language has seen an enormous revival. In many areas it has supplanted Spanish as the

everyday mode of public discourse. The Catalan people can express their national identity without secession.

It is still the right of the Catalan people to declare for independence if they so wish. But polls have consistently found that a majority in Catalonia opposes independence. Although “Yes” won a huge majority in the referendum of 1st October, only 2.2 million votes were cast out of an eligible voting public of 5.3 million. As was the case in the referendum of 2014, those in favour of staying in Spain abstained from the vote in their millions.

On 22 September, *Socialist Worker* carried an article that noted “only 28 percent of Catalans support the Spanish state constitution”. True enough. But how many support independence? And what does the meagre level of support for independence imply for a separate Catalan state?

LOGIC

The International Marxist Tendency (Socialist Appeal) has published 29 theses on the Catalan question. There apparently was no room for a 30th to acknowledge the lack of a pro-independence majority.

Even if one were to favour secession, what end is served by ignoring this fact? If the IMT thinks independence is the right course of action, surely it has a duty to get to grips with the problem?

A common logic underlies most of the pro-separation statements from the British left. They start by noting the undemocratic nature of the Spanish constitution and the right-wing, corrupt character of its capitalist regime. They then note that Catalan separatism, traditionally a minority pursuit, has been much buoyed by disgust and dissatisfaction with the Spanish regime.

They conclude that an independent Catalonia must be supported as a way of “breaking” with that regime and “sparking”

left-wing revolt in the rest of the Iberian peninsula.

No thought is given to the democratic implications of setting up a breakaway nation state in which half or almost half of the population wanted to remain linked to Spain. Many especially of the working class have family origins from elsewhere in Spain and have a reasonable fear of Catalan-chauvinist revanchism.

No thought is given to the national divisions the independence movement has driven not just between Catalan workers and those in the rest of Spain, but also between Catalan workers themselves, many of whom are alienated by a politics of ethno-linguistic identity which leaves them in the cold.

No thought is given to what effect independence will have on the rest of the Spanish labour movement by lopping off one of its most militant industrial centres. No thought is given to what kind of a state will be created by a thoroughly neoliberal Catalan nationalist bourgeoisie, competing for contracts and market access with the bigger capitalist neighbours surrounding it, and deprived of the counterweights against world-market pressures which larger units like the EU have.

No thought is given to what effect will be had on a generation of Catalan workers taught that austerity, corruption and exploitation are the fault, not of the ruling class present in all regions and all countries including their own, but of “Madrid”.

We are told only that independence will “weaken” the Spanish state.

Perhaps it will. But what weakens the bosses does not automatically strengthen the workers. Emotionally tempting as it might be, simply supporting the opposite of whatever the unpleasant regime of Mariano Rajoy wants is no programme for socialist advance.

As Leon Trotsky, a long-term advocate of a federal Spanish republic rather than an inde-

pendent Catalonia, once said: “The policy of the proletariat is not at all automatically derived from the policy of the bourgeoisie, bearing only the opposite sign – this would make every sectarian a master strategist; no, the revolutionary party must each time orient itself independently in the internal as well as the external situation, arriving at those decisions which correspond best to the interests of the proletariat.”

Against the nationalisms of both Spanish and Catalan stripes, the left must make its own voice heard. Against state repression! For the Catalans' freedom to decide their own fate! Against nationalist separatism, and for working-class unity in a struggle for workers' rights, democracy and socialism across Spain and beyond!

Socialists in Spain speak out

On 1 October, thousands of people expressed their support for the referendum by intending to vote, or voting.

The significance of the mobilisation of thousands of people who demand to vote for independence cannot be silenced by the police violence organised by the Rajoy government.

The level of political repression seen in Catalonia gives us a sample of what this government is capable of doing to the rights of the people, and what it in fact does, every time that the working class try to defend themselves against the attacks of the bosses and their politicians.

The PP, along with Ciudadanos and the PSOE, speak of democracy, of the law and equality for all: they lie.

As for this Catalan conflict, it is nothing more than the democratic right that millions of people in Catalonia want, to have a say in a referendum about their future — and the state is opposing them with unjust legalisms, to try to get things back to how they liked them. But they'll change the constitution when the banks call in their debts!

We mustn't forget the role of the numerous Catalan nationalists who are filling their mouths with pro-independence proclamations: Los Mas, Puigdemont, Junqueras, Forcadell, Pujol, etc. whose Catalan governments have seen the working people crushed, and who are now stoking a nationalist conflict to hide capitalist exploitation.

The workers of Spain, of all Spain cannot fall into divisions between Catalans, Andalusians, Castilians, Galicians, etc. because that would only mean fighting ourselves.

We must struggle for our rights and interests, as workers, as a class, against the bosses. Changing nationality — independence — would not change exploitation, precarious work, social inequality.

Our enemy is capitalism, the Spanish and Catalan bourgeoisie, and only the working class is able to settle the social conflict, through workers' unity, fighting together, against capital and its corrupt governments.

• From the revolutionary socialist group Voz Obrera, bit.ly/voz-ob

Cuba: the role of the working class

Pablo Velasco reviews *A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the Working Class Shaped the Guerrilla's Victory* by Steve Cushion

What role did the Cuban working class play in the 1959 revolution? This is the key question discussed in Steve Cushion's provocative book. Whilst the book demonstrates the active role workers played in Cuban history during the 1950s, the author is far too uncritical of Castroism and inflates the role of the Communist Party Stalinists.

Cuba in the 1950s was ruled by the dictator Fulgencio Batista. His regime was propped up through the trade union bureaucracy, led by Eusebio Mujal, who ruled the Cuban Workers' Confederation (CTC) with thuggery and corruption. The Cuban working class was highly unionised, with over one million members in a country of six million people. Powerful union organisations, such as the sugar workers' federation (FNITA) took militant action for both economic and political demands. Within the unions there were rank-and-file networks, including communists, ex-Trotskyists and others who opposed Batista and Mujal.

Workers supported bourgeois political forces, including the Autentico and Orthodox parties, and Fidel Castro's July 26 Movement (MR-26-7), formed in 1955. The MR-26-7 organised a workers' section from the beginning, led by sugar worker Luis Bonito. It took in Guantánamo rail workers around Nico Torres and others, eventually becoming the national workers' front (FON) in 1957. It would organise general strikes in August 1957, April 1958 and January 1959 as part of the campaign to overthrow Batista.

Cushion has trawled through the archives in Havana, Manzanillo, Guantánamo and Santiago de Cuba to examine the leaflets, pamphlets, newspapers and other clandestine materials produced by Cuban workers in the 1950s. He has unearthed some fascinating accounts of struggles by public transport, bank, port, tobacco and sugar workers that have often been ignored in previous histories. In particular, his account of other regions beyond Havana has brought into sharper relief some local successes even where workers were defeated elsewhere. Cushion also draws out the key role played by particular individual militant leaders, whose allegiances, whether communist or Castroite, shaped the outcome of key struggles.

However Cushion makes some grandiose and politically dubious claims that don't stand up based on the evidence presented. It is hardly news that the Cuban workers fought against Batista or that workers' struggles helped to undermine the regime. It was after all a revolution in country with a sizable organised working class. Nor is it particularly unusual for bourgeois forces to organise workers' sections. The Autentico party did so in Cuba (organised by Mujal), as did the Peronists in Argentina and the ruling PRT in Mexico.

Perhaps the biggest political error in the book is its interpretation of the Cuban Communist Party, known as the PSP. Cushion says this party was "probably the only consistently honest force in Cuban politics during the 1940s". Yet this was a Stalinist party almost from the start. It was a party subordinate to Russian foreign policy under Stalin through the twists and turns of third period



Cuban workers were highly unionised: a general strike in 1933

sectarianism to the popular front. The PSP supported Batista in the 1940s and ran the trade union movement until purged at the beginning of cold war. Although it led some militant trade union battles and organised its own networks (CDDO, CNDDO) against Mujal, it was a Stalinist formation opposed to independent working class politics in Cuba during this period.

Cushion admits that the PSP did not offer a socialist alternative in the 1950s and tailed nationalist currents such as the MR-26-7. Yet throughout the book he represents the PSP as some sort of genuine working class force, as a legitimate tendency within the labour movement simply competing with the mujalistas and the MR-26-7 for workers' support. Cushion portrays the differences between the MR-26-7 and the PSP as essentially tactical, with both forced to converge to overthrow Batista. This under-represents the particular politics of both the Castro movement and the PSP's Stalinism.

NETWORKS

Cushion emphasises the role of MR-26-7 and PSP networks in organising the general strikes in August 1957 and April 1958.

The successful 1957 action, triggered by the murder of prominent MR-26-7 leader Frank Pais, has sometimes been regarded "spontaneous". However it was clearly well orchestrated by MR-26-7 activists. The 1958 strike is often regarded as a failure, in part because the MR-26-7 organised it without consulting the PSP. Cushion argues that the MR-26-7 "military" conception of strike organisation contributed to its failure in Havana, but that the action was more successful outside the capital in Santiago and Guantánamo. These correctives are valuable, but do not challenge the overall picture of workers being used by the MR-26-7 as a stage army to batter down the walls of the Batista regime, while remaining subordinate to the guerrilla-led armed forces.

Perhaps Cushion's most overblown claim concerns the January 1959 general strike, which he believes forced the dictator from office. He claims the strike was "the result of a high level of working class organisation and was crucial to the triumph of the revolution". Cushion accepts that during 1958 the main role of the MR-26-7 workers' section was to provide logistical support for the guerrilla armies. However he seizes on the creation of the united national workers' front (FONU), which brought together the MR-26-7 and PSP workers' sections, as well as the workers' congresses within the liberated territory at the end of 1958, as somehow proof

of the working class exercising a decisive role.

Cushion's own account shows that the demands made at these gatherings were for a cross class alliance, with explicit appeals to business people to back the rebels. What he calls a "united front" was much more a popular alliance, with both sides retaining their autonomy (including newspapers and network organisation), while agreeing on a final push to overthrow Batista. Batista fled on New Year's Eve and Fidel Castro called the general strike whilst taking Santiago on New Year's Day 1959. Cushion accepts at face value Castro's later claim that the strike had prevented Batista's generals from organising a coup. This is highly debatable, since the armed forces had disintegrated.

The wider point is more significant. The January 1959 general strike was never of the magnitude or nature of a workers' revolution, nor of independent working class action against the old regime. There were no soviets, or factory committees, red guards or other expressions of workers' own power separate from the rebels. Even if the workers' action helped to finish off the old regime, they were in no position to fight for their own rule at this point. That is the tragedy of the Cuban revolution.

Finally, Cushion's account does not shed additional light on the labour movement struggles in the first year of the Castro government. He reproduces the hackneyed Stalinist version of events, whereby the PSP was marginalised by the MR-26-7 trade unionists in the initial takeover of the CTC, only to be brought back inside by the Castro's intervention in November 1959. Cushion dismisses the MR-26-7 union leaders elected in early 1959 as trade union bureaucrats, ignoring the fact that the Castro group employed the PSP's trade union apparatus to tame the unions and bring them under rigid state control.

Cushion claims workers' action was crucial to the rebel victory in 1959. Undoubtedly workers played a role in the revolution and militant action helped to undermine the old regime. But this was at the behest of Castroite and communist political forces, neither of which stood for socialism or independent working class politics. Cushion's book is mainly a booster for the Stalinists' role in the Cuban revolution. The workers were subordinated to other, ultimately hostile political formations.

Working class socialism was missing from the Cuban revolution — that is decisive for our assessment of class battles in the 1950s.

Ernest Man

Martin Thomas reviews *Ernest Mandel, A rebel's dream deferred* by Jan Willem Stutje

Ernest Mandel (1923-95) was the world's best-known Trotskyist for some decades; the interpreter and synthesiser for the "Orthodox Trotskyist" mainstream; and also a prolific writer many of whose books reached readerships far beyond circles sympathising with Trotskyism.

Jan Willem Stutje, a Dutch academic professing "a close affinity" to Mandel's ideas, has written a biography which is of great interest for the reasons that biographies are generally interesting, that they help us see how the subject's ideas intertwined with their life and times.

A biography might also provide instructive critical analysis of Mandel's ideas. Stutje's doesn't. He is critical. Arguably he is pedantic and sour in some of his discussion of Mandel's economic writings.

But, as we'll see, he offers no criticism at all of the overarching political concept to the elaboration of which Mandel devoted his energies and ingenuity from 1951 to his death: that the proletarian revolutionary upsurge which the Trotskyists had looked to after World War Two had in fact, contrary to appearances, developed, only in a "deformed" and first-stage way, through the expansion of Stalinism.

What takes the place of political scrutiny is an ungenerous and unconvincing critique of Mandel's personality, which Stutje describes as adolescent, "blind to the soul", unable to deal with emotional conflict, and apt to lead him into harmful compromise.

As a child, writes Stutje, Mandel was "high-spirited yet also serious and caring... In energy and tenacity he resembled his father. He had a powerful imagination, learned fast..."

It is to Mandel's credit that he retained those youthful traits through life. And he developed determination and persistence. He remained active for what he saw as revolutionary socialism throughout his life, through huge hardships and disappointments, when Stutje's account makes it clear that at every point Mandel had easy and prosperous alternatives.

He also developed a range of "personal" talents valuable in political activity, not only skills at writing and speaking (in many languages), but also the ability to work and discuss patiently and in a friendly way with people of differing views while still maintaining his own ideas.

Mandel's faults were the faults of his politics, not a matter of an inability to acquire what the tired and jaded call "maturity".

He had good personal friends, as many older adults do not: Ernst Federn, Ernst Bloch, later François Vercammen, Charles-André Udry, and Janette Habel.

The mental illness of his first wife (from 1965), Gisela Scholtz, which led to such physical debilitation that she died in 1982, was established before he met her, and Stutje's book gives no evidence that Mandel was other than caring or helpful to her. His relations with his second wife, Anne Sprimont (from 1982), were on Stutje's account warm and loving.

Mandel looked after his mother Rosa after his father died in 1952, and into extreme old age. He dealt tactfully but firmly with her hostility to his wives. "He was never moody", writes Stutje. "As long as his work would not suffer, he agreed to anything". No,

Mandel and the impasse of orthodoxy

the problem with his politics was... the politics.

Mandel became interested in Trotskyist politics in 1936, when he was 13 — his father, though a prosperous diamond merchant, was an ex-member of Rosa Luxemburg's Spartacus League, had a large Marxist library, and was a Trotskyist sympathiser. Mandel formally joined the movement in 1939, when he was 16. Months later, the Nazis occupied his native Belgium.

Mandel was active in the underground resistance, was arrested three times (luckily, by the German army rather than the SS), escaped twice, and, though Jewish, survived a year in a Nazi labour camp.

In 1945 he returned to his parents' house (a "mansion", as Stutje describes it, where Mandel would live until his death, though later he also had a flat in Paris), and returned to his university studies.

A year later he quit university — Stutje doesn't really explain why — and took up a variety of journalistic jobs which sustained him until 1970, when he acquired a university post. He was the editor of the Belgian Socialist Party daily *Le Peuple* from 1954 to 1957.

At the same time Mandel became the main writer for the leadership of the Orthodox Trotskyist Fourth International, as it was re-assembled after the war around Michel Pablo (Raptis), an older, more experienced, and more forceful activist than Mandel, of Greek origin but resident in Switzerland or France since 1937.

From 1956 into the 1960s, Mandel edited *La Gauche*, a left social-democratic weekly which he himself had urged into existence in line with the Orthodox Trotskyists' policy at the time of working to prepare the conditions for broad new left wings which would eventually split from the established social-democratic or Communist Parties. *La Gauche* drew contributions from a range of more or less left-ish journalists: its British correspondents were Michael Foot and Ralph Miliband.

DWINDLED

The Belgian Fourth International organisation had had 750 members when Mandel joined in 1939, but quickly dwindled on the outbreak of war, and remained only some dozens strong until the late 1960s.

Stutje suggests it operated mostly as a more-or-less clandestine network of initiates within broader enterprises like *La Gauche*.

In 1962, Mandel had long been one of the world's best-known Trotskyist leaders, under the pen-name Ernest Germain. Yet when Jacques Yerna, the trade-union official who had been Mandel's leading ally on *La Gauche* since 1956, was accused by the right wing of being a Trotskyist, Mandel went to Yerna's office: "I need to tell you the truth. I am a member of the Fourth International". Yerna was taken aback and responded that Mandel should have told him sooner: "Perhaps I might have joined you".

Mandel's verdict on the experience, reports Stutje, is that he and his comrades should have focused on cadre-building from the early 1950s, and that would have enabled them to glean more from their work in the Socialist Party.

Mandel, it seems, had long had ambitions to write at greater length and in greater depth. In 1962, after three years of cajoling publishers, Mandel got out his thousand-page *Traité d'Économie Marxiste* (English translation, 1967: *Marxist Economic Theory*). Its weaknesses, in my view, were great, but at the time it was the only contemporary large-scale Marxist text on economics in a landscape where all other current "Marxist



The young Ernest Mandel (left) with Abram Leon, another young leader of the Belgian Trotskyists, who died in Auschwitz.

economics" was Stalinist dreck.

It got Mandel known, not just as a journalist in one life and an activist and writer of theses for a still scarcely-visible Fourth International in another, but as a theorist and scholar. By 1970 he was able to get a full-time academic post at the Free University of Brussels; he retained that until the 1990s, and also gained several visiting-professor gigs over the years.

He had remedied his lack of university certificates by using his *Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx* (1967: a valuable book, in my view) to acquire a master's degree from the Sorbonne, and in 1972 he would use his *Late Capitalism* to get a PhD from Berlin University.

The Orthodox Trotskyists had split in 1952-3. Mandel, despite misgivings, went with Michel Pablo when James P Cannon of the SWP-USA and others tried to swing the movement back from Pablo's extravagant extrapolations on Stalinist-led revolution.

But Mandel kept contact with the SWP, notably through Peter Bloch (referred to in Stutje's book as "Karl Manfred").

Through most of the 1950s, it seems, the "centre" of the Fourth International was pretty much identical with Pablo's flat in Paris, and then in Amsterdam, and its finances with the inherited wealth of Pablo's companion Hélène Diovoniotis, which also freed Pablo to be politically active full-time. Mandel and others were convened to meetings once a month and forcefully urged into activities; international congresses were convened in 1954 and 1957; a French-language magazine was put out every few months.

But, Stutje reports, all contacts, correspondence, and financial matters were kept in the hands of Pablo, Diovoniotis, and Pablo's close comrade Sal Santen.

In the 1940s and the very early 1950s, Pablo tried to make the Fourth International "centre" a strong interventionist force in the various national Trotskyist groups. Stutje's book suggests that Pablo largely gave up on that after 1953, and turned his energies mostly to being active as an individual. His focus was, increasingly, aid to the Algerian national lib-

eration struggle: publishing illegal materials, forging identity papers, and so on for the FLN.

After De Gaulle's coup in France in 1958, Pablo saw few prospects in the European labour movement. Mandel's resistance to that drift was strengthened by the great Belgian general strike of 1960-1.

When Pablo was jailed, in 1960, for counterfeiting money to help the FLN, and later went into exile in Algeria, Mandel stepped up efforts to renew links with the SWP-USA. He visited James P Cannon in California, and eventually got the Orthodox Trotskyists reunified in 1963.

GLORY

From the mid-60s to the late 1970s would be Mandel's glory days.

The Orthodox Trotskyist groups had thousands or at least hundred of new young recruits where previously they had numbered only dozens. Mandel became famous in quite wide left-wing circles. He published prolifically and spoke and debated to large audiences.

Stutje scarcely mentions the conflict within the reunified Orthodox Trotskyist movement which first set the SWP-USA against what it saw (rightly) as the ultra-leftism and wild over-optimism of the Europeans (what the French Mandelites later called "triumphalism"). Later the conflict would see the SWP-USA break from Trotskyism in the early 1980s and veer off into a congealed sect-like form of Castroism. In fact Mandel was a chief writer in that conflict.

By the early 1980s, the Orthodox Trotskyist groups were sagging. The rebound from "triumphalism" often brought demoralisation. Mandel's Fourth International had at the peak assembled an office staff of twenty in Paris, but most of them — including those whom Mandel had looked to as his successors, Udry and Vercammen — drifted away into lower-key activity. Vercammen died in 2015, and Udry is old and sick.

Mandel resisted the sagging with a "revolutionary optimism" which would appear,

even to his closest comrades such as Vercammen, as more and more delusionary. By the 1980s, according to Stutje, Mandel was already suffering serious health problems, the consequence of decades of relentless overwork. He continued to write, but less on current political issues; his condition deteriorated until he died in 1995.

The one thing in Stutje's narrative which gives some shine to his prissy criticism of Mandel's personality is his depiction of the role of Gisela Scholtz in Mandel's costly adaptation to the ultra-left swing of the Orthodox Trotskyists in the late 1960s and early 70s.

Scholtz, young, with little political experience (she joined the Trotskyists only after hitching up with Mandel), and erratic in her activity even after she joined the movement, was deep into the ultra-leftism. Stutje reports her efforts to convert a small-ish and routine demonstration in Brussels for nuclear disarmament into an attempt to storm NATO headquarters, and her satisfaction after the event: there had been good fights with the police, and only 40 comrades had been injured.

Mandel seems to have whisked Scholtz into the leading circles of the movement, deferred to her, lent his authority to her ideas. Whether that was just a political mistake, I don't know. Stutje's discussion, or lack of discussion, on Mandel's chief and determining political lapse is instructive.

Like all Trotskyists — the Heterodox around Max Shachtman and others, as well as the Orthodox — Mandel found it difficult to adjust to the dashing of their hopes for buoyant socialist mobilisations after World War Two. Like many, he was reluctant to admit that the hopes had been dashed, not just postponed briefly. Worse than most, he resorted to scholastic constructions and ingenious casuistry to prop up his reluctance. The feature of his temperament most damaging to his politics seems to have been an inability to say "I don't know", a drive always to have everything fitted into a scheme.

Yet until 1951 he resisted Pablo's theory that the socialist mobilisations had happened, and would continue to happen, in the form of Stalinist expansion; that this was really a sort of socialist expansion, deformed, incomplete, but real, and making it mandatory for Trotskyists to get in the flow.

Stutje's account: "In the end [Mandel] was forced to recognise Michel Raptis as his superior in political intuition... He was one of a politician that Mandel, who had difficulty putting aside key Marxist concepts and who held onto his facts with the tenacity of a positivist".

And again: "More strongly than Pablo, Mandel held to such key concepts of Marxism as the working class, the bureaucracy and the political revolution. Pablo was more impressionistic intellectually... Sometimes this had remarkable results, as with his analysis of the Yugoslav revolution".

Stutje seems unaware that anyone could doubt that it was "reality" that Tito's Yugoslavia was a "workers' state", despite the workers having no say in public affairs. So the "political intuition" which led Pablo to accredit Tito and others with creating workers' states ranks higher than "key Marxist concepts" and "holding on to the facts".

In fact the eventual submission to Pablo (and others) which left Mandel spending his life massaging Marxist concepts and facts to accommodate that "intuition" was the great tragedy which vitiated so much of his commitment, his industry, and his talents.

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!

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Scottish Labour lags behind

LABOUR

By Dale Street

Anas Sarwar, candidate of the right wing in the Scottish Labour Party (SLP) leadership contest, has been getting a bad press. And deservedly so.

The focus of the bad news was United Wholesale (Scotland) Ltd., the Sarwar "family firm" (in the sense that the only shareholders in it are the Sarwar family.)

The lowest paid employees in the company are paid the legal minimum: the National Living Wage of £7.50 a week. This is well short of the Scottish Living Wage of £8.45 an hour, and even further away from Labour Party policy of a minimum wage of £10 an hour.

The family firm could easily afford to pay the Scottish Living Wage. In recent years its annual pre-tax profits have always been in excess of £2 million.

Sarwar defended low pay in the family firm: "I don't support a voluntary real living wage. I support a mandatory real living wage." In other words: low pay can and will continue until government action puts an end to it.

But what about a trade union campaign to win higher pay this side of a Labour government? No chance of that in United Wholesale (Scotland) — it turns out that the family firm does not recognise a trade union.

The company's law firm — there's no money for the Living Wage, but plenty of money for lawyers — issued a statement saying that the reports of non-recognition of a trade union were "politically motivated" and that the company "declines to comment".

Sarwar himself used the defence



Anwas Sarwar and Richard Leonard

that he has no involvement in the family firm, and that he was merely a minority shareholder (one of just four — with a share package worth £4.8m). Has he never heard of the concept of "ethical investment"? Sarwar had in fact received £20,000 a year in dividends from his shares over a period of 13 years, until his re-election to Holyrood last year. But at one time or another surely all of us have overlooked the odd £20,000?

The media focus on the Sarwar family firm did, however, have a silver lining. It completely pushed into the background the fact that Sarwar spends £10,000 a year to send his son to a private school.

By the end of the week Sarwar decided to cut his (political) losses by placing his shares into a "discretionary trust", to be accessed by his children on reaching adulthood.

This must have been a bitter blow to Sarwar's supporters who had spent the week loyally arguing that there was nothing untoward about a candidate for SLP leader having £4.8m in shares in a company which failed to pay the Scottish Living Wage and failed to recognise a trade union.

In fact, they had gone even further, by accusing SLP acting leader Alex Rowley of using "dirty tricks" against Sarwar. Rowley had attacked the SNP in Holyrood for sid-

ing with "the millionaires rather than the millions" in deciding its tax policies. Sturgeon responded that it was unfair of Rowley "to personalise this debate by bringing Anas Sarwar into it."

The previous day Sarwar had tweeted that he was going to park his tanks on Nicola Sturgeon's lawn. Sturgeon responded: "Could you mow the lawn while you're there? I'll pay you the Living Wage if you do."

In any half-decent social-democratic party Sarwar would not even get onto the ballot paper in a leadership contest. The fact that he has done so in the SLP — with the backing of the majority of the SLP's parliamentarians — underlines how far the SLP lags behind the Labour Party at national level.

But the outcome of the leadership contest is certainly not a foregone conclusion. Richard Leonard is winning CLP nominations and trade union nominations — including from USDAW, which has always previously backed the right-wing candidate in leadership contests. The ballot runs from 27 October to 17 November.

The left has a chance of securing Leonard's election as SLP leader. But only if it is sufficiently organised and adequate politically to be able to defeat Sarwar's election machine.

School workers discuss new union

By Martin Thomas

Workers' Liberty school workers met on 7 October 2017 to discuss our plans in our workplaces and in the new National Education Union, formed on 1 September by the merger of the National Union of Teachers and the Association of Teachers and Lecturers.

The new union is making a recruitment drive, offering membership free to trainees and students, for £1 to newly qualified teachers, and for £10 for the first year to all teachers and all school support staff.

The response has been good, with twice as many new recruits to the NEU in September 2017 as there were to the NUT and ATL in September 2016.

We will be encouraging the 70% of school support staff who are currently non-union to join the NEU, and those who are also members of

other unions to "dual-card" by joining the NEU too.

We want a single union for all school-based workers. We will campaign in the NEU for the union to seek a recognition agreement so the NEU can represent, and negotiate on behalf of, all workers in schools.

The NEU should develop a culture of industrial unionism and move away from the NUT model of a professional association for teachers only.

A joint-membership, joint-representation deal with Unison, Unite, and GMB — similar to what UCU has with members of ten other unions working in universities and colleges, bit.ly/joint-m — would be a good way of achieving that.

Our meeting also discussed a proposal from school student Joe Booth for a campaign to "take the stress out of studying".

We will submit a motion for NEU NUT section conference, and cam-

aign on such issues as abolishing detentions (now being used at a rate of tens of thousands a year by many schools); drastically reducing or abolishing exams; remodelling schools to give students adequate social breaks and congenial places where they can take their breaks; abolition or simplification and gender-neutralising of school uniforms.

We are working on motions on other issues, including a boycott in primary schools of SATS and other high-stakes summative testing; free movement; union international delegations' relations with Hamas in the light of Hamas's union-busting in Gaza; and unionising multi-academy trusts.

On paper the NEU is committed to a drive to create union structures for solidarity and negotiation across multi-academy trusts. In practice, so far anyway, NEU full-time staff have mostly been sluggish about working on that.

Events

Thursday 12 October

Demonstration: Justice for Tube cleaners!
9am, City Hall, London SE1 2AA
bit.ly/2g7AuI0

Saturday 14 October

Grenfell Tower silent march
6.30pm, Notting Hill Methodist Church, 240 Lancaster Road, W11 4AH
bit.ly/2f15Rs3

Saturday 14 October

Rally — Keep fossil fuels in the ground and go renewable
10.30am, City Hall, Barkers Pool, Sheffield S1 2JA
bit.ly/2xd1yg7

Tuesday 17 October

Britain Deserves A Pay Rise — end the pay cap now!
5.30pm, Assemble outside Downing Street, London SW1A 2AA
bit.ly/2xO1vvi

Friday 20 October

The Russian Revolution 100 years on — London Forum
7.30pm, Room 675, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL
bit.ly/OctForum

Monday 23 October

Is socialism possible?
6.30pm, The Trent House, 1-2 Leazes Lane, Newcastle NE1 4QT
bit.ly/2greJ61

Have an event you want listing? Email: solidarity@workersliberty.org

UCU fights job cuts and “sackers’ charter”

By Gemma Short

UCU members at both the University of Manchester and University of Leeds will strike over job cuts and changes to the university dismissal policy respectively.

UCU members at Leeds will strike on 11, 12 and 13 October, and members at Manchester will strike on 23 and 24 October.

The University of Manchester plans to cut 140 academic jobs, supposedly due to an uncertain financial climate, yet the university recorded a £36m surplus last year and its 2015-2016 financial statement showed £1.5bn in reserves.

Despite the job cuts the university has also announced it will be hiring more than 100 new early-career academics, which the UCU argues is an attempt to “clear out” experienced, more expensive, academics in favour of newer, cheaper, staff.

The University of Leeds is changing its dismissal policy to one that



UCU members in Leeds informing students about the University's plans

the UCU calls a “sackers’ charter”. The new policy would allow workers to be sacked for “some other substantial reason”

UCU Leeds branch president Vicky Blake said: “The University of Leeds is insisting on an open ended catch-all power to dismiss staff on the grounds of ‘Some Other Substantial Reason’, posing a serious threat to our members’ job security.

“We believe the change could en-

able the university to sack people for all sorts of dubious reasons and may restrict staff from pursuing new ideas or controversial topics within their daily work. UCU is also concerned that this sackers’ charter could subject staff to third party commercial or political pressure over unpopular research findings.

“Or could even risk staff being sacked for a breakdown in trust with a manager.”

Being made to work for free

By a civil servant

PCS members in the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) have voted on a nearly 70% turnout, 84% in favour of strike action and 92% for action short of a strike.

Within weeks, Driving Examiners and enforcement staff in the agency could be on strike.

The union is giving DVSA a few days to come up with proposals to end a long running dispute over working time. If they don’t, then the two weeks’ notice of industrial action will be served.

The working time dispute centres on two main issues. The first concerns travelling to a work station. Currently travelling from home to your home work station is not counted as work and so is not paid for. If you are asked to travel from home to a non-home station,

the first 45 minutes of that journey is not paid for. The union says that this should be paid as working time. DVSA wants a situation where staff are increasingly deployed to different work stations but they don’t want to pay for this travel.

The second issue relates to a new type of driving test being introduced later this year. This test incorporates use of a Sat Nav. Currently examiners do seven tests in a day. The timing study for the new test suggests that to fit it into the working day in fact examiners will often have to work more than the working day. The union is proposing that any such “run over” is treated



as paid overtime or that the examiner can refuse to take out the last test of the day (as they can now) if that would lead to a “run over”. The agency of course wants staff to work any run overs for free.

So the dispute revolves around whether you get paid for working or not.

Strikes to hit three airports

By Gemma Short

Cleaners employed by Mitie at Manchester Airport have voted to strike to break a two-year pay freeze.

Workers are currently paid just above the government “Living Wage” at £7.50 but are demanding an increase to just above the real Living Wage (currently £8.45), and for £1 an hour to be backdated to April 2016. Their strikes were yet to be announced as *Solidarity* went to

press.

Unite is also balloting workers at Heathrow and Gatwick airports.

At Heathrow Unite is balloting engineering workers, security workers, air and landside operations and fire services, for strikes over a plan by employers to force through cuts and changes to terms and conditions.

At Gatwick Unite is balloting baggage handlers employed on a contract for Norwegian Airlines over pay. The workers are em-

ployed by employed by a subcontractor of a subcontractor, but the decisions on pay seem to be made by a company called Red Handling which is a subsidiary of Norwegian Airlines itself.

Rather than offering workers a pay rise which was due in May, Red Handling has suggested that a company barbecue could be organised!

The ballot at Gatwick will end on 13 October, and at Heathrow on 18 October.



Royal Mail seeks injunction against strike

By Charlotte Zalens

A CWU announcement of a 48-hour strike starting on 19 October has been met with legal threats by Royal Mail.

Royal Mail claims that under an existing agreement with the union the CWU must enter mediation with the company before going on strike. The CWU however has been attempting to resolve the dispute with Royal Mail for 18

months! Royal Mail has lodged an application with the High Court for an injunction against the strike.

Royal Mail is clearly unnerved by my members’ strength of feelings and the prospect of effective strikes.

The CWU has announced that it will not be calling off the strikes.

• More detail about the strike and ballot result: bit.ly/2kCPh1X

Derby Labour split over TA dispute

By Ralph Peters

School support workers in Derby, members of Unison, are holding consultative ballots in the special schools where wage cuts imposed by the Derby’s Labour Council are greatest.

Before bringing members out on strike again, Unison are planning to spend more time individually challenging Labour councillors. There are some signs that the pressure is having an effect. In the Council’s Labour group a motion of no confidence in the leader Ranjit Banwait was moved.

The motion picked up on the same theme that Derby Unison has drawn attention to time and again. That electorally the council may face a disaster if it does not recognise the damage done to its credibility from its damaging disputes with the local community and its lack of openness.

Labour Cllr Paul Pegg wrote: “The people of Derby fully understand why as a council we have had to make certain cuts and in the main they accept it. What the peo-

ple of Derby don’t do is trust the Leader ... hard working councillors are going to lose their seats at the forth coming elections.”

Cllr Pegg may tell himself that the problem with the council is solely the style of its leader. In truth the cuts the council has energetically pursued in its library and care provisions as well as to the wages of its school support workers have all done damage. It is not only the council leader that has to go but also the cutting policy of the whole council.

Unison workers have meanwhile taken heart that Derby North MP and former council leader Chris Williamson has felt necessary to go public with his displeasure with the council’s action. “I support the teaching assistants and the fantastic job they do. It is completely wrong that some are faced with pay cuts of up to 25%”

But what Unison’s Derby school support workers need most is national support and solidarity that might stop the council doing the dirty business of the Tory government.

Bus drivers strike over pay

By Peggy Carter

Bus drivers on First Buses in Manchester, Bolton and Bury will strike again on 9, 16, 23, and 30 October over pay.

Workers have been offered a

below inflation pay offer by First, effectively a pay cut. There is also a £1.88 per hour gap between the highest and lowest earning drivers, with drivers effectively being paid different rates for doing the same job.

Over 600 drivers are involved in the strikes.



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Picturehouse strikers defy threats

By a Picturehouse worker

On Wednesday 4 October workers from five Picturehouse sites walked out on strike, in the face of intimidation and threats of dismissal from Picturehouse management.

We walked out and converged on Leicester Square where the opening gala for the London Film Festival, organised by the British Film Institute (BFI), had a red carpet of big names from the film industry.

Whilst most of the great and the good at the gala tried to ignore the angry cinema workers inconveniently blocking their path from the champagne reception to the red carpet, some supported us. Actor and director Andrew Garfield supported the strikers, telling Sky News "It's awful. It's indicative of every aspect of our culture now, this massive social divide."

We are now in the middle of a two-week period of strikes, on 6-8 and 11-15 October. We will also demonstrate at Hackney Picturehouse on 15 October for the closing party of the film festival.

So why are we doing this during BFI London film festival. What exactly is our beef with the BFI?

BFI have been aware of our dispute for a year now. In 2016 when we struck during London Film Festival, you could perhaps pardon their ignorance, as our strike was in its early days. However it has been a whole year. Our union, BECTU, contacted them and tried to get them to pull out of Picturehouse sites, but they refused to do so (only pulling out of the Ritzy in Brixton). They have shown that they do not care about the welfare of the Picturehouse workers.

In holding their event, a prestigious film festival, at Picturehouse cinemas, they legitimise Picturehouse and they way it treats its workers. The BFI should be ashamed. Another example of companies that hide behind an ethical, liberal, mask but when it comes to the crunch side with the bosses, the only thing that really matters is profit.

Picturehouse has threatened to sack any worker who goes on strike. Why? Picturehouse consider our ballot to be "invalid" and any resultant strike action "unlawful". According to them we already get paid the London Living Wage. This isn't true. Our pay is £9.30; but the current Living Wage is £9.75. To be a Living Wage employer, you must sign up to the Living Wage Foundation and become accredited, and pay the living wage in line with inflation rises. We challenge them to do this.

How have we responded? Most workers have called Picturehouse's bluff, and walked out on strike. Despite the precarious nature of our work we will not be intimidated or bullied. We will stand strong in the face of adversity, we will stand united, and we will win.

Picturehouse is worried about the damage the strike is doing to their reputation and are lashing out at workers in response. So far no worker has been victimised for taking part in the latest round of strikes.

We still need support, so I appeal for people to come to our picket lines and support the campaign.

If we win, we can set a precedent that even the most precarious and vulnerable of workers can still resist exploitation and win.



Community strike supporters take action

The Picturehouse strikes are incredibly important, precedent-setting actions.

After a year of strikes, it seems that we must resort to embarrassing the company through loud and bold demonstrations in order to provoke the management into taking the staff seriously. This is why I took part in direct action to raise awareness about Picturehouse workers' struggles on Saturday 7 October, however nerve-racking that may be. The strikers need the support of the community to be successful and when they do win, it will inspire workers across the UK to take a stand, just as they have inspired me. I would encourage anybody

who cares about workers rights to help out in whatever way they can, be that: boycotting the cinema, donating to the strike fund or, most importantly, joining us in action on and off the picket line!

Will, Labour activist

This is a really important struggle for the wider Labour movement, for fair pay and conditions and the right to organise free of victimisation.

When we discussed it in Hackney South CLP it had unanimous support and it's been great to take part in and help organise community pickets alongside our Mayor, councillors and other members.

Heather Mendick, CLP Secretary

Hackney South and Shoreditch

Joining the workers at their picket was a lot of fun.

And a great opportunity to show Cineworld that their attempts at union-busting won't go unnoticed. You get a warm welcome and a real sense of the movement they're building by standing firm against exploitation.

Walthamstow Labour Party member

• For information about how to get involved see: picturehousefour.org
• For a video of the direct action see: www.facebook.com/haringeypicturehousestrike

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