

# Solidarity

## & Workers' Liberty



No 214 24 August 2011 30p/80p

For a workers' government

**Ban the EDL?**  
page 3

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**The religion of the Socialist Party**  
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# Post-riot clampdown on working-class youth

# OPPOSE

# THIS

# CLASS-HATE

# BLITZ

See page 5

**Hundred in the dock as dishes out round-clock**

Courts sit through the night to sentence rioters  
Kids as young as 12 are jailed before judges

at hospital. However, admitted burglary and assault sentences from behind bars.  
Police also caught a student taking a computer worth £200, again from Maud's electronics shop, James Abimbola.

to order offences and was conditionally discharged for 12 months. He was also ordered to pay £10 court costs.  
Judge Barry said defendants who admitted charges that they had brought shame on their

case of handling, and will appear to work on the other charge.  
Manchester Metropolitan University student Kunal Kaur, 19, of 216 Lane, Manchester, denied a charge of affray. He

David Morris, 30, of Grosvenor Avenue, Chorlton, 18, is accused of going equipped, possession of cannabis and a public order offence. He did not enter a plea.  
Student Peter Pogonibrodski,



## 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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# Libya: the return of hope

From back page

## Outright support for Qaddafi is confined to a marginal fringe of sects.

For most of the far-left, the intervention of NATO in Libya cancelled out the genuine democratic content of the Libyan uprising. To argue that NATO somehow engineered or orchestrated the Libyan uprising is a form of "anti-imperialism" based on a cynical, nihilistic defeatism. If American imperialism is so all-powerful and all-pervading that it can conjure up a mass movement in a foreign country entirely at will, then surely it is unbeatable? Of course the many kinds of imperialist interests that will now come to the surface in Libya — around oil, and rebuilding infrastructure — will not be there to act in the interests of democracy or

workers' rights.

But in fact the fundamental lesson of Libya — as with all the heroic and inspiring uprisings we have seen in the Middle East and North Africa this year — is that no ruling class is unbeatable. Those on the left have no business ignoring, marginalising or misrepresenting the political will of the Libyan people who organised to overthrow a tyrant.

The NATO intervention helped them by preventing the crushing of the uprising at a critical point. That is a good thing. But this victory does not belong to NATO, who intervened for their own reasons. It belongs to the Libyan people who fought and died to get rid of Qaddafi and who remained resolute in the face of conditions far worse than any more-anti-imperialist-than-thou dema-

gogue on the British left will ever have to face.

Workers' Liberty believes that a people staring down the wrong end of a state-sanctioned massacre have the right to call for assistance, even from imperialist powers. It is not for us, from the safety of Britain, to sanctimoniously condemn as insufficiently "anti-imperialist" the Libyans who demanded NATO intervention, such as the thousands of women who demonstrated in Benghazi in early March.

We know imperialism will only act in its own interests, and if and when it intervenes it will do so using its own, blundering, means. We offered NATO no positive support, trust or confidence. But when such an intervention is all that stands between the continued existence of a revolutionary movement

and its annihilation, it is irresponsible and morally degenerate to simply demand that it ceases, or to oppose it ever taking place. We believe that the gains of the uprising vindicate that view.

What now? At this stage, when much still hangs in the balance in Libya, and at this distance, our main job is to support any elements struggling for the maximum democracy and the maximum freedom.

If working-class organisation is our starting point, then the fundamental question must be whether that organisation is more or less possible, easier or harder, without the crushing, murderous Qaddafi regime.

**The answer is that it is infinitely more possible. And that alone is cause for celebration and hope.**

## Arab spring frees the Berbers

By Gerry Bates

One consequence of the uprisings across North Africa is the new freedoms won by the Berber peoples.

Authoritarian Arab regimes had suppressed Berber history and language, claiming they threatened 'national unity'. Islamists supported Arabic-only laws.

There are perhaps over 20 million Berbers, mainly in Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Mali and Niger. They share a common history and mainly speak variations of the Tamazight language.

In Libya Qaddafi believed Berber culture was "colonialism's poison" and banned their language. Many of the rebel fighters in the West of Libya are Berbers from their heartlands in the Nafusa Mountains. The rebel-controlled station, Libya TV, broadcasts in Tamazight for two hours a day.

In Morocco, where the monarchy has made concessions to head-off democratic opposition, a new constitution officially recognises the Berber language.

**In Tunisia and Egypt, each with only a few thousand Berbers, community associations have been formed for the first time.**

## Assad must go now!

By Mark Osborn

The rebel victory in Libya will strengthen the resolve of the Syrian democracy protesters and weaken the Baathist dictatorship of Bashar al-Assad.

Last week the increas-

ingly isolated Syrian regime faced UN, US and European calls for Assad to step down.

The UN Human Rights Council has ordered an investigation into violations carried out by the state during the five month-old uprising. The UN accuses the single-party state of

killing 2200 civilians and of a shoot-to-kill policy against unarmed volunteers. The friends of the Syrian dictatorship — authoritarian Russia, one-party China and Cuba — attempted to prevent the UN investigation.

## "We can no longer live under the regime"

By Ali Khalaf, a Syrian activist based in the UK

Syrian people that can no longer live under the regime started the movement. The main demands of the people remain freedom and dignity for all Syrians. Due to the way the regime has reacted, they are now demanding the regime is toppled.

This revolution was not started by any political party. Political parties independent of the Ba'ath Party have never been allowed in Syria. This will naturally change, but it will be the people of Syria that will choose their future leaders. No party will ever be allowed to appoint themselves sole rulers again in Syria. Any prominent figure involved in the protests always quickly disappears.

The strikes are happening for many reasons. The people of each city want to show their support to the other cities that are being attacked by the regime. People are far more educated than in the past, and they know strikes will

have an economic impact on the regime.

There are no organised trade unions in Syria. People would always be worried that some of their co-workers could be spies for the government. Corruption has been widespread, and trust in the workplace is rare particularly with any kind of civil service job.

Despite great efforts from the regime to divide the people of Syria, this revolution has never been a religious one.

Protests are organised via the internet and word of mouth.

Every day there are soldiers defecting from the army. It holds high risks not only for them but for also members of their families. When the soldiers do desert and come to the side of the people, many bring reports of their colleagues in the army being shot because they refused to shoot at the unarmed protesters.

The people have not armed themselves. There has been no looting or burning of homes by the people asking for freedom, but the regime have been filmed regularly looting and burning homes, busi-

nesses and even livestock.

On the danger of sectarian strife, I quote from a letter sent to me:

"For many years, all regions and sects have lived close to each other without any problems. ... It is true that many of these criminals in the regime are Alawi, but many collaborators and beneficiaries are from across the board including Sunnis and Christians. Many Alawi are decent citizens who do not agree with what the regime is doing. A lot of them are poor and many are fearful and therefore remain silent. The regime's attempts to create an ethnic war have not succeeded so far and we have to be alert to this and fight such a conflict as much as possible as this would only help these criminals in power."

**To support the Syrian revolution come along to demonstrations in the UK and show support directly. Demand the expulsion of the Syrian ambassador, write to your MP..**

• Abridged from: [www.workersliberty.org/node/17239](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/17239)

# Help Dale Farm resist!

By Hannah Thompson and Bill Holmes

**Dale Farm travellers' community in Basildon, Essex has been fighting a battle against eviction by District Council for the past ten years. From the end of August they could face the bailiffs.**

The momentum of the current attacks on the travelling community stems from racism towards gypsies in towns like Basildon — reflected in the council's willingness to spend £18 million on this eviction in a period of austerity and cuts, but nothing on providing alternative sites.

Some of the cash for the eviction has come from the government but the bulk is being funded by the council. It's a case of make cuts to save money, but keep the gypsies out whatever the cost!

Dale Farm is the largest travellers' community in the UK, housing 1,000 people. Dale Farm residents own the land but on around 40% of the site, (54 of the plots), planning permission has been refused. These residents on these "illegal" plots face eviction. Around 90 families will be affected.

Basildon Council argues the site is built on greenbelt land, yet has built several industrial sites in the area which are used for scrap disposal and storage.

Dale Farm has existed since the 1970s, and many of the plots have bungalows built on them, including fences and walls to separate the plots. Many of the children have attended the local school. If they are evicted, access to schools and GPs will become very difficult.

New Labour's 2004 Housing Act made some recognition of travellers' rights to housing, provid-

ing Gypsy and Traveller Site Grants to local authorities to pay for travellers' sites, and regional supervision to ensure that they did. But the policy was not enforced and local councils continued to block planning permission for travellers or failed to provide adequate sites.

The Coalition's "Planning for Travellers' Sites Policy" plans to scrap Labour's limited provisions, and gives local authorities more power to remove illegal settlements. Councils are not required to find money to support travellers and local authorities have no obligation to find sites.

Eric Pickles, minister for Communities and Local Government, argued that local authorities are "best placed to know the needs of their communities". Yet racism in the local community towards travellers is strong — all non-traveller pupils left Crays Hill Primary School once gypsy children became the majority.

**GYPSY COUNCIL**  
The Gypsy Council, which represents travellers internationally, has argued that "institutional racism" exists "in the way the planning system works against us to refuse and restrict planning permission". They say applications fail at the consultation stage.

There are 300,000 gypsies and travellers currently living in Britain in houses and caravans, and roughly 20% of those are living on land illegally.

A 2007 Department of Communities and Local Government survey concluded that travellers' life expectancy is 10-12 years below the national average, 18% of mothers experience the death of a child in their lifetime, 62% of adults are illiterate, and 25% of chil-

dren are not enrolled in education.

This eviction takes place against a backdrop of broader attacks.

New legislation will further criminalise trespass and legal aid will be refused to those accused of trespass. This would effectively deny squatters, travellers and demonstrators the ability to enter any property without permission of the owner or the local authority. Travellers who are occupying land illegally will be affected. Anyone refusing to leave could be immediately forcibly removed by the police. Property owners could also issue injunctions not just against the person re-entering their property, but on any property they are likely to enter having been moved on.

The ideology behind this is clear: if you don't own it — get off it!

The most vulnerable travellers will be forced, with the rest of the homeless and impoverished, into council housing that is dilapidated, overcrowded, in increasing short supply.

It is a bold move to push the non-propertied classes further into the gutter.

There is nothing inherently sacred about living in a caravan, or moving around the country in a way that makes access to education and healthcare very difficult. But such insularity, leading to a lack of education, would help maintain such things as misogyny, homophobia or re-

ligious bigotry in any community. It is decades of racist bullying that have impeded the ability of travellers to access education, build relationships with wider society, and control their own lives.

Dale Farm desperately needs working-class solidarity to protect itself. Imagine a PCS strike in the local council, or an NUJ strike against anti-gypsy racism in the press. But failing that it needs a physical presence of solidarity to argue the case for travellers' rights and to blockade the site from bailiffs.

## CAMPAIGN

**The Save Dale Farm campaign calls for supporters to join Camp Constant; a group of tents occupying the site until eviction day.**

It has gained support from campaigns No One Is Illegal, Feminist Fightback, Campaign to Close Campfield, Oxford and District Trades Council and others. The action so far has included the erection of a scaffolding "barrier" and a call for eviction training, and human rights monitoring on the weekend of 27-28 August at the camp.

There will also be a march against the eviction on 10 September 10.

Organisers want to hold back the bailiffs long enough to allow a final appeal to a high court judge to stop the eviction.

**Get involved in the anti-eviction campaign. Contact: savedalefarm@gmail.com**

# Ban the EDL?

By Charlie Salmon

**On what looks set to be their biggest racist provocation to date, the anti-Muslim English Defence League plan to march through Tower Hamlets, East London on 3 September.**

The EDL are seeking opportunities to disrupt the community and attack local Muslims.

This is the predictable pattern of EDL demonstrations.

Calls to ban them are understandable, but what would any ban achieve?

The most recent example is the EDL march through Telford on 13 August. The Home Secretary, Teresa May, banned the march but the EDL staged a static protest in its place. The "ban" did not stop the EDL from congregating nor did it stop confrontations between the racists and their opponents.

A coalition of Tower Hamlets councillors, the mayor, Unite Against Fascism, "One Tower Hamlets", Unite, CWU, NUT, Citizens UK and the "Canary Wharf Group PLC" have issued a statement in the national press calling for the march to be banned. The call has been signed by figures from the labour and trade union movement along with a group of priests, rabbis and representatives from the Muslim community.

The "Hope not hate" campaign has separately launched a petition calling for the banning of the march, which has gained over 20,000 signatures.

The coalition looks reasonable enough at first glance. But hang on ... what's the 'Canary Wharf Group PLC' (the owner of 100 acres of property in the citadel of London's finan-

cial market) doing on this list? What's their interest in banning the EDL march?

No doubt, the Canary Wharf Group PLC is a multi-ethnic, multicultural employer. How likely is it, though, that the Canary Wharf Group PLC and its CEO would like to see the banning of all demonstrations in and around that palace of unbridled, corrupt and feral capitalism?

The coalition will hold a "counter-demonstration" on Weaver's Fields in Bethnal Green on 3 September, but in all likelihood this will be a "counter-demonstration" that the EDL will never actually see. In reality it will be a tame celebration of the status quo in the borough. Local political, religious and business officialdom — much less the state — are not trustworthy allies in the fight against the EDL's violent racism, particularly at a time when Lutfur Rahman's council is pursuing a cuts agenda and attacking local unions.

Working-class organisations in Tower Hamlets need political independence so we can continue to explain how cuts like Rahman's help create conditions in which the far-right can grow.

And organisational independence so that when the EDL come to the borough, whether to march or to "protest" statically, we are not too busy with some mushy liberal fair on Weaver's Fields to confront the racists in the street if necessary.

(Abridged from <http://bit.ly/mPLhbS>)

**EDL attacks Norwich SWP meeting, and anti-fascist defence outnumbered.**  
[workersliberty.org/node/17274](http://workersliberty.org/node/17274)

# Australia gets its Tea Party

By Colin Foster

**Australia now has its "Tea Party", in the form of the Convoy of No Confidence of trucks and other vehicles heading for Canberra.**

The first contingent started from Port Hedland in Western Australia on 16 August, and all the eleven contingents converge in Canberra on 22 August.

The main organisation sponsoring the convoy is the National Road Freighters' Association.

It is promoting a petition to demand a fresh federal election because the Government "has been compromised into wilfully and

intentionally misleading the Australian people by introducing a Carbon Tax".

Other grievances include:

- "This Governments attitude to immigrants, whether legal or otherwise, is seriously flawed to the detriment of true Australians".

- Government debt (actually very low for Australia compared to most other countries) and the Government's scheme for a National Broadband Network.

- "The anti family movement" and "Marxist-loving 'Useful Idiots' at their [Sydney] Northern Beaches cocktail parties".

The NRFA complains about government regulations limiting drivers' hours on grounds of fatigue management: these regulation will "have no appreciable advantages for the owner drivers and small fleet owners".

Both the right-wing opposition parties, Liberals and Nationals, have backed the convoy. The parliamentary politician most vocally aligned with the convoy is Queensland Senator Barnaby Joyce, a right-wing rural populist and high-profile campaigner to ban abortion.

The convoy organiser, Mick Pattel, had been selected as the Liberal National Party candidate for

Mount Isa (in western Queensland), but stood down for the convoy. He claims:

"It would shock you, the number of Labor people [joining the convoy]."

"They believe that Labor is no longer Labor. They believe it has been hijacked by the Greens. It's gone too far to the left and they don't like it."

Pattel says that the convoy does not plan to organise any blockades.

The Convoy has parallels with the Tea Party movement in the USA and the truckers' and farmers' blockade movement in the UK in September 2000. It also has some parallels with Pauline Hanson's

right-wing populist movement, One Nation, which burgeoned briefly in 1997-8 but then collapsed through internal strife and being politically gazumped by the right-wing Howard government.

It looks unlikely to have as much autonomous impact as the Tea Party, because the relative weight of small-town and rural population in Australia is much smaller than in the USA, and the convoy has less autonomy from the incumbent leadership of the conservative parties than the Tea Party has from the Establishment, big-city, big-business Republicans.

Nevertheless, it is a sig-

nal of the way Australian politics is going. Labor has squandered the popular boost it got from the campaign against the Howard government's Work-Choices anti-union legislation, and the good luck it got after 2008 from the Chinese government's investment drive, and consequent high imports, maintaining Australia's minerals boom.

Even though Australia has suffered less from the world capitalist turmoil than other countries, discontent is widespread - and, in the absence of bold and sufficiently audible voices on the left, currently being hegemonised by the populist right.

Letters



## Riots: how are schools to blame?

**As commentators wring their hands with anguish at terrible kids who have “lost their moral compass”, once again schools — including a lack of discipline in schools — are getting the blame.**

This misses the point... again. The incredible work being done in schools, by very dedicated people, is being done despite the education system, rather than because of it.

Teaching Assistants and Learning Mentors (like myself) spend a lot of their time not assisting in the academic learning but in trying to convince the kids they work with that they are not the “crap” or “losers” or “failures” or any other of the derogatory terms they pour on themselves.

This is done against a backdrop of other messages. “If you don’t get 5 A-Cs”, “if you don’t pass your SATS”, “if your school is not at the top of the league tables”, “if you don’t achieve now, you will miss your chance”, “this is your only chance, don’t throw it away”. For a child coming from a home where learning is not the norm, or who won’t, for whatever reason, make the grade, the message is “you’re worthless”.

Such kids come to secondary school already with an overwhelming feeling of failure and a deep desire not to be there. Add to that the message given by the media, advertising and government propaganda, that “making it” means owning things, being rich and everything else that is out of reach, then the self-loathing is reinforced.

Add to that those kids whose families are not able to be a source of support, then some of these kids are in free fall with no “moral compass” pointing the way.

I thought the picture on the TV of the Malaysian boy being supposedly helped whilst actually being robbed was awful — this was an incredibly two-faced, anti-social act rather than a kick at the face of authority or the establishment.

We don’t have to like the behaviour, and we certainly don’t have to support it or make excuses for it. But we should try to understand it.

I remember, when the council cuts were being put through, talking to one of the council officers responsible for social services. It was very clear that, though on the face of it, the council could claim that they were not hitting front line services directly, they were, by removing other back up services, pushing many families down into the place where statutory need is acknowledged.

**And we now have three academies in the borough. That is three schools who will reinforce the whole ideological notion that there are kids who are “crap”. What a terrible indictment of our education system that is. Kids aren’t crap. Society creates the conditions in which kids do crap things.**

*Frances Burrows, Tower Hamlets*

## Our class needs consciousness, not “direction”

**Much of the left’s response to the riots centred on the argument that the whole thing would’ve been positively progressive if only the “anger” or “rage” of rioting youth could have been successfully “channelled” or “directed”.**

This is not only thoroughly patronising but also a total misunderstanding of the importance of ideas for socialists.

Patronising, because it implies that all we can expect from urban working-class youth is a formless “rage” that must be “channelled” and “directed” by an enlightened leftist elite. And a misunderstanding because it forgets that for our politics to win, millions of working-class people must take conscious ownership over Marxist ideas.

**Fantatising about an “angry” mass being “directed” by the far-left turns the anarchist caricature of vanguardism into a reality. It is one we should reject.**

*By Ira Berkovic, east London*

## Is the future with Russia’s workers?

Dave Osler



**The first time I visited Russia, it was still the core of the experiment that will go down in history as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Mikhail Gorbachev was attempting to transform Stalinism into something nicer instead, and frankly not making a very good fist of it.**

The place was just opening up to the outside world in 1989, and I got a reasonably-priced package deal through a travel company tied to the old Communist Party of Great Britain. Also on the trip were two very prominent British Trotskyists.

Somewhere or other, I still have a photograph of a leading Workers’ Power comrade looking distinctly silly as he clambered on the gates of the Winter Palace in a mock attempt to storm it. I suspect that particular piece of play acting will be the closest he ever comes to achieving the deed.

It is difficult to bring home to younger comrades just how central the issue of Russia was to the political identity of far leftists of that period. This was particularly so for the Socialist Workers’ Party, who used the claim that Russia instantiated state capitalism as a means of differentiation between itself and everybody else.

In hindsight, the SWP analysis was less incorrect than the main alternative designation (that Russia was a “degenerated workers’ state”), at the time when it mattered most. Russia after the late twenties clearly was not a workers’ state of any description, degenerate or otherwise, and all of us who maintained in public that it was that stand exposed by history as seriously mistaken.

But at the same time, it was difficult to regard the place as meaningfully capitalist, either, and I always had a sneaking suspicion that dissident US Trotskyist Max Shachtman’s description of the USSR as bureaucratic collectivist rang true, at least from what I knew about it.

Yet nobody on the 1980s British left — not even the predecessor of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty — articulated that position, and Shachtman’s writings were pretty much unavailable. And being just a rank-and-file young member of a small group, I didn’t dare question the wisdom of the elders, and kept my doubts to myself.

To describe Moscow and Leningrad — as the latter city was then — in the years of perestroika and glasnost as “chaotic” would be way too kind. Even the Lenin Mausoleum was out of action. Few shops seemed to have anything to sell, and such goods as were on offer were priced without rhyme or reason. Either they were ridiculously cheap or ridiculously expensive, but nothing in between.

Worst of all for a young man trying to have a good time on holiday, there was no beer to be had anywhere. I recall complaining about this fact to Olga, the burly middle-aged Intourist guide from central casting, who had from day one striven to prevent anybody in the package tour party from enjoying themselves too much.

“Never mind,” she sighed resignedly. “Next time you come to my country, there will be plenty of beer.” And you know something? She was right.

As I can testify after a journalistic assignment last month, both Moscow and the renamed St Petersburg have rein-

vented themselves as recognisably modern capitalist European cities. They have a full array of pleasant bars and restaurants, and a layer of the population with the money and leisure to frequent them.

As well as a famously super-rich post-Soviet oligarchy, there is a middle class comprised of 20-25% of the population that has taken the transition to capitalism in its stride. These are the people you will see on such elegant shopping streets as Tverskaya Ulitsa and Nevsky Prospekt.

But not everyone is doing as well as they are. While I didn’t get out into the sticks, ex-pat bankers told me that many people in the industrial interior have witnessed minimal change from the Soviet period. A substantial minority have seen their income deteriorate sharply, while 15% of Russians live in poverty. Entire villages are reputedly close to economic collapse, to the point where city dwellers consider them too dangerous to visit.

As is now extensively documented, the transformation from bureaucratic collectivism to private capitalism took Russia close to collapse. The problem with the so-called “shock therapy” strategy adopted in the 1990s is that it was based on too much of the former and too little of the latter.

Many enterprises reverted to barter if they produced at all, paying workers with a proportion of the goods to be sold for food. Criminality was rife, tax wasn’t being collected, and president Yeltsin didn’t even maintain a pretence of sobriety in public.

### BOOM

**The 2000s changed all that, thanks to a boom in oil and other commodities, and a new ruler who prevented the entire show coming off the road. Serious people — such as Carter administration Soviet specialist Zbigniew Brzezinski — have compared Putin to Italy’s prewar dictator Benito Mussolini. That is obviously overdoing it somewhat.**

It is true that Putin made the trains run on time, carefully manages ostensible democracy, and presides over a system that has integrated capital and the state to a degree that Tony Cliff’s designation seems, retrospectively, completely apt.

But there are legally functioning opposition parties, even if they do not compete on a level playing field. There are dissenting newspapers, even if star reporters not infrequently end up as corpses. Most important of all from our point of view, there is the nucleus of an independent labour movement.

I’m still not sure how and why the AWL became the first group to think the unthinkable and proclaim its adherence to Shachtman’s position. But remembering the derision such ideological evolution quite predictably attracted from those still stuck in untenable orthodoxy, it was brave move. Fair play to you lot.

Where Russia is going now is difficult to read. I interviewed several billionaires, and certainly they do not lack confidence in the future of their country as an oil and gas fiefdom. So far it has proved immune from the unrest that has upset much of the Middle East, and the complacent thinking is that most people are more bothered with having bread on the table than with human rights.

**But where there is social polarisation, there is at least the potential for social explosion, too. While we are not far off the centenary of 1917, I did come away with the impression that the final chapter has yet to be written. History sometimes does take a bloody long time.**

## Summer camp: socialism and socialising

AWL news



By Sam Greenwood, Hull AWL

**Workers’ Liberty’s summer camp, the first we have organised, took place in Hebden Bridge, in West Yorkshire, on 19-21 August. 35 young activists, a mix of young workers, uni and school students and unemployed people, took part in a weekend of political discussions, workshops and socialising.**

From the opening workshop on Marxist ecology to the closing rendition of the Internationale, the event was a success. There were eleven workshops, ranging from a socialist attitude to imperialism and what this means particularly in Iraq and Libya, to the lessons of the Russian, Chinese and German revolutions and organising in your workplace. A public speaking workshop and a night featuring a series of short films produced by during the 1984-1985 miners’ strike were also on the agenda. A discussion around the recent

riots provoked lots of contributions from comrades from across the country. One other excellent session was “the mechanics of exploitation”, which included a range of props such as a bottle of Dettol, a toilet roll and the “bread trick” from *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* were used to explain how capitalism works.

On the Sunday morning there was a women’s meeting which discussed plans for our socialist feminist student speaker tour, for our paper Women’s Fightback and for our upcoming socialist feminist conference on 19 November.

The weekend also had lots of time for further discussion and socialising.

During the camp there was a socialist library where books could be taken out to read during the event, or bought to take home, along with Workers’ Liberty literature and merchandise. The food was excellent, communally prepared by those that attended (special thanks to Kieran from West of London AWL for both planning the menu and assisting in cooking throughout the event!).

Three people joined the AWL during the event, with more arranging to meet up for further discussions.

**The event encouraged democratic, open socialist debate. It felt like a fantastic event to take part in and I would guess everyone who attended is eager to discuss plans for a bigger camp next year.**

# Oppose this class-hate blitz!

Yes, as through this world I've wandered  
I've seen lots of funny men;  
Some will rob you with a six-gun,  
And some with a fountain pen.  
And as through your life you travel,  
Yes, as through your life you roam,  
You won't never see an outlaw  
Drive a family from their home.  
Woody Guthrie

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.  
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

Falling fine acidic rain,  
The moral culture eats  
At the ties and fabrics of the society  
That makes, remakes, sustains and poisons it.

**Tory politicians, magistrates and press, ranting about “criminality”, “pure criminality” and “only criminality”, whipping up a crusade of class hatred and class scapegoating against the poor, their language that of stark class hatred.**

Judges and magistrates told by the Prime Minister and by their superiors to “ignore the rule book and lock up looters”. Police breaking into flats mob-handed looking for looted goods. The courts sitting all day and sometimes through the night.

Children and adolescents remanded without bail for petty offences and then sentenced to jail. Women with young children jailed for petty theft, or for “receiving” such things as a pair of trainers.

This is Britain in August 2011.

In response to the riots and the widespread outrage, the right has gone on the offensive, howling for blood. “Public opinion” has been mobilised on the basis of the ugliest social stigmatising, and hostility to the poor, the undereducated and excluded. They see their chance and they are grabbing it.

A 16-year-old boy gets six months imprisonment for robbing a few pounds worth of bottled water. What did the bankers get for robbing people of their homes, jobs, savings, hopes, prospects, sense of security? As the reader knows very well, they got public money on a vast scale, and most of them continue to draw bonuses on a scale that beggars belief.

What, exactly, happened in the four days of riots and looting in London and in cities across England? The picture is clear at the end of the cycle of riots, looting and burning.

## PROTEST

**It started in Tottenham with a peaceful protest against the killing by the police of a black man, Mark Duggan. It spread to other parts of London and then to cities outside London.**

Beginning in the heavily black areas of London — Tottenham, Hackney, Peckham — and triggered by seething indignation against the police, rioting and looting spread quickly to layers of white youth in London and then outside London to Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and other places. Not-all-that-large groups of young people ran amok, most of them, deprived, under-educated, unemployed or in dead-end jobs. They broke windows, looted and burned on a small scale

With not too many exceptions, the looters targeted shops selling consumer goods they coveted — mobile phones, trainers, TVs, electrical goods. The riots were from the beginning, or quickly came to be, direct action to seize desirable things which they either could not afford or could afford only with great financial stress and strain.

Despite some looting of food in some places, these were not “hunger riots”. You can see what happens as a revolt of the hungry, but it wasn't hunger for food. It was about things considered to be as fundamental as food by young people saturated in the values which incessantly bombard them from TV, newspapers, CDs, DVDs, and magazines in the media-saturated, commerce-mad society in which we live.

The looting which has caused such outrage in the bourgeois press was only the other side of the values and ideals of that press, the capitalist ruling class and of official society. The looters refused to abide by the rules of distribution in a market economy. They attempted to acquire what they wanted by direct action, strong-arm grabbing, despite the rules, and in defiance of the rules.

It was a wild revolt of the “lower” elements of commercial civilisation — in the great cause proclaimed and idealised incessantly by commerce itself. In a small way this was a revolt by a part of Britain's commercial-capitalist civil-



**“Get rich or die tryin’” is not our credo. Equally we defend the people who will now be the victims of the backlash.**

isation against itself.

In that sense, and from that point of view, from a direct-actionist anarchist idea of politics, they can be seen as positively, rather than merely implicitly, “political”.

The outrage that saturated the press and TV coverage was in part the indignation of “respectable” people who stick to the rules against those who refused to. It was all a piece with the witch hunting of the poorest for benefit-fraud, benefit-abuse, benefit-drawing — for being. It was the — understandable — outrage of small shopkeepers who had been looted or feared they would be rooted. The press and politicians took it up, multiplied, magnified it. The Murdoch and Desmond press found a variation of their staple agitation against “undeserving” immigrants. Even *OK* magazine took it up!

The ghost of Tony Blair has come back to contradict Cameron's verdict on the riots and looting, that it was all a matter of “criminality”, one aspect of a “broken society. Cameron is wrong, Blair insists, to talk about “a broken society” and a general moral decline in Britain: only specific identifiable families contributed people to the riots, only they are responsible for gangs on council estates. It has nothing to do with a general social malaise. These are youngsters, he implies, completely unaware of what's going on in the rest of the society in which they live. For all his superstitious God-bothering, Tony Blair is morally blind, deaf and numb!

## STUPID

**Of course, denouncing the riots as “pure criminality” is simply stupid. However many gangs exist in these areas and however much opportunist looting contributed to the outbreaks, it took more than criminal gangs to ignite these explosions.**

The deprived young people who have come out on the streets to fight those they see as their enemy, the police, and to grab a little instant prosperity have good reason to feel that they are outsiders, that they have been excluded.

Unemployed or working in dead end, unskilled, low-paid jobs, they have come through the education system maimed and semi-literate. They live in a society where great robbers and swindlers are admired whether they are legal, semi-legal or downright criminal. Where they enrich themselves without any regard for other people.

Why, many of them will think, shouldn't we help ourselves by looting shops and great stores, in a world where bankers can loot and get away with it? Where the politicians who serve them have looted society to bail out the bankers. Where the super rich know how to evade taxation.

No matter how inattentive to politics many of the young people may normally be, they will have gained a general impression about what has been going on at the top of society.

Many of the rioters in London live side by side with the very wealthy — the towers of Canary Warf are visible from half the London riot zones.

Those who are loudest in condemning the rioters and looters — the media, the politicians, the police, the racist and “anti-foreigner” agitators and the vengeful magistrates — bear most of the blame for these outbreak.

And they serve the bankers, the factory owners, the giant store owners and the stock exchange gamblers. They are responsible for creating the conditions and the mind-set that has led to the rioting and looting that has swept through Britain.

But there is nothing for the left to romanticise in these outbreaks, by giving them titles such as “insurrection”, “rebellion” and “resistance”. *Socialist Worker* has surpassed itself in an orgy of crypto-anarchist coverage of the riots and looting. Rioting is good! Looting is better! It's a proper form of fighting back!

They write as if completely unaware of the effect of the riots, looting and burning on the society in which it occurs, including on the working class and the labour movement. They write as if they don't notice the tremendous use which the Tories, the press and the whole Establishment is making of the riots to forward a regressive “law-and-order” agenda, in preparation for the resistance they expect from the working class when the cuts and the second-dip economic recession begin to bite seriously.

By contrast with *Socialist Worker*, Hannah Sell in *The Socialist* writes as if she lives in the same world as the rest of us, or near enough to it to know more-or-less what's been going. She tried to tell the truth. But she too falsifies the picture. Though she notes the looting of electronic goods, Sell seems to think that these were hunger riots by people desperately looting for food. Although food was taken, surely they were not that.

The left must understand the significance of a revolt of mainly young people that took the form of rioting, looting and senseless burning. Despite the hostility which so many of them feel for the Establishment and their bitter sense of exclusion, the psychology, ideas, goals and aspirations of these young people are shaped and determined by the dominant ideas of the rulers of our society — the attitude summed up in American rapper 50 Cent's maxim: “Get Rich Or Die Tryin'.”

The job of winning then to a different outlook, the working-class, socialist, class-struggle, Marxist outlook, is shown to be very urgent. That is easier to define than to accomplish. But it won't be done so long as large parts of the left pretend that the riots were glorious resistance or sheer outbreaks of hunger-driven desperation.

**However we analyse the riots and looting, socialists must fight to get the labour movement to defend the victims of the political backlash in which Britain is now gripped. We must insist, against the capitalist Establishment — the politicians, the press and the courts — that the responsibility for the blind raging anger that erupted across Britain in early August lies squarely with those who run British capitalist society.**

## Global finance markets extend their rule

Dick Bryan, professor at the University of Sydney and co-author of *Capitalism With Derivatives*, spoke to Martin Thomas about the trends behind current US economic difficulties.

**For 70 years we have existed with the idea that the US dollar is some sort of quasi world money, even when, with the end of the Bretton Woods Agreement in 1971, it stopped being officially so deemed. Especially over the last year, the international consensus on the US dollar has come under threat.**

It is notable that when there was extreme volatility in markets after the recent dollar credit rating downgrade and great fear of a global recession, there wasn't a rush of asset-selling to get back into dollars. The move was to assets like the Swiss franc and even, to a lesser extent, the Australian dollar. These are not serious safe-haven currencies. These are bits of evidence that US dollar is in decline as a safe haven.

But if there is indeed decline, it is not an instant process.

First, if the US dollar is now in decline as a safe-haven, it carries forward much status from the past. No-one holding US Treasury Bonds (especially the Chinese state) wants to see them crash, so the accumulated history of the US dollar as an asset-holding currency counts for much. But even the Chinese state said recently in the context of the credit rating downgrade of the dollar that there should be some international supervision of the dollar, and perhaps a new global currency. Neither of these possibilities should be taken seriously — there is no political momentum for either, and besides it is unclear what exactly they would mean. But the proposals see the Chinese state giving a rhetorical public slap to the US state — and that's significant. Will the Chinese state act on the belief that they are already holding too many US treasury bonds? The future status of the US dollar may well be changing.

Second, we need to distinguish between the dollar as a trading currency and as an asset-holding currency. For historical reasons, the US dollar remains the major currency of transactions in international trade and investment. That role will not change quickly, for there is no obvious alternative to take its place. While asset holdings can be readily diversified across a range of currencies, trade needs an agreed unit of measure. There is no real alternative to the US dollar here. It guarantees significant on-going demand for dollars so that in foreign exchange markets, the US dollar is on one side or the other of over 84 percent of contracts. This figure has hardly declined in the past few years. But the growth of foreign exchange transaction volumes on the dollar is a clear sign that even though trade and investment occurs predominantly in dollars, market participants are desperate to hedge their exposure to dollars.

### TRUSTED

**Something has to give here: it is hard to see how a currency can stay trusted as a means of exchange, but not as a store of value.**

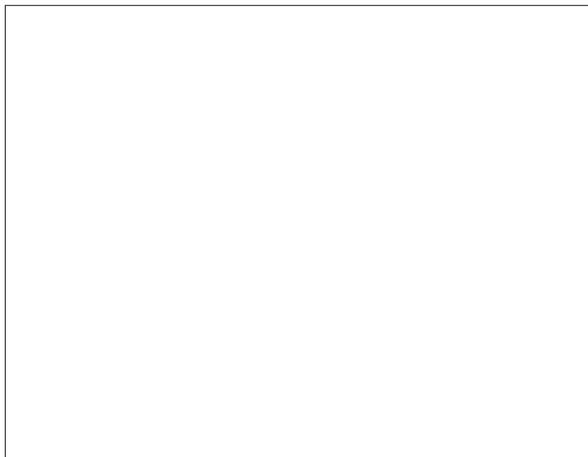
We cannot underestimate the significance of a loss of safe-haven status for, in the absence of another nation's currency assuming the mantle (and nothing presents itself here), it means that there is no anchor in global financial markets. If you were holding US treasury bonds for safety, they are now worth less since the downgrade. Hold cash, and the exchange rate drops. There is no benign way to hold wealth.

The implications are enormous. It means that in calculation, there are no absolute measures; only relative ones. It is as if we were acknowledging that our standard measurement anchors — yards, kilos, degrees — are no longer standardised. How would the world work if these units of measure became volatile? "How long is a piece of string?" would also be "how long is a yard of string?"

But this is the situation in financial markets. Has the price of oil gone up or down? There is no absolute answer — it all depends what currency you measure it in. In US dollars it has gone up; in Swiss Francs it has gone down. It means that there is no wealth-holding that is immune from market variability: all you can do is position yourself inside the market. The only security to be found, if we can use that word, is not in a quantum of wealth but in a rate of return. You must try and keep up with or beat "the market" (some index of asset values) in order to preserve value.

The attachment of a conception of "stability" to a rate of return rather than a quantum of wealth should not be surprising. It is the way capital measures itself (it measures its value in terms of the rate of profit), and our incorporation into the calculative logic of finance universalises that conception.

I think this is the most likely, and the most scary, scenario of the future of financial markets. The music never stops. Financiers will never get out of the market. They have got to keep playing and trying to beat the market, because there is nowhere safe to hide. The circumstances of us all will be tied up with the successes and failures of market trades.



What will follow from that, I think, is the ongoing massive growth of more and more sorts of financial products, more and more ways of holding wealth in a liquid (tradable) form. If financial market trading is everything, more and more diversity of things to trade will become the order of the day. We have seen derivative markets, condemned so widely in the midst of crisis, again surge in growth. In particular more and more facets of subsistence, and of daily life, will be re-configured as financial products and play out this calculative logic.

The person on the political right who has understood this is Robert Shiller, at Yale. He explains that most of the world's wealth is tied up in households, rather than in factories or infrastructure. Capital is developing ways to reconfigure the ordinary mundane parts of household life as financial assets. Shiller is behind the development of products to trade indices of house prices, where you and I could effectively insure our house price or the cost of rent increases, but his point goes further, to developing markets around many more things that look like insurance or contracts for the regular purchase of services.

### REMARKABLE

**Mortgage-backed securities were one well-known version of it. But the process of securitisation takes this process beyond mortgages. The securitisation of student loans, health and house insurance payments, telephone contract payments and electricity bill payments are other illustrations. This is a remarkable change, because it is bringing things of labour's subsistence into the domain of financial assets.**

House, health, heat are all now financialised. Every month you and I pay a telephone bill, power bills and health insurance. Some pay interest on mortgages and student loans, car loans, credit card payments. Securitisation sees these regular payments sold into the market in return for a cash payment. Someone out there buys a security backed by mortgages or a bundle of household 'assets' (asset-backed securities) and, in return for a payment now, they receive ownership of those future streams of household payment.

This process of securitisation is seeing workers being re-configured as an asset class — not an asset-holding class, though people do have pension fund stakes and so on, but an asset class. Capital wants to invest in households and get access to workers' income streams to convert them into financial assets.

Workers start to take on a new role in this new financial world. It is no longer just that workers are borrowing and lending, as they long have done, but that they are being linked directly into global securities markets. And in a world where there is no longer an anchor unit of measure, these financial contracts based on household payments come into the mix as part of the commensuration of capital.

Notice some parallels with our understanding of labour in production. There, we know labour's role as the source of value, appropriate via a process of commodity exchange (labour power for wages) In finance, we need to see wages as a foundation of financial valuations, via purchase of commodity exchange (contractual payments for loans/services). Both versions tell us that labour is the foundation of value. Therein lies a working class political potential in finance.

That potential is not devoid of an emphasis on regulatory reform — just as labour in the workplace has benefitted from some restrictions on the capacities of capital. But regulatory reform, in finance as in the workplace, presents a limited political vision. It is important too that Marxists do not get diverted by an emphasis on regulatory reform of finance.

Many on the left have advocated a turnover tax on financial transactions, in the belief that this would discourage speculation and help to tame finance. This is an idea that seems to arise when no-one knows what to do, on the left and the right of politics.

Sarkozy and Merkel have just called for a turnover tax on financial markets. My guess is it will never be implemented,

because individual heads of state can call for it, but it could only be implemented if all nation states were in agreement. It's an easy nation state response because no nation state can be expected to implement it. Sarkozy has been advocating it since 2008, but it never advances beyond being a one-liner: nothing ever gets to detail. But the problem is that markets are already so complex and unbounded it will be impossible to define what gets taxed and what doesn't. How is a "financial" transaction different from a "non-financial" transaction (indeed what is a non-financial transaction?).

It is all too complex, and I think that complexity is king — these markets are not about some notion of efficiency in resource allocation, and reforms to make them more transparent or efficient really miss the point. We have no means to verify whether they become more or less efficient. What is the meaning of efficiency in relation to finance? They are what they are because capital needs and wants them as they are; not because of arguments about "efficiency". Greenspan said as much earlier this year. A couple of years after his famous "flaw in the market model" confession, he was saying in April this year in a Financial Times opinion piece that, and the fact that markets appear opaque and incoherent, is just the cost of their increasing complexity, and we have to live with it as part of their development. For him, that's just the cost of having this wonderful capitalist system. I think he's right, not in the sense that the system is wonderful, but in the sense that increasing complexity is the projected path and any notion that these markets can be made transparent or efficient and thereby acquire some form of renewed legitimacy misunderstands the role they play.

Another development I think we need to consider associated with this scenario is that monetary measures are showing signs of detaching from states.

Throughout the 20th century, money has been in nation-state denominations, where states take responsibility for the stability of the unit of measure. We are seeing states coming into disrepute as overseers of the value of money — not the currencies of failed states like Zimbabwe, but states at the centre of capitalism. A once-taboo issue is now being discussed: do people trust the state's money? Would they treat sovereign bonds as a "safe" investment? The downgrading of the US credit rating was a sign in the negative — it was purely symbolic (the US is not broke, and the downgrade is minor) but money is all about symbolism. And of course the sovereign debts of southern European states (and others) points in a similar direction. They are tied up in the supranational Euro, so it is not reducible to a national currency issue, but the evidence here points in the same direction: nation states are currently not securing the value of money, but undermining it. That is a significant change of perceptions.

### WORKING CLASS

**And of course the working class gets drawn into this process for the state's perceived path to redemption is fiscal austerity — cutting back on state expenditure and thereby reducing the requirements of state borrowing, to be seen to be financially "responsible".**

People talked about something called neo-liberalism in relation to Thatcher and Reagan and an ideological assault on the working class. This time it takes the form of an imperative as states grasp for financial reputation. Here, ideological "critiques of neo-liberalism" are ineffective in setting political agendas. The answer is not to rally behind the state as opposed to markets, for states have been central to the problem.

Perhaps we have the monetary crisis of the state — not exactly parallel with the "fiscal crisis of the state" which James O'Connor wrote about in the 1970s, but something related. It suggests that where the state's priority is to verify its own monetary integrity, it will cut living standards to do it. It will have to subordinate all economic and social policy to secure the unit of measure. You cannot look to the US government or the Federal Reserve to guarantee the value and purchasing power of the US dollar. It can't guarantee the exchange rate or the inflation rate, or the credit risk on the dollar. The only thing it can guarantee is the prime interest rate — the rate paid by the central bank, and last week we saw the Federal Reserve locking in the prime rate for two years. The Fed will forego the tool of monetary policy in order to demonstrate that it can guarantee something — anything!

**In aggregate, the formal financial anchors are loosening their hold. The US dollar is under challenge as the flagship, and nation states do not have money in harness. Yet at exactly this time where liberal, fluid capital is ascendant, it looks to labour as its source of security and stability. The effect is that labour, not capital, carries the risks of finance, and thereby underwrites capital markets. Capital has manoeuvred well to get to this position from the midst of the global financial crisis. But it is not a safe place to stand.**

## Reactionaries gain from Islamist attack

By Dan Katz

*This week the Palestinians  
Asked the UN  
For recognition of  
The State of Palestine.  
They will not be put off  
With crumbs.*

*This week the Israeli  
Social protest leaders  
Formed a  
Committee of experts  
To pursue their demand  
For an Israeli welfare state.  
They will not be put off  
With crumbs.*

*Netanyahu has nothing to offer  
To either of them.*

*(Advert placed in the Israeli paper Ha'aretz, by the Israeli left-wing peace campaign Gush Shalom)*

**The mass Israeli protest movement for social justice, which has been gathering in strength since July, has been seriously set back in the aftermath of an Islamist terrorist attack. On the day Gush Shalom was placing its Ha'aretz advert, in an attempt to link the struggles for Israeli-Palestinian peace and the fight for a more equal Israel, Islamists from Gaza were busy helping Binyamin Netanyahu's right-wing Israeli government off the hook.**

Israeli officials say Palestinian fighters entered Egypt through tunnels from Gaza. They then travelled 200km through Egypt's Sinai, entering Israel near Eliat on Thursday 18 August. Six Israeli civilians, two soldiers, seven Islamists and five Egyptian policemen were killed by gunfire and explosions.

Following the attacks the series of mass protests set to take place across Israel on the evening of Saturday 20 August were cancelled. One of the organisations coordinating the movement, the Israeli National Union of Students, stated: "[The protest movement is] lowering its head on this difficult day [of mourning for Israeli dead]."

This was the first weekend for five weeks with no Saturday night demonstrations. Veteran Israeli activist Uri Avnery commented, "Since the beginning of the [Israeli-Arab] conflict, the extremists of both sides have always played into each other's hands... Netanyahu and his colleagues have already 'liquidated' the chiefs of the group which carried out the attack, called 'the Popular Resistance Committees'.

"What now? The group in Gaza will fire rockets in retaliation. Netanyahu can — if he so wishes — kill more Palestinian leaders, military and civilian. This can easily set off a vicious circle of retaliation and counter-retaliation, leading to a full-scale war. Thousands of rockets on Israel, thousands of bombs on the Gaza Strip. One ex-military fool already argued that the entire Gaza Strip will have to be re-occupied.

"In other words, Netanyahu can raise or lower the flames at will. His desire to put an end to the social protest movement may well play a role in his decisions."

### ARAB SPRING, ISRAELI SUMMER

**A coalition has emerged of those protesting against the high costs of housing, childcare, fuel, electricity and food.**

Over 40 tent camps have been established around the country. The core protest, based in the well-off Rothschild Boulevard area in Tel Aviv, now has more than 500 tents.

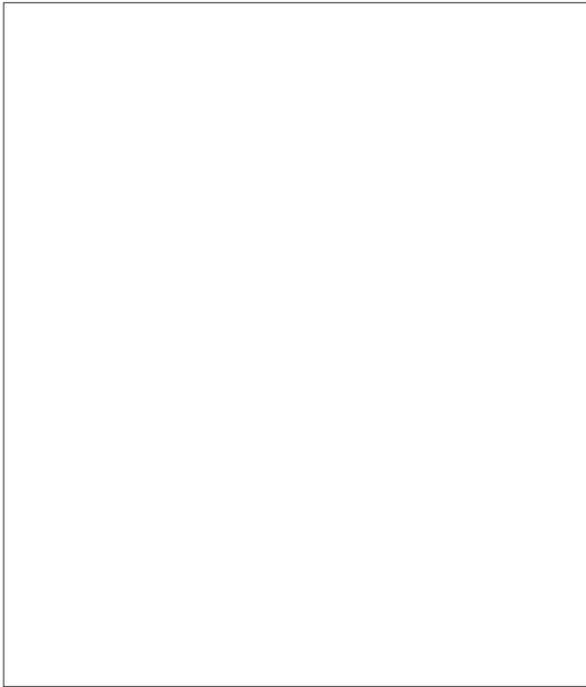
The protests, mainly led by youth and partly organised using the web, look a little like the recent Arab uprisings, but in content are closer to the "Indignant" movement in Spain; it bears some features of the movement the AWL advocated and attempted to build in the 1990s in defence of the British welfare state.

250,000 marched in Tel Aviv on 7 August, followed by massive local marches on 14 August. A quarter of a million, from an Israeli population of only 7.5 million, is the equivalent of two million in the UK. Such mass demonstrations make those on the British left who view Israel as a society without a "real" working class or class struggle look foolish.

According to opinion polls the protests attracted the support of around 90% of the population and have badly shaken Binyamin Netanyahu's government.

At first Netanyahu dismissed the protests, which started with demands for affordable housing.

The upheaval began in mid-July, when the landlord of 25 year-old Daphni Leef raised her already high rent. There are no rent controls in Israel, and an acute shortage of public



**A political shift in Israel, set off by the Islamist attack on 18 August, has set back Israeli "tent city" protests for social justice**

housing means soaring rents. 20% of Israelis now spend more than half of their disposable income on rent.

Instead of paying the new rate she created a Facebook event announcing that from 14 July her new home would be a tent in central Tel Aviv, on Rothschild Boulevard. She invited others to join her, not knowing if anyone would.

However her protest did not fizzle out. It quickly spread, drawing in wide sections of the population who brought their own demands for social justice.

The Israeli union federation, Histadrut, has rallied to the movement under the banner "Workers support the Protests". Histadrut Chair Ofer Eini said to a rally of thousands of trade unionists, "we lost our compassion and became a capitalist country. And not only a capitalist country, but a piggish capitalist country." Pnina Klein from the Movement of Working Women & Volunteers, called the government "a disgrace to the state of Israel in the way it abandons Israeli children [to poverty, with one-third of all children living below the poverty line]."

British trade unions — such as Unison — who are considering breaking links with the Histadrut over the Palestinian issue should look at the Histadrut's role in this movement. Unison could learn a lot about how to defend the welfare state from the Histadrut.

### NETANYAHU

**Netanyahu has now responded — aiming to buy time, dissembling as normal — by appointing a "panel of experts" to meet protest leaders and to look at their grievances. Netanyahu is a right-wing nationalist and, in economics, he is a Thatcherite. He has no intention of giving anything to the Palestinians or the Israeli welfare-state protesters.**

The protesters countered by forming their own 60-strong advisory council, composed of some of the most prominent university professors, including an Arab woman professor, and headed by a former deputy governor of the Bank of Israel.

Originally the protesters were firmly anti-political. That mood has, to some degree, given way as concrete reforms have been demanded, including progressive taxation and workers' rights. Writing in Ha'aretz the author Amos Oz suggests that, "The resources required for establishing social justice in Israel are located in three places: First, the billions Israel has invested in the settlements, which are the greatest mistake in the state's history, as well as its greatest injustice.

"Second, the mammoth sums channelled into the ultra-Orthodox yeshivas, where generations of ignorant bums grow, filled with contempt toward the state, its people and the 21st-century reality. And third, and perhaps foremost, the passionate support of Netanyahu's government and its predecessors for the unbridled enrichment of the various tycoons and their cronies, at the expense of the middle class and the poor."

Opinion polls show great support for radical welfare reforms. 82% of Israelis believe that free medical care should be provided even to patients with no health insurance; and 79% believe Israel must invest more money in the education system.

Israel was once one of the more equal societies in the

world. It has become one of the most unequal of all the advanced states. Since the 1980s a series of governments have attacked welfare provision and privatised services.

The average income after tax for the wealthiest 20% of Israelis is 7.5 times higher than the poorest 20% of society (2008).

The gap between the rich and poor in Israel has been steadily increasing. 25% of Israelis — or 1.7 million people — live in poverty, (the average in advanced Western countries is about 11%). 57% of ultra-Orthodox Jews and 54% of Israeli Arabs live in poverty.

Israeli education has been cut. Expenditure per student in primary school is 36% lower than the average in the rich OECD countries. Poorly funded state education has led to the expansion of private education for the children of parents who can afford it.

Since market reforms to the health service were made in 1994, many medical services have been cut. Costs of treatments have soared, meaning many are not able to access adequate health care. For example, around one third of the population does not use dentists and the percentage of elderly people who are completely toothless is estimated at over 50%.

In 2010, the subsidising of the water prices was completely halted, and the cost of water increased by 40-50%.

Israel's social safety net for the unemployed is especially flimsy: unemployment insurance in Israel is one of the poorest in the West, both in terms of eligibility requirements and in terms of the money provided. In 2010, only about 25% of the non-working population in Israel was eligible for unemployment benefits. The budget cuts in professional training have created a situation where today there are almost no professional training programs provided by the State. (Statistics from the Association for Civil Rights in Israel).

### ISLAMIST TERRORISM: WHO GAINS?

**Israel's new progressive movement has been, at least temporarily, set back by the Islamist attack. Debate about the need for state-provided welfare in Israel has been replaced with patriotic flag-waving.**

Every extra Hamas-launched missile fired into Israel creates fear which helps the Israeli right. Every Israeli death means it is harder for those who are arguing inside Israel for welfare, not arms spending.

Israeli workers are not the only losers. Rational, democratic voices among the Palestinians and inside Egypt have suffered too. The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, under nationalist Fatah leadership, has despaired of the stalled "peace process" and is making an initiative at the UN to have a Palestinian state recognised. The PA, in contrast to the Islamists, wants peace and a "two States" solution — an independent, sovereign state in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem (occupied by Israel in the 1967 Six Day War) alongside Israel. Apparently they have the support of over 120 states for their perfectly reasonable — but largely symbolic — UN recognition.

The Israeli government, however, is deeply hostile to the PA's UN move, saying it will lead to violence. Islamist terror and killing helps the right-wing in Israel prevent a democratic solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

And in Egypt, the killing of Egyptian policemen by Israel during the pursuit of militants who had carried out attacks on Israeli citizens, has provoked Islamist/nationalist demonstrations in Cairo.

Although the current military-led Egyptian government has repeated that the Egypt-Israel peace treaty of 1979 will be respected, there is an Egyptian foreign policy shift which includes a harder line against Israel. The Egyptian authorities have made angry noises; alarmed, Israel appears to be backing off.

One aim of the Gaza Islamist militants — and their supporters such as the SWP in Britain — is to draw Egypt into conflict with Israel. Such politics are poisonous and are a diversion from the burgeoning class struggle in Egypt.

Renewed Egyptian-Israeli hostility — or even worse, war — could only benefit the right in each state.

On the web:

### Chocolate and the Palestinians

**Agitation about boycotting Israel which hit the headlines in April 2011 when Greens-controlled Marrickville council, in Sydney, decided on a boycott, has emerged again with pickets outside Max Brenner chocolate shops.**

[www.workersliberty.org/node/17264](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/17264)

# A time

By Edd Mustill

**The summer of 1911 saw the high-point of Britain's pre-war industrial unrest, with a strike wave that engulfed the country's ports and railways. On Merseyside, the situation developed into something approaching a regional general strike.**

It began with seamen in Southampton. The immediate issues were medical examinations, which they regarded as humiliating, and the employers' "ticket" that the men had to pay for in order to be taken on any job. But the deeper underlying issue, as it was for many disputes during the "great unrest", was that of union recognition. The Shipping Federation refused even to communicate with union representatives, let alone recognise them.

Soon dockers, who had their own list of grievances, were joining in the action across the country. The docks of imperial Britain were sprawling industrial complexes which employed tens of thousands of people. For many, work was casual and irregular. Labourers' pay had barely increased since the great London dock strike of 1889. Docks were also home to thousands of rail workers who fared little better; Liverpool's railway porters earned 17 shillings per week and worked as much as 16 hours per day.

## INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

**The complex system of employment on the docks meant that there had been many different unions representing sectional interests, along with the general unions which had appeared during the wave of New Unionism twenty years earlier.**

Because of the nature of dock work, their membership was transitory. They would grow vastly during strikes and collapse again in periods of defeat. But they came together to form the National Transport Workers' Federation (NTWF), which held its first annual conference in Liverpool at the beginning of June 1911.

Ben Tillet, veteran union leader and sometime member of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and Independent Labour Party (ILP), was an important figure in the NTWF. Other activists included revolutionaries who believed that such industrial unions were the most effective way of fighting capitalism. They wanted the merger of smaller and craftist unions into larger, more powerful organisations that did not shut out unskilled workers.

Few embodied this spirit more than Tom Mann. He set up the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL), dedicated to spreading militant syndicalist ideas, influenced by what he had seen in France and his own experiences organising in Australia. He saw unions as potentially revolutionary organisations and urged direct action. Mann described wage conciliation boards as "Capitalist agencies for tying workers down and keeping them down without a further thought."

Mann arrived in Liverpool early in the summer and quickly became a force on the strike committee. He started a paper, the *Transport Worker*. It was like an extended workplace bulletin covering the whole transport industry, dedicated to strategic debates. Its contributors were trade unionists reporting on their own disputes from across the north west, in their own words.

When the strikes broke out in June, the NTWF was therefore well-placed to co-ordinate action across the transport industry. On the weekend on 25-26 June the seamen's strike was generalised in Merseyside, and shore-based workers started to boycott work on ships belonging to offending companies. This kind of industrial solidarity was the most striking feature of the period.

Some of the bigger shipping firms very quickly conceded big wage increases, showing how easily they could afford them. But the principle of union recognition proved to be much more contentious.

The same was true on the railways and trams where Merseyside workers had been involved in a simmering dispute for a few months, which had included taking one-day wildcat strike actions. By the first week of August, they were joining the strike from the dock depots, and starting to picket out other locations. This, along with other unofficial action in the north of England by members of the Amalgamate Society of Railwa

The Berlin wall going up

## As we were saying: why did the Berlin Wall fall?

The Berlin Wall, erected fifty years ago by the East German state, was a symbol of the totalitarian Stalinist systems. The wall was a monstrosity and we are glad it was torn down by Berliners at the end of 1989. The collapse of Stalinism was a victory for freedom. Despite a wave of capitalist triumphalism that followed, the workers of the former Stalinist states are now able to meet, discuss and form their own organisations. Here, an editorial in *Workers' Liberty* magazine of July 1990 examines the reasons behind Stalinism's collapse in Eastern Europe.

**For over 60 years the typical totalitarian Stalinist society — in the USSR, in the USSR's East European satellites, in Mao's China, or in Vietnam — has presented itself to the world as a durable, congealed, frozen system, made of a hitherto unknown substance.**

Now the Stalinist societies look like so many ice floes in a rapidly warming sea — melting, dissolving, thawing, sinking and blending into the world capitalist environment around them.

To many calling themselves Marxists or even Trotskyists, Stalinism seemed for decades to be "the wave of the future". They thought they saw the future and — less explicitly — they thought it worked.

The world was mysteriously out of kilter. Somehow parts of it had slipped into the condition of being "post-capitalist", and, strangely, they were among the relatively backward parts, those which to any halfway literate Marxist were least ripe for it. Now Stalin's terror turns out to have been, not the birth pangs of a new civilisation, but a bloodletting to fertilise the soil for capitalism.

### VISIBLE

**Nobody foresaw the way that East European Stalinism would collapse. But the decay that led to that collapse was, or should have been, visible long ago.**

According to every criterion from productivity and technological dynamism through military might to social development, the world was still incontestably dominated by international capitalism, and by a capitalism which has for decades experienced consistent, though not uninterrupted, growth.

By contrast, the Stalinist states, almost all of which had begun a long way down the world scale of development, have for decades now lurched through successive unavailing efforts to shake off creeping stagnation.

The Stalinist systems have become sicker and sicker. The bureaucracies tried to run their economies by command, and in practice a vast area of the economic life of their societies was rendered subterranean, even more anarchic than a regular, legal, recognised market-capitalist system.

The ruling class of the model Stalinist state, the USSR, emerged out of the workers' state set up by the October 1917 revolution by way of a struggle to suppress and control the working class and to eliminate the weak Russian bourgeoisie that had come back to life in the 1920s. It made itself master of society in a series of murderous if muffled class struggles. Its state aspired to control everything to a degree and for purposes alien to the Marxism whose authority it invoked. And it did that in a backward country.

In the days of Stalin's forced collectivisation and crash industrialisation, the whole of society could be turned up-

side down by a central government intent on crude quantitative goals and using an immense machinery of terror as its instrument of control, motivation, and organisation.

When the terror slackened off — and that is what Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin essentially meant: he told the members of his bureaucratic class that life would be easier from then on — much of the dynamism of the system slackened off too.

To survive, the bureaucracy had to maintain its political monopoly. It could not have democracy because it was in a sharp antagonism with most of the people, and in the first place with the working class.

So there was a "compromise formation", neither a self-regulating market system nor properly planned, dominated by a huge clogging bureaucratic state which could take crude decisions and make them good, but do little else. State repression was now conservative, not what it was in the "heroic" days either in intensity or in social function.

### STAGNATE

**The USSR slowed down and began to stagnate. And then the rulers of the USSR seemed to suffer a collapse of the will to continue. They collapsed as spectacularly as the old German empire collapsed on 11 November 1918.**

Initiatives from the rulers in the Kremlin, acting like 18th century enlightened despots, triggered the collapse of the Russian empire in Eastern Europe. But it was a collapse in preparation for at least quarter of a century.

The Stalinists had tried nearly 30 years before to make their rule more rational, flexible and productive by giving more scope to market mechanisms. Now, it seems, the dominant faction in the USSR's bureaucracy has bit the bullet: they want full-scale restoration of market capitalism. Some of the bureaucrats hope to become capitalists themselves. But with its central prop — its political monopoly — gone, the bureaucracy is falling apart.

The fundamental determinant of what happened in Eastern Europe in the second half of 1989 was that the Kremlin signalled to its satraps that it would not back them by force: then the people took to the streets, and no-one could stop them.

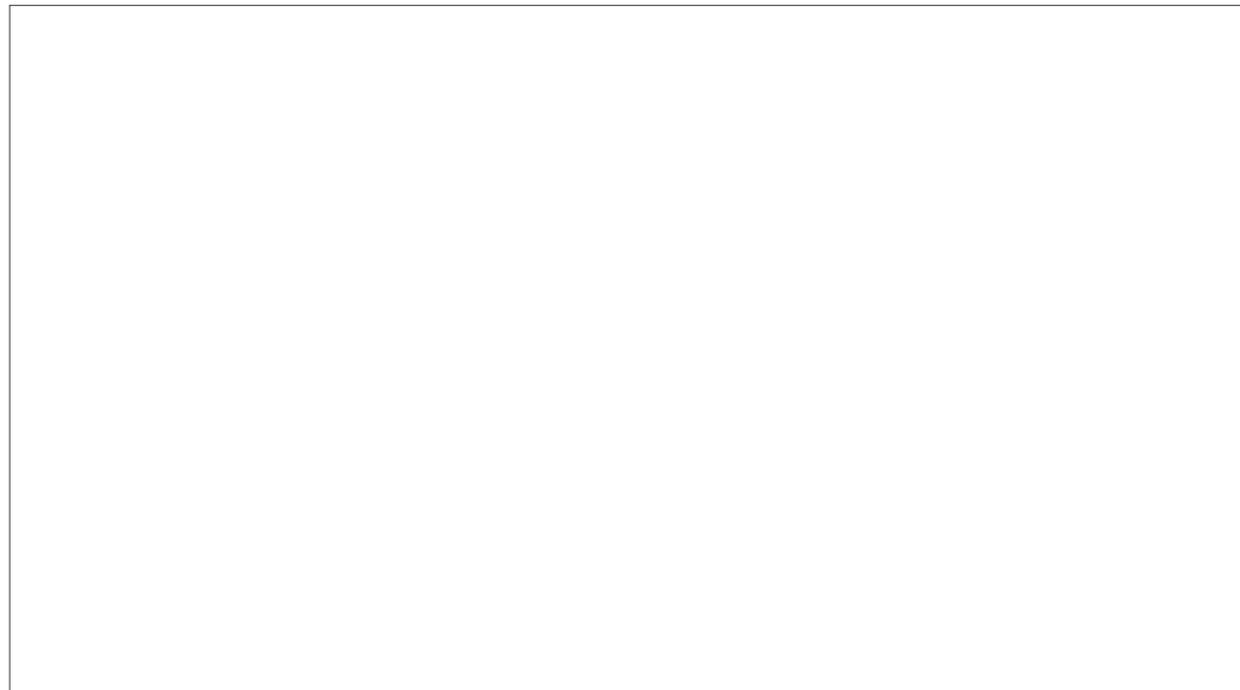
It is an immense triumph for the world bourgeoisie — public self-disavowal by the rulers of the Stalinist system, and their decision to embrace market capitalism and open up their states to asset-stripping.

We deny that the Stalinist system had anything to do with socialism or working-class power. Neither a workers' state, nor the Stalinist states in underdeveloped countries, could ever hope to win in economic competition with capitalism expanding as it has done in recent decades. The socialist answer was the spreading of the workers' revolution to the advanced countries; the Stalinists had no answer.

The Stalinist system was never "post capitalist". It paralleled capitalism as an underdeveloped alter ego. Socialists have no reason to be surprised or dismayed about Stalinism losing its competition with capitalism.

**The bourgeoisie has triumphed over the Stalinists, but it has not triumphed over socialism. And genuine socialism receives the possibility of rebirth as a mass movement from the events in Eastern Europe.**

# of possibility



## Tom Mann addresses the strikers

Servants (ASRS), precipitated a national railway strike.

It coincided with the hottest week of unrest in Liverpool. Police had been brought in from Birmingham, and soldiers were deployed to the city. At a mass outdoor meeting on "Red Sunday," 13 August, the police attacked three youngsters and the situation soon escalated into brutal street fighting. "The fight between the workers and the police," reported the SDF, "Was carried on from the roofs of the houses with slates, bricks, and bottles."

At the meeting, Mann got approval for what he called a general strike of all transport workers in the city. In the event, cargo workers were locked out by the employers first, and the general strike began on Tuesday 15 August. The same day, the rail unions met in Liverpool and presented employers with a 24-hour ultimatum to come to the negotiating table before a national strike was called.

Home Secretary Winston Churchill had dispatched troops to over 25 railway towns. In the face of the overwhelming military presence Mann wrote "Let Churchill do his utmost... not all the King's horses and all the King's men can take the vessels out of the docks to the sea."

On the Tuesday, a crowd attacked a convoy of prison vans carrying protesters who had been arrested on Sunday. Soldiers, who were supposedly in the city to help forcibly move goods from the docks, killed two men. Four days after that, with the railway strike gathering steam, a similar incident would occur at a mass picket in Llanelli in Wales, resulting in the shooting dead of two more.

Prime Minister Asquith showed no remorse. When rail union representatives rejected the government's offer of a Royal Commission to look at their grievances on the 17 August, in between the deaths at Liverpool and Llanelli, he reportedly replied: "Then your blood be upon your own head."

## A GENERAL STRIKE?

**This was the week when, famously, the government dispatched two warships to be stationed in the Mersey. Ben Tillett described it as "a week so pregnant with possibilities that some of us old campaigners had our nerves shaken."**

During this week it appears that even Tom Mann recommended that the dockers, threatened with a general lock-out, return to work. But the majority resolved to stay out to support the rail workers.

Strikes occurred in industries as diverse as tailoring, rubber manufacturing, and sugar refining. Some of these won quick, almost instant victories, again showing up the companies' claims that they couldn't afford to pay more. Many disputes included women workers who were building up union organisations from scratch, like Mary Macarthur's NFWW. *Transport Worker* recorded action being taken by pre-

viously unorganised workers like taxi drivers and paper boys.

Although the Merseyside strike committee which had been formed included some representatives from these sectors, like the bakers, it remained overwhelmingly dominated by the NTWF. By mid-August, the strike committee was issuing permits for the transportation of essential food and supplies, which could only be undertaken by unionised workers. Because of this, many of the city's hostile employers suddenly allowed their workers to join unions.

George Dangerfield remarked that "the unions had not gone forth to convert the disorganised and the underpaid, it was the disorganised and the underpaid who had converted them." Were the older leaders getting soft? There was certainly the stomach for a fight, but also a sense of apprehension about what the consequences would be. No-one, socialist or syndicalist, seemed ready to acknowledge the huge political implications of the general strike.

The national rail strike was called off by union leaders after three days, with the question of recognition still not settled. By September, Liverpool had calmed down, and most sections of workers had settled their disputes favourably. The issue of reinstating sacked tram workers was still a live one and provoked solidarity demonstrations.

Britain's small socialist movement was challenged by the unrest. The SDF had previously been ambivalent about or hostile to strikes, believing them to be a distraction from the fight for socialism. The ILP had a similar attitude.

But members of both these groups were active in unions

and sat on strike committees during the unrest. They eventually forced their parties to reappraise their views on the value of industrial work.

Nevertheless, old habits died hard for the leadership. The internal struggle was reflected in the confused attitude of the SDF in August 1911: "We Social-Democrats stand by the workers in any conflict in which they may be engaged. We do not advocate strikes, although we support them; but we never cease to insist upon the truth that, whatever they may gain by a strike, the emancipation of the working class can never be achieved save by the conquest by that class of political power."

It was probably this ambivalence that helped drive Mann out of the SDF and towards setting up a syndicalist organisation. While Tillett wrote that he was "proud to associate myself with my SDF comrades in this big fight," the reality was that revolutionary industrial militants got little or no help from their party, and were more-or-less left to get on with it.

By the end of the summer's strike wave, some on the SDF left were urging the party to send speakers to every union branch, and to actively recruit trade unionists. E.C. Fairchild began to write in favour of synthesising industrial and political struggles. But it would take more shop-floor experiences and an ousting of the old leadership during the war to make the party finally take industrial action seriously.

## RESULTS

**The rail workers retreat from action certainly represented a defeat nationally. Nevertheless, the Merseyside labour movement was seriously strengthened by the end of the summer.**

The ship stewards more than doubled their membership, while the number of unionised dockers increased nearly fourfold. Big sections of the workforce had won significant pay rises and promises to recognise the union card. Even the railway bosses were forced to quietly recognise the unions in the following months.

The story of the unrest does not end in autumn 1911. Strikes would continue, with mixed success, until the outbreak of the First World War. Liverpool's railway workers would be out again, boycotting scab goods during the Dublin lockout of 1913.

**Many contemporaries, on the right and the left, saw the unrest as the beginnings of a revolution. Liverpool probably represents the furthest the working class went in these tumultuous years towards wielding actual power over a part of society, albeit only for a few weeks. The city saw a level of working-class self-organisation seldom reached in British history before or since. A repetition on a national scale would have seen the country on the verge of a revolutionary situation. Unfortunately, the labour movement was not quite strong enough, materially or ideologically, to achieve this.**

## Glossary

**ASRS:** Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. One of the big rail unions that organised drivers and station workers, it merged with others to form the National Union of Railwaymen in 1913.

**ILP:** Independent Labour Party. The ILP rejected revolution but suffered internal tension between its moderate and radical wings.

**ISEL:** Industrial Syndicalist Education League. The propaganda group founded by Mann in 1910 to spread syndicalist ideas in Britain.

**NFWW:** National Federation of Women Workers. Some unionists encouraged women to join this rather than their own, male-dominated, unions.

**NTWF:** National Transport Workers' Federation. Founded in 1910 as an alliance of unions, it was the main forerunner of the TGWU.

**SDF/BSP:** Social Democratic Federation/British Socialist Party. The SDF, Britain's biggest Marxist group, was in 1911 beginning the process of merging with others to form the BSP.

Strikers' rally

## How workers can find their power

This is the second part of JT Murphy's 1917 pamphlet *The Workers' Committee*. Murphy was a founder member of the Communist Party and a Sheffield metal worker. Here Murphy outlines his socialist-syndicalist viewpoint: how workers organised in workers' committees, plant committees and local federations of those committees could develop class consciousness as well as organise themselves to win class battles. The pamphlet remains a source of ideas for any union militant wishing to building rank-and-file organisation. More background and the first part can be found at: [www.workersliberty.org/node/17209](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/17209)

### PLANT COMMITTEES

**The next step to intensify the development of the workshop committees [is] by the formation in every plant of a Plant Committee. All the stewards of each firm, from every department of that firm, should meet and elect a committee from amongst them to centralise the efforts or link up the shop committees in the firm.**

Just as it is necessary to co-operate the workshops for production, so it is necessary to co-ordinate the work of the shop committees. As there are questions which affect a single department, so there are questions which affect the plant as a whole. The function of a Plant Committee, will be such that every question, every activity, can be known throughout the departments at the earliest possible moment, and the maximum of attention be rapidly developed. The complaints of workers that they do not know what is happening would become less frequent. The trick of "playing" one department against another to cut rates could easily be stopped.

Without a Central Committee on each Plant, the workshop committee tends to looseness in action, which is not an advantage to the workers' movement. On the other hand with a Plant Committee at work, every change in workshop practice could be observed, every new department tackled as to the organisation of the workers in that department, and everywhere would proceed a growth of the knowledge among the workers of how intimately related we are to each other, how dependent we are each to the other for the production of society's requirements. There would proceed a cultivation of the consciousness of the social character of the methods of production. Without that consciousness all hope of a united working class is vain, and complete solidarity impossible.

Instead of it being a theory of a few, that the workers are associated in production, the organisation of the workers at the centres of production will demonstrate it as a fact. Then will the smelters, the moulders, the labourers, forgers, blacksmiths, etc., and all other workers, emphasise their social relationship, their interdependence in production, and the power they can be when linked together on a common basis.

Not only do we find in modern capitalism a tendency for nations to become self-contained, but also industrial enterprises within the nations tend in a similar direction. Enterprising employers with capital organised for the exploitation of certain resources, such as coal, iron and steel productions, etc., find themselves at the beginning of their enterprise dependent upon other groups of capitalists for certain facilities for the production of their particular speciality. The result is that each group, seeking more and more to minimise the cost of production, endeavours to obtain first-hand control over all which is essential for that business, whatever it may be.

For example, consider the growth of a modern armament firm. It commences its career by specialising in armour plate, and finds itself dependent on outsiders for coal, transport, machinery, and general goods. It grows, employs navvies, bricklayers, joiners, carpenters, and erectors to build new departments. It employs mechanics to do their own repairs to machinery and transport. As new departments come into being a railway system and carting systems follow. With the enlargement of the firm electrical plant and motors, and gas producers are introduced, which again enlarge the scope of the management for production of goods for which hitherto they had been dependent upon outsiders. A hold is achieved on some coal mine, a grip its obtained of the railway system, and so at every step more and more workers of every description come under the control of a single employer or a group of employers.

We are brought together by the natural development of industry, and made increasingly indispensable to each other by the simplifying, subdividing processes used in production. We have become social groups, dependent upon a common employer or group of employers. The only way to meet the situation is to organise to fight as we are organised to produce. Hence the Plant Committee to bring together all workers on the plant, to concentrate labour power, to meet centralised capital's power.

### LOCAL WORKERS' COMMITTEE

**There are no clear demarcation lines between one industry and another, just as there are no clear demarcation lines between skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers. A modern engineering plant, as we have shown, has in it workers of various kinds all of which are dependent upon the engineering plant, and must accordingly be represented on the Plant Committee.**

This drives us clear into other industries than engineering and makes imperative a similar development in these other industries as in the engineering industry. Then, just as from the trade union branches we have the Trade Council, so from the various industrial committees representatives should be elected to form the Local Workers' Committee.

It will be similar in form to a trades council, with this essential difference — the trades council is only indirectly related to the workshops, whereas the Workers' Committee is directly related. The former has no power, the latter has the driving power of the directly connected workers in the workshops. So the Workers' Committee will be the means of focussing attention upon those questions which affect the workers as a whole in that locality.

The possibilities of such an organisation in a district are tremendous. Each committee will be limited by its nature to certain particular activities: the Workshop Committee to questions which affect the workshop, the Plant Committee to questions affecting the firm as a whole, the Industrial Committee to the questions of the industry, the Workers' Committee to the questions relating to the workers as a class. Thus we are presented with a means of intensive and extensive development of greater power than as workers we have ever possessed before.

One has only to consider modern machine development to readily realise that as machinery enters the domain of all industries, as transport becomes more easy and mechanical, all kinds of workers become intermingled and interdependent. The consequences are such that fewer situations arise, fewer questions come to the front affecting, one industry alone or one section alone, and it becomes increasingly imperative that the workers should modify or adjust their organisations to meet the new industrial problems; for no dispute can now arise which does not directly affect more than the workers in one industry, even outside a single plant or firm.

A stoppage of much magnitude affects the miners by modifying the coal consumption, affects the railways by holding up goods for transport, and in some cases the railway workers are called upon, to convey "blackleg" goods and men to other centres than the dispute centres, and vice versa. A stoppage of miners soon stagnates other industries, and likewise a stoppage of railway workers affects miners, engineers, and so on. The necessity for mutual assistance thus becomes immediately apparent when a dispute arises, and an effective co-ordination of all wage workers is urged upon us.

The Workers' Committee is the means to that end, not only for fighting purposes, but also for the cultivation of that class consciousness, which, we repeat, is so necessary to working class progress. Furthermore, as a means for the dissemination of information in every direction, such a committee will prove invaluable, and reversing the procedure, it will be able to focuss the opinions of the rank and file on questions relating to the working class as no other organisation has the facilities to do to-day.

### NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL COMMITTEES

**The further extensive development in the formation of a National Industrial Committee now demands our attention, for it will be readily agreed that the local organisations must be co-ordinated for effective action.**

We are of the opinion that the local structure must have its counterpart in the National Structure, so we must proceed to show how a National Industrial Committee can be formed. In the initial stages of the movement it will be apparent that a ballot for the election of the first National Committee would be impossible, and as we, as workers, are not investing these committees with executive power there is little to worry about. Therefore a National Conference of Delegates from the local industrial committees should be convened in the most convenient centre. From this conference should be elected a National Administrative Committee for that industry, consideration being given to the localities from which the members of the committee are elected. Having thus provided for emergencies by such initial co-ordination the first task of the committee is to proceed to the perfecting of the organisation.

It will be essential for efficiency to group a number of centres together for the purpose of representation on the National Administrative Committee of the industry. We would suggest twelve geographical divisions, with two delegates from each division, the boundaries of the division depending upon the geographical distribution of the industry. The

functions of the committee should be confined to the focussing of questions of a national character relating to the industry. It must be clearly understood that the National Industrial Committee is not to usurp the functions of the executive councils of the trade unions. Power to decide action is vested in the workshop so far as these committees are concerned.

If the occasion arises when the rank-and-file are so out of touch with the executive councils of their unions that they take action in spite of them, undoubtedly they would use whatever organisation lay to hand. Apart from such abnormal circumstances the functions of the committee should be confined to the building up of the organisation, to the dissemination of information throughout the workshops of all matters relating to the industry, initiating ways and means of altering the structure and constitutions of the trade unions, and working with the true spirit of democracy until the old organisations are so transformed that the outworn and the obsolete are thrown off, and we merge into the larger, more powerful structure we have outlined.

### NATIONAL WORKERS' COMMITTEE

**But just as we found it necessary to arrive at the class basis in the local workers' committee, so it is essential that we should have the counterpart to it to the National Workers' Committee.**

Again we find that history justifies the development. As the trade unionists of the past felt that there was a community of interest between all trade unionists in a locality, and formed the Trades Council, so they eventually found a similar move on national lines necessary and formed the Trades Union Congress. Its counterpart in our movement is the National Workers' Committee. To form this we suggest two delegates should be elected from each National Industrial Committee. The smallness of the committee will not be a disadvantage. Of its nature it will confine itself to questions which affect the workers as a whole.

Having outlined the manner in which the structure can grow out of the existing conditions, we would emphasise the fact that we are not antagonistic to the Trade Union movement. We are not out to smash but to grow, to utilise every available means whereby we can achieve a more efficient organisation of the workers, that we all may become conscious by an increasing activity on our part how necessary each worker is to the other for production and for emancipation.

Unity in the workshop must come first, hence we have dealt more in detail with the Shop Committees than the larger organisations growing out of them. Not for a moment would we lay down a hard and fast policy. The old mingles with the new. Crises will arise which will produce organisations coloured by the nature of the questions at issue. But apart from abnormal situations we have endeavoured to show a clear line of development from the old to the new.

Working in the existing organisations, investing the rank and file with responsibility at every stage and in every crisis; seeking to alter the constitution of every organisation from within to meet the demands of the age; working always from the bottom upwards — we can see the rank and file of the workshops through the workshop committees dealing with the questions of the workshops, the rank and file of the firms tackling the questions of the plant as a whole through the plant committee, the industrial questions through the industrial committees, the working class questions through the working class organisation — the workers' committee. The more such activity grows the more will the old organisations be modified, until, whether by easy stages or by a general move at a given time, we can fuse our forces into the structure which will have already grown.

So to work with a will from within your organisations, shouldering responsibility, liberating ideas, discarding prejudices, extending your organisations in every direction until we merge into the great Industrial Union of the Working Class. Every circumstance of the age demands such a culmination. The march of science, the concentration of the forces of capitalism, the power of the State, the transformation of the military armies into vast military industrial armies, all are factors in the struggles of the future, stupendous and appalling to contemplate.

**"His Majesty's Government will place the whole civil and military forces of the Crown at the disposal of the railway companies..." So said the Premier of 1911 [during the strike wave of that year] to the railway men. So will say the Premier of England to-morrow. The one mighty hope, the only hope, lies in the direction indicated, in a virile, thinking, courageous working class organised as a class to fight and win.**

Were Stalinist dictators like Romania's Nicolae Ceaucescu (above) presiding over some form of "deformed" or "degenerated" working-class rule, innately more progressive than capitalism because of state-owned property and centralised planning? Belief that they were became an article of faith for much of the would-be revolutionary left.

# "Every sect is religious"

By Sean Matgamna

Commenting about Martin Thomas's article "The Socialist Party's working-class base", Dave Osler wrote on our website: "In general, the article is a fair assessment of the history and politics of Militant/SP. But what it doesn't mention is the class nature of the SP's base, and that is important [...] As Marxists believe that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class itself, I will freely admit to a grudging respect for the SP. So wrong on so many issues, but still..."

This raises important issues and begs an awful lot of questions about working-class socialism in general and the approach and history of the Militant/Socialist Party in particular. And, implicitly, of AWL.

Lenin summed it up nicely with the aphorism: "Theory without practice is sterile; practice without theory is blind". The central goal of Marxist socialists in politics is to reach the working class and educate it — the actually existing working class, as it is at any given time, in any circumstances, no matter what. James Connolly put it about as well as it can be put:

"To increase the intelligence of the slave, to sow broadcast the seeds of that intelligence that they may take root and ripen into revolt; to be the interpreters of that revolt, and finally to help in guiding it to victory is the mission we set before ourselves."

## EXPERIENCES

We go through its experiences with the working class. For instance, when there is conscription, we do not become conscientious objectors as a matter of principle, no matter how much we may disapprove of what the army is being used for.

A young member of the Healy organisation (then known as "The Club", later the Socialist Labour League, then the Workers' Revolutionary Party) had to be persuaded by the organisation not to register as a conscientious objector in the Korean War, not to separate himself from the experience of his generation of workers. He died in Korea.

We act always to help the working class to understand capitalist society, to see it in history as one of a number of exploitative class societies; to see its own place in capitalist society, to learn that it can be replaced with a better, socialist, society. In practice, except at the height of a revolutionary working-class drive against capitalism, that almost always involves relating to a minority. The point here is that, although of course we use our heads in deciding what we select, stress, focus on at a given moment; we do not, on pain of political self-annihilation, dilute what we say in order to reach the maximum number of workers; we do not adulterate what we say in order to have more effective agitation. Our agitation must be consonant with our basic

ideas, our programme. To do otherwise would be to work against our own fundamental, longer term, objectives.

To take something nobody on the left would think of doing, we do not use racist agitation or EDL-style xenophobia in order to reach the mass of the white working class. That would contradict and defeat the whole purpose of our work. We should not — to take something that almost everybody on the left does, and has done for decades — counterpose the increasingly defunct nation-states of Europe to the bourgeois attempt to unite Europe in the European Union.

In my opinion, one of the great sources of corruption on the left is the dominance of catch-penny opportunism in its agitation. There is a whole Marxist literature about that. See, for instance, Lenin's polemic in *What Is To Be Done* against some of the Russian Marxists.

History is full of examples of what not to do here. In the early 1920s — yes, the 20s, not the early 30s — the German Communist Party played with anti-semitism, during the so-called "National Bolshevism" episode. In 1881, when a wave of anti-Jewish pogroms swept across Russia, the Narodniks, who had recently assassinated the Tsar and, all in all, were splendid, magnificently heroic people who were, in broad terms, socialists, welcomed the programs as a manifestation of the popular will.

We work by way of general education. We use agitation against aspects of day-to-day life and conditions under capitalism to help workers see the system as a whole. We help the working class to organise. We act to organise the working class in trade unions, political organisations, ephemeral specific-issue organisations, all the way to organising armed insurrection, when that becomes necessary.

In all these phases, our central, all-governing concern, is to educate and prepare the working class, or a sizeable minority of the working class that can then reach the rest of the workers. That central concern tells us what we can and cannot do. It is the fundamental reason why Trotsky, living in a political, world-flooding deluge of Stalinist lies, again and again insisted that lying to the working class, misinforming the workers, misleading them, manipulating them is impermissible.

For ourselves, the tendency that is now called Alliance for Workers' Liberty has tried to live by those rules all through its existence. We regard the working class as central to all our concerns, as any Marxist must. That is why we have focused to a serious extent on the existing organisations of the working class, including, god help us, the Labour Party. Even the best Marxists are condemned to sterility if, ultimately, they cannot reach and transform the working class.

But to go from that general rule, the basic guiding rule, to the conclusion that the social composition of small propaganda groups — and all the Trotskyist groups are small propaganda groups — is the all important thing, or that having working-class members goes a long way towards compensating for political deficiencies — is to turn things

on their head.

The other side of Lenin's dictum it is also true, and fundamental: a working-class organisation will, to one degree or another, be blind unless it is armed with Marxism. And a supposedly Marxist organisation with rotten politics is not only blind; it is an active, malignant force working, sometimes against its own best intentions, to prevent the working class from seeing capitalism as it is.

## MILITANT/SOCIALIST PARTY

There are few examples in working-class history that demonstrate that as conclusively as the history of the Militant/Socialist Party.

Of course would be foolish to try to decide which is most important, theory and politics or practice. Both are essential, neither is self-sufficient. But it is Marxism — coherent, consistent working-class socialist politics — that differentiates the revolutionary workers, those capable of leading the whole of their class out of capitalism, from the great mass of the working class. In the last reckoning, politics is what is fundamental to a revolutionary Marxist organisation. That is its special contribution. Without that, striving for influence in the working class would be a pointless exercise. It is not enough, of course. To be effective, as Dave Osler says, it has to win the working class.

What if an ostensibly Marxist organisation wins the working class to non-Marxist politics? Then you have a historical abortion. The Stalinist communist parties of Italy and France were, each in its own country, the mass parties of the working class.

For decades they brought disaster after disaster, political betrayal after political betrayal, down on the working class they misled. They would have brought even worse disaster if they had taken power.

Before the Second World War, the majority of the working class in Czechoslovakia backed the Communist Party. That party, with help from the Russian army, led the workers into a terrible half-century of totalitarian subjugation.

Sections of the Romanian working-class, some miners for example, were prepared in 1989 to fight for Ceaucescu. Militant in Britain backed those Stalinist workers at the time, just as their predecessors in the Revolutionary Communist Party in 1948 publicly backed the Stalinist coup that put the airtight totalitarian lid on Czechoslovakia. I have known people who had few political illusions about the Communist Party of Great Britain who yet remained in that party, or joined it, because of its vaunted "working-class base". And it certainly did have a solid working-class base for most of its existence.

I think it is probably true that the Socialist Party, and before it, Militant has had a majority of people of working-class background in its ranks. But so too did the Healy

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organisation, in its various stages. (That organisation also, incidentally, had a lot of black workers and black young people; and many of the people who still, occasionally, sell the daily paper of its ultra degenerate Qaddafi-ite remnant, in Peckham where I live, are both working-class and black.)

Am I saying that it doesn't matter whether or not socialists influence workers and recruit them to their organisation? Of course not! I am saying that just looking at the class composition of small Marxist organisations doesn't even begin to answer the decisive questions about those organisations and their effect on the working class.

The sad truth is that since the political collapse of the Communist International, revolutionary working-class politics, as they had been understood all the way back to Karl Marx, have mainly been in the custody of small organisations that, more often than not, were sociologically not working-class.

Winston Churchill, of all people, put it very well in an article on the "Communist Schism", written just before World War Two, which I happened to pick up the other day. Writing on the Stalinist-Trotskyist division he said: "Stalin has inherited Lenin's authority, but Trotsky has inherited his message". Of course it was a different sort of "authority" in organisations that were very different from Lenin's organisation. But Stalin did "inherit" the internationalist would-be communist working class and its movement.

The tragedy of the working class in the mid-20th century — and of course of Trotskyism, which cannot thrive when the working class is defeated — was that though Trotsky and his very small movement could see and foresee the political realities with tremendous clarity (in pre-Hitler Germany for example, and in mid-30s Spain) they were unable to affect what the mass working-class movement did. In the diary he kept for a while, in 1935, when he was living in France, Trotsky compared himself to a wise old surgeon compelled to watch quacks and charlatans kill someone he loves. And they did kill the old revolutionary socialist working-class movement.

So what of Militant / the Socialist Party? In reality, Militant has been a source of backwardness and mis-education in the labour movement. It has never been anything else. In the decade and a half during which they ran the Labour Party Young Socialists, that movement was on many key questions to the right of typical young people in Britain, socially backward compared to large sections of working-class youth at that time. On such things as gay rights and the legalisation of soft drugs like cannabis, for instance. But not only on things like that.

## RACISM

**Take racism, for a particularly scandalous example. In a notorious case in the 70s they refused to back Asian workers striking against racial discrimination at Imperial Typewriters. Why? Because in part they were striking against white workers they accused of racism and of benefiting from discrimination.**

Now, plainly, where the workers are divided like that you should tread very carefully. You should advocate working-class unity, as Militant no doubt did. But not unity on the basis of keeping quiet about discrimination and the special ill-treatment of some of the workers in question! Not on the basis of implicitly or explicitly telling the most oppressed workers, in this case the doubly oppressed workers, not to split the working class. That is, not to fight back until they had first won over the white workers.

Has the Socialist Party learned from this? I'll be astonished if they have. To learn from your own history you have to know and understand it. The Socialist Party's way with awkward facts in its history is to bluster and deny them.

The work of another organisation, the Communist Party of Northern Ireland, is an instructive example of the same method.

From 1941 until they reunited in 1970, there were two Communist parties in Ireland, one on each side of the border) built up a great working-class following during World War Two, when it was unrestrained in its British nationalism and thus in-line with the outlook of the Orange workers.

It retained considerable influence in the unions for decades after the war. They had leading positions in the engineering union; Betty Sinclair, a woman of Protestant background and a one-time student at the Stalinist "Lenin University" in Moscow, was secretary of the very important Belfast Trades Council. How did they handle the fact that Catholics were discriminated against? They helped build up a tacit acceptance in the unions, where Catholics and Protestants were united on trade-union issues, that the discrimination against Catholics in jobs, in housing, in voting rights, etc., would not be raised!

That helped build the Communist Party of Northern Ireland. It kept a deceptive facade of working-class unity, but its influence in the working-class movement was malign. There might have been a principled political campaign in the relatively quiet years before 1969 — when the Protestant-Unionists did not feel actively threatened with incorporation against their will into an all-Ireland state — against such discrimination, in conditions where they could appeal to the class consciousness of the workers, and perhaps have educated that class consciousness. Thus they contributed to the explosion that began to engulf Northern Ireland in 1967, 1968 and 1969, with the rise of the Catholic civil rights movement.

Of course the Communist Party backed that civil rights

movement, and indeed, helped get it started. They said the "right" things. The call for a Trade Union Defence Force in 1969 originated with them (it was then picked up by the Maoist British and Irish Communist Organisation, and after that by Militant, which used it as a magic slogan, long after the CPNI had abandoned it.)

But here the CPNers were being liberals, having failed to be any sort of working-class communist politicians where it mattered — in the labour movement.

## LIVERPOOL

**When Militant in Liverpool came into conflict with the local black community, which had been subject to institutional racism for many decades, how did they explain the issues to their own people, and the Labour Party Young Socialists, which they led, and which did have some raw young people in and around it?**

They spread the story that the black people agitating against them in Liverpool were "spivs and gangsters". They resorted to the worst sort of racist prejudice-mongering and stereotyping of black people. (That is what was being said at Young Socialist Summer Camps, according to our young comrades who were there.)

What was their general role amongst those workers they reached? They preached "socialism". What was socialism? It was the "nationalisation" of "the monopolies" — by the bourgeois state.

What else was it? What existed in the Stalinist states. These of course were not fully socialist. They were degenerated and deformed workers' states that needed "political revolutions" to make them properly socialist. But, they were the first stage of the world socialist revolution unfolding in a perverted form in response to the "autonomous movement of the productive forces".

And by god, they were altogether better than anything else that existed on earth! They were to be defended in all circumstances, even while being criticised. Those who were trying to create similar states, had to be supported. The Russian army had to be supported in its terrible colonial war in Afghanistan — and was, for the duration of the 10 year war. Those "defending the nationalised property", even a Ceausescu, were to be supported, as the Stalinist coup had been supported by the RCP, one of whose key leaders has been Ted Grant.

One of the oddest things was that they did not even talk about nationalisation under workers control. In the 60s, you could find supporters of Militant and supporters of the International Socialists, now the Socialist Workers Party, in the Young Socialists, arguing vehemently that socialism was workers control (IS), or that it was only nationalisation (Militant).

It was like the blind men and the elephant in children's parable, each of them feeling different parts of the elephant, and arguing about what an elephant was — a snake, said those at the tail, a tree trunk, said those at the feet, a palm tree, said those at the ears, and so on. It was even odder when you knew that in the late 1940s, the RCP, whose leadership included Ted Grant, later of Militant (and then Socialist Appeal), had used the demand for workers' control to differentiate their politics from the politics of the nationalising Labour government.

Or take international affairs. Sometimes Militant's policies beggared belief. During the British-Argentina war over the Falklands Islands, what did they have to say? They were very wary of seeming to oppose the war, though I think they did "make the record" in the small print somewhere that they were against it. What did they think of the issues over which the war was being fought, the Argentine invasion of the Falklands Islands? What did they try to get workers who listened to them to accept?

They said that Britain, Argentina and the Falklands should immediately unite in a common federal state! It was the art of political evasion taken to the level of quasi-lunatic genius! The reader doesn't believe it? I don't blame you, but it's true.

In a previous article I dealt with their general approach to politics, with their fantastical "perspectives" for the labour movement and the world ("Libya, anti-imperialism and the Socialist Party", *Workers' Liberty* 3/34). This was not in any meaningful sense a Marxist organisation. It was a strange sectarian formation, incorporating no more than strands of Marxism and Trotskyism, making a quasi-religious fetish of some of its vocabulary. Certainly, their definition of socialism, either in relation to Britain or to the Stalinist world, had little in common with Marxist, working-class, socialism.

For what we are discussing, most pertinently, it parted company with Marxism and its view of the working class's role in the socialist revolution and in its attitude to the working class and its movements.

Their view of the world was a hybrid species of "bureaucratic collectivism". They saw as positive what a Max Shachtman saw as utterly negative.

Ted Grant, Peter Taaffe and Alan Woods were bureaucratic collectivists because what they described as going on in the world was the rise of a distinct new exploitative ruling class, which Grant called the "Proletarian Bonapartist Bureaucracy". It had a necessary economic and social role in the underdeveloped world, a role comparable to that attributed to the bourgeoisie by the Mensheviks in the Russian revolution. This "Proletarian Bonapartist Bureaucracy" was the blind creation of "the spontaneous movement of the forces of production" and in turn created its own sort of collectivist property.

Their outlook had more in common with the views of the strange Bruno Rizzi, with whom Trotsky polemicised in 1939, than with Trotsky's. Rizzi saw the world being involved in a progressive bureaucratic collectivism, driven by both the fascists and the Stalinists, in their different ways. To promote this bureaucratic revolution, he advocated the fusion of the Stalinists and the fascists in one organisation.

This, to Ted Grant, was a two-stage world revolution, in which the Stalinists (but not exclusively the Stalinists: other, non-Communist, forces had also turned Burma and Syria into "deformed workers states") were the protagonists in creating an immensely progressive form of totalitarianism which replaced the working class "in the period ahead".

And it wasn't just a matter of trying to define reality as he saw it. This view of progressive "Proletarian Bonapartist" totalitarianism was incorporated into their own programme by way of their support for Stalinist revolutionary movements — the inevitable "next step".

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**Militant responded to the Falklands war by peddling utopian fantasies about an immediate federation of Britain, Argentina and the Falkland Islands themselves.**

# A sophisticated apology for Castro

**Pablo Velasco reviews *Workers in Cuba: Unions and labour relations. A 2011 update.* (Institute of Employment Rights)**

**Whether it is resolutions at union conferences, House of Commons receptions or summer garden parties, the uncritical lauding of the Cuban government in the British labour movement stretches from Brendan Barber to Bob Crow.**

*Workers in Cuba* is a sophisticated piece of orthodox apologetics. It consists of a previously published essay by Debra Evenson, a foreword by Unite general secretary Len McCluskey and an introduction and annex by academic Steve Ludlam. The pamphlet will be widely circulated and is sufficiently crafted to sow great confusion.

The authors assume that Cuba is, in the words of its constitution, a “socialist state of workers”. They believe that there must somehow be substantive workers’ power in Cuba. But although Cuban workers played a significant (and sometimes neglected) role in the struggle against Batista, it was not a self-conscious working class, with its own leadership and its own organs of class rule, that made the revolution in 1959. No working-class revolutionary party led the Cuban workers in their battle for self-emancipation. No democratic working-class institutions, such as soviets, were established, even in the early years, through which the working class could exercise control of the surplus product it produced.

No-one — and certainly not the Castro leadership — talked openly about building a socialist state in 1959. According to the historian Van Gosse, letters from Cuba to the US in the early days were stamped with the message “In Cuba we are living happy now with humanism, no communism”. The now uncritical American SWP (no relation to the British one) argued after the seizure of power that the revolution was for national independence and Fidel Castro was “consciously resisting the tendency to continue in a socialist direction”. If socialism in one country was nonsense in Russia in the 1920s, then how much more absurd is the endurance of “socialism in one (relatively small) island”?

## CTC LABOUR FRONT

**Evenson’s essay uses legalistic formulas to avoid the real issues. She writes that, “Since its founding in 1939, the Cuban Workers Central (CTC) has been the only national organisation representing unions in Cuba.”**

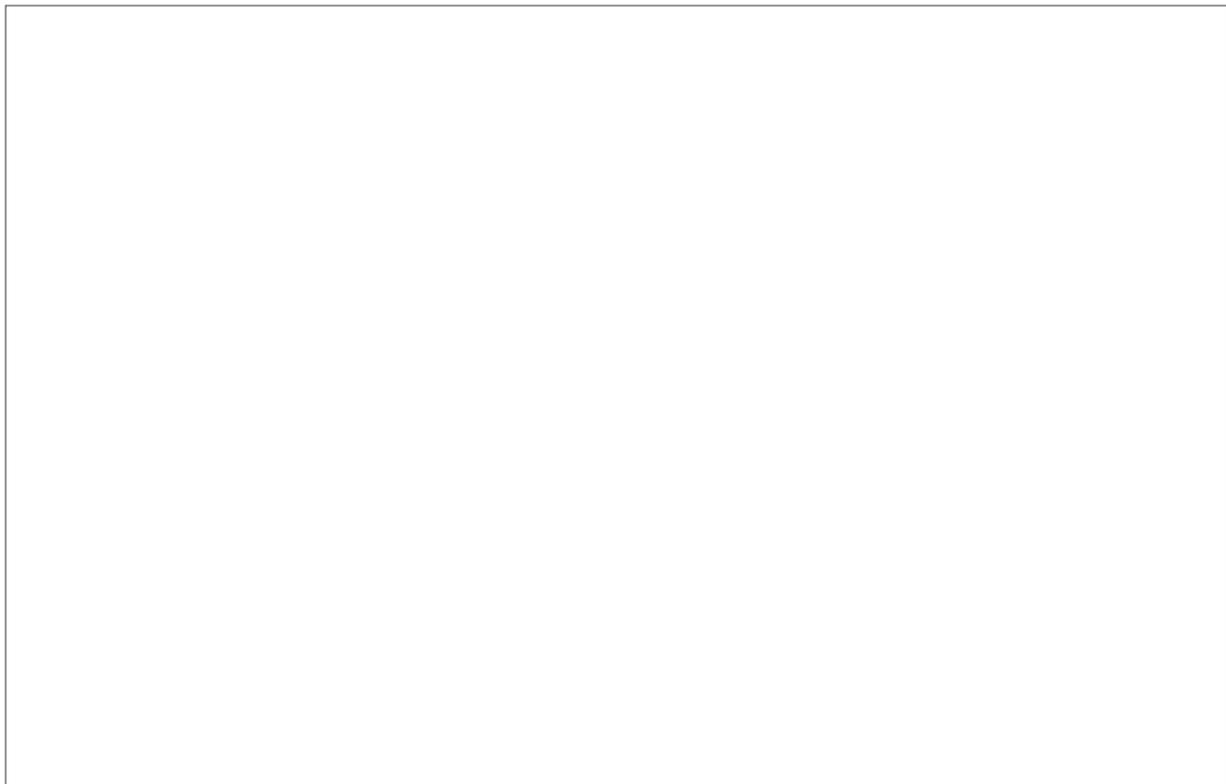
The Cuban Workers’ Confederation was from its inception heavily policed by Batista, first with the Communist Party and later by the corrupt Mujal. The first breath of revolution in 1959 shook most of the unions so hard the workers replaced the old bureaucrats with leaders more to their liking — many of them Castro supporters. However, in November 1959 the Castro government imposed its own slate, using Lázaro Peña and other Stalinists as their agents in the workers’ movement. By the so-called 11th CTC congress in November 1961, the CTC changed its name to Cuban Workers’ Central (rather than Confederation — hence the same initials), Peña became the new CTC general secretary. The CTC effectively became a labour front — it accepted government proposals to give up Christmas and sick leave bonuses and to work 48 hours a week.

Evenson argues that “Union membership is voluntary; but all workers have the right to join. There are approximately four million workers in Cuba; about 98 per cent are members of one of the national unions”. Yet such impressive density should make the reader suspicious, especially as strikes are unfeasibly rare (and there is no right to strike). Cubans join an affiliate of the CTC in order to get a job and to keep it, and to get many of the social welfare rations distributed through workplaces. This is not a sign of either militancy or union democracy.

Evenson notes: “Until 1992, the CTC was recognised in the Cuban Constitution as the representative of Cuban workers”. She recognises that “the CTC and the national unions adhere to the policies of the Communist Party of Cuba, which the CTC explicitly recognises in its statutes as the supreme political and ideological force in Cuban society”. She concludes, “there is a close and interdependent relationship between the unions, the government and the Party”. But the Communist Party monopolises the state and the state dominates the unions. Evenson undermines her own account, pointing out that “Until fairly recently, the CTC and the unions did not have their own legal counsel.”

## WORKERS’ CONTROL?

**Steve Ludlam’s essay is as slippery as Evenson’s. He writes that “Unions are legally autonomous and financially independent”, which may be formally true but rather avoids the historic dependence on the state and the way in which they are dominated by the state polit-**



**Cuba Solidarity activists: spreading illusions and ideas about false utopias**

**ical, ideologically and economically.**

He regards the argument “that the unions are mere transmitters of government policy” as “clumsy”, because unions everywhere have political alliances and the Cuban unions “transmit” in the other direction. But few would argue that workers and unions in capitalist states, dependent on bourgeois parties, are really in power. In fact the apologists struggle to demonstrate that Cuban unions are more than integral agents of the Cuban state.

Ludlam states that the CTC takes part in the formation of government policy. He states that in 2006 the CTC revived the workplace assemblies. Apparently over 80,000 assemblies met in 2008 to discuss preliminary production and service plans. Another mass consultation exercise discussed changing the age of retirement and raising pensions, with over 3 million workers meeting in 85,000 workplace assemblies to discuss the proposals.

If we assume the figures are accurate, they are still not sufficient to bear the weight of the argument. Ludlam admits that in the early 1990s, “the monthly assembly system was hollowed out by the mayhem of the Special Period”. They were revived from the top down, just as the unions themselves were resuscitated in the early 1970s at the whim of the government. For sure the assemblies are a form of consultation and may indeed modify proposals. Staff meetings, quality circles, toolbox talks, and management briefings take place under capitalism, but they do not add up to workers’ control. The assemblies do not amount to workers’ power in Cuba.

Ludlam might like to think workers are discussing how to divide up the surplus product. In reality, workers in Cuba have so little power they have been unable to extract a ration for even half the amount necessary for their own means of subsistence. The matters discussed in the assemblies are invariably determined by the central state and focus on how to more effectively exploit workers. Whether it is increasing productivity, working longer or mass sackings, the Cuban ruling bureaucratic class have the resources and the power, while the Cuban workers always seem to lose.

## INDEPENDENT UNIONS?

**According to McCluskey, this pamphlet “bursts the bubble of the so-called ‘independent’ trade unions exposing them as little more than a front for often foreign based interests”.**

Ludlam writes: “It is not necessary to assume that every Cuban dissident is a mercenary, or that every Cuban critic of its trade unions is a US agent, in order to acknowledge that in the 50-year US dirty war against the Cuban people, ‘independent’ trade unionism in Cuba is hopelessly compromised by its paymasters in Washington and elsewhere.”

Suppose everyone arrested in recent years really has been simply a US agent dressing up in the garb of independent unionism. It is not clear this invalidates every other attempt to campaign for independent unions — for example in the early years of regime or indeed in the 1980s, when a Solidarnosc-type organisation was apparently set up, before it was repressed. Nor does it invalidate the demand for inde-

pendent trade unionism in Cuba now and for the future. Such a movement would clearly have to recognise that its enemies were both the existing regime and the US government. Every new union movement emerging from Stalinist or totalitarian capitalist states has faced these dangers, including where it seeks allies, funds and support.

But self-organisation — and the freedom to meet, publish and disagree that go with them, are absolutely necessary if Cuban workers are to articulate their own interests. To deny even the possibility is to foreclose on the options for the foreseeable future and consign the Cuban working class to the role of appendage of either Castroism or US imperialism. For third camp socialists, there is another path.

## HALF A MILLION SACKED

**On 13 September 2010, the CTC announced that half a million state employees were to be “redeployed” — tossed out of the public sector and into self-employment. The CTC highlighted a million “potentially redundant” posts, and the decision was endorsed by the recent sixth Communist Party congress, suggesting the process will be implemented, albeit more slowly than envisaged at first.**

Ludlam tries to provide a positive gloss on this drastic retrenchment, arguing that at least the CTC was consulted and that the purpose is to “strengthen Cuba’s sovereignty and its solidaristic socialist model”. He makes a great deal of Resolution No.8/2005, which he believes made collective bargaining a legal requirement in Cuba and provided guarantees to workers in the event of redeployment. However he points out that the retrenchment undermines those promises.

He writes: “It is important to recognise that in some aspects of the redeployment programme, unions have agreed to some dilution of rights established in the 2005 legislation. The options of redeployed workers taking up ‘study as a form of work’ (established in the 2005 law), or of early retirement (as in the sugar restructuring in 2002), were withdrawn. Earnings-related unemployment benefit (‘salary protection’) established in Resolution No.8/2005 would now be time-limited; paid at 100% of salary for the first month, at 60% for up to five further months for those with 10 to 30 years of service”.

The authors of this pamphlet would have us believe that Cuban workers are basically happy to go along with their own occupational suicide — because they are really the owners of the state. A better explanation is that Cuban workers have been so beaten down, so atomised and so disenfranchised that they believe such protest would be futile. This is not a cause for celebration. Rather it should lead the Castrophiles to question the whole project they are supporting.

McCluskey states that the Cuban revolution is an “inspirational role model”. The Arab spring and the new workers’ movements and strikes in China are truly inspiring. Fighting austerity across the globe, workers need those real models. From Cuban Stalinism there is nothing inspirational at all.

# The myth of an “objective” media

Nick Davies is the *Guardian* journalist whose investigations into the Murdoch media helped uncover the phone hacking practises, exploding the recent scandal that led to the closure of the *News of the World*. Here, James Bloodworth reviews his 2008 book *Flat Earth News*, which aimed to expose “falsehood, distortion and propaganda in the global media.”

Nick Davies’s first book, *Dark Heart*, offered a brilliant exposé of the impact of Thatcherism on the lives of working people and their communities across Britain.

Researching the book, Davies spent time with those whose lives were ravaged by the 1980s privatisation drive; people who, for all the aspirational rhetoric of the Thatcherera, were brutally pushed aside by the culture of “greed is good” and thrown on the scrapheap.

In *Flat Earth News*, Davies takes on another cosy consensus — that of his own profession, journalism. *Flat Earth News* is scathing about the way changing media ownership patterns have led to the news-media becoming little more than a cash-cow for ruthless, free-market capitalists. The result of this change has, according to Davies, seen a once proud profession descend into banal “churnalism”, where the regurgitation of press releases supplants the search for real stories by dedicated and passionate reporters. As journalists attempt to turn over as much material as possible at minimal cost to their new bosses, the quality of their output is invariably suffering to the point where, Davies argues, much of what we read in our newspapers is little more than “Flat Earth news”.

From a critical perspective, Davies is somewhat apt to romanticise the journalistic profession of old. Rather than proposing genuinely democratic solutions, he harks back to an imaginary golden era when the media was owned by those

who were interested in little more than quality reporting in the name of the public interest. This is of course naive, not to mention ahistorical. The press barons of old may have been more concerned with the principles of good copy than today’s crop of capitalist proprietors, whose only interest is their bottom line, but as Hannen Swaffer (one of the early 20th-century pioneers of British tabloid journalism) put it, long-before the era of Murdoch & Co., “freedom of the press in Britain is the freedom to print such of the proprietor’s prejudices as the advertisers don’t object to.” In other words, the capitalist press has long had other things in mind than straightforward truth-telling.

## SIMPLIFICATION

**It is a simplification, of course, to assume that media barons set the political agenda and journalists simply jump into line; and Davies correctly points this out. For a start, there are many journalists who would refuse to do such a thing, however handsomely they were paid to do so.**

What newspapers and television stations do very effectively, however, is reinforce orthodoxy organically through the reproduction of their own economic interests. Should the media accurately report voices of dissent, it may in theory cannibalise itself through a transformation in society’s economic structure.

A genuine plurality of ideas is simply not in the economic interests of a heavily-concentrated mass media. The subsequent narrowing of political debate to the “centre ground”, with most other ideas portrayed not simply as illegitimate, but as disorderly and threatening, reflects economic trends that have become increasingly concentrated in the West over the past 30 years. The resulting “common-sense” assump-

tions of the media can be understood using a metaphor of a plant: the news may tell you when the first sprout breaks through the surface, but it does not tell you how the seed is germinating in the ground. It may tell you what somebody says is happening to the seed underground. It does not, however, serve to explain the germination process of the seed itself.

Davies does touch on the influence of “common-sense” assumptions in his critique of supposedly impartial media outlets:

“The great blockbuster myth of modern journalism is objectivity, the idea that a good newspaper or broadcaster simply collects and reproduces objective truth. It is a classic Flat Earth tale, widely believed and devoid of reality. It has never happened and never will happen because it cannot happen. Reality exists objectively, but any attempt to record the truth about it always and everywhere necessarily involves selection.”

Davies is right to dismiss the goal of an “impartial” media as impossible. The socialist press, of which *Solidarity* is a part, is not “objective” or “impartial”, and nor does it attempt to be. For us, the key criticism of today’s mass media outlets is not the abstract fact that they are representative of particular social, political and economic interests, but that the interests they represent are those of our class enemy.

While for socialists Davies’s book may seem relatively timid in proposing democratic solutions to the crisis of journalism, it is nonetheless an enjoyable and enlightening read.

**The book is worth a look for anyone interested in a competent critique of the modern media, even if, at times, it makes you want to grab Davies by the shoulders and shake him out of his nostalgia for bygone-era that never really existed.**

# “Every sect is religious”

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**The Stalinists, the bearers of a new form of production, had a progressive role to play even in a country like Portugal, or so said Grant in their magazine, as late as 1978.**

Grant, Taaffe, Woods et al also had a full quiver of rationalisations for accommodating to the bureaucratic leadership of the existing labour movement. Take the question of the “existing socialist consciousness of the labour movement”, which was an issue in dispute between them and those of us who founded what is now the AWL.

There was, undoubtedly, a mass “socialist” consciousness in the broad labour movement — a belief in statism, a preference for nationalised and municipalised industry over profit-driven-private enterprises. And, certainly, the then very widespread workplace struggles over working conditions, over seemingly small things like tea breaks, were a form of struggle for control by workers of their industries, and their working lives. There was a very high degree of de facto workers control in a number of industries. On the docks, for instance, a powerful element of workers control had emerged within the peculiar employment structures set up under the National Docks Labour Board. (Dockers were employed permanently, at a very low guaranteed minimum wage, by local Docks Labour Boards, and hired out as they were needed to the employer’s working the ships.)

But all this was tremendously inadequate, measured against what was necessary if the working class were to overthrow capitalism and replace the bourgeoisie as the ruling power in society. Workers had to understand about the nature of the capitalist state and what they needed to do about it; about the difference between nationalisation and democratic working-class socialisation of the means of production and exchange; about the need for international working-class unity. In reality the best of the labour movement in the 50s, 60s and 70s came to be in the grip of a sort of headless syndicalism.

In the largely syndicalist “Great Unrest” before World War One, and its continuation during and after that war, its thinkers and writers, such as James Connolly, saw the movement they were building as a means to overthrow the bourgeoisie. They saw the industrial unions they advocated and built as the infrastructure within capitalism of the future Workers’ Republic.

The de facto syndicalism in mid-20th-century Britain was an often tremendous movement of rank-and-file workers that relied on direct action. It was very often, also directed against the union bureaucracy. But it remained politically

tied to Labourism, and many of its militants and rank-and-file leaders to the Communist Party. They had very little notion of their movement as a mobilisation, and an education in action that would eventually overthrow capitalism. They looked to Parliamentary action to achieve political ends, even when they themselves acted to achieve political ends, as when hundreds of thousands struck work to force the release of five dock workers jailed for illegal picketing in 1972.

When the labour movement brought down the government in February 1974, all we had to replace it in government was Harold Wilson’s Labour Party!

In that situation the revolutionaries, the Marxists, were those who told the labour movement the truth about its own situation and about its own weaknesses, and what needed to be done about it. The idea that the socialist consciousness of the labour movement, such as it was, was adequate, or anything remotely like adequate, was simply preposterous.

The idea that all that was necessary for socialism, for working-class rule, was to generalise the widespread labour movement support for nationalisations into the demand that all “the monopolies” should be nationalised, was both foolish and pernicious. Militant’s activities were the preoccupations of a self-cultivating sect for which the class struggle was at best, less important than their own organisation.

What Militant did in all its activities was batten on the existing movement, accepting and reinforcing but also mystifying the ideas that existed — and sometimes even the most backward ideas as above — in the movement, at every point and in every way.

## MISEDUCATION

**Militant’s propaganda for “socialism” was a species of miseducation of the workers it reached. In its unrealism, its attitudes, its sectish schema-mongering,**

Militant peddled a kind of utopian socialism. It had an essentially manipulative attitude to the working class. Their formula to excuse saying whatever would help the organisation to survive and grow and avoid clashing with widespread working-class public opinion was “The workers wouldn’t understand that, comrade!” It generated such scarcely-believable idiocies as the British-Argentina-Falklands Federation and was a manipulative license for virtually anything.

Instead of the Marxist idea and its modus operandi that you function to educate the workers, that you stand against the tide of opinion when necessary, you had “the workers wouldn’t understand”. Trotsky’s advice was “To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true

in little things as in big ones; to base one’s program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives.” Those were his “rules” for the Fourth International, that had “shown it can swim against the stream”. Instead of that you had idiotic evasions like the British-Argentina-Falklands Federation demand.

And who knew what the workers would or wouldn’t understand? The wise men at the centre, licensed thereby, to cut and trim, evade and obfuscate. The truth is that they had contempt for the workers. The leaders of such groups always do.

One of their youth organisers at a Labour Party Young Socialists summer camp, where there were quite a lot of “raw” young workers, rowdy and factionally primed-up against the minority there (which was essentially the forerunner of the AWL), said to one of our organisers, speaking “man-to-man”, wised-up Marxist to wised-up Marxist: “If we let them off the leash, they’d tear you to pieces!” (For old-timers who might remember the period, it was Kevin Rammage speaking to Mick O’Sullivan). With that spirit, and I cite it because I think it sums up their real spirit, the fundamental attitude of the organisation’s leaders and that, whatever they say, always shows in practice.

They did not try to develop and raise up and broaden the outlook and the real understanding of the youngsters they organised, courtesy of the Labour Party. They didn’t teach them to think. Instead they taught them political parrot work.

The Socialist Party operates with the idea that “Marxism” is a given, that it is fixed. In reality it has to be sifted, applied, and redefined again and again in the light of experience. The Marxists have to learn and go on learning before they can be adequate interpreters and teachers for the working class. The Socialist Party is still making propaganda for the wonders worked by the defunct “planned economy” in Stalinist Russia. People like Peter Taaffe are evidently incapable of learning. The bureaucratic sect-structures of the Socialist Party prevents others from discussing and maybe learning from their own and other peoples’ experiences. The key idea of Marxist socialism, that the liberation of the working class must be self-liberation, is well put in “The Internationale”.

*“No servants from on high deliver  
No faith have we in Prince or peer,  
Our own right hand the chains must shiver,  
Chains of hatred, of greed and fear”.*

**Least of all will a socialist sect like the Socialist Party, teaching political and intellectual docility to those it influences, liberate the working class. As Karl Marx said: “In the last analysis, every sect is religious.”**

## Construction bosses go to war against workers

By Ira Berkovic

The UK's major electrical and mechanical contractors have launched an unprecedented attack on collective bargaining by attempting to unilaterally impose a new agreement on the industry.

The contractors, which

include industry leaders such as Balfour Beatty, wrote to workers in late July announcing their intention to impose new agreements.

The new agreement, if imposed, will lead to a significant deskilling and arbitrary downgrading by industry bosses. It will also

give managers an enormous amount of direct control over hours, breaks and pay procedure, as well as containing a no-strike clause. Blacklisting of union activists is already a factor in the industry and many workers see this latest attack as an attempt by contractors to stamp out

organised labour decisively.

Unions representing the workers were only given access to copies of the draft agreement after significant pressure. Unite have since withdrawn from negotiations and are mounting a campaign in defence of existing agree-

ments and procedures.

However, many rank-and-file construction workers are frustrated with what they see as their unions' inadequate response to the attacks. A packed meeting of activists on Saturday 13 August discussed the possibilities for industrial action to beat

the bosses back, rejecting the line from the union bureaucracy that a campaign based on petitions and lobbying could appeal to employers' better nature.

The meeting elected a steering committee of six individuals to coordinate the rank-and-file campaign.

## Support the Johnston Press strikers!

By an NUJ member

The media industry's first all-out strike in decades has seen journalists working for Johnston Press titles in South Yorkshire, including *Doncaster Free Press* and the *Selby Times*, take over a month's worth of action.

National Union of Journalists (NUJ) activists have accused the company of failing to act "humanely" towards its employees; it has so far refused to negotiate on any of the workers' grievances and is pushing ahead with its plans to make across-the-board job cuts, including the merging of three titles into one under a single editor.

Richard Parker, NUJ members at the *Selby Times*, said "The sense of unity among NUJ branch members, and the overwhelming level of public support, has been astonishing. It convinces us we're right to take this important stand, and that we must keep fighting for the future of local journalism."

Darren Burke, a member of the chapel committee, said "Our Members still feel as resolute as they did on day one. The longer this goes on the more determined our members will become."

Please send messages of support to the strikers from your union branch.

- Donations to Account name: DFP NUJ Chapel. No: 35630388. Sort code: 60-06-39

- Messages of support can be sent to one of the reps at [darrenburke@gmail.com](mailto:darrenburke@gmail.com), copy in [nujmanchester@nuj.org.uk](mailto:nujmanchester@nuj.org.uk).

- Invite an NUJ striker to speak at your next union branch/ campaign meeting by emailing Darren Burke (address above).

## Southampton council workers vote to continue strikes

By a Unison member

A meeting of 600 workers involved in the long-running battle at Southampton city council has voted by 4 to 1 to reject council bosses' latest offer and continue with strike action.

The offer centred on a promised £500,000 injection from the council to slightly reduce the pay cut faced by social workers, and the raising of the cuts threshold from £17,500 to £22,000, meaning that slightly fewer lower-paid workers would face the cut.

The meeting discussed whether to suspend the current strike actions and enter detailed negotiations on this offer, or to keep the current action live and continue general negotiations. Speaking after the vote, Unison branch secretary Mike Tucker said: "there

has been a clear decision by Unison and Unite members to carry on with the strike action. Myself and all the other Branch Officials will now implement the democratic decision taken at today's meeting." Unite Regional Organiser Ian Woodland said: "There was a huge amount of anger expressed at the meeting towards this proposal and the mandate given by our members for further action is very clear."

Unison will now hold members' meetings to decide which section of workers will be next to participate in the strike, as

well as reviewing its levels of hardship pay.

The meeting, which was attended by a quarter of all council union members and represented a cross-section of the workforce, took resolutions and amendments about the dispute.

Whatever its outcome, the Southampton dispute has put the best of labour movement traditions — control of disputes by rank-and-file committees and mass meetings with democratic structures and real sovereign control — back on the agenda.



Voting to continue the strike

## Victory on the tube

By an RMT member

Leytonstone-based driver Tunde Umanah, the latest tube worker to fall victim to London Underground's attempts to victimise union activists, has won his job back on appeal.

The investigation found inconsistencies in the story of the manager who had gunned for Tunde's job, and that memos relating to the incident were concealed from the disciplinary panel. While Tunde has been praised for his honesty, the manager has received a 12 month warning.

Tunde was a well-re-

spected RMT member. A union meeting about his sacking drew over 100 workmates in his support, members of RMT and other unions. The meeting resolved to take industrial action if he was not reinstated, sending a strong message to management.

As with the campaign to defend victimised Eamonn Lynch and Arwyn Thomas, the successful battle to reinstate Tunde has proved that fighting to defend sacked workmates produces results.

An Employment Tribunal has also recently ruled that another sacked driver, James Masango, was dismissed unfairly.

## Another win for London cleaners

Cleaners working at the landmark Heron Tower near Liverpool Street in London have won a pay increase to a "living-wage" rate of £8.30 per hour, and have secured commitments from management to resolve issues of staff shortages and unfair dismissal practises.

Cleaning contractor LCC also agreed to open up formal discussions with the workers' union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), with a view to establishing a recognition agreement.

The IWW's negotiations were backed up by solidarity demonstrations, part of an ongoing campaign to organise City of London workers which has already won victories for cleaners employed by Ocean Contract Cleaning at Guildhall.

Off the Rails a platform for rank and file railworkers. Summer issue out now.

See: [www.workersliberty.org/offtherails](http://www.workersliberty.org/offtherails)

## Picketing out agency workers

## Barnet council workers to strike on 13 September

By Vicki Morris

Barnet council Unison is taking industrial action against privatisation of council services, and on Saturdays in August has picketed an attempt to break a work-to-rule in revenues and benefits. The branch is also organising a one-day strike on Tuesday 13 September.

Around 400 staff in planning and regulatory services, and revenues and benefits have for several weeks not been doing overtime and refusing to cooperate with the work being done on privatising their jobs.

Barnet's Tory administration plans to privatise the bulk of council services under the One Barnet Programme (OBP), this in spite of the fact that the planned savings would be tiny. OBP will disrupt council services and the council is spending a fortune on consultants and overpaid executives expert in "change management".

Privatisation will mean cuts in pay and conditions of service in order to boost their profits.

The council has already offered three big contracts worth more than £1 billion to the private sector:

- Parking (£25 million)
- Planning, regulatory services and Hendon cemetery (£275 million)

- New Support and Customer Services Organisation (includes revenues and benefits, HR, procurement, finance, IT and a call centre to deal with residents) (£750 million.)

These contracts are for 10 years with the possibility of extending for a further five years. No wonder private companies are

heading to Barnet in droves: 100 companies attended a recent NSCSO "market day", including "big boys" Capita, Serco and BT.

The action in revenues and benefits is beginning to bite. There are around 140 permanent staff, plus 50 agency staff brought in to deal with a backlog caused by problems with a new computer system. The agency staff are now being kept on to deal with the backlog caused by the industrial action. Around 130 Unison members are taking action.

On Saturdays the council has offered overtime to agency and permanent staff. The Unison branch is treating this as an attempt at breaking the industrial action and, with the support of the local anti-cuts group and Barnet trades council, has organised picketing at the council. We have deterred agency workers from going into work. Five or six permanent staff who are not in the union have driven into work. Pickets have managed to stop a few of them and speak to them.

The Unison branch has organised a one-day strike of all members involved in the work-to-rule. On Tuesday 13 September they will start their strike during the day, to encourage maximum participation in picket lines and other activities. In the evening there will be a lobby of the Barnet council meeting, 6pm, Hendon Town Hall, the Burroughs, London NW4 4BG.

• To find how to support the pickets, please email [info@barnettuc.org.uk](mailto:info@barnettuc.org.uk). Please email messages of support to [contactus@barnetunison.org.uk](mailto:contactus@barnetunison.org.uk)

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## The end of a dictatorship

By Martyn Hudson

The hopes and aspirations of revolutionaries across North Africa have apparently been vindicated by the fall of Tripoli, the lair of the despotic Qaddafi family, to the democratic Libyan revolution. As we go to press remnants of the regime are still fighting with rebel forces.

The victory in Misrata, where massacre was averted by its struggling and heroic population and the intervention of NATO forces had led to a westwards advance by the rebels. The key towns of Zawiya and Zlitan fell. The pro-regime troops in the decisive port of Brega in central Libya literally

walked away from their posts. In the south of Libya the stronghold of Marzuq was taken by Toubou tribal rebels. By Saturday 20 August the revolutionary forces lay poised outside of the city limits of Tripoli.

The utterly brutal crackdowns in the city back in February had seemed to intimidate Tripoli's rebels and aside from minor uprisings amongst youth on some estates and neighbourhoods the rebellion seemed to be extinguished. But they were just biding their time to take their historic role in seizing their own city!

On Sunday morning the call to prayers was replaced in the minarets by the call to revolution. This signalled a mass uprising in the city. Thousands of

activists in the working class neighbourhoods of Tajoura and the Suq al-Juma came out onto the streets and marched on key installations in the city.

They captured the Mui-tiqqa military base and stormed the residence of Mansour Daw, head of Tripoli's secret police and security services. At the same time the rebel armies entered Tripoli and found their way already levelled by the working-class revolutionaries of Tripoli itself.

Suffice to say that the ideas of liberty and democracy had already paved the path to Green Square. From this point the rebels simply walked in to central Tripoli as pro-regime loyalist government members escaped or defected and thousands of

troops left their posts and handed their arms to the rebels — having seen that the regime was coming to an end.

Qaddafi and his odious security head Abdullah al-Senussi have been offered clemency and the rule of law if they give themselves up.

**The idea of coming to trial will not be attractive, as the evidence for mass murder and suppression of civilians is compelling. This seems to be the end for a family who have acted as bloodthirsty robber barons since the first 1969 revolution.**

## Fight union busting at Plymouth council

By Darren Bedford

**In the midst of long-running negotiations over a council cuts plan, in which 300 jobs are threatened and some workers could lose up to 20% of their income, Plymouth City Council has de-recognised the public sector Unison, leaving 1,500 council employees (80% of whom are women) voiceless as the council seeks to impose its new pay plans.**

The council's plans are extensive and include cuts to annual leave, the abolition of unsociable hours payments and a reduction of maternity and paternity rights to the statutory minimum. The council initially wanted to extend the working week to Monday-Saturday (6am-8pm) but were forced to climb down after unions refused to negotiate while proposals relating to nationally-negotiated terms and conditions such as sick pay, the working week and basic salary were included in the council's plans. (For a comprehensive exposition of the council's proposals, see here.) The council has also publicly threatened to cut 300 jobs.

### BALLOTS

**The three unions organising at the council (Unison, Unite and the GMB) balloted on the council's proposals in March.**

Unison members narrowly voted to accept, but GMB and Unite members rejected the bosses' plan. As a consequence slight changes were made to the cuts package and the unions went back into negotiation. Unison reassessed the offer and, after its legal department warned that recommending acceptance of an offer which disproportionately impacted against low-paid women workers could result in legal action being taken against the union, it recommended a no vote to its members. The council's response was to summarily de-recognise Unison. While it is claiming GMB and Unite are now on board with its latest proposals, both unions are seeking withdrawal of their signatures from the new deal. Unison's Regional Secretary Joanne

Kaye said in a letter to members: "Our concerns are not just technical, they are about the actual human impact of an agreement that potentially discriminates against mainly women."

### ANTI-UNION TURN

**The unilateral de-recognition of a 1,500-strong union in a public sector workplace marks an alarming new turn in class struggle in local government.**

2010 saw local authorities in Neath & Port Talbot, Birmingham and Walsall all use loopholes in employment legislation to impose cuts packages on their workforces by threatening mass redundancies.

The London Fire Authority used a similar tactic and was eventually forced into some concessions by strike action by the Fire Brigades Union. Using the threat of mass redundancy, effectively forcing unions to negotiate at gunpoint and entirely on the bosses' terms, was a way of undermining and short-cutting around collective bargaining agreements and became the default tactic for any local government management looking to make cuts.

Unless Plymouth City Council is defeated, then simply ripping up union recognition agreements altogether could become the new go-to measure for public sector bosses looking for a quick and easy way to ram through cuts.

125 miles east along the south coast, council workers in Southampton have recently voted overwhelmingly to continue their battle with a Tory council attempting to force through significant cuts to pay and conditions (see page 15).

**If Southampton and Plymouth are anything to go by, then it seems public sector bosses in Britain are taking lessons from their counterparts in Wisconsin, USA and deciding that straightforward union busting is the easiest way to bludgeon their employees into accepting cuts. They must not be allowed to get away with it.**

• Send messages of solidarity to [office@unisonplymouth.net](mailto:office@unisonplymouth.net) and copied to [dturmer@unisonplymouth.net](mailto:dturmer@unisonplymouth.net)

## The return of hope

### WHAT WE SAY

**For anyone who believes in basic human freedom, the fact that Muammar Qaddafi's 42-year long reign of autocratic terror in Libya is seemingly at an end must be a cause for celebration.**

As we go to press fighting is still going on in the capital Tripoli, but for the vast majority of Libyan people it seems to be the return of hope.

Qaddafi's rule was characterised by the most brutal extermination of all political opposition. Torture and public execution were commonplace. The scenes of mass jubilation on the streets of Tripoli and other Libyan cities that greeted the rebels' advances are an inspiring expression of joy and relief that Qaddafi's vice-like grip on power is irreversibly loosening.

But while celebration and hope are the proper first reactions, they must be tempered by a sober assessment of the uncertain political future the Libyan people now face.

The opposition which organised the fighting

against Qaddafi on the ground, its leaders grouped in the National Transitional Council, appears to contain very diverse political elements, some at odds with each other. Some are secular, some Islamist. The rebels included some defectors from Qaddafi's regime and some supporters of the deposed monarchy. A competitive battle to shape Libya's future is now underway.

The Transitional National Council's "Draft Constitutional Charter" already expresses many of those contradictions; it seeks to enshrine freedoms of assembly and association, as well as the right to strike, but also states that Islamic Shari'a is the "principal source of legislation". There will be battles over women's rights, Libya's relationship to foreign countries and over control of its natural resources. Tribal tension may blight the country as sectarian tensions have blighted post-Ba'athism Iraq.

For us, the point-of-departure is workers' organisation; but there is next to

### Celebrations now, but what next?

no working-class organisation in Libya. That is hardly surprising, given the brutal nature of Qaddafi's rule. But if Libya's future is to be even a minimally democratic one, trade unions and working-class political organisations need to be given space to develop and assert themselves. The basic levels of freedom that we hope will exist in the new Libya — freedoms that did not exist — under Qaddafi will make such developments possible.

Perversely, some on the would-be left in Britain will not share in the

Libyan people's joy. The Stop the War Coalition, led by Stalinists like Andrew Murray and the eclectic Counterfire group, prefers to emphasise the "negative aspects" of the overthrow of the regime, and can only bring itself to say that "many Libyans may welcome the outcome, and will be glad to see the back of Qaddafi". The word "many" does not even begin to quantify the immense, mass, celebration that is now taking place in Libya. And mealy-mouthed does not describe this zombie-like response to these tremendous events.

*Continued on page 2*