



For a
workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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www.workersliberty.org



Workers at Doncaster Care UK, who earn just £7 an hour, have struck 48 times. They fighting wage cuts and for a Living Wage, and to ensure the vulnerable adults they support continue to get a decent service.

HOW TO FIGHT POVERTY PAY

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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



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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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East Ukraine bombarded

By Dale Street

Fighting in the south-east of Ukraine between government forces and Russian-backed separatists continues.

According to the Ukrainian authorities: the separatists have suffered a series of military setbacks, their morale is low, and desertion from their ranks is rife.

According to the separatists: the Ukrainian forces have suffered a series of military setbacks, their morale is low, and desertion from their ranks is rife.

What is clear is that for several weeks three major urban centres — Donetsk, Lugansk and Gorlovka — have been subjected to daily military bombardment. This cannot have failed to have resulted in widespread casualties and physical destruction.

Less clear is the extent to which the separatists are able to continue to rely on support from within Russia.

The Ukrainian authorities



Separatist militia member inspects damage in Donetsk

are simultaneously claiming that (factions within) the Russian authorities are preparing to abandon the rebels, and that (factions within) the Russian authorities have stepped up supplies of new fighters and military equipment to the separatists.

Russian fascists and ultra-nationalists organised around the newspaper *Zavtra*, the TV station "Djen" and the fascist "think tank" Izborsky Club are continu-

ing to politically agitate and raise material support for the separatists.

And there is certainly reliable evidence that new fighters and high-tech military equipment are continuing to cross the Russian-Ukrainian border into Ukraine.

What began as a popular protest against government corruption and indifference to economic and social decline in the south-east has now become a political proj-

ect by Russian fascists to recreate Novorossiia, and a means for certain factions within the Russian authorities to destabilise Ukraine.

It has also become an opportunity for Ukrainian politicians to drape themselves in the Ukrainian flag and deflect opposition to their anti-working-class economic policies by invoking the need to defeat the "Russian mercenaries" in the south-east.

Nationalists demand: Troops In Now!

By Dale Street

"Death to liberals! Death to anarchists! Long live Novorossiia! Long live Russia!" enthused Aleksei Zhivov (leader of the Right-Conservative Alliance) in concluding last Saturday's rally in Moscow in support of "Russian Donbas".

The rally had been organised by the "Battle for Donbas" coalition, set up in June as a coalition of nineteen far-right Russian-nationalist organisations.

According to the coalition's pre-rally press release, the event had a very basic political message:

"We are holding a rally to support Novorossiia, the militia of Strelkov, and the liberation of Kiev from American occupiers and Ukrainian Russophobes, ... (and to oppose) the new project of Ukrainian Nazism which is full of hatred for Russia and Russians, the Russian-Orthodox religion, and the shared thousand-year history of Little Russia and Great Russia."

"Donbas must survive! Donbas must win! We call (on Russia) to provide mili-

tary-technical support to the Donbas militia and, if necessary, to carry out targeted missile-strikes on the mercenary forces of the Kiev junta."

Placards among the 3,000-strong crowd carried the same message: "Crimea is Russian — the Battle for the Donbas Continues", "Our Name is: Strelkov", "Putin — Send in the Troops", "Either Putin and Strelkov, Or You Are a Traitor", and "Radio Echo Moscow — Fifth Column in the Mass Media — Clear Out of Russia."

(Radio Echo Moscow is one of the few Russian broadcasters which criticise Putin. It has been regularly denounced by Russian nationalists as "the enemy within". When Zhivov called for "death to liberals", he referred specifically to its journalists.)

Apart from a speech, via video-link, by the Donetsk People's Republic People's Governor Pavel Gubarev, the main speaker at the rally was Alexander Dugin, leader of the Eurasian wing of Russian fascism.

His demands were simple: "Behind the Kiev junta stands the USA, and they will not tolerate a strong,

free, proud and victorious Russia. Putin, recognise the Lugansk People's Republic and the Donetsk People's Republic. Putin, send in the troops!"

In his opening contribution Zhivov, the rally's main organiser, cited Russia's annexation of Crimea as the model to follow:

"If you want to be friends with a Europe in which Gay Parades take place, then you can be friends with it. But without us. The Crimea staged a referendum and our President united Crimea with Russia. Crimea was saved! And the all the rest of Ukraine can be saved in the same way as well."

"They have declared war on us, we must be united and stand in solidarity, defending the Russian world. Long live Strelkov!" continued Zhivov. The crowd chanted back: "Hurrah! Putin — give the order to the troops!"

Other speakers spoke of the "war against Russia in the Donbas" and called for the use of Russian troops to "liberate" Lugansk and Donetsk" and then "Russian Kiev" as well. One of the official banners on the stage also carried the slogan: "Battle for Kievian

Rus'."

The speakers' contributions were not always consistent with one another.

A Ukrainian journalist who spoke of the horrors of war, for example, was immediately followed by a speaker from the Movement for the Legalisation of Handguns, who called on members of the Duma to immediately return from their holidays and pass emergency laws allowing the creation of private military companies.

The rally was followed by "a two-hour-long fundraising patriotic concert in support of Igor Strelkov and a free Donbas." The music was doubtlessly of the same calibre as the speeches.

A Popular Front for Russian nationalism

A dossier on the left and the Yalta "anti-war" conference

● bit.ly/1pMElbg

Local government workers, all out on 14 October

By Dave Pannett

Local government workers and most school support staff (members of Unison, GMB, and Unite) will strike again on Tuesday 14 October, following the mass strike on 10 July (which involved a greater number of unions).

Members of Unison, GMB, Unite, and the Royal College of Midwives in the

NHS will also be balloted for strikes from late August, and could join a 14 October strike if the ballot returns a yes vote.

For those of us in Unison, it had appeared that, for the first time in years, an attempt was being made to set out a serious strategy on pay. This involved:

- A clear industrial demand (a £1 per hour increase, or the Living Wage, whichever was higher),

rather than nebulous opposition to some government attack which in practise simply amounted to a demand for further negotiations.

- Coordination with other unions, not just in local government but with an NUT strike in schools, as well as with the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), who had their own live disputes.

- A planned escalation with Unison's Local Government Service Group Executive discussing a two-day strike on 9 and 10 September.

- A strike ballot of Unison members in the NHS, opening up another front in the pay battle against the government.

We have now faltered. The 14 October strike will almost certainly involve fewer unions, will be for just a single day, and will take place after a pause of three months during which much momentum will be lost. So what went wrong?

Unfortunately, what goes on in union headquarters is rarely shared with members. Instead of calling cross-union meetings of activists in branches, regions, and national committees to discuss strategy, it has been left to full-time officials, largely outside of demo-



cratic control.

The Unison officials dropped their plan for a 9-10 September strike (it's not clear why), and announced a 30 September strike instead. But only days after, NUT said it would not strike, and GMB and Unite said they would not strike until mid-October. The 14 October strike was then announced jointly with GMB and Unite. The dispute has been deliberately de-escalated.

Following "legal advice", Unison decided not to ballot thousands of its members in schools (perhaps up to 50% of its schools membership), as they were employed by Academies or Free Schools. GMB did ballot their members in these school. Was their legal advice different from Unison's? Do union leaderships even communi-

cate about these matters?

Unison's decision not to ballot those members meant the dispute was weakened.

While a Unison-only strike would certainly have been less effective than a joint strike (particularly as GMB often has higher density among certain groups of local government workers, such as refuse collectors, whose strikes put more immediate and visible pressure on employers), whether the abandonment of the 30 September strike, and the delay until 14 October, was, in the final analysis "the right decision", is a moot point. The question is: how were these decisions made, and where was the accountability?

The lack of an independent rank-and-file network within any of the local government unions, or across

them, is a big problem. Such a network could have acted to demand members' meetings to discuss strategy, and put pressure on the union leaderships to escalate the dispute. We are seeing the same democratic deficit that hobbled the 2011 pension. Union members cannot allow ourselves to be treated as a stage army for our leaders.

WHERE NOW?

Every local government union activist should build for 14 October to be as strong as possible.

We should demand Unison and other NHS unions announce, in advance, that health workers will also join that strike if their ballot returns a yes vote.

Unions should put their full resources into upping the momentum in the dispute: calling local actions, including members' meetings, public rallies, demonstrations, and regular stalls and leafleting, between now and 14 October to raise the profile of the issue, and help NHS union activists turn out the vote in the strike ballot.

Crucially, strikes beyond 14 October — for more than one day, and considering targeted and selective action — should be announced in advance.

Health ballot: vote yes!

NHS workers will be balloted for strikes from late August until mid-late September.

Unions are demanding a decent pay deal, after Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt refused to implement even the 1% increase recommended by the NHS Pay Review Board.

Unison's ballot runs from 28 August to 18 September and Unite's from 26 August to 26 September. The Royal College of Midwives has said it will ballot members "during September". GMB will also be balloting its members across August and September.

Activists say that some union officials have hinted that, if the ballot returns a yes vote, walkouts of only 2-4 hours, rather than a full day's strike, will be called. Some officials argue that this will still be disruptive, but will hit lower-paid staff less than a whole-day strike.

No form of action should be fetishised, and if workers genuinely feel that shorter walkouts will be more effective than full-day strikes, they should be considered. But the financial hardship argument could be eliminated at a stroke if unions levied strike funds to support lower-paid members.

And if unions dedicate their full resources to mobilising a high turnout and a strong yes vote in the strike ballot, they could also build up workers' confidence to strike for a full day.

Tories' anti-union stunt hits buffers

By Darren Bedford

Bruce Carr, the QC appointed by the government to review the anti-union laws, has said that his report will make no recommendations.

He expressed "concern" about "the ability of the review to operate in a progressively politicised environment in the run up to the next general election", and said that while he would still publish a report, it would not provide "a sound basis for making recommendations for change."

The Carr Review was commissioned in November 2013 after the Unite dispute at Grangemouth, amidst much rhetoric from right-wingers that new laws were needed to prevent "bully-

ing" and "harassment" during industrial disputes. The Tories were also pushing for tougher laws governing strike ballots.

The collapse of the review, and Carr's effective admission that he was forced to be the front man for a Tory election stunt, is a welcome development for trade unionists. But it should not be a cause for complacency. The Tories have already said they could include commitments to new anti-union laws, including a minimum threshold for strike ballots, in their manifesto for the 2015 election.

Unions need an active campaign against the anti-union laws, and for a positive charter of workers' rights.

Killing shows institutionalised racism of US police

By Beth Redmond

Michael Brown, a black 18 year-old, was killed on 9 August by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri.

Brown was unarmed, making his way to his grandma's house with a friend when, according to witnesses, a police vehicle pulled over and tried to drag him into the car.

Brown ran away and was shot. He then raised his

arms to prove he had no weapon and was shot twice more.

The police on the other hand state that there was a "scuffle" which led to Brown assaulting a police officer, causing him to be shot "multiple times".

Tensions between the police and the local community rose during the following days. The city of Ferguson has a population of 120 000, around two thirds of which are black.

Hundreds of people entered the streets to protest at what had happened. At its height on Saturday, local police called for 60 other units to "settle the crowd", who were chanting phrases such as "kill the police".

On Sunday, it was reported that the protests had turned to riots, with shops being looted and windows and cars being destroyed.

When contrasted with the many white men who

have committed massacres and shot themselves before they have been shot by police, it isn't hard to see how bad institutionalised racism is in the US police.

Brown's family have retained the services of civil rights attorney Benjamin Crump, who represented Trayvon Martin's family, a young black man who was shot and killed in 2012 by George Zimmerman, who claimed self-defence.

Duggan campaign appeals for witnesses

By Louise Baty

At a vigil to mark the three years since Mark Duggan was shot by police, Carole Duggan made an appeal for fresh witnesses to come forward.

The Justice for Mark Duggan campaign made the appeal directly to the campaign, giving a campaign phone number on posters that have been posted around the area where

Mark was shot. Carole Duggan said "If you don't want to speak to the IPCC, who we know are not fit for purpose, we have a hotline number where you can speak to any member of the campaign."

There is good reasons for campaigns talking over evidence and witness reports together prior to going to the police. This allows campaigners to discuss and decide the best approach to the police, and how to respond if the police do not use the evidence as we wish. After the death of Ian Tomlinson at the hands of police officers during G20 protests in London in 2009, campaigners discussed with witnesses in this way.

Support Israeli refusers!



A poll showed 95% of Israeli Jews believed the war to be justified. In the same poll only 3-4% agreed with the statement that "the IDF had used excessive firepower in the conflict". In a separate poll only 10% agreed THAT it was time to stop the war. The opposition is very isolated.

Nonetheless on 26 July around 5,000 people protested against the incursion into Gaza in Tel Aviv. On 9 August protestors defied a ban to protest in the city (see picture). These and other demonstrations have faced violent right-wing opposition.

On 26 July around 300 right-wing protestors gathered alongside the anti-war demonstration in Tel Aviv. Shouting chants like "death to the leftists!", they threw missiles and attempted to physically attack protestors.

In Haifa an anti-war protest was attacked by right-wing thugs who then beat up an Arab Deputy

Mayor and his son. In Jerusalem a "Jewish-Arab unity march" from the city's only bi-lingual school was subject to verbal abuse and in Tel Aviv a reading of ex-soldiers' experiences by Breaking the Silence was disrupted by up to 100 right wing activists.

But the movement of young people refusing military service has grown significantly. In November 2013 Workers' Liberty hosted a tour by Noam Gur, one such refuser. At the time she told how she was one of a handful of refusers. A letter from 150 young refusers has been published by Israeli media. Many of these young people will face jail sentences as well as backlash from their local communities. A letter from 50 people who are refusing to be called up as reservists has also been published.

The peace movement in Israel really needs our support, it is key to changing the current political climate in Israel.

No to union busting!

Say No to union-busting of Palestinian workers organizing in Mishor Adumim settlement

"An attempt to unionize Palestinian garage workers in the West Bank is being busted by an Israeli employer working together with police. Workers at the Zarfati Garage organized in the independent WAC-MAAN union, called a strike to defend their rights and the employer retaliated by fabricating "security" charges against the union leader, Hatem Abu Ziadeh using the war in Gaza as a cover. Israeli po-

lice have now revoked his work permit, which meant his actual dismissal. WAC-MAAN and the workers at Zarfati Garage are determined to struggle against this arbitrary persecution of Committee Chairperson Hatem Abu Ziadeh.

Please support their demand to cancel all charges against Abu Ziadeh and allow the workers to freely organize and demand their rights. Support them by sending a message of protest."

• You can sign the petition at bit.ly/1sNFHCF

Huge protests for Gaza

Thousands have joined demonstrations in support of Gazan people over the last month. Gemma Short compiled reports from Workers' Liberty activists.

SHEFFIELD

Gathering at the town hall every Saturday lunch time, protests have been more than in 2009 and 2012 with a larger number of women and children and up to 400 people.

Speeches have highlighted the appalling conditions for those in Gaza, as well as anti-Israel and anti-US rhetoric.

Later protests had a sombre atmosphere and included actions like "die-ins".

Workers' Liberty has had a good reception from people not from the organised left; unfortunately other left groups have chosen not engage in debate. We have sold around 20 papers, various pamphlets and books at each demonstration.

Workers' Liberty Sheffield plan a solidarity film showing of Five Broken Cameras, raising money for WAC-MAAN, the independent trade union centre for Arab and Jewish workers in Israel-Palestine.

LONDON

Tens of thousands of people marched through London protest on 9 August, the biggest yet of regular London protests.

Protesters gathered outside the BBC offices at Portland Place, marching past the US embassy and on to Hyde Park. Workers' Liberty members took part in the protest, arguing for an independent Palestine alongside Israel and for Arab-Jewish workers' unity.



Our politics on the Israel/Palestine are distinctly different from those of many of the leading political forces that organised the protests. Nevertheless, we were able to gain a hearing for our arguments, and the atmosphere has been, on the whole friendly and comradely.

We sold around a hundred copies of *Solidarity* on 9 August and had many political conversations with other marchers.

NEWCASTLE

Newcastle demonstrations have been some of the biggest mid-week protests the city has seen in many years. They have been called by PSC, Labour Friends of Palestine and Friends of Al Aqsa.

There have been at least four large protests in the city centre with around 500 people. A smaller protest of 200 took place at the BBC and a die-in protest in front of the civic centre had approximately 100.

The majority on protestors have been from the Muslim communities in Newcastle, but have also been quite young.

At the lobby of the BBC, the chants, led by supporters of Counterfire who are central to PSC, were: "Palestine must be free: from the river to the sea." People joined in with this chant but in discussions it has been clear that many do not consider this to be a slogan for one-state in Israel-Palestine. Indeed the organisers of PSC say they take no position on the debate over one state or two states in the area.

The Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG) have regularly focused their anger on Labour councillors and MPs — often deservedly over cuts etc. — but they have now demanded the local MP should not speak at rallies because she is critical of Hamas as well as Israel.

Counterfire and others have criticised the RCG for upsetting unity on this question, they have been less clear on the point about being critical of Hamas.

Selling copies of *Solidarity* with a headline calling for two states has been relatively easy to do on all demonstrations and public sales; we have sold more

than usual.

MANCHESTER

A central focus of Gazan solidarity in Manchester has been around the soap and cosmetics shop Kedem in the city centre.

For two weeks supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign have held daily pickets. They say the resources used to produce some of the shop's stock has been stolen from Palestinian areas of the Dead Sea.

Counter-protests by members of the local Jewish community and friends of the shop owner have also been held.

In the beginning the two protests were aggressively antagonistic and a police line separated the sides. Over time relations have mellowed and protesters from either side are conversing, albeit uneasily and under the watchful eye of a constant police presence.

Manchester (the city with the second largest Jewish community outside London) has seen anti-semitic behaviour from people supporting the Palestinian cause; men driving cars with Palestinian flags drove through the Jewish area of Leicester Road throwing eggs at passers-by and shouting "Heil Hitler". Some conduct on the demonstrations has been of this type. Dealing with that hasn't been helped by the equivocation of the local Palestine Solidarity Campaign. In an email to activists they asked people "not to appear anti-semitic" despite it "being difficult" not to do so.

On Saturday 9 August the local BDS group, heavily influenced by the local Revolutionary Communist Group, organised a small but loud march down Market Street with the intention of "putting pressure on Israeli shops and banks".

Workers' Liberty in Manchester is clear that our support and solidarity is with the Palestinians. We encourage participation on the pro-Palestinian marches. However, we are also for challenging head-on the anti-semitic discourse and attacks made in the name of Palestinian solidarity.

BDS tactics, especially if conducted as badly as they have been in Manchester,

undermine the positive, internationalist solidarity that will help secure the liberation of the Palestinian people. Our time would be better spent building links with Israeli and Palestinian workers organisations.

NOTTINGHAM

Demonstrations have been held every week, called by the local PSC and the initial one attracted 600.

On 5 August we heard Israeli oppositionist Uri Gordon of Anarchists against the Wall as well as Dr Musharraf Hussain of the Karimia Institute who was openly critical of Hamas.

On the other hand rabbis from the reactionary Neturei Karta have also addressed the rallies. Their opposition to Israel is that it is essentially a secular state that does not live up to its claim to be Jewish.

These Jobbik-supporting ultra conservatives do damage to the cause of the Palestinians and should not be welcome on the protests.

Broxtowe Labour Party are organising a public meeting on Gaza on Sunday 16 August when their PPC and former MP, Nick Palmer, will speak to his proposal to halt the British supply of arms to the Israeli government.

Also speaking at the meeting directly by Skype from Tel Aviv will be Elizabeth Tsurkov, the director of the Israeli NGO, Hotline for Refugees and Migrants (facebook.com/HotlineForRefugeesAndMigrants).

LEEDS

Over 2000 people rallied and marched in Leeds. Protests have also taken place in Wakefield.

Whilst a lot of anger was directed at the BBC's coverage of the assault on Gaza, the turnout represented a diverse range of opinions. Some chants reflected a perspective that wants Israel and less explicitly, Jews, being "removed" from region. Unfortunately many people join in all the chants without considering their content and this needs much more discussion.

Whilst our views in opposition to BDS are minority ones, support for a two-state settlement is not ruled out by many people protesting.

Religion, LGBT rights and military regime

Kate Harris interviews Yemisi Ilesanmi, a Nigerian campaigner for LGBT rights and author of the book *Freedom to Love for All: Homosexuality is not un-African*.

How did you get to where you are today as an LGBT activist and out bisexual woman?

It has been an interesting, tasking, journey towards self-awareness. It is also a journey that has involved studying society and finding my place in it. It is a continuous journey and one where I have to constantly remind myself that I have a right to be who I am in a world that is desperate to make me into what they would rather I be.

I started being politically and socially aware of my human rights at an early age. I was born in Nigeria in the mid-70s and grew up in a society that was marred with constant military coup d'états. There was no stable democracy. It was confusing because people took to the streets to celebrate successful coup d'états. I wondered why it was a good thing for the military to forcefully overthrow elected officials. But the people's response was that the elected officials were corrupt. However, after having a taste of what military dictatorship means, people stopped celebrating coups. This started the difficult journey towards demanding and organising for a civilian regime where they would have a say in electing their own political leaders.

The military regime and its abuse of power, which includes but is not limited to the suspension of the constitution, denying citizens fundamental human rights like freedom of expression and dragging perceived opponents (mostly human rights activists) to prison on trumped up charges, made me politically conscious of the need to have my fundamental human rights asserted and protected.

As an undergraduate, I became more politically active. I joined the socialist movement in my university and also became an active student union leader. From there, it was a constant battle against the oppressive military regime and a battle towards securing a democracy. The battle caused us to lose some of our comrades to the bullets of the military junta. Also, many of us had to spend years fighting trumped up charges in courts; we had our degrees withheld for political reasons.

After leaving school, I was recruited into the trade union movement and started working for the Nigerian Labour Congress. It was another 10 years journey of fighting for and defending workers' rights, locally, nationally and internationally.

Having gone through all the struggle to secure a democracy, it comes as a shock when as a bisexual woman, the democracy I fought hard for is now being used as an instrument of oppression. Those civilians that are now at the helm are no better than the military juntas. They have no basic respect for human rights and have no interest in equal opportunities for citizens.

They recently passed a law that stipulates 14 years impris-

onment for anyone who engages in same sex relationships and 10 years imprisonment for anyone who advocates LGBT rights. Freedom of expression and association are being crushed under the draconian boots of elected leaders.

If I was bold enough to stare down military rulers, it is a must that I continue to fight for my freedom in a civilian regime. We need the dividends of democracy which we gallantly fought so hard for; unfortunately we are yet to reap the expected dividends of democracy. Nothing much has changed, it is still business as usual.

I refuse to hide my sexuality, especially when I know it is a fundamental human right for me to be able to be who I am, express my gender identity and sexual orientation without fear of oppression or discrimination. The draconian anti-LGBT law has been passed but the battle continues. Advocacy and educating the masses are tools I use. Not being silenced by fear is important. I have chosen to be openly out and I will continue to speak out against all forms of oppression.

When did you become, or realise you were, a socialist?

I became a socialist in my early twenties. My university had a rich culture, a hot bed of left movements. I became a member of the Marxist group, Campaign for Workers Alternative (CWA) and also a member of Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM). It was all exciting reading the *Communist Manifesto*, discoursing and debating socialist works and it surely was interesting relating all that to our present society, especially considering that all this was during the reign of military regimes.

We had military-appointed university Vice Chancellors who were doing their best to clamp down on student union organising and union activities. So we always had collisions with the school authorities.

Some of us got suspended and we had to resort to the courts to overturn the unfair suspension. It was a difficult time, academically, we did not get much done because the school timetable was never stable. It was either the academic staff union were on strike or the university was closed down due to students' protests. It was a politically active time but our education did suffer. But no regrets. I think joining the socialist movement on campus was one of the best decisions I ever made.

How do you deal with the hate speech that you are subject to?

I do get a lot of hate speech from homophobes, biphobes, transphobes and religious people on account of my fight for LGBT rights and also for being an outspoken atheist. I just put it down to ignorance and continue to do my best to educate people and put information within their reach.

Ignorance leads to fear, fear leads to hate and hate leads to violence. Ignorance can be the most violent element in society, therefore it is important for us to try and combat ignorance in every way possible.

I do my bit by providing information. I wrote and self-published my advocacy book titled *Freedom To Love For ALL: Homosexuality is not Un-African*. The book is available on Amazon. I also have a blog called YEMMYnisting where I write about current issues, including LGBT rights, feminism and atheism. I use social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to spread awareness. This also means I get a lot of hate messages but it also means people are talking and the message is getting out there. Subjects that were once considered taboos are being raised and openly discussed. I consider this to be a step in the right direction.

How important is it for socialists to be secularists?



Religion is an instrument of oppression. Socialists must be conscious of the ways religion has been used and still being used to manipulate people, cause division, keep people suppressed and used to turn women, men and ethnicities against one another. It is one big stumbling block towards workers' unity across borders.

Religion divides, and only the rulers and oppressors benefit from keeping people divided. Socialists must understand that it is important to have a secular state and a secular constitution where religion does not interfere with politics or the laws and policies of the land.

It is important that socialists understand that religious beliefs cannot be a reason or excuse to deny women or sexual minorities their human rights. It is important that socialists understand that religion truly is the opium of the masses. It is a tool the rulers use to numb the people to stop them from revolting against the government. It is also the tool many rulers use to incite the people against themselves. A democratic state must be a secular one.

How does being a feminist interact with the rest of your politics?

Being a feminist is an integral part of my being. My feminism is not a cap I put on and off, it is constantly with me. Feminism is both personal and political. The political is personal and the personal is political. I demand to be treated as a human being and accorded all the inalienable human rights accruing to every human being.

If any of these rights is being denied on the basis of my gender or sexuality, I speak out. I fight back. I assert myself. It is present and visible in my daily interactions. It can be in the privacy of my bedroom, in a room full of family members and friends, in my workplace with colleagues and employers, or a public platform. Wherever I am, I assert my rights to enjoy my inalienable human rights and not be treated as a sub-citizen or sub-human being because of my sex, gender identity or sexual orientation. So my feminism is with me 100% of the time.

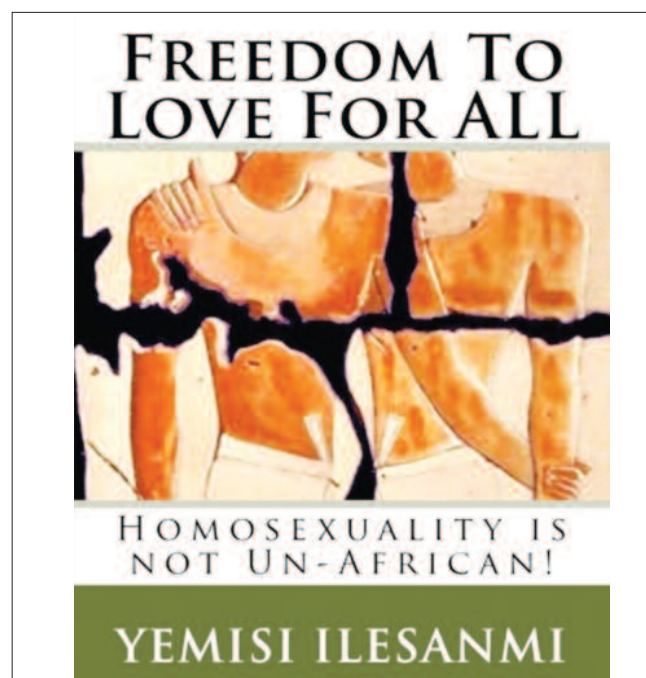
What impression do you have of the British left?

So far, my impression is that there is not much left in the British left. The British left strikes me more as reformist. This is not peculiar to the British left. I hope that there will be a vibrant left movement in UK colleges and universities because these places should be a hotbed of political ideas and the left movement should have no difficulty making its presence felt, especially considering how much capitalism has failed the people.

Is there anything you would like to draw the particular attention of *Solidarity* readers to?

The need to unite across borders. Reach out to left movements in developing countries especially in Africa. There are many passionate young and old socialist comrades in many African countries. It would be great to establish international solidarity and build our strength across borders. Workers of the world unite should not just be a slogan, it should be something we actively strive to achieve.

• Read more on Yemisi's blog: bit.ly/Xfflux



The BBC is boring...

Press
By Gemma Short



People protesting against Israel's attacks on Gaza have been taking demonstrations to BBC offices across the country, claiming BBC bias in coverage of the conflict.

Is the BBC a biased news institution? Certainly! A brief look at any item of industrial news will tell you immediately which side of the barricades the BBC is. Is this a surprise? Not at all!

Throughout the BBC's history it has played a decisive and divisive role in events. In the 1984-5 miners strike, the Hillsborough disaster, the Iraq War, the BBC told a certain story.

So is it "shame" on the BBC for biased reporting on the Gaza war? In a way yes, on the level of purely humanitarian feeling. However, it is not a particular "shame" against their tradition, history or mission. Despite being an obligatory licence fee funded broadcaster, the BBC is by no means controlled by "the people".

Outside of London where there is no Israeli embassy to target, having a go at the BBC has been a focus for solidarity protests. However, in Sheffield, Newcastle, Bristol and other places this often resulted in protests outside of local BBC radio or news offices. Rather more symbolic than effective there.

So the question is, what do the action want to achieve: to change BBC reporting or build a consensus whereby there is a single, uncomplicated "enemy" comprised of the BBC, Israel and the British state?

BIAS?

Is the BBC more biased than other news institutions?

This depends on what sort of bias and what situation. The BBC in particular holds up the idea of balance. This balance boils down to giving equal air time to different sides. In an unbalanced conflict such as that in Israel-Palestine we know that simply giving equal air time does not equal balance.

Comparisons are hard to make, and somewhat unproductive. One infographic claims that in the same evening on Wednesday 30 July the BBC spent 24% of its bulletin covering Gaza whilst Channel Four News spent 38%.

It further claims that C4 News explicitly blamed Israel for an attack on a UN school and raised the possibility of this as

a war crime, whilst the BBC did not. This infographic was made by a journalist at Saudi pan-Arab news station Al-Arabiya- not exactly a bastion of truthful reporting.

Watching both BBC and C4 News coverage all I can see is a greater willingness to show pictures of dead or injured children and use more emotive language on C4 News. Pictures of dead children does not necessarily mean that C4 News is reliably reporting the historical depth of this complex conflict.

Many will point you to Russia Today (RT) or Al Jazeera for unbiased news coverage. RT, as an example, portrayed last summer's deadly chemical weapons attack by the Syrian regime on its own people as "staged". Al Jazeera is funded by the ruling family of Qatar. Whilst none of this, like with the BBC, means that these news stations will never report the truth, it certainly means that as a socialist they should not be your sole, unquestioning, source of information.

SOLIDARITY

By keeping in touch with left wing and workers organisations in Israel and in Palestine, we can get more, and more useful news. Workers' Liberty tries to do this.

We have also in the past organised speaker tours with young people from Israel who are refusing to serve in compulsory military service.

Direct contact and solidarity with organisations such as Gush Shalom (an Israeli peace movement) or Wac-Maan, a workers advice centre and many other groups and individuals who either seek to organise Palestinian and Israeli unity or better understanding, is a much more productive way of getting the news and forming solidarity than trying to "shame" the BBC.



"Stop this war, start a different one"

The Left
By Dan Katz



The Stop the War Campaign is misnamed. To the naïve it is a happy, pacifist campaign. However the splinter of the SWP that runs it (called Counterfire) is very far from being pacifist, and it would be far more honest for the campaign to be renamed, "Stop this War and Start a Different One".

Counterfire - and unpleasant friends like Sami Ramadani, who writes on the Stop the War site - would be very happy if everyone in the Middle East ganged up and attacked Israel. Or the US.

Apparently - according to Ramadani, and despite all known facts and common sense - Islamic State (ISIS/IS) is actually serving Israeli interests. The evidence for this?

It seems the "ISIS Caliph [leader] and Israeli war criminal Netanyahu declared the death of Sykes-Picot borders between Iraq and Syria on almost the same day." You might think this is a statement of fact, but not Mr Ramadani who finds the alleged coincidence highly suspicious.

More than that, the leader of ISIS/IS, doesn't "mention Israel or its war crimes in Palestine." It must be so disappointing to Ramadani that IS writes: "We haven't given orders to kill the Israelis and the Jews. The war against the nearer enemy, those who rebel against the faith, is more important." In other words IS is quite busy, currently, slaughtering Shia and Christians. However, this isn't quite the same as "serving Israeli interests", is it?

At a rally in Holland a couple of days ago IS supporters chanted, "Death to the Jews!" Does any sane person think ISIS will not get round to Israel after it has polished off the Shia?

Ramadani claims, "Israel's ambassador in Washington explained why Israel and the west should back ISIS 'bad guys' against other 'bad guys'." The evidence for this? Ramadani links to an article by a man called Christof Lehmann. There are a few problems with this. The first is Christof Lehmann is a tiresome conspiracy nut. The second is Lehmann's article is based on the word of an anonymous source 'close to a Lebanese billionaire' who claims backing for ISIS was decided at a meeting of a US think-tank, months ago (a think-tank which controls US policy?). And finally, that the article doesn't mention an Israeli ambassador at all.

Then Ramadani, having convinced himself, writes, "It is clear to me that ISIS is serving Israeli and US economic, political and military objectives in the region." Which just leaves a small problem: why is the US currently bombing ISIS/IS?

MORE ABOUT SCOTS INDEPENDENCE

Common Weal splits from the Jimmy Reid Foundation, or how and why the left is divided over Scottish independence:
• bit.ly/1BbXFog

Morning Star suspension for "acting like a Daily Mail reporter"

By Beth Redmond

Rory McKinnon, who had been a reporter at The Morning Star for three years, has been threatened with the sack for confronting the RMT about Caroline Leneghan's domestic violence allegations against the union's Assistant General Secretary Steve Hedley (see bit.ly/So6ZmS).

McKinnon attended the RMT's women's conference in March this year as a Morning Star reporter, and in a session on combating sexism in the workplace queried as to whether "the lack of formal investigation into the allegations against Hedley had affected women members' perception of the union." Alan Pottage who was speaking in the session, and is the union's national organising co-ordinator refused to comment, and McKinnon was later removed from the conference.

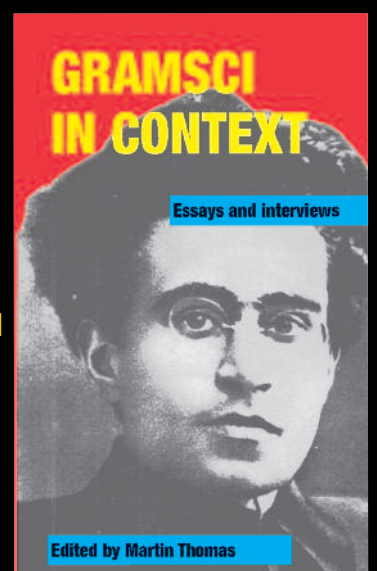
Richard Bagley (editor of MS), informed McKinnon the next day that he had been suspended for "gross misconduct".

During a disciplinary hearing six weeks later, Bagley said of the question McKinnon originally asked about the Hedley case, "it feels more like something a Daily Mail reporter would ask than someone from the Morning Star", "this has damaged our relationship with the trade union movement" and "the paper's priorities do not include personal controversy".

McKinnon resigned on 25 July, and wrote a blog post revealing all of this information on 26 July. The Morning Star issued a report on 28 July, announcing the retirement of company secretary Tony Briscoe and the departure of Richard Bagley for "family reasons".

It is truly mind boggling how a supposedly left-wing publication could behave in such a way; but the powers that be at the The Morning Star are much more concerned about their cosy relationships with trade union bureaucrats than the feelings of rank-and-file women trade union members.

A revised and 50%-expanded edition of the 2012 booklet Antonio Gramsci: working-class revolutionary, summarising Gramsci's life and thought.



It disputes the "post-Marxist" readings of

Gramsci and discusses the relation between Gramsci's ideas and Trotsky's.

Price £6, or £7.60 including postage, order from workersliberty.org/books

How to fight poverty pay

Care UK workers in Doncaster, south Yorkshire, struck for two weeks from 29 July to 11 August. The strike was part of a long-running dispute to win the Living Wage.

Since the dispute began in September 2013, the support workers (120 looking after 140 people with learning disabilities in the Doncaster area) have struck 48 times, often for several days at a time. This is a highly unusual strike in a labour movement where most strikes are for one or two days only. Moreover the workers are expected to "extend and intensify" their action.

The determination of this group of workers is an inspiration to many others who are or who would like to fight poverty pay. It is especially important as wages in social care are being cut everywhere.

Care UK boss Chris Hindle has denounced the strikers' demand as "simply unrealistic." This is the boss at a private equity-backed company which each year takes more public money.

Jim Bell of Doncaster Unison said that four years of a pay freeze had made it "impossible" for workers to "meet the basic costs of living." Strikers said that morale was "sky high" at the start of the latest strike.

Earlier this year, many strikers refused to sign new contracts that would have led to even worse wages. Workers are currently paid £7 per hour, 65p less than the minimum necessary for a decent standard of living.

Meanwhile, care workers in Barnet have voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action against a potential wage cut of over 9%.

Unison members took the vote after their employer, Your Choice Barnet (YCB), offered to lessen the scale of the wage cut by only 1%! This would still mean a hefty 8.31% drop in wages, with no guarantee that further cuts won't be coming round the corner.

YCB is owned by Barnet Council, and provides specialist social care to people with physical and learning difficulties. However, the council seriously underfunds the organisation.

Rather than providing the service with the necessary funds to provide care to all those who need it, the council insists on funding YCB as if it were a private company operating on a commercial basis, with funding granted only if a service user turns up to their appointment. If someone misses their appointment due to illness or a clash of commitments, YCB loses its funding to pay for it. Inevitably, those who pay the price for inevitable funding shortfall are the workers.

Both Doncaster and Barnet demonstrate what happens when health and social care services are marshalled into the discipline of the market.

The private equity firm which owns Care UK is interested, first and foremost, in delivering profits for its shareholders – the quality of care for vulnerable people, and the pay and conditions of the workers will always come a distant second.

Likewise, while YCB in Barnet is fully owned by the council, it is expected to function as if it were a private company working to commission.

There is nothing inevitable or necessary about contracting out diminished, undermined services to private contractors. The enormous stores of wealth in society make a quality health service, free and accountable to the public, entirely possible. But in order to save and rebuild the NHS, the labour movement must organise to fight for it. In Yorkshire and Barnet, care workers are showing how that might be done.

•For more information, including on how to donate to the Doncaster strike fund, see the strikers' Facebook page at bit.ly/care-uk-strike



SAVE THE NHS! LOBBY LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE

Join our campaign to demand Labour rebuild the NHS. Come and lobby their annual conference in Manchester on September 21 at 14:30.

For more information email nhsliaison@yahoo.co.uk or ring 07904 944 771 / 07796 690 874



Scottish referendum: vote No!

In five weeks time, the people of Scotland will decide whether or not to become an independent state.

YouGov polls have consistently shown voters to be split down the middle. That was until the debate between Labour's Alistair Darling and the Scottish Nationalist Party's First Minister Alex Salmond at the beginning of the month. Poll results now show "No" votes to be 55%, "Yes" votes at 35%, with the rest undecided.

Both the "Yes" and "No" campaigns are claiming a victory out of the public debate. Salmond has been criticised for talking, for what seemed the entire debate, about what currency Scotland would have post-independence. But he also converted the most undecided voters.

In very general terms, socialists are not in favour of borders between peoples, we are for the breaking down of borders. Our overwhelming concern is what is in the interests of the working-class and a larger political unit makes forging unity between the working classes of England, Scotland and Wales much easier. That in turn makes the labour move-

ment much stronger, and allows for a more powerful force against the bourgeois state.

That is why we advocate a "vote no to independence" in this referendum.

Of course it is up to the people of Scotland to decide what kind of political arrangements they want to make and we would defend their right to take and implement that decision against "Unionist" threats.

There is, however, an exception to being automatically in favour of the larger political unit; that is when one nation is more powerful and therefore dominant over a weaker one. In such situations conflicts are more likely to happen and injustices can occur, often leaving the less dominant country in political and economic disarray.

In this situation, the weaker state has the right to self-determination and to become separate from the other. Scotland, however, is not an oppressed nation. It is and has been for a very long time a fully integrated part of the bigger British state. Even Alex Salmond claims an independent Scotland

will continue to be British!

The British left appear, sometimes, to make the right arguments for a "No" vote, and then in the final breath of the argument appear to do a 180 degree turn. The SWP for instance: "Their [the SNP] argument is like saying Coca Cola rots your teeth when it's bottled in London but if you site the bottling plant in Edinburgh then Coca Cola is good for you." Yes... "...but the breaking up of Britain as an imperialist power is a small victory worth fighting for." Is it? Is being pro-independence just to appear to be so very, very anti-Tory worth damaging a common labour movement and links between the working classes?

Arguments from left groups for independence are difficult to make sense of, and from a socialist perspective it would be far better to call for a federal republic in Britain within a democratic federal Europe. That is, a united political unit, no monarchy, with strong local autonomy for the Scottish people, and others.



Tom Cashman 1950-2014

Tom Cashman has died of a brain tumour aged 64. He was a life-long socialist and militant trade union activist, who had a long connection to the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and its predecessors.

Tom came from a family in Wallasey on Merseyside with Irish roots and labour movement involvement. He joined Workers' Fight (precursor of the AWL) in 1973 while a student at Middlesex Polytechnic and subsequently recruited his brothers Mick, Tony and Peter and briefly his sister Liz.

Unusually for student leftists at that time, Tom was already working in the Labour Party and was an early member of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. He was also active in Irish solidarity work in the 70s, particularly in WF's critical intervention in the Troops Out Movement.

For most of his working life Tom worked as a bus driver, mostly in Surrey. He built up a base in the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), paying close attention to workplace issues. He went from being a garage rep to chair of the Central Bus Committee and then on to various national passenger transport committees in the union. He was one of two key people who devised the plan that kept union organisation on London buses going after privatisation. He was elected to the General Executive Council of the TGWU in the early 90s as part of the United Left, was on the joint executive negotiating the merger with Amicus, and re-elected in the new union Unite.

Tom did not abandon his principles as he took on these positions. He rejected the offer of a job in the union, which would have been better paid and better for his

health, as he believed that lay members not officials should control the union and that to represent his co-workers he had to stay "on the job".

He also fought for his politics openly and without concern that they would bring him into conflict with the mainstream left in the union — one example being his consistent opposition to anti-EU left nationalism, which he spoke against at one TGWU Conference. That reflects Tom's personality — that he always stated his views, bluntly and without diplomacy but with no personal malice. He was always prepared to have the argument even if he was in a minority but difficult to convince if he did not agree.

Though Tom did not remain in the AWL, he remained friendly to AWL comrades and acted as a valuable source of advice and information on labour movement issues. The independent working class politics he preached over 40 years drew on the group's ideas. His great strength was to fuse those ideas with a serious and practical orientation to the labour movement. That made him more than either a trade union militant or a propagandist left activist. Tom persisted with his activism and involvement in the class struggle to the end of his life having made his commitment at a young age. We should take his life as an example.

This brief sketch cannot do full justice to Tom's life and contribution. *Solidarity* will carry a further article in the next issue and welcomes contributions from others who knew him.

We send our condolences to his partner Johnnie, his daughter Ruth, his family, friends and comrades.

Bruce Robinson

The last Bolshevik

In August 1940 Leon Trotsky was murdered by a Stalinist agent. In this month we print an episode from the heroic resistance of the "Trotskyists", the opposition to the regime, from inside Stalin's Russia.

Vorkuta, a place 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle was the site of one Stalin's concentration camps. Here, in 1937, the last massacre of the surviving Trotskyists occurred. These were the last of the Bolsheviks who, standing by the programme of the October Revolution, had fought the Stalinist counter-revolution inch by inch. Here they were first concentrated and then systematically slaughtered.

Joseph Berger was a prisoner in the Soviet Union for over 20 years. He tells here about a meeting in prison with Trotsky's younger son, Sergei, about the mass hunger strike of the Trotskyist prisoners — women, men and their children — at Vorkuta, after which they were annihilated by the GPU.

I met Trotsky's son Sergei in 1937. We were both waiting to be interrogated in Lubyanka [Stalinist secret police KGB headquarters and prison in Moscow].

The waiting-rooms were small bare cells known as "kennels". Normally each prisoner had a kennel to himself but the Lubyanka was overworked, busy officials rang each other up in search of a place for their charges, and sometimes two were made to share. Thus we spent several hours together one night in February.

For me it was a memorable meeting. Sergei had recently been brought back from Vorkuta. His case had been reopened and he took a gloomy view of his prospects. My own seemed little better, and before long I was in fact sentenced to death. But for some reason Sergei said he had an intuition I would survive, and he gave me a message for his parents, should I ever see them.

He was about 28, a shortish, spare young man with a round face and moustache. Unlike his brother, he had never taken the slightest interest in politics — he had even refused to join the Komsomol [Communist Party Youth League]. He had a passion for books and was addicted to the circus. As a child, he had once run away and joined a travelling circus.

His relations were naturally worried about his irresponsible ways and even pointed out that they could damage his father's career. But he remained incorrigible.

When his father found himself in the Opposition, he thought it only proved how right he himself had been in his bored indifference to the regime. He did well at school but hesitated a long time over the choice of a career. In the end, he was trained as an architect.

When Trotsky was exiled in 1929, Stalin — in one of his unpredictable moments of generosity — allowed him to take his family and even his archives abroad. Sergei heard the news in some provincial town where he was working. He received an anxious message

from his parents. Trotsky took the blackest possible view of the situation in Russia and foresaw the fate of all those who were connected with him. "Think of the worst possible thing you can imagine and multiply it by ten," he said to the friends who saw him off from Odessa. But Sergei was at the time in love with a girl who was unwilling to leave her family, and he refused to follow his parents abroad.

For a time it seemed as though his father's fears for him had been groundless. Not only did he escape the purges of the early thirties, but family friends who still had some influence found him a job. Only in 1935, after the murder of Kirov, was he summoned by the authorities and asked to make a public repudiation of his father.

They explained that he had only to tell the truth — he had never got on with his parents or shared their views, and he had not accompanied them into exile. All he had to add was that he now regarded them as enemies of their country. He refused on the grounds that he had always been apolitical. This was the reason for his differences with his father — and he would certainly not join in hounding them now. He lost his job but was not arrested until some months later.

Brought to Moscow in the autumn of 1936, he immediately went on hunger strike as a protest against his arrest. But the investigation was completed within ten days. He was sentenced to five years in a labour camp. In December, he arrived in Vorkuta and for the first time found himself among followers of his father. They filled him with admiration.

While the great majority had "capitulated", there remained a hard core of uncompromising Trotskyists, most of them in prisons and camps. They and their families had been rounded up in the preceding months and concentrated in three large camps — Kolyma, Vorkuta, and Norilsk. Sergei gave me the first news I received of those in Vorkuta.

I was not surprised at the impression they had made on him. I had met several since my arrest. Most of those I knew were intellectuals to whom Trotsky's views — less cut and dried than Lenin's — had appealed from early on. The majority were experienced revolutionaries who had fought in the civil war but had joined the Opposition in the early twenties. A larger proportion than in other parties were members of national minorities, but all of them were fiery internationalists, intolerant of the very idea of local or Soviet nationalism and scarcely able to grasp the concept of nation. Had the term "rootless cosmopolitan" been invented by then, it would certainly have been applied to the Trotskyists.

Purists, they feared the contamination of their doctrine above all else in the world. This had been the greatest obstacle to their co-operation with other groups and, even in the camp, they tended to keep to themselves. They had inherited this attitude from Trotsky. Lenin could be hard or flexible as it suited him. But Trotsky, even in exile, with

iks in Russia



Sergei Sedov the prisoner

almost every door shut in his face, could still use his time and his brilliant gifts on venomous polemics with Western socialist leaders.

When I accused the Trotskyists of sectarianism, they said that what mattered was to “keep the banner unsullied”. Their fanaticism antagonised the majority of prisoners, and even those whom it attracted were not always made welcome. But their gloomy courage was proof against all temptations and threats.

I remembered a former leader of the Armenian Komsomol. He had received a three-year sentence which ran out in 1937. Every prisoner’s identity card bore the date of his release. One day, to my horror, he took out his card and, calmly smiling, altered the date from 1937 to 1987. He explained that he did not of course expect to be alive by then, but that as long as he lived he would remain a Trotskyist and would therefore have to stay in prison. Stalin was right, according to his lights, to keep the Trotskyists locked up. As for them, all they had to do now was to bear witness by suffering and dying for the truth.

When I told such people that, as politicians, they were “opting out of history”, they replied: “That’s what every opportunist tells us.”

Sergei found the conditions in the camp abominable, but his companions gave him a warm welcome for his father’s sake and were themselves heartened by his presence. He remained as uninterested in their political and economic views as before, but he spoke with veneration of their independence of spirit and could even say that the weeks he had spent among them had been “the happiest in his life”.

He wanted his parents to hear about their friends and of his own change of heart, and his mother particularly to know that he was sorry for all the anxiety he had given her and that he was determined to die with dignity. He was shot a few weeks later. I was released in time to write to his mother but not to see her — she died before I reached Paris

in 1962.

I heard more about Sergei from a friend of his who had had the same interrogator. When he asked news of him, the official said, “if his father sends a wagon full of gold we might let him go.” But it was only a cruel joke. No such offer was made to Trotsky, and Sergei’s fate must have already been decided when — perhaps in order to deprive his friends of the moral comfort of having a Trotsky among them — he was brought back from Vorkuta.

HEROIC STAND

Many years were to pass before the world outside heard about their last, heroic stand and their death in the Northern forests.

The main facts were published in the *Sotsialistichesky Vestnik* in New York (No. 10/11, 1961). I can only add the details I was able to piece together from the stories of Sergei and a few prisoners I met much later. That the extermination of the Trotskyists was decided on and carefully planned in Moscow is known by the fact that the same system was followed in all three camps. But I heard more about Vorkuta than the other two.

There, in the autumn of 1936, the Trotskyists put certain demands on the authorities, such as to be allowed to live with their families and lodged separately from the criminals (whenever the political and criminal prisoners were mixed, persecution by the criminals was an added torment for the “politicals”). They insisted that the conditions generally were more degrading than in any jail in a capitalist country.

The authorities refused and threatened them with reprisals. Then in October, the Trotskyists with their wives and children declared a mass hunger strike. With the onset of the Siberian winter and in conditions deliberately planned to break them, this needed almost superhuman courage. A few sympathisers joined them.

Other prisoners, bribed by an extra slice of bread a day or broken by the threat of sharing the fate of the Trotskyists, or even out of “conviction” (I met a few such people), were induced to side with the authorities — this is perhaps the blackest side of the affair. The camp radio broadcast speeches by former “politicals” who had arrived at a position curiously similar to that of some of Stalin’s apologists even today.

Stalin was the man of destiny. His victory was a historical necessity. Obedience to his will was a sacred duty to Lenin. Judged “objectively” — whether they knew it or not — those who opposed him were “enemy agents”. The Trotskyists added to their stock of jokes. One gaunt hunger striker meeting another would ask: “Why are you so gloomy?” The other replied: “The Gestapo haven’t sent me my allowance yet.”

The strike was kept up for three months. Even the children persisted, though the strike leaders begged the mothers to stop them because the sight was intolerable to the



Left Oppositionists in Siberian exile demonstrate on the 11th anniversary of the 1917 revolution

men. Most of the strikers survived. Some were forcibly fed. Usually a man can do without water as well as food for about ten days. If he drinks, he can last out several weeks and, if he is forcibly fed, for five or six months, though his health is ruined. (Note: I held a long hunger strike twice, once for 44 days and once for 56 — JB.) Camp doctors boasted that no striker died in hospital; in fact, the hopeless cases were discharged and died a few days later.

After three months nearly all the strikers’ demands were suddenly granted. A minority still refused to compromise, but they were overruled. When, a fortnight later, all the concessions were withdrawn, it was too late to begin again, though some tried. The camp authorities justified their trick on the grounds that a successful strike would have made discipline impossible.

The end came in the summer of 1937. A troika (a special investigation commission of three people) arrived from Moscow. The Trotskyists were put on special work and lodged at the brick factory. Some were put through a new and more severe interrogation. One day in the autumn, the brick factory was cordoned off by special guards. The prisoners were given two days’ rations and their transfer to another camp was announced. This was astonishing news as by then the weather had virtually cut off all links with the rest of the world. All that was known at Vorkuta for some time was that the Trotskyists — in their rags and with their two days rations — were marched off into the forest at night, and that two days later the guards returned with only a few prisoners who had been included by mistake.

But from there the news gradually leaked out. A day’s march away, the convoy came on a set of temporary shacks. There the prisoners were locked up. Their names were checked against a list and then, group by group, they were called out and machine-gunned. Some struggled, shouted slogans, and fought the guards to the last. The guards, as was usual on such occasions, were half-drunk.

When it was over, the guards poured paraffin over the bodies and the rags and set them alight. For a long time the bonfire burned deep in the forest. The camp commanders were notified of the names of a number of people who had been shot as bandits, saboteurs or Trotskyist counter-revolutionaries. A few bandits had in fact been included, as well as a number of Trotskyists who had recanted long before.

This was the first massacre on such a scale — others were to follow during and after the war. By the end of 1937 hardly a member of the Trotskyist cadres was left in the three camps — only a few individuals were spared for special reasons.

The tracks were carefully covered up, for Stalin wanted to be able to rewrite history as well as make it. As secretly as the Trotskyists, the heads of the troikas which had condemned them, as well as members of the execution squads, were shot in 1938. The few who escaped by chance were those who had left the service.

In 1939 came the turn of Yezhov, whose orders they had carried out and by whose order most of them had died. The only announcement was of his transfer to another post, but he vanished completely.

Inside British Islam

Matt Cooper reviews Innes Bowen *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (London: Hurst, 2014)

With the Trojan Horse controversy in Birmingham's schools and press concern about Muslims travelling to fight with Sunni Muslim militias in Syria and northern Iraq, suggestions of "extremism" amongst British Muslims have become a staple public discussion. Innes Bowen's well researched book on the organisations and ideologies of British Islam puts this into a clear context.

The dominant strands of Islam in Britain are conservative, politically quiet and, to a degree, isolationist. It is only a small minority of Muslim organisations that are politically assertive, and few of these are militant jihadists.

The first thing to understand for anyone whose experience of religion is of Christian denominations is how unlike these church organisations Islam is. Christian churches tend to have a clear hierarchy, centrally-owned property and religious dogma emanating from the centre. Islam, particularly the Sunni Islam that is the most common form in Britain, lacks such a formal hierarchy. Rather, at its centre is the ulema, the community of scholars, divided into schools and factions who compete in their interpretation of religious texts. Most mosques are locally run free-standing trusts which chose which current to adhere to.

Over 80% of mosques in Britain adhere to one of two schools of Sunni Islam. The Deobandis are dominant, especially in their facilities to train Islamic scholars in the UK. This is a conservative form of Islam which may frown on television and music being used for entertainment, and attitudes towards women are typified by preference for long black gowns and sometimes face veils. Although this shows their links with Saudi Salafism (Wahhabism), the Deobandis are distinct from it.

The Deobandi current in Islam grew up in India after 1919, and opposed the creation of a Muslim state in Pakistan, arguing for an Indian state with Muslims having their own legal and social structure within it. Deobandis organised in Pakistan after 1947 where their conservatism has informed the Taliban and some Kashmiri jihadist groups. British Deobandis however are closer to the more politically-detached movement in the Gujarat, India. In Britain most Deobandi leaders tend to eschew politics and have no representation on the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) or on the government backed Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB).

Bowen notes that it is not unusual for members of these communities to engage in local politics through the Labour Party, but suggests that rather than being a sign of integration this is to "protect the ability of Muslims to live as a religious minority, fully practising and expressing their faith." The Deobandis have twenty-three UK-based seminaries but the scholars educated are no less conservative than their Indian educated predecessors and tend to advocate a "100% Deobandi lifestyle". Areas where Deobandi are concentrated are not hotbeds of radicalism, but are under the deadening hand of conservative orthodoxy.

The Deobandi missionary movement, Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), has come under scrutiny since some of the 7/7 bombers passed through its ranks. Bowen argues persuasively that TJ is apolitical and socially conservative, however, its refusal to address wider political questions makes it a fertile recruiting ground for radicals. TJ's role is, nonetheless, pernicious. Their mission is not conversion but the pursuit of Muslims who they perceive as not sufficiently devout. They reinforce the existing conservatism of the community and police its "boundaries of purity".

The other major group in the UK is the Barelwis, a branch of Sunni Sufi Islam, which has the allegiance of nearly 40% of British mosques. Their infrastructure is much less developed than that of the Deobandis, with few seminaries and a reliance on foreign born imams. Classes for the young are often limited to rote learning of the Quran. It is a traditional, conservative Islam like the Deobandis but lacking its religiosity. Although it was Barelwis who first burnt copies of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, it was not the Barelwi leadership that took the campaign forward. Indeed, in recent years they have asserted themselves as the anti-jihadist "good guys" who do not believe in the creation of Islamic states.



Bowen argues that it is exactly this conservatism and lack of political engagement that creates the potential for radicalisation among young Muslims who drift away, with some being attracted to other branches of Sunni Islam, often Islamist groups, that are willing to engage in political questions.

While these groups may support Islamic states abroad, in Britain this is expressed as creating an assertive Islamic political identity that promotes anti-secular policies in relation to Muslim people in Britain. These radicals are not found in the main established British groups, but in other more marginal Sunni groups, particularly Salafists. Although mainstream Salafist views are spread widely, particularly through British Muslims attending the Saudi University of Medina, its more radical forms were particularly boosted through many of the 1980s Afghanistan mujahideens' adherence to Salifism. Notable Islamists in Britain have been Salafists, for example Omar Bakri who established the British branch of Hizb ut Tahir and later the more explicitly jihadist Mahajiroun. At its most extreme, Salifism can shade into al-Qaeda jihadism. For example, the radical preacher Abu Qatada is a Salafist.

DIFFERENT DEGREES OF ISLAMISM

Another radical network is the British associates of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi Islamists, Jamaat-e-Islami, who run the East London Mosque in Whitechapel and the Islamic Forum of Europe (IFE), although this group has the allegiance of only around 2% of Britain's mosques.

Jamaat supporters were prominent in the formation of the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs which was formed at the time of the protests against *The Satanic Verses* which attempted to win the leadership of Muslims in Britain, out of which the Muslim Council of Britain was launched in 1997. Appearing to be an umbrella group, it was in reality dominated by Jamaat supporters, and for some years after 2001 was feted by the government as representative of Muslims in Britain as a whole.

Bowen argues that there are different degrees of Islamism in this network, but the most radical is that of the IFE and its youth wing. Particularly in Tower Hamlets, these ideas have attracted young Muslims from a Bangladeshi background who are less concerned about the history of the 1971 war where Jamaat supporters opposed independence and were guilty of sectarian killing. Rather, they are drawn to its radical rhetoric on Palestine and the "War on Terror". The IFE backed Lutfur Rahman who was elected as an independent to be mayor of Tower Hamlets after being barred as the

Labour candidate.

The Muslim Brotherhood is less of a force in the UK. The Brotherhood is active across the Sunni Middle East and North Africa where it seeks to establish Islamic states, although they are not militant jihadists. Their focus on Arabian states restricts their appeal amongst British Muslims. Nonetheless, the Brotherhood has won support through the Federation of Student Islamic Societies which they formed in 1962 (in alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami groups with which they have long standing international links and ideological affinity), these becoming prominent in the 1980s.

In 1997 some Brotherhood members who wanted to focus on winning the political leadership of the Muslim community in Britain set up the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), again allying with Jamaat supporters in the Muslim Council of Britain. MAB went on to become part of the SWP-dominated Stop the War Coalition, and although MAB were in the orbit of Respect they never joined. They were also close to Ken Livingstone when he was Mayor of London.

There were however tensions with MAB between those who sought to be political insiders and those who wanted to be more radical outsiders. The insiders came to dominate, and the Metropolitan Police's Muslim Contact Unit came to view MAB so favourably that in 2005 it helped them take over control of the Finsbury Park Mosque from supporters of the radical cleric Abu Hamza.

Those who sought a more oppositional stance split from MAB in 2006, forming the British Muslim Initiative (BMI), although this has largely become a flag waver for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Brotherhood's Palestinian affiliates, Hamas. Bowen suggests that neither MAB nor the BMI has had much success with extending their base much beyond Arab students and ex-student radicals, and it is Jamaat who through the MCB had more success in claiming this role of political leadership.

Although Bowen does attempt to lighten the tone of the book by ending with a discussion of the Shi'ite Twelvers and Islami sects, which she sees as more compatible with secular political engagement, the overall picture of the book is pessimistic. Institutionally, Islam remains a conservative and isolationist ideology in the UK. And the main reaction *against* this, with some attraction for younger Muslims, is a more *strident* Islamist ideology represented by Salafist groups and Jamaat-e-Islami.

Bowen's book does not focus on the impact that these ideas have on people from a Muslim background and their beliefs and practices. The book is in line with the "parallel lives" view developed by the Home Office's Community Cohesion Unit after the 2001 riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley which suggested that although in some areas Muslims live side by side with others, their lives were largely separate. This is an idea that has been criticised by many on the left as blaming the victims, but it is likely to contain a strong element of truth. For example, 2011 census data shows people of a Pakistani or Bangladeshi background being far less likely to marry or cohabit outside of their group than others (9% and 7% respectively, compared with 43% of people from a Caribbean background and 31% of people of Chinese origin).

Paradoxically, the report for Birmingham Council on the Muslims in their school system by Ian Kershaw casts some potentially more positive light on the situation. Though the scene described is very much conservative and inward looking Kershaw also suggests that the community leaders seeking the transformation of schools are more conservative and isolationist than the people they purport to represent who are, on the whole, more liberal and open-minded.

It is not the job of socialists to promote the self-appointed leaders of Muslim communities or apologise for their conservative views in the name of diversity and multiculturalism. Rather, it is their role to support the secularising and liberalising currents in British Islam and in Muslim communities. As Bowen shows, such secularists and liberals have a serious struggle with which to contend.

Disobedient Objects



Where are our children?: Mothers of children who were captured and tortured for speaking out against the Pinochet regime in Chile

By Rachael Barnes

The Disobedient Objects exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, emits a strange atmosphere. It is a curation of works, or “objects” which have contributed to social change, collected over the last three decades.

The room is filled with seemingly random objects, from DIY signs made by the Karnataka Farmers’ Association trying to protect their farms, bust cards made in the UK for those campaigning for gay rights in the 60s and Burmese currency made illegally, secretly featuring the face of Aung San Suu Kyi.

The tone inferred by the descriptions of each piece, left by the creators themselves, leads us to think that an art exhibition in London is not where they had hoped their handiwork would end up. One description, under a poster made by the indigenous movement in Spain, 2011, simply said “Archive this! Occupy this Museum! (...because Victoria and Albert are not “art and design”!) Copy and spread this image, but please don’t “make business” out of it.”

The curators of the exhibition have since said a lot of the

activists were reluctant to loan their work to the gallery. Things created as a result of people fighting for their life, their livelihood, their education or their basic human rights can often lose all sense of meaning when displayed behind glass in a museum.

Some aspects of the exhibition challenged the often elitist art industry, featuring the masks worn by Guerrilla Girls, an activist movement who aim to expose sexism, racism and corruption in art, and the Cheap Art Manifesto, which states that “cheap art defies, ridicules, undermines and makes obsolete the sanctity of affluent-society economy”, “cheap art fights the business of art!”.

It’s a trendy statement to make, especially in the student movement, that activism can all be done on Twitter, or by writing a blog that your friends then share on Facebook.

This collection of protest tools reaffirmed for me that, whilst social media is a useful aid to organising, it will never replace the effectiveness of the simplicity and the emotion that goes into making tools for demonstrations and protests on the streets.

• The exhibition is free and runs until February next year.

The art of growing up

Beth Redmond reviews *Boyhood*, a film by Richard Linklater

Boyhood is an intimate depiction of a young boy, Mason, growing up between the ages of 6 and 18, in a fatherless family struggling for money. His mother (Patricia Arquette), over the span of the film, has to juggle single-parenthood, studying for a masters and coping with a string of drunken, violent husbands.

Before I went to see the film I asked someone for a briefing and was told that “nothing really happens”, “it’s too long” and “they should have made it about the sister”. But that briefing is wrong on all counts.

Richard Linklater, who also made the *Before Sunrise*, *Before Sunset*, *Before Midnight* trilogy and *A Scanner Darkly*, is a genius. He started shooting this film in 2002 and used the same set of actors over the next 12 years to create a unique ensemble between the cast and the viewers. I had no idea how profound the effect would be of being able to see a boy of 6 morph into an adult over 12 years. I didn’t feel like I was watching the film, I felt like I was living it. I felt like I was living it in the cinema for the entire 12 years, and not in a bad way.

And that is a testament to how well the film is made, the attention to detail means that every little action is believable; the actors are natural and fluid together. I go to the cinema for

a break from my own life, but this is one of the only films I have ever truly got lost in. The others were David Lynch films but I don’t think I got lost for the same reason.

Touching on themes of misogyny, abuse and addiction and their often very subtle effects on family members and how they shape growing children makes this film very unique. It never confronts the “big” problems head on, Mason never asks his mum about his step-dad beating her, in the same way that he probably wouldn’t in real life. Maybe that is where ‘nothing really happens’ came from, because the family don’t talk about their problems, they just get on with it.

The concept of *Boyhood* was a massive risk for Linklater, he invested 12 years of his working life into this project, and for me it paid off ten times over.



The cutting edge of gentrification

By Kate Harris

Two weekends ago I went to see Rift theatre’s production of *Macbeth*, which is held in Balfron Tower, Poplar. There was some interesting theatre and good performances. But the real star of the show was the building it was held in.

In reviews and reports of the show, Balfron Tower is described as “abandoned”, “decaying” and a “monument to idealism”. None of these are accurate. It’s a well-designed, structurally sound block of ex-council housing with amazing views across London. People should and could be living there.

In 2007 it was transferred to local housing association Poplar Housing and Regeneration Community Association, HARCA. Tenants were told they would be able to move back into the block following its refurbishment. But the flats will be sold off.

A former resident, interviewed in Novara online magazine, Sarah, says, “As soon as I moved into that flat, they suddenly “lost” my housing application and told me I wasn’t on the list... They’re trying to push me into private rent or move me way out of the borough, like Bradford or Southend or somewhere. I don’t know anyone in those areas.” A housing officer at Tower Hamlets even told Sarah to try cosmic ordering — otherwise known as the woo that Noel Edmonds believes in.

I’ve worked on the Focus E15 Mums’ campaign, and met people from the Carpenters Estate. Despite being in a different borough (Stratford is in Newham), this all sounds very familiar. Residents of the Carpenters Estate, are being “decanted”, and the land is being sold off to build a new development. Good quality housing stock there is empty. The Focus E15 campaign posted pictures of themselves with their children over the boarded up windows, saying, “We could live here”. They were told they would have to move halfway across England or face making themselves and their kids “intentionally homeless”. We won the right to stay in London, but the young women are dispersed in short-term private lets.

The bottom line seems to be that, as soon as rich people want to live in an area, then the working classes, under-employed and unemployed get moved out. Whether it’s the Olympic Park drawing the petty bourgeoisie in, as in Stratford; or Canary Wharf and London City Airport, as in Poplar, then we get moved.

Populating the block in the meantime are “guardians”, who are paid to live in insecure housing in order to prevent squatting; and arts projects, like the play I saw.

In Novara, James Butler talks about “complicity” and calls artists “the shock troops of gentrification”.

Creating a fictional world in a decanted East London tower block may leave a bad taste in the mouth. It completely detracted from the play: I spent the entire time wanting to ask questions about the history of the building.

But the real targets of our ire should be Tower Hamlets — which is supposedly a leftwing borough council, and Lutfur Rahman is supposedly a leftwing mayor — and the housing association, HARCA.

If you are concerned by gentrification in London, please join with the Focus E15 Mums. We hold a stall every Saturday on Stratford Broadway, outside Wilko’s, between midday and 2pm. In order to fight the hypocrisy in the councils and the driving out of working class people from London, we need grassroots housing campaigns, not hand-wringing about “hipsters”.

More info:

• <http://novaramedia.com/2013/08/social-cleansing-in-tower-hamlets-interview-with-balfron-tower-evictee/>
• on.fb.me/1kyQIZI

Carnival: party or protest?

By Elizabeth Butterworth

Notting Hill Carnival will be held this year on the 24th and 25th August.

In between the photographs of smiling policemen and the swathes of tourists, it's important to remember Carnival's history of anti-racism.

In August 1958, there were riots in London and Nottingham after racist murders such as that of Antiguan carpenter Kelso Cochrane. Young white men, numbering in the hundreds, attacked the houses of Caribbean residents on Bramley Road, West London. Oswald Mosley and other fascists were also spreading hatred.

Claudia Jones was a journalist from Trinidad, a Marxist-feminist who had been jailed in the United States for her political views. She set up an indoor carnival (during the winter) to celebrate Caribbean culture, and the ticket sales went towards the legal fees of those black people who had been arrested for defending themselves.

There was also a small outdoor procession in Ladbrooke Grove.

Carnival went outside and was held on the streets of West London. Black Caribbean people took over space that was normally not theirs.

In 1976, ten times the normal number of police were sent, and there was a riot. Sixty people were hospitalised and sixty-six were arrested. 17 young black people went to court, collectively facing 79 charges, but only two were convicted.

Between 1986 and 88, the police clashed with carnival organisers as they tried to restrict the space taken up by Carnival. They brought charges, which were not proven in court.

In 1989, the Carnival was run by a businesswoman at the head of the new Carnival Enterprise Committee. They were happy to work with the police and policing got heavier and more restrictive. There was a backlash in the form of the Association for a People's Carnival (APC) and others calling for a democratic Carnival.

At the 2014 Carnival, there will be a phone app to guide visitors around the carnival. There are hugely lucrative sponsorship deals and large numbers of police. The commercialisation of Carnival is almost wholesale.

Carnival's radical history of resisting the police and violent racism is being erased and replaced by a liberal narrative of multiculturalism, friendly cops and "positive race relations".

Carnival is political as much as it is a celebration, and it's worth remembering that.



No one oppression can justify another

As we
were saying...



Between condemnation of Israel's conduct in the war that may now be concluding and denial of Israel's right to exist there is logically, politically and morally a very wide gap. However, those who deny Israel's right to exist frequently succeed in blurring that distinction.

Justified outrage is not linked to finding a solution to the conflict, two independent states of Israel and Palestine side-by-side, but to support for an Arab nationalist or Islamist project to destroy Israel. In Britain the would-be revolutionary left is the habitual and the worst offender here. This text was part of a discussion in the French Trotskyist movement of the need to make and hold the distinction between criticising Israel and backing the just demand of the Palestinians for their own state, and supporting chauvinist efforts to destroy Israel and replace it with an Arab state "from the river to the sea".

The article, abridged and republished in 1992 by *Socialist Organiser*, first appeared earlier that year in *Critique Communiste*, the journal of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR, Revolutionary Communist League, the French section of the Fourth International), which is now part of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (New Anticapitalist Party, NPA).

The point here is not to polemicise about our current political positions on Israel and the Palestinian question. Israel has given itself the most reactionary government of its history, and the Palestinian people need our solidarity now more than ever. But, for many decades, shady areas have remained both in our awareness and our assessment of the fact of Israel. It is of that we wish to speak here.

For many years, anti-Zionist violence allowed people to escape "white man's" guilt cheaply. Directing anti-colonialist thunderbolts at the formerly oppressed allowed them to evade the responsibility which the West should rightly feel about the Holocaust. The Trotskyists of the time followed behind, and despite violently anti-Zionist slogans, the Trotskyists were sometimes accused of... Zionism.

It is true that for a number of the Trotskyists there were big issues here. They were concerned to step up their anti-Zionism in order to distance themselves from any suspicion of belonging. Thus, for those militants of Jewish "origin" (the expression behind which these ashamed Jews hid themselves), Jewishness found no place in their commitment. Although their Jewish identity and Auschwitz represented, in many cases, the starting point of their rebellion, that identity, experienced as the shame of a religious particularism, or, worse, a political (Zionist) particularism, could not decently be taken up.

To be suspected, as a Jew, of belonging to an international plot rather than a people, was alas not new. Zionist hydra, state of many tentacles: the words speak for themselves. No other state in the world however racist and colonialist has ever achieved such adjectives.

The demonisation of Israel can only remind us that here we are dealing with a special state... a Jewish state, perhaps. Official anti-Zionism is only the presentable display of the secular anti-semitism of many countries. In the bookshops of Arab or Latin American countries, one can without fear of any censorship (that which is called anti-imperialism is not condemned here) find openly anti-semitic works such as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. In Cairo, Mein Kampf, that celebrated Third-Worldist work, is freely on sale in Arabic.

It is true that the nation of the late Nasser (who widely in-

fluenced Arab nationalism) granted the Jews a delay of a few days to leave the nation: all, bourgeois or proletarians, communists or others, had to be deprived of their nationality. They could be stateless in France, in Britain, in the USA... or choose the only country which, in spite of them not choosing it, chose them despite themselves and offered them citizenship, Israel.

[After 1948] the Jews of the Arab world could no longer envisage a return to the ancestral ways: a half-muted life in the shadow of the Islamic crescent which, after the departure of the European powers, affirmed itself as the bulwark of a new-found identity.

Real refugees, many of them — Syrian, Iraqi, Egyptian Jews — Jews who were refugees in their heads, because they came from countries where there was no longer any future possible for Jews — these people found Israel rather than choosing it. As the outlet for their exile, much more than the cause of their departure, Israel represented, for two-thirds of the Israeli population called oriental Jews, the only possible country.

Anti-Zionist discourse prefers to talk about the blond Western warriors. The idea of Israel being the "spearhead of imperialism" gives credit to this partially erroneous thesis. Although Israel's policy corresponds today to imperialist interests in the region, it is false to consider the creation of the state as a simple manipulation by the imperialist West. It took wars, years of negotiation, and struggle against British power, before the state of Israel was recognised. The Soviet Union was the first state to recognise this "puppet state"... of imperialism.

ARAB NATIONALISM

The rhetoric of Arab nationalism has not hesitated to identify Israel as a new Crusader state, and thus to give another symbolic meaning to expelling the "foreigners" from the sacred land.

It is an obvious historical error, because the Jews who arrived in Israel were not emissaries of a Christian and Western empire, but refugees and survivors from one of the greatest massacres of our time, victims of that "barbarous West" whose racist and imperialist ideology would find its most violent and total form in Nazism.

It is almost dumbfounding to observe that the argument [that certain peoples are not real nations with rights] although no longer applied to the Palestinians [as it was by the Zionist pioneers] continues to figure in the ideological array of some militants. The Jews are thus not a people, much less a nation, but at most a religious minority who can enjoy freedom of worship in the democratic — and Arab — Palestine.

It seems odd that, for internationalists like us, only one people in the world can be an exception to the common analysis — the Jewish people — that the right of self-determination, which seems in the light of history to be one of the most opposite of Marxist principles, cannot function in this case.

Finally — and this would deserve a longer discussion — it may appear regrettable, for the Jews as for the other peoples, that the Holocaust should have contributed so heavily to a form of national identification. For sure, there should be no question of accepting Israel's claims of direct inheritance from the Holocaust. The memory of the victims of the Holocaust belongs to no one, just as it has served no end: this untypical massacre cannot explain anything, for it simply is not explained itself.

Nonetheless, it remains true that Israel, more than any other state, can claim a portion of legitimacy from it. Those are the fruits of history: a history which we did not write and in which we had so little influence! To us it falls to transform that history, without forgetting and without obsession, knowing that oppression engenders oppression and that no one oppression can justify another.

Three fronts of the class struggle

Part two of an article on the early history of the German socialist movement. By Paul Hampton

What was the secret of the SPD's success? Engels identified the advantage the SPD had as early as 1874, in a new preface to his book *The Peasant War in Germany*. Engels pointed to its fusion of the three fronts of the class struggle that made the German socialists the model to follow. He wrote:

"It must be said to the credit of the German workers that they have utilised the advantages of their situation with rare understanding. For the first time in the history of the labour movement the struggle is being so conducted that it's three sides, the theoretical, the political and the practical economical (opposition to the capitalists), form one harmonious and well-planned entity. In this concentric attack lies the strength and invincibility of the German movement..."

The decisive element in Engels' appreciation of the SPD was its work on the ideological front of the class struggle — something identified by Lenin in his pamphlet *What is to be Done?* The party owned an impressive network of newspapers and publishing houses, whose task was, as Bebel put it, "to spread clarity". It published its own central paper — going through different names — *Volksstaat* (*People's State*), *Sozialdemokrat* and *Vorwärts* (*Forwards*), but also scores of local papers, with a broad range of publications dealing with the numerous cultural activities its members ran.

No issue occupied more time at its early congresses than debates about the party press. Bracke argued that the party paper should not appeal to the "basest passions", but should "build the spirit and character, and educate the workers for their political and social mission, while it offers them an understanding of present conditions". At the end of the antisocialist law there were about sixty local newspapers with some ties to the socialists, with a total circulation of about 250,000. By 1914 the SPD owned and operated 94 newspapers with 1.5 million subscribers, most appearing six times weekly.

The most famous and inspiring activity of the outlawed socialists during the heroic period 1878-90 was the distribution system set up to smuggle the *Sozialdemokrat* into Germany from Switzerland. Supervised by the "red postmaster", Julius Motteler, this system used the *Vertrauensmänner* to receive and distribute packets of issues smuggled into the country by various means. In 1895, Motteler wrote a guide for Italian socialists on how to smuggle literature — something that no doubt circulated among other parties. The papers created the scaffolding for local branch organisation, education and the dissemination of the message both to party members and new supporters.

There were other steps taken to educate members. Workers' libraries were established, which meant a single publication changed hands dozens of times. In 1914, more than eleven hundred libraries established by nearly 750 different localities. In 1906 a central educational committee was established and in the same year a central party school, located in Berlin was founded.

A defining characteristic of the SPD press was its openness, with party members encouraged to use it as a forum for airing their diverse views. Wilhelm Liebknecht insisted on a democratic editorial policy that encouraged free expression for all party members. In 1885, he told the staff of *Der Sozialdemokrat*: "As comrades you have the same right as every other comrade to judge, to condemn, and to attack, but as editors of the party organ you do not have the right to take sides within the party."

Vorwärts hailed the invigorating effect of the debate, adding that socialists were "too good democrats" to tolerate the "intellectual autocracy" implicit in a central organ that dictated orthodoxy in all contested issues. "The central sheet belongs to the entire party," Liebknecht pointed out in 1896, "and if various currents prevail in the party... I do not consider myself entitled to damn or excommunicate deviating opinions from my editorial desk."

A similar policy of debate and sharp polemic characterised the theoretical organ, the *Neue Zeit* (*New Times*). Published from 1883 and edited by Kautsky, it only became an official party publication in 1901, although Kautsky retained complete independence in shaping editorial policy until the war. It carried a wide range of Marxist analyses by Marxists from many countries. Although its subscription list only peaked

at 10,000, it had enormous influence in the party and internationally.

The SPD regarded the Reichstag in Wilhelm Liebknecht's words, as "a fig leaf covering despotism". Nevertheless, the party excelled on the political front, particularly standing in elections, spreading the socialist creed, including into places where they had not previously done well. The long slog of electoral campaigning paid off. In 1871 they got just over 3% of the vote and two Reichstag deputies. On the eve of the ban they won nearly 8% and had nine deputies. The SPD Reichstag fraction was the only section of the membership exempt from the stringent anti-socialist laws and they used the platform throughout, reaching almost 20% of the vote by 1890. By 1903 it had won over 30% of the vote, winning over a third of electorate in 1912, the last elections before the war.

The party also ran campaigns — its members urged as Liebknecht put it, to "educate, agitate and organise". Unable to organise street demonstrations until the 1900s due to stringent laws of association, it still organised May Day rallies and other big indoor meetings. The party was also instrumental in utilising all possibilities on the "cultural front" of the class struggle. As Steenson (1981) described it. The party "sponsored extensive social, cultural and educational endeavours". It ran insurance programmes, burial societies, and travel clubs and sponsored facilities in which itinerant and indigent workers could find shelter and support. There were "socialist taverns and cafes, socialist theatres, socialist athletic clubs, and in some heavily industrialised areas, even entirely socialist neighbourhoods". There were walking and hiking clubs, including The Friends of Nature. Beginning with the singing clubs and the gymnasts, by 1912 "there were at least a dozen national federations and one super organisation of sports clubs (gymnasts, cyclists, athletes and swimmers), the latter called the Central Commission for Workers' Sports and Physical Fitness".

TRIBUNES AGAINST OPPRESSION

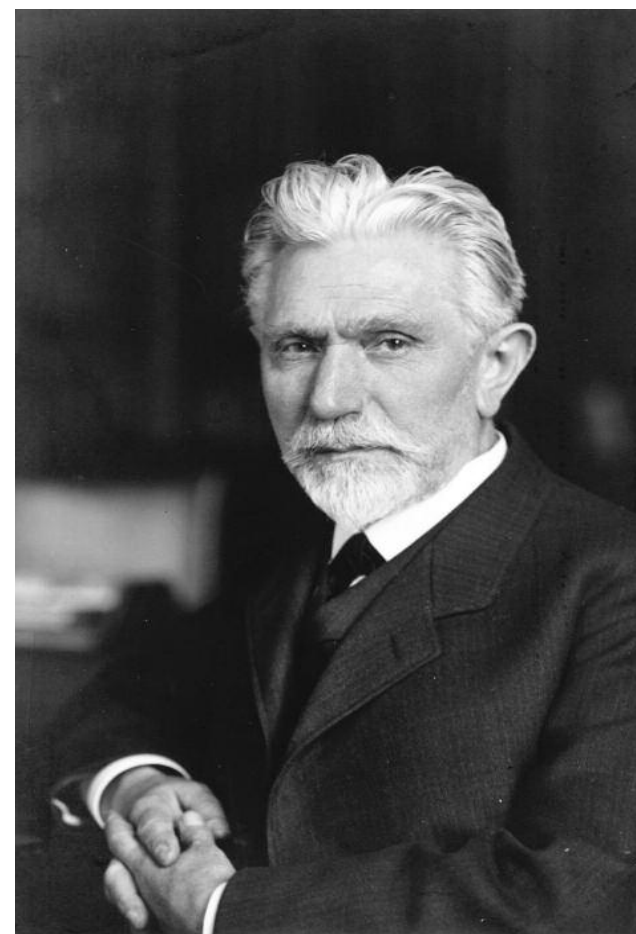
SPD members were also "tribunes of the people", taking up a broad issues of oppression beyond narrowly economic worker-interests. Until 1908, it was illegal for women to attend political meetings or join political associations in all parts of Germany ruled by Prussian law. Even in areas where women were permitted to participate in political meetings, they faced segregation in balconies or roped off areas. One of the SPD's greatest achievements was the creation of the socialist women's movement, which by the war involved 140,000 women in Germany and influenced others women's movements in England, Russia and elsewhere.

The party made the connection between women's liberation and socialism early in its history. In the 1860s, Bebel hosting meetings of the emerging feminist movement led by Louise Otto-Peters, advocated women's suffrage and women joining trade unions. Although he did not win the debate at Eisenach, where the formulation was "all citizens", the Gotha programme included the demand for the vote for men and women. Bebel's book, *Women and Socialism* was considered a salacious read for its time. It went through 50 printings and numerous revisions between 1879 and 1913. However it raised serious issues, such as sexual violence, rape, incest, the veil, sexual orientation, arranged marriage, pornography, abortion, prostitution and the family, sexually transmitted diseases, fashion, trafficking in women, women at work and countless other insights.

Bebel understood the universality of women's oppression, arguing that "Independently of the question whether a woman is oppressed as a proletarian, in this world of private property she is viewed almost exclusively in terms of her gender" and "the tyranny of men over women is similar to the tyranny of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat; in many ways the former is even worse". He explicitly criticised the objectification of women under capitalism and other class societies. Bebel stated that working class women suffer doubly: as women and as proletarians, and that working-class women had "more in common with bourgeois women or aristocratic women than do working-class men with men of other social classes".

To this picture of double oppression, Bebel juxtaposed the vision of the socialist future, where "women will be equal

Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg on their way to the 1910 Social Democratic Party of Germany (SDP) congress in Magdeburg.



August Bebel

with men when they are not only legally but also economically equal, when they enjoy the same human rights as men, and when social conditions make it impossible for men to set themselves up as their masters because they are the breadwinners". Although vocally critical of the "enemy sisters" in the bourgeois feminist movement, he also made a strong case

for autonomous organising, both for feminism as a social movement and for organising within the SPD, arguing that “women can no more rely upon the aid of men, than the workers can rely upon the aid of the bourgeoisie”. Nevertheless, woman “must look about for allies, and she naturally finds such allies in the proletarian movement”.

It was this tradition that Clara Zetkin and other socialist women took up with gusto. Zetkin outlined her evolving view of women’s oppression and how to fight it in speeches to the Second International (1889) and at the party’s congresses, notably at Gotha (1896). From 1891 Zetkin edited the SPD women’s paper *Die Gleichheit*, which had 125,000 subscribers in 1914. Consistently on the left of the party, the paper was also adopted and copied by international socialist women, notably Armand and Kollontai in Russia.

The SPD also fought on the economic front of the class struggle, which meant principally the organisation of trade unions and the strikes. This was a battle the Marxists had to fight against other tendencies in the labour movement. Generally the Lassalleans were hostile to union organisation — although they did recruit some influential trade unionists. There were also liberal and Catholic unions. Bebel took a positive attitude towards building trade unions — drafting model statutes in 1868. At Eisenach the textile union, which included both men and women, was represented. The party debated attitudes to protective legislation for women, the working week and other demands.

Unions were banned by the anti-socialist laws, but when these were rescinded a quarter of a million joined trade unions. Membership doubled during the 1890s and doubled again by 1905, and then again by 1910. At the outbreak of war, around 2.4 million workers belonged to trade unions. Workers continued to face both belligerent employers and a bellicose state, epitomised by the Hamburg dock strike of 1896-7. Lock-outs were common. The SPD was tactically cautious with regard to strikes, although as disputes became more widespread from the turn of the century, the party debated political mass strikes. The Luxemburg-Kautsky debate in particular repays study, a strategic and tactical high point before 1914 that can inform discussions in today’s conditions.

THE MODEL

The German SPD was the model for aspiring Marxists in Europe and elsewhere, as witnessed by adoption of similar methods and the reports of its activities in their own press. Writing to Engels (26 October 1890), Paul Lafargue referred to his group of French Marxists as “we who hold up the German party as a model”. William Morris spent the last twelve years of his life propagating socialist ideas at more than a thousand public meetings, speaking to perhaps a quarter of a million people and publishing 400 newspapers. In the early 1890s, Rosa Lux-



Wilhelm Liebknecht

emburg established a small group of Marxists in Poland (later also including Lithuania) with a similar model. These organisations began with a few dozen committed people, but they were inspired to mimic the SPD.

Lenin’s commitment to the model never wavered until the war: he was not only an “Erfurtian”, as Lars Lih has argued, but an Eisenacher, a Gothan and a Mottelerite rolled into one. Polemicalising against those who said he wanted to split the Party, Lenin asked: “When and where did I call the ‘revolutionism of Bebel and Kautsky’ opportunism? When and where did I ever claim to have created any sort of special trend in international social democracy not identical with the trend of Bebel and Kautsky?” (*The Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, 1905). In 1913, writing his obituary of Bebel, Lenin wrote that he was “a model workers’ leader”, with whom “nobody can compare”. As late as April 1914, Lenin hailed “the great services” performed by German Social Democracy, its “strictly formulated theory”, its “mass organisation, newspapers, trade unions, political associations” (What Should Not be Copied From the German Labour Movement).

CRITIQUE

The SPD leadership betrayed the cause of international socialism by supporting their own government in the First World War. Only the Spartacists around Luxemburg, Leo Jogliches, Zetkin, Franz Mehring and Karl Liebknecht (son of Wilhelm) salvaged the honour of the party, although all came to recognise that a new party and a new international was necessary to replace it.

Why did the SPD evolve from a revolutionary party to one committed to a conventional form of bourgeois parliamentary democracy? We can readily dismiss accusations that the party was “crippled from birth”, as one historian has argued. The SPD remained subversive until at least the beginning of the twentieth century — it was perceived as such by German capitalists and their state.

A more convincing explanation is that the SPD and the unions became, particularly in the decade prior to the war, successively more embourgeoisified and incorporated in the state. The party became a conservative, sclerotic, bureaucratized organisation, tightly controlled by an apparatus of politically-limited functionaries, personified by Fritz Ebert, who became secretary in 1906 at the age of 36, and chair of the party in 1913. Schorske (1955: 124) described him as “colourless, cool, determined, industrious and intensely practical... all those characteristics which were to make him... the Stalin of Social Democracy”.

By the outbreak of war, the SPD had over 4,000 party officials, hundreds in every great metropolitan centre and ten times the number at the turn of the century. A similar pattern emerged in the trade unions, which had nearly 3,000 paid full-time functionaries, compared with only 100 a decade earlier. On top of this, the cooperative movement also had its own bureaucracy and handsome treasury, while the party papers paid for hundreds of full-time journalists and 3,000 manual and clerical workers, managers, commercial directors and representatives. There were also its elected representatives: 110 deputies in the Reichstag, the 220 deputies in the various Landtags and its 2,886 elected municipal councillors.

These leaders became materially privileged compared with the workers they represented. Wilhelm Liebknecht remarked at the party congress in 1892: “The greatest portion of you who sit here are certainly to a considerable extent aristocrats among labour — I mean with respect to income.” The accusation was thrown back at him — he allegedly received 12,000 marks a year from his party activities, when the average worker received 700 marks wages. He had clearly come a long way from the “soldier of the revolution”, but these funds alone do not explain the rightward lurch of the party. Similarly, we can discount the theory that a labour aristocracy among wider layers of workers had grown spoiled on the tribute from imperialism. The better-paid workers in the productive industries tended to be more militant, as events after the war would show, when they created workers’ councils and formed the backbone of the Communist Parties.

More significantly, the democratic mechanisms that had served the SPD well throughout its history became more and more constricted. Its “democratic centralism” became less democratic and highly centralist. The party press increasingly closed opportunities for left critics to dissent. The party congress became more like a choreographed rally than a workers’ parliament. The principles of accountability, election and democracy were replaced with a machine that became more closely integrated into the German state.

Ultimately, the explanation for the demise of the SPD must

be political. The party leaders grappled with the great questions of the day, but did not draw the necessary political conclusions from the plethora of voices contesting it. We know from Day and Gaido’s book, *Discovering Imperialism* that the SPD debated geopolitical rivalry for over a decade before the outbreak of war, and held a more or less adequate account of its driving forces and likely consequences. However there were more deep-seated contradictions that began to play out.

The Marxism articulated by the SPD was often a vulgar evolutionism, a mish-mash of ill-digested Darwinism, positivism and other pseudo-scientific fads of the age. Bebel and others declared that capitalist society was working busily towards its own collapse and the SPD need only wait for the moment when power would fall into its hands. This conception of socialism as evolving inevitably led to an abstract propagandist passivity, a revolutionary “waiting” in the face of the turn in the world situation. Similarly, Kautsky oxymoron that “Social Democracy is a revolutionary party, but not a party that makes revolutions” meant his “centrism” increasingly became merely a means to rationalise the leadership’s accommodation to reformism in the new century.

Some of the rot was found in the max-mini programme at Erfurt programme, when socialism became the talk of Sunday sermons, disconnected from the day-to-day pursuit of reforms. This dichotomy extended to strategy, with no bridge between the fight for reforms and the eventual struggle for power. These dualisms would only be overcome in conceptions of transitional demands, the united front and the workers’ government developed by the Bolsheviks and later the Communist International.

Crucially, the party never ideologically defeated Bernstein’s revisionist trend that emerged in the late 1890s and which proclaimed that “the movement is everything, the goal is nothing”. At stake was not a debate about different means (parliamentary or insurrectionary) to inaugurate socialism, but of the socialist goal being replaced by an entirely different goal — accommodation to modern capitalism. It only belatedly created a party school and did not educate its members systematically. The left in the SPD did refute Bernstein’s strictures and underline the ongoing, exploitative and oppressive nature of capitalism, but they did not draw the political and organisational conclusions that followed — the necessity to organise their own separate faction, with its own press and apparatus, to fight the bureaucracy inside the SPD, with the perspective of either winning the majority for socialism or ultimately splitting away with the militant workers.

The SPD was not what it seemed by 1914. As one historian put it, it appeared like a “monolithic juggernaut”, but was in reality “a shaky conglomerate beset by serious fissiparous tendencies”. Its “sonorous trumpeting of revolutionary rhetoric” masked the absence of a revolutionary strategy for taking power. Its organisational fetishism enabled internal differences to be ignored indefinitely rather than resolved. By 1914, although it still stood for working class political representation, it was no longer a Marxist party in the sense Marx, Engels and the best of their followers understood it. The displacement of the Marxist line by a nationalistic reformism is the great tragedy that preceded the treachery of 1914. We cannot ignore the betrayal, but nor can we write off the entire experience as worthless. Today we learn lessons from defeats, so as better to prepare our own victories.

WHAT TO READ

Gary Steenson, Not one man! Not one penny! German Social Democracy, 1863-1914.

David Barclay and Eric Weitz (eds.) Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990.

Frank Macklenburg and Manfred Stassen (eds.) German Essays on Socialism in the Nineteenth Century: Theory, History, and Political Organization, 1844-1914.

Michael Löwy, The Theory of Revolution in the Young Marx discusses the pre-history.

Vernon Lidtke, The Outlawed Party: Social Democracy in Germany, 1878-1890.

Carl Schorske, German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism.

Werner Thönnessen, The Emancipation of Women: the Rise and Decline of the Women’s Movement in German Social Democracy, 1863-1933.

Anne Lopes and Gary Roth, Men’s Feminism: August Bebel and the German Socialist Movement.

Vernon Lidtke, The Alternative Culture: the Socialist Labor Movement in Imperial Germany.

Lars Lih, Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? In Context.

Government stance hardens in firefighters' pension dispute

By Darren Bedford

Firefighters in England and Wales have begun a further eight-day period of strikes, as the Westminster government refuses to improve its pension proposals.

The strikes began on Saturday 9 August, and will last until Saturday 16 August. They take place every day between 12 and 2pm, and again from 10.59 to 11.59pm.

The current pensions proposals in England and Wales are still unworkable, and mean that firefighters will still face dismissal simply because they cannot maintain the physical fitness requirements necessary until they are age 60. Concessions by devolved governments have been sufficient to avoid strike action in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

For months, the Westminster government is known to have considered and costed an improved position that would allow firefighters to retire with more flexibility from age 55, but this has not been offered.

The Westminster government appeared to have hardened its position further in the last week. New Fire Minister Penny Mor-



daunt wrote to union leaders on 6 August informing them that she considered the meeting scheduled to take place the following day to have "fallen". This is the first time talks have been cancelled, and was followed with more aggressive media briefing against the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), describing its approach as "illogical".

Yet it is the government that created an unworkable pensions scheme, and it is the government's own research that has confirmed that working to 60 is beyond most firefighters. The only logic at Westminster is the "logic" of making public sector workers pay for the economic downturn that was created by the Tory bankers and their friends.

The strikes show that FBU members have a con-

tinued willingness to take action in defence of their pensions. The union is keeping up the momentum of action over the summer holidays, rather than going to sleep for months. The union's leadership has said it is willing to carry on with action, unless the government breaks the log-jam.

SCOTLAND

In a related development, the incumbent FBU regional secretary in Scotland John Duffy was hammered four to one in elections for the post.

Duffy is an active SNP member and strangely for a Scottish nationalist, the recipient of an OBE earlier this year. He is widely seen as committed to "social partnership" with the SNP government, and for cobbling together the deal that kept Scottish firefighters out of strike action since it began last September.

It is a good thing that FBU members in Scotland have decisively rejected Duffy's approach.

Elections for the positions of Scottish chair, Scottish treasurer and EC member for Scotland are now imminent. Duffy's defeat could turn out to be a forerunner of more incumbents being removed from office.

Ritzy workers to vote on deal

By Jonny West

Workers at The Ritzy cinema in Brixton, south London, will vote on a new pay offer from their employer, Picturehouse Cinemas.

The deal was reached after exhaustive late-night talks at conciliation service ACAS between Picturehouse management and reps from the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU), including workplace reps from The Ritzy itself. Workers have struck repeatedly in a dispute aimed at winning the London Living Wage.

The negotiating team is recommending acceptance of the deal, which provides what a BECTU statement calls a "voyage to higher pay." The deal offers an immediate pay increase to £8 per hour, backdated to October 2013, with further increases to £8.20 on 5 September, £8.40 on 2 January 2015, and a final increase to the (current) London Living Wage rate of £8.80 on 4 September 2015.

Because the London Living Wage would not be secured for over a year, many workers see the deal as falling short of the central demand of their long-running dispute — an immediate implementation of the London Living Wage. In early July, workers voted by a 97% majority to continue the Living Wage dispute.

Workers were also frustrated by BECTU's initial press releases publicising the deal, which implied it had already been accepted. A statement from the strikers said: "It should be made clear that this does not mean that a deal has been 'agreed' as some media outlets have reported. As at every stage of this process, the BECTU members at The Ritzy themselves are the only ones empowered to make that decision and they will do so in the coming weeks through a secret ballot."

The ballot runs until 26 August.



Tube canteen staff strike

By Ollie Moore

London Underground catering staff struck on 4 August, demanding reinstatement for victimised union rep Petrit Mihaj.

Petrit, who has been central to Tube union RMT's organisation and recognition campaign amongst Sodexo canteen staff, has been vindicated by an Employment Tribunal ruling

that his sacking was unfair and based on his trade union activities. Despite this, Sodexo has refused to reinstate him.

The solid strike, which took place from 6.30 to 11.00am, often the busiest time for the Sodexo-run staff canteens at depots, saw picket lines and demonstrations in several locations.

On Monday 11 August, RMT began a campaign of

demonstrations targeting Sodexo's headquarters. The company, which has dozens of public contracts in education, healthcare, prisons, and elsewhere, is also notorious for its racist treatment of black and ethnic minority employees, paying out millions in a 2005 law suit after it was revealed to have systematically denied promotion to black workers in the USA.

Stop the witch-hunt against Liam Conway

By Gerry Bates

The Nottinghamshire Division of the National Union of Teachers has repeatedly written to the General Secretary and the National Secretary seeking to negotiate a settlement on issues relating to financial irregularity in the Division and to close down the matter on just terms. But the appeals of Nottinghamshire members appear to be falling on deaf ears.

Yet the union has continued to process disciplinary cases against those who blew the whistle on the irregularities.

Liam Conway has been the main victim of the union's actions having now been subject to eight separate disciplinary com-

plaints. Those making the complaints can only have one intention, to have Liam either removed from his officer positions (Secretary of Nottinghamshire NUT) and the National Executive (representing Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire) or to have him expelled from the union.

Effectively those initiating false allegations (of bullying, unprofessional conduct and bringing the union into disrepute) have lost the debate and are seeking to use the complaints procedures to overturn the democratic decisions of members.

Two new complaints have been made against Liam Conway since his election to the National Executive in March, both are now being processed to full disciplinary hearings in Oc-

tober.

At every stage over the last two years, members meetings, officer elections in Notts and this year's NEC election (where, Liam Conway was elected comfortably to represent Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire) those bringing the charges have been vindicated in their views and supported overwhelmingly by members.

Even the Certification Office for Trades Unions has written to the NUT informing them that the two internal NUT investigations into the finances of Nottinghamshire NUT were flawed, that the union's view that no fraud or financial irregularity had occurred was unsustainable, that those who had raised the alarm were right to do so, that on the lack of autho-

risation for payments and the absence of transparency in the accounts of the payments, the evidence supported their contentions.

It has been claimed that the NEC and national union officers cannot interfere with an independent disciplinary process. This is nonsense!

The NEC and the officials of the union have a responsibility to ensure that all disciplinary complaints comply with both the rules of the union and the law. These cases breach both the law and the union's rules.

Whistleblower legislation and the 1992 Trade Union Act protect union members from unjustifiable discipline and any detriment arising out of complaints about financial irregularity, provided such complaints are made in good faith.

More importantly, as a result of a similar case in the 1990s when Ian Murch (the current NUT National Treasurer) was suspended from the union, the NUT rules were changed to ensure that no member could be disciplined for opinions "expressed about the policy and management of the union". This rule has been repeatedly ignored here.

Members of the NUT are paying for this injustice. The cases cost time and money and undermine the functioning of union officers, permanently tying them up in complaints procedures. It is effectively a union groundhog day and not a very nice one.

This is a witch-hunt conducted against Liam Conway and others by the official structures of the NUT. No member of a trade

union should be denied the right to blow the whistle on potential wrong-doing in a trade union.

The left should not ignore such wrong-doing for fear it might give a bad name to a trade union. Charges of bringing a trade union into disrepute should not be used to cover-up financial bad practice or other forms of corruption.

The NUT claims to be a democratic lay-led union. This case shows such a claim to be fraudulent. All trade unionists should unite in calling for the end of these complaints and for a settlement of the dispute in Nottinghamshire Division of the NUT on just terms.

We call for an end of the witch-hunt against Liam Conway.



Solidarity

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ISIS threatens the Kurds; US sends bombers

That the US has been pulled in was predictable. The details are unexpected.

The US is bombing not to aid the Baghdad government's forces, but those of the (very) autonomous Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq.

The US action was triggered by ISIS advances against the Kurds on 2 August, and announced by Barack Obama on 7 August.

The conventional wisdom had been that the Kurdish armed forces were tougher than the ramshackle and demoralised Iraqi army. The Iraqi Kurds' first response to the ISIS advances in the north of Arab Iraq was not to fear an ISIS invasion of Kurdish areas, but to take the chance to seize the disputed city of Kirkuk.

Iraqi Kurdistan has generally been more prosperous and stable than Arab Iraq since 2003. Many refugees from the ISIS advance in northern Arab Iraq fled north to Kurdistan rather than south to the Shia-dominated areas under the Baghdad government.

Now ISIS is only 40 km from the Kurdish capital Erbil. The Baghdad government announced on 5 August that its air force would help the Kurds.

The new ISIS advance comes despite reports that discontent with ISIS's ultra-Islamism is rising in the Sunni Arab areas ISIS controls.

Christian and Yezidi religious minorities have fled the ISIS advance. US president Obama says that the US bombing is aimed at helping those religious minorities.

The US is highly selective about aiding persecuted minorities, and a more rounded analysis is offered by US academic Juan Cole.

"The US is intervening for political as well as military reasons. Washington says that more such military aid may be forthcoming if Iraq will form a government of national unity. So basically, Obama is putting pressure on President Fuad Massoum to pick a prime minister other than Nouri al-Maliki and form a government asap.

"Likewise, Washington wants the Kurds to remain within a federal Iraqi framework rather than declaring independence, and seems to be bombing ISIS positions for the Kurds in order to extract a promise from Kurdistan president Massoud Barzani that he will stay in Iraq".

Obama has ruled out sending US ground forces. The visible reluctance of the US to risk military embroilment in Syria, or new embroilment in Iraq, makes Obama's statement credible.

More bombing is likely, though. According to Reuter's, the Iranian regime, which holds great sway in Iraq, has now decided that Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki must be replaced. Maliki will not go easily, but the combined pressure of the US and Iran is likely to get him overthrown.

"Regional power broker Iran believes... Maliki is no longer able to hold his country together and is looking for an alternative leader to combat a Sunni Islamist insurgency, senior Iranian officials said on Tuesday [5 August]".

Even under a new leadership, Baghdad's resistance to ISIS is likely to continue to have a Shia-sectarian tone. And yet the ability of ISIS to win support or compliance among Sunni Arabs in northern Iraq was largely generated by the stubborn, authoritarian, corrupt Shia sectarianism of Maliki's government.

As between the Kurds and ISIS, though, socialists should back the Kurds: they are not only resisting sectarian ultra-Islamism but defending their national rights.



Christian and Yezidi religious minorities have fled the ISIS advance

It does not follow that we should positively support or endorse the US bombing. The bombing cannot be assessed in isolation from overall US policy in the region, which has given fuel to Sunni ultra-Islamists rather than undercutting them. Over 12 years of US bombing in Afghanistan have left the Taliban stronger, not weaker. When the US had huge occupation forces in Iraq, and extensive military control, it twice set out to reconquer the city of Fallujah after it had been taken over by Sunni ultra-Islamists, and both times failed to install a local government strong and well-accepted enough to resist new ultra-Islamist takeovers.

The Stop the War coalition has published an article by Lindsey German which hints and suggests that US bombing is now the main thing to be opposed in Iraq. The article is mealy-mouthed — it nowhere has the slogan "stop the bombing" — and proceeds by three other claims, all suggested rather than clearly stated.

One is that the US creates "dangerous and deadly wars and conflicts". Sometimes: but in this case ISIS has already created the war.

The second is that "if anything has been shown to have failed in recent years it has been US airstrikes". So if the air strikes succeeded (in their own terms, presumably), we should support them? Our opposition to US policy is not to its aims, but to its inability to realise them? In fact, US bombing sometimes succeeds. (Bosnia, Kosova).

The third is that the US bombing is somehow connected to Israel's assault on Gaza. "Gaza... has to be seen as connected to the other issues". But how, except in the sense that everything is connected?

The US is bombing with its own motives, but those motives centrally include aid to the Kurds. The US military action is unlikely any time soon to escalate to anywhere near a point where it becomes the dominant factor and sidelines the "local" Kurds-vs-ISIS issues.

- No confidence in US intervention
- For secular government in Iraq as the only solid basis for quelling Shia-Sunni sectarianism
- Self-determination for the Kurds
- **Help the hard-pressed Iraqi labour movement survive both the totalitarian threat from ISIS, and the pressures of Shia counter-sectarianism and war fever in Iraq and Kurdistan.**

Solidarity with Gaza!

By Charlotte Zeleus

At the time of writing (11 August) a ceasefire between Hamas in Gaza and the Israeli government is holding up.

That is only a little comfort and relief for Gaza's population. Nearly 2,000 Palestinians have died since the start of "Operation Protective Edge". In Gaza City, 20-30% of the housing stock has been damaged. Ten out of 26 of Gaza's hospitals have been put out of action either by lack of power or lack of medicine and medical equipment. Such damage of infrastructure in a place that has suffered from acute shortages, the result of an Israeli-Egyptian blockade, is a disaster.

The stark difference in the casualties shows the power imbalance — the death toll for Israel is less than 100.

Israel claimed self-defence against Hamas rockets, and it has a right to defend itself. But its historical oppression of the Palestinians and the current military campaign against Gaza cannot be legitimately justified as self-defence.

The Palestinians have the right to defend themselves. But launching rockets at civilian areas of Israel is not self-defence, or a viable strategy to make Israel back down; the Israelis can shoot down, not all, but many Palestinian rockets, before they do damage and they are a political gift to the Israeli right.

The fundamental blame for the carnage here is with Israel. Israel has the power to end the blockade and accede to a just political settlement. It has the resources to rebuild Palestinian homes, hospitals and schools.

The current ceasefire may yet collapse. The story of the Gaza strip is one of fundamental political instability. The last Israeli military offensive was in 2012 when 167 Palestinians were killed. In 2008 1,400 Palestinians were killed.

Only a long-term democratic settlement can stop this happening again and again. A peace settlement should be based on the creation of a fully independent Palestinian state alongside Israel and supported by international economic aid, as well as the dismantlement of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

We are a long way from such a settlement. International solidarity, and solidarity between Jewish and Arab workers across the borders, is critical to achieving this aim.

- End the blockade!
- Two states for two peoples!

• Demonstrations and other solidarity, see page 5



End the cycle of destruction