

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



No 211 8 July 2011 30p/80p

Fight for a workers' government

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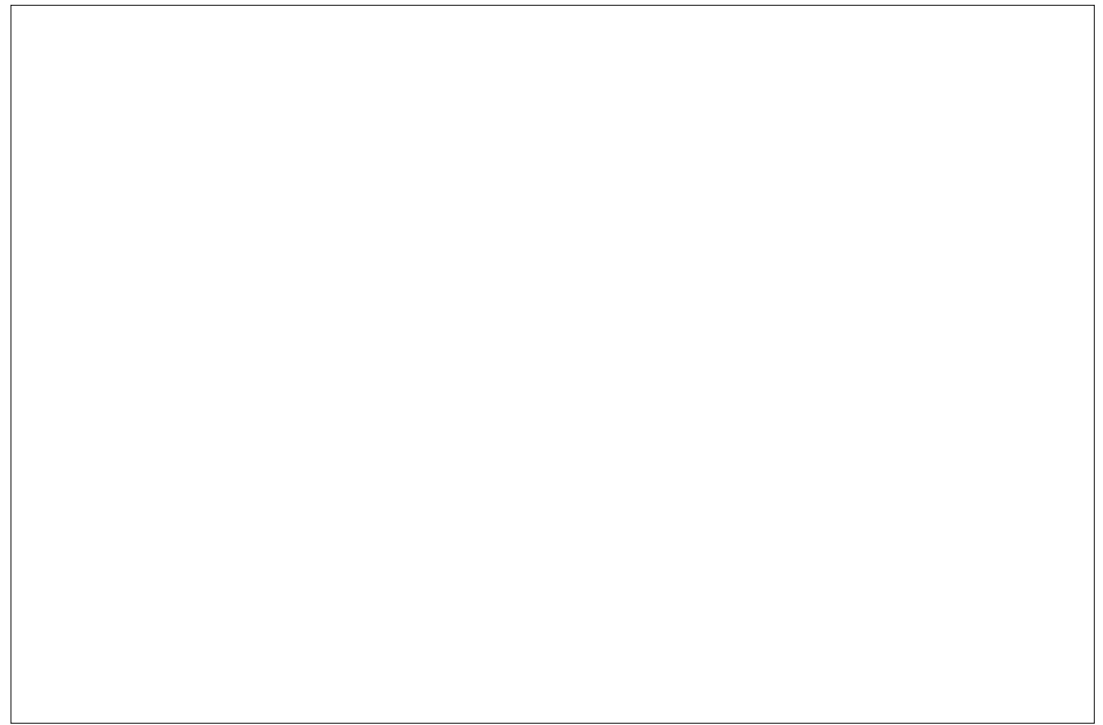
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# TAKE

# THE



Time to end the power of Rupert Murdoch and all the "media moguls". And to call to account the politicians and police who have done his bidding.

# MEDIA FROM

# MURDOCH!

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## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

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

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# The labyrinth of Tripoli

By Martyn Hudson

As of early July, rebel forces are only 60 miles from the Libyan capital Tripoli.

The war is continuing in the Nafusa mountains to the south, and the rebels are advancing from the east, although Misrata is still being shelled by government forces.

Qaddafi is thought to be hiding out in hotels and hospitals. This kind of ending is what we hope for for all Shahs, Tsars, Caesars and despots of all kinds.

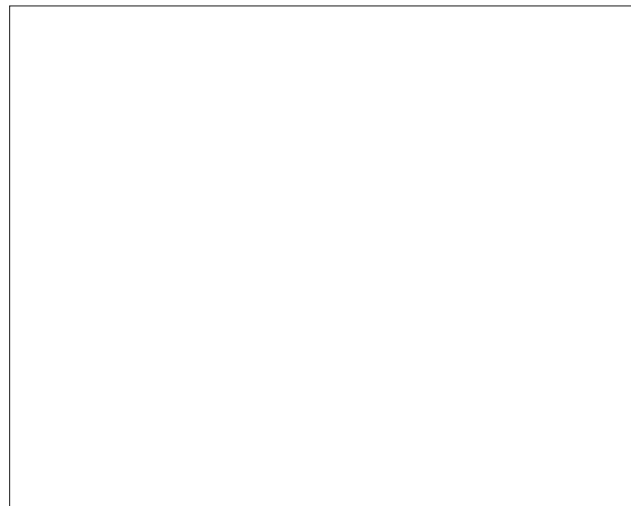
In desperation Qaddafi has called for attacks on civilians in Europe in retaliation for NATO attacks on loyalist forces — on homes, offices and families of those who are attacking him.

But the burgeoning complaint from rebel forces over the past week has been that NATO forces are holding them back and being too delicate about destroying enemy armour.

NATO is nervous about the consequences of the rebels taking Tripoli, in terms of civilian casualties and retaliatory hostilities; and the ragtag rebel militia probably isn't in a fit state to take the city if there is any sustained opposition from loyalist forces.

The key to the taking of Tripoli is what it always has been — an uprising from the masses of the city itself — an uprising which hasn't been visible since the brutally suppressed demonstrations back in February.

Glimmers of the insurrection are evident, but



### Rebels are advancing

they will not amount to much until the city is on the verge of being taken.

However, Tripoli is surrounded, and Qaddafi can surely not evade capture or elimination for long now.

Qaddafi's genocidal posturing has continued. His calls for a march to the western mountains are incoherent and in no way practical.

There remain both loyalist forces and loyalist civilians. Although recent pro-regime demonstrations in Green Square have been staged, there is still a large degree of support for Qaddafi in Tripoli. Any kind of warfare in the city is bound to be hugely bloody.

That is perhaps inevitable, outside of a negotiated settlement. That settlement can no longer include Qaddafi, Saif al-Islam and Abdullah al-Sanoussi, although it might be settled by a betrayal of Qaddafi by his immediate military clique

who will be looking to save their own skins

It is clear that rebel forces and NATO are in close collusion. The rebels cannot do without NATO. NATO suspicion of the rebels is quite evident.

The transitional regime in Benghazi is amenable to NATO and clearly sees aid from the US, the UK, France and Italy as the reason why it was not militarily liquidated by loyalist forces months ago.

In the liberated parts of Libya, press freedom, multi-party democracy and a developing civil society look entirely on the cards. Little wonder that nobody in the east has any kind of Qaddafi-restorationist tendencies.

The decisive question is Tripoli. Tripoli itself is central only because of the figure of Qaddafi. The decentralisation and fragmentation of the old regime left little of state power in the city. If anything Misrata had more claim to be the financial capital of the state.

Tripoli is significant because it is where the symbolic power of the regime resides — invested in the personality of the "Colonel" himself.

**The future for us however critically resides in the masses of Tripoli and their will for freedom. We can neither trust or rely on NATO, nor forget about the people's revolt and backhandedly support Qaddafi by way of clamour against NATO attacking him.**

## Islamist violence in Tunisia

There has been a spate of Islamist demonstrations and violence in Tunisia. On our website Oussama, a militant from the Ligue Gauche des Ouvriers, a Trotskyist organisation in Tunisia, explains these events:

- Violence at a showing of the film *No God No Master*, where the cinema was smashed up.
- A demonstration to demand the release of an Islamist activist.
- An attack on a left wing meeting.
- [www.workersliberty.org/node/17038](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/17038)

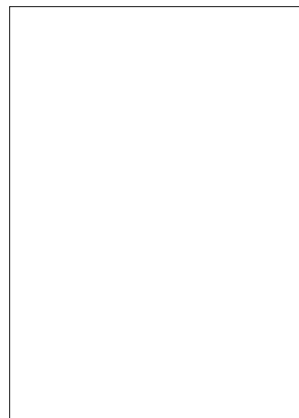
# Syria: a new phase

By Mark Osborn

In early July film footage came from an unnamed Syrian town, showing a group of young men — perhaps six or eight of them — bare-chested on a dusty road.

They are so agitated they are repeatedly getting up and then lying down again. They are beating their chests and shouting at figures in the distance. The translation tells us they are screaming: "Cowards! Kill us if you dare!" at the Syrian armed forces.

Over 1500 people have been killed in the course of the Syrian uprising. Those young men might very well be shot dead. Their extreme bravery illustrates the extent of the contempt and hatred in the Syrian



revolt for the absurd, corrupt, one-party regime that has spent months attempting to crush it. The people want freedom and are prepared to die for it.

Despite the torture, mass arrests and murders, the protest movement continues to grow.

Demonstrations have

taken place in more than 150 towns and villages, in every corner of Syria. Each Friday more than 100,000 people have protested. The protests are getting bigger. Friday 1 July saw the biggest mobilisations yet.

In Hama, a city of 800,000, more than 300,000 marched. The state had lost control of the city.

President Bashar Assad responded by sacking the town's governor, Ahmad Khaled Abdel Aziz, on Saturday 2 July. Activists in Hama expressed worry to al-Jazeera that a hard-line replacement would be sent.

Tanks began to mass on the outskirts of Hama on Sunday 3 July.

Syria's army appears unable to deal with the new scale of these widespread

mass protests. Their strategy appears to have been to focus on one area at a time, and that means that they cannot deal with widespread, simultaneous actions.

The *Economist* reports that although the army's nominal strength is 400,000, only a quarter is well armed and able to fight, and only 50,000 are considered to be reliable.

The US is alarmed by the threat of instability. It appears to be encouraging a wing of the opposition to enter a dialogue with Assad.

**An opposition conference was openly held in Damascus on 27 June, something that would have been inconceivable prior to the recent uprising.**

# Harshest slump since 30s

By Chris Reynolds

**Economic output in the UK has now been fairly static for about eight months. It is still 4% below 2008.**

This makes this slump harsher than any since 1930-4, when output was 5% down a similar time along.

The National Institute of Economic and Social Research reckons it will be 2013 before output is back to 2008 levels.

That prediction assumes no new convulsions. But the Bank of England reports that the prices at

which old Greek government bonds is trading imply that international financiers guess an 80% probability of Greece defaulting (i.e. not paying debts when they fall due).

The implied probability of Portugal defaulting is 50%; of Ireland defaulting, 50%; of Spain defaulting, between 30% and 40%.

Robert Peston of the BBC estimates that if all those defaults happen, UK banks will see about half their capital wiped out. It will be worse for them if French and German banks, which hold more south European debt, get so hard hit that they then fail to cover debts

they owe to UK banks.

The EU, the IMF, and the European Central Bank are scrabbling to make sure that the blade of Greece's crisis cuts into Greek workers' standards and, as a fall-back, EU funds, rather than into the banks; and they may succeed. Or they may not.

Inflation is running at 5.2% (RPI) or 4.5% (CPI). The Bank of England is supposed to calibrate its credit policy by a target of 2% inflation. It dare not do that for fear of crashing the economy again. Continued easy credit from the Bank of England to banks increases the risk of high in-

flation in coming years.

So much for the Coalition government's claims to heal the economy. So much for their claim that decent jobs are available and only need "workfare" pressure on the jobless and disabled to fill them.

Government policy will bring, at best, continuing economic depression, and, very possibly, renewed downturn.

**Its only merit is one from the point of view of the bankers and bosses: that it is driving down workers' and social standards so as to enable quicker, easier profits.**

Spanish youth protest

## Europe for citizens, not for bankers!

By Molly Thomas

**Some say that the recent protests in Spain are similar to the upheavals in the Arab world.**

Much of the agitation has come from the 15 May movement, a "movimiento de indignados".

They advocate more participation by the ordinary people in government. They cite the pernicious influence of banks and major corporations. They have a slogan "No somos marionetas en manos de políticos y banqueros" — roughly, "We aren't puppets in the hands of politicians and bankers".

From as early as March this year, student unions have been holding demonstrations in centres like Madrid, Barcelona, and Valencia, attracting the attention of many teenagers, especially migrants.

Many young people are unhappy with the high unemployment (about 20.7% in Spain as a whole but 42% amongst young people), low wages, and budget cuts in the education sector.

They blame the Prime Minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, both of the two major parties, and even the trade unions. The secretary of the Student Union says that they have as many as a million young people in search of jobs, and countless others trapped in jobs that pay badly.

The major concern in many of these protests has been education. The protesters also cited the conflict in the Arab world, the military intervention in Libya (which they see as

imperialist), and the unhealthy capitalist influence in government thanks to Zapatero "selling out".

Another complaint has been police brutality. On 4 July, peaceful protesters camped out in several cities were evicted by police. An early protest called for less money to be spent on police (referring to the expenditure on security during the visit of the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall to Madrid) and more money to be spent on education.

These people are leftists in traditional terms but reject the the two-party system as controlled by the PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol: social democrats) and the conservative PP (Partido Popular).

This cannot be seen as a genuine awakening of a leftist revolution for Spain and the rest of Europe, but rather an unfocused complaint from frustrated people whose government has failed them dramatically.

The slogan is "Democracia Real Ya" — real democratic now. One protest blogger, Damian Ruiz, has articulated what he believes "real democracy" is: "Real democracy is when people are consulted, are considered, are respected and not manipulated in the perverse social engineering created by political parties." He then goes on to denounce the lack of consultation of the people in the government's important decisions.

**According to the Real Democracy website, they want Europe to be for its citizens, not just for businessmen.**

# Unis: pig of a White Paper

By Daniel Lemberger Cooper

**On 28 June, the Government this week released its White Paper on the future of higher education.**

It is dressed up with talk of improving "the student experience", but, as the President of Oxford Student Union has said, that is like putting lipstick on the pig of big cuts in teaching budgets and big increases in student fees.

Universities minister David Willetts wants to remove the legislative restrictions on private capital entering the university sector.

The government wants more like A C Grayling's New College of the Humanities, or Buckingham University.

The interesting thing about the A C Grayling creation is that it is run by the charitable wing of a private equity company (an anonymous Swiss family owns around 35%). It's a botched attempt, having failed to attain degree-awarding powers and the sought-after "university college" title.

The government is stopping central funding to the

arts, humanities and social sciences.

Problem: not many private institutions have shown an interest in science, technology, engineering, and maths, because they are costly to run.

Students at private providers are to be given access to the public system of student loans and grants.

Established universities will be fettered in the short to medium term, mainly through the continued use of the student recruitment ceiling, until such a point as the newcomers are able to operate cheaply and competitively.

The White Paper the creation of 85,000 new student places which will be regulated differently from

existing student numbers.

85,000 students (around one in 20 students of the 2012 intake) would be competed for by universities.

Universities would compete to get more students, and with them the extra funding from the government which follows the students.

20,000 of these places would be available only to institutions charging less than £7,500 per year.

Rather than opening up higher education, these changes will make universities even more places for the elite.

As the *Economist* comments: "supporters of the New College (set up by A C Grayling) admit that it will draw most of its stu-

## WORKERS' LIBERTY SUMMER CAMP, WEST YORKSHIRE, 19-21 AUGUST

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

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- Paris, May 68: students spark a workers' revolution

- The story and lessons of the miners' strike
- Socialism vs Stalinism
- Training: how to give speeches and write leaflets/articles
- Organising at work
- Why is the left male-dominated, and what can we do about it?

\* Students and class

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Spaces are limited, so if you'd like to come please get in touch as soon as possible!

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# An encounter with the shy Peter Taaffe

Left

By Jill Mountford



The pensions demo on 30 June was exciting enough, but I felt an extra thrill at the start in Lincoln's Inn Fields when I spotted Peter Taaffe. There he was, the General Secretary of the Socialist Party! The "legendary Peter Taaffe", as his friend and disciple Derek Hatton said of him in his memoirs.

Peter Taaffe, the main man responsible for the great victory of the Liverpool labour movement over Thatcher and the Tories in 1985. (The one associated with the name of Derek Hatton and the image of a fleet of council-hired taxis dashing around Liverpool to deliver notices to council workers telling them they were sacked.)

The staunch anti-imperialist who for ten years supported Russia's colonial war against the peoples of Afghanistan.

Taaffe isn't seen out much these days, so spotting him was quite an event. Here was my chance to invite him, face-to-face, to debate with us on Libya. Taaffe has written thousands of words in their press polemicising against us on this question. Some inexplicable shyness stops him accepting our offer to go head-to-head with him in a debate before supporters of AWL and the SP to explore and thrash out our differences.

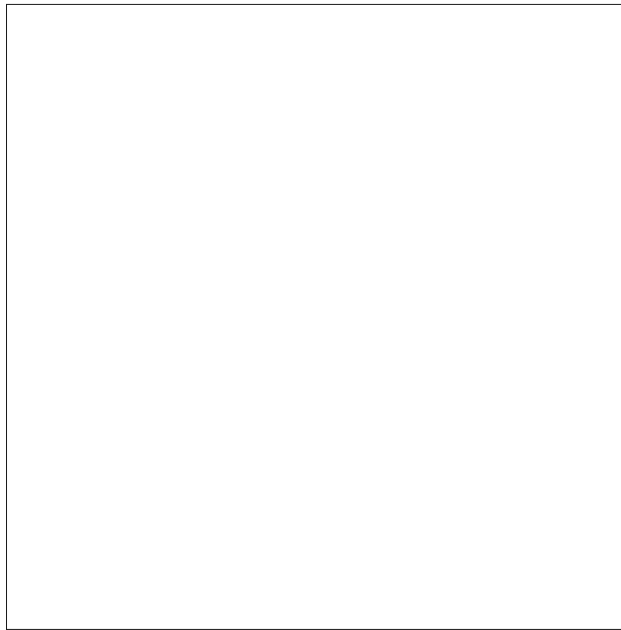
I didn't want this shy man to take fright so I tried to put a reassuring smile in my voice. "Hello Peter", I said, in my friendliest manner.

Taaffe responded with a smile and an equally friendly "Hiya". But the smile vanished when he caught sight of Solidarity, which I was selling. Picking up the signal, a big lad wearing an RMT badge stepped in. A bodyguard! To protect him from me? Taaffe is small, but I'm even smaller. Then I saw another big lad moving in. At this point my inner groupie stirred.

I was in the presence of a man important enough to rate bodyguards! Two of them! Wow! In that Kevin Costner film, the mega pop star had only one. The General Secretary had two! For a moment I was awestruck. Then my inner Bolshevik elbowed the over-impressed groupie aside.

What does he need bodyguards for? This is about status and self-importance, not protection. Perhaps the bodyguards are the Socialist Party equivalent of a stretch limousine for the company director? Or were they there to protect his Royal Shyness from people like me? In any case, a debate would do him good. I did what I'd come to do!

"Peter", I said, "I'm offering you an invitation to debate us on Libya. We've been calling your office, but we haven't got very far. We've been asking local SP members. Some seem willing, but not sure that you will allow them to. So,



## His Royal Shyness

how about it?"

"Who are you?" he replied, now spitting his words out. In the same breath, he answered his own question "You're irrelevant, we've said what we've got to say, you're irrelevant."

"Peter", I said, still trying to put a smile in my voice, "you've just spent thousands of words polemicising against our 'irrelevance'. Obviously there are rumblings in your organisation about your position on Libya, and I guess there's some support for the AWL position: isn't that why you've taken us on on your website?"

While I'm talking Taaffe is rolling his eyes, slowly shaking his head from side to side and repeating the mantra: "You're irrelevant, you lot are irrelevant". The minders, the big lad from the RMT and a tall passive bloke with a fixed look of love on his face, pleased just to be in the General Secretary's orbit, roll their eyes and slowly shake their heads, mimicking Taaffe in perfect synchronisation. For a second I think I've been teleported to the set of Dr Who.

The big lad speaks excitedly, but I haven't a clue what he's trying to say. The General Secretary, in a soothing voice, tells him: "It's okay, I can speak for myself". When he indicates that he is about to speak, the others instantly fall silent and become reverently attentive.

I make the offer again, and now Taaffe starts to get angry and a little nastier. "AWL — middle class. You're all middle class", he spits out. "You're all middle class students. You lot are irrelevant". Peter is strongest on sociology: he knows

that the decisive thing is not its politics, but the class composition of a would-be socialist organisation. Look at the good results that approach helped win in Liverpool. Look at the history of the proletarian-based Communist Parties of Western Europe.

Now he's waving his hands in poo-pooing motions, as if to brush me off. When I persist, he says: "Do you I know Janine Booth in the RMT?"

"Yeah, of course. She's great, isn't she?" "No!" says Taaffe angrily, "She's a disgrace to the working class. We'll debate you in the RMT".

The General Secretary is now wearing a sly smile, pleased with himself, as if he's trumped me. I say we'll be happy to debate the SP in the RMT too. This is my day for surprises: when I persist in urging the need for a wider public debate, he starts to get a bit upset, agitated.

This is an old man who is not used to being contradicted and talked back to. Or debating on an equal footing with his opponent. He repeats, again and again: "You lot are irrelevant". Then without any sign that he sees the irony in it, he blasts out an order to me: "Stop repeating yourself, you're irrelevant. Go on — do a runner like Matgamna".

He pauses for a second, his eyes flit back to the distant past, a rheumy old man reliving a triumph of his youth, and then he lets out a theatrical laugh: "You won't know about that, will you? It's before your time, when Matgamna did a runner".

He likes this; he likes himself: he has reassured himself, remembering when the three people who started what is now AWL walked out of the Militant/Socialist Party National Committee meeting (after they had, in a pre-conference period, been forbidden to circulate internally a wide-ranging criticism of the organisation's politics).

"What? Like you don't know about the Russian Revolution because it was before your time? Of course I know about our history. Now you're just making a fool of yourself". He really didn't like that; and neither did his bodyguards. You don't call the Pope a fool to his face! If angry glares and clenched mouths could kill...

When a younger male comrade of mine came over to see what was going on the General Secretary ordered him: "Take her away, she's hysterical, she keeps repeating herself".

Hysterical? I recalled the stock cartoon image of a flabby-bodied Margaret Thatcher in a "Wonder Woman" bathing costume, in Militant and on their placards, and the slogan "Ditch the Bitch!" with which Taaffe tried to "raise the consciousness" of the labour movement in the mid 1980s.

**For a moment or two I wondered if I'd mistaken some foolish old man, wandering the streets with a menacing grin and delusions of grandeur, for the General Secretary of the Socialist Party. But I knew I hadn't. It really was the Bishop Taaffe. And his bodyguards!**

- [www.workersliberty.org/pool](http://www.workersliberty.org/pool)
- [www.workersliberty.org/66](http://www.workersliberty.org/66)

Letters



## Substituting thuggery for argument

The Sheffield pensions demo on 30 June was no place for the unemployed, according to elements of the left and trade unions.

Charles Cartwright, a brickie who has been unemployed for two years, started to heckle the crowd as it was forming in Ponds Forge. His point was that people on the demo were lucky to have a job. Unfortunately that is the sentiment of many working-class people, especially if they are feeling the sharp end of the recession.

Workers' Liberty members were able to speak to him for a short while. Unfortunately he was soon confronted and surrounded by a SWP NUT steward and snarling SWP youth who began to taunt him and physically intimidate him. At this point the police found cause to intervene and the SWP members present helped the police to remove Mr Cartwright from the demonstration.

Charles Cartwright is, like many many others, a tragic example of what government's agenda does to the morale of working-class people.

The left and the trade unions cannot shy away from tack-

ling arguments and explaining alternatives. The left has to face up to this task or their will be incidents like this where members of our class are ostracised from the labour movement for life by moronic thuggery which fails to consider the unfortunate facts that most of our class are not yet Marxists.

**What we need is working-class solidarity. Sheffield Workers' Liberty is putting a motion to the Sheffield Anti-Cuts Alliance to set up an unemployed workers' caucus for the city. We openly invite Mr Cartwright and the thousands of unemployed workers in the city to get involved.**

Chris Marks, Sheffield

## The strange story of Snowy

Last year another Workers' Liberty member and I went to a meeting about organising against an EDL demo in Bradford.

After a few minutes a group of about half a dozen young guys turned up. They were led by a middle aged guy calling himself "Snowy" (aka John Shaw). He was from the EDL. We had a bit of an argument. Snowy said he wasn't racist and had mixed race relatives. He described himself as a working class Tory who was just trying to counteract Islamic extremism.

We argued back that the EDL acted like anti-Asian racist thugs. After a while he and his bored looking mates left.

From this encounter we learnt a few lessons about secu-

rity. It also helped cement the coalition which organised a working class anti-racist mobilisation against the EDL in Bradford. The EDL ended up having a torrid time in Bradford, and John "Snowy" Shaw slipped from my mind.

The EDL have always acted as a rallying point for those who want to carry out violent and racist provocations. It has been right to oppose them on the streets and elsewhere. There have always been fascists involved. However they could not be described as straightforwardly fascist.

Their lack of a political programme or centralised leadership made that label sound hollow, even if the EDL had the potential to morph in the direction of becoming a more organised ultra-right/fascist force.

In the year since Bradford the EDL has been through several schisms and crises. The northern divisions have become increasingly fused with neo-Nazis and organised fascists. As a consequence they have started to focus on attacking the left and the labour movement.

Reports on this split have put Shaw front stage again. He is now the leader of the "Yorkshire Divisions", and he seems to personify the shift in his organisation's politics towards hardcore fascism. Shaw has started recommending to his followers the notorious anti-semitic forgery the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The Nazis put the *Protocols* on the school curriculum, and neo-Nazis have continued to peddle it to this day.

**Ironically many reactionary Islamist groups also peddle the *Protocols* as well. The EDL is becoming a conduit of a new generation of racists from tabloid Islamophobia to organised fascism. The need for the labour movement to lead opposition is more urgent now than it has ever been.**

Duncan Knight, Leeds

# Take the media from Murdoch!

"Freedom of the press in Britain is the freedom to print such of the proprietor's prejudices as the advertisers don't object to" — Hannen Swaffer, one of the early 20th century pioneers of British tabloid journalism, cited in *Tabloid Nation*, by Chris Horrie.

**The Murdoch empire has decided (7 July) to shut down the *News of the World* — hoping to dodge the discredit of the hacking scandals, and no doubt quickly to move on to a new venture.**

Murdoch should not be allowed to dodge so easily. The latest revelation in the unfolding story of the abuse of its power and wealth by the *News of the World* is truly shocking.

It is also a revelation, even to people who had thought they knew "all about" the press.

"Reporters" hired detectives to hack into the mobile phone of a girl, Milly Dowler, who had been kidnapped and murdered, and by deleting messages confused the police, and Milly's parents, about whether she had run away, or been abducted, or was alive or dead.

They hacked into the phones of the parents of Madeleine McCann, the small girl who went missing on a holiday in Portugal. They did the same sort of thing to a very large number of other victims and their relatives.

Such papers concoct news, inflate the trivial, and trivialise and personalise the serious and important. They hound and persecute people who can be made use of in sensational stories.

They have the power to make or break the careers of politicians, commentators, show business "personalities", and "ordinary" people — and they used it as capriciously as the mad Roman emperors, Nero and Caligula.

They arbitrarily decide what is news and what is newsworthy, not according to any objective judgement and measurement, but to sell papers and advertising. They hook readers on sensation, prurience, and identification with (or loathing of) the glamorous and the famous. They bestow fame, and take it away, and batten on its recipients.

What we now call the red-tops, and used to call the tabloid press, render serious mass discussion of certain subjects impossible.

They express the politics and the prejudices of the proprietor and advertisers. In a world in which international and British bankers inflicted catastrophe on the lives of millions, and still pay themselves obscenely large salaries and bonuses — in that world, the press campaigns against poor people and against disabled people as "scroungers" and "welfare cheats".

Freedom of the press is of tremendous social and political importance. It had to be fought for and won in a prolonged struggle against censorship and against restrictions on what the working class could read. (In Britain there was a heavy tax — "stamp" — on each issue of a paper, to price it out of the reach of workers).

The mass circulation newspaper proprietors have made press freedom into something empty and repulsive - into freedom for proprietors and advertisers.

Richard Desmond owns the *Daily Express*, *Sunday Express*, and *Daily Star*. His newspapers are viciously chauvinist. They run racist campaigns against immigrants and workers of foreign origin. They do immense harm. They make rational discussion of questions such as large-scale immigration and the European Union impossible.

### MURDOCH AND THE POLITICIANS

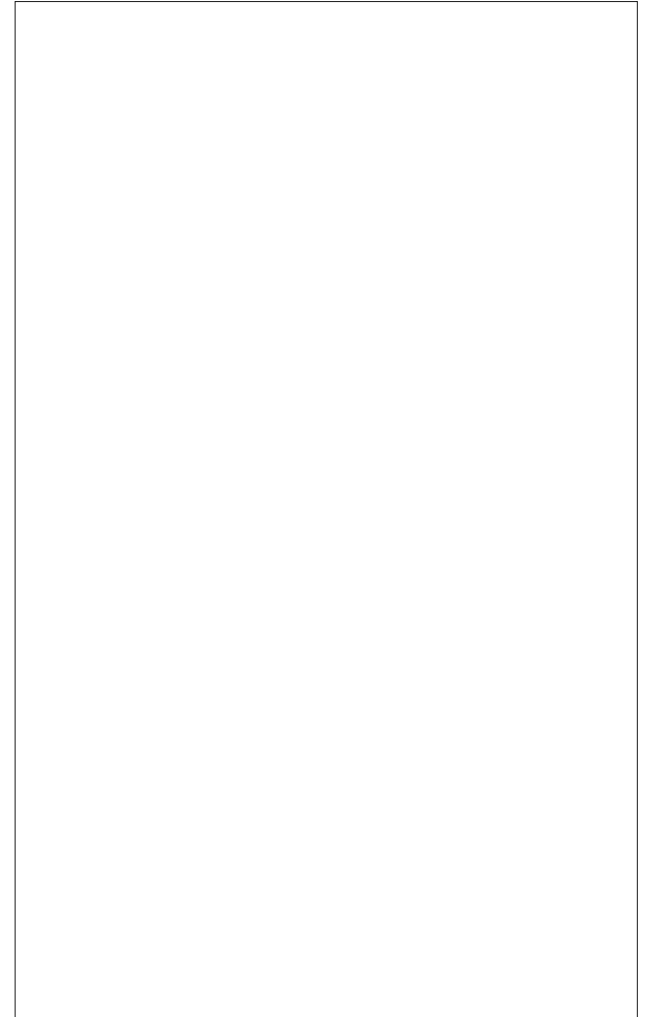
**Rupert Murdoch, an American citizen, owns a vast swathe of the press, from the *Times* and *Sunday Times* to *The Sun* and the *News of the World*, as well as satellite TV and film companies. Politicians bow and scrape and pay court to him.**

BBC2's *Newsnight* showed a startling piece of film: Tony Blair, visiting the Murdoch headquarters in Wapping, waves obsequiously from a distance to Rebekah Brooks, now chief executive of the Murdoch organisation News International. The Prime Minister gives her a small, timid wave, wiggling his fingers, from a distance. She turns away without waving back and, in a crowd, moves towards the conference room where the Prime Minister's audience with her will be held.

The need of conventional politicians to pander for the support of the press defines bourgeois politics in Britain now. It is the measure of their power.

Just before the present wave of revelations, the Government had licensed Murdoch to take complete ownership and control of Sky, where before he was a mere majority shareholder. The Liberal-Democrat minister Vince Cable was forced out of his job, sideways into another one, because he had said he was "gunning" for Murdoch.

Future generations will have difficulty in understanding the mindset of people who believe that bourgeois democracy in Britain could function properly while the media, a major factor in shaping public opinion, is owned, and operated for their profit, their prejudices, and their interests, by such as Murdoch and Desmond. As much difficulty as we have in understanding the mindset of people who accepted that children of ten should be hanged for theft, or tolerated chattel slavery.



**They are trying to extricate themselves. Don't them get away with it!**

The story of the modern press is encapsulated in the story of *The Sun*. *The Sun* is the lineal descendant of the labour movement paper *Daily Herald*.

George Lansbury started the *Daily Herald* in 1912 to help in the widespread anti-capitalist agitation of the labour movement then. After going from daily to weekly during World War One, it became a daily again, owned by the TUC, in 1922. From 1930 it was half-owned by the TUC and half by Odhams Press. It was *the* Labour paper.

It was sold, and its name changed to *The Sun*, in 1964. And then there was no labour-movement daily, however loosely-defined. It still backed Labour. Murdoch bought it in 1969, and then it took off as a demagogic "popular" tabloid in which bourgeois like Kelvin McKenzie mimicked the speech patterns of the working class, pandered to the most ignorant prejudices, and fostered them, so long as they were compatible with the interests of Murdoch.

*The Sun* became a major factor in British political life. It backed the Tory party until 1997, when it backed Blair, the Thatcher understudy who had hijacked and transformed the Labour Party. It has swung back to the Tories.

Isn't it the story of the power and role of money in political life, summed up?

The labour movement should aim to take the press out of the hands of the billionaires. The idea that the suppression of the power of newspaper owners would be an attack on the free press is as ludicrous as the idea that the press they run really is a "free press".

There is no reason at all why a publicly-owned press should not be so organised that it would guarantee such real fail-safes as a legal right to reply — the sort of rights that members of the AWL have in our press now, writ enormously large.

**Workers on the billionaire media should take over their presses, their offices, their studios, and their broadcasting centres, and have them put under public ownership. The media should be run under workers' and democratic control, with legal guarantees of pluralism.**

## Unions: make Labour change course

From back page

The Labour Representation Committee should invite its affiliated unions, and PCS, NUT, UCU and ATL, to back a labour-movement conference to discuss an across-the-board union political fightback not only on pensions but also on NHS and welfare reform.

These proposals are part of a drive to rally, reinvigorate, and transform the trade union movement so that it raises itself to the level advocated by Karl Marx almost 150 years ago:

"If the Trades Unions are required for the guerrilla fights between capital and labour, they are still more important as organised agencies for superseding the very system of wages labour and capital rule... They must now learn to act deliberately as organising centres of the working class in the broad interest of its complete emancipation.

"They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction, considering themselves and acting as the champions and representatives of the whole working class..."

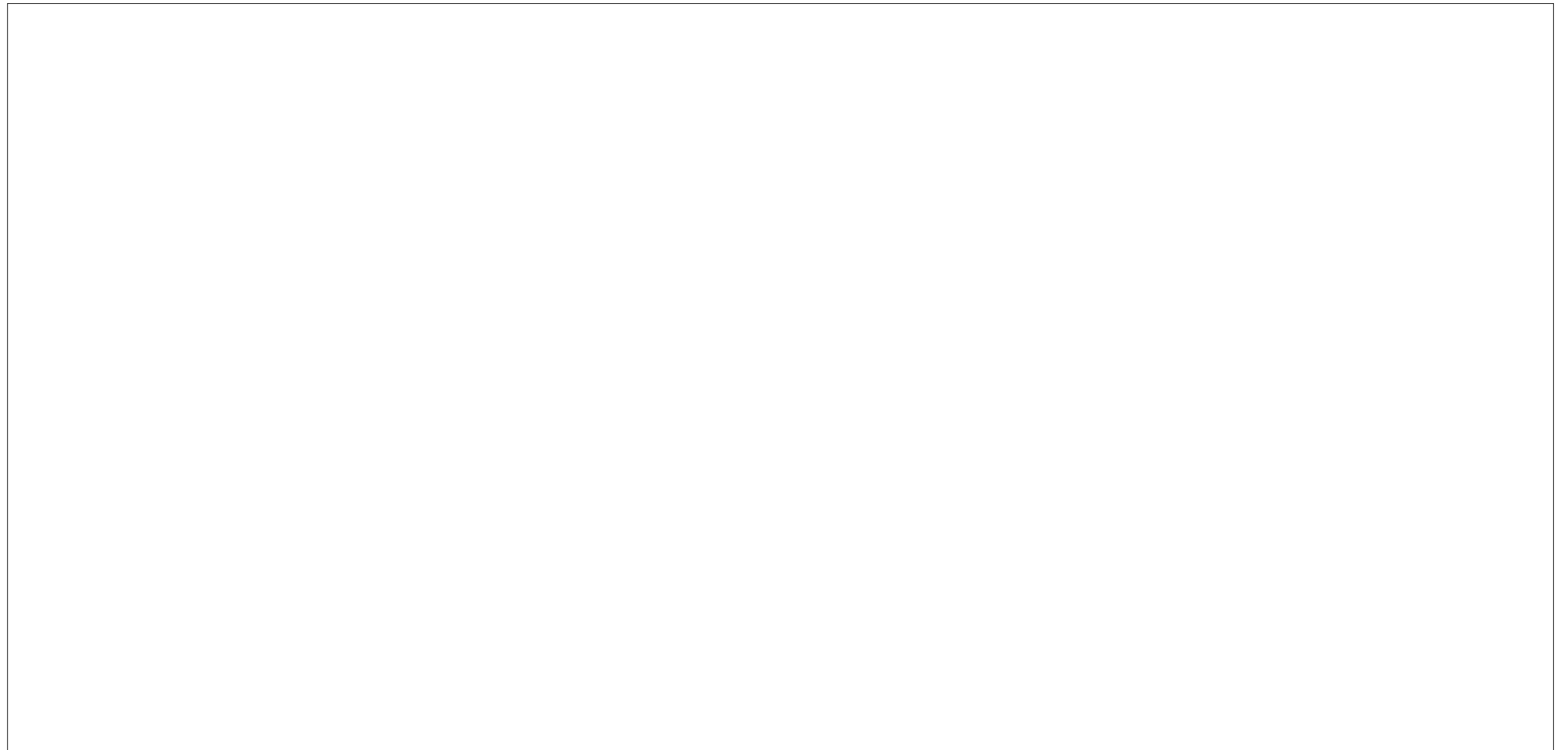
A concerted drive by the unions and the left to reshape the Labour Party — and, once it became a vigorous drive, it could not shrink from split with the New-Labour loyalists — would be nothing other than a drive to create the possibility of a *workers' government* as an alternative to the coalition.

Otherwise the only visible governmental alternative to the Tories, for workers, is an Ed-Miliband-type Labour government (or Lib-Lab coalition regime) which would moderate the coalition's measures, if the coalition hadn't already moderated them itself, as it might well have done by 2015, but basically carry on from where they left off, as Blair carried on from where Thatcher left off.

Instead, we should organise in the unions and the left for a government accountable to the labour movement, a government which imposes working-class interests on society in the same way that the current government imposes the interests of the rich.

**What matters most now is that the unions assert themselves politically using every channel and avenue possible, inside and outside the Labour Party.**

# Where next for pension fi



Glasgow PCS picket line. Picture Jack Donaghy

By Stewart Ward

**The strikes on 30 June by teachers and civil service workers against pension cuts were the labour movement's opening salvo in a war against the government. If we are to win, the war will involve many more strike days and other creative forms of industrial and political action.**

In primary and secondary education, the strike's impact was enormous. Even though NASUWT, one of the bigger teaching unions, was not participating in the strikes, the big majority of schools were affected. Even on *Daily Mail* figures only 28% of schools were fully open. The overwhelming majorities in favour of strike action (92% in one teachers' union, NUT, and 83% in another, ATL) give some indication of the level of feeling at least among the unions' active layers.

In further and higher education, there was a poorer turnout for the strikes organised by the University and College Union (UCU). Given the timing of the strike, when many FE and HE terms have finished, this was almost inevitable. Even so, UCU stewards in places like the University of Central Lancashire reported being "pleasantly surprised" at the turnout and support for the strike. UCU members at South Bank University in London maintained pickets of all the campus's main entrances.

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) turned out in higher numbers than might've been expected given the somewhat disappointing turnout and vote in their strike ballot. Workers' Liberty member Charlie McDonald, a PCS rep in east London, said "I've never known support for a dispute like this in my 20 years as a union rep. Six people joined the union this week as they wanted to strike."

The attendance at demonstrations and strike rallies across the country was solid on the whole. Some estimates put the march in the relatively small city of Exeter as high as 2,000. In Newcastle, some activists assessed the rally as "the biggest march we can remember in the city". In Glasgow, even though only one union (PCS) was on strike (Scottish teachers have a different pension set-up), hundreds rallied in the city's central George Square, and union activists maintained dozens-strong picket lines at workplaces like Northgate.

On the whole, the rallying of students and young people to the union demonstrations hoped for by some activists did not happen: but that was to be expected with universities, colleges, and schools either finished for the academic year or deep in exams.

In Southampton, Doncaster, north London, Birmingham and Crewe, strikes were bolstered by other workers in ongoing local disputes. In some places, such as Birmingham, unions not on strike such as the Communication Workers' Union gave their members public backing in refusing to cross strikers' picket lines.

Few places saw mass meetings or assemblies where strikers and their supporters could discuss the direction of the dispute, but in Nottingham, where a meeting was held, a motion calling for a continuation and escalation of action, and rank-and-file control of the dispute, was passed.

### WHAT SHOULD THE UNIONS DO NOW?

**Those with a valid ballot mandate should set a date now for another strike in the autumn, to keep up the pressure on the government, to focus the activists, and to stimulate activists in Unison, Unite, and GMB.**

They should organise strike levies to prepare for longer strikes by strategic groups of workers in rolling and selective form. They should reconfigure their funds so as to enable them to keep operating even if hit by anti-union laws. They should encourage their members to organise joint union committees with other public sector unions everywhere.

They should organise large national meetings of union reps to discuss further one-day strikes in advance of sustained action, and the possibilities for rolling and selective strikes.

They should discuss broadening out the demands of further action to include defence of public services and jobs as well as pensions, and consciously see themselves as fighting for the whole working class on issues like the NHS and welfare. They should discuss how unions facing immediate and sector-specific attacks, like CWU (facing Royal Mail privatisation) and RMT (facing the McNulty reforms to the rail service), can be drawn in. They should campaign politically, against the anti-union laws and for a workers' government.

A concerted working-class fightback against the government will also need a campaign to rebuild working-class organisation at every level. The labour movement needs a "New Unionism" for the 21st century, a movement to reach out to and organise the semi-casual, low-paid workplaces where many young workers now work. It also needs a "Minority Movement" for the 21st century, a national network of rank-and-file activists within and across unions that can pressure the union leaderships to act and organise independently of them when they won't.

Local anti-cuts committees, which have some activist au-

tonomy from labour movement officialdom and were therefore central to the fight against the first wave of local authority budget cuts, have often shrunk somewhat since 26 March and do not seem to have been significantly bolstered or revived in the run-up to the 30 June strikes. Those committees need to work hard to rebuild themselves as open, democratic forums – not as cartels of far-left cadres – by campaigning on the Health Service, benefit cuts, etc.; approaching local public-sector union branches and workplaces to help the activists there; and lobbying MPs to oppose the pension changes and (for Labour MPs) to distance from Ed Miliband and back the strikes.

London Mayor Boris Johnson reiterated his call for new anti-union laws, which would require a 50% turnout of the entire electorate, as well as a majority of those voting, to make a strike lawful.

He said that the government should take action "right away". The Confederation of British Industry wants the law changed to require a "yes" to strike from 40% of the electorate (i.e., for example, an 80% yes vote if turnout is 50%). Vince Cable, speaking at the recent GMB congress, said that pressure on the government to introduce new anti-union laws would increase if strike levels went up.

Boris Johnson himself was backed by just 19% of the electorate when he won the election for mayor of London; David Cameron's Tories won only 23% of the electorate in the May 2010 election.

### ANTI-UNION LAWS

**Although most major unions are affiliated to the United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Trade Union Laws, none yet does the positive campaigning against existing anti-union laws that would provide a springboard for a campaign against proposed new ones. Unions need to stop seeing the anti-union laws as hoops they must jump through (or resignedly submit to, as too hard to jump), and more as obstacles to get round and, ultimately, smash.**

Activists in more militant unions such as the RMT and PCS should push for their unions to call a trade-union activist conference to discuss a new campaign against the anti-union laws, and for a positive charter of union rights, or get rank and file networks to call it independently and seek backing and sponsorship for it union organisations.

Unions need to prepare to work around the law wherever possible. They should move their funds abroad so that they



# ight?

can continue operating in the event of sequestration, and give their members "off the record" support for unofficial action.

The government will make no big changes to its plans for public sector pensions from just one day of strike action. But it will have been shaken by the unexpectedly good turn-out on 30 June. It may budge a little.

Although the media remains almost uniformly anti-strike, the government's vice-grip over the public narrative suffered blows such as Mark Serwotka's roasting of Francis Maude on BBC Radio 4's Today programme.

There are also pressures on the government from other quarters. If the government overdoes things, especially with the increases in contributions, then it may crash the Local government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and possibly others. Contributions will plummet. Required pension payments in, say, 40 years' time will also plummet, but that is little consolation to Cameron and Osborne, since the sum needing to be paid out in pensions *now* remains the same. A measure aimed at improving the government's budget balance would in fact worsen it.

Separate and detailed negotiations are underway to some specific public sector workers' pension schemes, such as firefighters and lecturers in pre-1992 universities. FBU general secretary Matt Wrack told members at the union's conference in May to "prepare for national strike action" over pensions. Firefighters already face the highest employee pensions contributions in the sector, and the government wants to hike their contributions from 11% to between 14 and 17%. FBU opinion polls indicate that up to 25% of firefighters would consider leaving the pensions scheme if the reforms went through, at a potential cost of £210 million to the taxpayer.

## NEGOTIATIONS

**The UCU is balloting its members in the Universities Superannuation Scheme, the pension scheme from pre-1992 universities, for strikes. The ballot will close on 14 September.**

UCU has already negotiated down the increase in employee contributions for existing members from 2% to 1.15% and frozen the proposed new entrants' contributions at 6.35%. Although the union is balloting for action, it says it wants to "narrow the gap" rather than fight the two-tier system altogether. The fact that negotiations have won some concessions from government shows that it is possible to force movement.

The LGPS is different from the three other big public sector pension schemes — teachers (which includes FE and post-92 unis), civil service, and NHS — in that it is a fund (or conglomeration of funds) into which contributions are paid and out of which pensions are paid. For the three other schemes, contributions go into, and pensions come out of, current government revenue. There is no fund.

The large scale of the government's pension cuts means, however, that any concessions likely anytime soon will leave workers still much worse off. The complexity of the Government's plan (see [tinyurl.com/pensionsbriefing](http://tinyurl.com/pensionsbriefing)) makes it easier for the Government to make a show of concessions without budgeting on essentials.

The element which concerns the government most immediately (i.e. helps its immediate budget problems) is also the element which concerns workers most immediately, namely, the increase in contributions. That increase could be moderated — the total gain to government revenue expected from it, £2.8 billion a year, is small-ish in relation to the total government budget — but is still likely to remain a large grab from workers' wage-frozen budgets. Concessions sufficient to allow workers decent pensions with affordable contributions, at a reasonable age, are conceivable only with a sustained campaign of mass strike action based on a battle for a labour-movement political alternative.

- **Picket line and demonstration reports from 30 June** — [tinyurl.com/30junereports](http://tinyurl.com/30junereports)
- **Two assessments of 30 June from trade union activists** — [tinyurl.com/twoassessments](http://tinyurl.com/twoassessments)
- **The battle after 30 June: how to win** — [tinyurl.com/5sz83jw](http://tinyurl.com/5sz83jw)
- **Reading on the Minority Movement and how to build rank-and-file networks** — [tinyurl.com/5ran826](http://tinyurl.com/5ran826)
- **Reading on New Unionism** — [tinyurl.com/3qzsf12](http://tinyurl.com/3qzsf12)
- **Workers' plan for the crisis** — [workersliberty.org/workersplan](http://workersliberty.org/workersplan)

# Roots of Euro-crisis

**John Grahl (Professor of European Integration, Middlesex University), will be speaking at "Ideas for Freedom", 9-10 July. He talked to *Solidarity*.**

**Some of the Baltic and central and east European countries are in virtually the same situation as the eurozone crisis countries. One big difference as far as the west is concerned is that they're not in very heavy debt to western banks, so western banks haven't got a lot to lose. Their debts are largely to the IMF and so on.**

But the debts are large relative to the size of those economies. Huge deflationary processes have been launched in the Balkans and in Hungary.

In that sense, Greece's crisis is not unique. But Greece's crisis would not have unfolded in the same way if Greece hadn't joined the euro in 2001. A background factor in Greece's crisis is its loss of export competitiveness, and if Greece hadn't joined the euro, then that loss would have been reduced by currency depreciation. As for the credit problem — Greece would not have been able to borrow as much.

Countries like Hungary and Latvia have faced huge crises since 2008, but have voluntarily kept pegging their currencies to the euro, strictly or loosely. In some ways that's surprising. The broader point here is that in many countries, including Iceland, the political classes are very reluctant to attenuate their links to the international financial system. East European governments keep their currencies in line with the euro because failing to do so would delay their entry into the euro. They are willing to pay a high price to get into the eurozone and gain, they hope, more investment flows.

Some people argue that the answer to Greece is for it to quit the euro, but economically there's not much sense to that. I don't know how any Greek government could defend a reintroduced drachma and avoid Zimbabwean-style hyperinflation. I don't even know how a Greek government would get people to accept drachmas in place of euros, except perhaps public-sector workers who would have no choice.

## RIGIDLY NEO-LIBERAL

**Since 2008 Germany has taken a rigidly neo-liberal course and sought to impose it on the eurozone. In 2009 Germany passed a constitutional amendment banning future budget deficits; in 2010 it introduced big cuts, though Germany has no real debt problem.**

Meanwhile the European Commission, with German support, wants all eurozone economies to be back within "Stability Pact" limits by 2013.

I think all that has to do with the fact that the corporations and big employers in Germany don't see Germany as a market any more, but rather as a base from which to export. In the past they had an interest in having relatively good wages and conditions and the progressive growth of a domestic market, but they don't care about that any more. They care only about competitiveness.

The pressure, especially on people in Germany with lower incomes and lower wages, is absolutely shameful. It goes beyond anything that was produced by Thatcherism or by right-wing administrations in the US. The inequality in Germany is unique in that it is concentrated very heavily in the lower end of the income distribution.

The German policy is very dysfunctional from the point of view of the eurozone as a whole. You can't turn the whole of the eurozone into a big Germany. Germany can only have its current strategy because other countries don't.

The Schuldenbremse [a clause written into the German constitution in 2009, saying that neither the federal government nor the states are allowed to run budget deficits from 2016 (federal government) and 2020 (states) onwards. Certain exceptions apply] is insane.

The first attempt to apply that sort of rule was the Bank Charter Act of 1844 [which allowed the Bank of England to issue notes only to the extent of the amount of gold it had plus £14 million — and was suspended in the financial crises of 1847, 1857, and 1866]. All such attempts have failed and will continue to fail. There's no way you can operate a modern capitalist economy without public debt.

Look at the problems posed in the US right now by a Federal debt limit which everyone knows has to be breached.

The project, as conceived by the leading governments of the eurozone, is that its problems will be resolved essentially by greater compression of costs, especially of wage-costs, in the weaker states. But that will make the debt problem worse. Growth will stop, which will also worsen the debt problem.

The EU is, in principle, saying that the rules of the Stability Pact [which stipulates that budget deficit should not be more than 3% of GDP] should be back in force by 2013. The projections simply do not make sense. It is assumed that the fiscal corrections will proceed very rapidly, while current account deficits continue, which implies a huge surge in household spending and corporate investment which is just not going to happen.

The United States is going to be more or less constrained to limit its imports. That's the eurozone's biggest market. Where else can the Europeans export to? The moon?

## COLONIAL

**From a global point of view, the eurozone is extremely irresponsible. It should be running an overall current account deficit, which would assist with the adjustments with the US, China and so on.**

Directives are being proposed, and may very well be passed at the European Parliament, which envisage a tightening of the constraints in the Stability Pact as well as more comprehensive surveillance over the macroeconomics of all countries. My fear is that this surveillance regime would primarily concern the weaker economies.

The leaders of the eurozone recognise that some measure of debt forgiveness will eventually be necessary, but insist it be linked with huge amounts of conditionality and a kind of tutelage. It would be a kind of political union, but with an essentially colonial content. That's what emerging.

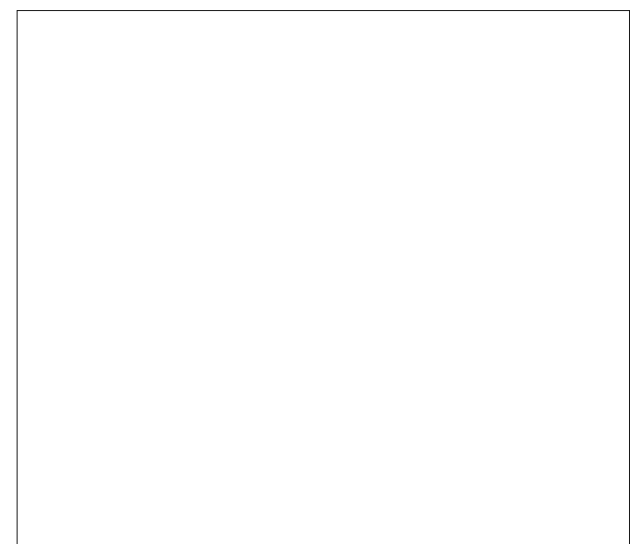
The central states are realising they won't get their money back, and they won't consider wiping the debt without the kind of surveillance that allows them to tell weaker states not only that their governments are spending too much money, but that their wage costs or social security costs are too high and must be cut.

I would advocate the assumption of the debt by stronger European agencies. Not simply the temporary re-financing of the debt, but the assumption of the debt. Those agencies should simply repay a large part of the debts. It's a European problem, Europe helped to create it. It needn't be 100% but it should be substantially above 50% of what's outstanding.

There needs to be a coherent position from the left taking on the Europe-wide aspect of the crisis. The left needs to do the arithmetic and argue for an expansionary, employment-oriented solution as the one to go for.

**The big obstacles would be governments, in Britain and elsewhere in Northern Europe, taking a populist stance against the indebted countries; but in terms of economic coherence at least the argument is very strong.**

- John Grahl was talking to Martin Thomas.



Left needs Europe-wide answers to Greek crisis

# The political logic of the BDS campaign

By Harry Glass

The boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) campaign has become the dominant frame for viewing the Israel-Palestine conflict in recent years and Omar Barghouti has been its most high-profile exponent. His book *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* (Haymarket Books) demonstrates the real political confusion behind BDS and why socialists should oppose it.

The BDS campaign dates from 9 July 2005, when a gathering of 170 Palestinian organisations, including unions and civil society groups demanded boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel. BDS makes three demands on Israel:

- ending the occupation and colonisation of all Arab lands [occupied in 1967] and dismantling the wall;
- recognising the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality;
- respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties.

These are often dressed in the garb of UN resolutions. The first two demands are completely reasonable for any democrat or socialist. However there are fundamental problems with the demand for the right of return.

First and foremost, it is a slippery formula, evasive about who it applies to — is it simply those displaced in 1948 or all Palestinians, does it mean the same place they were living then, or simply immigration into a new Palestinian state? Ultimately the demand is incoherent with regard to the political basis of a democratic solution to Israeli-Palestinian relations. The BDS campaign publicly fudges the question of the political solution. Officially “the BDS movement as such does not adopt any special political formula and steers away from the one-state-versus-two-states debate”.

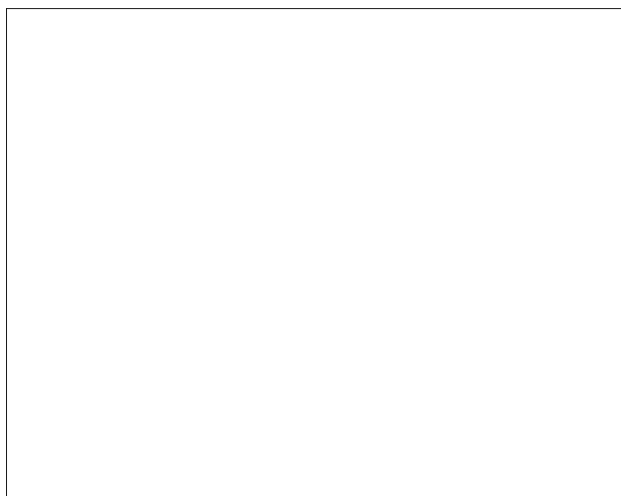
## SELF DETERMINATION

However Barghouti is quite explicit about his view. He states: “I have for over twenty-five years consistently supported the secular democratic unitary state solution in historic Palestine”. He laments that now “there is no political party in Palestine now or among Palestinians in exile calling for a secular, democratic state solution”. His politics are the PLO’s, frozen in 1987.

Barghouti is also unequivocally opposed to a two states solution. He says: “The two-state solution is not only impossible to achieve now — Israel has made it an absolute pipe dream that cannot happen — but also, crucially, an immoral solution. At best it would address some of the rights of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, a mere one-third of the Palestinian people”.

But in a moment of candour, he reveals that the political basis of BDS is not compatible with two states either. He wrote: “You cannot practically reconcile the right of return for refugees with a negotiated two-state solution”. There it is in black and white: support BDS and you are tied to a single state solution.

Barghouti offers an impoverished version of self-determination. He moralises that “A call signed by more than 170



Palestinian political parties, unions, nongovernmental organisations, and networks, representing the entire spectrum of Palestinian civil society... cannot be ‘counterproductive’ unless Palestinians are not rational or intelligent enough to know or articulate what is in their best interest”.

He also says no Palestinian party stands for a single state — but there is no need to defer to that opinion! So 170 organisations call for boycott; but no-one is for his real objective — secular, democratic state. Too bad for the Palestinians — they can be trusted with the means, but not the end. He reduces Palestinian oppression to racial rather than national terms, hence all the rhetoric about apartheid.

On the other side, Barghouti simply denies that Israeli Jews have any right to self determination at all. He cannot conceptualise them as a nation, therefore their self determination is not even discussed. He sugar-coats his “solution”, saying he wants “a secular democratic state where nobody is thrown into the sea, nobody is sent back to Poland, and nobody is left suffering in refugee camps”.

Yet there is no explicit criticism of Hamas in the book. He simply dismisses the problem of Hamas’ politics altogether: “It’s irrelevant whether or not Hamas accepts Israel’s so-called right to exist as a Jewish state (read: an apartheid state) or accepts the ‘67 borders ...”.

With the single state solution, whether secular or Islamic, neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis get to exercise their own, self-defined, self-determination.

Barghouti’s failure to engage with the right of Israeli Jews to self-determination is clear from his contempt for the Israeli left. “...most of what passes as ‘left’ in Israel are Zionist parties and groups that make some far-right parties in Europe look as moral as Mother Teresa”. And “The so-called peace groups in Israel largely work to improve Israeli oppression against the Palestinians, rather than eliminate it, with their chief objective being the guarantee of Israel’s future as a ‘Jewish’ — that is, exclusivist — state. The most radical Israeli ‘Zionist-left’ figures and groups are still Zionist, adhering to the racist principles of Zionism that treat the indigenous Palestinians as lesser humans who are the obstacle or a ‘demographic threat’...”

Barghouti explicitly defames those who argue that the logic of the right of return would be the elimination of the state of Israel: “the only true fighters for peace in Israel are

those who support our three fundamental rights: the right of return for Palestinian refugees; full equality for the Palestinian citizens of Israel and ending the occupation and colonial rule”.

Laughably, Barghouti states that the BDS movement “does not subscribe to drawing up lists to decide who is a good Israeli and who is not based on some arbitrary political criteria”. Yet this is precisely what he does. He narrows progressive Israelis to only those who support BDS — eliminating for example the refuseniks, the peace movement, the unions and various writers. All the rest are branded with inverted commas.

Barghouti is quite upfront that BDS ultimately means ostracising everything Israeli. The campaign is “working to expel Israel and its complicit institutions from international and interstate academic, cultural, sporting... environmental, financial, trade, and other forums.” He soft-soaps that “groups that for tactical reasons support only a subset of BDS, or a targeted boycott of specific products or organisations in Israel, or supporting Israel, are still our partners. Boycott is not a one-size-fits-all type of process.”

He distinguishes between advocating such a targeted boycott as a tactic, leading to the ultimate goal of boycotting all Israeli goods and services, and advocating such a targeted boycott as the ultimate strategy. While the former “may be necessary in some countries as a convenient and practical tool to raise awareness and promote debate about colonial and apartheid regime, the latter, despite its lure, would be in direct contradiction with the stated objectives of the Palestinian boycott movement”.

## TOTAL BOYCOTT

For Barghouti the boycott of settlement goods alone is not sufficient. At a practical level “Israel has made it extremely difficult to differentiate between settlement and other Israeli products, simply because the majority of parent companies are based inside Israel or because colony-based companies have official addresses there”.

Politically “even if distinguishing between produce of settlements and produce of Israel were possible, activists who on principle — rather than out of convenience — advocate a boycott of only the former may argue that they are merely objecting to the Israeli military occupation and colonisation of 1967 and have no further problems with Israel”.

Finally, there is a moral problem with accepting these “two grave... violations of human rights and international law as givens”.

BDS may seem in the ascendant for now. It may make progress in places, on the back of the Israeli state’s next atrocity. But BDS needs to be fought politically, because it stands in the path of two states, the only consistently democratic solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

**BDS is ultimately a pessimistic approach. It put the agency for change outside of the region. It wants civil society, which includes not only NGOs and unions but bourgeois governments and business internationally, to make things right for the Palestinians. There is another road. The Palestinian workers in alliance with Israeli workers fighting for a two state democratic solution to the national question, is the force that could deliver peace and much more besides.**

# A lo-fi look at symbolic action and its dilemmas

Liam McNulty reviews *Just Do It: A Tale of Modern-day Outlaws*

For her documentary about the environmental direct action movement the director, Emily James, was given access to the often secretive world of Climate Camp, Plane Stupid and the other loose networks which came together for direct action at the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen, the London G20 summit and Kingsnorth power station.

The nature of the footage inevitably gives it an honest lo-fi feel, overlaid with some impressive animations, and an engaging narrative. But it was all a bit predictable; as one activist watching it with me put it, “it seemed like edited highlights of the last three years of my life.” In framing the documentary around several individual activists and a few particular actions, what the film gains in personalising activism it loses in the ability to draw out wider political issues underpinning the debate about climate change and capitalism.

On the other hand, the film’s execution reflects on the politics of many of those involved in the direct action movement. Just like the documentary, Climate Camp and similar

groups prioritise highly imaginative and attention-grabbing stunts aimed at drawing attention to particular issues. Much of the action is symbolic, aimed at “sending a powerful message” to the government or capital.

For instance, the activists chaining themselves to the headquarters of the nationalised Royal Bank of Scotland wished to “reclaim the bank”, but little discussion was given to the sort of nationalisation which would make the banking system truly socialised and democratic.

Similarly, although activists bravely faced a major police operation to shut down a coal-fired power station, this was done with no consultation with the workers. While drawing attention to the issue of carbon emissions, such action will never succeed in shutting down every coal-fired power station in the context of a new sustainable economy. After one action, an activist was asked “does any of this do any good?” After a long pause, she replied: “You can’t do nothing, that wouldn’t have done any good.”

These points are not necessarily meant as criticisms of actions featured in the documentary but to point out some of the limitations which activists themselves recognise yet have not yet found a way of addressing. One activist went to Copenhagen with her focus on climate change and came

back, after experiencing the repressive conduct of the Danish police, realising that the capitalist system as a whole was the problem. Regarding the post-capitalist future, however, she was “not sure how we’re gonna get there or how’s it going to work but let’s give it a go.”

Some answers are hinted at in the film yet never explicitly drawn out. Apart from the RMT banners flying outside Vestas, the questions of class and the labour movement are never addressed. The actions featured in this documentary have radicalised a new generation of brave and talented young activists, have exposed the links between capital and the state, and cleverly pointed out what is wrong with the current system. Yet there is a gap between means and ends, between symbolic action and the creation of a new system which can solve the problems of climate change.

**In the socialist movement, we should be reaching out to people involved in direct action because of a largely shared vision of what sort of world we want to see. There is much we can learn from them but also a contribution we can make in terms of ideas about fighting for a better world through workers’ self-organisation and class struggle; about socialism and the rule of people over profit. Let the dialogue continue.**



# Gramsci and Trotsky

By Martin Thomas

**In June 1930 Alfonso Leonetti, Paolo Ravazzoli, and Pietro Tresso — three of the eight members of the Executive of the Italian Communist Party — were expelled.**

Stalin was imposing in Italy his “Third Period” line which had led the German Communist Party to denounce the Social Democrats as “social fascists” and dismiss the threat of Hitler taking power (it said “fascism” was already in power, and another form of “fascism” could thus be no new threat; and anyway, “after Hitler, our turn next”).

Italian fascism had been in power since 1922, and since about 1926 had snuffed out all legal labour-movement activity in Italy. Leonetti, Ravazzoli, and Tresso wanted to campaign for bourgeois-democratic demands against the fascist regime, and to challenge social democracy with united-front proposals rather than complacently declaring that social democracy was already dead and the future was single combat between the Communist Party and fascism.

The three formed the “New Italian Opposition”, the first Italian Trotskyist group.

Since 1927 the Italian CP had been led by Palmiro Togliatti, an ingenious and supple-spined politician who remained in post and in line with Stalin until his death in 1964. Before Togliatti the main leader had been Antonio Gramsci.

Since 8 November 1926 Gramsci had been isolated, in fascist jails; but his brother Gennaro could visit him. According to Antonio Gramsci’s orthodox Communist Party biographer, Giuseppe Fiori, Gramsci told Gennaro that he “supported the attitude of Leonetti, Tresso, and Ravazzoli... and rejected the International’s new policy”.

In 1932, trying to rouse the German workers’ movement to united action against Hitler, and to learn the lessons of the crushing of the Italian workers by fascism, Trotsky cited Gramsci as a model of sober revolutionary-socialist politics. “Italian comrades inform me that with the sole exception of Gramsci, the Communist Party wouldn’t even allow of the possibility of the fascists seizing power... Once the proletarian revolution had suffered defeat... how could there be any further kind of counterrevolutionary upheaval? The bourgeoisie cannot rise up against itself! Such was the gist of the political orientation of the Italian Communist Party”.

Gramsci and Trotsky had met when Gramsci went to Russia between May 1922 and December 1923, for the Fourth Congress of the Communist International and other meetings.

In 1922 Gramsci was still deferring to Amadeo Bordiga, the main leader of the Italian Communist Party, and Bordiga’s opposition to political united-front tactics and to broadening out the CP. But Gramsci’s writings in 1919 and 1920 had shown a more dialectical turn of mind. As Frank Rosengarten records, to Trotsky and others, Gramsci “seemed... to be the man best suited to liberate the Italian party from the fruitless rigidities of... Bordiga”.

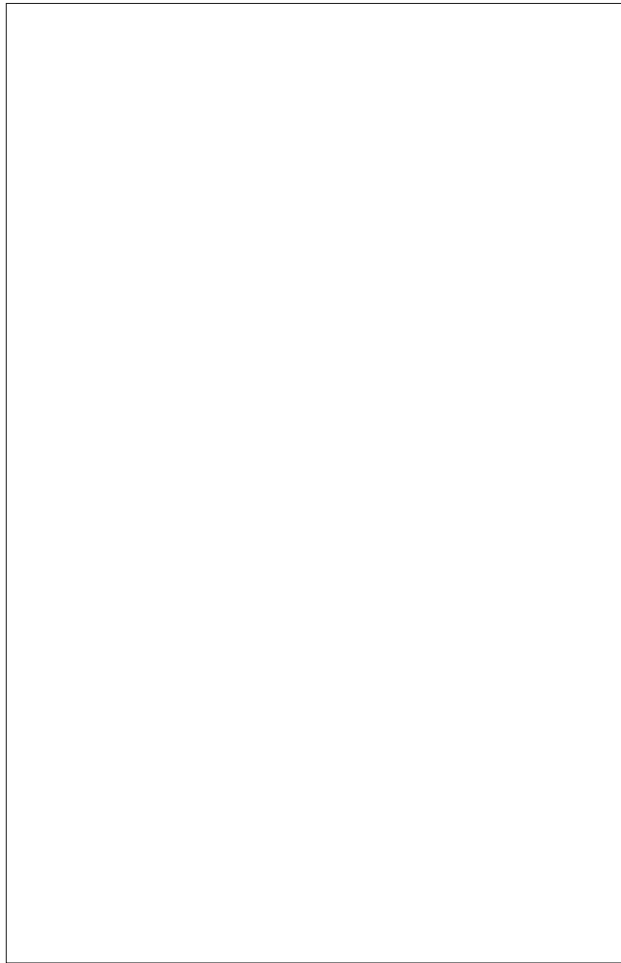
Trotsky later told another Italian Communist: “We had to press hard to convince him [Gramsci] to take a combative position against Bordiga and I don’t know whether we succeeded”.

Over the next years Gramsci did start arguing for united-front policies and against Bordiga. In his *Prison Notebooks* he continued to explore the issue. His agreement with Ravazzoli, Leonetti, and Tresso in 1930 reflected a conviction by then long and solidly held.

Trotsky at the Fourth Congress also gave Gramsci another theme which he would explore in the *Prison Notebooks*: the differences for revolutionary-socialist politics between a Western Europe with densely-organised civil societies, where socialists would have to tackle “heavy reserves” of the bourgeoisie before revolution, and a more loosely-knit Russia. Some writers on Gramsci have claimed that he deduced from that difference a policy for richer capitalist societies of gradual advance through cultural diffusion, in place of the activist party politics of the Bolsheviks in Russia. That deduction would have been as out of character for Gramsci as for Trotsky.

Trotsky: “In Europe we have a process differing profoundly from that in our country, because there the bourgeoisie is far better organised and more experienced, because there the petty-bourgeoisie has graduated from the school of the big bourgeoisie and is, in consequence, also far more powerful and experienced; and, in addition, the Russian Revolution has taught them a good deal...”

“[In Russia] the big bourgeoisie and the nobility had gained some political experience, thanks to the municipal dumas, the zemstvos, the state Duma, etc. The petty bourgeoisie had little political experience, and the bulk of the population, the peasantry, still less. Thus the main reserves of the counter-revolution — the well-to-do peasants (kulaks) and, to a degree, also the middle peasants — came precisely from this extremely amorphous milieu. And it was only



after the bourgeoisie began to grasp fully what it had lost by losing political power, and only after it had set in motion its counter-revolutionary combat nucleus, that it succeeded in gaining access to the peasant and petty-bourgeois elements and layers...”

“In countries that are older in the capitalist sense, and with a higher culture, the situation will, without doubt, differ profoundly. In these countries the popular masses will enter the revolution far more fully formed in political respects... The bourgeoisie in the West is preparing its counter-blow in advance. The bourgeoisie more or less knows what elements it will have to depend upon and it builds its counter-revolutionary cadres in advance...”

“It will hardly be possible to catch the European bourgeoisie by surprise as we caught the Russian bourgeoisie. The European bourgeoisie is more intelligent, and more far-sighted... The revolutionary proletariat will thus encounter on its road to power not only the combat vanguards of the counter-revolution but also its heaviest reserves...”

“But by way of compensation, after the proletarian overturn... the European proletariat will in all likelihood have far more elbow room for its creative work in economy and culture than we had in Russia... This general proposition must be dissected and concretised with regard to each country depending upon its social structure...”

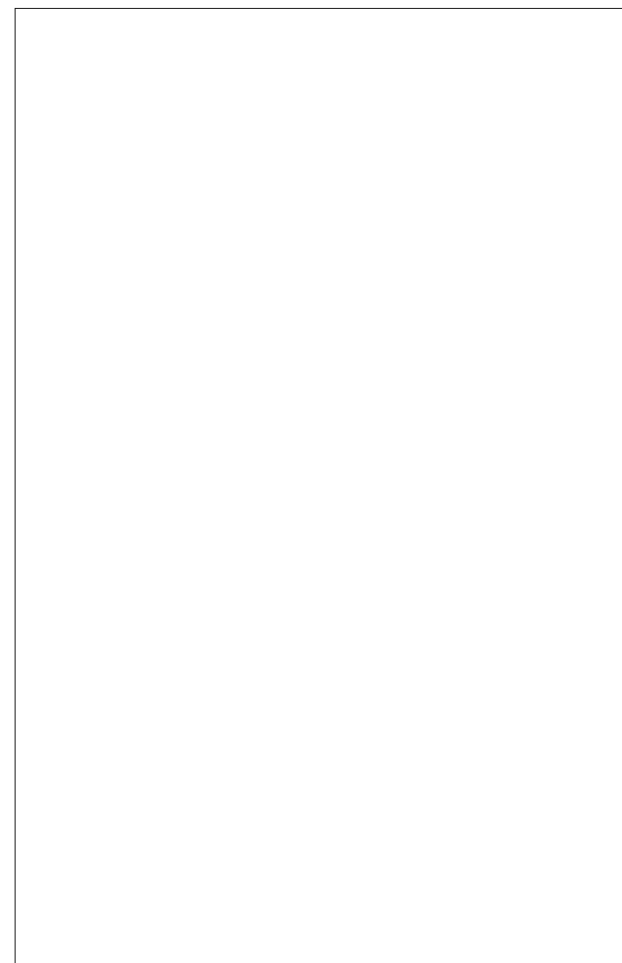
Gramsci wrote an essay on Italian futurism included in Trotsky’s book *Literature and Revolution*. Later, “the positions that Gramsci was to take on the relations between art and politics in the *Prison Notebooks* are... remarkably similar to those taken by Trotsky in the years 1923 and 1924, when he... led the campaign... to ‘reject party tutelage over science and art’.” (Rosengarten)

## VIENNA

**From Moscow, Gramsci went to Vienna, where he worked with Victor Serge, an activist in the Left Opposition to Stalin which emerged, around Trotsky, in 1923-4. Serge recalled in his memoirs that Gramsci was wary of the flood of careerist recruits brought into the Russian CP by Stalin and his allies after Lenin’s death in the same way that the Left Opposition was.**

“Trained intuitively in the dialectic, quick to uncover falsehood and transfix it with the sting of irony, [Gramsci] viewed the world with exceptional clarity. Once, we consulted together about the quarter-million workers who had been admitted at one stroke into the Russian Communist Party on the day after Lenin’s death [in 1924]. How much were these proletarians worth, if they had had to wait for the death of Vladimir Ilyich before coming to the Party...”

“When the crisis in Russia [between the Left Opposition and Stalin] began to worsen, Gramsci did not want to be broken in the process, so he had himself sent back to Italy by his Party”. (Taking his seat in the Italian parliament, won in



the April 1924 election, must have been the main motive. Gramsci may well also have been glad to get further afield from the Comintern centre).

Gramsci and Trotsky were both revolutionary Marxists. Yet Gramsci was not a Trotskyist, and Trotsky was not a Gramscian.

In February 1924 Gramsci had declared that the Left Opposition stood for “a greater measure of involvement on the part of the workers in the life of the party and a lessening of the powers of the bureaucracy, in order to assure to the revolution its socialist and working-class character”.

In a letter sent to Stalin’s Central Committee just before he was jailed in 1926, Gramsci still protested at Stalin’s bureaucratism, and for that reason the pliant Togliatti, then living in Moscow, suppressed the letter. But Gramsci now also went along with the demagogic argument from Stalin and Bukharin that the Joint Opposition of 1926-7 (drawing in Zinoviev and Kamenev as well as the 1923 Oppositionists) represented an economistic or workerist failure to understand the concessions necessary to the peasantry.

“In the ideology and practice of the opposition bloc is being fully reborn the entire tradition of social democracy and syndicalism which has thus far prevented the Western proletariat from organising itself into a ruling class”.

Gramsci was wrong on that: Stalin’s turn within two years to murderous terror against both the peasantry and the working class is ample proof.

In the *Prison Notebooks* Gramsci continued to conflate Trotsky’s ideas with those of Bordiga; or of Zinoviev from the period in 1924-5 when (in alliance, then, with Stalin) he pushed a blustering ultra-left line onto the Communist International; or even of the people in the early Communist Parties who said that revolutionary principle demanded a permanent “offensive”. “[Trotsky] can be considered the political theorist of frontal attack in a period in which it only leads to defeats”.

Even more oddly, Gramsci in the *Prison Notebooks* referred back to Trotsky’s speeches at the Fourth Congress of 1922, and then dismissed Trotsky with a sneer. “However, the question was outlined only in a brilliant, literary form, without directives of a practical character”.

Trotsky had explained very well the “directives of a practical character”, and the folly of permanent “frontal attack” — including to the initially-resistant Gramsci himself.

The early German Communist Party, explained Trotsky, “still felt as if it were a shell shot out of a cannon. It appeared on the scene and it seemed to it that it needed only shout its battle-cry, dash forward and the working class would rush to follow. It turned out otherwise...”

“The working class had been deceived more than once in

Continued on page 10

the past, it has every reason to demand that the party win its confidence... the need [was] for the Communists to conquer, in experience, in practice, in struggle, the confidence of the working class..

"A new epoch [of communist activity was necessary] which at first glance contains much that is, so to speak, prosaic, namely — agitation, propaganda, organization, conquest of the confidence of the workers in the day-to-day struggles".

The Communist Parties had to learn again, and adapt, much that was of enduring value from the tactics of the pre-1914 Marxist movement.

"Some comrades told us: And where is the guarantee that this organisational-agitational-educational work will not degenerate into the very same reformism, along the road travelled by the Second International? No guarantees are handed us from the outside. The guarantees arise from our work, our criticism, our self-criticism and our control".

United-front tactics were central to the "prosaic" work.

"We must conquer the confidence of the overwhelming majority of the toilers. This can and must be achieved in the course of struggle for the transitional demands under the general slogan of the proletarian united front".

In his writings on Germany in the 1930s, Trotsky would further explain that in advanced capitalist countries, with dense civil societies, the united front "from above" — agitation and organisation around demands directed at established reformist leaderships — was almost always an essential component. "Under the conditions existing in advanced capitalist countries, the slogan of 'only from below' is a gross anachronism, fostered by memories of the first stages of the revolutionary movement, especially in Czarist Russia".

Why did Gramsci "forget" all that? Trotsky was on the defensive in 1925, waiting quietly for a better occasion to rouse revolutionary opinion against Stalinism. Maybe that disoriented Gramsci. We cannot know.

Frank Rosengarten conjectures that in 1924-6 two "considerations weighed heavily on Gramsci and impelled him towards the condemnation of Trotskyism as factious and insubordinate". One was "the need to create a compactly organised, tightly disciplined, and ideologically unified Communist Party in Italy"; the other, "his belief that the dispute in the Soviet Union were to go on without a resolution of some sort, it would spell the doom of the entire Third International".

Gramsci went along for a while with early Stalinism. Maybe he did so because he could not yet see the issues clearly, did not want to be evicted and politically marginalised on grounds he was not sure of, and so could see no other choice. "I don't know yet" was not a permissible stance in the Comintern of 1926.

Trotsky was, surely, much sharper and clearer about Stalinism than Gramsci ever was.

## PARTY AND PROGRAMME

**1930 would show that, even if some attitudes to Trotsky "stuck" from 1926, Gramsci never went over to Stalinism. His *Prison Notebooks* argue for an open, intellectually-alive revolutionary socialist party.**

Both Gramsci and Trotsky emphasised, thought about, and wrote about the question of the revolutionary socialist party much more than other Marxists of their epoch.

The view, common today after the disorienting work of Stalinism, that it could make sense to be a revolutionary-socialist activist but organise only on the trade-union or campaign level and not on that of revolutionary-socialist party-building, would have seemed to them too nonsensical to argue with. The question for both Gramsci and Trotsky was not *whether* to work to build a revolutionary-socialist party, but *what sort of party, and how*.

Gramsci, in a passage in the *Prison Notebooks* where he appears to be thinking about the risk of fascist repression pulverising his party, saw the building of a clearly-defined and educated activist core as primary:

"This element is endowed with... the power of innovation (innovation, be it understood, in a certain direction, according to certain lines of force, certain perspectives, even certain premises)... This element [could not] form the party alone; however, it could do so more than the first element considered [i.e. the eventual relatively-loose mass membership]... The existence of a united group of generals who agree among themselves and have common aims soon creates an army even where none exists..."

"The criteria by which the [activist core] should be judged are to be sought 1. in what it actually does; 2. in what provision it makes for the eventuality of its own destruction... the preparation of... successors".

There is nothing in Gramsci's writings comparable to Trotsky's explanation, in *Lessons of October* that "a party crisis is inevitable in the transition from preparatory revolutionary activity to the immediate struggle for power. Generally speaking, crises arise in the party at every serious turn in the party's course..." — from which it follows that the party has to develop a breadth of education and pluralism of cadre to allow for rapid shifts in balance and in leadership.

But some questions were studied more by Gramsci than by Trotsky.

In 1922 Trotsky had argued that revolutionary-socialist

parties needed to relearn "prosaic... organisational-agitational-educational work", and for "criticism, self-criticism, and control" to stop the resulting *inevitable and even proper* conservatism of "habits and methods of work" becoming noxious. Trotsky left much to develop on what that "criticism, self-criticism, and control" in "prosaic" work would mean.

He explained the difference between a transitional-demand approach, and that of the old minimum/maximum programme scheme of the pre-1914 Marxists; but the overwhelming focus of Trotsky's writings from 1917 to 1940, was on sketching how a Marxist organisation (and, from the late 20s, a *small* Marxist organisation) could fluidify a miscongealed labour movement in *acute crises*. Many of his explanations of transitional demands were closely interwoven with pictures of acute crisis, and difficult to unweave for use in other times.

Explosions and catastrophes followed fast on each other. From the early 1930s, Trotsky was convinced both that capitalism was in intractable agony, and that the USSR was so acutely unstable that it could be assessed only as a temporary concatenation of elements bound to fly apart, one way or another, very soon.

All that was for good reason, but "one-sided".

Gramsci, stuck in prison, developed a longer-term focus on processes of preparation. "The decisive element in every situation is the permanently organised and long-prepared force which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favourable (and it can be favourable only in so far as such a force exists, and is full of fighting spirit). Therefore the essential task is that of systematically and patiently ensuring that this force is formed, developed, and rendered ever more homogeneous, compact, and self-aware".

What were the necessary elements of "criticism, self-criticism, and control" in that "systematic and patient" activity?

## PHILOSOPHY

**Gramsci discussed philosophy and perspectives. There was a drift in the pre-1914 Marxist movement — by no means universal, but eventually dominant — to split perspectives into two levels.**

On one level, capitalism would move forward economically, creating larger and more concentrated working classes and bringing on itself worse and worse crises. On another, the educational and organisational work of the socialists, instructing workers in the truths derived from statistical observation of economic development, would make the labour movement stronger. Socialist revolution would come when the two lines met in a definitive capitalist crisis and a majority-supported socialist movement.

Gramsci: "In politics the assumption of the law of statistics as an essential law operating of necessity is not only a scientific error but becomes a practical error in action... Political action tends precisely to rouse the masses from passivity, in other words to destroy the law of large numbers. So how can that law be considered a law of sociology?..."

With a big revolutionary party, "knowledge... on the part of the leaders is no longer the product of hunches backed up by the identification of statistical laws, which leaders then translate into ideas and words-as-force... Rather it is acquired by the collective organism through 'active and conscious co-participation', through 'compassionality', through experience of immediate particulars, through a system which one could call 'living philology'..." ["philology" is the study of how languages or words develop historically].

"Only to the extent to which the objective aspect of prediction is linked to a programme does it acquire its objectivity: 1. because strong passions are necessary to sharpen the intellect and help make intuition more penetrating; 2. because reality is a product of the application of human will to the society of things... therefore if one excludes all voluntarist elements, or if it is only other people's wills whose intervention one reckons as an objective element in the general interplay of forces, one mutilates reality itself".

As he showed in his writings on schooling, Gramsci was not a naive enthusiast of learning-by-doing. He recognised the necessity of formal "instruction". But he integrated it as an element within a "philosophy of praxis" which, even if it has serious lacunae, is far more enlightening than what became the Stalinist scheme of a "Marxist philosophy" based on alleged iron laws of natural development.

Gramsci reconceptualised the way in which a revolutionary socialist party must strive to educate the working class as the activity of a collective "democratic philosopher" and "permanently active persuader".

He argued that political polemic must proceed differently from military battle, in which wisdom is to seek the opposition's weakest points. "On the ideological front... the defeat of the auxiliaries and the minor hangers-on is of all but negligible importance. It is necessary to engage battle with the most eminent of one's adversaries... if the end proposed is that of raising the tone and intellectual level of one's followers and not just... of creating a desert around oneself by all means possible".

Where the Catholic church had kept together learned people and a mass following by "imposing an iron discipline on the intellectuals", the socialist movement must avoid "restricting scientific activity" and instead organise a continual process of intellectual interchange and levelling-up.

Much of Trotsky's attention was focused on frantic short-term alternatives of revolution and catastrophe. The pre-1914 Marxist movement had tended to see capitalist development as linear evolution. Gramsci developed another concept, "passive revolution", or "revolution/restoration", of processes in which a ruling class extends itself and reshapes society by absorbing or decapitating other elements.

By 1938, under the pressure of events, Trotsky had drifted into a too-absolute "negativism" about capitalism, which he saw as able only to descend deeper into chaos. In parallel, his urgent search for revolutionary recompositions of the labour movement had drifted into an unrealistic overestimation of the possibilities for small socialist groups to find ways to "switch the points" (as he once put it) for the "train" of an already-existing but misled socialist workers' movement.

In some passages of the Transitional Programme, therefore, as in the famous one about the "crisis of humanity" being "reduced to the crisis of leadership", the prospect of revolution appears in almost mystical form, as a sudden apocalyptic coming-together of elemental mass working-class rage and a revolutionary leadership prepared by pure willpower.

Perhaps Trotsky had no choice but to make this "error", or else resign himself to defeatism in a situation where the labour movement faced dramatic short-term choices to mobilise for revolution, or be crushed. For sure, abstracted, crudified, and dogmatised versions of his vision would contribute to much sectarian posturing in the decades that followed.

Against that posturing — not Trotsky's, but in a certain sense Trotskyist — Gramsci has much to teach us.

In an economic, barebones-Marxist scheme, he wrote, everything "appears as a moralistic accusation of duplicity and bad faith, or... of naivety and stupidity. Thus the political struggle is reduced to a series of personal affairs between on the one hand those with the genie in the lamp who know everything and on the other those who are fooled by their own leaders but are so incurably thick that they refuse to believe it".

Thinking is often warped by a belief in "objective laws of historical development similar in kind to natural laws, together with a belief in a predetermined teleology like that of a religion: since favourable conditions are inevitably going to appear, and since these, in a rather mysterious way, will bring about paligenetic events [regenerating events, i.e., revolutions], it is evident that any deliberate initiative tending to predispose and plan these conditions is not only useless but even harmful. Side by side with these fatalistic beliefs however, there exists the tendency 'thereafter' to rely blindly and indiscriminately on the regulatory properties of armed conflict..."

"In such modes of thinking, no account is taken of the 'time' factor, nor in the last analysis even of 'economics'. For there is no understanding of the fact that mass ideological factors always lag behind mass economic phenomena, and that therefore, at certain moments, the automatic thrust due to the economic factor is slowed down, obstructed or even momentarily broken by traditional ideological elements — hence that there must be a conscious, planned struggle to ensure that the exigencies of the economic position of the masses, which may conflict with the traditional leadership's policies, are understood.

**"An appropriate political initiative is always necessary to liberate the economic thrust from the dead weight of traditional policies..."**

• This article draws on Peter Thomas's talk on "Gramsci and Trotsky" to the AWL London Forum, 29 June, and on Frank Rosengarten's article, "The Gramsci-Trotsky Question", *Social Text* #11, 1984-5.

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## Southampton strikes spread

By Darren Bedford

**Unite and Unison have given Southampton City Council notice that unless the council lifts the threat of mass redundancies, due to come into effect on Monday 11 July, their six-week long strike will spread to more groups of workers.**

Building maintenance workers, who carry out repairs on council housing stock, and Port Health Officers, who provide health protection within Southampton port and oil refinery, through inspection and certification of cruise liners, containers and oil tankers, will join the strike from 11 July unless the council backs

down.

The impact of those workers joining the action would be enormous. Southampton's port brings in around £300 million each year and could grind to a complete standstill if the strike is solid.

The 11 July round of action will also involve workers in waste and recycling, street cleansing, libraries, toll collection and parking enforcement. It is part of a creative strategy of indefinite rolling strikes whereby unions mobilise different sections of the workforce in order to apply the maximum ongoing pressure to management. By bringing workers central to the running of Southampton's port and oil refinery into battle, the

unions are significantly ratcheting up the potential impact of the dispute.

Unite regional officer Ian Woodland said "[Council leaders] Royston Smith and Jeremy Moulton must wake up now to how serious this city's council employees are about getting justice. There is absolutely no need for this city to force people onto lower wages — to do so is a malicious attempt to bully worried working people into accepting any terms in order to hang onto their jobs. Our great port will now suffer badly thanks to the stubbornness of the council leadership. They know full well there is a better way forward and it ought to have dawned on them that the people of

this city do not believe their dire propaganda about Southampton's finances."

**ARMAGEDDON**  
Woodland dubbed 11 July "Armageddon Day" for the council and reminded bosses that the lifting of the sackings threat is the key demand of workers in this dispute.

He reminded them, however, that the lifting of the threat would only guarantee a suspension — not a cancellation — of the action.

Described as "the UK's Wisconsin" because it mirrors Republican governor Scott Walker's attempts to break the power of public

sector unions in his state, the Southampton dispute — perhaps more so than even the 30 June strikes — represents the most important landmark in terms of labour movement resistance to the coalition's cuts agenda. It is the one major dispute where unions have fought to win on the basis of sustained action and a high-level of rank-and-file participation and control. If the Southampton workers win, their victory will rock local government bosses throughout the country. If they lose, it will be a massive setback for all of us.

**For more information, and details on how you can support the dispute, see: [soton-unison-office.org.uk](http://soton-unison-office.org.uk)**

## Raising debate at Marxism 2011



**By Dan Rawnsley**  
Workers' Liberty members always attend the SWP's "Marxism" festival (this year 30 June-4 July) because we firmly support debate on the left.

We run a stall, sell *Solidarity*, and organise fringe meetings to discuss things we believe are missing from the main agenda. We also try to intervene in the sessions to put across our ideas and engage other socialists in a discussion.

This is difficult at times. For example in the session on anti-fascism (a controversial topic on the left), "comments from the floor" were taken from a pre-arranged list. Hence no debate.

This is what's wrong with "Marxism" — the SWP go to great lengths to avoid "divisive" debate; they have to have people convinced that the SWP's line is the only worthwhile one. Then they thrust membership forms at people as they leave the room.

Apart from being anti-democratic it can be counterproductive. A woman who came to one of our fringe meetings specifically complained about this.

That said, the discussions we had with SWP members were largely civil and comradely. For example two activists came to discuss Israel and Palestine with us. I had the feeling one was an organiser trying to "expose" us in front of a newer member. When he was losing the argument, he tried to send his newer comrade off to pick up a stray newspaper sheet. But the debate remained calm, forcing the SWP members to present politics, rather than bluster.

We ran two successful fringe meetings, one on Libya and NATO intervention and another on the call for a general strike. Both allowed for a wide ranging discussion.

I think to those for whom it was an introduction to the way Workers' Liberty does debate, it provided an engaging space in which ideas could be seriously thrashed out. What is the point in being on the left unless you want to raise your own and other people's political ideas to a higher level?

## Rail workers plan to fight McNulty

By Becky Crocker, RMT conference delegate

**At the Annual General Meeting (conference) of the rail union RMT (26 June to 1 July), the key debate was about the recently-announced McNulty Report on the rail industry.**

Although rail spending post-privatisation has risen due to the privateers themselves, the report recommends further deregulation of the industry. All recommended savings will be from cuts to staffing levels, wages and conditions. This is a class-motivated attack on our unionised workforce; as one delegate put it: "this is our miners' strike".

Is our union up to the challenge? The leadership moved a motion for a vigorous public and political campaign, which was passed unanimously. It is encouraging to see the leadership taking these attacks seriously. Bob Crow's keynote speech of the conference was a battle cry to defeat McNulty.

But some speakers from

the floor went further and hinted that an industrial strategy is needed. One reminded the leadership to update membership records for taking industrial action, saying "we're ready to fight, bring us out!" Another said, "This unites us all, something we've not seen since the old BR days. We can win this". In the coming months, Workers' Liberty will need to build on the union's defiant stance, extending the debate about the combination of political and industrial strategy that will defeat these attacks.

International speakers also hinted at tough times ahead. Bob Kinnear from the Amalgamated Transit Union in Toronto, Canada, told us how the Ontario state government banned transit workers' strikes, under the banner of "essential services", the same sort of thing that London Mayor Boris Johnson is attempting. Bob Kinnear told us that 50% of their workforce were in favour of losing the right to strike, so it was pertinent that the conference unanimously passed a motion initiated



**Rail worker activists protested in Liverpool against the cuts package proposed by the McNulty report. The demonstration heard speakers from all three main rail unions (RMT, TSSA and ASLEF) as well as local labour movement activists. They were protesting outside the BT Conference Centre, which was hosting a conference sponsored by private transport firm Merseytravel and chaired by Tory ideologue Steven Norris.**

by Workers' Liberty members on educating RMT members about the importance of industrial action in the face of impending threats.

**RANK-AND-FILE**  
Other issues showed that the rank-and-file need to force the leadership to take up issues with their full seriousness.

Peter Pinkney from Teesside berated the union for effectively abandoning the Network Rail dispute

after strike action was injected in Easter 2010. Liverpool Branch won an appeal against the way the union had agreed changes to pay cycles with Network Rail. The key issue was that "members had wanted a say".

London Transport Region also won a victory for rank-and-file democracy. A set of proposals generated by a local reps' meeting had been voted down by the leadership. Assistant General Secretary Pat Sikorski defended this decision by saying the union

should listen to "senior" but not local reps. We persuaded the conference to overturn that elitist decision.

Despite hearing trade unionists speak from Canada, New York, New Zealand, and even having to sit through a Cuban "trade unionist" defending the Cuban government, we had a more difficult time in persuading the RMT to welcome the burgeoning independent Egyptian trade union movement.

The leadership's argument is that we must tread carefully until we know more. I gave a detailed speech about the record of bravery of this movement. It was sadly not enough to dissuade the conference from following the leadership. But Workers' Liberty members made a powerful case that will not be forgotten.

**Even in a militant union, such as the RMT, there is still a need for the input of Workers' Liberty members to advocate serious fights, rank-and-file democracy, and real working-class internationalism.**

### In brief

**SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL**  
6,500 workers at Tory-controlled Shropshire Council face the sack as their employer becomes the latest local authority to use the threat of mass redundancies as a way to undermine collective bargaining and bully workers into accepting worse

### conditions.

Workers must agree to a 5.4% pay cut by 30 September if they want to keep their jobs, as the council seeks to make £76 million of cuts.

Unfortunately the response from Unison, which represents 40% of all workers at the authority, has been less than stirring. "We are advising our members to do nothing", Unison spokesman Alan James said.

**CITY CLEANERS**  
The syndicalist union In-

**dustrial Workers of the World reports that its members working as early morning cleaners at Guildhall in the City of London have staged a two-shift strike in protest at the non-payment of wages.**

Workers sat in the reception area of cleaning contractor Ocean's offices for the duration of their two-hour shift on the mornings of 14 and 15 June. The IWW describes the situation as "on a knife-edge", with bosses promising to make good the shortfall in

next month's pay packet.

**FAWLEY LOCK-OUT**  
Unrest in the engineering construction industry continues as 20 GMB members have been locked out of their jobs.

The workers, employed by PTF Engineering at the Fawley Refinery in Southampton (currently operated by Exxon Mobil) were locked out after the contract PTF held was re-tendered and taken over by Hertel, a Middlesbrough-based contractor. The other 80 workers employed

under the PTF contract, not members of the GMB, have been taken on by Hertel.

Workers have been protesting at Fawley itself, and the GMB plans further protests at Hertel's offices in Middlesbrough.

**LONDON POSTAL WORKERS**  
Postal workers in London have registered a score draw with management in a battle over job losses and closures.

• For more, see [bit.ly/qA51e5](http://bit.ly/qA51e5)

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## Ed Miliband condemns strikes

# UNIONS: MAKE LABOUR CHANGE COURSE!

By Colin Foster

**The National Union of Teachers has followed up the 30 June strike against pension cuts with a proclamation that it is fighting for Fair Pensions For All, including a fair deal on the state pension and levelling-up for private-sector workers.**

It's a good move. The Government's planned changes to public sector pensions go hand-in-hand with changes to state pensions (raising the pension age, freezing Pension Credit), and interweave in a more complicated way in the process, already well advanced, of trashing private-sector pension schemes.

The Government will be defeated, and civilised pension provision for all established, only by a campaign which combines three elements:

- "demonstration strikes" like 30 June;
- selective and rolling strikes by strategically-chosen groups of workers whose action can have maximum economic impact, sustained by strike levies;
- lively, vigorous political campaigning.

### DIVIDE

**Mehdi Hasan of the New Statesman (no left-winger: why did the union leaders leave it to him?) has recently confirmed what Solidarity has long argued: that the big "pensions divide" "is not between private sector and public sector — as usual, it's between the rich and the rest of us".**

A recent Incomes Data Services report shows that directors in Britain's top 100 companies average a pension pot of £2.8 million — enough to buy each one

an annuity of £170,000 a year.

Many directors can earn their full pension after only 20 years service, while it takes MPs just 26 years. Most workers take between 35 and 40 years to accrue a full pension (and the Government wants to make accrual rates even worse).

The Government pays tax relief on pension contributions of £37 billion. 60 per cent of that goes to the very well-off (higher rate taxpayers), and 25 per cent to the rich (the top one per cent).

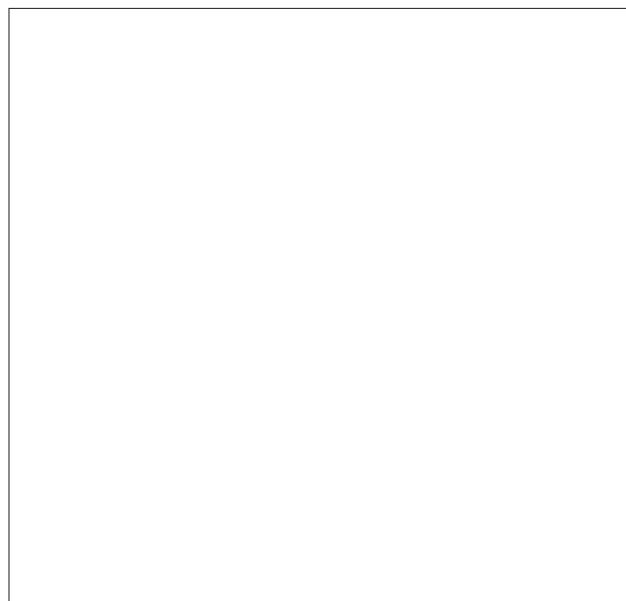
The unions should launch a political campaign demanding decent pensions for all, funded by *taxing the rich and big business*. They should tie it together with defence of the Health Service against the Government's marketisation plans, and defence of welfare benefits.

And the unions should be demanding that the Labour Party help them. The Labour-affiliated unions should be *insisting* that the Labour Party help them.

Labour Party leader Ed Miliband denounced the 30 June strike by using the same learned-by-heart soundbite again and again. The small print of his statements criticised the Government. But his headline message was — and he knew it would be — opposition to the strike.

Even Miliband's small-print criticisms of the Government included absolutely no commitment that the next Labour administration will reverse its measures and restore rights.

We have a government making cuts which even its own ministers nervously label "Maoist" and sure to make them unpopular — and the Labour leader spends his time denounc-



Right now he is going along with the New Labour diehards

ing *resistance to the Government*...

The Welsh Labour Party leaders, no more left-wing than Ed Miliband, could see that was stupid, and backed the strike. But Ed Miliband has diehard-Blairite apparatchiks twisting his arm.

Using their positions in the wonkosphere of New Labour, they have bullied the feeble Miliband into such stances, all the better to discredit him and in due course to evict him and replace him by one of their own.

Behind the scenes, Ed Miliband has also gone along with having "the Leader's office" back old-style Blairite hatchet-man Chris Lennie for new Labour general secretary, against the union nominee Iain McNicol.

All this tells us is that Miliband is under far less pressure from the unions than from the wonkosphere.

The unions need to change things. Threats about the withdrawal of funding can help shake up

the debate, but mostly the unions need to use their weight within the Labour Party structures to demand that those structures are opened out to democracy and Labour Party leaders support the labour movement in its basic campaigns.

They should start delivering on that in the next few months, as we move towards the Labour Party conference (25-29 September) which will decide on a review of party structure and policy.

"Unions Together" / TULO, the umbrella body for Labour-affiliated unions, should campaign positively, actively and openly for the democratic reforms it has included in its submission to the Labour Party's structural review, and back other democratic rule changes coming up for a vote in September.

As yet it hasn't even made its proposals public to union activists on its website, let alone started campaigning for them!

*Continued on page 5*

## Traveller families face eviction Defend Dale Farm!

By Bill Holmes

**Eviction notices have been served to 51 traveller families on the Dale Farm site in Essex, sparking a call for activists to help defend their homes.**

Basildon Council has served the notices which give them until the end of August to leave Dale Farm, which was first occupied in 2001.

Travellers at the site — the largest in Europe, and home to around 400 people — have offered to leave peacefully if alternative plots are provided for them. But the council has never made any serious attempt — despite legal obligations — to do that.

The cost of enforcing the eviction has been put at more than £10 million, with finance coming from the Home Office, Essex Police, Basildon Council, the Department for Communities and Local Government and others.

They could spend the money protecting jobs and services for everyone in the local community. Or on establishing community facilities that might bring travellers and local working-class people together.

This eviction is the persecution of a minority community. It is a racist act by a vicious Tory council. There is a long history of persecution of gypsies and travellers — including the genocide of the European Roma people by Nazi Germany. The politicians who are making hundreds of people homeless show very little "sensitivity".

Activists are being urged to join a resistance to the eviction.

A call-out has been made for supporters to join Camp Constant on Friday July 29 so they cannot send in the bulldozers.

**It is important that activists who want to get involved contact the Dale Farm campaign to find out how: <http://dalefarm.wordpress.com>. Or search on Facebook for Dale Farm Solidarity.**

## Richer than ever

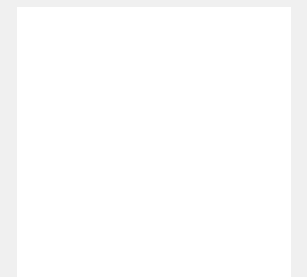
By James  
Bloodworth

**According to a new report, the world's wealthiest are getting more prosperous by the day.**

The annual World Wealth report by Merrill Lynch and Capgemini shows that the wealth of "high net worth individuals" (HNWIs) around the world reached \$42.7 trillion (£26.5 trillion) in 2010, rising nearly 10% on the previous year and surpassing the peak of \$40.7 trillion reached in 2007.

In Britain the wealth of the 1,000 richest individuals — as measured by the *Sunday Times* — was £333.5 billion in 2010. After a year of everyone being exhorted to pull together and share the burden, the wealth of this top 1,000 had increased to £395.8 billion.

The rich making fortunes on the backs of others is nothing new of course. The UK Chief Executive of Tesco was paid £5 million in 2005. In the same year the average



**Nat Rothschild will soon be splashing out £1 million on his 40th birthday bash at an exclusive resort in Montenegro. Small change for him. He is worth a thousand times that amount.**

Tesco employee was paid £12,713. Is the Chief Executive of Tesco 430 times more industrious and productive than the average Tesco employee?

But the wealth of these "entrepreneurs" and "tycoons" ultimately comes from the sweat and hard work of the majority.

**In the midst of austerity, however, what the figures do show is that there are some cuts we desperately need: cuts to the wealth of the super-rich!**