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workers
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 379 7 October 2015 30p/80p

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replace Trident, we could have:**



**1.5 million new
homes, or
150,000 new
nurses employed
indefinitely**

See page 5

Join Labour! Join Young Labour!

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:

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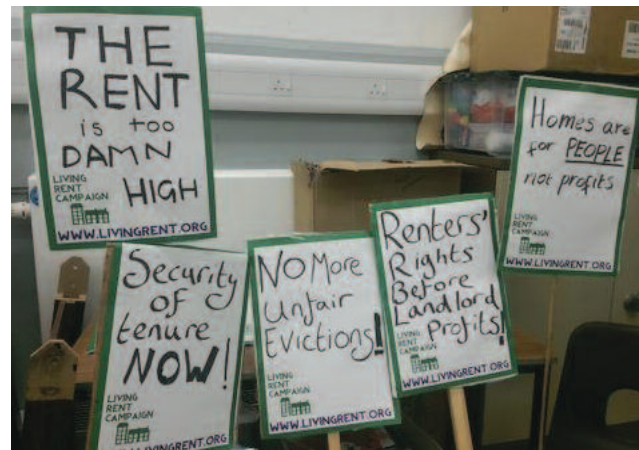
Scottish tenants win rent controls

By Gordon Maloney

Last month Nicola Sturgeon announced the Scottish Government's 2015-16 programme of government. In it, on the back of an enormous campaigning and lobbying effort by the Living Rent Campaign, was a commitment to introduce provisions for rent controls.

Further, the First Minister outlined plans to scrap short-assured tenancies and the no-fault grounds for eviction. These laws, introduced by Thatcher in the eighties, meant tenants in Scotland have some of the worst protections from eviction and least secure leases anywhere in Europe.

This is, without a doubt, an enormous victory for the campaigners who have spent the last year up and down the country gathering consultation responses and petition signatures, marching and demonstrating outside dodgy letting agents, building links with trade unions and the workers' movement, meeting and lobbying with MSPs and MPs, forcing the issue of poverty and insecurity in the private rented sector high up the agenda of Scottish politics, and comprehensively winning the argument that the market



has failed and is incapable of delivering secure, affordable housing.

The Living Rent Campaign has built a coalition of organisations representing more than a million people behind their call for rent controls, and made waves within the SNP, Labour, Greens and RISE, Scotland's new Left alliance. It is hard to imagine the First Minister announcing what she did without the stakhanovite efforts of tenant activists in every corner of the country.

But with the positives out of the way, let's have some pessimism.

Firstly, there are lots of questions to be asked. The programme of government outlines provisions to introduce "local rent controls" in "rent pressure areas." It

doesn't say anything about how these rent controls would work or what constitutes or, who decides what is, a rent pressure area.

Secondly, rent controls aren't just about cost. There are parts of Scotland where rent isn't comparatively expensive, but where there do exist chronic issues of poor quality housing. Rent controls linked to quality, such as the model that exists in the Netherlands, are

the most efficient way of forcing up standards, by giving landlords an immediate financial incentive to make repairs. It is unclear whether there will be scope within the provisions outlined to have this effect.

That said, and even with those caveats, this is an enormous step forward for private tenants in Scotland and we have come a long way. The argument has been won that the free market is unable to deliver secure, affordable housing.

But there is a long way still to go, and only an active, vibrant, and organised tenants' movement will take us those next steps.

That is why it is imperative that everybody who wants to see a model of housing in Scotland that puts tenants and human need before profit for speculators and landlords gets involved in the Living Rent Campaign, and helps us make it happen.

Russian bombs to defend Assad

By Simon Nelson

Russia has begun bombing Syria, claiming it is targeting Daesh (IS). But the airstrikes are, in effect, a defence of the Assad government, which Russia maintains is the legitimate government of the Syrian people.

The *Guardian* reported that a rebel group trained by the CIA, Liwa Suqour al-Jabal, had its training camp in Idlib struck repeatedly in two separate bombings.

Russia has hit a range of targets in both northern and central Syria, affecting the increasingly fragmented rebel groups, including members of the Islamic Front and the Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra.

One of Russia's most targeted areas is in the north-west of Syria, where a larger number of Chechen fighters are found. They were responsible for the destruction of an Assad military installation in the area.

A Russian spokesman quoted by the *Guardian* admitted, "These organisations are well known and the targets are chosen in co-ordination with the armed forces of Syria."

Whilst the US has condemned attacks that target non-Daesh groups, they remain committed to "deconfliction" talks which they hope will stop US and coalition airstrikes clashing with Russian fighters while both are undertaking airstrikes.

The entrance of Russian fighter planes has, however, lowered the level of airstrikes being undertaken by the US, who have switched their focus to Iraq.

The US are concerned that Russia is attacking moderate rebels who, they say, have the best chance of defeating both Daesh and Assad. But these moderates include various strands of Islamists, most of whom split from the Free Syrian Army, and many of whom have ended up as part of the Islamic Front, Jabhat al-Nusra or even Daesh.

Much of the US-provided weaponry found their way into the hands of these "moderates". Robert Fisk reports in the *Independent* that the US trained an additional 70 fighters in 2015 and sent them into Syria via Turkey.

On their return to Syria, almost all of them were captured by Jabhat al-Nusra.

US and Afghan forces clash with Taliban

By Omar Raii

Afghan and US forces have found themselves under intense criticism after the bombing of a Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) hospital in the city of Kunduz, during an attempted recapture of the city.

Kunduz, an ethnically mixed city in the north of the country and close to the border with Tajikistan, has previously been under threat from Taliban forces that have long held sway in provincial areas around the city. Following a planned offensive on 28 September, the Taliban captured most of the city.

After being embarrassed by the fact that even now, fourteen years after they were ousted from power by the US-led invasion of

Afghanistan, the Taliban are able to capture the country's fifth biggest city, the Afghan government, along with US forces, are currently attempting to recapture Kunduz.

In the most controversial action taken, at least 22 people were killed when US bombs hit a Médecins Sans Frontières facility, apparently on the orders of the Afghan government who were convinced that Taliban fighters were inside the hospital. Many critics have called this action a potential war crime.

Investigations have been launched by both NATO and the US armed forces. But neither the Afghan government nor the US will be able to find a military solution to the problem of peace in Afghanistan.



Students against cuts



Right To Strike organised a bloc on the TUC's No To Austerity demonstration.

The campaign's next action will be on 2 November, the date of the TUC lobby of Parliament over the Trade Union Bill. RTS is calling for a protest outside Parliament and local action outside London.

• More: righttostrike.org

McCluskey “bargains” on Trade Union Bill

By Gemma Short

Unite union general secretary Len McCluskey has offered the government a deal on the Trade Union Bill.

On 1 October he sent David Cameron a letter offering to accept the 40% and 50% ballot thresholds in return for the introduction of electronic ballots.

It is not wrong to seek an alternative to postal balloting, which has been imposed on unions. Postal ballots ensure members vote in isolation in their home; they are plagued with problems such as members moving house or just forgetting to post their ballot paper.

Electronic ballots, though they would be better, do not necessarily mean workplace ballots. They may still mean members voting in isolation without any discussion with workmates.

Further, the demand for electronic or workplace ballots should not be made as a trade-off for accepting government meddling in our unions' democratic processes.

Unions *should* be more democratic, more controlled from the workplace, but achieving that is our job, not the state's.

Our demand should be that unions decide on democratic processes and that there should be no restrictions or rules about our bal-

lots.

What about the other, crippling, elements of the bill — restrictions on picketing, lifting the ban on the use of agency workers to cover striking workers, and the attack on unions' political funds?

McCluskey has said in speeches that he still opposes these, but his letter to Cameron doesn't mention them, and his move can only weaken the campaign against them.

McCluskey's letter is typical trade union leader behaviour: the talk of “boxing clever” and working with “friendly amendments” to the bill. Thinking we can beat the Tories' class war by negotiations on small amendments with the government is a fatal trap.

The opposite is needed — building a mass movement to oppose the bill, persuade and educate the public, and prepare trade union members for the necessity of breaking the laws if they pass.



Students join march against the Tories

By Jessica Patterson

There was a considerable student showing at the 80,000 strong TUC demonstration against Austerity outside Tory party conference, in Manchester on Sunday 4 October.

The student bloc, including groups from Bristol and several Scottish universities, injected some much needed energy into the march and formed one of the liveliest sections of the protest.

Local campus group, Free Education Manchester, ran a section in conjunction with the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, which included a high number of first-time demonstrators.

Free Education Manchester's visible contribution was an important victory for grass-roots organising. In the run-up to the demo, the Student Assembly against Austerity was criticised for failing to include or consult local activists. Following this, the NUS National Executive voted, by e-mail, against a motion calling on the SAA to take their lead from the Free Education Manchester. There has been no explana-

tion about the reasoning behind this decision.

Despite this, on the day, Free Education Manchester took the lead, its banner forming the front of the bloc, encouraging students to feed into the march from the SAA's inexplicably distant meet-up point.

On its arrival the bloc galvanised the nearby education unions into a series of chants, including calls for open borders. These chants, the banners and placards, revealed how the movement stands for much more than the abolition of tuition fees.

Taking place exactly one month before the NCAFC's national demonstration, the bloc gave activists a sense that student politics is experiencing resurgence.

Free Education and Living Grants for All

Wednesday 4 November
Assemble 1pm, Malet Street, London

Demand public ownership to save steel jobs

By Luke Hardy

On Friday 2 October a Department of Trade and Industry statement confirmed that the 1,700 workers who have lost their jobs at SSI UK steelworks in Redcar should prepare for even worse news.

As SSI's parent company had filed for insolvency in the Thai courts, the workers' redundancy payments were under threat. SSI had talked of keeping the plant “mothballed”, with the implication that the plant could re-open and workers be rehired if the price of steel increased to the point where a “healthy profit” could be made.

Mothballing would involve keeping the plant's coke ovens burning — necessary if the ovens were to be retained.

The government's promised bailout of £80 million would not keep the ovens/plant going. It is in-



tended to help retrain workers and set up job finding schemes.

The unions have now dropped the argument against the job losses, and are pushing for mothballing.

Roy Rickhuss, General Secretary of the Community Union, said “Government must ensure that the industrial assets are protected and skills are retained to give steel making a chance of a future. We believe there are parties who could ensure that the industrial assets are mothballed safely,

with reduced environmental impact, and we would encourage the liquidators to look favourably on this option as offering the best opportunity to secure a return to creditors.”

Whilst the safety and environmental impacts are important, the union leaders and the leaders of the Labour Party should be arguing for the plant to be in public ownership and workers' control.

Steel is vital for construction and the engineering needed for infrastructure renewal, building and reno-

vating vital new homes and the infrastructure and facilities that goes alongside new homes too. Steel is vital too for the renewal and updating of clapped out rail, energy and road infrastructure.

There's insufficient or no private profit in building social housing, and these social needs therefore go unmet. The relentless demand for profit is the same reason 1,700 steel workers are being forced out of their jobs.

Socialists should put pressure on the unions to make the arguments for public ownership.

In the case of Redcar steel jobs, it will take workers acting to make the decisive difference. Perhaps workers should occupy to keep the coke ovens going and stop SSI from selling off the equipment.

Such action would also highlight the political issue and the need for workers' control.

Tories relaunch fake union

By Gerry Bates

The Tories have said they will start their own “trade union” — the Conservative Workers' and Trade Union Movement.

They say this “union” will appeal to workers who feel they are not represented by their “militant left-wing” trade union leaders.

This is an attempt to “recreate” (as its appointed leader Robert Halfon puts it) the “Conservative Trade Unionists” movement which made some splash in the 1970s. CTU, now named “Conservatives at Work”, stresses that it is open to “employers, managers, and company directors”. (Its leader is a former lawyer, now a Tory MP).

The Tories know very well how society works; they are seeking to disguise its workings, and pit workers against each other, while they continue to profit from their exploitation of us.

Unfortunately many of these “militant left-wing” trade union leaders the Tories seek to rally workers against have failed to deliver on their promises. Without organising a serious fight back against the Tories some trade union members may question the purpose of their union.

All the more reason for union leaders to start showing some leadership, and to organise a movement of trade unionists to fight to Tories.

The enemy is capital!

Letters



In the 1970s Hoxton, just north and west of Brick Lane, site of the now-notorious Cereal Killer Cafe mobbed by a publicity-seeking anarchist group on 26 September, was a stronghold of the fascist National Front.

The national headquarters of the NF, a scarier outfit than the BNP of recent years, was on Great Eastern St, halfway between the two areas.

Hoxton's population was ageing, white, of the least organised sections of the working class or of the "lumpen-proletariat" (chronically unemployed), and embittered. Brick Lane's population was overwhelmingly Bengali, also poor, and sufficiently alarmed that for a while local activists organised an anti-fascist defence squad to patrol the streets every night.

The NF frequently rallied in Hoxton market, and felt confident enough to sell papers regularly at the top of Brick Lane.

Since then both Hoxton and Brick Lane have been "gentrified", partly by the construction of private housing, and partly by a daytime influx of relatively well-off workers. This is a big centre of the art world in London, and it is "Tech City" or "Silicon Roundabout".

My own area, just over the Islington-Hackney border from Hoxton, has been changed by the same process.

I agree with Gemma Short when she writes (*Solidarity* 378): "We don't want to live in ghettoised working-class communities" (or, I'd add, communities which ghettoise the poorest sections of the working class, with the lumpen-proletariat, from the better-off sections). "Fetishising the 'working-class street' of a greasy spoon and a betting shop is reactionary".

I'd go further. "Gentrification" in our area has, on balance, had positive effects. Racism is on the defensive. The population is much more diverse than 40 or even 20 years ago. Facilities are better.

SELF-ABASING

Gemma writes: "No doubt, the laundrettes, greengrocers and corner shops that used to provide for a working-class community have been replaced". They haven't.

The area has laundrettes. It has never (in recent decades) had many greengrocers, but it has some. Since World War Two bombing, it has been an area of council blocks rather than terraced streets, and so without corner shops, but there are now more and better "corner"-type shops than there were.

"Ghettoised" council estates on the edges of cities are less liable than the inner city to have better-off people coming to live there, or to see better-paid industries developing. That is a disadvantage, not an advantage. Those estates may have nothing to serve local shoppers unready to pay for a taxi to the supermarket beyond one or two shops with small stocks and high prices, sometimes just a mobile shop.

It is stultifying and self-abasing, not revolutionary, to regard the small art galleries or the very numerous Vietnamese cafes now in Hoxton as alien invasions, and to look to a golden age when everyone was a virtuous proletarian who wanted nothing beyond what could be got from a laundrette, a greengrocer, and a corner shop.

I've seen a similar process, but in that case of average-to-poor working-class areas getting an influx of those a bit better off, rolling through the suburbs of Brisbane from where my daughters live to the two suburbs beyond them on the railway line. Again, on balance local working-class people gain.

Yes, some things are lost. Yes, there is a risk that local working-class people will be driven out. It can be resisted. Yes, some of the newcomers will be daft and pretentious.

But the enemy is capital, not daft and pretentious middle-class people, and not slightly better-off working-class people. Proletarian "miserabilism", the habit of wallowing in "us poor workers" philistinism, is not socialist.

Martin Thomas, Islington

Subtler plans of the Labour right

Labour By Colin Foster



Luke Akehurst, secretary of the right-wing Labour First faction, hopes to bring down Labour's new Corbyn-McDonnell leadership by pressure of public opinion.

Akehurst disavows those on the Labour right who want a coup against Corbyn. Writing on Labour List (22 September), he relies on this:

"Some of [Corbyn's] grassroots supporters will go through the same painful process of awakening and political education that led to many Bennite activists becoming successively Kinnockite then Blairite in the 1980s and 1990s. Their idealism didn't survive repeated interaction with electoral defeat and hostile working class voters on the doorstep... And people get older..."

MPs, he hints, will then move against Corbyn. And "trade unions will get fed up" because they'd prefer right-wing Labour administrations to a risk of continued Tory administration.

His model is the 1980s. But the Labour left surge of the 1980s was broken by the impact of industrial defeats and alarmed trade union leaders, not by an immovable conservatism in the electorate. In 1980-2, when Labour's leftism was at its height, Labour was way ahead of the Tories in the polls. Polls during the Labour leadership election showed Corbyn more popular than Burnham and Cooper with the general public as well as with Labour people. The left can win a majority if we argue our case.

In the meantime, Akehurst rejoices in Corbyn's "concessions related to foreign and defence policy". He says that there "the disagreements are profound ones where the two sides simply have different moral principles", whereas in domestic policy "how radical you think it is realistic and electable to be". It's an odd contrast, because plenty of moderate bourgeois thinkers oppose nuclear weapons and NATO membership, while all are against large-scale public ownership for bigger reasons than "electability".

Akehurst thinks that Corbyn will be restrained by "advi-



Corbyn decided to shun "polite" tradition to speak at a People's Post event in Manchester on 5 October

sors who have come out of the Socialist Action group and Ken Livingstone's City Hall administration, pragmatists who are interested in securing and wielding power through compromise" (i.e. such as Simon Fletcher and Annaliese Midgley). They can, he thinks, hold off "the organisers of the grassroots CLPD and LRC networks who will want to push forward at top speed with constitutional and policy changes".

The question, in short, is whether the left can keep its nerve, draw the new young Corbyn supporters into the CLPs and Young Labour groups, and win the debates through patient explanation.

Ironically, Akehurst, a great supporter in its time of Blair's suppression of Labour democracy, concludes by welcoming the following fact:

"Next year, now that it is clear that conference is again the stormy forum where Labour will decide its direction, not just a fun week by the seaside being lectured by frontbenchers, I expect that CLPs up and down the country will see hotly contested elections to be a conference delegate".

TUSC: disorientated over Corbyn

The Left By Cathy Nugent



When the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) met on Saturday 26 September, the hot topic for discussion was how socialists should respond to the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Leader of the Labour Party.

But, according to reports on websites of two of TUSC's affiliates, the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party (but not in any detail on TUSC's own), TUSC will just do what it usually does. It welcomes Corbyn's victory, but it will stand in the May 2016 local elections on a very limited socialist platform, for what are likely to be, especially in the new situation, very poor results.

However, reading between the lines, and reading a report from the Independent Socialist Network, a more strange and ambivalent set of attitudes emerges.

The Socialist Party (SP) website (28 September) reports SP leader Peter Taaffe's speech. It focuses on the likely attack from the right against Corbyn. To continue with the spirit of pointing out the obvious, this line of argument does leave the SP open to the criticism that it should not be standing outside Labour, letting the Labour right get away with such an attack.

Perhaps Taaffe, in true SP tradition, has a grandiose scenario in mind: that if only TUSC "keeps its powder dry" and waits for the split, there is the prospect of a TUSC-Corbynite party in the future. Taaffe: "The Corbyn surge is looking for a way forward and they won't find it in the current Labour Party structures".

On a more micro level TUSC will be pursuing a "united front" with Corbyn supporters on the basis of building

groups composed of people who are anti-cuts in local government. But this is somewhat contradicted by SWP member Jenny Sutton saying: "There can't be any hard and fast rules — that they have to be in the Labour Party or have to be out of the Labour Party or have to be opposed to all cuts."

So TUSC wants to build a united front of people who are opposed to some cuts, and says to those Labour Party members who are engaged in an intense struggle to win ground inside the Party, don't bother with that, just fight the cuts.

In sharp contrast, the Independent Socialist Network, another affiliate of TUSC, argues (on the Project website* 21 September) that the Corbyn group should organise a "twin track" fight against austerity, inside and outside Labour. But the emphasis is on a supportive orientation to the fight within the Labour Party.

They argue: "[Corbyn] must now use his position as a new party leader with a massive mandate to open up the Labour Party to all who want to join it, including those who have voted for or stood as candidates for rival left-wing parties. All those socialists who have been proscribed or otherwise prevented from joining the Labour Party must be allowed in. The internal party structures must be completely democratised... Conference must be democratised and become sovereign, making policy to be implemented by party MPs, MEPs and local councillors... policy must be made democratically by the Labour Party members."

The approach of the Independent Socialist Network (although we might argue about its inflated perspective of building a mass socialist party quickly) is much more grounded in reality.

It won't have much sway inside TUSC and, on the face of it, they don't intend to stay in TUSC much longer.

• www.socialistproject.org

Scrap Britain's nukes!

The government — continuing decisions made by the previous Blair-Brown New Labour government — is already spending hundreds of millions of pounds on a British nuclear weapons system to replace Trident.

The final decision on the system, and the start of construction of submarines to carry the new weapons, is due by late 2016. The first submarine would then be scheduled to enter service in 2028.

The total cost of this program is understated by the government. It would be huge, £100 billion or more. The same money would build 200 big new hospitals, or employ 150,000 additional nurses indefinitely, or build 1.5 million new homes. It would repair all the recent cuts in the NHS and social housing.

Even if the system could be got cheaply, it should not be got. In the worst periods of the cold war, until 1953, Britain had no nuclear weapons.

Britain has had its own submarine-based nuclear weapon system only since 1968. The Polaris system introduced then ran to 1996; Trident has run from 1994.

The government's aim with the new system is not to stop war, but just to sustain Britain as an influential and weighty ally of the USA.

BUTTON

Even Denis Healey, a long-time and fervent opponent within the Labour Party of unilateral nuclear disarmament, told the BBC after he retired that he would never have "pushed the button" to use nuclear weapons.

He took the same position that Jeremy Corbyn is now attacked for taking. In 2008 a BBC interview challenged Healey about what he would have done when, in the 1960s, he was the person designated to "push the button", or not, if the prime minister, then Harold Wilson, was out of action. What would he do if nuclear war had broken out, Britain was being attacked, and the armed forces chiefs said he must "push the button"?

"I would still have said that... is no reason for doing something like that. Because most of the people you kill would be innocent civilians."

In 2006 Healey said: "I don't think we need nuclear weapons any longer". He supported Gordon Brown as Labour leader, but said that Brown was "wrong on Trident".

The Trident replacement program is creeping ahead only because no proper debate has been allowed on it. Tory-Labour consensus on the issue means little debate in Parlia-



ment, and until this year right-wing control of the Labour Party has meant little debate in Labour.

In 1989 Neil Kinnock managed to bury Labour's nuclear disarmament policy of the 1980s by the device of a "policy review". A labour movement demoralised by ten years of Thatcherism let him get what he wanted.

Then the shutters came down on further debate. Tony Blair allowed one at 1997 Labour Party conference because, buoyed up by his general election victory, he was confident of winning the vote.

In September 2006 the TUC resolved: "Congress calls upon the Government not to replace Trident."

A few weeks later, Labour Party conference met. The report to it from the National Policy Forum stated: "The question of the replacement for the Trident system is one of central importance... there should be a full debate on the

issue."

That statement that there should be a full debate then became the pretext for denying a debate. Seventeen motions from constituency Labour Parties were ruled out of order, on the grounds that the NPF had already covered the issue.

Trident failed to win the priority vote at this year's Labour Party conference, but it is near-certain it will be debated in the coming months.

The GMB union backs Trident replacement, and the Unite union is equivocal, because they worry about the jobs which could be provided by the replacement project. But there are a hundred good social uses for the heavy engineering equipment and skills which might be used for the replacement.

The labour movement must demand that the decision top scrap Trident and not to replace it is coupled with a program for those social uses.

Help us raise £15,000

On Friday 2 October Workers' Liberty comrades and friends in North London had our first session of our reading group for *The two Trotskyisms confront Stalinism*.

We discussed the context of the debates we will be discussing in the coming weeks — the context of what happened to the Russian Revolution. The event was attended by 10 people and everyone chipped in some money for us to be able to provide some food and drinks.

Study guides for the book are now available (buy online at bit.ly/twotrotsstudy) and comrades in the reading group found the study guide useful to structure discussion and guide reading.

If you have not already started a reading group in your area, please organise one. Order some study guides from us, make sure you have a copy of the book and get down to learning about the history of Trotskyism!

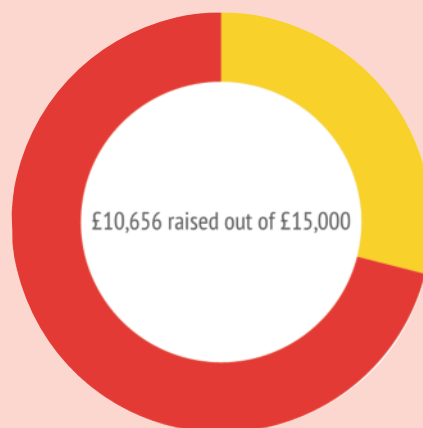
Please also consider:

- Getting a subscription to our weekly newspaper, Solidarity — workersliberty.org/subscribe
- Taking out a monthly standing order.
- Making a one-off donation
- Organising a fundraising event in your local area
- Committing to do a sponsored activity and asking others to sponsor you

- Buying some of our books, posters, autocollants or pamphlets

For information on standing orders or how to donate visit workersliberty.org/donate For more ideas and information on fundraising visit workersliberty.org/fundraising

Thanks this week to Wilfrid. We also raised £85 through extra sales at the 4 October anti-austerity demonstration. So far we have raised £10,656.



Workers' Liberty London Forum

Lessons from Greece:

The left in power

Speakers: Theodora Polenta and Martin Thomas

Thursday 15 October

**7pm, Lucas Arms,
245a Grays Inn Road,
WC1X 8QY**

bit.ly/greeceforum

An open letter to a “rejoiner”

By Martin Thomas

Dear comrade,

You're one of the sizeable minority of “rejoiners” among the 180,000 or so people who have joined the Labour Party since the general election, in the leadership contest or since Jeremy Corbyn won leader.

I'm writing to urge you to make your rejoining not just a tepid “see how it goes” affair, but a full restart of the political energy and ardour of your previous activism.

Even if the young people entering politics with the Corbyn surge have been on demonstrations and other one-off actions before, there has been effectively no Labour youth movement, and no other leftish youth movement, either, broad and big enough to allow new young people to learn through regular discussion, debates, and activity.

Even if they've got to university, they're unlikely to have found more than a scattering of mostly small rival left meetings, and on some campuses not even that.

They will learn, they will shape themselves, by sifting, analysis, comparing, criticising, appropriating the ideas that they're offered by more experienced people, and by melding those ideas with what they've picked up from school or university or family. They will do that under a downpour of conservatism ideology, subtle from the *Guardian* as well as loudish from the *Mail*.

Will the voice of independent working-class politics, of revolutionary socialism, of critical Marxism, be loud and clear enough amidst the hubbub?

DEPENDS

It depends. It depends on how many of us there are, how organised, how energetic, how cohesive and disciplined, how well educated and trained.

Instructive, when selling papers or distributing leaflets on the streets or at a demonstration, is the realisation that most of the people who seem to reject your offer actually don't “see” you. Just as everyone does every day on the streets, they semi-automatically screen out most of the bustle around them, the better to focus manageably.

Our left, the Marxist left, must pass a threshold of vigour and visibility even to enter effectively into contest with the NGO-ish soft left, the Stalinoid “the-USA's-enemy-is-our-friend” ideologues, or the equivalents in the new Labour Party of those around Tsipras who took Syriza from vowing socialism to enforcing a new cuts Memorandum.

If we don't, the new young activists will be drawn down those political blind alleys, or retreat and disperse in dismay.

Maybe you came into left-wing politics in 1984-5, around the miners' strike. Or in 1990-1, in the battles against the poll tax and against the Kuwait war. Or in the “new anti-



Many “rejoiners” will have first become active during the miners' strike

capitalist” actions following the Seattle WTO protest of 1999.

You met defeats, disappointments, difficulties. You'd always had friends and family telling you that you were fighting the sky with your socialist activity: their arguments started to bite.

Young children, frail parents, jobs, ill-health, or a dozen other influences pulled you out of activity. You were nauseated by Blair's Labour Party. You may have joined an organised effort to build something better to the left of Labour, like the 2000-2 Socialist Alliance; but most of you didn't, and those efforts produced new disappointments.

Unlike many, though, you remained true to your values. You didn't capitulate to Blairism. Probably you've come to demonstrations from time to time, you've been active at some level in your union.

Unlike so many, you didn't kill the militant younger self within you. You didn't throw away the “investment” you, and many comrades around you, made in educating you in the ideas of socialism and the lessons of working-class history. Now you can put it to work again in a big way.

In some ways, Tony Blair's greatest crime was his success in driving so many socialists into retreating, disgusted, from activity. If he hadn't carried through that crime, he would never have been able to join the USA in invading Iraq, or undermining the health service through the internal market and PFI.

You opposed Blair. Now tens of thousands of young people will be striving to undo Blair's malign work. Will you bring your knowledge and experience to help them?

Palestine: t

After the recent killing of four Israelis by (most likely Hamas-affiliated) Palestinians, Israel's Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu “promised” harsh retaliation. In fact Netanyahu's promise was an announcement after the fact — already the Old City of Jerusalem had been closed to all non-resident Palestinians, and 100 or more had been wounded by Israeli troops around the West Bank. This article looks at the political backdrop to these events.

By Adam Keller*

Sometimes, on the battlefield, a soldier takes a hand grenade and pulls out the pin but does not yet toss it.

It is possible. As long as a finger is kept on the spot, the grenade will not explode — but this is a dangerous expedient, which is very inadvisable to continue with for long. If the finger slips, or somebody jogs the soldier's hand and the grenade falls, it can explode at an unexpected place and time and with unpredictable results. And once the pin is pulled from the grenade, it is not so easy to put it back.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) went to the UN Assembly General a much-troubled man. Ten years have passed since he was elected to replace Yasser Arafat, and not much to show.

Since Abbas was elected, he had adhered to a clear and consistent position — Palestinians should avoid armed struggle, which had reached its peak during the second intifada. Acts such as suicide bombings sully the Palestinians' international reputation and bring upon them destructive and deadly Israeli reprisals. Instead, the Palestinians should take political action, mobilise international public opinion, build up a position in international diplomatic institutions, and simultaneously conduct on the ground a popular struggle mobilising big numbers of people in demonstrations and protests, in which no violent means will be used beyond stone throwing. For ten years he led the Palestinians on the basis of this policy — with practical results on the ground remaining close to nil.

RECOGNITION

True, on the international diplomatic arena the “State of Palestine” won recognition in a great variety of international forums, culminating in this week's ceremony of raising the Palestinian flag, among the flag of all the other nations, in front of the UN headquarters in New York.

In principle, the Palestinians possess a far stronger international diplomatic recognition than the Zionist movement had in the aftermath of the Balfour Declaration, which promised no more than “a Jewish National Home” whose precise nature remained unclear.

However, also to the thousands of Palestinians gathered in Ramallah to view the New York flag raising ceremony in huge TV screens, it was clear that as of now, it is a virtual state, whose presence in the world of diplomacy sharply contrasts with its absence in reality on the ground. Over his ten years in office, Abu Mazen was unable to change in any significant way the situation in which the Palestinian Authority exercises an extremely limited degree of control over a string of narrow enclaves surrounded by Israeli military forces and ever-expanding settlements. To this should be added the deep divisions among the Palestinians themselves, between Fatah and Hamas, West Bank and Gaza Strip. All attempts to bridge over these divisions and establish a united Palestinian government ended in dismal failure.

Among Palestinians, there is a growing discontent with the status quo, especially against the “security cooperation” between the security services of the Palestinian Authority and those of Israel. Two weeks ago, there was widespread protest following the publication of videos showing Palestinian Police in Bethlehem beating up a Palestinian boy during an at-



The status quo cannot continue

tempt to prevent demonstrators from getting to the Israeli Separation Wall surrounding the Tomb of Rachel — to hold a protest there. Increasingly, Palestinians feel that continuation of the status quo serves the Israeli side, the Palestinian Authority providing a force of subcontractors who “manage the occupation” and who facilitate the appearance of “Palestinian self-rule” which reduces criticism of ongoing occupation. One of the most prominent advocates of dismantling the Palestinian Authority and “handing the keys to Israel” is none other than Saeb Erekat, one of Abu Mazen’s closest aides and advisers (who headed the negotiating team with Israel, as long as there were negotiations...).

As soon as Abbas let it be known that he was planning to “throw a bomb” during his speech at the UN. Immediately, European and American diplomats came rushing to restrain him. But from what was leaked to the media, they did not have much to offer. Reportedly, Secretary of State Kerry promised an emergency aid of 300 million dollars, which would keep the Palestinian Authority alive but would in no way change the underlying conditions. And in his own speech at the UN, President Obama did not mention the Palestinians at all — nor did Russian President Putin.

Until the last moment it was unclear what exactly Abbas would say in his speech. The first twenty-five minutes of it he devoted to rhetoric which sounded very similar to what he said on previous years. Railing against the iniquities of the occupation, particularly the offensive of Israeli extremist groups against the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem, and the killing of an entire Palestinian family in the arson of their home at the village of Duma. This was followed by compliments to the European Parliaments which recognised Palestine in the past year, most especially to the government of Sweden, as well as to Pope Francis who had canonized two nineteenth century Palestinian nuns. There was also a quote of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (of whose assassination the twentieth anniversary will soon be marked) who said that if Israel remains in the Occupied Territories it will become an Apartheid state.

An editor at CNN evidently reached the conclusion that he was not going to say anything of practical significance, and that there was therefore no point in continuing to broadcast the entire speech live with a simultaneous translation. This was a mistake — because just after the live broadcast on CNN ended, Mahmoud Abbas at last got to his “bomb” — just in time caught on Al-Jazeera.

“Continuation of the status quo is completely unacceptable because it means surrender to the logic of the brute force being inflicted by the Israeli Government (...). The transitional Oslo Agreement stipulated that the agreements would be implemented within five years, ending in 1999 with full independence for the State of Palestine and the termination of the Israeli occupation. But Israel stopped the process of withdrawing its forces. (...) We will not remain the only ones committed to the implementation of these agreements, while Israel continuously violates them. We therefore declare that we cannot continue to be bound by these agreements. (...) I must reiterate: the current situation is unsustainable. Our people need genuine hope and need to see credible efforts for ending this conflict, ending their misery and achieving their rights. The State of Palestine, based on the 4th of June 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, is a State under occupation, as was the case for many countries during World War II. Our State is recognised by 137 countries around the world and the right of our people to self-determination, freedom and independence is recognised globally as being inalienable and unquestionable. Either the Palestinian National Authority will be the conduit of the Palestinian people from occupation to independence — or Israel, the occupying Power, must bear all of its responsibilities.”

In principle, here are — but no date set for implementation — all of the measures discussed and debated in recent



The Palestinian flag was raised at the UN for the first time on 30 September

months, from the cessation of security cooperation with Israel up to a complete dissolution of the Palestinian Authority, handing over the keys to Israel and demanding that it fill its obligations as the Occupying Power. Options with a very volatile potential. What would tens of thousands of armed members of the Palestinian Security Forces do when no longer required to prevent their own people from acting against Israel? What if the Palestinian security forces are completely disbanded, their members dispersing, holding on to their weapons but getting no salaries? And what would happen to the Palestinian health services and schools without a Palestinian Authority to manage them and pay the doctors and teachers’ salaries? Would Israel, as the Occupying Power, assume this financial and administrative burden — as was the situation until the Oslo Accords? And if Israel will not, who will?

SUFFER

A lot of questions, a lot of troubling scenarios. There is no doubt that in any situation of chaos, the first to suffer would be the Palestinians themselves.

But, sometimes, the willingness to suffer is a way to accomplish. That is what hunger strikers do — cause harm to themselves in order to get attention to their grievance. As it happens, just this week the famous hunger striker Mohamed Alan won his prolonged struggle, with the State of Israel agreeing to release him from Administrative Detention — along with two others of his fellow hunger strikers as well. But to achieve this, Alan had to skirt very close to suffering irreversible brain damage.

On a larger scale, chaos in the West Bank may force the Americans and the Russians, currently focusing on solving the crisis in Syria, to pay similar attention to the Palestinian crisis.

It is clear that the Palestinian President really does not want such scenarios to be actually enacted. He still hopes that to have placed the threat on the international agenda would be enough; that diplomats and politicians would mobilize and devote to the Palestinian problem more than lip service; that the Palestinian National Authority would indeed become the conduit of the Palestinian people from occupation to independence — and that the bomb would not have to be actually set off. But the decision might not remain in his hands.

One day after Abu Mazen’s speech at the UN, some armed

Palestinians went in a car on a road used by Israeli settlers in the Nablus area. They passed a car in which a couple of young settlers were travelling with their four children, and opened fire. The couple, Naama and Eitam Henkin, were killed on the spot. Their children, who were in the back seat, were not injured. And today the situation heats up with acts of random revenge by settlers, and violent demonstrations by right-wing extremists, and the arrival of large military reinforcements, and Palestinian villages being surrounded and subjected to extensive searches. Fiery declarations were made to a crowd of thousands at the funeral of the couple (“The war on terror demands determination, an iron fist and a lot of endurance. We are fighting a bloodthirsty and ruthless enemy, we will chase after them, we will not rest until we lay hands on the murderers and those who sent them” said the Defence Minister).

The settlers and their representatives in the Netanyahu government — and there are many of these — are trying to change the status quo — in their direction. They demand “a disproportionate punishment” of the Palestinians, the blocking of Palestinian traffic from the roads, and above all settlement construction — extensive new construction in existing settlements plus the creation of a new settlement at the very spot where the couple was killed. Education Minister Naftali Bennett, leader of the Jewish Home Party, declared that in his view “Israel has no interest in the continued existence of the Palestinian Authority”.

In the meantime, the conflagration continues in Jerusalem, where once again the entry of Muslim worshippers to the Al-Aqsa Mosque was restricted, and those who were denied entry clashed with police in the nearby streets. Also in Is-sawya, one of the perennial “hot spots” of East Jerusalem, a large crowd confronted the police. “A young man who tried to throw a Molotov cocktail was shot by police officers below the waist. His fellows spirited him away. The police are now conducting searches to find and apprehend him” was the on the spot report of the evening TV news, which then went on to the extensive clashes in Hebron. The commentator spoke of “typical intifada images” — stone throwing, exploding tear gas canisters and burning tires.

As of now, the Palestinian security services did not yet get any instructions for a change of policy. They continue to maintain security cooperation with Israel. The finger is still on the grenade.

* <http://adam-keller2.blogspot.co.uk/>

Anarchist strawmen and Corbyn

By Ira Berkovic

An article signed by “Phil” on the LibCom website puts the anarchist case against Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party. It says that working-class activists should “steer clear” of Labour, and makes five specific arguments:

1. The fight isn’t just against The Tories

No-one who has been involved in Corbyn’s campaign, and witnessed the attacks and attempted sabotage by figures on the right of the Labour Party, could believe that the Tories are the only enemy. This is a straw-man argument; only the most credulous and ignorant could imagine that Labour under Corbyn’s leadership will be uniformly and straightforwardly on the side of progress.

Dedicated class warriors for the interests of the ruling-class, people like Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson, have occupied senior positions in the Labour Party for years. The Blairite project consisted of the construction of a professional cadre of operators, fixers, and factional manoeuvrers — an ideologically-disciplined “party within a party” — to capture the commanding heights of the Labour Party and wield it as a neo-liberal social instrument. Whatever popular mystique Blairism once commanded may now have been stripped away, but many of the personnel remain, particularly within the Parliamentary Labour Party.

For Corbyn to make progress with even his platform of fairly moderate social-democratic demands, he will need to confront those elements. The struggle against the pro-capitalist confiscation of the Labour Party is now taking place in a spectacular form within the Labour Party itself. Phil, an anarchist spectator on that struggle, has nothing to say about that struggle beyond bland platitudes.

“All politicians”, we are told (apparently they are an undifferentiated and homogenous category), “are chameleons in opposition. In power, they’re the managers of the state and servants of capital.” This is empty rhetoric posing as a revolutionary critique of the state. How a Labour Party led by the likes of Corbyn and McDonnell acted in government would depend very much on the social pressure under which it was placed — by its own membership, by its affiliated unions, and by wider working-class social and industrial movements. Phil abandons in advance any hope of ever creating such pressure.

Maintaining one’s critical faculties and independent perspective — about Corbyn himself, Parliamentary politics in general, and the Labour Party as an institution — is vital, but someone who purports to be a working-class revolutionary, of whatever stripe, and responds to the immense surge around Corbyn by saying only “well, he’s a politician, he’s bound to sell you out” is cancelling herself or himself out of current politics in favour of abstractions.

2. We can’t just wait five years

“The most common strawman thrown at anybody critical of electoralism in general but of Corbyn in particular”, Phil says, “is that all we want to do is sit at home and wait for the revolution.” Phil argues that “none of [the work leftists in Labour might do in advance of an election] has a concrete effect until a vote comes and maybe Labour win, and maybe they’re not as bad as the Tories.”

“On the other hand, the work that anarchists advocate can have concrete effects now. Whether it’s on as small a scale as winning one worker back stolen wages, or as significant as a whole workforce winning the living wage, it’s a concrete gain in the present. That’s where improvements in people’s lives come from: forcing businesses to stop using workfare, taking on unscrupulous landlords, helping claimants fight benefit sanctions.”

A strawman, to counter a strawman. Phil’s article positively duels with strawmen. The idea that the kind of activity described is somehow the sole activist property of anarchists is spectacularly arrogant. Perhaps Phil’s strawman Labour leftist would turn their nose up at it, and insist door-knocking for Labour election candidates, or procedural activity within Labour structures, is the only worthwhile use of activist time, but in the real world, many of the 250,000 people who voted for Jeremy Corbyn are people who are involved in precisely the kind of activity he mentions. And they voted for Corbyn because they saw in his campaign an opportunity to raise the profile of the politics that, for them, un-



Creating illusions in Parliamentary change?

derpinned that activity; to assert a working-class alternative to neo-liberal austerity not merely at the level of individual struggles and individual local “concrete effects” (reforms within the system) but at the level of national politics.

Are some of them misguided? Probably. Do some of them have a naive faith or illusions in the possibility to win social change through Parliamentary means? Most likely. But the movement around Corbyn expresses much more than both of those things, and by demagogically counterposing it to the “real” activity of anarchists, which “can have concrete effects now”, Phil substantially writes off the potential of those people.

Revolutionaries in the Labour Party want to use the surge around Corbyn as part of a process of rebuilding working-class organisation and political confidence — not to be stored up for 2020, but to be used now, industrially and politically, against the bosses and their state.

Ironically it is Phil’s perspective, of abandoning the terrain of national politics for a focus on localised struggles, that counsels “waiting”: wait, build up your strength through battles over individual issues, and ignore whatever “the politicians” are doing over your head; that’s not your concern.

Fortunately, 250,000 people have begged to differ.

UNIONS

3. The Labour-trade union link is a millstone around our necks

Phil writes the organic link between the industrial labour movement and the Labour Party out of history in a few sentences, claiming “Labour wasn’t founded by organised workers but specifically by the union bureaucracy.”

This is simply an ahistorical distortion. There was a growing groundswell, with mass participation from rank-and-file workers, in favour of independent labour representation that led up to and created the conditions for the founding of the Labour Party, including through the “New Unionism” movement of the 1880s. The driving force was the socialist groups, the ILP and the SDF. Phil erases those workers from the historical scene, insisting that only the members of “the union bureaucracy” were conscious actors.

Perhaps ironically, Phil’s argument so closely mirrors that of the Socialist Party (SP), the group which leads the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS). The SP has argued that the reason Unison and Unite have not been more militant is that they are Labour-affiliated. But do they, and does Phil, really believe that a Unison which disaffiliated from the Labour Party — but retained its immensely undemocratic, bureaucratic internal regime — would magically become a militant fighting force? The experience of the PCS shows that a non-Labour affiliated union, with a self-declared “Marxist” leadership, can still express all the traits of bureaucratic, sell-out unionism. What has mattered in the unions is not, in the first instance, whether or not a union is Labour-affiliated, but the relative strength within it of bureaucratic and rank-and-file organisation. For perhaps a generation or more, there has been next to no independent rank-and-file organisation in the labour movement in Britain; no counterweight to the power of the bureaucracy.

The unions, and the party they founded, were then what they are now: sites of struggle, formations in dynamic tension between conflicting interests. They are, fundamentally,

an expression of class struggle. By organising workers, as workers, at the site of exploitation they express class struggle in an essential and organic way. Neither the unions, nor the Labour Party, are alien implantations into our class, but organically generated by capitalist class relations. The difference here is between those of us who want to revolutionise the organically generated, historically-developed labour movement — that is, the actually-existing mass labour movement — and those who want to build a revolutionary labour movement outside of it.

There are some obvious flashpoints coming up in terms of the unions’ relationship with Labour. Despite having backed Corbyn, unions like Unison are clearly uncomfortable with much of his platform (Unison leader Dave Prentis was openly critical of Corbyn’s decision to appoint left-winger John McDonnell as his Shadow Chancellor). Unison, Unite, and the other Labour-affiliated unions face a test: what role with they play now? Will they, for example, push for Labour to commit to not only opposing new Tory anti-union laws, but repealing existing ones if in government? Will they use their links to Labour to put pressure on Corbyn to moderate, or to pressure him to radicalise? The answers to those questions depend on the outcome of struggles within those unions, within the framework of the Labour-union link. But, if all they have to say about that link is “break it”, they are struggles which Phil and his comrades cannot possibly contribute to.

4. We need a movement independent of any party

What are “parties”? People with shared political ideas and approaches combining to fight to win majorities for those ideas and approaches in a wider sphere (in this case within the wider working class). Despite their holy terror of the word, all the anarchist groups are “parties”.

“Parties” are inevitable. Better that we organise into parties than have political differences play out “behind the scenes”, allowing our movement to fall prey to the leadership of undemocratic “invisible pilots” (a phrase anarchist forefather Mikhail Bakunin once used positively as a model for how anarchists should operate!).

It seems that Phil’s concern is that the wider working-class movement will get drawn into having defend Corbyn, and by extension the whole Labour Party, against right-wing criticism, even if it moves rightwards. It’s not an unreasonable concern, in the face of a mounting media onslaught against Corbyn that risks distracting from the policies themselves. But a rightwards drift of Corbyn’s leadership is not inevitable, and depends greatly upon what we do now.

What the working class needs is an independence of political ideas, and parties and unions which are independent from the interests of other classes. The fight now ongoing in the Labour Party is a fight to free it from the politics of the ruling class.

5. There are no short cuts

“The liberation of the working class is the task of the working class ourselves”, Phil finishes (quoting Karl Marx, who had a rather different attitude to Phil on the question of political parties), “and that means it’s a task outside the boundaries of the Labour Party.”

Well of course it is. The potential of the current moment is not that it might transform the Labour Party as it currently exists into a vehicle for socialism, but precisely that it might go beyond “the boundaries of the Labour Party”, exploding the unstable and contradictory tug-of-war it has always represented, and create new possibilities for independent working-class politics. The Corbyn surge is exciting and important precisely because it questions where the boundaries of the Labour Party are, and seeks to test them.

Workers’ Liberty believes that revolutionaries should be inside that process — one of a mass working-class inquiry into exactly what the limits of our current organisations are. We should help that process develop, and, where we can, accelerate it — not simply by advocating greater militancy in this or that struggle but by attempting to educate ourselves and those around us in bigger ideas, beyond social-democratic reformism and towards a politics of revolutionary working-class power.

There are, indeed, no short cuts to the development of a mass revolutionary working-class movement. But it will not be built from scratch. It will be built through struggles within our existing organisations. And, as the old saying goes, “you gotta be in it to win it.”

Portraying capitalist injustice

By Sandra Robinson

The touring theatre company, Townsend Productions, are now on the road with their excellent play, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, based on Robert Tressell's novel, first published in 1914.

The play is the latest in a string of politically committed and successful plays, including 'United We Stand' (the story of the Shrewsbury pickets), 'We Will Be Free!' (the Tolpuddle Martyrs story) and 'On the Road to Freedom' (a choir and theatre community project).

The cast portray the novel's central message of the brutality and injustice of capitalism whilst remaining true to the story's characterisations, class depictions and comic moments. This is all the more impressive as the cast comprise just two actors; Neil Gore, co-founder of Townsend Productions with Louise Gore, and Jonathan Markwood. Their skills, passion, energy and humour combined with creative use of props, music and puppets (!) results in a highly enjoyable as well as thought-provoking production.

The story is set in the Edwardian era and remains as relevant today as ever. The Great Money Trick (in which money is demonstrated as the cause of poverty) continues to be played out globally on the world's poorest and most vulnerable. Tressell set out a valuable socialist critique, providing an explanation of inequity and its resulting poverty, division and despair, though he is less clear about exactly how to overcome it. The central character, Frank Owen, tries to convince his fellow decorators to stand up to the ruling classes and capitalism but is ultimately unsuccessful in his endeavours.

Nonetheless, this remains an inspiring socialist classic. Tressell's work was credited in helping Labour win the General Election of 1945. Tony Benn said of Tressell, "He gave us a torch to pass on from generation to generation. He gave us a lamp to light the way".

In Townsend Productions' adaptation, it will continue to inspire audiences and activists.

• Further information: [@raggedtour](http://www.townsendproductions.org.uk)



Tories' fake consultation undermines broadcasting

By Les Hearn

If it is news to you that the government has been running a public consultation on the future of the BBC, then don't panic. It's already too late to take part. The consultation was quietly announced to start on 16 July, just five days before the House of Commons broke for summer.

Even worse, some of the questions were so strangely phrased that respondents would find it difficult to know what was being asked (*How should the relationship between Parliament, Government, Ofcom, the National Audit Office and the BBC work? Very well? Which elements of universality are most important for the BBC? Eh?*).

Others seemed to require knowledge to answer that few people if any would have (*Is the BBC crowding out commercial competition and, if so, is this justified? We need access to a parallel universe without a BBC to answer this! Where does the evidence suggest the BBC has a positive or negative wider impact on the market? Probably nowhere, but it's difficult to prove a negative!*).

The Tories have often felt that the BBC is biased against them, unlike the national press. This is partly a matter of perspective, and Labour governments have also complained of bias. Government policies tend to get more scrutiny from an independent broadcaster since they will result in something happening, unlike opposition policies. But it is also because they sometimes look at the evidence for government policies and bring in independent experts to examine this.

Actually, the BBC tends to be quite conservative (with a small "c") and often follows the agenda of the rightwing press. For example, they seemed to follow the general "rubbishing" of Ed Miliband by the Tory press and uncritically accepted the coalition's line that austerity (or making the people pay) was the only solution to the problems caused by the banks.

Nevertheless, the Tories felt that the BBC was too critical during the election campaign. Ed Miliband's strategist, Tom Baldwin, claimed in a *Guardian* article that the Tories "threatened the BBC with far-reaching reforms," including to the licence fee system, if they didn't change their coverage. A senior Conservative described Baldwin's claims as "complete and utter nonsense." Nevertheless, some two months later, the BBC had already been handed the responsibility for free licences and the BBC Charter Review Public Consultation had been launched.

They justified this by referring to

(1) Scandals over large salaries and payoffs for senior executives (unjustifiable, but clearly emulating the private sector about which there were no government complaints);

(2) The Jimmy Savile affair (neglecting to mention his support by Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative government of the time);

(3) The fiasco of the Digital Media Initiative which lost the



BBC £98 million (admittedly bad, but dwarfed by the government's losses on IT projects — £140 million at least just on Universal Credit so far).

Clearly, there is more justification for an inquiry into the behaviour of successive Tory governments.

The right-wing press, led by Murdoch, are only too keen to reduce the competition from independent broadcasters whose output is highly valued by the public. Sky charges four times as much as the BBC for far less service; no doubt they could charge more without the competition.

Already, the Tories have announced that they are off-loading some of government responsibility by making BBC "volunteer" to fund free licences for the over-75s. If BBC income doesn't rise to cover this, then there will be less money to make programmes. And the amount lost will increase since the aged population is growing quickly. There have been no announcements about free subscriptions for the over-75s to Sky and so on.

The BBC often gets it wrong: One example is its repeated failure to reflect the ethnic diversity of Britain. Greg Dyke, Controller of the BBC, described the BBC in 2001 as "hideously white." Lenny Henry recently pointed out that black and minority ethnic participation in the broadcasting industry as a whole had fallen by over 30% from 2006 to 2012.

Another example is in its mistaken idea of balance between evidence-based views and their opponents. Professor Steve Jones (Emeritus Professor of Genetics at UCL), in a review of science output by the BBC, found there was an at times

"over-rigid" application of the Editorial Guidelines on impartiality in science coverage, which failed to take into account the "non-contentious" nature of some stories and the need to avoid giving "undue attention to marginal opinion". Professor Jones gave reporting of the safety of the MMR vaccine and more recent coverage of claims about the safety of GM crops and the existence of man-made climate change as examples of his point.

In another example, Professor Brian Cox referred to astrology as "a load of rubbish." This provoked a complaint about lack of balance which the BBC did not uphold. Cox issued his own "apology," saying "I apologise to the Astrology community for not making myself clear. I should have said that this new age drivel is undermining the very fabric of our civilisation"! However, the BBC did say that Cox was merely expressing his own opinion when the evidence of the last 2000 years (and certainly of the last 400 years) provides no support for astrology whatsoever.

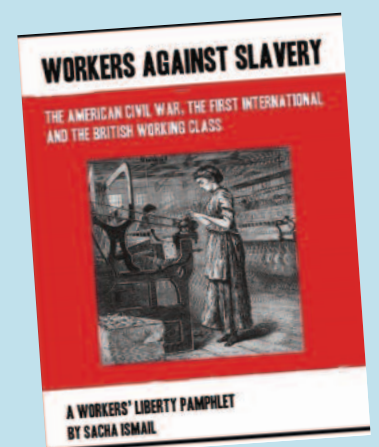
In general, Jones' review found that science coverage was informative but not investigative, and that participants tended to be male (80-90%). I suspect that if he had looked at ethnic balance, the findings would have been just as worrying.

In general, the BBC does a lot better than any other broadcaster in the world, because it is largely independent of government or big business. We need to tell the Tories to keep their hands off.

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Sir Paul Kenny's Brexit idiocy

By Harry Glass

If the bankruptcy of the trade union bureaucracy were in any further need of demonstration, then the antics of soon-to-depart GMB general secretary "Sir" Paul Kenny over the European Union (EU) referendum adds a new chapter.

First, Kenny orchestrated a motion to the TUC Congress, which would have pledged the trade union movement to campaign for Brexit if David Cameron extracted some concessions from other European powers on the working time directive, agency workers and other workers' rights. The key phrase was: "Congress gives notice that it will campaign for a 'no' vote in the referendum if these rights and protections are removed."

After some behind the scenes horse-trading, Kenny withdrew the resolution in favour of TUC general council statement. This softened the stance, warning the prime minister that "you will lose our members' votes to stay in the EU by worsening workers' rights". It added that if British workers' rights were further undermined, the "pressure to put TUC resources and support in the referendum behind a vote to leave the European Union will intensify dramatically".

Kenny spoke to the resolution and rhetorically repeated his threat in the Congress debate on Tuesday 15 September. He said: "If Cameron secures the sort of cuts to workers' rights he is seeking — will you be able to stand up and say to members and beyond that 'yes — we know your protection under the working time directive and rights to proper earning on holiday pay are going, yes — we know crucial rights for agency workers are going, that health and safety laws designed to protect the work life balance are being denied to you, that free trade agreements threaten your job and your public services. But forget all that — We want you to vote yes to support these attacks."

Second, Kenny made a similar attempt at Labour Party conference on 28 September. This time the GMB motion was composited, with Kenny moving the resolution so as to add his own caveat. Actually the motion stated: "Conference supports the membership of the EU as a strategic as well as an economic asset to Britain and the Labour Party approve of UK membership of the EU", adding that "Conference recognises that Europe needs change, but notes that the path to reform is working with our allies across Europe".

Kenny put his own spin on it, stating that "Free movement of labour has become the right to exploit workers in one



Kenny's nationalism is a disgrace

member state by employment of people through the now notorious umbrella agencies". He chastised Labour Party leaders who "by blindly embracing a Europe at any price, merely encourage Cameron and the CBI to push for even more attacks on working people".

Kenny penned a crass justification of his position, published in the *Morning Star* on the same day. Kenny criticised Jeremy Corbyn's pledge to vote to stay in the EU in the referendum and fight for reform. Kenny opined: "This retreat on the European Union is a big mistake. The EU needs reform. All those ideals of a social Europe, of solidarity and raising pay and conditions to a standard, have been lost. The EU has become an exploiters' charter." Apparently, because Cameron is going around Europe trying to sell off working people's rights "Jeremy's original 'wait and see' position was correct. So why give them a blank cheque? That's bad negotiating tactics."

Kenny pretends he is conducting negotiations, when in fact he's not even at the table. It is no blank cheque to commit to staying in the EU and pledge, as Corbyn has, that a future Labour government would overturn any opt-outs that Cameron secures. In fact such a position is more likely to persuade other European leaders not to give ground to Cameron. Even if Cameron were able to extract some concessions, it would take workers in Britain back to the situation in 1993, when the UK belonged to the EU but the Tories opted out of the social chapter. Most unions then were for staying in, for good reason.

Instead of seeking to fight alongside workers across Eu-

rope to level up rights and protections, Kenny appears to think that if his poker game fails, somehow leaving the EU will be okay for workers. What Kenny fails to explain is how leaving the EU would strengthen workers' rights. A Tory-driven "leave" campaign might topple Cameron, but only to replace him with someone more right-wing like Johnson. And a Eurosceptic-led Tory party would immediately slash workers' rights even further in pursuit of trade deals and concessions with world markets. Kenny's position is strategically wrong and tactically completely inept.

Kenny then makes a classical sleight of hand, exclaiming "And Labour wants us to fund the In campaign, to stand on platforms next to Tory bastards and then to convince our members to swallow it?" To campaign alongside the Tories, he warns, would be "as bad a mistake as it was in Scotland. Worse."

This is nonsense. Corbyn has already ruled out a Labour "yes" campaign merged with the Tories. The "quit EU" camp will be dominated by reactionaries such as Lawson, Farage and quite probably a few current Tory cabinet members. The risk of being pulled behind them is not hypothetical. Already the anti-EU People's Pledge campaign, driven by right-wing Tories, has roped in the RMT union (briefly) and Labour MPs such as Jon Cruddas, John Cryer, and Kelvin Hopkins.

Socialists and trade unionists must make our independent stand based on the best assessment of working class interests, not on dubious guesses about the relative strength of the bourgeois "yes" and "no" camps.

Kenny also echoes Tory anti-migrant talk. The EU is simply "transporting people with lower living standards to new places in order to further lower living standards". He told the Stalinist-nationalist *Morning Star* that "he's pleased that so far, the social conflict this can cause has not got out of hand. But he's in no doubt that that's thanks to unions, not politicians".

This is a mealy-mouthed way of saying the problem with the EU is too many migrants and that the only way to protect "British" labour is to put up the border controls. Kenny dissolves internationalism with this stance: workers in Europe, migrants or refugees are irrelevant to his main concern: namely, British workers.

Beneath the veneer is a callous narrowness, a shameful chauvinist sectionalism, that can have no place in the labour movement. His anointment by the British state completes him. But no workers should follow his abysmal counsel.

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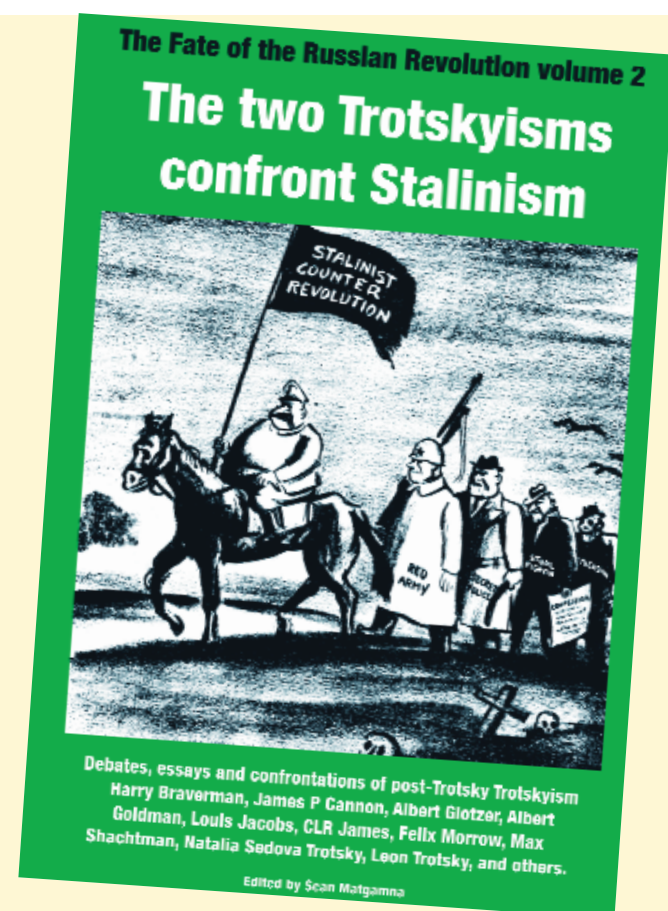
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Fight redundancies at Manchester Uni

By Luke Neal

Over the summer, senior management at the University of Manchester announced that over 250 workers, predominantly in IT services, were at risk of compulsory redundancy.

This was a bold and unprecedented move on their part: in the past a “collegial” approach had been sought, with compulsory redundancies avoided and the option of lifelong membership to a redeployment register for workers subject to voluntary severance. The campus trade unions – Unite, Unison and UCU – have been engaged in negotiations over the issue, and are likely to ballot for industrial action following the response of management expected on October 7.

The campaign, however, has been fraught with difficulties and compromises, for instance that very deadline for a response, which was overly generous and increases the amount of workers likely to take a voluntary package in the meantime. From a seemingly strong start with 300-strong meetings and demonstrations in the last fortnight of August, some momentum has been lost. Leftist students and a few rank and file union

members have made an intervention through agitation amongst the student body and direct pressure on the joint-union committee for open meetings, demonstrations, the inclusion of IT-based and student speakers, etc.

At points we have taken the initiative outside of trade union structures. Last week, for instance, we called a demo as they had refused to. They later backed and promoted it anyway, which shows the value of an independently organised leftist rank-and-file-type group. On that demonstration a media worker described the situation: “this [UoM] is a great institution. But it is as if, since the fees gone up, they care less and less about the people that make the place work. It’s noticeably more impersonal.” His last phrase reminded me of Michael Heinrich’s (2011) characterisation of capitalism as a system of “impersonal domination”.

On the ground in higher education workers are beginning to feel the effects of financialisation and marketisation ever more sharply.

As elsewhere, the immediate obstacles are those placed in front of working class militancy in the form of the disorganised and bureaucratic union leadership.

John Burgess for general secretary

Barnet Unison secretary, John Burgess, has now been nominated for Unison general secretary by 47 branches and by the South-East region.

The nominations mean that John is now on the bal-

lot papers, with a week to go before nominations close.

Workers’ Liberty is supporting John and urges activists who want to see a more democratic union to get involved in his campaign.

Support Barnet strikers

Workers in Barnet will strike on Wednesday 7 October in their ongoing dispute over privatisation.

Social workers, coach escorts, drivers, occupational therapists, schools catering staff, education welfare officers, library workers, children centre workers, street cleaning and refuse workers will strike on 7 October as their services face outsourc-

ing. These workers are some of the only ones left directly employed by Barnet council after mass privatisation, as the “easycouncil” aims to reduce its directly employed staff to fewer than 300.

Workers will be on picket lines in the morning and a rally will be held outside Barnet House at 12.

“Thank you for your solidarity”

By Peggy Carter

Strikers at the National Gallery, London, returned to work on Monday 5 October after 111 days on strike.

They have secured a deal which protects members’ terms and conditions and sees their sacked PCS rep reinstated.

The deal, which was made on Friday 2 October, does not stop the privatisation of gallery services but is a big climb down by gallery management in most areas, and the gallery has agreed to review the private contract after one year.

Sacked PCS rep Candy Udwin will be reinstated. Staff will be paid the living wage, which will also be updated on basic pay in fu-

ture years. Guarantees have been got on terms and conditions for staff transferred to Securitas. They cannot be changed without union agreement. Terms and conditions for newly recruited Securitas staff will be broadly comparable with those of existing gallery staff.

There are also guarantees on rosters, staffing levels, health and safety and other benefits.

A spokesperson for the strikers said: “We could not have succeeded in winning the outcome that we have without your help on our picket lines, showing solidarity and raising funds to keep our strike going.”

“We will continue to campaign to reverse the privatisation and will help promote a national cam-



paign to keep museums and galleries free, publicly owned and publicly run. We will keep you informed of the next steps.

“Thank you again for your fantastic solidarity. Our strike has shown that workers who stand up and

fight will get support and can win.

“We hope that we will encourage others to do the same and our success will help build a national movement against cuts, privatisation and for an alternative to austerity.”

Tube drivers in strike vote

By Ollie Moore

Tube union RMT will ballot driver members on London Underground’s Piccadilly Line for strikes, in a vote opening on 6 October and closing two weeks later.

The union says there has been a “comprehensive breakdown of industrial relations” on the line, with workers saying that local bosses have become increasingly authoritarian and disciplinarian. The situation was brought to a head over the recent sacking of driver Paul Okoro, who was dismissed for allegedly answering his phone in the

train cab, despite witnesses attesting that he handed over control of the train to another colleague before taking the call.

An RMT statement said: “The wholesale abuse of procedures and agreements by management on the Piccadilly Line is rife and amounts to the development of a campaign of bullying, harassment and intimidation that the union will not allow to continue.”

RMT is also balloting its members on the Docklands Light Railway, which is operated by private contractor Keolis Amey, for strikes over changes to working practices. The ballot is due



back on 22 October, meaning any action could be co-ordinated with potential strikes on the Piccadilly Line.

Rank-and-file bulletin Tubeworker is calling for Tube unions to reinstate

industrial action in network-wide disputes with London Underground if the company doesn’t deliver concessions on job cuts and work/life balance.

Lidl: Pay fairly

By Gemma Short

Supermarket chain Lidl has dismissed a worker from its Belfast store for questioning their discriminatory pay policy.

Lidl became the first in a stream of supermarkets to announce they will be paying the living wage last week, but the rate only applies to their stores in England, Scotland and Wales, and not to those in Northern Ireland. The worker who was sacked questioned the fairness of this pay discrep-



ancy in Facebook comments.

Union Unite has called a protest outside Lidl’s Belfast store at 5pm on Thursday 8 October, and calls for activists outside of Belfast to support the protest on social media.

Carlsberg workers fight for pay rise

By Charlotte Zalens

Workers at Carlsberg’s Northampton plant are operating an overtime ban and work-to-rule in a dispute over pay.

Workers, members of Unite, have not had a pay rise since April 2014 and voted by 89% for action short of strikes and 77% for strikes. Unite says if the action short of strikes does not make management negotiate, the union will organise

strikes.

Workers argue that Carlsberg staff across Europe have had pay rises this year as part of a two-year pay deal, but only workers in England haven’t.

Unite also says workers are in dispute over the planned closure of their final salary pension scheme in April 2016 and the transfer of many workers to an inferior pension scheme.



Tories smear migrants

By Gerry Bates

Home Secretary Theresa May's comment at the Tory Party conference on 6 October 2015 should become as notorious as Margaret Thatcher's outburst against immigrants in 1979.

"When immigration is too high", said May, "when the pace of change is too fast, it's impossible to build a cohesive society. It's difficult for schools and hospitals and core infrastructure like housing and transport to cope".

She echoed Thatcher in 1978: "People are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture".

The facts brand May's

words as divisive scare-mongering.

Immigration brings not only demand for infrastructure, but people to build and operate that infrastructure. Just like any increase in population. Or even better, since immigrants are mostly highly productive young adults.

Researchers at University College London have found that European migrants pay out far more in taxes than they receive in state benefits, a net contribution of £20 billion between 2000 and 2011. This is true for migrants from the "new" EU members such as Poland, Romania and Bulgaria as well as the "old" EU countries (bit.ly/CR-AM).

The highest-immigra-

tion area in the UK is London, where about a third of the population (2.83 million of 8.63 million) are migrants. Only 34% of year 11 students in London schools are "white British"; the other 66%, far from making schools unable to cope, give London schools an average 8-point GCSE lead over the rest of the country.

The most dynamic and lively societies in human history have often been high-immigration societies, like the USA of a hundred years ago, when over 25 million Europeans poured into it within a few decades.

Tory (and New Labour) government policy makes it difficult for schools and hospitals and housing to cope.



Cuts make it difficult for those services to come. Low public wages and low public investment make it difficult for them cope.

The allocation of credit to the economy by pumping it direct into the pockets of bankers (which is essentially what QE means), rather

than by putting it into social projects, makes it difficult to cope.

Not immigration.

Junior doctors: Let's save the NHS!

By Gemma Short

The campaign by junior doctors against the imposition of a new contract which would see them working 90 hour weeks, with pay cut and the safety of patients endangered, is gathering support amongst medical staff and members of the public.

Attacks on health workers have been free-flowing at Tory Party conference, with David Cameron using the occasion to visit hospitals and GPs surgeries in the area and reaffirm his commitment to launch-

ing a "seven-day NHS". Ratcheting up the attacks on NHS workers, claiming they don't already deliver a seven-day service, shows that the Tories are beginning to realise that doctors are serious about the industrial dispute and cannot be taken lightly.

The British Medical Association, whose Junior Doctors' Committee agreed on 26 September to ballot its members, says its demands are reasonable, but firm — they say they will only return to negotiations if the Secretary of State agrees to preconditions in writing. Given that the ex-minister who was

in charge of negotiations last year has said that Secretary of State Jeremy Hunt "ripped up an agreement in principle" and completely re-worked the new contracts, the demand for preconditions is understandable.

The ex-minister, Dr Dan Poulter, claims in the *Guardian* that Jeremy Hunt has triggered "understandable" anger. He also accuses Jeremy Hunt of desperately seeking ways to save money to help tackle the expected £30bn hole in the NHS budget by 2020, pushing aside 53,000 junior doctors in the process.

The junior doctors' campaign has organised more protests in the lead up to their ballot, following the one in central London on 28 September attended by thousands of doctors and supporters. A protest will be march from Richmond Terrace to Parliament Square on 17 October, and a further protest will be held on 24 October in Newcastle.

The enthusiasm and support for the junior doctors' campaign has the potential to feed into a wider debate about the future of the NHS — campaigners are using the slogans "Not fair, not safe", and "Let's save the



NHS".

The campaign is about terms and conditions at work, it's about not being exploited by your employer, it's about the wider impact in the

NHS and the Tories' desire to weaken the NHS, paving the way to privatisation.

• London protest: on.fb.me/1FRelHh
• Newcastle protest: on.fb.me/1MW3lb7