

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

**Press freedom
threatened**
page 5



**FIERCE RIOTS
DRAMATIC ARREST
OF JAMES LARKIN**

**1913 Dublin
lockout**
page 8

**Syria: answering
a critic**
pages 9-10



BOB CARNEGIE: HOW WE DEFEATED BOSSES' SPITE

A victory for workers' rights



On Friday 16 August charges were dismissed against Bob Carnegie, a union and community activist prosecuted for assisting a construction strike in Brisbane in August-October 2012. Bob, who stood to be jailed for six months, was supported by workers' strikes and demonstrations.

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, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- 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!

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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Unite can save Labour-union link

By a Unite member

The United Left group, which commands a majority on the Executive of the giant Unite union, meets in Manchester on 31 August to discuss the Collins-Miliband proposals on the links between the unions and the Labour Party.

UL secretary Martin Mayer, in convening the meeting, has made clear that he disagrees with Ed Miliband's suggestion that trade unionists counted as "affiliated members" only if they explicitly and individually "opt in".

Jim Kelly, another known defender of the collective trade-union voice in the Labour Party, is due to introduce the discussion. The UL meeting could lead to serious objections at the Unite Executive (meeting from 16 September) to Unite general secretary Len McCluskey's more-or-less unqualified support, so far, for Miliband's move.

Len McCluskey has said that he "welcomes the opportunity" to recast the trade unions relationship with the Labour Party; that the union "block vote didn't stop the Labour government invading Iraq" or keep Labour "out of the clutches of the banks and the city"; and that "defending the status quo is not an option".

Unite circulars have not been clear about whether they will support the cutting-down of union representation at Labour conference and Labour committees, or if they agree that unions must change

their rules to require individual members to "expressly agree" before a part of their political fund payments goes to the political levy paid to Labour.

If Unite votes for such changes at the Labour conference starting on 22 September, or at the Labour special conference planned by Miliband for spring 2014, it will weaken and seriously undermine the ability of working-class people through the trade unions to influence politics. And it will mean that the Unite union's new political strategy, agreed only recently, would be in tatters.

That strategy was meant to be a process in which Unite's members actively engaged in the Labour party and used Unite's collective representation in Labour structures to swing the Labour party to supporting policies that would improve the lives of working-class people.

Democratic rights within the Labour Party, and campaigning for them to be extended, were supposed to

be an essential part of that strategy.

The scale of the problem is shown by the recent agitation from some Labour figures, and in the media, about Ed Miliband not announcing enough new policies. In an even halfway democratic party, policies should be debated and decided by the conference, not just announced by "the leader".

In Manchester the United Left should vote for proposals which give clear direction to Unite's leadership and to the union's delegation to Labour Party conference on how the union should conduct itself on this issue.

We should insist that unions' decisions about which organisations we affiliate to, and how we manage those affiliations, should be in the hands of our members, and not dictated to us from outside. We should not vote for proposals that would force the union to change our rule book.

We should not vote for

proposals that undermine or diminish the collective representation of trade unions in the Labour party.

At present the union decides collectively whether to have a political fund, and where to affiliate. As was made clear in the leaflets for the ballot in which, as recently as May 2013, Unite members voted by an 87.4% majority to retain their political fund, part of that political fund goes to a levy paid to the Labour Party.

By law individual members can "opt out" of the political fund. We should not accept a return to the system imposed by the Tories between 1927 and 1946, where workers could not pay into the political levy unless they explicitly "opted in".

And we shouldn't be forced to vote for controversial proposals put to Labour Party conference at the last minute without the union having a full debate on them.

We should make positive proposals to improve democracy in the Labour Party — for a policy-making conference, for the right to amend NPF documents, and for changes to selection procedures.

The timing of this debate on the union link shows that some on the Labour right are willing to lose the 2015 general election if it helps them end trade-union influence in the Labour Party.

The leadership of Unite must not be allowed to be complicit with that.

Whipps Cross protests

Two demonstrations have been set against threatened cuts at Whipps Cross hospital in East London. The first is on 16 September, 5pm at the Whipps Cross Road entrance; the second, on 21 September 21, noon at The Green.

The threat comes from plans being compiled by Barts Trust to cover a £50 million deficit arising from the £7.1 billion PFI bill at two of the Trust's five other hospitals, Bart's and the Royal London.

The Trust plans to force 1,000 staff, from healthcare assistants to matrons, to

compete against each other for jobs as it reorganises nursing cover across its six hospitals.

It has threatened Charlotte Monro, Unison branch union chair at Whipps Cross hospital, with disciplinary action for raising alarm about job losses, and removed her from a staff-management forum and threatened.

Barts has hired a managerial "troubleshooter", Donald Muir, last notorious for restructuring Rangers football club, on a six-month contract to design the cuts.

Barts has refused to say how much it will pay Muir.

For Workers' Liberty summer camp, 8-11 August around 40 people came to Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire, more than previous years.

Sessions concentrated on three streams; ecology, liberation and class struggle socialism. There were also film showings and a brilliant "open mic night" of theatre, poetry and music.

Comrades were free to attend these or have fun by the campfire, discussing politics, socialising, climbing hills, eating delicious vegan food and playing football matches, including at 6am!

I found this summer camp the best one yet. It was relaxed, with excellent discussions, as well as fun memories. However there are always improvements to be made. Though we had a beautiful location, it wasn't ideal for accessibility.

Demaine Boocock

Egyptian left activists demonstrating in support of rail workers, April 2013

Egypt's left after the massacres

By Pete Radcliff

Hannah Elsis of the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists and the ISN writes: "This notion of 'but Morsi is better than Shafiq and then we can deal with him later', which some of the left put forward in last year's elections, is in my opinion the mistake many of us made that paved the way for today's 'let the army get rid of them, then we will deal with the army'."

"This transitional thinking is what keeps compromising the revolution and causes the revolutionary movement to stutter.

"We need to be confident and coherent and rid ourselves of the amnesia, divisive and disingenuous polarisations, and transitional circles that have blighted us hitherto in order to learn from mistakes and move forward".

Elsisi is right. Ahmed Maher, a leader of the April 6 movement which played a prominent role in 2011, has said that after the massacres of Brotherhood supporters and sympathisers on 14 and 16 August it will take a generation to win back the momentum of 25 January 2011, when the mass street protests began that would soon topple Mubarak.

The Revolutionary Socialists, as always, keep an upbeat tone in their propaganda, but they are reduced to action on a small scale. RS leader Gigi Ibrahim draws comparisons with where they were before the Arab spring started.

When the army chiefs removed MB president Morsi on 3 July, many on the Egyptian left denied that this was, in fact, a coup. Some even went on to support the massacres on 14 and 16 August.

Those included the Nasserite Tagammu Party, and also a more credible Nasserite group, the Karama party, now part of the United Nasserite Party.

Even more disturbingly, the two million strong independent trade union federation EFITU, by a vote of two-thirds of its Executive, backed the 26 July demonstration called by Al-Sisi.

Even the Revolutionary Socialists and the April 6th movement denied that 3 July was a coup, although they opposed the August massacres of the Brotherhood supporters.

The Revolutionary Socialists, like their mentors in the SWP, tend to avoid accounting for their past mistakes by putting a positive gloss on every situation.

"The people who called on the military to protect them on 30 June and subsequently, can defend themselves, without waiting for a hesitating army or police." (Statement from the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt, 6 July 2013). "Al Sisi did on 3 July 2013 what Hussein Tantawi did before him on 11 February 2011 — he acquiesced to the will of the rebelling populace, not out of any patriotism or revolutionary fervour, but out of fear of the revolution." (Egypt: Four days that shook the world by Sameh Naguib, of the RS).

Journalists who said that a military coup had taken place were subjected to accusations that they were acting as supporters and accomplices of the Brotherhood. This was part of a simplistic and ludicrous narrative, propagated energetically by Nasserite forces, but also repeated by others on the left, that Morsi's government was the agency of... "Zionism and the West".

The mobilisation around

the Tamarod movement had grown dramatically from mid April to 30 June. Tamarod was set up by a small group which included former Revolutionary Socialist Hassan Shahine and another four activists. They were also inspired by Kefaya, the "Enough — Movement For Change" in 2004 to oppose the election of Mubarak for his fifth term of office.

The Tamarod made a number of democratic demands and demanded the resignation of Morsi by 30 June. It said nothing about what would replace Morsi.

The idea of petitioning to get more signatures than Morsi had votes, that is more than 13 million, appeared at first ludicrously optimistic.

BROTHERHOOD
But there was huge popular opposition to the Brotherhood.

The liberal bourgeois groups in the National Salvation Front came in on the campaign; so did the rapidly resurgent Nasserite movement, the April 6th movement, and the Revolutionary Socialists. Every office of the independent trade-union support group CTUWS became a petition-organising point. EFITU also threw itself behind the petition.

Some say that the Brotherhood's only crime was its adoption of neo-liberal economic policies. But there was more. The Brotherhood was an authoritarian, frequently brutal, reactionary religious force.

A host of media individuals and artists found themselves charged with insulting Islam or the President. Brotherhood thugs worked with the military to beat up and kill protesters. The Islamists even estab-

lished impromptu torture chambers.

A video was circulating showing Morsi supporters throwing to their deaths teenage kids who had been identified as opponents of the Brotherhood.

The harassment of women increased dramatically. On the days after 30 June Human Rights Watch would report an epidemic of sexual violence. 91 women, primarily those involved in protests, were raped in the area around Tahrir Square.

General Adel Affi of Morsi's Shura Council claimed that: "Women contribute 100 percent in their rape because they put themselves in such circumstances."

The Copts have been subjected to periodic attack for decades. But the Brotherhood actively promoted attacks on Copts by claiming that the anti-Morsi alliance was led and engineered by Copts.

The Brotherhood continued the persecution of trade unions, arresting strikers and putting down strikes.

The RS had not foreseen this. In their 14 August statement they said that: "The Revolutionary Socialists did not defend the regime of Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood for a single day". But they did vote for it to come to power, saying that the MB as a foot-dragging part of "the revolution" while Morsi's opponent in the presidential run-off, Shafiq, represented the counter-revolution.

Even now some such as Counterfire call for a new alliance with the Brotherhood in Egypt. The RS seem to reject this: "These masses will not accept reconciliation with the Muslim Brotherhood".

Greek teachers plan strike

Nicos Anastasiadis, a teacher in northern Greece and a member of the socialist group DEA, talked to *Solidarity*.

The federation of secondary school teachers' unions has decided to strike at the beginning of September. We believe that we can create a spark to persuade all other unions to strike too. We will strike together with students and their parents. We need each others' support and we must all fight together.

The government is dissolving technical education in favour of private schools. They've sacked 2,656 teachers from technical schools, from 110 specialties. About 20,000 students are now obliged to go to private schools. Also, 2,200 school caretakers have been fired.

The 2,656 teachers have been put in redeployment on 75% salary for eight months, and then many of them will probably be fired. Similar things are being done all across the public sector.

When teachers go back to school on 2 September, we will organise meetings. Teachers have already reacted over the summer with demonstrations and meetings. Teachers and hospital workers marched on common demonstrations.

I believe that if the secondary school teachers strike, the primary school teachers will come with us.

All our strikes now have one goal — to overthrow the government. This needs a long strike from all or most of the Greek working class. The goal should not be small changes in the government's policy. Without its overthrow the same problems will keep happening.

The government may try to "conscript" the teachers [put them under military discipline, so a strike is classed as desertion], and we must be ready to face this challenge.

Our goal should be the formation of a left-wing government. That would boost the self-confidence of the Greek working-class and be a step forward in the fight for socialism.



Greek teachers protest

US: new fast food strikes

By Darren Bedford

US workers employed by fast food chains including McDonalds, Burger King, Pizza Hut, and Wendy's will launch a national strike on 29 August as part of their ongoing fight to win a \$15/hour minimum wage.

Most fast food chains currently pay well below \$10 per hour (some as little as \$7.50), and workers have organised a series of city-wide strikes over the past year, involving workers in New York, Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, and elsewhere.

The planned national strike will take place the day after the 50th anniversary of the March on Wash-

ington for Jobs and Freedom, the seminal labour and civil rights movement mobilisation at which Martin Luther King delivered his historic "I Have A Dream" speech.

Fast food workers have organised through a number of national and local workers' centres and campaign groups, including Fast Food Forward and Workers Organising Committee of Chicago. Most are backed by large national unions, with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU, one of America's largest) playing a central role.

The SEIU has also brought in community organisers to help.

The right and wrong kinds of journalism

Press

By Patrick Murphy



The detention and interrogation of David Miranda at Heathrow airport on 18 August has proven quite a test for the British press.

The basic facts of these events might lead you to expect a show of unity across journalism in defence of their own. Miranda is the partner of an investigative journalist, Glenn Greenwald, who has found himself at the heart of one of the great news scoops of the century — the revelation that US and UK state agencies are spying on all of us. It's the 21st century Watergate, the sort of story that draws ambitious young people into journalism in the first place.

The claim by Glenn Greenwald that the detention was no more than an attempt to intimidate him via his partner may not be the whole story, but there can't be any doubt that intimidation was an important subsidiary message of the detention.

The day after the Miranda incident the *Guardian*, not surprisingly, allowed the story to dominate its news agenda and made further revelations about the forced destruction of computer hard drives containing information under the supervision of British security agents in the paper's London offices.

Most papers had lead news items about the story and three, other than the *Guardian*, decided it should be the subject of their editorial comment. All three, to one degree or another, identified the threat to investigative journalism and the danger of allowing state power to grow unchallenged.

The *Mirror* was the clearest and most strident with a leader entitled "Freedom at stake" and an accompanying article by Liberty Director Shami Chakrabarti with the headline "You could be next". The *Times* and *Financial Times* were more cautious, balancing their concerns about press freedom with an insistence that Snowden had, after all, broken the law and it was understandable that the state would want to pursue him and stem the release of material in his possession.

More interesting and revealing was the reaction from the rest of the British press.

The *Mail* and the *Telegraph*, for example, had lead news items but made no comment at all. Their headlines suggested no special concern for journalism and even a hint of sympathy for the state. The *Mail* chose to lead with "Journalist's

Claire Fox: faux libertarian

partner held for 9 hours had 'secret files'". The *Express* also chose not to comment but headlined their story "Police defend detaining partner".

For most of the last two years the *Sun* and News International have had their own reasons to parade their commitment to the freedom of the press from any interference by the state. On this occasion, however, they had nothing to say at all. No news story and no editorial comment. No doubt the role of the *Guardian* in exposing alleged wrong-doing at the *Sun* and other News International papers got in the way of Rupert Murdoch's otherwise single-minded commitment to press freedom.

If so, he wasn't the only one to let dislike of the *Guardian* get in the way of consistent liberal principle. The most intriguing intervention in the post-Miranda coverage was a comment piece in the *Independent* penned by one-time Revolutionary Communist Party member Claire Fox. Fox and her cultish associates in the Institute for Ideas and *Spiked online* have cloaked their very marked move to the right of British politics in the language of anti-state libertarianism.

She couldn't fail to condemn the detention of Miranda and the draconian law that allows it without appearing wholly unserious, and she duly did. That was, however, really just throat-clearing before her main point, which was to present the harassment of investigative journalists like Greenwald as no different in nature to the belated police investigation of phone-hacking.

"Perhaps it's understandable that the British police has become blasé about focusing on journalists and their associates. Who needs to resort to anti-terrorism legislation when, post-Leveson Inquiry, the police have three ongoing investigations into the press, which according to the Press Gazette

have seen 59 journalists arrested.

"None of these journalists has yet been convicted, many have spent months on police bail, and all have had to endure hours of questioning. Worse, their plight has not been taken up by campaigning journalists of the Greenwald variety because — well — they are the wrong kind of journalists. So while it is terrible if Miranda was an innocent bystander in his partner's investigations, what about the families of those Sun journalists arrested in dawn raids?"

What Fox does here is to equate the exposure of major state intrusion on all of our lives (via reporting the evidence of a whistleblower) with the generation of celebrity gossip via illegal payments to police officers and other public officials and the hacking of phones. And that's the most generous description of the activity alleged against the journalists for whom she appeals.

The event at the heart of the Leveson inquiry, let us not forget, was the hacking of the phone of child-abduction victim Milly Dowler. The "three ongoing investigations" she refers to are into police corruption, phone-hacking and computer-hacking. There is no better exemplar of the purpose of investigative journalism than the *Guardian* exposure of Snowden's claims. There is no worse example of the degeneration and abuse of that ideal than the actions of News International over the last 20 years. Claire Fox simply conflates the two.

That she does so in the name of individual freedom and liberty is especially ironic. What Snowden and the *Guardian*'s team of journalists have been doing is alerting us to the fact that the US National Security Agency has access to the email and internet use of all of us — that we are not as free as we may think even in our own homes.

What the Murdoch press have traded in for decades is their untrammelled power to interfere in private lives, to gain access to phones, homes and emails by hook or (more often) by crook. Some of the laws they broke are amongst the few in existence to protect our freedom.

The suggestion that Greenwald and others of his type should be taking up the plight of journalists accused of this sort of activity rather than the plight of Edward Snowden is beyond parody.

It's impossible to tell without knowing the individuals and the pressures they were put under whether Fox's chosen heroes are "the wrong kind of journalists" but I don't think we should hesitate to describe the work they were asked to carry out "the wrong kind of journalism".

Solidarity with Chelsea Manning!

Kate Harris



Content note/ trigger warning for transphobia and sexual violence

Though many people in the media and online expressed surprise at Chelsea Manning's announcement this week, a lot of us in the LGBT+ community have been aware that she is probably a trans woman for quite some time. Rumour was that she went by the name "Breanna". Actually, *Wired* published speculation about Manning's gender way back in 2010.

There has been some confusion over how to refer to Manning in conversation and articles, with many news outlets repeatedly using the wrong pronouns. Although before there was some confusion over her gender as her identity was being suppressed for various reasons, since Manning came out and asked for people to use female pronouns and refer to her by her real name, Chelsea, then that is what we should do. Using her former name should be avoided unless absolutely necessary.

Chelsea Manning faces a incredibly brutal totally out of proportion 35 year sentence. She will also have to serve it in

a harsh prison system. Due to US policy, she will be in a men's prison, where she will no doubt face abuse from other inmates as well as prison guards. Even if she spends her entire term in solitary confinement, she will still have to interact with the prison authorities. Even if she is segregated with other LGBT+ prisoners, tragically, this will not really protect her from abuse.

In 1994, a woman named Dee Farmer took prison warden Edward Brennan and other members of the prison administration to the Supreme Court of the United States. She had been repeatedly raped and beaten by her fellow inmates in a male prison and had contracted HIV as a result. Farmer argued that the administration should have known she was vulnerable to such abuse and put special protections in place. She won.

Despite this victory, the rape, sexual assault and abuse of trans people in US prisons remains extremely high. According to the US Department for Justice, a third of trans women are sexually assaulted while in prison. (In my view, the methodology of this study was poor and the figure is potentially higher.) Trans* women are thirteen times more likely to suffer sexual assault during incarceration than the average. Let's not forget that abuse isn't usually random, one-off incidents, but may happen over a long period of time, or may be part of a wider range of abuse.

On top of this abuse, if the experiences of other incarcer-

ated trans women is anything to go by, there will be potential barriers to her accessing the medical assistance she requires for her transition. In the event of medical treatment being refused, she may take prison officials to court but is unlikely to win (according to a report by the National Center for Lesbian Rights, 2006).

Very briefly looking at trans* rights in Britain outside of prisons, it is clear that trans people are facing horrendous levels of discrimination and oppression. Trans teacher Lucy Meadows committed suicide in March 2013 after being hounded by the rightwing press. Trans* people were consistently erased from inclusion in the Same Sex Marriage Bill of England and Wales — most notably by LGB rights organisation Stonewall. Ironically, trans people played a huge role in the Stonewall rights the "liberal" charity is named after, but the charity is all too ready to ignore and even erase trans* rights discourse. The Same Sex Marriage Act makes it hard for trans people seeking divorce to gain recognition of their gender from their spouse, among other problems.

LGBT+ rights go way further than same-sex marriage. Just as our trans comrades have been there throughout struggles, from the Stonewall riots to Section 28, it's the duty of cisgendered people in our community to be active supporters of the rights of trans people. And it's the duty of socialists to support oppressed groups, including the trans* community.

Defend press freedom!

On Sunday 18 August, David Miranda, the partner of *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald, was detained for nine hours at Heathrow airport and questioned by police. His phone, computer and other electronic equipment was confiscated. He was not allowed access to a lawyer until the last hour of the questioning. The police told him he would be locked up if they thought he was “not cooperating”.

He was detained under Schedule 7 of the 2000 Terrorism Act, and the police questioned him as if they suspected he was a terrorist. They asked Miranda, a Brazilian citizen, for his political opinions about recent protests in his country. Those protests were sparked by bus price rises!

Bullying, highly coercive and unreasonable treatment like this must be illegal, right? No. Schedule 7 of the 2000 Terrorism Act gives the police powers to detain and question anyone at ports and airports in the UK and, unlike the (equally harassing) “stop and search” law, there don’t have to be “reasonable grounds” for stopping people.

Schedule 7 has, according to the civil liberties campaign Liberty, been routinely abused and it is being challenged in the European Court of Human Rights. People who fit a certain “racial profile” — people of Asian or Arab descent — have been detained under Schedule 7.

But Miranda’s detention was not “routine” in that sense. It was an intervention by the British state, more than likely coordinated with the US state, prompted by paranoia about press investigations into the state spying, and intended to intimidate the press into silence on these matters.

Miranda’s partner Glenn Greenwald is at the centre of journalistic investigations into UK and US state surveillance arising from revelations made by US whistleblower and former intelligence analyst Edward Snowden. All the emails, phone calls, texts and social media communications made by you, me and everyone else in the world are potentially available to the state.

David Miranda at the time of his detention was travelling to Rio de Janeiro after a visit to a film maker working on Snowden’s revelations.

The government’s lawyers, backing up the police, have argued that Miranda is not a journalist, therefore his detention and confiscation of the documents he was carrying was “in the national interest”, was about “protecting the country” and so on. They and the police were forced into a ludicrous position of saying David Miranda is, or could be, a terrorist.

The left must make a political campaign out of these alarming events. We need to spell out what the state is doing and why it does what it does.

Firstly, David Miranda’s detention and the subsequent court ruling (22 August) which allows the government to keep, scrutinise and use the documents they confiscated from Miranda, is a very serious threat to press freedom. If journalists cannot protect their research and sources on which they base their stories, they cannot do their job of calling powerful people to account.

Miranda’s detention is part of a global picture of creeping repression. In the US, following the Snowden leaks, the Justice Department was caught spying on Associated Press journalists. The government has also threatened to send a *New*

David Miranda after his “Schedule 7” detention

York Times reporter to jail if he refuses to disclose the source of another leak.

Second we should point out this secret surveillance is not essential or even very effective at catching and stopping Islamist terrorists or any other group inclined to murderous acts in the name of reactionary political causes.

And even if it was effective it would not be right. Suspected Islamist terrorists should have the same rights as everyone else, and those should include the right to a lawyer, the right not to be “rendered” to a state torturer on the other side of the world, and the right not to be locked up without charge.

Secret monitoring is about the state creating and maintaining controlling mechanisms in society — building up the police and other coercive powers, developing a legal infrastructure weighted in favour of the rich. The state presides over, keeps in check and helps to reproduce class society.

Along with the Chelsea Manning case these events have shown the extent to which the capitalist state will sacrifice the lives of individuals and democratic rights in order to maintain its ability to operate without scrutiny.

Defend whistleblowers and press freedom. Lift the lid on state surveillance. Abolish the anti-terror legislation.

• act.freepress.net/sign/journ_press_intimidation

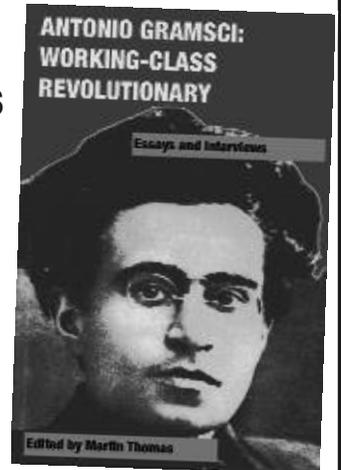
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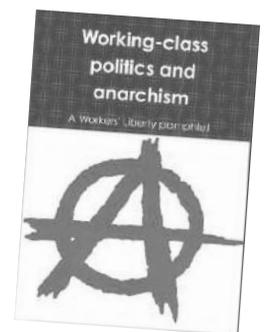
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“The last moment belongs to us”

By Sean Matgamna

On 23 August 1927, two Italian-born anarchists were strapped into the electric chair in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, and electrocuted by order of the Mass. Supreme Court. They were Nicolo Sacco, a shoemaker, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a fish-pedlar.

During the seven years they were in jail before their execution, the names of Sacco and Vanzetti became a byword in the US and international labour movement for ruling-class justice and the use of the courts to frame up and lynch rebel workers.

Sacco and Vanzetti themselves believed they were victimised because they were foreign-born radicals. They felt themselves to be representatives of one class, the working class, being judged in the hostile courts of their class enemies. They conducted themselves as class-conscious men throughout their long years in jail fighting for their lives.

They insisted on seeing themselves as class-war prisoners. “I am and remain for the emancipation of the working class”, said Vanzetti firmly in 1926, after the Massachusetts Supreme Court had refused a new trial.

Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested in May 1920 and charged with armed robbery and murder.

This was the period of the anti-Bolshevik hysteria usually linked with the name of Palmer, then US Attorney General. Thousands of socialists, communists, and anarchists were harassed and jailed, or, if foreign-born, deported. There were lynchings by vigilantes and murders of prisoners by police.

In May 1920 a radical friend of Sacco’s and Vanzetti’s, named Solseda, was found dead outside a building where the authorities had detained him. Alarmed, Sacco and Vanzetti attempted to borrow a motor car to move incriminating radical literature. This attracted the attention of the police to them. They were arrested and charged with shooting the paymaster and a guard on the main street of South Braintree, Mass., in April 1920.

The actual charge against them played less part in the court hearings than did the fact that they were foreigners and anarchists.

The legal case against them rested fundamentally on identification by eyewitnesses. In addition ballistic experts gave evidence that was interpreted by the prosecution as proof that a bullet used in the robbery had been fired from a gun found in Sacco’s possession. Modern experts consider this to be inconclusive; and Sacco had a weighty alibi.

At the time of the robbery he had been in Boston making arrangements for a passport at the Italian Consulate. The Consulate corroborated his account.

No matter. Sacco and Vanzetti had given false information about themselves to the police. They had carried guns and the police said. they had got the impression that Sacco and Vanzetti had been inclined to use them when they were apprehended.

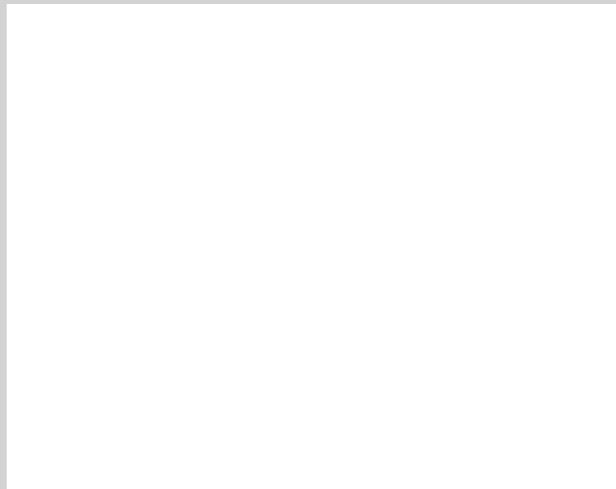
All this showed clear “knowledge of their own guilt”. But, the defence counsel explained, these things had a different explanation: Sacco and Vanzetti were aware of being foreign-born anarchists, the sort of people who were being arrested, jailed and deported daily in 1919-20.

This explanation was as good as an admission of guilt to the prosecution, which appealed to the religious, political and national prejudices — Protestant Anglo-Saxon and Irish Catholic — of the New England jury, against Sacco and Vanzetti, Italian anarchists, who opposed the ruling class. and who had opposed World War One.

In July 1921 they were found guilty of first-degree murder.

Light is shed on the character of this trial by a secondary part of the Sacco-Vanzetti case. Vanzetti was tried for and convicted of an armed robbery carried out in December 1919. Sacco was not tried, for he could prove he had been in the shoe factory on the day of the robbery.

The conviction of Vanzetti rested entirely on evidence of identification by eye-witnesses. Statements now available, but kept secret until Vanzetti had been long dead, made by private detectives immediately after the robbery in 1919, vary greatly from the evidence given in court on the basis of which. Vanzetti was convicted.



Sacco and Vanzetti

The conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti aroused a great protest throughout the USA and around the world, which quickly became a campaign to save them. Millions of workers protested and demonstrated “For Sacco and Vanzetti”. In Britain the TUC, the Labour Party, and hundreds of local working-class organisations protested, as did the working class movement in many countries. Opposition spread to include wide layers of liberals and others.

This seemed only to strengthen the relentless bloodthirstiness and obstinacy of the Massachusetts establishment. The US Supreme Court refused to interfere.

In 1925 an already condemned man, Madeiras, made a confession which led to much circumstantial evidence that the South Braintree raid was the work of professional gangsters. That made no difference.

An advisory committee set up by Governor Alvin T Fuller in mid-1921 showed unmistakably the attitude of the ruling class to Sacco and Vanzetti. It consisted of the President of Harvard University, the President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and a retired judge. It whitewashed the trial and the convictions to the best of its abilities.

Even this committee felt obliged to answer widespread criticisms of the judge, Thayer, by censuring him for a “grave breach of decorum” in uttering prejudiced remarks outside the court against Sacco and Vanzetti. The committee concluded, nevertheless, that this prejudice had not influenced judge Thayer in court!

After seven years of refined torture, during which all the possible legal appeals were exhausted, Sacco and Vanzetti were, according to the American practice, brought to court for sentence.

Before the sentence, Vanzetti said to the judge: “You are the one that is afraid. You are the one that is shrinking with fear, because you are the one that is guilty of attempt to murder”.

After it, he said: “Now we are not a failure... Never in our full life could we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man’s understanding of man as now we do by an accident. Our words — our lives — our pains — nothing! The taking of our lives — lives of a good shoe-maker and a poor fish-pedlar — all! That last moment belongs to us — that agony is our triumph!”

Sacco and Vanzetti’s revolutionary attitude made the trial a test case, a trial of strength. Sacco and Vanzetti looked to the labour movement for their freedom. There were mass demonstrations, and strikes and great meetings. But the protests were not strong enough to stop the work of the executioner.

With virtually martial law in force in Boston, Sacco and Vanzetti were electrocuted in the early hours of the morning of August 23rd, 1927.

It has now been admitted by the authorities that two “innocent” men died on that day. That isn’t much use to Nicolo Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. And indeed it is not much use, either, to the thousands of black victims of racism who right now are in jail in the USA.

• From Workers’ Action 66, 13 August 1977

A victory

By Martin Thomas

On Friday 16 August, contempt of court charges against Bob Carnegie, the Workers’ Liberty Australia member and union activist prosecuted for assisting a construction strike in Brisbane in August-October 2012, were dismissed.

All the big construction sites in the centres of Brisbane had been shut by strikes, as they were on 11-13 February, when the case came to trial.

2,000 construction and other workers came to a solidarity demonstration at the Federal Court in Brisbane. Around 100 crammed into the courtroom and cheered when the judge announced the verdict.

He ruled that the terms of the injunctions obtained by the construction company Abigroup (part of the giant multinational corporation Lend Lease) against Bob had not been sufficiently clear.

If the charges had been upheld, Bob was likely to be sentenced to six months’ jail.

Emerging from court, Bob said: “Fellow workers, comrades, case dismissed. We won.”

Won for now, that is.

Bob added: “An eight-day civil trial is set down in October where Abigroup will attempt to have me found guilty under the tort of nuisance, and held responsible for millions of dollars in damages. I still need your support”.

Abigroup had conceded the justice of the workers’ claims. While the dispute was still on, they had never asked the police, present every day at the community protest outside the site, to remove Bob. Then they tried to penalise Bob, in order to deter working-class activists in future.

The judge must have had his awareness of Abigroup’s spite, and of Abigroup’s lawyers’ unclarity in in wording, sharpened by the protests.

That is how many working-class victories are won. The law does not float in an ether outside the class struggle. The content and the interpretation of the law are shifted by the pressures of class struggle.

The strikes and demonstration to support Bob did not come from the free-flowing goodwill of the union leaders. Ever since the charges were laid against Bob, in October 2012, they had been cautious.

Cautious because they are union officials, steeped in the idea that the most important thing in trade unionism is always protecting the “bricks and mortar” of the official trade-union machine. And cautious also because they knew Bob to be an independent-minded man, a political critic, a Trotskyist.

Ever since the charges were brought, there has been a rank-and-file campaign, mostly organised by socialists. It has issued leaflets, in French and Spanish as well as in English; organised demonstrations and meetings; and collected messages of support all over the world.

Without that we might well not have won this round. With a continuation of the campaign, we can win the next round, against the case for damages to be heard in October.

The origins of this case are shaped by particularities of the Australian labour movement, but its lessons are more widely applicable.

The right to strike has always been very limited in Australia, which has a long tradition of binding arbitration. It is even more limited under current legislation, passed by the Rudd-Gillard Labor government to repeal the ultra-vindictive WorkChoices law introduced by the previous conservative administration in 2005.

Industrial action is “protected” from legal reprisals only if it is to gain a new collective-bargaining agreement, and after the expiry of the old agreement. (And it is not always “pro-

for workers' rights



The campaign needs to continue

By Bob Carnegie

The support that I received, particularly from the construction unions in Queensland, was magnificent. Thousands downed tools and marched to the hearing, filling the foyer of the court, where I was able to address the workers and thank them for their support.

We had support too, from the United Voice union, and from socialist groups, Socialist Alternative and Workers' Liberty in particular.

There was an intense, palpable feeling when it was announced that the case had been dismissed. Such things give confidence to workers that if they support their comrades when they're under attack, they can achieve victory even when it seems virtually impossible.

I've now been invited to talk to four hundred stewards down in the engine room of construction unionism, in Victoria. So we have given workers some degree of confidence that everything isn't hopeless in a world where workers don't get many wins.

The acquittal shows the importance of what organisations like Workers' Liberty have done. The international support I received was astounding, and maybe more solid than the national support. It's important that people know the dispute came under a lot of high-level surveillance. Some of my emails were hacked, including ones from Workers' Liberty.

Our campaign needs to continue. Abigroup is claiming damages \$300,000 a day. Because of my role in the last 30 days of the dispute, they are trying to get \$9 million out of me!

The standard of proof in a civil case is "balance of probabilities" rather than "beyond reasonable doubt" so we're faced with a difficult situation.

Lend Lease [parent company of Abigroup] is hell bent on bankrupting community activists for supporting workers and demanding massive damages from unions along the way for simply trying to ensure that workers doing the same work are paid the same pay.

The union is also being sued for damages, but my defence is separate from the union's defence, since I acted as a community activist rather than under the instruction of the union.

If the case against me personally is successful, it will establish a precedent that any member of the public who joins a community protest supporting a group of workers will be financially liable for the losses the employers say they suffered.

There is a community protest down in Port Melbourne where activists have been highlighting the case of six dockworkers who have been sacked because they refused to do a job they weren't properly trained to do. Already community activists have been hit with injunctions, so you can see the shape of things to come if Abigroup are able to get away with this.

It is really important that unions and community groups work together and that no one is left isolated.

Thousands of workers downed tools to come to Bob's hearing

tected" even then).

Thus most strikes in Australia are "unprotected". Many are short strikes where the boss sees no gain in attempting legal action — like those staged to support Bob on 11-13 February and 16 August — or where the union pays a fine.

The one which broke out with 650 workers on the Queensland Children's Hospital construction site in August 2012 was illegal, but much longer than usual — nine weeks.

The workers' demand was for a union-negotiated agreement for the site, with a "subcontractors' clause" which would ensure the same rate for the job across the many subcontractors on the site, and make the main contractor, Abigroup, responsible for back-pay and other entitlements of the employees of subcontractors that failed.

The dispute was sparked by a gyproc subcontractor going bust and leaving its employees without jobs and without pay. Unions had condemned cut-throat tendering on the gyproc subcontracts months before.

Abigroup got court orders against all the union officials, including the site delegate, and they stayed away from the site. The bosses must have hoped that would kill the dispute. The workers were still on strike, but without leadership and without organisers.

BOB'S ROLE

Bob Carnegie is not a construction worker by trade. But he is a well-known trade unionist in Brisbane. In August 2012, he was at home, unable to work at his trade because of illness.

The workers asked him to come and help them organise. He went. He helped organise daily community protests outside the site, weekly mass meetings with full and democratic discussion, dispute bulletins, the collection and administration of a hardship fund for strikers, and delegations to other workplaces.

Abigroup got court orders trying to instruct Bob to keep away from the site. He stayed there.

By early October Abigroup had to concede the workers' demand.

The union officials negotiated an agreement. It's fairly usual in Australia for a deal to end a dispute to include an agreement by the boss not to prosecute workers. In this case the union officials said that Abigroup would undertake not to prosecute some other workers, but would give no promises about Bob.

It is not unknown in Australia for trade-unionists to be jailed over industrial disputes, including on "contempt of court" charges. Bob Carnegie himself was jailed in 1985 for activity in support of a power workers' dispute.

However, Abigroup's move against Bob was unusual in its vindictiveness, and clearly part of a drive across the construction industry to roll back trade-union activity.

Those details may be particular to Australia. But the lessons from how we won the campaign against the "contempt of court" prosecution have wide relevance.

The unionisation rate in Australia is lower than in Britain. The political climate is as unfavourable. In March 2012 the conservative LNP won a landslide victory in Queensland, the state of which Brisbane is the capital. Federally, a wretched Labor administration is staggering towards almost-certain heavy defeat by a stridently right-wing opposition in elections due on 7 September 2013.

Construction workers on big city-centre sites are better-organised in Australia than in Britain. But in Britain too there are patches and pockets of strong trade-union organisation.

These things won the campaign:

- Rank and file initiative, not waiting for the official union leaders;
- The will to test and query unjust but ostensibly legal impositions;
- **Solidarity: strongly-organised groups of workers using their strength, not just to win their own demands, but to support those who would otherwise be isolated and victimised.**

Dublin 1913: the “proletarian army” is born

By Tom Harris

A hundred years ago (on 26 August 2013) tram workers in Dublin struck after their employer had tried to stop them being members of the Irish Transport and General Workers' union. The strike spread, eventually involving 20,000 workers, and lasted eight months.

It was a bitter dispute — bosses locked out the workers [shut up workplaces as a means of resisting workers' demands] — but socialists at the time admired the militancy and organisation of the Irish workers. Vladimir Lenin praised the “unparalleled animation” of the Dublin labour movement, and marvelled at how a region that had been mired in religious backwardness and poverty had so quickly become a “country with an organised army of the proletariat”.

How had such a transformation come about?

At the turn of the 20th century the Irish working class was oppressed by conditions of extreme poverty and exploitation. Largely unorganised, workers in Dublin lived in crowded and poorly maintained tenement buildings and worked for miserable wages. The journalist George Russell described working-class Dublin life as “an interesting experiment ... to find out how closely human beings can be packed together, on how little a human being can live and what is the minimum wage an employer can pay him.”

Things were not much better in the countryside. Tenant farmers and agricultural labourers had very few rights and a semi-feudal relationship with the powerful landowners. Conditions were compounded by national oppression, with the potential for democratic reform blocked by British rule.

The early Irish trade union movement had been a limited affair. Groups of skilled workers were organised in narrow “craft associations”, but the great mass of urban workers had little organisation to protect them. In Britain, a similar situation had prevailed until the late 1880s when a generation of socialists began to organise workers on a militant, industrial basis known as “New Unionism”.

With hopes of replicating New Unionism in Ireland, Liverpool-born trade union organiser James Larkin went to Belfast in 1907. Belfast was one of the most important industrial cities in the UK. Larkin was sent by the National Union of Dock Labourers to recruit and organise dockers. He led an important strike in the Belfast docks that briefly bridged the sectarian divide between Catholic and Protestant workers.

Larkin and other socialists went on to unionise most of the ports in Ireland, utilising militant tactics of aggressive industrial action. Wages and conditions began to improve. However a tension was developing between Larkin's radical approach and the conservatism of the NUDL leadership (led by James Sexton). The union leadership accused Larkin of embezzling funds when he issued strike pay to dockers without the Executive's approval. The authorities took their opportunity to teach the troublemaker a lesson, and Larkin was jailed.

The case outraged a generation of young Irish socialists, who successfully campaigned for Larkin's release. Once free, he set about creating a new workers' organisation on the industrial principles of new unionism. The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union recruited across the country, becoming the largest union. Its biggest concentration was in Dublin. The ITGWU began to organise the “unskilled”, “general” workers to challenge their exploitation.

The favoured tactic was the solidarity strike. If one group of workers came under attack, others would come out in support, multiplying the disruption.

Rather than a chaotic rabble, the employers of Dublin were now faced with an organised class that would not allow itself to be victimised. The capitalists began to make concessions. Wages began to increase by as much as 25 percent.

The bosses began to plan their retaliation. William Martin Murphy, one of Ireland's wealthiest businessmen and a prominent Home Rule nationalist, devised a scheme to “crush Larkin” and the ITGWU. Co-ordinated action had made the labour movement strong, and Murphy knew that co-ordinated action on behalf of the employers could be similarly effective. He proposed to the Chamber of Commerce and all the industrialists of the city that from now on no one was to employ ITGWU workers. Workers must renounce in-

volvement with the union or lose their job.

Aware that he was plotting a course for war, Murphy presented his plans to the British authorities at Dublin Castle. He was assured of police and military support in his showdown with the union.

STRIKE BEGINS

The first systematic sackings of union workers began in Murphy's own companies, the Dublin United Tramway Company and the *Irish Independent* newspaper.

After days and weeks of victimisation and lay-offs, the ITGWU called strike action for 26 August, the first day of the Royal Dublin Horse Show. At 9.50 in the morning, when as many trams as possible were clustered in the city centre, staff stopped their vehicles.

But Murphy was prepared. An army of scab drivers were deployed, guarded by police escort, and trams were running again within the hour. Union workers responded by hurling stones at the trams, and later that day thousands rallied for a meeting outside the union's headquarters in Liberty Hall. Those who addressed the crowd had their homes raided by detectives the next morning.

Dozens of trade unionists were brought before police courts, accused of intimidation, and their leaders were charged with incitement before the police magistrate. The magistrate, E G Swifte, was a substantial shareholder in the Murphy's tram company.

When Larkin called for a mass demonstration on O'Connell Street, Swifte banned it. At another meeting outside Liberty Hall, Larkin burnt the proclamation setting out the ban. He would be at O'Connell Street, he said, “dead or alive.”

The other union leaders negotiated a route for the march leading from Liberty Hall to the outskirts of the city. The ban, it was thought, would be observed after all. Larkin, however, had got himself smuggled into a room of one of Murphy's own hotels on O'Connell Street, and addressed a crowd from the balcony. It was an audacious act, but the police responded brutally. A full baton charge of the crowd beneath the balcony left around 500 people hospitalised.

The next day, the Trades Union Congress was meeting in Manchester. Horrified delegates listened to reports of the police violence. The Congress voted to give full support to the strikers.

A city-wide lockout was now in place, and the situation descended into all-out war. Two workers were beaten to death by police and another, Alice Brady, was shot dead by a scab. William Martin Murphy was dubbed “Murder Murphy” for the brutality of his tactics, and his effigy was burnt in the streets.

The great Irish socialist James Connolly was also an organiser in Dublin at this time. He took it upon himself to begin to drill workers into an Irish Citizen Army for self-defence.

SOLIDARITY

Under the immense pressure of starvation and state violence, solidarity from other workers became critical.

The bosses had planned well for the fight, setting aside funds to keep themselves comfortably afloat while they waited for the workers to submit. Those who went into work found they were denied entry or pay until they had abandoned the union. The bosses' plan revolved around starving out their employees. It was therefore crucial to the workers' chances of success that as much financial and material support from outside Dublin could be mustered.

When Larkin toured Britain to appeal for solidarity, he addressed enormous audiences, including a packed Albert Hall. Over the course of the lockout, union branches, trades councils and Labour Party branches generated over £93,000 worth of aid (an astounding figure for the time), and ships full of food for the strikers made their way into Dublin. Without this support, it is unlikely the strike could have lasted more than a few weeks.

Despite the crucial difference made by the aid, the city was nevertheless wracked with violence and poverty. To alleviate the situation, one English socialist, Dora Montefiore, began to organise for the children of strikers to be evacuated from Dublin and housed with sympathetic trade unionists in Britain for the duration of the labour war. An appeal in the

Audacious and determined: Jim Larkin

Daily Herald was met with an enthusiastic response. Hundreds of offers to house and care for children flooded in from London, Liverpool and Glasgow. Space for 40 children and five mothers was offered from trade unionists in Plymouth alone.

Montefiore led a delegation to Dublin to organise the passage of the children to safety. Relieved and exhausted mothers crowded into meetings at Liberty Hall, eager to get their children out of the starving tenements. The capitalist political establishment of the city was deeply alarmed by this development — if workers no longer had to fear for their families they stood a far better chance of holding out. They sought to disrupt the scheme by stirring up sectarian hysteria, and a propaganda campaign was waged by fanatical priests and the Ancient Order of Hibernians, who claimed that evacuated children would be placed in the corrupting homes of Protestants and Jews. Children would return to their parents as heathens, they claimed. Moreover, the absence of motherly responsibilities would supposedly lead the women of Dublin into promiscuity and sin!

When parents took their children to the train station they were mobbed by howling priests and men from the Order, leaving mothers and children distraught. This appalling intervention, approved and sanctioned by the Archbishop of Dublin and the Catholic establishment, effectively destroyed the evacuation scheme. Starving children continued to scavenge the bins of the city for food.

The moral, financial and material support from outside Dublin was important, but it was only able to buy the locked out workers more time. In order to strike a crippling blow to the Irish bourgeoisie, strikes would have to spread until it had paralysed not just Dublin or Ireland but Britain as well.

Militants in the trade unions were agitating for this, and there were some small instances of success. Railway workers in the Midlands and dockworkers in Liverpool refused to handle goods from Dublin and a steam ship transporting Guinness to London was effectively stranded by workers who refused to unload it. But the large scale of industrial action in solidarity that was required never came.

The leadership of the TUC held a conference in Ireland and ruled against such a course. The conservative, bureaucratic leadership began to rein in the money and food sent to Dublin, and the strikers were left more and more isolated. After eight months, the union accepted defeat and workers either renounced their membership or accepted they had been sacked.

Despite the best efforts of William Martin Murphy and the employers of Dublin, the ITGWU was not destroyed, and recovered over the coming years to be bigger than it had been before the Lockout. Nor would the Irish working-class ever return to the level of disorganisation and humiliation it had known before the establishment of the union.

Though the bosses had won a temporary victory, they had done so at a great cost to themselves, and no effort was ever made to repeat such an all-out assault on Dublin's workers.

Syria: a reply to a critic

By Mark Osborn*

“The regime and its allies have lost any moral standing in what they chose early on to frame as an existential struggle, in which self-serving ends justify abominable means.”

“Much of the opposition, in response, has gradually adopted a similar worldview, brandishing its enemy’s ruthlessness to excuse its own excesses ... The opposition refers to the regime as an occupying power and tends to stress the alien culture of the Alawi minority that forms a key component of the regime’s fighting structure. ...

“The core of the opposition, never entirely peaceful, has grown vicious and short-sighted, too. Kidnappings for ransom, torture and execution of detainees, desecration of corpses and indiscriminate attacks are not the sole preserve of the regime’s henchmen.

“[Pro-regime] loyalty was driven by communal fear, social prejudice and individual selfishness. Loyalists chose not to see the obvious savagery with which the regime dealt with protesters, peaceful activists. ... A former ambassador acknowledges the regime’s horrendous repression, but justifies it as a response to the opposition’s radicalisation, when in fact the former catalysed the latter.

“As the revolt has transformed from street protest into all-out war, its initial displays of grace — facing tanks with roses, holding crosses aloft with Qurans and shouting that Syrians are ‘one’ — have in many cases given way to pure hatred. Armed groups that were initially made up of local shabab (young people) who merely wanted to protect their families and friends became brutal and ideologically repulsive.”

(From an article by Peter Harling of International Crisis and Sarah Birke of the *Economist*, MERIP, April 2013)

While the AWL initially supported the uprising against Assad we have been forced, by the developing situation in the country — by the facts — to re-evaluate. Marcus Halaby from Workers’ Power has written a long polemic against our re-evaluation (bit.ly/syriadebate). Although Marcus is sincere and honest, replying to him is difficult because his position seems incoherent,

Since I last wrote on this debate (against Pham Binh, *Solidarity* 282, April 13) several shifts have taken place, none of them good.

First, the military balance has shifted towards the regime. The Lebanese party-militia Hezbollah’s fighters were decisive when the regime retook Qusayr from the rebels on 5 June.

A senior Revolutionary Guards leader, Hossein Taeb, explained, “If we lose Syria we won’t be able to hold Tehran.” Iran has provided more financial and military aid and helped construct a new 60,000-strong militia, the National Defence Force, based on Alawites and other minorities, modelled on its own Basiji. Iran and Hezbollah have intervened for strategic reasons, to ensure Assad’s survival.

Second, Syria is increasingly a site for wider conflicts to be fought out.

The intervention of Iran-Hezbollah highlights a sharpened international Shia-Sunni struggle. For example, in response to the kidnapping by rebel militia of nine Lebanese Shia pilgrims in May 2012, two Turkish airline pilots were seized in Lebanon in August 2013, apparently to force the Turkish government to ensure the Shia are freed.

It seems that there were 2-5000 Hezbollah fighters in Syria in May during the battle for Qusayr. There are also significant numbers of non-Syrian Shia militia members ostensibly guarding religious sites inside the country.

The Sunni-Shia battle is reflected in the regional power struggle between Saudi Arabia (plus Qatar) and Iran. Qatar has reportedly spent \$3bn on supporting the rebels over the last two years and has offered \$50,000 to every Syrian army defector and his family. Saudi armaments go through Jordan, Qatar’s through Turkey.

These outside forces meddle directly inside Syria. For example, Moaz al-Khatib, the president of the external-opposition front, the Syrian National Coalition, recently resigned, stating: “The people inside Syria have lost the ability to de-

Pushed towards sectarianism

cide their own fate. I have become only a means to sign some papers while [Saudi and Qatar] decide on behalf of the Syrians.”

It is not only Hezbollah and Iran who have fighters on the ground, but, for example, there are estimated to be 2000 Tunisian Islamists fighting for the opposition (information: Patrick Cockburn, 23 May 13, LRB).

A new East/West Cold-war face-off is shaping up between China-Russia and the US-EU over Syria.

The Syrian Kurdish question is also being internationalised. There seems to be the possibility of a major round of fighting between PKK Kurdish militias (dominant in north east Syria) and Islamists. Isa Huso, a senior Kurdish politician in the area was recently killed by a car bomb — blamed on Islamists — in Qamishli, in the north east. Both sides are now mobilising; Massoud Barzani, a warlord-political leader in Iraqi Kurdistan, has threatened to intervene on the side of the Syrian Kurds; Turkey also has dirty hands.

Third, the war is spilling over into neighbouring countries. There are now 1.7 million refugees in neighbouring countries and the sheer number of refugees is impacting on politics and social life (and this figure is expected to rise to 3.4 million by the end of 2013). In addition, the refugees have brought their political views with them. And finally, societies like Lebanon are already split by the conflict with sections of the original population taking different sides.

Lebanon, for example, has four million citizens plus now 525,000 Syrian refugees (the equivalent in the UK would be about 8 million). In August 2013 Al Jazeera reported that 80% of the Lebanese population believes the refugees are stealing their jobs; the government has promised a crackdown. Lebanon, which suffered sectarian war for 15 years, from 1975, is potentially extremely unstable and has already seen open Syria-related fighting in Tripoli in February 2012.

More recently, dozens have died in clashes, and in July a prominent Syrian government supporter, Mohammed Dar-rar Jammo, was assassinated in southern Lebanon; a roadside bomb hit a Hezbollah convoy; a car bomb wounded 53 people in a Hezbollah area of Beirut. (*Fox News*, July 13)

Bombs exploded in Turkey on 11 May, killing 49 people, mostly Turks, leading to violent demonstrations against Syrians.

There are now 250,000 Syrians in Egypt who face a clamp-down by the new post-Brotherhood government.

Nouri al-Maliki, the Iraqi prime minister, says, probably rightly, “If the [Syrian] opposition is victorious, there will be a civil war in Lebanon, divisions in Jordan, and a sectarian

war in Iraq.” Maliki, a Shia and leader of the Dawa party, is no friend of the socialist left, but he is not wrong to be concerned. An opposition victory would strengthen Islamist and Sunni chauvinist forces that are already mobilised in Iraq, killing hundreds each week with car bombs and suicide attacks. 1045 civilians and security personnel were killed in May, the highest figure for several years.

SUPPORT THE “REVOLUTION”?

Nevertheless Marcus Halaby wants to maintain support for the Syrian ‘revolution’. He begins like this:

Revolutions — quoting Lenin — are not born perfect; we should not expect one army to line up perfectly behind a banner reading, “socialism” and another behind a banner reading “imperialism”.

Sectarian civil wars have happened (for example in Lebanon), but this, today, in 2013, in Syria, isn’t one; there are sectarian aspects to this uprising against Assad’s regime but in communal civil wars each ethnic group normally has their own party/militia. (I am thinking about reworking Lenin for Marcus: sectarian civil wars are not born perfect, with one side lined up behind a banner reading “Sunni” and one side behind a banner reading “Alawite”...)

Halaby claims that the war in Syria is not a communal war, and that the majority base of support for the regime is Sunni. For this unusual claim he provides no evidence whatsoever, just his opinion. It is also beside the point, since we have not argued that Syria is gripped by a Lebanon-style civil war, only that the current civil war could degenerate even further to produce a new Lebanon (or much worse).

What we have argued is that the opposition is increasingly gripped by ethnic sectarianism and Islamism. For example:

The *Daily Telegraph* notes kidnappings and targeted violence from Islamists in this article: “Syrian Christian towns emptied by sectarian violence: Tens of thousands Syriac Christians — members of the oldest Christian community in the world — have fled their ancestral provinces of Deir al-Zour and Hasakah.” (2 August 13)

In an article “Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham Expands Into Rural Northern Syria”, Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, on the Syria Comment website, details the extensive expansion of sharia courts and Islamist rule across large areas of north-eastern Syria.

A 15 year-old boy, “Muhammed Qatta was executed in the northern province of Aleppo on Sunday by the Al-Qaeda [affiliate]... accused of using the Prophet Mohammed’s name in an offensive manner... The rebels shot the boy in the head and neck with an automatic rifle in front of a crowd that included Qatta’s parents.” (*Telegraph*, 10 June 13)

Saint Elias church in Qusayr was desecrated by Islamists on May 13 (footage on YouTube, also shown in July 13 on Channel 4 News).

The *Guardian* discusses increasing ethnic division and cleansing: “Homs, long a place where a Sunni majority lived in co-existence co-existed with minority Christian and Alawite communities, has now been a city of cantonments for almost 18 months: Alawite areas are surrounded by security walls that are off-limits to opposition areas. The countryside to the north and east, where Sunni and Alawite communities live nearby each other, has been volatile for much of the past year, with massacres documented in Sunni communities in Houla, Baniyas and Hoswaie.

“The apparent cleansing is not all one way though. North of Latakia, Alawites have been chased out of their villages near the Turkish border by opposition groups, which in that area are dominated by jihadists.” (*Guardian*, 22 July 13)

The offensive led by Islamist militias on Alawite villages in Latakia province shows what an opposition victory might look like: “The three-day offensive, targeting Alawite villages close to Assad’s hometown of Qardaha, has seen some 200 people killed, according to activists. Hundreds, possibly thousands of Alawite civilians have fled the villages seeking refuge in the coastal city of Latakia itself, residents told The Daily Star, following a large-scale assault by some 2,000 opposition fighters, led by Al-Qaeda linked groups.” (*Lebanon Daily Star*, 7 August 13)

* This article was written in mid-August 2013, so includes no comment on the most recent events in Syria.

An end to species war?

Daisy Thomas reviews 'The City of Bones'

'The City of Bones' is based on the first of *The Mortal Instruments* series of books by Cassandra Clare, and I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the film adaptation. I was especially impressed by Lily Collins, who played Clary, the young female protagonist.

Clary always thought she was just like everybody else until she started drawing a mysterious symbol. From there, everything she thought she knew is changed.

She goes from being a "mundane" (a human) towards becoming something else entirely. She is joined by her best friend, Simon (Robert Sheehan), who appears a fairly run-of-the-mill kind of guy, but he actually handles all the supernatural stuff fairly well... for a mundane.

The story is set in a world with a hierarchy of different "races", "Shadowhunters", "Downworlders" (werewolves, vampires, faeries, and warlocks), and "mundanes" (humans).

Through flashbacks and testimonies, we learn that many years ago there was a treaty, called The Accords, supposed to allow all the different "races" to co-exist peacefully.

One powerful Shadowhunter, Valentine, is not for harmonious co-existence. He is a cruel, single-minded dictator who continues to push elitist ideas. A class/ "race" hierarchy is prominent in the films as well as the books. Shadowhunters,

created by the mixing of angel and human blood, are at the top, though they also serve as protectors by hunting demons.

Luke, a werewolf, and Jocelyn, a Shadowhunter and Clary's mother, led an Uprising, a rebellion against Valentine. Unfortunately Valentine escaped, and many Downworlders were slaughtered by Valentine's followers.

In the times of the story, there's an unspoken "you-don't-bother-me-I-don't-bother-you" deal between the races, but there's still tension, resentment, and dislike between the races, even though there's no explicit all-out war.

We discover towards the end of the film that Valentine still desires to "purge" the world and dreams of a pure Shadowhunter race who will serve as his own personal army. He will only succeed in this plan if he gathers all three of the Mortal Instruments: the Mortal Cup, the Mortal Sword, and the Mortal Glass (but that's literally another story).

Clary tries to dissuade him from this crusade, but Valentine is too far gone and continues to plot this massacre and pursue the Instruments, even after he disappears. In the final few scenes, we see Clary still with the Mortal Cup and reunited with her mother, Jocelyn.

Along the way, Clary falls for Jace (Jamie Campbell Bower), an impulsive, cocky, aloof, sarcastic Shadowhunter. Jace works with siblings Isabelle (Jemima West) and Alec (Kevin Zegers).

Lily Collins plays Clary

Isabelle is smart, courageous, and an amazing fighter. Her confidence is grounded in her abilities, while Jace is more arrogant. Alec is shyer and less confident.

Much like when I was reading the book for the first time, the movie at once drew me in. The tension and fighting between the different "species" was superbly handled.

I won't mention any other specifics because I don't want to give away spoilers, and because I really want you all to watch this film and to read the series.

Syria

From page 9

Moreover the opposition is fractured, increasingly given to brutality and criminality. For example:

"Earlier this month al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq assassinated a senior commander of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), resulting in fierce clashes between the groups in Aleppo." (*Telegraph* 30 July 13)

Jonathan Alpeyrie, a French-American photographer was released on 24 July after \$450 000 was paid to a FSA unit which had kidnapped him and kept him for 81 days.

"Aleppo Province: A fighter group assassinated a peaceful activist, whom was detained a few weeks ago by a fighter group during one of the protests." (SyriaHR, 3 April 2013)

Abu Sakkar, who fought with the Farouq Brigade, and now runs his own unit in the FSA, was captured on film eating the organs of an Alawite fighter he had killed. What makes someone formerly considered a moderate do this? He says his brothers were killed during peaceful protests, his aunt and uncle were killed, his parents were arrested and then he was phoned up to listen to them being beaten. He has witnessed the destruction of Baba Amr. He has 14 wounds on his body. (BBC 5 July 13).

Marcus acknowledges some concern about the nature of the opposition. But the question he needs to ask himself is not: how far must this situation travel before it becomes the "perfect" communal war? He needs to ask himself: what will the consequences be if this opposition wins?

His answer appears to be: revolutions are messy, the situation is not perfect. Which is generally true, but concretely here, is an evasion. It is a left version of Donald Rumsfeld's shrug, "stuff happens."

Unless we think all "revolutions" are necessarily good, all militancy against a hated regime is always positive — we must ask the question: do we back this revolution? Some revolutions make things worse: Pol Pot, Stalin's revolution against the workers, Khomeini's revolution in Iran...

The AWL has concluded we should not back the victory of the rebel war. Why? Because we measure resistance to tyrants against what we positively want to see, not against how much damage is done to a particular regime.

Of course there was a wonderful beginning, millions of Syrians on the streets in 2011, coordinated by local committees. But the uprising has morphed into something different, and the power centres in the opposition are no longer local coordination committees but are with the militia leaders. The politics of the militia leaders are not good, plus there are multiple rebel political centres which virtually ensure a victory over the central state would lead to fragmentation, cantonisation, warlordism and further fighting. Opposition victory

won't win democracy, women's or workers' rights. It will achieve economic destruction, partition, the abolition of a relatively normally functioning modern society and with it the possibility of progressive collective struggle.

But Marcus continues: "To argue, as Osborn does, that 'There is no oppositional force, good or bad, currently capable of replacing the existing state and keeping the country — more or less — together' is to take the normative forms of struggle in a labour movement dominated by social democratic reformism, by parliamentary careerists and trade union bureaucrats, and to apply it to precisely the sort of situation where by definition, the material preconditions for it do not and cannot exist."

He insists that anyone who disagrees with him — that an assessment of the concrete circumstances, balance of power, forces in the struggle, actually matter — is a wretched social democrat. But there is a difference between the chaos of Barcelona late 1936, and Syria, 2013; between Paris, in May '68 and Syria 2013. Not all chaos is the same, some is good (from a working-class perspective), some is dangerous.

THE SUNNIS AND ASSAD

And what of Marcus's peculiar claim that the base of the regime support is Sunni?

Of course 75% of Syria's 23 million population is Sunni. No doubt there are some Sunnis who still have jobs for the state and who — while they might not like the state — are quiet. This is Assad's base of support? Here Marcus equates passive acceptance with support.

It is true, of course, that the sectarian Alawite regime of the Assads had reached an understanding with the Sunni capitalists and merchants (of Aleppo, the old business centre, for example). The merchants would leave politics to the Baathists as long as they were allowed to continue to enrich themselves. But that Sunni elite no longer exists. It has been dispersed. The only economy left in Aleppo is the war economy of the regime, the activity organised by the opposition militias, and the black market operations also in the hands of the militias and state.

No doubt there are a small number of Alawites in the opposition; no doubt there is also still significant sympathy among Christians for the opposition; but there is no avoiding the fact that the opposition is in its big majority actively hostile to Alawites — there are many reports, for example, of oppositionists testing captured government supporters' speech (accent and pronunciation) to weed out and kill Alawites.

The US think-tank CRS (13 June 13) writes, correctly, I think, about the most likely current alternative: "If current trends hold, fighting may gradually turn from a two-sided war into a contest involving multiple combatants from armed ethnic/sectarian communities, rebel militias, and remnants of the old regime. External intervention, including Hezbollah

and Iranian support for Assad and increased US support for select opposition forces, may invite a cycle of counter-intervention from other parties."

AWL does not call for or advocate a deal between the Ba'athists and the opposition, which will inevitably be rotten. But, also, we would not necessarily denounce or agitate for the disruption of such a deal. The alternatives available now are worse.

Marcus: "I might pose the problem as follows: there is a struggle going on within the revolution, just as there is in Egypt and Tunisia, except that the prolonged nature of the revolution and civil war has meant that it is taking place now, even before the regime has even fallen."

In Egypt and Tunisia there are powerful independent trade unions and organised leftists. There are women's organisations and independent media. There is space to organise and discuss. None of this exists in Syria.

Marcus talks of the "unicorn" of the Third Camp. This unicorn is trotting around in Tunisia and Egypt. Not so Syria.

There is a struggle going on in Syria, but it is different to the struggle going on in Egypt and Tunisia. The battle in Syria is between different wings of the armed opposition, the state, outside powers — there is no left, no unions. Only the remnants of the original opposition remain, hemmed in by militarised groups.

Marcus accuses the AWL of "searching in Syria for a working-class agency ... and failing to see one behind all the beards," which causes us to fall for "the favoured device of imperialist diplomacy and bourgeois journalism to talk of the threat or actuality of 'failed states', 'age-old ethnic hatreds' and 'chaos' precisely in those situations where the ruling class sees no obvious or credible agent capable of executing its will and managing its affairs for it at an acceptable price."

Of course the bourgeoisie manages the truth to serve its own interests. However, when US leaders declare that Syria is (pretty much) a failed state and there is chaos in Syria — they are right. Reading bourgeois policy statements and assuming the opposite is true is not Marxism!

And the implication of "...and failing to see [a working class agency] behind all the beards..." is terrible. Marcus can't believe there are unions and workers' parties in Syria. He must mean: given the lack of a working class agency, the men with the beards will do.

Our problem is not beards per se (sometimes I forget to shave myself), but what these particular people with beards think and do: the men that run the opposition militias are not a substitute for a workers' movement (or the mass popular, democratic movement which existed in Syria two years ago — also featuring men with beards, but with different political intentions to the current militia leaders).

• More: bit.ly/syriadebate

“Boris Bike” strike against bullying bosses

Workers employed by the Serco Barclays cycle hire scheme (“Boris Bikes”) struck on 12 August. They are members of the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT). Two RMT reps spoke to *Solidarity* about the dispute.

We had a meeting with Serco about two weeks ago. We had four main issues.

The first was the 2.3% pay increase we received in April, which works out at about 1.3% when you take away some of the strings. That’s not good enough. Everyone’s unhappy about what they got. Some people got a bit more, some got less, some didn’t get anything.

We also spoke about bullying and harassment. There’s been a huge in-

crease in people taking out grievances against management. It’s completely out of control — as of two months ago, we had 38 active disciplinary procedures. There was another 25 to 30 that were either on hold, waiting to start, or coming to an end. That’s 70 in one small company. There’s obviously a problem. I think all the managers need to be re-trained.

Another issue was shift patterns. Our shift patterns are 7pm to 3.30am, and 11am to 7pm. Before that it was 9am to 6.30pm, which wasn’t too bad. But Serco wanted to change everything. We’ve had 10 shift changes in the last three years, including four in one year.

Workers are getting into routines and sleeping patterns and then they’re being

broken. You run the risk of accidents happening if people aren’t sleeping properly.

They want to impose these changes without any negotiation, and sometimes have imposed rosters without any notice.

The final issue is travel allowance. Workers are being penalised if they’re arrived slightly late because of problems with public transport. We’ve even had cases where workers have found managers filling in late forms for them, which is essentially fraud.

The whole management culture is abysmal. All we are is a number to them.

We’ve been campaigning for union recognition for nearly three years now. Serco doesn’t want to recognise the RMT, and they’ve done a backdoor deal with Community. As far as I



know, they have less than 10 members. We have over 100. Every day, the union is getting stronger.

This is the first strike there’s been involving this workforce. We planned a strike at Stratford around the Olympics, but that was undermined by Community negotiating a backroom deal to get so-called Olympic bonuses of £500 (a payment with so many

strings attached that many people ended up not receiving them).

People just feel they’ve been pushed too far. The customers aren’t satisfied either, especially since the hire prices increased.

I’m very happy with how the strike has gone. With any strike, you always want it to go better, but we’re 110% in it. The picket line is strong, and we’re going to carry on fighting.

We want Serco to negotiate. But if Serco aren’t prepared to do that, we’ll put on another strike. And we’ll keep doing that until they’re ready to talk.

The strike’s been great. It’s the first time we’ve done this, and it’s great that people have come out and shown their support. I’m sure more people will be out for the next strike.

Management is management everywhere, but here they seem worse. They don’t have the skill set to run this job. They don’t know how to relate to the workforce, understand them, listen to them, talk to them. If management behaves this harshly towards the workforce, there’s going to be a strike.

They’re very stubborn. They don’t seem to want to sit down. We’ve consistently offered talks, including when we were balloting, but they don’t want to resolve anything.

The primary issue for us is the bullying and harassment. If the bullying culture didn’t exist people would think twice about striking over an issue like pay.

We really hope that this strike will get management around the table.

RMT plans strikes over job cuts and agencies

By Jonny West

The Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT) is balloting its entire membership on London Overground, after its members in the guard/conductor grade held an effective strike (<http://bit.ly/rmt-jobs>) against job cuts on Sunday 25 and Monday 26 August.

London Overground bosses are planning to cut 130 conductor posts in a bid to move towards “Driver-Only Operation” (DOO), against the backdrop of a 12.5% cut in overall central

government funding to Transport for London.

RMT will also ballot its entire membership across London Underground as part of a fight against casualisation. The strike will demand that London Underground ceases its use of agency labour, and takes workers currently employed through agencies into direct employment, including the former Train-people workers who lost their jobs when their agency’s contract was terminated.

Janine Booth, London Transport workers’ representative on the RMT Exec-

utive, said:

“The extent of casualised working practices across industry has finally hit the headlines, with revelations of a million or more people on ‘zero-hours contracts’, with no reliable income. Hundreds of these work on London Underground’s infrastructure, and LU would love to spread this appalling exploitative practice across other areas of the company.

“Workers want, need and deserve secure employment. RMT intends to mobilise our members across all grades to insist on this.”

Jobs threatened at NPower

By an energy worker

On Wednesday 14 August, RWE the troubled German owner of energy company NPower, announced a 60% fall in revenue, mainly to do with power generation in Germany.

Buried beneath this was a plan to shut unspecified 16 out of 26 sites in the profitable British section.

Although details are unspecified, they are talking about 3,000 job losses, or a

third of the workforce.

There have already been announcements of offshoring and redundancies, but mainly of management or the generally well-paid but unorganised consultant and IT-type grades. These staff are on temporary and personal contracts and despite some (lacklustre) attempts at organising, few are in the union.

The grades covered by national negotiation, where union membership is concentrated, have not been hit

so far, but surely will be.

There are three unions organising in Npower. Unison organises mainly clerical grades in the north east and West Midlands. Unite organises mainly meter readers, engineers, and clerical staff in Leeds. GMB also organises both blue collar and white collar staff in the north east.

Similar “cost cutting”, and potential job losses, is hitting the rest of the “big six” utility companies.

Bridgwater postal workers stay strong

By Darren Bedford

Bridgwater postal workers concluded their ninth strike day on Monday 19 August.

They will now seek the green light from their union, the Communication Workers’ Union (CWU), to launch a week-long strike from 2 September.

The strike has become a beacon for postal workers nationally, as burgeoning local disputes provide momentum for a national fight against the government’s planned sell-off of Royal Mail.

Management culture in the postal service has is described by union reps as based on “systematic bullying”.



Dave Chapple, Bristol CWU branch chair, said: “Managers have secretly spied on us, peeked under toilet doors, bullied us out of tea and fag breaks, refused legitimate overtime claims, taken us off our own duties, changed duty start and finish times without agreement, chivvied us in public for not walking or cycling fast enough, threatened temporary contract staff with reductions in hours, and banned and

threatened CWU reps with disciplinary action for performing their legitimate union activities.”

A local CWU statement commended the intervention of Unite general secretary Len McCluskey, who has instructed the 150 Unite members amongst managerial grades at Bridgwater (who had previously been working during the strike) to respect CWU picket lines.

• Please send messages of support to davechapple@btinternet.com or on 0777 6304 276. Send solidarity donations to Dave Chapple, 1 Blake Place, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 5AU. Make cheques out to “Bridgwater Trades Union Council”.

High Court blow for unions

A High Court Judge has ruled that two of the actions in an RMT campaign of industrial action “short of a strike” at East Midlands Trains are unlawful, as they technically include strike action and are therefore not covered by the union’s ballot for action short of strike action.

RMT balloted its East Midlands Trains members for the action in a dispute over a range of issues relating to upgrading of Nottingham station. As part of the action, members refused to work various duties outside their agreed rosters — effec-

tively “work to rule”.

East Midlands Trains bosses sought a High Court injunction against the action, claiming that refusal to work represented a strike. A judge granted the injunction on 15 August.

The ruling may now mean unions have to ballot for strikes in order to take actions previously covered by “action short” ballots. It also gives bosses potential legal ballast against any worker who wants to work within the terms of their contracts.

The rest of the action on East Midlands Trains will continue.

Cinema workers launch living wage fight

Workers at the Curzon cinema chain have launched a campaign to win living wages.

Workers also face a reduction in their hours.

On 9 August, a Guardian article exposed that 150 Curzon workers were on “zero-hour contracts” — effectively the chain’s entire non-managerial workforce.

• More: bit.ly/zero-curz

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

No support for US bombs: but Assad is main enemy

By Mark Osborn

Syria's disgusting, murderous, one-party state responsible for mass murder, torture on a vast scale, and an enormous humanitarian disaster inside Syria, where whole towns have been raised to rubble.

Over four million are internally displaced, nearly two million have fled the country, seven million are in immediate need of humanitarian aid, the economy has collapsed, and over 100,000 are dead.

The main responsibility for this utterly avoidable catastrophe belongs to the Syrian government and military.

Bashar Assad's small ruling inner circle has chosen to reinforce and exploit sectarian divisions in Syria in order to cling on to power. Some of the ruling group are also parasites, who have accumulated great wealth through membership of the ruling family or cliques that control the state. The unscrupulous elite want to protect their power and riches.

In 2012 US President Barack Obama declared that use or movement of chemical weapons by the Syrian state would constitute a "red line", without spelling out the exact consequences for Syria if they were used.

The Syrian army's most recent chemical attack was on a much larger scale

Obama wants to see an end to the war in Syria but has not acted openly and decisively for fear of making the situation worse, not better. The US fears — rightly — that Syria might fragment and collapse into utter chaos with swathes of territory run by al-Qaeda aligned Islamist militias if the US helps the armed opposition to victory.

CHEMICAL WEAPONS In the past months the Syrian state has been testing the likely Western response to the use of chemical weapons against its own population.

Assad has probably used chemical weapons in small quantities on several occasions over the last year. A 20-strong US team is now in the capital, Damascus, sent there to investigate past at-

tacks.

Emboldened by recent victories over the opposition, on Wednesday 21 August the Syrian army bombed a civilian area in north east Damascus. Some of their rockets almost certainly carried chemical payloads. This was an attack on a different scale to previous chemical use.

Doctors Without Borders reported that three hospitals it supports in the area around Damascus received 3,600 patients displaying neurotoxic symptoms. The political opposition, the Syrian National Coalition, claimed 1300 had been killed during the bombardment, mainly by poison gas. It seems certain that several hundred died.

This is a war crime committed by a regime against its own, unarmed people, sleeping in their beds. The people were being pun-

ished and terrorised simply because they live in an area held by opposition militias.

The more extreme militias have pledged sectarian revenge on the Alawite minority community that Assad's family is part of. The al-Nusra Front leader Abu Muhammad al-Joulani has apparently stated: "We are announcing a series of revenge operations called 'An Eye for an Eye.' Your Alawite villages will pay a very dear price for every chemical rocket that you've launched against our people." The cycle of tit-for-tat sectarian outrages is speeding up.

Now there is great pressure on the US to be seen to respond. They may use cruise missiles against government targets in Syria. They have already allowed hundreds of tonnes of Saudi arms, stockpiled in Turkey for months, to be released to opposition fighters.

What should the left say?

Firstly it is not our job to advocate the US intervenes. We do not trust the US. It is by no means clear that Western military intervention will improve the chances for peace and democracy in Syria. On the contrary, it may speed up the disintegration of the country.

Equally, if the US destroys the bases used by Syria's military to massacre its own citizens you will not find the AWL on the streets protesting.

Some of the more disorientated left will ask us to "defend Syria" against US intervention. These are leftists who allow their politics to be determined by simply negating US policies — no matter how bad the alternative that they thus implicitly or explicitly support.

The main problem in Syria is Assad's policy, not the US. And if the UK's left wants to oppose meddling foreign powers — and we should — it should start with demanding Iranian forces and Hezbollah militia get out of Syria.

The main enemy here is not America.

Hovis workers strike against zero-hours contracts

By Rosalind Robson

Workers at Hovis (Premier Foods) bakery in Wigan have voted to strike against the replacement of permanent workers with lower paid agency workers on zero-hours contracts.

Workers will strike from 28 August to 4 September and further strikes are scheduled for 11-18 September and 25 September to 2 October.

Workers who are organised by the BFAWU has already taken cuts in pay and working hours to avoid further redundancies. They voted 75% for strikes following abortive talks.

The union says pay rates for some workers have fallen from around £13 per hour to £8.60 an hour.

27 PER CENT
The Office of National Statistics estimates 250,000 workers are on zero-hours contracts (where workers are "on call", taking whatever work they can).

However projections by the Chartered Institute of Personnel

and Development suggest the figure could be as high as a million. And now research by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation among 600 employers showed that 27 per cent used zero-hours contracts.

McDonalds in Britain employs 90% of its staff on these contracts. Around 19% of workers in the hotels and restaurants sectors are on these contracts.

The recession, the natural fear by workers of losing their jobs, and a long-term lack of combativity from the unions has combined to ensure bosses use these kind of "flexible working" practices aggressively.

Zero-hour contracts, unscheduled overtime, last minute shift changes are there to ensure bosses stay more profitable and make workers' lives a misery.

It is very good news that some workforces and unions are beginning to fight back.

Syrian atrocity: Galloway blames Israel

Speaking on the Iranian propaganda outlet Press TV, the Respect MP George Galloway stated: "If there's been any use of nerve gas it's the rebels that used it."

He explains: "If there has been a use of chemical weapons it was al-Qaeda that used the chemical weapons — who gave al-Qaeda the chemical weapons? Here's my theory, Israel gave them the chemical weapons."

It takes someone with Galloway's intellect to sniff out the Zionists' cunning plot — al-Qaeda and the Jewish state are conspiring to force the US to act. Of course they are.

Normally if Israel (or France, or the UK,

etc.) wants the US to do something they get their ambassador to pick up the phone.

But not this time. This time Galloway believes Israel gave a shed load of chemical bombs to people that hate Jews. Obvious, when you think about it.

This is the Syrian al-Qaeda that if it had chemical weapons would use them against Syrian Alawites (or Israel), not Sunni civilians in rebel-held suburbs of Damascus.

This is the same Israeli state that recently bombed Syria to stop chemical weapons getting into the hands of Islamists (Hezbollah, in that instance).

The US claims that Assad was responsible? Lying imperialist bastards. All makes perfect sense.

Cops "helped bosses blacklist"

By Darren Bedford

Peter Francis, a former undercover police officer turned whistleblower, says information he gathered was later passed to the "Consulting Association", the shadowy company funded by 40 major firms to help them blacklist potential union organisers.

Francis says that information he gathered while posing as a member of the Youth Against Racism in Europe group was passed onto the Consulting Association.

Senior figures involved with the CA have admitted to a parliamentary committee investigating the issue that they had regular contact with the police. To many, including many blacklisted workers themselves, direct state involvement has seemed almost undeniable from the start. Many say that the information contained in their CA files could only have been obtained from the police.

Dave Smith, of the Blacklist Support Group, said "Police investigating the police is never going to get to the truth. This smacks of a cover-up. Only a judge-led public inquiry will get to the facts of collusion between the state and the blacklists."