

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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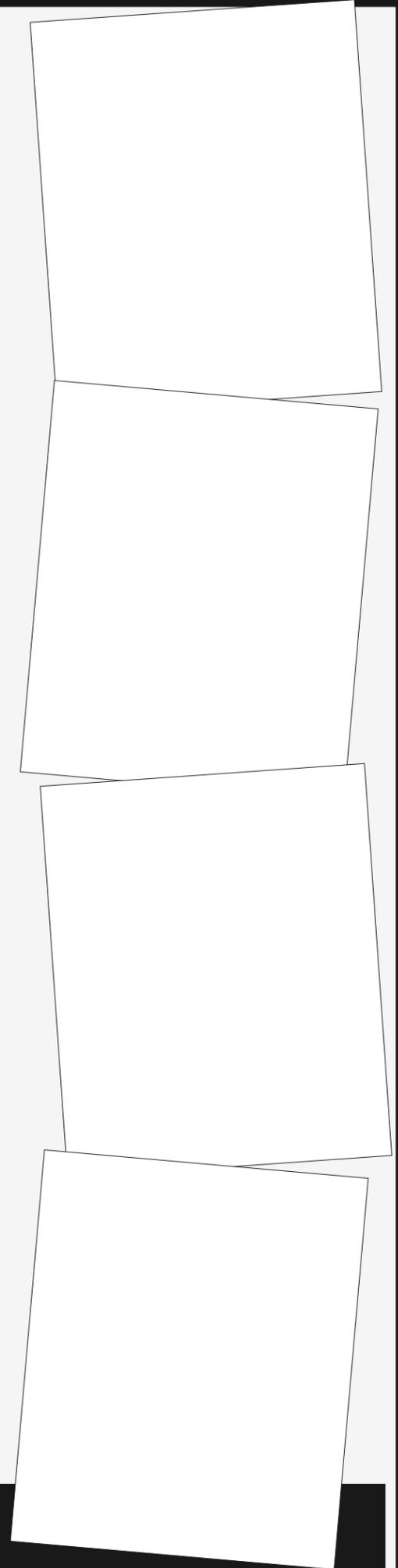
Murdoch crisis reveals cesspit

Open up the media!

Banish the billionaires!

One by one Rupert Murdoch's lieutenants, and other people implicated in the News of the World scandal, stumble and fall. From the top: former Chief Executive of News International, Rebekah Brooks; former editor of the News of the World and then director of communications for David Cameron, Andy Coulson; former Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Paul Stephenson; and the Assistant Commissioner in charge of the 2009 police review of the hacking allegations at News of the World, John Yates.

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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"Euro-periphery" needs investment

George Irvin is a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and author of *Super rich: the rise of inequality in Britain and the United States*. He spoke to *Solidarity* about the new stage of the eurozone crisis created by the jump, from 8 July, in the interest rates that Italy has to pay to sell bonds (IOUs) on world markets.

Eurozone politicians have been so slow to react that the bond markets are rightly worried about the poor and inadequate nature of the response.

Bond markets a few months ago worried about excessive deficits and high public debt-to-GDP ratios. Now bond markets are starting to worry about poor economic performance and economies being squeezed. They're worried that fiscal austerity will slow growth to such an extent that the debt to GDP ratio will have to increase.

The current row between Merkel [the German chancellor] and the European Central Bank (ECB) over the issue of whether private banks should take a haircut is a sideshow. It doesn't begin to resolve the problem.

The ECB has to buy more national bonds, there has to be a much greater bailout facility, and the ECB has to find a way of issuing jointly-backed euro-bonds.

The Germans banned euro-bonds from being built into the original architecture, so the ECB can't issue its own bonds.

The irony of that is that if

a euro-bond could be devised quickly and sold on international markets, it would be enormously successful. The euro has not become a major world currency because it's so difficult to get hold of in the form of bonds. You can only hold national, not European, euro-bonds.

But when the German and French finance ministers meet they will be discussing not that but the same old argument about whether private banks should take a haircut [agreed cut in what's repaid to them on the bonds they hold], or whether the ECB is right and a haircut on the part of the banks will prompt Greece to default.

There's a perfectly sensible argument for Greece to default and leave the eurozone given the political constraints on it. Greek labour is being asked to pay enormously for a debt it had little part in creating.

HAIRCUT

But on the other hand, the cost of default might be enormous and much of that cost might fall on Greek labour as well.

If Greece defaults in an uncontrolled way, then its entire banking system will collapse. The assets held by the Greek Central Bank are mainly Greek euro-bonds; thus a default on those euro-bonds would mean its banking system will have no assets. Even if a new drachma could be put in place within 48 hours—which would require something of a miracle—it would immediately lose

value.

The Greek Central Bank doesn't have the reserves necessary to prevent an immediate collapse in value of a new drachma. The collapse would make imports two, three or four times more expensive and ordinary Greeks have to buy imported food and imported clothing. Default would not be painless for ordinary Greeks.

DEBTS

Anyone who currently has debts denominated in euros would find those debts doubling or tripling when denominated in new drachmas.

Many Greeks who have taken out mortgages in euros would find themselves attempting to pay off mortgages which had become effectively unserviceable.

The left needs to make two arguments. In the very short term we should argue for European authorities to buy up Greek euro-bonds, assume Greek debt, and issue a Europe-wide bond.

The larcenous interest rates that Greeks are being asked to pay on the loans from the European stability fund should be reduced. They're being asked to pay over 5%, and the Germans can borrow money on the international market at less than 3%. It's not German taxpayers who're paying Greece. The money's flowing the other way.

In the longer term, the eurozone needs quite different architecture. It needs to be able to issue eurozone bonds, and it needs a unified fiscal system. Europe

needs a treasury, and it needs a wage policy to make sure wages are in some sense tied to productivity gains and that productivity gains happen faster at the periphery than they do in the centre. That in turn would reduce income disparity and make countries like Greece more competitive.

I would be in favour of a sort of "Marshall Plan", financed by European euro-bonds, for the periphery. Take European infrastructure: investment has repeatedly been blocked; development of the so-called "TENs system" [schemes aimed at developing trans-European networks for transport, energy and telecommunications] has been lamentably slow. Investment in decent, integrated infrastructure for the whole of Europe would greatly help market integration and it would help to 'crowd in' private investment as well.

I'm essentially talking about a much more federal Europe. To give an example, suppose the United States didn't have a federal treasury and individual states were largely financed on their own bonds. Relatively productive states would do very well, whereas states like Mississippi would have to pay perhaps 10% for ten-year bonds.

Europe needs a treasury if it's going to survive. If that doesn't happen, European integration will be set back thirty or forty years.

US debt: into the abyss?

By Chris Reynolds

"An August panic similar to those in 2007 and 2008 no longer appears far-fetched. Only this time, the global economy is far less well-equipped to cope..."

"Another leg of the economic crisis which started in 2007 is a distinct possibility — and exchequers simply do not have the fire-power to offset another private sector panic".

That is how the *Financial Times* summed it up (18 July), under the headline: "The abyss that awaits".

One factor is the spread of the eurozone crisis to Italy. The other is the prospect that the US government will run out of cash on 2 August.

The US government, unlike other major states, has a legal limit on its borrowing, currently \$14,300 billion. All modern capitalist economies require large

and liquid markets in government debt to function; so the debt rises with the general rise in economic output and inflation; and Congress often has to reset the limit. A hundred times so far, over the years.

The Republicans refuse to raise the limit unless President Obama and the Democrat majority in the Senate agree to cut the US budget deficit *exclusively* through spending cuts, with no tax rises. Obama has gone a long way towards the Republicans, but they still refuse to make a deal.

TEA PARTY

Many "Tea Party" Republicans do not want a deal at all.

They *want* the US government to run out of cash, and be dealt a shock that will force more radical spending cuts.

This attitude, like the very existence of the legal

borrowing limit, reflects the pressure of small-town USA (only 28% of the US population lives in cities bigger than 100,000, whereas nearly 60% of the UK population does).

If no deal is reached by 2 August, the first step is for the federal government to lay off all "non-essential" government workers and shut down all "non-essential services", as it did from 14 to 19 November 1995 and from 16 December 1995 to 6 January 1996.

That shutdown came from a standoff between President Clinton and a Republican majority in Congress over budget cuts wanted by the Republicans. But it came at a time when the US capitalist economy was in good shape overall.

Today, large-scale federal government lay-offs could tip a very sickly US economy into renewed full-scale slump.

A prolonged impasse

could lead to the US government failing to make payments due on previous borrowings — "defaulting".

The effects would be huge. For decades, for governments and corporations worldwide, US government debt has been the safest form of holding wealth. For that reason, in the crisis since 2007-8, despite all the US economy's turmoil, purchases of US government debt have increased, not fallen.

The price of gold has risen above \$1600 an ounce for the first time, with rich people thinking gold is safer than dollars. But there is just not enough gold to be world money at the present scale of the world market.

A collapse of the dollar would mean chaos in international trade.

• The 1995-6 shutdowns: bit.ly/eT60Vy

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N. Ireland “rejectionism” grows

By Thomas Carolan

Serious street fighting in Northern Ireland between police, Catholic youths, and dissident Republicans, on one side, and Protestants, Catholics and police on the other, is becoming all too reminiscent of the clashes that led to the breakdown of the old Six Counties Protestant-ruled state in mid-1969, and the beginning of British army intervention on the streets.

There are people on both sides of the Catholic/Protestant sectarian divide who work deliberately to push things as far as they can, in order to smash up the present mandatory power-sharing system set up under the Good Friday Agreement (GFA).

There have always been bitter “rejectionists” on the Protestant side. The worst single slaughter in the “Troubles” occurred after the GFA was signed, the work of dissident Republicans.

Does the recent fighting indicate a level of intensifying conflict that threatens to break the power-sharing system?

In 1998 and afterwards there was very widespread rejection of the Good Friday Agreement, and barely enough Protestant support to keep the experiment of power-sharing afloat. Many Protestant-Unionists felt they were losers in that Agreement, being forced to abandon the hope of majority (Protestant-Unionist) rule and accept the mandatory right of the minority to be in government with

them.

By contrast, Catholic-nationalist support for the GFA was massive. The two main Catholic-nationalist parties, the SDLP and Sinn Fein (representing the IRA), backed the agreement. The dissident Republicans were a mere splinter group, nowhere near Adams and McGuinness in the support they had.

The Catholics felt that they gained a great deal. That was true, though in fact a looser variant of the 1998 power-sharing agreement had been on offer since late 1973 and the Sunningdale Agreement. The subsequent 25-year war won nothing in addition to that, except that mandatory involvement in government for the different shades of political opinion able to win enough votes ensured that the Provisionals and the Paisleyites were guaranteed a place in government.

A number of things, however, are new.

The economic crisis blights all hopes of things improving steadily. Cuts are likely to have a far worse effect in Northern Ireland than in the rest of the UK.

The system set up by the GFA is itself a system of intricate bureaucratically-organised sectarianism. It tried to freeze, and over time detoxify, sectarian animosities, translating them into political jockeying by Protestant-Unionist and Catholic-nationalist parties. Far from sectarianism getting less in the years since the GFA, it has got

much worse. Over 40 internal walls between Catholic and Protestant areas now segment Belfast, where at the time of the GFA there were only half that many. Economic crisis is unfreezing some of the frozen sectarian animosities, and they are still toxic.

The years of Provo-Protestant-British warfare which persuaded many to back the GFA are ancient history to the present generation of young people, many of whom in certain areas are alienated from the society.

There is probably a slow erosion of the authority of the Sinn Fein leaders, now in government. They cannot but be seen as in part responsible for the way things are for many working-class Catholics. In the Catholic ghettos, the dismantling and disarming of the IRA removes much of the power of intimidation and coercion on which Sinn Fein’s authority rested.

In the form of songs and stories, a powerful current of Republican intransigence and revolt runs through the Catholic community, onto which current grievances can easily be attached. The political culture that looks to communalist, nationalist, blame-the-Brits explana-

tions for what is wrong is immensely strong in Northern Ireland.

The dissident Republicans are becoming more effective in organisation and military capacity.

The Protestant paramilitaries of the UVF, who strongly supported the GFA, are undergoing political changes, perhaps in connection with internal factionalism and external gangsterism.

Can the “rejectionists” topple the power-sharing system? In contrast to the days of Protestant majority rule, under the GFA system dissatisfaction is much more a Protestant than a mainstream Catholic thing. That limits, and certainly slows down, mass Catholic identification with the rioting Catholic youth.

The tragedy in all communal conflicts is that at a certain point the “extremists” set the pace, and set community to confrontation with community. By targeting the whole “other community”, they force the members of that community to identify with their own “extremists”, if only in self-protection.

That seems a long way off yet, even if recent events make it less distant than it was.

The flashpoint in 1969 was not the July marches of the Orange Order, but in Derry in mid-August when the Orange Apprentice Boys organisation held its annual march. Dissident Republicans have some support in Derry now. Watch what happens on 13 August when the Apprentice Boys march.

Above: rise in profits for Cargill (left), rise in food prices (right)

Agribusiness booms, millions starve

By Gerry Bates

In Europe, the capitalist crisis means discomfort, stress, and humiliation for millions.

In many parts of the world, it means outright starvation.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, “countries in the [Horn of Africa] are confronted with the failure of the short rains in late 2010 and negative trends that threaten the long rainy season in 2011...”

“The number of those requiring emergency assistance has grown from 6.3 million in early 2011 to 10 million today — a 40 percent increase — in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda (Karamoja region). The majority of the newly affected people are reported to be in Kenya (1.2 million). In addition, the number of Somali refugees in camps in Kenya and

Ethiopia has reached the unprecedented figure of about 517,000 people”.

People in that region face triple blows:

- Drought;
- The collapse of government in Somalia;
- World food prices have risen by two-thirds since early 2009.

The exact factors in rising world food prices are difficult to work out. Speculation, bio-fuel production, droughts, dearer oil raising fertiliser prices, increased urbanisation, are all implicated, or may be.

But for sure the world still produces enough food for everyone. The poor could buy enough food if they weren’t so poor; and they wouldn’t be so poor if the rich weren’t so rich.

And for sure the big agribusiness corporations, like US-based Cargill, are making record profits.

Stop the local government fire sale!

A new government White Paper proposes to allow almost all public services to be opened up to competition from the private and voluntary sector. Vicki Morris reports on the reality of the Tory council in Barnet, north London.

Barnet council is inviting bidders for a contract worth £275 million over 10 years. The successful bidder will take over the council’s regulatory and development functions which includes things such as planning, environmental health and transport.

This is only the first of a number of big contracts worth more than £1 billion over the next 10 years.

The Tory administration wants the vast bulk of council services to be carried out by private companies. Any money that the private companies manage to save, by doing the job for less than the council pays

them, they will keep and give to shareholders as dividends and senior executives as more pay. The chief executive of Capita, Paul Pindar, is already paid £14,500 a week.

Staff now directly employed by the council will be transferred to and employed by the private company which wins each bid.

Those staff will take their current pay, holiday entitlement, sickness pay, etc., with them. However, there is no guarantee that this protection will last long. One of the purposes of this type of outsourcing is to attack workers’ pay and conditions of service.

The council unions have been campaigning against this mass privatisation since 2008. They have been supported by a growing band of anxious residents. The recent scandal has shone light on just how bad the council is at handling the outsourcing it already does.

A small, local firm called MetPro started providing security at some Barnet council buildings in 2006. No tender was put out and no contract with this company ever drawn up. By 2011 the company had made more than £1.3 million from the council, well over the threshold at which the work should be properly tendered.

Disgruntled local residents investigated MetPro and discovered that they were going bust, owing £400,000, £245,000 of that to HM Revenue and Customs. We also found out that the council had never checked whether MetPro staff were CRB checked — they weren’t — or whether the company was registered with the Security Industry Authority — it wasn’t. A recent damning internal audit report showed that Barnet council routinely ignores its own Contract Procurement Rules.

If Barnet can’t manage a

small contract like this with a local company, how is it going to handle a massive, multi-million contract with the big boys such as Capita and Serco?

MILLIONS Barnet say that mass outsourcing will save millions of pounds. In fact, the savings they show on paper are actually quite small, and, of course, might never be achieved.

After three years, the One Barnet Programme has only cost money — several millions in consultancy fees.

There is no sign of anyone but large companies picking up the functions the council is trying to shed. Barnet is cutting the already small grants they make to voluntary sector organisations.

There is a lively anti-cuts group, Barnet Alliance for Public Services, which has taken up the fight against OBP. The council unions

commissioned 30 reports in response to the council’s proposals; none of them has been properly answered.

Now, as each section of council staff is “packaged” up and offered for tender, the council Unison branch is balloting them for strike action and action short of strike. So far the staff balloted have voted overwhelmingly for action. Development and regulatory staff are currently working to rule; revenues and benefits and parking staff should all be taking action soon.

Barnet NUT has some staff affected, but fewer, and is facing the challenge of rapid academy-isation in secondary schools. The GMB branch is not taking

industrial action, although their activists have been involved in the community campaigns.

After some delay Barnet Unison got the backing of the London region for an industrial strategy and Unison has at last realised that outsourcing threatens the union’s position in local authorities, based as it is on their power to bargain on behalf of council workers. With new legislation in the pipeline and Barnet leading the way, this is an issue confronting all local authorities.

Outsourcing is a central part of the Tories’ war to drive down the conditions of working-class people, and erode the quality and accountability of public services. We must fight it!

Debating the Histadrut



Letters

Recently I have become involved in a debate on the *Morning Star* letters page about Israel and the Israeli trade union federation Histadrut. I thought readers would like to read some snippets.

On 17 June I took issue with a *Morning Star* review:

"Roger Fletcher's review of Michael Riordon's new book equates holocaust denial with a failure to speak out against the 'fascistic policy and actions of the Israeli state.'

"Calling Israel fascist is lazy but also very dangerous. Fascism destroyed independent labour movements and suppressed socialist groups. Israel has free trade unions, a peace movement and a free press.

"The Israeli government's attitude and policy towards Palestine and Palestinians is a crime, but hysterical demonisation of Israel will not help."

The following replies were published. From Jimmy Janovich (30 June):

"Israel is not a 'fascist state' — quite right. Nor were tsarist Russia, imperial Japan or Petain's France. No-one could call them democracies, however.

"Israel does have a powerful trade union movement — which only covers Jewish workers.

"Israel did once have a free and critical press. This has disappeared."

And from Don Evans (4 July):

"In September Palestinians will make an appeal for statehood at the UN, hoping for a two-state solution. Israel will oppose this and the US will support her.

"Israel is so confident because the US and many EU states, Britain included, always fall for Israel's skilful use of World War II history designed to establish victim-status for the country. Such appeals aim to make criticism of Israel a no-go area. We have to get beyond this.

"The basic fact is that Israel has occupied somebody else's land. As an unwelcome presence she has to either make peace with the inhabitants, leave or face continuous war."

Linda Clair (14 July) took up the issue of the Histadrut:

"...The aim of Israeli trade union confederation Histadrut from its inception in 1920 was never to campaign for workers' rights or build solidarity. It was founded as an exclusively Jewish organisation to facilitate the colonisation of Palestine and worked with the Jewish Agency to promote the exclusion of Palestinian labour.

"It is an arm of the Zionist state, promoting and defending policies that violate Palestinians' basic civil, political and human rights... Histadrut condoned the slaughter in Gaza and the murders on the Mavi Marmara as well as the general ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.

"In May this year the General Federation of Palestinian Trade Unions issued a statement calling for the boycott of Histadrut as part of the overall boycott of all Israeli Zionist institutions. Boycott, divestment and sanctions are our non-violent tool for assisting Palestine to achieve its freedom."

Another letter from me made the following points:

"Histadrut has collaborated with the Israeli government's oppression of Palestinians. So what then should British trade unionists and socialists do?

"Primarily we should support independent unions and peace groups that seek to organise working-class people across the divide.

"However we still need to support workers in Histadrut when they are in struggle against their own bosses..."

"The most progressive force in Israeli society are workers in struggle. We must do all we can to help these workers realise the end of the occupation of Palestine is in the interest of all workers in the region."

It is good that the *Morning Star* is (for once) allowing debate. It has not stopped printing lies and half truths however.

I have written again, pointing out that the Histadrut is not what it was in 1920, or 1948 or even 1995 — a big employer, running health and pensions, etc, for the state. It is a trade union, albeit, like our own unions, heavily bureaucratised. It has many Arab members, and has not been Jewish-only since 1959. The Israeli press is certainly more critical of the Israeli government than the *Morning Star* is of China.

Also the PGFTU did not make the call to sever ties, it was the BDS campaign. The PGFTU has an agreement with Histadrut and has not abandoned that agreement.

David Kirk, Leeds

Hacking: the press view



The more liberal and broadsheet press have, understandably, and in the case of the *Guardian* deservedly, had a good time with the unfolding crisis around News International.

It was Nick Davies of the *Guardian* who originally painstakingly uncovered the hacking phenomenon. The *Independent* too saw its more high-minded approach to journalism vindicated. But the more interesting aspect of press coverage of the affair has been the response of the remaining Murdoch papers and the right-wing press in general.

For the first week or so the *Sun* ignored the biggest story in the country. By last week that became so absurd they decided to lead their coverage with the story of Murdoch's apology to the family of Milly Dowler. They were particularly keen to quote the Dowlers' solicitor Mark Lewis who said "He [Murdoch] apologised many times. I don't think anybody could have held their head in their hands so many times..." So Rupert's regret was heartfelt and sincere, right?

The *Sun* were also keen to ensure their readers knew about the major adverts placed in every other paper apologising for the activities of their parent company. And that the multi-billion pound corporation had to pay thousands of pounds for these adverts — does their penance know no bounds?

Still there were hints already of the old combative News International style. The *Sun* does not yet have the confidence to openly challenge the holding of a full public enquiry on the hacking scandal. They did, however, run a story on 15 July informing us that "the bill for the public inquiry on phone hacking could run into tens of millions of pounds". They compared it already to the very long-running and expensive Bloody Sunday inquiry.

This is not a beast that is likely to change its behaviour in any meaningful way. It has now been widely reported that when Ed Miliband publicly called for Rebekah Brooks resignation his aides were contacted by NI to be told "now that you have made it personal for Rebekah we will make it personal for you". Just a few days later, when Brooks was arrested, Murdoch's goons perhaps realised that the days

Rupert Murdoch after meeting the Dowler family

when that kind of threat worked were over.

The rest of the right-wing press had a dilemma. It's one thing to enjoy the fall of your major rival, it's quite another to allow the backlash against the whole tabloid method and culture to develop without any effective resistance.

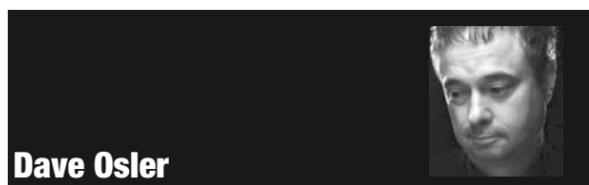
Taking advantage of the new market opportunity both the *Mail* and *Express* on 17 July offered readers a chance to buy their toxic rags for "only £1". In the *Mail* Peter Hitchens was happy to stick a small boot into "the Murdoch press", but only to clear his throat before his main argument. "Since we are to have a Judicial Inquiry into the wicked Press", he intoned, "shouldn't we also have one into wicked politicians?"

Concerned about the possible greater regulation of the tabloid press Hitchens penned a semi-anarchist rant about all the evil things government does: break up families, hold increasing numbers of trials in secret, sell information about us to outsiders, record our emails, spy on our rubbish bins and use airport X-ray machines "to peer sneakily at our naked bodies". He even comes over all left-wing, reminding us that "newspapers don't waterboard people, or bundle them off to clandestine prisons. Newspapers don't bomb Belgrade or Baghdad or Tripoli, or invade Afghanistan".

News International's prestige British paper prepared the same case with more nuance. The *Sunday Times* comment was: "Hopefully a more responsible press will emerge from the recent scandal. But the media and politicians will always have a close relationship of mutual interest and hostility".

And what a perfect description of the normal state of affairs between government and the press that is. That translates as "our bosses and you have mutual interests. But just in case you ever have the audacity to forget this we are always prepared to unleash our hostility. And you wouldn't like that to happen now, would you?"

Murdoch's power



Dave Osler

If there is a qualitative difference between having a dominant interest in BSkyB and outright ownership of the satellite broadcaster, it pretty much escapes me. But Rupert Murdoch has decided that outright ownership is what he wants, and, until a few days ago, that was exactly what it looked like he was going to get.

This is a man who has for decades played a role in British politics that illustrates perfectly the radical left critique of parliamentary democracy. To rewrite an old anarchist slogan: whoever you vote for, News International gets in.

Not only does the company have a perceived ability to make or break governments. In addition, Murdoch's family and his senior executives go to expensive lengths to build personal friendships with top politicians. That leaves a small clique effectively able to write the laws under which its interests operate.

Coverage of the so-called Chipping Norton Set suggests that little has changed since the hey-day of the Cliveden Set under Macmillan. Need something sorted? Bring it up next time Dave and Sam pop round for supper. Welcome to the world of face-to-face class politics, complete with good food and a bottle or two of jolly appreciable claret.

Nor does Murdoch influence stop at such quotidian questions as media ownership restrictions. Although only those present at the relevant meetings between him and Tony Blair will ever know for sure, it is widely believed that one reason Britain did not join the euro is that a certain Australian-born US citizen told the prime minister that his newspapers would campaign against the proposal if it ever went to a referendum.

That this proved the correct call is not the point here.

Prime ministers are supposed to take such decisions on the basis of what is best for the economy, not at the behest of a man who is neither an individual nor a corporate taxpayer in this country, and who would not be directly affected one way or the other by the outcome.

When News Corp last year tabled a £8.2bn offer for the BSkyB shares it does not already own, most Conservative politicians would happily have let it go through on the nod, despite the round robin from the *Daily Mail*, the *Guardian*, the BBC and others, decrying the implications for media pluralism.

Although Vince Cable insisted that the bid be referred to OfCom, shall we just observe that the regulator does not have a reputation for undue stridency. There was every expectation that the deal would happen.

That was before the *News of the World* hacking revelations. The growing backlash from this scandal meant that Murdoch was forced to back down, marking his first significant setback in this country since he was refused permission to buy Manchester United in 1999. But don't forget that Murdoch retains de facto control, whatever happens.

As a result, the politics of media ownership are back in play for the first time in two decades, and, given the changes in the media landscape since then, it probably would not hurt for the left to give that matter some fresh thought.

Labour Party policy under Kinnock was to seek to place tight caps on the proportion of aggregate national newspaper circulation that one group could control, and restrict cross-ownership of print and broadcast media. But is even that enough?

And while we are on the subject, we should also be asking how it is that we have been left with no widely read democratic socialist publications whatsoever? Or even a high profile website?

The real challenge will be not to put a temporary check on Murdoch's avarice in this one instance, but to cut down his power to the extent that it is no longer an absolute check on political vision.

Take the media from the billionaires!

According to the former commander of the Flying Squad, John O'Connor, the close personal and corrupt financial bonds between senior policemen and the Murdoch organisation that are now being exposed were forged in the heat of the Battle of Wapping in 1986.

There, every day for months, police smashed through picket lines of sacked printers and the labour movement activists who stood side by side with them.

In a drive to break the power of the print unions in Fleet Street, the centre of newspaper publishing, Murdoch had moved his newspaper operation out to Wapping, sacked hundreds of printworkers, and replaced them with a newly-recruited scab workforce.

Day after day, pickets fought Murdoch's scab-herding police shock-troops. It was a repetition on a smaller scale of what had been done against the miners in the 1984-5 strike. Many pickets were injured.

That fact puts the scandal now ripping through the press, the police, and the political establishment into perspective.

The Murdoch press and (later) TV was the counterpart in the media, on the level of social propaganda, to the Tory offensive in the 1970s and 1980s.

As often with gangsters called in to help, the Murdochs came to lord it over the political establishment that had been glad of their support.

The Murdochs terrorised politicians and private citizens alike with the threat of character and career assassination. They conducted press vendettas against those who crossed them. They used blackmail and the threat of blackmail to keep public figures and political leaders in line.

Controlling 30 or 40% of the British press, they ignored the law and when they thought that necessary, broke it. They did that for decades, with impunity.

FEAR

They became so powerful that they could shape government policy and the policy of the opposition. Prime ministers fawned on them, happy for a nod of approval or restraint in the Murdoch press's disapproval of them.

They helped corrupt, vulgarise, and debase public life. They functioned in effect as a powerful political party above the other parties. They made ideological and political war on anything left of centre or even just centre.

They did not do it by argument, but by ridicule, scandal-mongering, and systematic misrepresentation. In the 1980s, for example, they created the "loony left", using or inventing unrepresentative bits of silliness, to prevent discussion of real left-wing ideas.

Politicians resented the power of the Murdoch press, but mainstream politicians never dared take on Murdoch. To do that, they rightly calculated, was to sustain terrible immediate blows to career and hope of office.

The paralysing fear and careerist gutlessness of the politicians in turn made the reign of Murdoch possible and, for long, invulnerable.

Many of the things that are now being focused on have long been known. In 2003 Rebekah Brooks admitted before a House of Commons committee of inquiry that her organisation had paid the police for information.

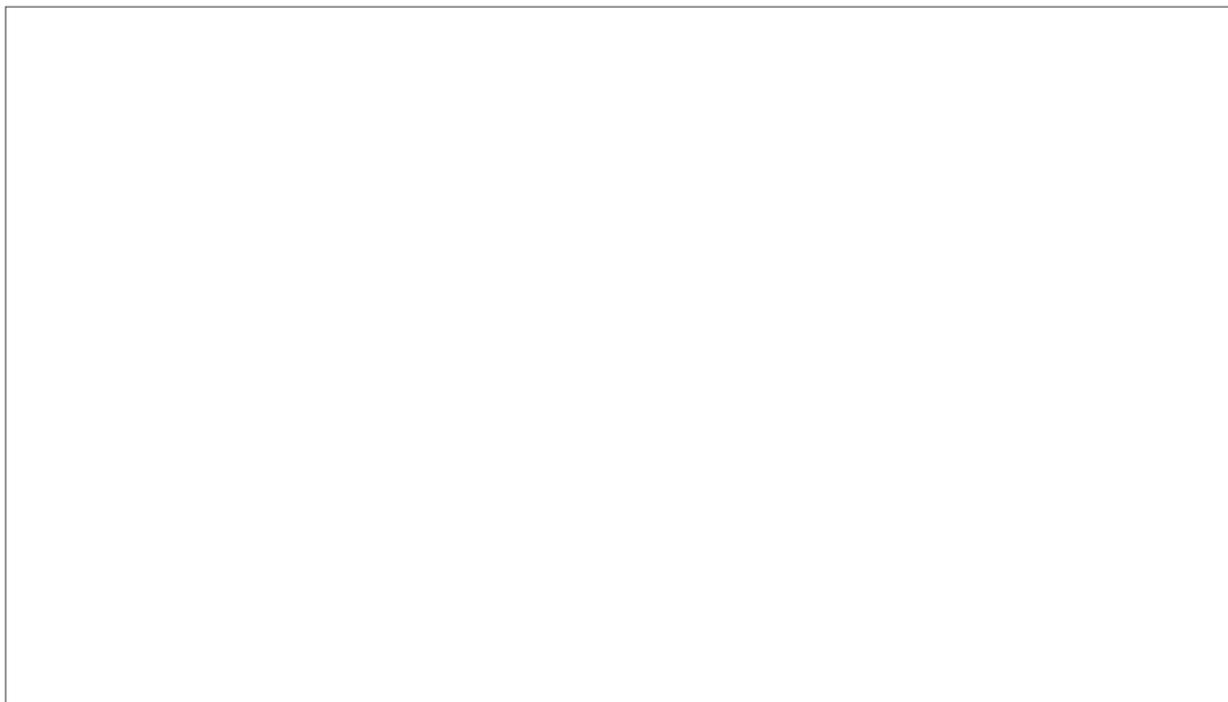
Four years ago a private detective, Glenn Mulcaire, and the News of the World royal editor, Clive Goodman, were jailed for tapping phones. Nobody who followed the News of the World "exposures" and "exclusives" had good reason not to understand that illegal methods had been used to get the information.

It was not revolt against any of those things that finally blew the top off the Murdoch media empire. It was the revelation that the *News of the World* had hacked into the phone of a murdered child, Milly Dowler; that they had erased messages and thus for a while given the child's family false hope that she was still alive.

That was grotesque, to be sure, but, even so, only a very small part of the damage, social, political, and intellectual, that the Murdoch organisation had done.

A month ago the Murdochs held their annual summer garden party, at which the whole Establishment, including the Prime Minister and the other main party leaders came to pay respect as his beneficiaries come to the mafia boss in the film *The Godfather*. Reports don't say whether or not someone remembered to play the tune played in *The Godfather's* garden party, "Mr Wonderful".

But if someone had started to sing that to Rupert Murdoch, few there, and maybe no-one there, would have had



Still pulling the strings?

the guts to refuse to join in!

Now their real feelings are coming out as politicians fall over themselves in their haste to vent their spleen at Murdoch. And if that's how such "big" people felt, what about the rest of us?

Gordon Brown went to the House of Commons to voice his volcanic indignation against the Murdoch press for having printed details about his infant son's health. When prime minister, he felt he had no option but to smile and bow to the tyrant.

And it hasn't been just corrupt policemen and venal, gutless career politicians. The Murdochs got their hooks into segments of the left, too. Ken Livingstone, one of their main targets in the 1980s witch-hunt against the "loony left", was in the 1990s a highly-paid columnist on Murdoch's *Sun*, where, among other things, he criticised the official Labour election campaign in 1992 for proposing tax rises.

The *Guardian* did splendid work campaigning against the illegal activities of the Murdoch organisation. Its editor, Alan Rusbridger, commenting on the storm in which the Murdochs are caught up in, compared the public response to the revelations about Milly Dowler to the moment in a Bucharest square in 1989 when the crowd — first one person, then a few, then many more — began to boo the Stalinist dictator Ceausescu, who fell from power soon afterwards.

BASIS OF POWER

This extraordinary but accurate comparison begs questions which Rusbridger did not tackle. For Ceausescu emerged as dictator out of the murderous Stalinist state machine set up after World War Two by the Russian occupying army.

His power had depended on police, army, jails, torture chambers, firing squads — on physical repression and the pervasive threat of it and airtight censorship. And the power of the Murdochs? It depended on fear all through the establishment, and the belief that if people could "get in" with the Murdochs they could gain great advantages.

More than that: the power of money was and is the power behind the power that Murdoch exercised. Heir to a rich father, Rupert Murdoch built a powerful commercial sub-state within the state, more powerful than elected governments.

In varying ways and degrees that is what all the owners and controllers of the economic giants do.

Appearing before the House of Commons inquiry, as we go to press on 19 July, Rupert Murdoch took the line of monarchs immemorial when forced to admit to doing wrong. He was "badly advised" by underlings. He didn't know. They never told him. His power was abused by others.

What the Murdoch scandal does is bring under public magnification and scrutiny the nature of bourgeois power, the relations of such power to bourgeois politics, their evisceration of bourgeois democracy on a day-to-day and year-

to-year basis.

But bourgeois democracy is now vindicated? The Establishment is in the process of calling Murdoch to account? Is it?

Even if Murdoch is cut down; deprived of what he dearly wanted — full ownership of BSkyB, which the politicians would have let him have if the Dowler scandal had not broken out; forced in the USA (where the Murdoch operation is being investigated by the FBI) and in Britain to break up his empire — even then, nothing fundamental will be changed.

As in the Egyptian revolution of spring 2011, where the dictator fell but the power remained where it always was, with the armed forces, so also, no matter what happens to the Murdoch empire and the Murdoch family, private ownership of the media and of the economy in which we all live will continue.

Even if Murdoch's 30 or 40% of Britain's press is prised from him, private ownership of the press will continue, as will its employment in the interests of the bourgeoisie.

In the last reckoning the police will still serve bourgeois law and be hired thugs for Murdoch and other Murdochs in situations like Wapping.

The scandals now unfolding are like a hidden network of wires behind plaster which, exposed by the Milly Dowler case to vigorous investigation, are being pulled on, shattering the plaster. Hidden connections are being exposed, showing the links of the Murdoch press (but surely not only the Murdoch press) to career criminals, politicians, and corrupt policemen.

The wires are still being yanked on, and there is no knowing where it will lead. Cameron is implicated — the same Cameron who a few months ago moved Lib-Dem minister Vince Cable sideways in his government because Cable had identified himself as an enemy of the Murdoch empire. Boris Johnson is too.

Labour leader Ed Miliband has gone on an offensive but a very small one — brave when it was clear that being brave against Murdoch carried little or no immediate risk.

The unions should demand that the Labour Party mount a proper offensive, a creative and not just an opportunistic and reactive offensive, and an offensive not just against the Murdochs but against private ownership of the media on which the health or lack of it in the body politic depends.

They should press Miliband to demand a general election now. The Tories' present one-point lead over Labour in the polls would mean little in a general election campaign.

A serious labour movement opposition would launch a crusade to drive the Tories and the Lib Dems from office, on a programme which would include sorting out the media once and for all by taking it out of the hands of the billionaires and into public ownership, under a system where the right of reply and response and public discussion was guaranteed.

Free the press from rule by the rich

Lenin, a leader of the Russian workers' revolution in October 1917, wrote this article in September 1917 when plans were being discussed for organising Russia's first-ever Constituent Assembly elections.

The publication of a newspaper is a big and profitable capitalist undertaking in which the rich invest millions upon millions of rubles.

"Freedom of the press" in bourgeois society means freedom for the rich systematically, unremittingly, daily, in millions of copies, to deceive, corrupt and fool the exploited and oppressed mass of the people, the poor.

The question is whether and how this crying evil can be fought.

First of all, there is a very simple, good and lawful means: a state monopoly on private press advertising.

Private advertisements yield a tremendous income, in fact the principal income, to the capitalist publishers. This is how bourgeois papers hold sway, how they get rich, and how they deal in poison for the people all over the world.

In Europe there are newspapers which have a circulation as large as one-third the number of inhabitants of the town and are delivered free to every home, and yet yield their owners a sizable income. These papers live by advertisements paid by private people, while the free delivery of the paper to every home ensures the best circulation of the advertisements.

Then why cannot democrats who call themselves revolutionary carry out a measure like declaring private press advertising a state monopoly, or banning advertisements anywhere outside the newspapers published by the Soviets in the provincial towns and cities and by the central Soviet in Petrograd for the whole of Russia? Why must "revolutionary" democrats tolerate such a thing as the enrichment, through private advertising, of rich men, and spreaders of lies and slander against the Soviets?

Such a measure would be absolutely just. It would greatly benefit both those who published private advertisements and the whole people, particularly the most oppressed and ignorant class, the peasants, who would be able to have Soviet papers, with supplements for the peasants, at a very low price or even free of charge.

Why not do that? Only because private property and hereditary rights (to profits from advertising) are sacred to the capitalist gentlemen. But how can anyone calling himself a revolutionary democrat in the twentieth century, in the second Russian revolution, recognise such rights as "sacred"?!

Some may say it would mean infringing freedom of the press.

That is not true. It would mean extending and restoring freedom of the press, for freedom of the press means that all opinions of all citizens may be freely published.

What do we have now? Now, the rich alone have this monopoly, and also the big parties. Yet if large Soviet newspapers were to be published, with all advertisements, it would be perfectly feasible to guarantee the expression of

their opinion to a much greater number of citizens — say to every group having collected a certain number of signatures. Freedom of the press would in practice become much more democratic, would become incomparably more complete as a result.

But some may ask: where would we get printing presses and newsprint?

There we have it! The issue is not "freedom of the press" but the exploiters' sacrosanct ownership of the printing presses and stocks of newsprint they have seized!

Just why should we workers and peasants recognise that sacred right? How is that "right" to publish false information better than the "right" to own serfs?

State power in the shape of the Soviets takes all the printing presses and all the newsprint and distributes them equitably.

Then, two months before the Constituent Assembly, we could really help the peasants by ensuring the delivery to every village of half a dozen pamphlets (or newspaper issues, or special supplements) in millions of copies from every big party.

That would truly be a "revolutionary democratic" preparation for the elections to the Constituent Assembly; it would be aid to the countryside on the part of the advanced workers and soldiers. It would be state aid to the people's enlightenment, and not to their stultification and deception; it would be real freedom of the press for all, and not for the rich.

It would be a break with that accursed, slavish past which compels us to suffer the usurpation by the rich of the great cause of informing and teaching the peasants.

• Abridged from <http://alturl.com/k99oz>

The right to get distributed

One factor in the domination of the British newspaper industry by billionaires is that it is difficult for smaller newspapers — such as *Solidarity* — to get distributed.

In Britain, newspaper and magazine distribution is dominated by two big corporations, Smiths News and Menzies Distribution. They are reluctant to distribute anything unorthodox or radical. Smiths refused to distribute *Private Eye* until well into the 1970s, and does not distribute any left-wing publication.

In France, the dominant distribution network, Presstalis (formerly NMPP), is obliged by a 1947 law to distribute all newspapers, including the left-wing ones.

Smiths and Menzies should be nationalised and replaced by a public-service distribution network obliged to distribute all publications.

The socialist capitalist

Questions and answers on the socialist attitude to the press

The *News of the World* has abused its powers, but fundamentally we have a free press, don't we?

No. In Britain — as opposed to say Cuba or Saudi Arabia — the media is largely free from dictatorial state control. This is worth having, and was won by the organised working class over many decades of struggle. It means there is some diversity of opinion even in the mainstream press, and also that we can publish newspapers like *Solidarity*. We should defend that. But it is freedom of the press primarily for the very rich, for individuals and corporations rich enough to media resources like TV stations, newspapers and large-scale printing presses.

As Lenin put it in 1917, when the revolutionary workers' government he led was attempting to establish a policy for reshaping the press in line with working-class and popular interests: "For the bourgeoisie, freedom of the press meant freedom for the rich to publish and for the capitalists to control the newspapers, a practice which in all countries, including even the freest, produced a corrupt press."

In today's capitalist world, we have "freedom of the press" in the same sense we have "democracy". It is not purely a sham, or meaningless for the working class. But it is freedom and democracy curtailed and distorted by capitalist limits, denying real voice and control to the vast majority of the people.

So we should limit media monopolies? One man, one newspaper?

Any curbing of Murdoch is welcome. It is good that News Corp will not be able to acquire the rest of BSkyB. But even "one person, one newspaper" would not deal with the basic domination of the media by big capitalists. If Murdoch's empire is broken up, we will have more numerous smaller tyrants, not democracy.

So what then?

Public ownership of all large-scale media resources and capital (printing presses, newspaper and TV offices, broadcasting technology, distribution networks, etc) and their allocation for use by different organisations and groups according to support in the population.

How is that different from a state-controlled media?

It's completely different. Advocating public ownership of something does not necessarily mean you want it controlled by the government.

In the 19th century, when most education was private, Karl Marx advocated a universal system of state schools. But he demanded that "government and church should be equally excluded from any influence on the school", commenting that, in fact, the capitalist state "has need of a very stern education by the people".

Allocating media resources to different groups dependent on strength of popular support would allow a flowering of media diversity far greater than what exists today. There should be strict legal guarantees of pluralism and minority rights to underpin this.

Lenin again:

"Some may say it would mean infringing freedom of the press.

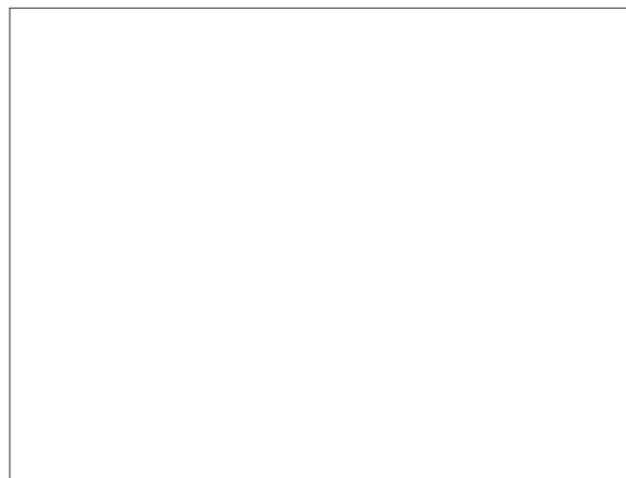
"That is not true. It would mean extending and restoring freedom of the press, for freedom of the press means that all opinions of all citizens may be freely published... Freedom of the press would in practice become much more democratic, would become incomparably more complete as a result."

Even the state-owned media we have now — the BBC TV and radio channels — are very far from government mouth-

Read a report of a recent NUJ meeting to discuss the Murdoch scandal at

<http://www.workersliberty.org/node/17124/edit>

Best alternative to the “free press”



pieces churning out uniform, obedient, dull propaganda. And that is despite being run in a bureaucratic and market-driven way. We need to fight for the democratisation of public broadcasting too, but even today's BBC is evidence that public ownership need not mean authoritarian state control.

How would all this be decided?

We are a long way from winning a workers' government which could put this sort of set up into effect. The details would have to be worked out in the course of the struggle. But it would not be difficult to have some sort of public media commission to establish and oversee the framework for access to and allocation of resources. There could be various mechanisms for judging popular support, from membership figures to referenda to collecting signatures. It would have to be a continuous process.

In Russia in 1917, Lenin advocated that priority go first to the various soviets, the workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils; then to large political parties; and then to smaller parties and any groups of citizens able to collect a given amount of signatures (he suggested 10,000).

What about advertising?

If, say, the *Daily Telegraph* has enough support to get the resources it needs to continue publishing a similar paper, fine. Freedom cannot just mean freedom for those a workers' government approves of. It has to include freedom for opponents. But there is no reason why a socialist society should tolerate the system of private advertising, which is another mechanism which distorts the media in the direction of the

rich and powerful. It has also contributed to the deterioration of journalistic standards — look at the free newspapers.

There should be state control of commercial advertising in all media.

Media workers' organisation and power will play a crucial role in any transition to a genuinely democratic media system in a socialist society.

In May 1984, in the middle of the miners' strike, the *Sun* tried to print a front page picture of Arthur Scargill with his hand in the air and the headline “Mine führer”, implying some sort of affinity with fascism. The printers refused to print this; in the end the *Sun* ran with the headline “Members of all the *Sun* production chapels refused to handle the Arthur Scargill picture and major headline on our lead story. The *Sun* has decided, reluctantly, to print the paper without either”.

Great days! The News International bosses, the right-wing press and the Tories presented this as an attack on press freedom. In fact it was a working-class assertion of press freedom against the almost universal anti-NUM consensus of the capitalist press, of which the *Sun* represented the most extreme expression. (After the miners were defeated, Murdoch took on and smashed the printers' union and the NUJ.)

The destruction of the newspaper unions was intimately bound up with the development of the Murdoch empire. And the reassertion of media workers' power will be intimately bound up with the defeat of Murdoch and his like.

Ideally, when the *News of the World* closure was announced, we would have liked the paper's workers to take over its facilities and start producing a new, better paper — though in fact their organisation and consciousness were nowhere near high enough for that to happen. (We would also have advocated that the paper's resources were nationalised — as with other firms that close and lay off workers.)

Lastly, we need a flourishing labour movement press.

Believe it or not, the *Sun* is the successor of the *Daily Herald*, a one-time socialist paper that began as a print workers' strike bulletin in 1911 and from 1922 belonged to the TUC. Murdoch bought it in 1969 and created the monster we know today.

At present there is no major newspaper that will even support strikes. From the *Sun* to the *Guardian*, they all take the bosses' side or dither. Why doesn't the labour movement establish its own, quality, popular daily paper? (We don't mean the shoddy, Stalinist *Morning Star*.)

The answer is conservatism and timidity. We should fight for this, and meanwhile do everything we can to strengthen, promote and win a wider circulation for socialist papers such as *Solidarity*.

Self-regulation of the press?

By Mark Osborn

In October 1992 the *Independent on Sunday* (IoS) published a smear article by its then political editor Stephen Castle suggesting without evidence that sympathisers of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and other leftists had tried to rig ballots (in Sheffield) for the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party.

We wrote a letter stating that the claim was nonsense; we oppose rigging elections. Our letter was printed, but edited in such a way that it made little sense.

The cheating charge was taken up by other papers, including the local *Sheffield Star*.

Socialist Organiser, our paper at the time, had been banned by the Labour Party in 1990. Those seen selling it could be expelled. We were particularly strong in Sheffield where members were kicked out from the local parties. It was in the interest of those looking for a purge to make and circulate these allegations.

The AWL was not rich enough to sue Stephen Castle for libel. We campaigned to clear our name but we also looked

for other avenues to make our case. We took the issue to the Press Complaints Commission.

As part of making our case to the PCC I talked to Stephen Castle on the phone. He was whiney and squirming. “What do you want from me?” he asked (some honesty perhaps?).

I taped our conversation where he admitted that he had no evidence for the charge against us. He could not tell me the name of anyone alleged to have taken part in the ballot rigging. He had no serious explanation for why he had written the article in the first place.

I sent a copy of the tape and a transcript (in case they were too lazy to listen) to the PCC. Surely we had nailed Castle?

But the PCC thought otherwise. They said that we'd had our letter printed and that was the end of the matter.

At the time the PCC were finding for less than 1% of all complainants. I had the impression that unless a paper accused the Queen Mother of having sex with corgi dogs (without photographic evidence), the PCC would let the press off.

Capitalist “self-regulation” of the press is a joke. It allows a veneer of “responsibility” to cloak all sorts of nonsense and bad behaviour by the press bosses.

Why the British press is the worst in the world

By Martin Thomas

Britain's newspapers are probably the worst in the world, aside from the state-controlled newspapers under dictatorships, which are bad for different reasons.

Some British newspapers, such as the *Financial Times* or the *Guardian*, are no worse than their equivalents in other countries; but Britain's redtops are foul in a way rare elsewhere, even in countries where Rupert Murdoch owns many newspapers.

This result is a triumph of capitalist market forces. It happens because Britain's redtops have an unusually favorable marketplace.

Britain has one of the densest newspaper markets in the world. It has a large concentrated population and (except for Scotland) a single newspaper market.

Because of an early concentration of the population in cities, Britain has also, historically, had a relative high ratio of newspaper readership to population.

Most large-population countries have regionalised newspaper markets. For example, the top-selling paper in France is *Ouest-France* [“West France”], published in Rennes, not Paris. The top-selling paper in Germany (after *Bild*, on which more later) is *Süddeutsche Zeitung* [“South German Newspaper”], published in Munich, not Berlin.

The USA's top-selling paper is the *Wall Street Journal*, and India's is the *Times of India*: deliberately “up-market” newspapers selling at a high cover price to people who want serious business news, while mass-market circulation in those countries is of local newspapers.

Thus the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* are almost the whole world's top-selling newspapers. They are outsold only by some Japanese newspapers; some state-circulated Chinese papers; the *Times of India*; and Germany's *Bild*, possibly the only other newspaper in the world as foul as Britain's redtops.

On the face of it, the high sales should improve the press. Producing well-researched, well-written articles costs money. If papers can spread the cost over three million readers rather than a few, then they should be able to provide more well-researched, well-written articles.

And so they do — if “research” is taken to mean phone-hacking and bribery, and “well-written” is taken to mean crafting stories for maximum gossipy sensation!

In theory, a dense market could go either of two ways: one defined by a “drive to the top”, with newspapers competing to outdo each in imaginatively-researched, thoughtful articles for attentive readers; and another defined by the “drive to the bottom” with papers competing to be bought “for a laugh” by inattentive readers, maybe starved of real gossip in their everyday lives, and entertained by having the world's affairs presented to them in faux-intimacy.

The “drive to the bottom” is easier, and spirals into a vicious circle: the papers debase the markets and the markets debase the papers.

The rise of radio, TV, web, and freesheet news has consolidated the vicious circle. These media cannot provide the depth of good print journalism. Equally, freesheets cannot provide the sensationalist fake-gossip of papers like the *Sun* (because it's too expensive), and TV news has no special motive to try (because channels can attract audience by the soaps, game-shows, and “reality-TV” stuff into which their news broadcasts slot).

They all provide basic news, on the level of reshapes of the press releases and newsagency dispatches that come into their offices. The redtops can assume their readers get their news elsewhere, and focus on getting themselves bought “for a laugh”.

The driven-to-the-bottom newspaper market debases public discourse, by “drowning out” intelligent public debate. It does not necessarily mean newspapers rigorously pushing a conservative “line” for their right-wing billionaire owners: if it serves circulation, the redtops will publish sensationalist, gossipy attacks on the rich and powerful. But the market also gives the owners huge scope to flatter and nurture whatever popular prejudices they find congenial.

The capitalist market is not a democratic basis for organising the media.

When Murdoch smashed the unions

Cathy Nugent reviews *Bad News: The Wapping Dispute*, by John Lang and Graham Dodkins

In 1986-7 5,500 print production workers were sacked for striking against an attempt to impose new draconian terms and conditions at Rupert Murdoch's new, then state-of-the-art, printing plant.

The story is beautifully told — with first-hand accounts recorded shortly after the dispute ended — by former *Times* librarians John Lang and Graham Dodkins. This “warts and all” account, describing the humour, commitment and comradeship of the printworkers, is a great source of political lessons.

In 1986 Murdoch, working closely with the Thatcher government, set out to smash the print unions. The story of how Murdoch did that is essential to understanding how he became a feared and feted establishment figure he was.

Rupert Murdoch, the son of an Australian journalist and newspaper proprietor, used his background to strike a pose which could impress the naive. The leader of the SOGAT print union, Brenda Dean, was one such fool. During the strike Dean secretly meets Murdoch in his Beverly Hills home. Over barbecued lamb chops she came to the conclusion that “printing ink is clearly in his [Murdoch's] blood” and “all he wanted to do was produce newspapers”. But there is more ice than ink in Murdoch's blood. It is not his love of newspapers, but of capitalist accumulation, that dictates his actions.

Murdoch began his business in the UK with the acquisition of the *News of the World* in 1968, followed by the *Sun* (1969), then the *Times* and *Sunday Times* (1981). Grateful for Murdoch's support, the Tories declined to refer the *Times* deal to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission even though Murdoch would have a big chunk of the UK's national press.

Immediately the print unions got a foretaste of what Murdoch was about. He pushed through major staffing cuts and a wage freeze at the *Times/Sunday Times*. A year later Murdoch went for further redundancies among clerical staff.

At the time of the Wapping dispute there were two main print unions, the National Graphical Association (NGA) and the Society of Graphical and Allied Trades (SOGAT).

Before and during the strike printers in Fleet Street, then the base of the national press, were vilified as “overpaid”. When made by other print workers the complaint was the frustration of *underpaid* workers. When made by the bosses the complaint was hypocrisy. During the post-war boom newspapers were happy to see wages rise — it was a way of putting pressure on each other as competitors.

The print unions in Fleet Street had established a degree of workers' control. They won and maintained a “closed shop” (100% unionised labour in production areas). They were confident enough (and often displaying more political consciousness than the journalists who wrote the newspapers) to stop the newspapers in support of other workers. During the miners' strike the *Sun's* printworkers successfully stopped the publication of a front page with the headline “Mine Führer” and a picture of miners' leader Arthur Scargill ostensibly giving a Nazi salute (he was waving to someone).

EDDIE SHAH

Murdoch was not the first to attack the print unions. In 1983 newspaper entrepreneur Eddie Shah decided to expand from his Stockport base into Bury and Warrington, bypassing the union at his company, the NGA, and recruiting non-union labour. After NGA members walked out in Stockport they were sacked.

Solidarity (secondary) picketing organised by the NGA was declared illegal under new Tory anti-union legislation. Mass picketing followed, leading to the union being fined. NGA members in London's Fleet Street walked out. On 29 November a mass picket was broken up by riot police.

After dithering, the TUC decided not to back the NGA and the workers were defeated. Shah made a single-union agreement with Eric Hammond of the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union (EETPU). The same pattern would be repeated at Wapping.

For Murdoch, borrowing heavily to expand his American business, replacing outdated technology and increasing profits in his UK Fleet Street operations was imperative. He applied deceit and cunning and it worked: the print union leaders were at best naive and at worse downright stupid.

Under capitalism, workers are always vulnerable to their labour being replaced by the introduction of more efficient machines, but it is not inevitable that they will be “thrown on the scrap heap” and will not benefit from labour-saving technology. The way to ensure that technology benefits workers is to fight for such things as a shorter working week with no loss of pay.

Murdoch's plan from the start was to move all his titles

Clashing with police. Photo: Andrew Wiard (Report)

and operations to Wapping, to derecognise the unions in the process and sack all the workers if they showed any resistance. While Wapping was being built and equipped Murdoch invented an entirely fictitious plan to produce a new paper, the *London Post*, at the plant (the title never materialised). In September 1985 he told the unions that he would not negotiate on terms and conditions at Wapping for his older titles until an agreement was reached on terms for the *London Post*.

But in September 1985 news broke (via *Socialist Worker*) that with the help of the EETPU in Southampton News International was recruiting scab labour to work at Wapping.

Murdoch's terms and conditions for the fictitious *London Post* were provocative in the extreme: no union recognition; no “closed shop”; complete flexibility of working; new technology to be introduced at anytime followed by job cuts; the company's right to manage.

The union leaders carried on negotiating even though it was now clear that Murdoch was out to smash the unions and employ scab labour at Wapping.

The TUC told the EETPU not to sign any single-union deal with Murdoch, but as that was after the strike had started and the scab workforce had been crossing the picket line its “insistence” was worthless! The EETPU was not expelled from the TUC until a year after the end of the strike and over another single union deal. (It is worth noting that the EETPU was never recognised at Wapping or at Murdoch's new Scottish plant, Kinning Park in Glasgow.)

In January 1986 a ballot was held by NGA and SOGAT, returning big majorities for strike action.

On 23 January *Sun* journalists, bribed with £2,000 per head, voted by 100 to 8 to transfer to Wapping. *Times* and *Sunday Times* journalists would follow. If more than a handful of “refusenik” journalists had come out in solidarity things might have gone differently. Journalists eventually lost union recognition at the Murdoch press.

CRAFT DIVISIONS

Lang and Dodkins describe the relationships between journalists and clerical/production workers:

“Traditionally the journalists saw the printers' practices as an obstacle to getting their stories out and there was a great deal of jealousy because the printers were earning as much, if not more, than they were earning themselves. Their attitude of superiority... was something that many clerical workers experienced in their day to day contact with journalists.”

At 6.40pm on Friday 24 January the strike began. Twenty minutes later, as striking staff were escorted off the Fleet Street premises, they were given a letter saying “Your employment has ended, your P45 and any money due will follow shortly.”

The unions hoped that Murdoch would not be able to produce his newspapers; but that hope now seems incredibly naive. Everything was ready to roll at Wapping and the high-walled, barbed wire surrounded plant was always going to be difficult to picket. Crucially, drivers employed by TNT were used to transport printed papers, and they were told by their union the TGWU, as it faced a High Court injunction against secondary action, to cross the picket line.

Lang and Dodkins detail all aspects of the strike organisation, the strengths and the weaknesses.

On the one hand there was a strike HQ which became the base for individual activists to get involved, and encouraged total commitment.

On the other hand the rank and file had little or no control over negotiations. Whenever negotiations took place very little information got through to members. The idea of a strike committee was not discussed in SOGAT until Septem-

ber, was opposed by middle ranking officials, and voted against.

The far left, trade unionists and Labour Party members turned out in force for the mass Wednesday and Saturday night pickets at Wapping as well as specially organised marches during the year. Support groups were set up.

POLICE VIOLENCE

As in the 1984-85 miners' strike — and so many other important class struggles before — the police were mobilised to break the printworkers, and they deployed all their weapons.

Riot police. Mounted police. Arbitrary arrests. Trumped up charges — Communist Party member Mick Hicks was jailed for 16 months for allegedly pushing a megaphone into the face of a cop. Truncheons wielded. Such was their overwhelming presence that the Wapping area became a mini-police state.

Residents were often denied access to their own streets and were harassed. But Wapping residents organised solidarity and protests about the police behaviour. One young man, a resident of the area, Michael Delaney was killed by a speeding TNT lorry. Despite a coroner jury's verdict of unlawful killing no action was taken against either TNT or the lorry driver.

But the pickets were also a place for the left and labour movement to congregate and, as in any major class struggle, to discuss political ideas.

After one violent confrontation with the police in May the then leader of the Labour Party Neil Kinnock described those who had reacted to police action — that is, out of control rampaging by the police — as outcasts. But that was Kinnock's standard response to any class struggle. He had done the same the same during the miners' strike: side with the bosses, scab on the people who need to defend themselves.

In March SOGAT's assets were sequestered and the union was fined £25,000 for instructing its members in wholesale distribution not to handle Murdoch's newspapers. From then on Brenda Dean focused on doing what she had to do to get back control of the funds — i.e. selling out the dispute. By April Dean and Tony Dubbins of the NGA were proposing to set up a National Joint Council at Wapping to replace union recognition for the individual unions. Later Dean offered to accept 2,000 redundancies.

In April Murdoch made the strikers a offer — via Channel Four News. “Compensation” would be paid (i.e. he had no intention of reinstating the workers). And Murdoch would also give the old *Times* newspaper building in Gray's Inn Road to the labour movement... so that they could produce their own newspaper. The idea that such a “gift” might be accepted from a man who had cynically plotted and planned to throw workers on the dole and had demonstrated such hostility to the labour movement is incredible. Nonetheless SOGAT commissioned a feasibility study into the proposal!

Mass picketing at Wapping was an inconvenience, and sometimes more than that, to Murdoch. But what was really needed was escalation of the industrial action — by other print workers on other newspapers. Union members in democratic decision-making meetings called for such an escalation. But it did not happen. Instead, the union relied on a completely ineffective boycott campaign. Dean felt increasing hostility from rank and file union members.

By autumn 1986 the strike was weakening. A vote against another humiliating offer was close. As the strike weakened the union leadership garnered more and more control over the direction of the strike and limited the action outside Wapping.

In October when Murdoch sent individual “pay off” offers to strikers, the unions, slow to respond, did not stop many individuals from taking the money.

In January Brenda Dean agreed to a deal with News International. In return for “compensation” already voted against, the company would not take further action in the courts against SOGAT. The national executive called off the strike. The NGA was forced to follow. Despite Dean's instruction to immediately cease action outside Wapping, 3,000 turned up to the final Saturday picket.

On 9 February all the print chapels met. With most present abstaining, a decision to end the strike was made.

***Bad News* reminds us just who Rupert Murdoch and his lieutenants are, what they have always stood for. They have stood not for “uncovering the truth”, but for self-serving dishonesty. Not for making the world a better place for little children, but for using people and bringing insecurity and misery into the lives of working-class families. Not for loyalty, but for screwing the workers and, if it helps them sell newspapers, screwing the rest of the world too.**

Tommy Sheridan: not the only sinner

Peter Burton reviews *Downfall* by Alan McCombes

Alan McCombes describes Tommy Sheridan as his “closest political companion for 20 years”.

He met Sheridan as a young recruit to Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party) in the mid-1980s, and worked with him in the poll tax agitation in Scotland (1989-90) which made Sheridan famous.

With the majority of Militant/SP, McCombes and Sheridan quit the Labour Party in the early 1990s, setting up Scottish Militant Labour in 1992, the Scottish Socialist Alliance in 1996, and the Scottish Socialist Party in 1998. McCombes and Sheridan split from Peter Taaffe and the SP in 2001, converting the SSP to a looser grouping.

In late 2004 McCombes and Sheridan fell out over Sheridan’s demand that the SSP back him in responding to a *News of the World* sex-scandal story by launching a libel suit (instead of just waiting for the pumped-up scandal to fade).

In August 2006 Sheridan won the libel suit, despite SSPers testifying against him, and split from the SSP, forming a new electoral front, “Solidarity Scotland” (no relation to this paper!). Then he was charged with, and in January 2011 jailed for, perjury. Meanwhile McCombes’s SSP, which for some years got 10% of the vote in Glasgow and organised maybe 3,000 members, dwindled to a small rump. “Solidarity Scotland” never really took off.

“The record has to be set straight”, writes McCombes, “and not by a detached journalist but by a central participant in the events at the heart of the story.”

In the first chapter of *Downfall*, McCombes recalls how he pushed for Sheridan to be taken on as Militant youth organiser in 1986. He was impressed by “his raw talent as an orator and his pulsating energy”. But as early as page 4 McCombes is being wise after the event. Sheridan was a “consummate media performer”, but “would never obtain the intellectual breadth or depth of”... Jim Sillars and Jimmy Reid.

McCombes notes the impression made on Sheridan by Derek Hatton, the leading figure in Militant’s control of Liverpool’s Labour council in 1984-5. Militant consciously groomed good-looking, media-savvy, suave-dressing spivs. That backfired on them in Liverpool as early as 1985; and then McCombes went on repeating the same approach for two decades more in Scotland.

“If the poll tax broke Margaret Thatcher, it made Tommy Sheridan”, writes McCombes, adding snottily: “though not because of any strategic abilities but as a ‘front man’... [his] strengths were as a campaigner rather than a strategist”.

McCombes asks: “Did we create a personality cult around Sheridan”? He replies with a qualified no. “Focusing on an individual keeps things simple for the media and makes it easier to connect with people and get the political message across... But we went too far”.

You’re damned right you went too far! The SSP paper *Scottish Socialist Voice* ran a centrespread on Sheridan’s wedding in 2000. Ballot papers gave the SSP’s name as “Scottish Socialist Party — convenor: Tommy Sheridan”.

A public image was promoted of a man who not only had done good work against the poll tax, but was clean-living, physically fit, teetotal, his only weakness sun-beds. And Mc-

Tommy Sheridan at the end of his trial for perjury

Combes thinks it is just Sheridan’s fault that Sheridan came to believe in the image?

The SSP leaders drifted to a conception of socialism as a kind of Stalinism with a human face delivered to the working class from above, with Tommy Sheridan in the role of a Scottish Che Guevara.

An educated membership who had been kept informed over the years could have got the party out of the difficulties. But all attempts over the years to move in that direction failed.

All attempts to get Marxist educationals off the ground
All attempts to get a more collective, activist-based approach to industrial work

All attempts to open up the *Scottish Socialist Voice* to real debate and discussion.

Downfall falls short of the full truth. For example: did everyone really reluctantly go to Sheridan’s perjury trial, under legal compulsion? Didn’t Rosie Kane use her column in the *Record* to “demand” a perjury investigation after the defamation trial?

If George McNeilage acted completely alone in taping and selling the tape of Sheridan allegedly confessing to the *News of the World*, as the book asserts, why did SSP leaders at the SSP’s October 2006 conference work so hard to block a Workers’ Unity emergency motion which asked that the party distance itself from his actions in selling the tape to the *News of the World*?

The left has to think about its culture — the gang psychology that made Sheridan so central and, until the falling-out, so unquestionable. It has to create educated, informed, rounded activists, and a culture where no one is indispensable or elevated into a presidential role.

From the boy who lived to the man who died

Daisy Thomas reviews the final Harry Potter film “The Deathly Hallows — Part 2”

As I joined countless others at midnight in packed cinemas for the final instalment of Harry Potter, excitement was in the air.

After all, this would be the last time there’d be a midnight screening of Harry Potter, the last time people could dress up like the characters, and the last time there’d be a new Harry Potter movie.

The acting was very well done and, as always, the special effects were brilliant. The idea that Thestrals didn’t actually exist, or that flying motorbikes defied gravity, was not important. This was a fantasy world where magic was real and good battled evil.

One particular example of good acting and character heroics was Neville (played by Matthew Lewis). Neville has never really been given a great deal of attention or opportunities to prove himself before, but he made up for it this time, to high degrees of hilarity. And, while there were great casualties, it was heartening to see, once again, that good triumphed over evil and that good things can be interwoven into dark stories.

But good as it was, there were a few things that got on my wick. First, when Harry pulled himself and Voldemort into that massive hole. That was not in the book and added nothing to the story.

Second, the deaths of characters we had gotten to know (and in some cases, loved) over the years: Lupin, Tonks, Fred, and Snape, were not given the same attention as in the books (despite there being some weeping in the cinema). I assume the filmmakers glossed over them because of time.

Third, Snape’s memories were not as detailed as in the books, nor did they cover the important scenes at Hogwarts when he, Lily and James were students there (even though this had been covered earlier in the books). Young Lily did not have the green eyes that people keep raving about and comparing to Harry’s eyes. If you’re going to mention an eye colour that much, at least get someone who fits the bill.

Fourth, I was disappointed that Dumbledore’s childhood and his relationships with his family and Grindelwald were not explored. I really enjoyed that in the books.

And, finally, I didn’t think that the characters pulled off looking 19 years older (and they didn’t mention Teddy Lupin — nor the fact that Tonks had even had a kid before her untimely death). So that was also disappointing.

But those complaints aside, the movie met most of my expectations. I remember one of my friends remarking: “And that scene where Harry is talking to Dumbledore in King’s Cross station, it was exactly as I had imagined it.” That too happened with the scenes at Gringotts.

Particularly enjoyable moments included: the epic fight scenes, Neville’s heroics, McGonagall’s impressive spell-casting, Molly Weasley calling Bellatrix a bitch, and Snape’s redemption.

To sum up, it is hard to express just how Harry Potter was so good, so I’ll just leave it as: “It was great, it sucks that it’s over, and if you haven’t already seen it, go now.”

WORKERS’ LIBERTY SUMMER CAMP, WEST YORKSHIRE 19-21 AUGUST

Height Gate, nr Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, OL14

In August young members and friends of Workers’ Liberty will be taking part in a summer event in the beautiful hills of West Yorkshire. It will be a mix of socialism and socialising, with political discussion, activist training and fun.

Discussions will include:

- The mechanics of exploitation: how capitalism works
- Paris, May 1968: students spark a workers’ revolution
- The story and lessons of the miners’ strike

- Socialism vs Stalinism
- Training: how to give speeches and write leaflets/articles
- Organising at work
- Why is the left male-dominated, and what can we do about it?
- Students and class

Food and crash-pad accommodation costs £20. We can offer help with transport. Spaces are limited, so if you’d like to come please get in touch as soon as possible!

edward.maltby@gmail.com or 07775 763 750

Daniel Radcliffe was Harry Potter

Ideas for Freedom 2011

By Sacha Ismail

More than 200 people attended Ideas for Freedom, Workers' Liberty's annual summer school of socialist discussion and debate — the biggest one for more than a decade.

We opened with a Friday night showing of Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike*, followed by presentations from young strikers from the NUT and RMT and a discussion of how the film's themes relate to the sharpening class struggle today. We closed on Sunday with inspiring speeches and the singing of the Internationale. In between were 22 excellent presentations, workshops, debates and discussions, from workplace bulletins to socialist feminism, from "chavs" to school students' struggles, from the Arab Spring to the Labour Party and cuts. We continued our tradition of encouraging debate and discussion on the left by inviting a variety of speakers from outside the AWL — including debates on Marxism and anarchism and with the Workers Power group on whether socialists should be raising the slogan for a general strike. Other socialist and anarchist groups also ran stalls at the event.

There was a women's caucus on Saturday and on Sunday some of the AWL's union fractions — teachers, railworkers, PCS, UCU, Unison — held meetings for workers in those sectors.

Because of increased ticket, literature and merchandise sales, the event made a substantial "profit" — money that will be ploughed back into our campaigning in the weeks and months ahead. We also raised £1,165 from a collection. The packed-out Saturday night social, a showing of the films *Pictures of Zain* and *What You Looking At?* and discussion on film, sexuality and multiculturalism led by their director, our comrade Faryal, raised £285 for the Salit quarry workers, Palestinians striking for union recognition from their Israeli bosses. We also collected £100 for the Medical Professional and Allied Workers' Union of Zimbabwe, a

RMT activist Becky Crocker speaking at the Friday night film showing.

class-struggle, socialist-led union recently persecuted by Mugabe's police.

Three people joined the AWL and a number of others made arrangements to meet to discuss joining.

After last year's Ideas for Freedom, we commented: "Ideas for Freedom is a showcase for Workers' Liberty as a tendency which is pretty much unique on the British left — a rational, democratic, clear-thinking Marxist organisation, committed to independent working-class politics, to vigour in debate and to a non-sectarian approach to other socialists and to the broad labour movement. Despite our small size, we believe that strengthening our organisation

is essential to helping the working class win the battles that lie ahead.

If you enjoyed the event, or are sorry you missed it, please consider working with us and, if you're convinced, becoming an AWL member".

Gilaine Young is a PCS union activist

"This IFF was my third consecutive. Year on year I have been impressed not just by the quality of the speakers and the 'organised' aspects of the event, but with the outstanding contributions made from the floor.

"Particular highlights for me this year included the 1880s New Unionism/matchwomen's strike session, the excellent short films/discussion on Saturday night, and the Tube-worker session which inspired me to open discussions with colleagues about producing our own workplace bulletin.

"This IFF confirmed for me that AWL is a group committed to open and honest debate, even when dealing with difficult or controversial issues, and that was a big factor in my decision to join at the close of the weekend."

Giulio is a student activist at City University, London

"I found Ideas for Freedom inspiring and incredibly useful. The talks were both topical and informative. My personal highlight of the weekend was the 'Chavs' talk with Owen Jones, and discussion of how the left needs to reconnect with the white working class, not dismiss them. I would thoroughly recommend going to Ideas for Freedom for any serious lefty."

Hannah McQuarrie is a library worker and Unison activist at the University of Westminster

"I liked the mixture of formal debates with more participatory workshops, and the mix of AWL speakers with speakers from outside organisations, some of whom agreed with AWL and some of whom didn't. It was everything positive that I'd ever experienced about Workers' Liberty packed into one weekend."

How to protect freedom of the press

Does the News International scandal imply a need for public intervention in the media? Or would that lead to restrictions on the ability of journalists to investigate corruption within powerful institutions in society? Ian Overton, award-winning documentary maker and Director of the Bureau for Investigative Journalism, gave his views to *Solidarity*.

The idea of the fourth estate regulating the fourth estate is a good one, but I do not think the fourth estate should be regulated by the first three. We need self-regulation and ultimately, in a commercially-driven media, market forces will dictate.

There's a demand for consequences, but we've already seen them; a newspaper has collapsed, we've seen senior individuals, including police officers, resign and Murdoch's been brought before parliament.

My major concern out of all of this is that newspapers may now be forced to adhere to much stricter legal requirements in terms of how they conduct investigations. That's fine when it comes to hacking Milly Dowler's phone, but what about hacking the phone of an unknown hedge fund manager who's playing the markets illegally and the FSA is refusing to investigate?

This is the third big story in as many years — with the financial crisis and MPs' expenses — that has involved people in positions of enormous power absolutely refusing to acknowledge problems with how that power was wielded and how they conducted themselves. There's a peculiarly British belief that people in such positions wouldn't be capable of such high levels of corruption, but that's been proved wrong.

How can we rely on the judiciary to investigate and regulate corruption in the media when they themselves may be corrupt? For example, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has recently been rapped over the knuckles over alleged corruption in the jury service. We need an independent fourth estate to challenge these things.

We need to avoid a situation where a journalist can be arrested for writing something dissenting, which does happen in some so-called "democracies", or where a newsreader can be sacked for saying something the government doesn't like, which happens in Italy.

If I'm investigating a wealthy businessman who decides to throw his lawyers at me, I need to get my own lawyers in order to respond to that and I end up spending money on legal defence that I should be spending on journalism. If an editor of a commercial publication is faced with a robust

lawyer, there's going to be a lot of pressure on them to say that a contentious story is simply not worth printing.

I wouldn't describe the reaction to the scandal as "hysteria". Hysteria to me implies rioting in the streets, burning tyres and smashing windows. There is a certain outcry for something to be done, but something *has* been done; the *Guardian* and *New York Times* pushed and pushed and exposed this. In future, someone like Paul Dacre running the *Daily Mail* would be an absolute fool to let his journalists use anything but the most upright tactics in their investigations. We've drawn a line in the sand here and to an extent this was a necessary blood-letting.

I don't think it means we need an extension of privacy laws, as Jack Straw is calling for. The buck has to stop with the editors of publications. I believe journalists should be empowered; editors need to hold them accountable for the

accuracy of their reporting but in terms of basic responsibility that lies with the editors. The way journalists go about their work will reflect the culture that their editor has developed in the newsroom, so I wouldn't blame individual journalists for this in the same way that I'd blame generals, rather than rank-and-file soldiers, for crimes committed during a war.

Journalists are a difficult, cantankerous and challenging bunch, and that's positive. They have to be that way for them to do their jobs. But there need to be clear judgements about what's in the public interest. A story about a footballer sleeping with a prostitute is not in the public interest; that's titillation.

Going after and challenging the corruption of power is in the public interest, and journalists need to remain free to do that.

And from media moguls?

By Martin Thomas

Ian Overton is right that we don't want governments to be able to stall or sack awkward journalists, and that such things can happen in parliamentary democracies as well as under dictatorships.

But what does "self-regulation" mean? The dominant "self" of the media industry — that is, the editors and other high-ranking bosses appointed by the billionaires — take journalists off stories, demote them, or sideline them, every week. And in a way immune from public challenge.

Even if we should manage to get some union representatives into a "self-regulatory" system, as long as the media are privately owned by billionaires the "self" doing the self-regulation will be dominated by the billionaires' deputies.

The record of the Press Complaints Commission shows how such a "self" will always be reluctant to act against its own.

Ian Overton also looks to "the market" to save media standards. Even enthusiasts for market economics concede that markets work well when only when buyers have good information about the quality of the goods on offer as well as prices.

The market could keep the media good only if, before choosing what papers to buy, we were first educated by another set of media which informed us well enough that we

could judge whether the papers on offer reported news well or badly...

Otherwise, misinformation and non-information are not eliminated by the market. They feed on themselves.

Moreover, the capitalist market for media is not determined only by readers. It is determined, as much or more, by advertisers.

Timely and full public information is a necessary foundation-stone of democracy, and democracy must take up the job of generating that information rather than leave it to the self-regulation of those already "information-powerful" and to the supposed virtues of the market.

The right of every individual and small group to produce their own web site or leaflet or bulletin is basic. But it is not enough. Regular, comprehensive public information requires large networks of reporters, expensive communication systems, big and fast printing presses or broadcasting facilities, expensive distribution systems.

Those large-scale social assets should be socially owned. Their use should be allocated democratically, with every large body of thought getting its share. That should be backed up by rules guaranteeing rights of reply, and changes to the libel law so it gives some protection to the unmoneyed and removes the over-protection that current law gives to the litigious wealthy.

None of that implies any power for governments to suppress critical reporting.

Save jobs at Bombardier!

By Darren Bedford

Workers will rally in Derby on 23 July to protest the loss of 1,400 jobs at the Bombardier train manufacturing plant.

The losses come as a result of the government's decision on 16 June to award the £1.5 billion contract for new carriages for the Thameslink rail line to German manufacturer Siemens.

After the rejection of their rival bid, Canadian-owned Bombardier announced on 5 July that it would cut 1,400 jobs (446 permanent and 983 temporary) from the current workforce of 3,000 at its Derby site, where rail rolling stock has been built under various ownerships for 171 years.

DEFINITE

The Government claims that the Siemens contract will create 600 rail-manufacturing jobs in the UK, when part of the contract work is done at the Siemens factory in Hebburn, Tyne and Wear; but that is unclear and the 1,400 job cut is definite.

The cuts explode the Tories' story that job losses and attacks on pay and conditions in the public sector will be compensated for by an expansion of private sector jobs.

Bombardier Derby currently manufactures train carriages for London Underground, London Midland, and Stansted Express, but all three contracts are due to finish in December 2011. Bombardier claims that it would have cut up to 1,000 jobs whether or not it won the Thameslink contract.

According to rail expert Christian Wolmar, complete closure of the Derby works "after the current order for London Underground trains is fulfilled in 2014, seems inevitable".

The rail union RMT, which represents some workers at Bombardier Derby, says that the knock-on effect of the closure could be the further loss of 13,000 jobs in Bombardier's supply chain and in other businesses.

This is not because the skills and the equipment in Derby are useless, could not be adapted to other production, or even are not needed for rail rolling-stock production.

Wolmar notes: "Train travel is booming and there is an obvious lack of rolling stock. With a bit of will, extra carriages could be ordered to lengthen existing trains and give hope to Bombardier that it should hold on with the prospect of getting the large Cross-rail order" [after 2015, when Crossrail, the new rail line across London, is completed].

WORKERS' CONTROL Unions should demand that Bombardier Derby is nationalised, under the control of the people who work there.

There is a precedent for even Tory governments nationalising big companies to prevent economic devastation. In 1971, Edward Heath nationalised aerospace engineers and car manufacturer Rolls-Royce (also Derby-based). However, nationalisation in-and-of-itself is not enough. Nationalisation on the model of the

Northern Rock nationalisation in 2007, when the failing bank was taken into state control, downsized (resulting in significant job losses), streamlined, made fit for profitability and handed back to the private sector, is not the answer. Unions should fight for democratic public ownership, and for Bombardier to be run directly by elected committees of workers who can manage the company on the basis of social need.

Much of the rhetoric against the government's decision, including from the unions, has shaded into "British jobs for British workers" territory.

SOCIALIST

The main unions involved, RMT and Unite, are demanding that the government withdraw the contract from Siemens and award it to Bombardier.

But demanding that German workers (and maybe some British Siemens workers too) lose jobs so Derby workers can have them is a nationalist, not a socialist, solution to the problem.

If the starting point is human and ecological need, rather than profit, it is clear that there are more than enough trains that need making to provide work for both Siemens and Bombardier workers. And, if not trains, then other items that the plant's productive capacity could be easily converted to make. The Thameslink contract does not represent all the work that could be, and indeed needs to be, done by a plant like Bombardier Derby.

A fight to save jobs at Bombardier should be part of a class fightback to impose a working-class programme to combat austerity across the whole of society. The entire labour movement should throw its weight behind the Bombardier Derby jobs fight and support Bombardier workers in taking whatever action necessary to save their jobs — demonstrations, strikes, occupations and beyond.

They should begin by making the 23 July demonstration a priority for national mobilisation.

More reports online

- London cleaners win — <http://bit.ly/nZyy4G>
- BBC strikes — <http://bit.ly/oTKjh6>
- Plymouth counter-demo against the EDL — <http://bit.ly/oT0C3G>
- Palestinian quarry workers' strike into second month — <http://bit.ly/rktpsG>

Aviation workers reject pay deals

By a union rep

On 27 June, NATS, the UK's main provider of air traffic services, received notification of rejection of the pay deals offered to two sections of its workforce.

Prospect ATSS, which represents engineers, and PCS, the union for operational assistants and administrative grades, returned ballots rejecting their offers by 88% and 79% majorities respectively, on turnouts of over 75%. The offers made consisted of 4% for year one (Jan 2011), followed by RPI capped at 4.5% in year 2, with significant strings attached for both groups.

The third section of NATS' workforce, air traffic controllers, voted to accept their RPI+ deal through their separate and distinct branch of Prospect, the

ATCOs Branch.

The NATS Trade Union Side (NTUS) entered negotiations in May 2010 united in their aim for an RPI+ deal across the board in light of the real-terms cuts their members received over the previous two years of profit. NATS management made an early derisory offer, which they insisted could only be bettered through negotiating "efficiencies" with each union independently, and so separate bargaining began.

When the offers were presented, the Prospect ATSS and PCS executives recommended rejection, with Prospect ATCOs standing alone in favour of their deal. In the run-up to the ballot, NATS announced a dividend of £42.5m. Talk of ATCO protest votes in solidarity with their colleagues was banded around on an

internet bulletin board, and workers discussed the disparity between the offers freely. Meanwhile, management explained the "pressures on the business" and the "wider economic climate" that prevented them from providing an adequate rise for their workforce.

Within five days of the ballot results, the workers' anger and frustration intensified with the publication of the Annual Report. NATS reported a pre-tax profit of £106.1m, a significant improvement on the £78.3m for 2009/10 despite the loss of revenue associated with last April's volcanic ash cloud. They have managed to reduce their staff costs from £382m to £357m through a carefully planned program of redundancies. Delegates at one of the union conferences stated that some areas are so short-staffed that over-

time is being hard-rostered, and in other areas work is being consolidated into smaller and smaller teams without regrading.

Union reps at airports, air traffic centres and in offices around the country are now preparing members' briefings to decide what industrial action to take, on a timeline that could see disruption to services in the summer.

The vast majority of members in NATS will have never taken any such action before, so their blossoming militancy will need guidance from those connected to the wider labour movement.

What their leaderships must now do is stay in touch with the shifting perspectives of their members and develop and provide the industrial strategy they will need to win.

Birmingham council workers strike against cuts. These workers want to fight, but what is the Unison leadership doing?

Strike to stop pension cuts: name the date. And soon!

By Stewart Ward

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) Executive is talking about the idea of second strike against pension cuts in the week beginning 7 November, to follow on from the one on 30 June.

NUT is in talks with the other "J30" unions, as well as the National Association of Headteachers.

NUT is also discussing the prospect of a mass lobby of parliament in October, for which it hopes to mobilise at least one teacher from each school in the country. A special executive meeting on 9 September, the first week of the new academic year, will discuss the issue further.

ACTION

Activists in the civil service workers' union PCS say that their leadership appears genuinely enthusiastic about further action and is in discussions with other unions about naming a date in the autumn, and preferably earlier rather than later.

It is unwilling to take the lead itself, worrying that any date called by the PCS would be seen as arbitrary.

But the leadership of the big local government and health union Unison continues to use the anti-union laws as a smokescreen for their own sluggishness and conservatism, claiming at a recent National Executive Committee meeting that problems with their membership records might slow down their balloting process to such a degree as to make action impossible before 2012.

Senior Unison official Bob Abberley claimed it could take four months to simply get the membership records in sufficient order to hold a ballot.

Unison leaders also sug-

gest that they want to exhaust the scheme by exhaust negotiations now underway after the end of central talks with the Treasury before balloting.

With negotiations proceeding at differing paces in different sectors, union leaders could attempt to wait until negotiations are concluded across the board before acting. And that would mean Unison not even starting ballot preparations before October.

Rumours abound that a deal which avoids an increase in employee contributions in the local government pension scheme may be negotiable, and there are suggestions that Unison leader Dave Prentis is willing to accept such a deal even at the cost of breaking any common front of public sector workers.

Unless grassroots activists within Unison can organise sufficient pressure to force their leaders to act, it seems vanishingly unlikely that Unison members will be able to officially participate in any autumn strike dates.

UNITY

The worst case scenario is the total breakdown of cross-union unity, leading to a series of scattered one-day strikes by individual unions or small groups of unions.

Or maybe all will be dragged down the pace of the slowest.

Activists inside public sector unions should agitate for a date to be publicly named as soon as possible, and for that date to be as early as possible.

And unions must explore strike levies and rolling, selective, strategically-planned and ultimately indefinite action rather than just one-day set-pieces.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Southampton battle enters third month

“The one-day strike is no more”

By Darren Bedford

The dispute dubbed “the UK’s Wisconsin” has entered its third month as Southampton local government workers extended their strike against mass redundancies and pay cuts.

Workers including parking attendants, toll collectors and port workers began a week-long stoppage on Monday 11 July as the council’s deadline for accepting the new terms came and went. While most workers have accepted the new contracts, those who haven’t have not yet been sacked.

The industrial action’s focus has now shifted from demanding the council withdraws the threat of mass sackings onto straightforwardly demanding the non-implementation of cuts and the restoration of terms and conditions. Nearly 1,000 workers demonstrated on Wednesday 13 July.

The new strikes were launched as a leaked council budgeting report showed that the council plans to spend £5 million a year between 2012 and 2014 on making more workers redundant. The report shows how the council plans to axe 361 posts in 2012, 725 the following year, and 1,224 by 2014. This amounts to a reduction of around 25% of the total workforce, at a cost of £15 million, in just three years.

Unite regional organiser Ian Woodland described the figures as a “disgrace” that would devastate those workers who accepted the

worse contracts in a belief that it would secure their job. Figures have also emerged that show the council is preparing to plough a further £4 million into its reserves, exploding the bosses’ lie that cuts are a financial necessity.

Ian Woodland spoke to *Solidarity*:

“Our demand now is the restoration of our members’ pay to the pre-11 July levels. The key issue for us was always resisting the erosion of our members’ terms and conditions. The council has a twisted view of how to negotiate and relate to unions, and they’ve stampered to introduce cuts.

DEMONSTRATION
“The demonstration on Wednesday 13 July was superb. All our striking members attended, which was about 700.

“Small groups of other workers, including civil servants, teachers and dockers, also joined us, so it was probably around 800 people altogether. It was a very angry, lively, and colourful demonstration. It was scheduled to coincide with a full council meeting which many of our members went into. The strength of feeling and the anger had to be seen to be believed. As the council leader was speaking we turned out backs and walked out.

“Throughout the dispute, our joint stewards’ committee has worked very well. We’ve met at least once a week and if action intensifies we might meet twice. Every morning we’ve had mass meetings on the picket lines giving members up-

dates about where things are at with the negotiations and to discuss what action they want to take. Keeping members informed about the running of the dispute and the ongoing negotiations has been very important. We’ve always taken votes to decide where to go next and which groups of workers to bring out. Groups of strikers have been rota’d to go out into the community and deliver leaflets. Over 60,000 have been distributed to date; it’s been important to keep the community on side and aware of the issues.

“Workers outside Southampton can send donations and messages of solidarity.

They’re no small thing; we’ve kept a file and relay them all to our members on picket lines. It’s something very practical and impacting that other trade unionists can do.

“But beyond this, we want the wider movement to observe and learn from our experience. It’s very clear to us that the one day strike is no more. Unions need to start bringing workers out strategically and putting resources in to make sure those strikes are well supported and backed up. Unions need to think strategically about where we can apply maximum pressure to the employers; we’ve deliberately targeted the income streams for the council, such toll booths and parking. We’ve also brought out workers who can provide a visual picture of the impact of the strike, like street cleaning and refuse. The involvement of port health certification offi-

cers has been hugely important too. Before we mobilised them we had discussions with the stewards on the docks to make sure they were completely on board and happy with the proposed actions.

“The port health workers have had a huge impact in terms of slowing down trade and even turning boats away. It’s really been hitting the council hard. The lesson is to think strategically, and organise.

THREE
“At this stage, there are three prongs to our campaign.

“This dispute isn’t going to be won or lost just with industrial action. We’re making a legal challenge about the employers’ lack of consultation, and there’s also a debate amongst our membership about taking political action. It’s possible that we’ll get a Labour council at the next election, which opens up certain potentials but it also new pressures and potentially new disputes. The demand of our campaign, on all fronts, remains to restore our members’ pay.

“We feel that the model we’ve got in Southampton can work nationally. The action we need for a dispute like the pensions fight has to be on a much longer term – maybe a week, maybe two weeks.

“We’ve got to be putting our resources into those disputes and making sure members are supported in taking action for as long as it takes to win. That’s what unions are for.”

Syrian rebels gain confidence

By Dan Katz

The heroic uprising of the Syrian people against brutality and despotism continues to grow despite intimidation, mass arrests, torture, extreme violence and murder.

The biggest street protests since the movement erupted in March took place on Friday 15 July.

The marchers were demanding the release of political prisoners. It is estimated that 10,000 have been detained since March.

Rami Abdel Rahman, of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said one million people turned out in just two cities: Hama and the eastern Kurdish town of Deir al-Zour.

In the capital — heavily policed Damascus — 20,000 marched and 16 were killed. In Deraa, to the south on the Jordanian border, mass protests resumed again following a brutal clampdown. One activist commented, “All hell broke loose, the firing was intense.”

Rights activist Mustafa Osso said some 100 soldiers defected and joined the protesters in al-Boukamal near Iraq’s border late on Saturday. He said protesters and the soldiers marched in the streets chanting “The people and the army are the same.”

According to al-Jazeera, on Sunday 17 July 2000 Syrian troops followed by tanks stormed the town of Zabadani, 40km from Damascus, near the border with Lebanon.

The Ba’thist state has rounded up more than 500 people since Friday. Syrian authorities have also detained a leading democratic opposition figure, Ali Abdullah, after a raid on his home in the Damascus suburb of Qatana on the morning of Sunday 17 July. Abdullah, who is a writer and a member of the Damascus Declaration calling for peaceful democratic transition, was released from jail on 30 May, following a pardon.

The government began a “National Dialogue” in mid-July which was boycotted by the opposition as a sham.

On 16 July the National Salvation Congress, a gathering of 350 expatriate Syrians meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, elected a 25-member board. The conference issued a statement saying activists in Damascus would elect another 50 board members. The aim had been to form a shadow government, but divisions between the participants — democrats, Islamists and Kurds — prevented that.

Kurdish organisations pulled out accusing other participants of ignoring Kurdish rights.

The aim was to hold simultaneous meetings in Syria and Istanbul, but the Syrian military broke up preparations for the meeting in Damascus on Friday. Despite the crackdown, some Syrian opposition activists met at a small private location in Damascus and used an internet phone link to address the Istanbul gathering.

The US’s verbal contest with the Syrian state was ratcheted up following attacks by regime thugs on the US and French embassies.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that President Bashar al-Assad had “lost legitimacy” to rule.

News from Egypt and Libya

In Egypt, exasperation with the military council which has ruled the country since the revolution pushed out former dictator Hosni Mubarak on 11 February has spilled out onto the streets.

People have been camping out in Cairo’s Tahrir Square since 8 July, and there have also been big protests in Suez.

The military and the government have responded with some concessions:

- Fired more than 600 senior police officers;
- Postponed the scheduled parliamentary elections from September to November (this has been a demand of the left and liberals, worried that only the Muslim Brotherhood will be able to organise well in time for earlier elections);
- Imposed limits on the committee set to create a new constitution;
- Sacked half the cabinet, and appointed 15 new ministers.

Protesters are still demanding other moves, including the end of military tribunals for civilians, and a quicker trial of Mubarak.

As of 19 July, rebel forces in Libya are reported to have taken the important oil centre of Brega. Both the rebels and the big powers seem increasingly confident that Qaddafi is on the way out.

On 19 July, the US government said it was “time to recognise the Transitional National Council [in Benghazi] as the official voice of the Libyan people”.

The Libyan rebels will have to be wary of moves by NATO to use the military help it has given the rebels as a lever for power to shape a post-Qaddafi government.