Solidarity
For social ownership of the banks and industry

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Britain: low wages, but 1% ultra-rich

THE MOST UNEQUAL IN EUROPE

Fight back: strike on 10 July.
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What is the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty?

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists’ relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the bubbling over of lives 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 assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.
- 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.
- A 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.
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The right and Iraq

By Martin Thomas

The USA and most other big-power governments (including China, which has huge oil interests in Iraq) have followed a Saudi call for “a national conciliation government” in Iraq.

Vladimir Putin’s Russia has confined itself to saying: “We warned long ago that the affair that the Americans and the Britons stirred up there [in Iraq] wouldn’t end well.”

The US has got a pledge from Maliki to form a new government by 1 July, but may resign itself to Maliki holding it.

The Sunni minority in Baghdad is reckoned to have fallen to 12% (as against 35% pre-2003) over ten years of simmering sectarian civil war in Iraq. So, ISIS is unlikely to be able to take Baghdad; but also, a reshuf- led Baghdad government is unlikely to be able to present itself as other than Shia-dominated.

John Kerry’s recent speeches suggest the US will be too alarmed by the ISIS advance to be very insistent about political change in Baghdad. ISIS now has a new semi-state stretching from Turkey’s borders almost to Iran’s and controlling Iran-Lebanon and Iraq-Jordan land routes. None of its neighbours will live with that state peacefully any time soon.

Much of the territory is desert; and so ISIS, if it retains control, will not be content with what it has: it will seek control of markets and routes to the sea.

Probably not even the military might of the Americans can defeat ISIS quickly. Radical Sunni Islamists seized control of the city of Wallajah twice before, during the US occupation of Iraq. The US had trouble re-taking the city effectively and unable to stabilise an alternative to Is- lamist rule there.

Iran must be as alarmed as the USA; but Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei says: “We don’t approve of [US] action as we believe the Iraqi government [i.e. Maliki’s government], nation and religious authorities are capable of ending the sedi- tion”. According to presi- dent Rouhani, the Sunni rebels are “bits of dust com- pared to the pious [Shia] of the country”.

Maybe Iran will collabo- rate with the USA in secret. But the official line from Iran is that ISIS “has been a tool in the hands of Tel Aviv and Washington”.

“The takfiri terrorists and their allies including the US, the Zionist regime and certain Arab countries, have decided to re- taliate for their defeat in Syria by attacking Iraq”.

By Simon Nelson

Three million Syrian refugees, UK takes 24

Just 24 Syrian refugees have been admitted into the UK under a special arrangement — the Vul- nerable Persons Reloca- tion scheme (VPR) — to help those identified as most at risk and who have not yet claimed asylum.

By comparison Sweden has admitted over 24,000 refugees.

Since 2011 almost three million Syrians have fled the country, most to neighbour- ing Arab states with Lebanon alone taking in over one million people. A further 6.5 million people are believed to be displaced with no where to go.

The Government had committed to take only 500 of the most vulnerable refugees, resisting an imposed UN quota. It argued that the leading role it played in delivering aid to camps in Jordan and Lebanon meant it had “done its duty”. Really?

Theresa May’s commit- ment to bring down net migra- tion is the real sticking point here. Political consider- ations are far more important than lives of displaced Syrians.

Meanwhile there is a huge backlog of asylum cases. Some Syrians will have to wait up to a year for their cases to be heard even when an initial evidence of anti-Assad activity has been provided.

The labour movement should fight for refugees to be welcomed into the UK with unrestricted access to the NHS and other public services. After the release of the VPR figures protest were held at the Home Of- fice.

Such actions should be supported and will have to continue as part of a campaign to support those forced to leave by the civil war.

The left and Iraq

Socialist Worker, and others, say not much more than that the US invasion of 2003 is to blame for the break- down, and that new US bombing or ground troops will help.

Socialist Worker nowhere says straight out that it is against ISIS. But it implies that: the growth of ISIS “threatens sectarian bat- tles that will have an im- pact far beyond Iraq”. SW doesn’t point out that US action would be to support a Shia-sectarian government, maybe modi- fied but still sectarian, and thus would not mend things. It doesn’t even point out that the USA’s preferred method of war, high-tech bombing from a safe distance, is especially likely to feed political backlash (as in Afghanistan).

SW’s making of much say- ing imperialism is bad, but the core of its case is only that bombs are (always) bad.

The SWP splitters RS21 and ISN have said noth- ing.

The Socialist Party mostly stresses that in 2003 “the Socialist Party warned [the US invasion] could lead to the break-up of Iraq and terrible sectarian war”. The SP’s archives show that they didn’t warn, unless in ob- scure small print. Prob- ably the SP, like us, like most others didn’t know.

Socialist Worker, on the contrary, suggests that the sectarian divisions were invisible before 2003 and created by the US alone.

In fact, for centuries the Shia in Iraq were second- class citizens in a Sunni- lamist rule there.

Stabilisation of Iraq has adm itted over 2 4,0000 refugees, resisting an im-
New disability benefit “a fiasco”

By Matthew Thompson

Personal Independence Payment, the benefit launched last year to replace Disability Living Allowance, has already run into trouble.

Despite its limited geographical introduction, there is already a large backlog of claims to PIP, with many disabled people waiting months for a decision and some terminally ill claimants dying before their application is processed. In a critical report by the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, the chair Margaret Hodge describes the introduction of PIP as “a fiasco”.

Unlike other benefits claimed by disabled people such as Employment and Support Allowance and Income Support, DLA isn’t based on National Insurance Contributions or means-tested against other income or savings. It’s non-transferable and can’t be claimed by those in work, reflecting the fact that it is designed to cover some of the extra costs associated with personal care (paying someone to help with cooking, cleaning, washing etc.) and mobility (taxis, adapting vehicles for wheelchair use etc.) rather than to replace wages when you are sick or unemployed.

The Department for Work and Pensions has outsourced the medical assessment of claimants for PIP to two private companies, Atos and Capita, each of whom has — to say the least — a patchy record when it comes to delivering public services under contracts awarded to it by the Government (Atos recently exited its contract to carry out work capability assessments for ESA a year early after delays and criticism of its in-office assessments and medicals).

If the rate of refused claims by Atos in the transition from Incapacity Benefit to ESA is replicated with PIP, it has been estimated that only forty per cent of those currently receiving DLA will be getting it in two years time.

PCS, the union which represents civil servants in the Department for Work and Pensions as well as staff in private contractors such as Atos and Capita has said these contracts should be terminated as soon as possible and the assessment work should be brought back in-house.

“It is a scandalous waste of taxpayers’ money for these failing contractors to continue to get paid for their shockingly poor performance whilst PIP customers have to wait months for their claim to be dealt with.”

Labour betray young people

By Michéál MacEoin

Labour leader Ed Miliband has promised to cut Job Seekers’ Allowance (JSA) for around 100,000 18- to 21-year-olds and replace it with a lower means-tested benefit depending on claimants’ qualifications and skill levels.

This will affect those young people under 21 who have not have A-levels — around seven out of ten 18- to 21-year-olds currently claiming JSA.

Miliband told the press that “Britain’s young people who do not have the skills they need for work should be in training, not on benefits.”

What Labour have not explained is why young people can’t have the same training and enough to live on at the same time.

This policy will kick young people who have already reeling from tuition fees, the abolition of Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and record levels of youth unemployment.

JSA is already too low — £57.35 a week (£28.19 a day) for under-25s. The new rate could be even lower, as it is means-tested on the basis of parental income.

The Labour policy follows the same reactionary course as the Tories’ plans to remove housing benefit from under-25s and increasing young peoples’ reliance on their parents.

There are innumerable and obvious reasons why young people cannot, or do not want to, live with family members — parents or guardians may be abusive or homophobic, or young people and family members may simply not get on.

Recent Trade Union Congress (TUC) research shows that prospects for young people not in full-time work or education have deteriorated sharply in the last decade and a half.

This does point to increased barriers for young people getting into work, including lack of skills. But any policy which does not take into account an unemployment rate of nearly 7% is really about demonising those individuals who are out of work.

Labour needs a programme for decent, unionised, and socially useful jobs, expanded, well-funded training, and living benefits.

This new policy smack of political posturing and Labour’s tendency to bend towards rather than shape public opinion.

At a time when the welfare state has been chipped away by decades of means-testing, Labour needs to break with austerity and stand up for universal benefits for those in need.

Protest against neo-Nazis after Tottenham stabbing

A crowd of about 200 people gathered outside Tottenham Town Hall in London on Monday night to protest fascist activity in the area, following a racist attack on Saturday night.

A 24-year-old Polish man, believed to be Jewish, was knifed at a music festival in Markfield Park after neo-Nazis from the Zjednoczeni Emigranci (ZE) group stormed the event. They threw flares and rocks at the crowd. The man who was stabbed was treated at hospital and is recovering well.

Unite Against Fascism (UAF), which is led by the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP), called the demonstration, to which a diverse range of activists showed up despite short notice and little advertising. A diverse range of people were represented, including local residents, the Turkish and Kurdish community centre DAY-MER, National Union of Teachers members, independent workers’ and trade unionists, anarchists and members of the Green Party, SWP, RS21, the Socialist Party, Workers’ Power and the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty.

After UAF called an end to the demonstration, about one hundred anti-fascists marched down Tottenham High Road to the park where the attack took place, led by Polish anti-fascists from Gwiazon 161 and the Anti-Fascist Network.

Ultra-nationalists from ZE have been increasingly active in Tottenham, gathering around the green adjacent to the Town Hall and in Markfield Park and leaving racist graffiti, including some around Seven Sisters station.

A further demonstration has been called for Saturday, 28 June, in Markfield Park at 3pm.

By Kate Harris

As Pride season kicks off, it looks like the majority of festivities will be more establishment-focused than ever. Part of London Pride (29 June) will continue to the Cenotaph for Armed Forces Day and the police will be a prominent part of the parade.

Our movement seems to have a very short memory. Our acceptance as LGBT+ people into institutions has been very, very recent and is also not consistent or inclusive of all of us.

Sex between two men wasn’t legalised in Scotland and Northern Ireland until 1981 and 1982 respectively. During the miners’ strike in the 1980s, we gained sympathy from straight, cis working-class people as they became aware of the levels of police violence and harassment that we were subject to through working with Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners.

While the British establishment is now smug about their perceived progressive views on the rights of LGBT+ people, the homophobia and transphobia that many suffer across the world is often, at least in part, a consequence of British colonialism and the evangelical Christianity of missionaries in the nineteenth century.

And today, LGBT+ asylum seekers are told to “prove” their sexual orientation in order to be able to stay in this supposedly welcoming, LGBT-friendly state.

LGBT (and to a lesser extent, T, I, etc) people are the cause du jour of the more liberal minded elements of the ruling classes, but only the right kinds of LGBT+ people: immigrants, poor queers and people with less well-understood identities are still ignored or revered.

Historically, capitalism reinforces the oppression of women and LGBT+ people because the nuclear family was (seen as) better for the social reproduction of the labour force, and women’s unpaid labour in the home could be relied upon. Alongside straightforward bigotry, this led to state discrimination and violence against us.

The heroic struggles of LGBT people have changed our status in many parts of society. Pride should connect us with our radical roots, with queer anti-capitalism, and with those in our community whose right to exist is under attack.

• Paul Penny, (London Transport RMT LGBT Officer, Workers’ Liberty) and a speaker from the African Out and Proud Diamond Group will be speaking at Ideas for Freedom on the International Fight for LGBT rights, 12:30pm, Sunday 6 July, University of London Union, Malet Street.
A different kind of feminist

How I became a socialist
By Jill Mountford

The Christmas of 1969 was a turning point for me. I was a month off my ninth birthday when my sister gathered up all the selection boxes and various other sweets and treats and parceled them up for the pot-bellied, fly-covered starving black kids who appeared in our living room every tea-time all the way from Biafra.

I didn’t declare then that I was a socialist. But I did carry what felt like a huge burden of concern that I had some responsibility to sort things out. Immediately, that meant giving all our chocolate away. In the long term, it meant finding out about how the world works and why some kids starve to death on a huge scale while others have loads of chocolate.

I was a feminist before I was a socialist. I was fifteen in 1976 and the influence of the women’s movement was filtering through to popular culture. Candy Stanton’s ‘Young Hearts Run Free’ was in the charts, warning young women of the crushing pain of being trapped by marriage and kids. Erica Jong’s ‘Fear of Flying’ gave a ‘grown up’ and modern, liberated expression to the history I was being taught at school about the Suffragettes. I was angry, but inspired.

The Friday before I left school in June 1977 I was sent for an interview by my office skills teacher and I got the job. I felt I’d gained a further addition to my liberation: music, novels, history and now my own job and some cash. How wrong could I have been? Having a wage did buy me a few choices. But I gained a further addition to my liberation: music, novels, history and now my own job and some cash.

There were times when the relentless routine felt like crushing torture. I had just left school, where I’d had a great history and society, full of lies, in which World War One was a celebration of the greedy “Yuppy”. I knew, without any doubt, I had no solidarity with Thatcher and she had none with me or my class. Bitterly disappointed with Labour after the ‘Winter of Discontent’, it all seemed a bloody mess.

I found a leaflet for a women’s consciousness raising group and joined. This brief encounter was no love story. I was looking for solidarity and some answers, I didn’t find it here. These educated, clever, articulate, middle-class women didn’t like my accent, my energy or my politics. For some strange reason I’ve yet to understand they were obsessed with talking to each other about their genitalia. I was obsessed with talking about changing the world. I was a feminist, but a different kind of feminist from them.

The next stop was the local women’s peace group: this involved eating a lot of gluten-free cake and talking a lot about non-violent direct action. From here I went to Greenham: this involved eating a lot of dhal and engaging in a lot of non-violent direct action. From here I went to Greenham: this involved eating a lot of dhal and engaging in a lot of non-violent direct action. I was persuaded of the need to be an organised resistance to smash capitalism into the ground and in its place creating a new socialist society.

Teaching “British values” in schools

Letter
From a teacher in the AWL

Following the “Trojan horse” “scandal” regarding the alleged plans of Islamic governors at various Birmingham schools, David Cameron wrote an article in the Mail on Sunday about “British values”. He defined these as “a belief in freedom, tolerance of others, accepting personal and social responsibility, respecting and upholding the rule of law”.

Cameron also promised, alongside Education Secretary Michael Gove, that teachers in 20,000 state funded schools will “actively promote” British values. Those who do not subscribe to these values will be ruled out of becoming school governors — though this is laughably impossible to enforce.

As a state school teacher, I’m struggling to know what this means for me. In the humanities we have already seen changes to the Citizenship and History curriculum at secondary level, with a liberal rights discourse being replaced by a curriculum of “precious liberties” and “the role of the monarch” in Citizenship; and what Cameron describes as bringing back “proper narrative history” in that subject, “so our children really learn our island’s story”.

When I started teaching, I was struck by the comments of a fellow who is a History graduate, saying he chose to become a Maths teacher because he did not want “to lie to children”. I teach Citizenship, History and Religious Studies. I feel confident that Gove would be appalled by my lessons, because I refuse to lie to children, instead teaching them about the brutality of the British Empire; the flattening of young women who found that laughing their way through the day helped. Kicking the boss’s afternoon cake down the dusty corridor, putting back on the plate, then knocking on his door and presenting it to him with an insincere smile, broke the monotony. Nailing a kipper under his desk and then insisting his room didn’t smell, felt like payback for him robbing our time.

My parents were pleased I hadn’t had to go into the “pots” (working in a pottery production factory). Instead, I had a nice, clean job in an old, established solicitor’s. Working in a small office for some silly old fuckwit was seen as progress. The thing that irked me more than anything was that I had no free time, no say in how my waking hours were being spent. I really felt like any freedom I’d had at school had been taken away from me.

After three years of working in a variety of mind-numbing jobs, I left work to go to college. By now, we had a woman prime minister, riots on the streets, a war in the Falklands, growing unemployment, the selling off of public services and a celebration of the greedy “Yuppy”. I knew, without any doubt, I had no solidarity with Thatcher and she had none with me or my class. Bitterly disappointed with Labour after the “Winter of Discontent”, it all seemed a bloody mess.

I found a leaflet for a women’s consciousness raising group and joined. This brief encounter was no love story. I was looking for solidarity and some answers, I didn’t find it here. These educated, clever, articulate, middle-class women didn’t like my accent, my energy or my politics. For some strange reason I’ve yet to understand they were obsessed with talking to each other about their genitalia. I was obsessed with talking about changing the world. I was a feminist, but a different kind of feminist from them.

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Teaching “British values” in schools

After telling me that they thought the History GCSE Programme of Study was racist. I would like to see Cameron or Gove try to teach History or Citizenship in the way they would like to (in a London comprehensive). They would be rightfully laughed out of the classroom. A trainee teacher I came across was told by a 13 year old boy of African background, after talking about all the countries that “we” owned in the British Empire, “That’s because you [the British] stole them.”

Before writing this I had a look at the Life in the UK test for those who apply for permanent residency here. It had some outright lies in it, such as, “British people are proud of their record of welcoming new migrants” — at which I darkly laughed out loud. Ironically, many of the liberal values it highlights are not practised by the Prime Minister or the Education Secretary: for example it says that British citizens should “treat others with fairness”, “look after the area in which you live” and “respect the rights of others, including their right to their own opinions”.

You can have opinions, as long as they are the right ones. You can practise freedom of religion, within the correct framework (the one white upper-middle class people approve of). You can have individual liberty, but if you are a young black man living in a working-class area, you can expect to be regularly stopped and searched for no reason.

What should I tell my students? Should I tell them that the racism they experience is negligible because the UK is a “tolerated” place, whether they believe it or not? Should I hide my real views and promote the state? Should I instead impose a set of arbitrary “British values” on them?

All of these would inevitably involve watching their eyes roll into the backs of their heads and possibly getting told to fuck off. I think I’ll stick to what I’m doing. As it says in our department office: Keep Calm and Ignore Michael Gove.
Build for 10 July strike!

Members of the public sector union Unison have voted by a 59% majority to strike on 10 July against a 1% pay offer and for a rise of at least £1 an hour. In the week preceding the announcement of Unison’s ballot result, the National Union of Teachers confirmed it would join a 10 July strike.

Strike ballot results from Unite, GMB, and the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) (all over public sector pay) are yet to be announced, and the Fire Brigades Union has a live ballot that will allow it to participate in a 10 July strike. Transport for London staff (employed in central TFL administration, rather than by subsidiary companies such as London Underground) in RMT, TSSA, and Unite have already confirmed their participation in the strike.

In addition, Unison is planning to ballot its members in the NHS but activists anticipate that strikes, if voted for, would not happen until October.

The turnout in the Unison ballot was around 14%. This is worryingly low, and suggests real gaps in Unison’s organisation on the ground in local government workplaces. The poor turnout means there is still risk that Unison’s leadership will pull back from calling a strike at all, which could in turn cause smaller unions to pull down. Unison members should be vigilant to this threat.

Activists in Unison and other unions should call emergency meetings to build for a strike — both to put pressure on union leaders to call the strike, and also to make the strike as solid as possible. If the strike goes ahead, the Tories will probably redouble their propaganda offensive against the unions and push for new legislation requiring minimum thresholds in strike ballots. Unions must prepare a counter-offensive against the anti-union laws, fighting for a positive charter of workers’ rights.

Workers’ Liberty members in public sector unions argue that 10 July must be the start of a campaign, not an end in itself. The recent Unison local government conference discussed the importance of setting further strike dates and the Executive have discussed 9 and 10 September as possible further dates. We need to hold them to this promise.

Britain is the most unequal of the larger countries of western Europe. Only Portugal is more unequal.

Fuel poverty has been redefined by the current government to count only those who spend more than 10% of their income on heating and also have residual income below the official “poverty line” defined for 2012 at about £12,000 a year after housing costs.

Since real wages have been falling since 2009, the poverty line has dropped too — you have to be poorer before the government statistics will recognise it. Nonetheless, figures released from the Department of Energy and Climate Change project that the number of households living in fuel poverty will increase from 2.28 million in 2012 to 2.33 million (9% of UK households) in 2014.

Under the previous measure (10% of income on heating) 4.5m households (17%) would be fuel poor. These are not so much cases of the “squashed middle” but of those living in poverty unrecognised by the official figures.

This picture of people struggling to make ends meet but not recognised as poor by the government is underscored by a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, called ‘Wages, Taxes And Top-Ups’. This looks at how tax and benefits have affected working families on modest incomes from 1998 to 2013.

While this group saw some improvements in their living standards before 2008, since then both falling real wages and cuts in benefits have hit.

Using their measure of a Minimum Income Standard (a measure of what people believe to be an acceptable minimum standard of living), the research shows that by 2008 the lowest paid 25% of working one parent families had a disposable income £21 a week above this minimum, but £23 below it in 2013. The lowest paid 25% of double-wage-earning families saw a similar fall, while families reliant on one wage saw their disposable income fall from £65 per week below the minimum to £113 below.

For those solely reliant on benefits, the picture is far worse. The Child Poverty Action Group report “On The Brink” looks at the impact of benefit cuts in London and the social cleansing this is beginning to bring about. The benefits cap, bedroom tax, localisation of council tax benefits and local caps on housing benefits have combined to leave families in receipt of these benefits in London an average of £1,300 a year worse off. In many cases the impact is more than twice this level.

This has helped fuel child poverty in London, with 36% of children in London living below the poverty line. This will only get worse as rents continue to rise and the ability of councils to make discretionary payments to mitigate these cuts is further squeezed.

A report from the High Pay Centre shows a long term trend of Britain becoming more unequal compared to the other members of the OECD (the organisation that brings together the world’s 32 most developed economies).

Forty years ago, the UK had one of the more equal economies amongst the OECD states. Now, only Portugal, Israel, the USA, Turkey, Mexico and Chile are more unequal.

The report seeks to put into perspective the claim by the Conservatives that Britain has become more equal since the 2008 crisis. The measured decrease has been slight. All indicators suggest this is a pause caused by some of the financial losses of the richest in the 2008-2009 crash (the very rich lose more in a crush, at least temporarily), and the underlying trend is still for increasing inequality.

The report shows that in 2011 the average disposable income of Britons was £15,800, 84% that of Germany. However, the top 20% (a much broader group the truly rich) reached a disposable income of £32,800, only a little behind Germany.

The most unequal country in Europe

Britain was as far as equal as the most equal in Europe, Denmark, they would have nearly £2,000 more a year. The poorest 20% in the UK have incomes very similar to the bottom 20% in some of poorest EU states, like Slovenia (£6,700) and the Czech Republic (£5,100).

There is huge inequality within the top 20%. Figures from the World Top Incomes Database (2011) show 13% of all income is taken by the top 1% in the UK. If this was redistributed to every household in the UK, each would be around £5,600 per year better off.

If incomes only as unequal as in Denmark, then each household would be £2,700 better off each year.
Behind the rise of the Front National

French socialist Yves Coleman responded to questions from Solidarity

What do we know about the voting base of the FN (socio-logically, demographically, etc.) and how has it changed since 1983?

To answer your question I will be obliged to use statistics based on “social professional categories” which are not ideal to understand any social reality. This said, if you compare the results of the European elections in 1984 to the same elections in 2014, the Front National (FN) jumped from 17 to 28% of the votes of company owners, from 14 to 15% of higher professionals, managers and qualified experts, from 14 to 22% of second-ranking professionals, from 15 to 35% of white-collar and service workers and from 8 to 45% of blue-collar workers. So, the change is clearly the growing electoral influence of the FN among the working class.

As regards the difference between men and women voters, what was true thirty years ago is no longer valid today. Today women don’t hesitate to vote as often as men for the National Front. What has not changed is that the more educated voters are, the less they vote for the National Front. According to sociologists like Nonna Mayer and Florent Gouvet, the FN socio-electoral basis has been enriched, after 1995, by growing numbers of young workers whose parents are also workers, or of young people who are married to a working-class man or woman. This generation has not known the long domination of the right (1958-1981).

It has known the Communist Party and Socialist Party in power and the catastrophic balance-sheet of France’s left governments (1981-1986 and 1988-1993), which were unable to do anything against the dramatic rise of unemployment (from 1.6 million in 1981 to 3.2 million in 1993, from 6.3 to 10% of the active population), continuing destruction of whole industrial branches (coal, steel, shipyards, textile, etc.). On the contrary, during that period and still now, the Socialist Party defended the necessity of having a competitive economy based on good capitalist investors; it hailed the virtues of creating one’s own business even and glorified individual capitalist “success stories” like the crook Bernard Tapie. According to sociologists, young workers who vote for the National Front explicitly hate the word “solidarity”. They think the state only cares about foreigners, illegal migrants and “lazy” French people supposedly living on social benefits paid by “their” taxes. They dislike trade unions and grass roots associations, etc.

More recently it seems the FN has gained more influence not in the poorest suburbs (of the former Parisian suburban “Red Belt”, dominated by the Communist Party from the 1930s to the 1980s) but in towns where very few or no foreign workers live, but where the fear of losing one’s job and of living in an insecure environment is constantly growing. That’s at least what has been noted by the social scientists after the last municipal and European elections of 2014. Apparently it’s not the poorest Franco-French workers, unemployed or not, who vote most for the National Front but those who have a job, a small technical diploma (like the CAP — two years — or the “baccalauréat professionnel” — three years) obtained in a vocational school, who live far away from the poorest suburbs but fear losing their social status.

When one talks about the “workers” vote, one should always keep in mind the percentage of working-class voters is smaller than the percentage of workers in the overall population, because (legal or “illegal”) foreign blue-collar workers constitute a very important part of the manual working class in France (around 50% of the six million blue-collar workers) and they have no right to vote.

So, contrary to a legend, there has been no massive mobilisation of FN voters who support their party’s line — Trotskyist far left or the new Parti de Gauche (a small socialist and trade unionist in its ranks. It does not organise a significant, militant, youth organisation. It does not play any role in the strikes or struggles for better living standards in working-class suburbs. It’s not able for the moment to control whole sections of the territory as French social-democracy and later the Communist Party did. So we should obviously be concerned by its growing electoral and ideological influence (for example, its electoral results encouraged the “Republican” Right to adopt its agenda on migration laws) but we should not panic or become paralysed by the FN.

The FN has leading cadres with a clear fascist past, but avoids street-fighting and more recently has tried to get a “moderate” image. How would you define it as a party?

The FN has never been a purely fascist party, with only fascist cadres and militants. The radical left often presented in the past the FN as a “pre-fascist” party and had more in mind the strategy of fighting the FN in the street as the left sometimes fought the fascists in the 1930s and getting it banned by the state. That strategy has failed for many reasons which can’t be dealt with here.

On the other hand, the denunciation of the FN as “non republican”, if not a fascist, party was also propagated by the mainstream media. It was and is part of the Socialist Party’s strategy (Le Monde and Liberation dailies have been very close to the Socialist Party for years and fully supported this dangerous policy): to exaggerate the importance and influence of the FN, to present it as an imminent fascist threat for democracy and is conceived as a way
• to divide the right (the UMP party is a front bringing together several right and centre organisations),
• to gather all the left around a vague conception of anti-fascism and anti-racism (therefore the creation of SOS Racisme in 1984 with the help of the Socialist Party)
• and more important to enable the Socialist Party to win the elections, given the very unfair electoral system in France (no proportional vote). But the advantage of this strategy for the Socialist Party has clearly come to an end.

So how do you answer your question about the nature of the FN, one has to trace its origins. The initial project was conceived by a core of mostly young fascists coming from “Ordre Nouveau” (a group banned in 1973 after one of its meetings was attacked by the — Trotskyist — Ligue communiste révolutionnaire). This project of a FN, uniting the radical right and neo-fascist groupings with the anti-Gaulleist right, was “kidnapped” by Jean-Marie Le Pen.

He had more contacts with official, bourgeois politicians than those inexperienced young guys and their older neo-fascist mentors.

Le Pen also had good relations with ex-supporters of the Vichy regime (which collaborated with the Nazis) or men who fought on the Russian front in the Légion des Volontaires contre le Bolchévisme with the SS, and good friends...
among the anti-Gaullist military people who participated in the OAS (the Secret Army Organisation which tried to overthrow De Gaulle and stop Algeria’s independence negotiations).

Le Pen managed to group together in the same “Front” pagan neo-fascists, national-revolutionaries (inspired by nationalism, bolshevism, another form of fascism), Catholic traditionalists, ideologists of the “Nouvelle Droite” (New Right)3, people nostalgic for Vichy and French colonialism, and some traditional right-wing politicians. He was a good speaker (his charisma is appreciated by a large periphery... and even more by the media!). He was able to play the role of the leader in a dominating position over the different fractions and tendencies of the FN fighting each other inside his party, while he nurtured and manipulated these rivalries to stay at the head of his organisation. But he has never been a serious organiser, because he wanted to control every detail and every decision of his cadres and to play his personal card.

The relation of the FN with street violence has never been the same as the traditional fascists in the 1930s. The FN did not try to organise its own militias (it preferred to infiltrate the police and armed forces, hopefully with little success until now — not like Golden Dawn in Greece) although it had a quite professional and impressive “service d’ordre” called DPS (Département Protection Sécurité) which also works as an intelligence agency (it supposedly has 1500 members and has been connected to many violent incidents).

It always maintained more or less hidden friendly relationships with smaller fascist groups (the advantage of these groups is that they can be banned on Sunday and recreated the next day) although many elements close to the nationalist-revolutionaries, the New Right and the national-Catholics inside the leadership and among its militants. So either they left to form new parties (MNR, Parti de la France, etc.) or go back to their original fascist groupplets, or they stayed but were marginalized, or opportunistically changed their line to a softer one.

There have been a lot of debates among historians about the labelling of the FN: national-populist, neo-populist, populist, radical right, far right, nationalist authoritarian, etc. Mainstream social scientists have never characterised the FN as a fascist party and I think they are right. The problem is that they slander or ridicule the anarchist or radical left anti-fascists as being as “totalitarian” as their enemies; they underestimate the unofficial links between the FN and the more radical groups from which the FN regularly co-opts militants and even leaders; they are too confident in the capacities of French (or European) democratic systems to pacify and swallow the FN or other nationalist-populist parties; they underestimate the influence of social media on the FN militants (for example the influence of people like Soral and Dieudonné who have an anti-semitic agenda and nurture popular anti-semitism with an anti-Zionist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist rhetoric).

To whitewash the FN, Marine Le Pen copy-pasted what Bruno Mégret (the FN number two at that time) tried in the 1990s: building the Front from below, by winning small town municipalities (from 10,000 to 100,000 inhabitants); gaining as many municipal councillors and mayors as possible, making local alliances with the right (UMP) to break or split this mainstream right party, trying to attract young people with a certain academic background and high rank state officials, etc. This project failed with Mégret because Le Pen did not admit any intelligent rival with an alternative strategy. So he kicked Mégret out of the party in 1998 but Marine Le Pen rapidly took up exactly the same ideas some years later... with Daddy’s help. This project also failed because (with the exception of one mayor in Orange who left the FN while remaining on the same political line), the FN has been unable to financially and politically manage the towns of Toulon (185,000 inhabitants), Vitrolles and Marignane, gained in 1995 and 1997.

Marine Le Pen was also very much inspired by Fortuyn and Wilders tactics in the Netherlands. The idea was to appear the best defender of Western freedoms and civilisation (including, for Marine Le Pen, French Enlightenment, French Revolution and French Republic, which were always demonized by French traditional fascists). She did not go as far as her Dutch models who openly defend gay rights but she sold to the media and to the public a kind of cheap “feminism” (meaning women can divorce, work, raise their children alone, sometimes be obliged to abort without risking going to Hell) and a cheap form of “tolerance” towards homosexuality (several of her political counsellors are gay and this situation creates problems in the FN Old Guard).

It does not matter whether she is “sincere” or not, the fact is that she was presented by the media as an “independent” woman who had liberal ideas (liberal in the American sense of the word). The media just forgot to tell us she is now 46 years old and still lives with daddy in a luxurious private mansion, and most of her party’s money comes from her father’s dubious heritage (Le Pen managed to convince the owner of a big building company — Ciments Lambert — to leave him his money when he died).

Marine Le Pen also borrowed from the Dutch right populists the idea of targeting Muslims, both as migrants and as practitioners of a non Western religion. It was a good move for her because she could this way defend “laicité” (French conception of secularism) which was always traditionally a left, or at least a Republican, idea, attacked during a long period by the right, the Catholic church, the monarchists and totally ignored by the traditional far right.

Notes
3. About the “Nouvelle Droite”’s impact of British Far Right one can listen to Nigel Copsey’s conference in English http://back-doorbroadcasting.net/2011/09/nigel-copsey-au-revoir-to-sacred-cows-the-nouvelle-droites-impact-on-britains-far-right/
What is anti-Muslim racism?

By Sacha Ismail

There is a lot of reference on the British left to “Islamophobia”, but less actual discussion about what it means. Do Muslims in Britain suffer oppression as Muslims, and if so what kind?

The term will argue that Muslims in Britain do suffer specifically anti-Muslim oppression and bigotry, but that anti-Muslim racism is a better way to understand and describe it.

**ISLAMOPHOBIA**

The use of “Islamophobia” to describe anti-Muslim bigotry blurs the distinct concepts of Muslims as people, Islam as a religion (which like all religions is an extremely broad, variegated spectrum of ideas, practices and cultures) and right-wing Islamic-inspired politics, including Islamism (and, indeed, left-wing Islamic-inspired politics).

Whatever the intentions of those who first developed the term in the 1990s, and of many who use it now, its rise has been intertwined with the rise of right-wing religious reactionaries. As the East End Bengali leftist Ansar Ahmed Ullah put it: “We do not use the term ‘Islamophobia’. Calling things ‘Islamophobic’ is a defence card used by Islamists whenever they are criticised.”

The way the term has developed has promoted the implication that any criticism of ultra-conservative Islamic politics and practices is a criticism of Islam per se and moreover of a bigoted criticism, i.e expressing hostility against Muslims.

Moreover, the implication of hostility to religion as such hardly gets to grips with the multiple aspects of discrimination and oppression faced by Muslims in Britain and elsewhere. Most of which have little to do with Islam per se (which is not to say they are entirely separable from the victims being Muslim).

The necessity of untangling things is shown by the record of the Blair government, which while it presided over racist policies of various kinds, including some which targeted Muslims specifically, was in many ways not Islamophobic but Islamophilic — funding Islamic organisations, facilitating the establishment of Islamic schools and so on. To call Blair an Islamophobe is to confuse, not clarify.

In various writings since 2007, Robin Richardson, who edited the Runnymede Trust’s influential 1996 report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, has made comparable criticisms of the term Islamophobia. He also argues that because it is widely accepted and used, particular by Muslims themselves, it is not possible to abandon it.

I would not make a big deal of opposing the term, but I am not in favour of using it. Another term Robinson suggests, anti-Muslim racism, makes more sense to me.

There is a problem with bigoted attitudes towards Islam as a body of ideas, practices and traditions, because this is a definite theme of some right-wing ideologies: from common-place ignorance about the facts of Islam to stupidity promoted by the right-wing press to the wild anti-Islamic claims of the organised far right.

There are numerous facets to this, from particular (often conspiratorial) views of international politics to claims about Islam and women’s rights, LGBT rights, et cetera. Sometimes such arguments are made on a more strictly religious basis (referring to the text of the Quran, etc.), but even where they are made on a “cultural” basis and shade into more straightforward racsim, arguments about the nature of Islam play a crucial role.

Sometimes isolated elements of such criticism will sometimes be true — but those making them have racist “real reasons” as well as more publicly acceptable “good reasons” for making them. Socialist criticism of Islam is radically different from the ill-informed, inconsistent and sometimes lying criticism of the right. Although we should be open-minded about textual, ideological and in-social-practice differences between different religions, our criticism of each has to be consistent both with our criticism of all religions and our wider struggle against anti-racist worldviews.

Consistency is possible because Marxist criticisms have a materialist and not a religious basis. They seek to understand and criticise both Islam and Islam-majority societies in the context of social development and class struggle, in the same way that we criticise Christianity and other religions and cultures.

Bigoted hostility towards a religion does not necessarily produce the kind of racism which many Muslim people in Britain experience. In the US, for a long time, there was widespread vehement feeling against the Catholic religion but in so far as there was bigotry towards ethnic groups strongly associated with Catholicism (Irish, Italians, etc), this faded long before the anti-religious feeling did. For instance, Irish Catholics became a major force in US society and politics in the early 20th century.

Anti-Muslim racism has flared up since 2001, but the events of the “War on Terror” do not by themselves adequately explain why. After all, the early 1970s saw many more Irish Republican bomb attacks in England than there have been Islamist bomb attacks. There was quite a lot of anti-Irish feeling at the time, but it died away relatively quickly, even before the ceasefire in Ireland.

Most Muslims in Britain face material conditions which makes them vulnerable to racism. While opposition to phobia of or bigotry against Islam is necessary, socialists’ basic concern remains to “de-Islamise” but to understand this racism so we can help fight it.

**RACISM**

To say “x group is not a race” as if this is straightforward is to misunderstand the nature of racism.

There is no such thing as a “race” — there is one human species. Today almost no one subscribes to 19th century or Nazi-style biological racism — which insists that there is a definite set of races — or at least not openly. Racist arguments often involve some variant of “I’m not racist, but...”

Almost universally, racism is used to mean prejudiced hostility (and institutional oppression built on it) to all members of a group which may not be pseudo-scientifically defined as a “race” but which has shared characteristics based on individual choice but some communal “tag” — often skin colour, but also sometimes other characteristics such as language (or presumed) religion.

In Britain there is a history of racism being closely bound up with the “tag” of skin colour, but many examples from all over the world show this is not a necessary part of it. Muslims in Gujarat or Catholics in Northern Ireland look physically the same as Hindus and Protestants — the point being that in these contexts the religious terms actually describe ethnic groups defined by religious heritage.

Muslims in Britain suffer hostility and oppression. Is it because they are Muslims? Almost 70 percent of Muslims in Britain are of South Asian background (over 42 percent Pakistan, over 16 percent Bangladesh, over 8 percent Indian). Anti-South Asian racism (again “Fakis”) has a long history here. Aren’t we just talking about anti-Asian racism, perhaps with a new rhetorical coat of paint?

The disadvantage in terms of poverty, jobs, housing etc suffered by South Asian people in Britain, particularly Pakistanis and even more so Bangladeshis, remains. There is a general law that can be used to suggest that those suffering from social disadvantage will also become the target for bigotry and oppression — in order to justify the disadvantage and because they are relatively easy and vulnerable scapegoats. Given this, it is unsurprising that anti-Asian racism has been more persistent than racism against Irish people, who for a long time have been better off, more integrated and more confident.

It is not at all clear that Muslims suffer discrimination in employment, housing, etc. because they are Muslims — e.g. that an Albanian or Turkish migrant would suffer worse than a Bulgarian or Romanian one for more specifically religious reasons. Nonetheless it would be perverse to ignore the fact that the huge majority of Asians in Britain who suffer worst from poverty and disadvantage are Muslims. This must be what gives anti-Muslim racism some of its strength.

Moreover, since the 1980s, religion in general has become a bigger force in British and world politics, and Asian Muslims here are much more likely to prioritise their identity as Muslims. The worldview of anti-Asian racists has shifted too including the far right, with a new emphasis from e.g. the BNP and Ukip, and the rise of specifically anti-Muslim organisations like the EDL. Racists are much more likely to focus their hostility on Muslims specifically, but at the same time the popular racist image of a Muslim is often a South Asian.

In other words, anti-Asian racism persists, but it is intertwined with anti-Muslim racism. The intertwining is demonstrated by the fact that an Asian person who is not Muslim but looks something like the stereotype of a Muslim may well become a target of anti-Muslim racism. Being dark-skinned may make you a target more than being from an ethnic group which is predominantly Muslim (e.g. Turkish people).

Of course, anti-Muslim racism has other aspects which affect all Muslims, as touched on above. These are often more vivid than the grinding disadvantage and poverty affecting South Asian Muslim communities in particular, though they happen in part because of them. Far-right mobilisations; attacks on mosques; street hassle or hate attacks on people dressed a certain way; bigoted nonsense in the right-wing press; state repression on other Muslims — these things can affect Muslims of different “races”, even if their focus is often on Asians.

**FUTURE**

In the situation of cuts, worsening social conditions, etc. we know that racism is in general getting worse.

“Austerity” naturally affects the most disadvantaged most heavily, while scapegoating also increases. Despite the disarray of the organised far right, “hate crimes” against Muslims shot up in all major Muslim population centres in 2013. Figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales suggest that both that in 2012-13 religiously-motivated hate crime — which is predominantly anti-Muslim — grew much faster than racially-motivated hate crime.

2012-13 was the year of the Woolwich murder and the (as it turned out, relatively small) wave of anti-Muslim agitation which followed it. We will have to see how the figures look for next year.

It is true that anti-migrant agitation has displaced anti-Muslim agitation as a focus for the organised right, unsurprisingly given the disarray of the BNP and the EDL and the rise of UKIP. But unfortunately there are good reasons to suppose that anti-Muslim racism has deep roots and will persist.

This is not just because UKIP is a less virulent force than the anti-Islam movement, but because anti-Muslim racism has deep roots, including anti-racist worldviews. Anti-Muslim racism keys into better established anti-Asian themes and because most European migrants are, with exceptions like the Roma, less poor and thus less vulnerable.
This a welcome re-issue of a booklet published shortly after the miners’ strike by Socialist Organiser (a forerunner of Workers Liberty). Alongside the original articles and illustrations there are updates and a new introduction.

As a compact but highly readable account of the strike and the lessons to be drawn from it, I can recommend Class Against Class unreservedly. The reader is taken through a more-or-less blow by blow narrative of the strike with many eye-witness accounts from NUM activists and their supporters. The important debates that raged at the time are all discussed in depth.

Much of the analysis and reporting not only stands the test of time but, just as important, conveys to the reader a strong sense of what it was like to be involved in the biggest industrial dispute in Britain since 1926. In this respect it is a valuable text for younger readers. It is astonishing to think (at least for me!) that if you are 40 years old you would only have been ten at the time of the outbreak of the strike.

In the section “The story of the strike” the reader is taken through the history of the dispute, including the preparations made by the government, the strike on the miners, particularly in light of the earlier climb down by the Thatcher government in 1981. Some thorny issues are tackled head on. Why was solidarity lacking from the other major trade unions? and the controversy over the hostile debate of whether or not there should have been a national ballot. On the issue of a national ballot, the reader is taken through a, with a number of eye-witness accounts from women who were centrally involved in building up the various women’s support groups.

The “Lessons for our own time” are discussed in the final section and this is followed by some additions for the 2014 edition. Finally, there is an appendix discussing “The National Union of Mineworkers, Stalinitism, and Solidarnosc”. All in all, a very comprehensive and detailed and an extremely useful introduction to the strike and the issues it raises, very few of which have gone away.

On the issue of a national ballot, Class Against Class argues strongly in support of the striking miners’ minority position on the miners, particularly in light of the earlier climb down by the Thatcher government in 1981. Some thorny issues are tackled here; why was solidarity lacking from the other major trade unions and the controversy over the hostile debate of whether or not there should have been a national ballot.

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When we debated Vladimir Derer

The May 1979 general election, in which Labour Party leaders who had systematically turned against their working-class base since winning office in 1974 were defeated by Thatcher’s Tories, triggered rank-and-file revolt in the Labour Party.

Local Labour activists, and for a while even some trade union leaders, rallied around the slogan “Never again!” They vowed to win changes in Labour Party structure and policy which would tie future Labour governments to the mandates and interests of the labour movement.

The revolt surged forward through 1980 and 1981, and into a Labour deputy leadership contest on 27 September 1981. Tony Benn, the figurehead of the Left, won a big majority of the vote among individual Labour Party members and lost to right-winger Denis Healey only by 49.6% to 50.4% after the union and MPs’ votes were counted in.

Benn’s defeat sparked debate in the Labour left. Many Labour people had been alarmed by the splitting-away of a large chunk of Labour’s right wing in March 1981, to form the SDP, which later united with the Liberals to form the “Liberal Democrats”. The union leaders were repenting of their rebellion, and signalling that they wanted a compromise with the Labour right, which they would cut at a meeting in Bishops Stortford in January 1982. Already many MPs previously considered left-wing had backed off by refusing to back Benn for deputy.

Vladimir Derer, the leader since 1973 of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, who died on 10 June this year at the age of 94, argued that the left should hunker down and take a more defensive stance. The debate on this was carried in many publications of the left, but most of all in Socialist Organiser, a forerunner of Solidarity.

Socialist Organiser, 61, 12 November 1981

By Vladimir Derer

Brighton [the autumn 1981 Labour Party conference in Brighton] showed that, for the time being at least, the democratic advance was successfully checked. At all levels of the Party the support for further constitutional changes was seen to be ebbing.

Among the trade unions a halt to democratic reforms was called already last year when there was an overwhelming support for the reposition of the three year rule for constitutional issues. No doubt support for democratic reforms is still strongest among the constituencies. However, even here it is falling off.

The margin, sometimes a very wide margin, by which union members expressed their preference for Healey [when balloted in the deputy leadership election] does indicate that the argument for democratic reforms and Party policies — the platform on which Tony Benn fought his Deputy Leadership campaign — is not won so far as the mass of the members of the labour movement is concerned.

Concern over Labour’s chances to win the next general election, which are threatened by the present divisions, has made the need for Party unity an urgent priority even at the cost of entering into a compromise with that wing of the Party which is led by the majority of MPs and trade union leaders.

To adopt aggressive tactics at this stage would only result in further isolate of the “left” and be even greater threat to democratic reforms already achieved.

Comrades who advocate “aggressive tactics” in the present situation are still clearly carried away by the euphoria generated by the Deputy Leadership campaign. They are simply refusing to face the fact that this campaign ended with the declaration of the final result.

The gains of the last few years can only be successfully defended in the name of Party unity. Reforms that are coming up next year must be argued for as essential for the sake of Party unity. At this stage we can only press for such reforms and policies that can still be realistically achieved.

Last but not least, it is necessary to mobilise support for the commitment by the Party leadership to a significant extension of public ownership. Without such a commitment the alternative economic strategy amounts to little more than an alternative way of running a capitalist economy.

The setting up of an entirely new organisation which would adopt a “high profile” approach — with circuses and jauntybores so beloved to the far “Left”, the Communist Party, and those members of the Labour Party who try to compensate for their inability to make any headway within the Party (i.e. their failure to make full use of the existing party channels) by fantasies about the effectiveness of “extra-parliamentary” action — would make a successful defence of such gains as have been made, let alone any new achievements, quite impossible. [There was then talk of a new alliance of Labour’s left, which eventually emerged as “Labour Liaison 1982”].

Where the situation is not particularly favourable, patient explanations must replace some immediate demands, and only such immediate demands should be pressed which have some chance of being actually realised. In this context one might usefully recall what Lenin wrote 60 years ago:

“To accept battle at a time when it is obviously advantageous to the enemy, but not to us, is criminal; political leaders of the revolutionary class are absolutely useless if they are incapable of changing tack, or offering conciliation and compromise in order to take evasive action in a patently disadvantageous battle” (Collected Works, vol.31, p.77).

- From articles in Socialist Organiser 57, 15/10/82; 58, 22/10/81, and 61, 12/11/81

Time to go on the defensive

By Vladimir Derer

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Only battle can reestablish confidence

By Gerry Byrne

If there is one law in politics, it is that nothing stands still. Either you go forward and press home victories, or the ground already gained gets taken back. Vladimir Derer’s article — for “low profile”, non-divisive tactics miss this vital point.

His argument that if we keep our heads down and don’t antagonise the opposition, then they’ll accept that we’re for unity too and will leave alone the democratic gains already achieved, is the wisdom of the ostrich.

It credits the right with a gentlemanly Queensbury Rules view of politics. It’s a recipe for turning a temporary retreat into a rout.

Of course it is necessary to make a sober assessment of where we are at. False optimism is only slightly less dangerous than Vladimir’s crushing defeatism. But... was there really nothing gained [from the Deputy Leadership campaign]? Was it really only the distasteful diversion Vladimir Derer sees it as?

One can’t help feeling that Vladimir Derer sees as one of the disadvantages of that campaign what I would count one of its strengths, the widening of the debate to far greater numbers of people both in the CLPs and more especially in the unions.

Why else his almost obsessive uncompromising reference to “extra-parliamentary politics” and “circuses and jauntybores”? He talks of a new mood in the Party, which is quite evident, but he sees it entirely from the perspective of internal organisation. Yes, there is a new mood and it’s one that is not particularly advantageous to what we’re trying to do. Enormous pressures are being extended, but the question is, how do we react to them?

The problem with the “let’s unite behind the leadership we’ve got” argument is that the leadership is part of the problem. The objective pressures which create the felt need for unity at all costs are precisely that this system is in a crisis that allows of no half-way solutions.

[The answer] is widening of participation to the mass of Labour Party and trade union members; following through the fight for democracy in the unions; linking the democracy struggle with the policies needed to offer a real alternative to the Tories... extending the fight for accountability to local government... against the weak-kneed reusal by Labour councils to fight [the Tories].

The “effectiveness of extra-parliamentary action” is not a “fantasy”. It is precisely extra-parliamentary action or the lack of it which created the climate of demoralisation. It is only action in halting the Tories’ onslaught and reestablishing confidence into the working class which will create a more amenable climate for the changes so dear to Vladimir Derer’s heart.

He seems to have fallen into the trap of taking up a mirror-image of the attitude of groups like the SWP to Labour Party democracy as totally irrelevant to the class struggle.
**Tube cleaners stand up to Big Brother**

Cleaning workers on London Underground are fighting the introduction of biometric fingerprinting machines, which cleaning agency ISS wants workers to use to book on for shifts. ISS cleaners in the RMT union are boycotting the machines. A cleaning worker spoke to Solidarity about the struggle.

Biometric fingerprinting takes a print of your capillary blood vessels, which are unique to every one of us. Immigration authorities put biometric data on your passport and visas, to keep track of exactly who is in a country. It’s a “Big Brother” technology. ISS says biometric data will make their pay systems more efficient, but we believe it goes beyond that. ISS has an overwhelming majority of migrant workers. We believe it goes beyond that.

ISS has an overwhelmingly migrant workforce. We believe it goes beyond that. ISS has an overwhelmingly migrant workforce. It costs them a fortune to hire agency staff to cover for cleaners they’re locking out for refusing to use the machines, and they’re also being fine because of unfilled jobs. In talks with RMT, they agreed that everyone locked out on Monday 16 June would be paid, and that implementation would be delayed until Monday 23 June. In further talks at ACAS, the implementation was put back again until 4 July, which gives us a couple of weeks’ breathing space to organise further.

I think we’ll have to strike over this. It could be a long-drawn-out battle. We need strike funds urgently, otherwise cleaners won’t be able to afford to go on strike. The JWGB at the University of London has been effective in organising fundraising events and donations, we need to learn from that.

There’s been a tendency for cleaners’ struggles to be sidelined when issues amongst directly-employed LU staff come up. We can’t let that happen. This is the biggest fight for cleaners on the Tube since the Living Wage strikes in 2007. If RMT takes it eye off this issue again, or deprioritises it to focus on the LU jobs dispute, cleaner reps who’ve organised the action so far will be picked off.

ISS is a multibillion pound company. Low-paid, mainly-migrant cleaning workers taking them on feels like a modern-day David and Goliath. But I don’t think the company realises what we’re capable of. We’ve already proved that with our action so far. We sat in station mess- rooms because ISS wouldn’t let us work if we didn’t touch the machines, and we weren’t forced to pay us for it.

That’s already stung them. We must continue to stand our ground.

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**Support Lambeth college!**

*By Katy Dollar*

Teaching staff at Lambeth College are on all-out strike. The workers are fighting new contracts that attack pay and conditions, which would affect all new workers and create a two-tier workforce at the college.

The changes include:

- An increase in working hours, and a lower hourly rate of pay.
- Reduced holidays.
- An attack on sick pay entitlement for those on long-term sick leave.

This is the fourth week of all-out indefinite action for UCU members at the college.

Unison members joined the UCU on strike for the second time on 24-26 June. The UCU have agreed £50 per day strike pay for their members. Union’s strike pay is £15.

Niall Macgrath explained concerns about the difference in strike pay: “It costs as much to feed a UCU member as it does to feed a UCU member.”

Uniquest launched the “campaign for a Lambeth College Striker” initiative at their National Delegate Conference. Ruth Cashman and Jon Rogers, Unison Joint Secretaries explained:

“We are calling for donations so we can make hardship payments to the workers who want to fight this disgusting attack. We are not taking on the work because they cannot afford to stay out. This is local dispute of the campaign to defend the jobs and the work they’ve been forced to pay

They’ve been forced to pay with completely spurious disciplinary charges for their role in the dispute. The Lambeth College strikers’ fight is everybody’s fight. Make sure you pay your passion.

The joint unions are also calling on community and student groups to back the action by organising solidarity actions to support the strike.

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**“Law” used to gag debate**

*By a conference delegate*

The ill-defined threat of legal jeopardy dominated speeches at Union conference (15-20 June), far more than the subject of the national pay dispute.

At Local Government Conference two emergency motions on the pay dispute were ruled out of order on the ground that the unions might place the union in legal jeopardy.

Given they were not printed on the agenda and no detail was allowed in appeals to the Standing Orders Committee from sub-committees, delegates were left with no idea what legal jeopardy the union was facing.

Lambeth UNISON delegate Jon Rogers requested the conference went into private session so delegates could discuss the pay dispute frankly. That was rejected.

Those delegates who obtained back-alley copies of the unprintable motions were somewhat surprised — they simply contained suggestions that the union made a mistake in not seeking legal advice. Legal jeopardy has been used for many years to silence key debates at conference against the left, but this year at National Women’s Conference, Eastern Region and National Women’s Committee.

Union activists need to campaign on the principle of over-cautious treatment of the law. These laws are not our laws. We should call on our union to listen to members not lawyers and uphold the right to debate the policy and strategy of our union.

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**Vote for John Leach!**

Workers’ Liberty members active in the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers’ union (RMT) are backing John Leach in the election for General Secretary.

John is standing on a platform of democracy and equality, committing to put women, black, LGBT, and disabled members’ struggles at the heart of the union, and emphasising the importance of member leadership.

The other candidates are Mick Cash, Steve Hedley, Alex Gordon, and Alan Potts. Voting will be from 21 July to 22 September.

Read more about John’s campaign at facebook.com/johnforGS
IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2014

Their class war and ours

Across the world, capitalists are waging class war against the living standards and rights of workers and the oppressed. At Ideas for Freedom, the summer school on 3-6 July in London organised by the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty (AWL, which publishes Solidarity), we will be discussing how we can resist and fight back.

IFF will include lectures, debates, workshops, films and plenty of space for objections, dissent and criticism. It opens with a Thursday night (3 July) Radical Walking Tour of East London and a Friday night (4 July) meeting on “One hundred years of class war and ours”.

Daniel Randall will talk about on Jewish revolutionaries

Fighting the far right

This year has seen the continued rise of the racist, anti-immigrant right across Europe and the world. What can the left do to build solidarity between migrant and local workers, and turn back the tide of nationalism? Several sessions at Ideas to Freedom will be addressing the question.

Migrant struggles in Britain past and present

For centuries, people from around the world have been travelling to this island and settling. Their struggles against racism and bigotry and for a decent life are an inspiring example for today. Vicky Morris of the AWL and Sherry Paudel, NUS International Students’ Officer, will discuss the lessons.

Is the far-right winning over Europe’s workers?

The European far-right has made big gains in elections across Europe. Are they winning the argument amongst European workers? What can the left do to beat them back? Yves Coleman from the French journal Ni patrie ni frontières, Matt Cooper of Workers’ Liberty and Greek socialist activist Theodora Polenta discuss the way forward.

- Revolutionary Jews

When millions of Jewish migrants fled poverty and persecution in Tsarist Eastern Europe, they settled in great numbers in Britain and the US. They often worked in sweatshops and grim, un-unionised workplaces, and were threatened by xenophobia and a nascent fascist movement. Hip-hop artist and AWL activist Daniel Randall will give a presentation on the history of Jewish radicals and revolutionaries.

Politics and Class Struggle in India after Modi’s election

The Hindu chauvinist BJP has just swept the Indian National Congress from power. What does the BJP’s victory mean for the diverse Indian working-class? Jairus Banaji from the School of Oriental and African Studies and a speaker from South Asia Solidarity will discuss the issues.

Jairus Banaji will discuss Narendra Modi and the rise of the BJP

The weekend sessions are at the University of London Union, WC1E 7HY.
A creche and overnight accommodation are available free, and food will be available cheap.
Tickets bought in advance cost £34 waged, £18 low-waged/university students, £7 unwaged/school or college students.
Book or inquire now at www.workersliberty.org/ideas

Grillo allies with UKIP

By Hugh Edwards

Italy’s Five Star movement, which announced its arrival on the political scene as the harbinger of a new, modern “non-ideological” Italy, cleansed of the filth and corruption of the “old”, has just joined forces with the right-wing populist UKIP in the European parliament.

After weeks of “democratic” debate, and a online referendum, it was announced last week that Five Start leader Beppe Grillo and UKIP’s Nigel Farage had managed to fish from the sewers of Europe’s political right the minimum of 48 representatives necessary to constitute a parliamentary group of Euro deputies.

Among the new bedfellows of the 24 UKIP and 17 Five Star MEPs are an elected Le Pen deputy, Joelle Bergeron, several from Lithuania’s “Order and Justice” party, a few from Sweden’s ultra-racist “Democrats”, and a few more of the same ilk from the Czech extreme right.

They share a visceral opposition to Europe and immigration, differing only in the virulence of their racist utterances or, in the case of Grillo and his friends, the degree of philistine self-delusion that “racism” is just another “old” ideology.

Nothing since the galloping victory of Renzi a few weeks ago could more urgently underline the debacle that is now being played out in the Italian left and working class movement. The Grillo phenomenon was, in its origins, a cry of anger and protest from millions of the most downtrodden. In less than two years, amidst the unresolved political and economic crisis, Grillo now increasingly figures as the aspiring right-wing opposition, following the collapse of Berlusconi’s Forza Italia and the Five Star haemorrhage of three million votes.

LEFT

And the left that in the same European elections claimed that the positive performance of the Tsipras campaign marked a turning point in the direction of building a Syriza movement in Italy?

Fine words, but the campaign’s largest politically organised component, SEL led by the governor of Puglia, Nichi Vendola, has split. Its deputies and senators prefer to “tough it out” in the battle to persuade Renzi, and the left of his party to throw a few crumbs more to the masses.

Nothing surprising here, given that in two-thirds of the country the so called radical left, Vendola’s outfit and Ferrero’s Communist Refoundation, are in alliance with Renzi’s Democrats in local, regional and provincial councils.

But the picture is even blacker in “red” Livorno, historically the most left-wing city in the country. In order to defeat the Democratic Party candidate in the second round of the recent mayoral elections, the whole of the radical left backed the Five Star movement, the leader of which declared not so long ago that the local steelworkers of 3,000 workers should be closed and trade unions abolished. Little wonder that the fascist right in the city voted for the Grillo candidate!

The shameful spectacle of political impotence and retreat continues. And all this despite real, courageous battles and struggles going on, especially from sections of the remarkable base unions and others. The need for revolutionary clarity, theory and organisation was never more burningly obvious than in Italy today.