

For a  
workers'  
government

# Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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[www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)

**Take back what they  
have looted  
from workers**

**TAX**

**See  
page 5**



**THE RICH!**

## 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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# Tragedy in the Aegean

By Dora Polenta

In the early hours of Monday 20 January a Greek coastguard patrol detected a small boat near then Greek island of Farmakonisi, in the Aegean Sea between Greece and Turkey.

On board were 28 asylum seekers, 25 Afghans and 3 Syrians, including many women and children.

The survivors say that the coastguards attached a rope to their boat and towed it towards Turkish waters at high speed and in rough seas. The boat capsized.

The coastguards eventually picked up 16 survivors. Six people were found dead, amongst them a woman and a five year old child, and six others are missing.

As the boat capsized, so the survivors say, some of the asylum seekers tried to climb aboard the coast-guard vessel, but were beaten and kicked to prevent them. One survivor, a father who lost his three children and his wife, says that he asked the coast-

guards to give him a life jacket to save his family and they ignored him.

The 16 survivors arrived in Athens on Thursday 23 January and were greeted by members of the "Deport Racism" movement and of the Social Network of Support for Refugees and Immigrants, representatives of UNHCR, and MPs from the left-wing party Syriza. The official Greek state offered no welcome.

Many asylum-seekers have died before this in the Aegean. The difference in this case is that people drowned when under the direct control of the coastguards, and that the coastguards' reported attempt to tow the boat into Turkish waters was illegal.

According to official data, at least 19,144 migrants have died between 1988 and the end of 2013 when trying to enter Europe. 14,309 died in the Mediterranean or the Atlantic, trying to reach Spain; and 1,504 in the Aegean Sea between Greece and Turkey. During the years 2011-2013, the Greek coastguards carried out 550 seizures, identifying 11,741



Survivors

would-be immigrants.

The Minister of Shipping has attacked the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner, Amnesty International, and Syriza as making "misguided, premature declarations".

The ministry and the pro-government media chorus have denied that coastguards were towing the boat towards Turkish waters, and claimed that the capsizing of the boat was due to the people on it all suddenly moving to one side.

Government spokesman Simos Kedikoglou has denounced Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras:

"Mr Tsipras defames his

country, aiming at the abolition of Frontex [the EU agency for monitoring the EU's external borders] and the massive entry of illegal immigrants."

The existence of fascist nuclei within the Greek state apparatus is common knowledge. In any case, these deaths are due to the inhuman logic of European and Greek immigration policy and the fortress Europe policy of closed borders.

**Yet the Greek presidency of the EU has set the intensification of enforcement at the external borders as a top priority. "We will focus on measures relating to the prevention of illegal immigration, readmission and return, and building the institutional capacity for border management".**

**Racist political agitation against migrants increases in Italy**  
[bit.ly/lega-n](http://bit.ly/lega-n)

## Mobilise against the EDL in Slough!

On 1 February 2014, the Anti-Fascist Network will mobilise to oppose the English Defence League's first national demonstration of the year in Slough. We are calling on all anti-fascists in London to come with us to Slough to support the locally-organised counter demonstration, which will take place at 11am Salt Hill Park. It's important that we continue the pressure against the EDL, and other far-right and racist organisations, and that we close down their space to move and cause division amongst working class people. The coach from London departs from outside the Bloomsbury Theatre at 9am sharp, and we will head to Salt Hill Park in Slough to assemble at 11am. The coach will depart from Slough at 5:20pm. For info on how to book coach places, visit [bit.ly/slough-coaches](http://bit.ly/slough-coaches)

## Let asylum-seekers into Australia!

Asylum seekers detained by the Australian government on Christmas Island are staging hunger strikes in protest against their treatment and forced separation from family members.

At least 78 men have joined the strike; hundreds more, including children, are participating in sit-ins. Some people are self-harming with glass and razors, and others are sewing their lips together.

Christmas Island is a tiny Australian territory in the Indian Ocean, uninhabited when first found by European explorers. Its settled population is now mostly Chinese-Australian, but the Australian government uses it as a detention camp for asylum seekers.

**Successive governments have refused even to detain asylum seekers in mainland Australia, instead dumping them on remote islands.**

● More: [www.refugeeaction.org.au](http://www.refugeeaction.org.au)

## Hungarian far right stymied

By Phil Grimm

The leader of Jobbik, one of Europe's largest far-right parties, held a rally in London on 26 January.

Jobbik, which is now the third-biggest party in Hungary, campaigns on an explicitly anti-semitic, anti-Roma platform. Its paramilitaries violently attack Roma communities, while its parliamentary statesmen denounce Zionist conspiracies and demand that the government draw up lists of influential Hungarian Jews.

With elections in Hungary approaching, Jobbik's leader, Gábor Vona, came to London to drum up support amongst the city's large Hungarian community.

Jobbik supporters were due to meet at Holborn tube station, but on their arrival discovered over a hundred anti-fascists gathered at the entrances. Protected by a thick line of police, the fascists were

trapped in the ticket hall for several hours. Eventually police ushered them back onto the trains, relocating the rally to Hyde Park.

The Holborn protest was one of the more effective anti-fascist mobilisations I have seen. Unite Against Fascism (the SWP-controlled front that dominated proceedings) has earned itself a bad reputation for organising stationary, passive protests away from where fascists congregate. However, in Holborn, the anti-fascist mobilisation was effective in physically blocking and disrupting the fascists' attempts to go about their business.

Scuffles between anti-fascists and groups of Jobbik thugs trying to find their way around central London continued throughout the day.

**Encouraging also was the number of Hungarians who joined the anti-fascist crowd.**

# Egypt: Al-Sisi to stand for President

By Tom Harris

The 14-15 January referendum on a new Egyptian constitution returned a 98% majority.

However, only 38% of eligible voters took part. The new constitution will replace the one introduced in 2012 under the Muslim Brotherhood presidency of Mohammed Morsi (voted through on a turnout of 33%).

Despite the low turnout, the result is a major boost to the military-backed regime which has governed Egypt since it deposed Morsi in July 2013. Off the back of the victory, General Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, the man who oversaw the coup, has announced his candidacy for the upcoming presidential elections. Senior military commanders have publicly given al-Sisi their blessing.

State and corporate media waged a massive propaganda campaign in favour of the new constitution, while those who agitated for a no vote faced harassment and arrest. The Muslim Brotherhood, who constituted the largest or-



ganised opposition to the new draft, has been forced underground and its leaders have been jailed.

Few dispute that the constitution has at least the passive support of a large portion of Egyptians. Many liberals and secularists view it as a bulwark against Islamism. It is also true that the new draft contains democratic guarantees which the old one didn't — against torture, for freedom of speech to journalists. It declares men and women equal.

But the constitution also

represents an entrenchment of the military in government. The army is given the right to appoint the Defence Minister and military spending is placed outside of civilian control. Civilians can be summoned before military courts and the role of the army in public life is enshrined.

Turnout was far lower than 38% among some sections of Egyptian society. Turnout among young people was well below average, despite the mass involvement of young Egyptians in the protests and uprisings

of the last three years. This reflects an increasing bitterness amongst the young as the police measures of the old Mubarak regime, the regime so many of them helped topple, begin to reappear.

**In the wake of the referendum, there have been suicide and car bombings in Cairo. The government has been quick to blame the Muslim Brotherhood, though the jihadist group Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (Champions of Jerusalem) has claimed responsibility.**

# Stand-off over Thai elections

By Steve Wilson

**There have been anti-government protests and a permanent protest camp in Bangkok since November 2013. With growing frequency protesters have been shot; bombs have injured dozens and killed several.**

The protestors are calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, and for a "People's Council" to take her place. The opposition say the council would be unelected but would oversee a transition to new elections and an end to Government corruption.

In response, the Government has called for elections on 2 February.

The Democratic Party (DP), whose supporters make up the majority of the protestors, and are known as "yellow shirts", will boycott the election. In the meantime the Government has declared a state of emergency in response to growing instability, and the threat of a military coup, a

repeat of an event which took place in 2006 against the previous administration of Thaksin Shinawatra.

Pro-government "red shirts" are protesting as well. Yingluck Shinawatra is Thaksin's sister, and her party, the Pheu Thai Party, is seen as a successor to her brother's Thai Rak Thai party.

The anti-government protestors view Yingluck as a proxy for her exiled brother, who is believed to be trying to re-enter frontline Thai politics. An amnesty bill which would have allowed for his return was defeated in the Thai Senate, and the section of the Thai bourgeoisie virulently hostile to Shinawatra and his support in rural and Northern Thailand has instigated the current round of protests.

Thailand's National Anti Corruption Commission (NACC) has confirmed it will investigate the current government's proposals to amend the constitution to make all senate seats elected, as well as potential corruption in its rice sub-

sidy program.

As *Solidarity* said previously, "politically the red shirts are not a working class or peasant force. They are tarred by their relationship to Thaksin Shinawatra, who has provided financial backing for them and retains a level of support within the organisation. The red shirts are at best a petty bourgeois movement".

However this does not mean workers' sympathy should be with the opposition who oppose not just the alleged corruption of Shinawatra but also policies that have brought in greater access to healthcare for the rural poor and have improved the living standards for many of Thailand's poorest.

Whilst the anti-government protests are significant in Bangkok, such hostility does not extend throughout the country. This split has led to a red shirt claim that the anti-government protest leaders want to divide Thailand between the urban centres and the poorer, rural north.

Supporters of democracy in Thailand should note that neither of these wings of the Thai ruling class opposes the repressive *lèse majesté* law against insulting the King, which has led to numerous activists being jailed, including left wing democracy campaigner Somyot Pruksakasemsuk.

**Any attempt to block the elections on 2 February whether by the protesters or the military should be opposed, but reliance on the populism of the Shinawatras is a dead end and distraction from the much needed independent working-class opposition.**

**Court rules against Royal Wedding arrestees**  
[bit.ly/roy-wedd](http://bit.ly/roy-wedd)

# Syria talks: little hope for political settlement

By Simon Nelson

The "Geneva II" talks between warring sides in Syria aim to establish, as set out in the June 2012 Geneva Communiqué, a transitional government involving "both sides", alongside a review of the Syria's constitution and legal system.

The official Syrian opposition, the National Coalition for Syrian and Revolutionary Forces (SNC), at first refused to take part without a guarantee that President Bashar Assad would step down. On 18 January it retracted.

The Syrian Government only agreed to talks, if they included ending "terrorism" and clarified terminology in the original communiqué.

Representatives of the Kurdish controlled areas of Northern Syria are absent. Since November, Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) has been under the control of the Democratic Union Party (PYD). The SNC's Arab chauvinism makes it dismissive of the Kurds. And neither the US nor the UN has pushed for the Kurds to be represented.

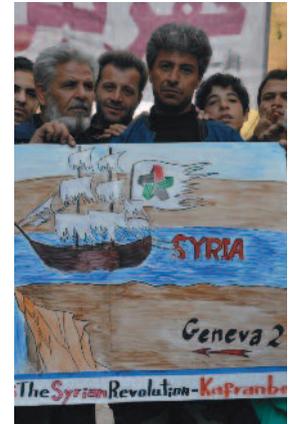
Meanwhile the government appears amenable to Kurdish demands in order to stop them fighting government forces.

Iran does not accept the Geneva Communiqué; its invitation to attend the talks was rescinded, after the SNC objected. The government asserts the conference will fail without its regional backer.

Both sides have now met face to face but have not spoken directly. Discussions on the release of prisoners and getting aid into the areas where fighting has led to a major humanitarian crisis are priorities for the UN. After negotiations food and medicine may be allowed into Homs. This will boost Assad's position.

Aid arriving in Homs would amount to progress; the likelihood of any lasting political settlement is however zero.

Tensions between the Al Qaeda backed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), more moderate Islamists, and Kurdish groups are increasing.



After several weeks of fighting in the Syria-Turkey border town of Jarabulus, Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters believed they were on the verge of driving out ISIL. However a series of car bombings, one of which killed 33 women and children, was a disturbing reminder of the brutality of ISIL's fighters.

In response to a FSA request for backup, over 100 ISIL fighters arrived, many dressed like FSA fighters in camouflage and began arresting and arbitrarily beheading civilians who they said had collaborated with the FSA. ISIL shot a further 40 people and took others in for questioning.

As hundreds more civilians now cross the border into Turkey, ISIL have stepped up bombings there, adding to the more than 130,000 people killed in the past three years, and severely worsening the refugee crisis. Many are now unable to reach camps in Turkey.

In an audio message posted online the ISIL put a call out to other rebels, particularly other Islamists, "the (Islamic) state is reaching out to you to stop fighting us, to focus on fighting the nusairiyah". The Nusairiyah is the Shia sect that ISIL says the majority of the Syrian Government and Assad family belong to. The Sunni Islamists of ISIL and other rebels view such groups as cults and heretical to Islam.

**The leader of Al Qaeda, Ayman al Zawahri, has echoed the call for peace between rebels. Unity with ISIL can only be of a virulently anti-Shia, hardline Islamist and cold-blooded character.**



The ISIL is reactionary... but the Taliban is not?

## Socialist Worker looks two ways on Islamists

The Left  
By Colin Foster



**Socialist Worker** of 21 January cites approvingly “a statement issued by the Revolutionary Left Current [in Syria which] spoke of ‘the double repression’ suffered by the popular movement — from the regime and armed Islamist groups”.

It quotes an RLC activist: “people say we need a second revolution”.

Until now, mostly, *Socialist Worker*, and related currents of thought, have been willing to criticise Islamists only when, and on the grounds that, they are neo-liberal, pro-IMF, etc.

The Islamist ultras of ISIL/ISIS in Syria are not particularly pro-IMF. They are more “anti-imperialist”, if “anti-imperialist” means “anti-American”, than the secular and soft-Islamist strands of the anti-Assad movement, who have asked for US and European military aid so that they can combat the ultras.

When the US looked like bombing Syria after revelations about Assad’s chemical weapons, ISIL fighters said, and plausibly, that the US would use the anti-Assad raids also as an opportunity to zap ISIL.

Yet, as the RLC activist quoted by *SW* points out, whatever ISIL’s hostility to the USA and the IMF, it is reactionary because of its relation to the plebeian population in Syria.

“The masses on the ground... are suffering the most from the growth of these groups... Islamists have whipped people in the street for not respecting Friday prayers. Popular committees and activists have been attacked...”

This new line of argument is welcome from *SW*. But how does it relate to *SW*’s longstanding support for, for example, the Taliban in Afghanistan?

The same issue of *SW* cheers a “fresh blow to the Western occupation” made by the Taliban bombing a Kabul restaurant.

The IMF rep in Afghanistan and four UN officials were killed. So were eight Afghans. The restaurant was not a military target. The Taliban statement explained the attack as one on “a restaurant frequented by high ranking foreigners... where the invaders used to dine with booze and liquor in the plenty”: that stance is a threat to Afghans who drink alcohol rather than a help to the liberation of the peoples of Afghanistan from foreign overlordship.

Why can’t *SW* see that the whole political course of the Taliban in Afghanistan is as reactionary as ISIL’s in Syria?

*SW*’s continuing perplexity is signalled in another article, by Ronnie Margulies on Turkey, which (rightly) criticises the main opposition party there — the CHP, heir of the former Kemalist state-party, the RPP — but (oddly) does so by calling the CHP “Islamophobic”.

The CHP’s activists and leaders are Muslims, as are 98% of Turkey’s people. Secular-minded Muslims, but Muslims.

The CHP’s denunciations of Turkey’s governing party, the AKP, artificially puff up the AKP’s soft-Islamist tendencies so as to excuse the CHP’s quasi-Stalinist and rancidly nationalist politics? Maybe. But what does “Islamophobic” mean if a sizeable constituency of Muslims, in a solidly Muslim country, look “Islamophobic” to *SW*?

Some Muslims have a prejudiced hostility to other sorts of Muslims? Indeed. The most “Islamophobic” Muslims in that respect are the Islamist ultras like ISIL, hostile to Shia, Sufi, secular-minded, and even soft-Islamist Muslims.

But *SW* never calls groups like ISIL “Islamophobic”. For *SW*, the term “Islamophobic” functions to try to discredit radical criticism of political Islamists by denoting it with the same adjective as EDL-type or *Daily-Express*-type racism towards Muslims.

# Not an anti-imperialist struggle

Stephen Velychenko’s analysis of events in Ukraine is selective, simplistic and kitsch (*Solidarity* 310). It writes large national minorities and the working class of Ukraine out of existence.

Ukraine is a vast area with no “natural” borders. It has always had a diversity of identities and languages. The industrial Donets Basin (Donbas) region in the east of Ukraine has had a mixed Russian and Ukrainian working class going back to the 19th century.

As a Ukrainian historian from the region says, “The fact that you came from the Donbas was more important than that you were Russian or Ukrainian; so of course the break-up of the Soviet Union also meant a raising of this regional identity and loyalty... In any case, most people here honestly couldn’t say what they are ethnically, because most families, like mine, are mixed.”

The Crimea is also largely Russian speaking. It was merged into the Ukrainian SSR by Soviet bureaucrats in the 1950s and ended up as part of Ukraine after the break up of the Soviet Union.

Velychenko suggests the millions of Russian-speaking Ukrainians settled in the region for generations are a colonial caste and agents of Russian imperialism. This kind of portrayal is common on the kitsch left, made in relation to Israeli

Jews, Ulster Protestants and Kurds; it is rightly opposed by us. The identification with Russia, linguistically or culturally, doesn’t make the national rights of these people any less legitimate.

Consistent democrats and socialists should side with protesters in the Ukraine demanding civil rights and release of political prisoners. But to see this as an anti-imperialist struggle is misleading.

It’s no doubt true that Russia throws its weight about in the region and welcomes autocratic pro-Russian tendencies in the Ukrainian regime. However the situation is more complex. The pro-western section of Ukrainian bourgeoisie is not our friend!

We should remember the chauvinism and nationalism of much of the bourgeois-led opposition. The Fatherland Party of Yulia Tymoshenko wants to abolish any special status for minority languages, particularly Russian (though this would also affect Romanian, Hungarian and Moldovan speaking minorities as well).

**The main question here is democracy, and as such we should support those who reject Ukrainian nationalism and try to organise rather than disenfranchise the large Russian speaking minority.**

Luke Hardy, Leeds

## The meaning of outrage

**After Liberal Democrat Maajid Nawaz tweeted a cartoon from the satirical web comic ‘Jesus and Mo’, along with words outlining how he, as a Muslim, did not find it offensive, the response was disappointing, but predictable.**

Dozens of people (including liberals and of course, that great champion of freedom so long as it isn’t in Iran, Cuba or Syria, George Galloway) expressed outrage at Nawaz’s actions, many of whom are demanding that he be recalled as Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Hampstead and Kilburn.

Nawaz, a Muslim and former Islamist turned head of “counter-extremism” think-tank Quilliam Foundation, has even received death threats from particularly zealous believers.

“Outrage” at such small actions is more often than not manufactured by political leaders as a way of establishing themselves as the authentic leadership of a community. This takes place in many parts of the world, it is common in India for example. However this episode (the latest in the line of many similar incidents) cannot even be seen by any rational person as an attack on a community, as is the excuse often given by those who demand censorship.

When Salman Rushdie, a man of Indian-Muslim background, was vilified, the justification was that he was an apostate and thus it was perfectly fair to call for his death; but in what way is a Muslim “community leader” who calls

for blasphemy to be punished by the state any more of a legitimate or representative member of the Muslim community than Maajid Nawaz?

It is surely the height of racism and ignorance to assume a homogenous view from over two million Muslim people in this country, a highly diverse community that includes people of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Arab, Iranian, and Turkish origin.

It is the EDL view as well as the Islamist view (just one of the numerous things they have in common), that all members of the Muslim community are *outraged* — or at least should be *outraged*, lest they be accused of not being “proper” Muslims — about things as innocuous as cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad.

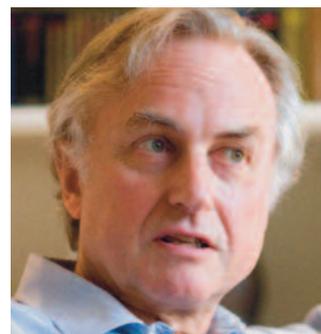
I would wager that their health, their children’s education, their wages or, from a more international perspective, the deaths of thousands of their co-religionists (as well as Christians and other minorities) in a seemingly inter-minable war in Syria is much more of a concern for most ordinary Muslims, than a frivolous comic on the internet.

**The right not to be offended should never be considered something meriting support. Rosa Luxemburg famously said that freedom is always the freedom of the one who thinks differently, and it is that dictum that socialists should strive to defend.**

Omar Raii, north London

## Tact and science

**As Matthew Thompson suggests (*Solidarity* 310) most religious people today in Britain have retreated from the claims which, historically, all major religions made, to explain the world and the cosmos.**



Richard Dawkins: his snobbish, manner does not prove him wrong

But they try to keep the cherry orchards for themselves. Science can deal with astronomy and building bridges and treating cancer, but religion still claims to rule on what is right and wrong.

I think Molly Thomas demolished that claim for religion in her article in *Solidarity* 228: “Faith is invalid as a way of knowing, and unsound as a basis for belief, because of its desire for exclusivity.”

Of course, if your work-

mates all think that lesbian and gay sex is a crime against the Word of God in the Bible or the Koran, then you must find more tactful ways of arguing with them than just telling them that you went to university, so know better. Richard Dawkins may be snobbish in his personal manner.

That issue of not “talking down” is quite separate from judgements on the intellectual substance of religion

It is also quite separate from the idea, to which I think Mark Sandell was responding, that socialists should relate to religion in relatively-secularised Britain in tones of deep respect which would be overdoing the tact even in a much more religious environment.

Mark Sandell meant by “primitive” not just “old” but “superseded”.

**If you call the toilet facilities somewhere “primitive”, you will not think yourself refuted by someone who says that latrines have been dug there, and for tens of thousands of years humans managed without latrines.**

Martin Thomas, north London

# Take back the wealth, tax the rich!

The top ten per cent in Britain pocket over £300 billion a year. Just a ten per cent tax bite from that flow would be enough to offset all the cuts that the Government is making.

Yet shadow chancellor's Ed Balls's minimal proposal to tax fewer of the rich, and more lightly — to raise the top income tax rate from 45% to 50% — has brought an outcry.

Digby Jones, former chief of the bosses' federation the CBI, and briefly a minister in the last Labour government, squealed that it meant "kicking" those who "create wealth and jobs".

Stock exchange boss Xavier Rolet said it would stop new enterprise. "The right tax rate for entrepreneurs is what motivates investment".

Others claimed that it would make bosses take their businesses elsewhere. Oddly, international competition is supposed automatically both to pull up the incomes of the rich towards the *highest* levels in the world, and to push down the incomes of the worse-off towards the *lowest*.

Capitalist bosses, when and if they expand, no more "create" wealth and jobs than feudal lords did when they seized new territory, or slaveowners when they developed new plantations, or landlords "created" the houses we rent from them.

The machinery, equipment, facilities, and communication networks which individual workers need in order to toil productively are created by the labour of other workers. They appear in capitalist society as the property of bosses, or even as created by them, only because of the lopsided operation of wage labour.

Not because of any natural law, but because of capitalism, we are employed only when the new value created by our week's labour exceeds the price paid for, and the value, of the commodity we sell in the labour market, our labour-power. Only when capitalists draw profit from the exchange which gives them control and ownership over the whole flexible, ever-expanded, creative force of labour, in return for the limited pittance of wages sufficient to keep the pool of labour-power in trim.

Some capitalists work hard, and have talent? Yes, but they primarily work hard at, and have talent at, outdoing other capitalists in the competitive battle for shares of the wealth produced by workers' labour.

Revealingly, most top capitalist bosses have little training



**Ed Balls' proposal to introduce a temporary 50% rate of tax caused outcry. But it is a very minimal measure in the face of so much inequality**

in or knowledge of the technologies of the production from which they draw their loot. In capitalist management hierarchies, the least well-paid is usually the production manager, the one most likely to know something about the job or even to contribute to productive effort.

The organised working class should take control of the wealth we have produced, and organise our work directly for ourselves and for social benefit. We want public ownership of the banks and big industry under democratic control.

In the meantime, we want at least to recoup some of the costs of public spending from the ultra-incomes of the rich. At present, even though income tax rates make it look as if the rich pay modestly more, in fact, thanks to tax avoidance and the impact of taxes like VAT which hit the worse-off harder, the rich are taxed more lightly than the worse-off. In 2006-7, the bottom 10% of households had a tax take of 46% of income; the average, 35.3%, and the middle ranks about the same; and the top 10%, just 34.2%.

From World War Two through to 1979 — and most of that time, under Tory governments — top income tax rates were between 98% and 83%. For a while, in 1947-8, the rate was 147.5%. Even for the first decade of Thatcher, the top rate was still 60%. Only after the miners had been defeated and the

morale of the labour movement weakened did the Tories dare reduce the rate to 40%.

There was still great inequality in the higher-rate decades. The rich found ways round the top tax rates. Equally, the higher tax rates did not stop wealth and jobs being "created" at a much quicker rate than in these times when, we are told, wealth and jobs can be coaxed into existence only by bribing the rich with tax-cut after bonus after pay-rise after dividend pay-out after tax-cut.

The rich did not need the tax cuts which Thatcher set rolling. But they liked them. The tax cuts made things easier for them. They were part of a process which, for the last 30-odd years, has sent inequality spiralling, and spiralling again.

We want equality. As a first step, and as a necessary step to fit ourselves to demand and implement economic equality, the labour movement should fight to limit and reverse inequality. It can be done: even now, the inequality spiral has had its work cut out to get further than reversing the shift to reduced inequality made between the end of the 1930s and the end of the 1940s.

A 50% tax rate is only an initial gesture, or token. Every penny of what the top bosses salt away is looted from the efforts of the working class.

## Help us raise £12,000 by October

With this issue of *Solidarity*, you may well receive a leaflet for the day school on New Unionism which we are helping to organise on 29 March.

The leaflet, in its production, betrays the fact that we are poor, and forced to use cheap methods of producing leaflets.

Leaflets, as distinct from regular workplace bulletins with focused, regular and detailed workplace news, have their limitations as a medium of socialist publicity. James P Cannon wrote: "I believe all experienced organisers recognise that throwaway leaflets are the most expensive and least productive of all propaganda methods".

But Cannon took it for granted that meetings, day schools, campaign events require leaflets to advertise them, of decent quality. Internet publicity is not a substitute: we're far more likely to interest someone in an activity if after a conversation we leave them with a leaflet than if we leave them with a recommendation to read an email or scan a website.

So to be effective socialists we need money for leaflets, as well as for bulletins, equipment for our office, meeting costs, and so on.

**We want to raise £12,000 by our AGM in October 2014**

You can set up a regular payment from your bank to: AWL, sort code: 08-60-01, account: 20047674, Unity Trust Bank, Nine Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2HB).

Or send a cheque to us at the address below (cheques payable to "AWL"). Or donate online at [workersliberty.org/payment](http://workersliberty.org/payment). Take copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college, or campaign group, or organise a fundraising event. And get in touch to discuss joining the AWL!

**More information: 07796 690 874 / [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.**

**This week we have raised £107. Includes profit from book sales and donation from John. Thanks.**



# The Tube, 1863 to 1979

Janine Booth's new book, *Plundering London Underground: new Labour, private capital and public service 1997-2010* examines the Public-Private Partnership (PPP), which was dreamed up, and imposed, but also faltered and collapsed, within the term of Blair and Brown's Labour government.

One key "justification" for the PPP was that London Underground was in such a poor condition that it required a massive cash injection. The argument went (wrongly) that only the private sector could deliver that investment. But how did London Underground get into such a woeful state? The first section of *Plundering London Underground* looks at this historical background; the excerpt below takes us from the Tube's birth through to the end of the 1970s.

**The world's first railway to carry passengers underground did so for the first time on 10 January 1863. Thereafter, private companies built and operated several new lines, creating a railway web beneath London.**

From 1908, the companies began to jointly promote their services as "the Underground". In the 1920s, governments gave the companies financial support to improve services and create jobs, but the competing private owners nonetheless failed to provide a coherent and reliable service.

In 1929 Herbert Morrison, Minister of Transport in a minority Labour government, drafted a Bill to unite the Underground in public hands, later recalling that, "Here was I, without a socialist majority, determined to go into some scheme of public ownership."<sup>i</sup> He recommended that London's passenger transport should be run by "a small board of business men of proved capacity", and that the dispossessed private owners should be paid compensation. Morrison's plan was implemented in 1933.<sup>1</sup>

A new public corporation, the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB), now ran London Underground. Previously separate "railways" became "lines" of a single London-wide Underground service: for example, the Central London Railway was now the Central line.

The chair of the LPTB was Lord Ashfield, until then leader of the Underground Group of private companies. In its first year, the LPTB's stockholders — mainly the former private owners — received dividends of nearly £5 million.<sup>ii</sup> Because of the continuing involvement of the private companies and their chiefs, some trade unionists and Labour left-wingers felt that Morrison's scheme fell short of the full public ownership and industrial democracy that they wanted.<sup>iii</sup>

## WORST

**Ernest Bevin, leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union called it "positively the worst form of public control".<sup>iv</sup>**

By 1936, there were reports of a "rising storm of protests" by passengers and a "seething discontent" among workers about poor services and worsening conditions.<sup>v</sup>

Matters improved with the New Works Programme. From 1937, the Programme provided substantial new investment and created jobs at a time of high unemployment. It extended the Central, Northern, Piccadilly and Bakerloo lines, electrified the Metropolitan line north of Rickmansworth, and built new tunnels, stations and escalators. The programme slowed during the Second World War, but nonetheless led to services running 18% faster in 1947 than in 1933.<sup>vi</sup> For transport writer Christian Wolmar, this period was "undoubtedly the London Underground's heyday".<sup>vii</sup> For the first time, some degree of each of the five key factors — public ownership, London control, adequate funding, integration and public service — were all in place together.

London Underground was run by a London body until 1948, when Labour's first majority government brought the

whole railway industry into public ownership. London Underground was placed within the new British Transport Commission. This new body prioritised reconstruction of the mainline railway and shelved unfinished parts of the New Works Programme. This "nationalisation" meant that a national authority, rather than a London one, now had ownership and control of the Underground.

## NO INVESTMENT

**Christian Wolmar believes**

**that: "if any period could be identified as the source of the state of the Underground today, it is the immediate post-war period up to the 1960s when, quite literally, nothing was invested. The system has been playing catch-up since then."<sup>viii</sup>**

After fifteen years of national control, the Underground returned to the control of London bodies from 1963, and investment began to grow again. The Victoria Line opened in 1968. In 1970, the new Greater London Council took over, and according to Underground worker Dave Welsh, 'It began to be possible to articulate a strategic policy for the tube with cheaper fares as the keystone'.<sup>ix</sup> The 1970s saw the Jubilee line (originally named the Fleet line) built and the Piccadilly line extended to Heathrow airport, funded partly through government finance and partly through by the new London Transport authority (LT). But the second half of the 1970s saw real-terms public funding of London Transport fall off. Martin Eady, who worked at Ealing Common depot, explained that:

*"By the back door the public expenditure cuts are having serious effects on tube workers and passengers.*

*The cuts in capital spending mean not only that much-needed extensions are not built (remember the Fleet line extension, the River line, the Hackney-Chelsea line, etc.). Renewals of outworn rolling stock, decrepit station buildings and appalling staff facilities are held back, resulting in severe discomfort for passengers and staff alike. Many spare parts have to be robbed from one train to keep another in service, so repairs become make-do-and-mend jobs, especially on the older pre-war stock".<sup>x</sup>*

**Government — both London and national — was about to change hands, with dramatic consequences for London Underground.**

## Notes

1. The London Passenger Transport Act was passed under the National government, which had replaced the Labour government in 1931.

i. Lord Morrison of Lambeth, *Herbert Morrison: An Autobiography*, Odhams, 1960, p.41.

ii. *Socialist Party of Great Britain, Nationalisation or Socialism?*, 1945.

iii. See, for example, *Ben Pimlott, Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, Allen & Unwin, 1977, pp.66-67; and *The Live Rail*, 1936.

iv. Quoted in Britain at Work project newsletter, 'Going Underground: tales from the tube', 2013.

v. Arthur Downton, *The London Transport Scandal, London District Committee of the Communist Party*, 1936, p.1.

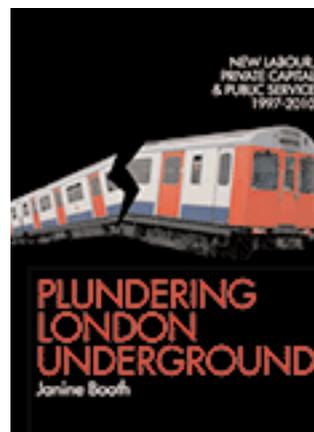
vi. John R Day and John Reed, *The Story of London's Underground* (9th edition), Capital Transport Publishing, 2005, p.146.

vii. Christian Wolmar, *Down The Tube: the battle for London's Underground*, Aurum Press, 2002, p.31.

viii. Christian Wolmar, (2002), p.37.

ix. *Britain at Work project newsletter*, (2013).

x. *The Platform*, March 1977.



Order the book at [bit.ly/plun-lu](http://bit.ly/plun-lu)

# Revolutionary black struggle

The AWL's new book, *In an era of wars and revolutions*, brings together cartoons published by revolutionary socialists in the US between the 1920s and 1950s. Sacha Ismail discusses the cartoons that deal with the oppression of African Americans and black liberation struggle.

**Some of the book's most powerful images are indictments of black oppression in the United States. The period covered by the book ends just as the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s was beginning to stir.**

In the "Reconstruction" of the 1860s and 70s, after the abolition of slavery, African Americans and white radicals organised a mass movement to smash racism and create a multiracial democracy. But the US bourgeoisie betrayed its temporary allies, the four million ex-slaves. The result was a brutal system of white supremacy, "Jim Crow" segregation and super-exploitation of black workers which lasted the best part of a century and, after its overthrow, still shapes America today.

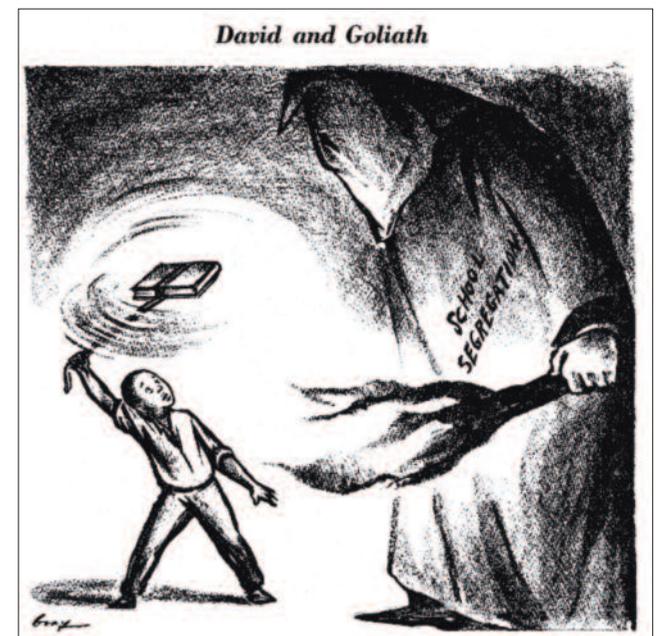
By the 1930s, the white-supremacist regimes of the US South were decaying, but still very much alive. In the mid-1950s, when the latest cartoons in *Era* were published, the vast majority of black Americans could not vote. Segregation was still in place, enforced by a system of state and vigilante terrorism against black people and other dissidents. The national army was segregated until 1954. Lynchings, though less common since the 1920s, continued.

These cartoons attack, with seething anger, these issues and more — segregation, including in schools and the army; lynchings; the right to vote; unemployment and discrimination at work; slum housing; police brutality; the complicity of the political establishment; and the role of racism in union-busting.

African Americans made up more than 10 percent of the USA's population, and a bigger proportion of its working population. Their oppression was a gigantic democratic question both distinct from and central to the general class struggle in America.

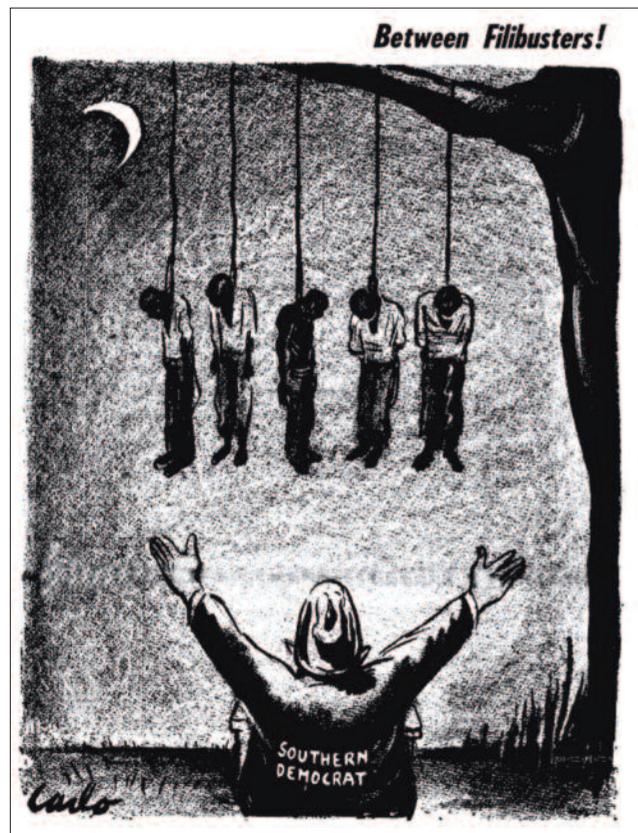
## LABOUR MOVEMENT

**The American labour movement which developed between the Civil War and the First World War was poisoned by the racism which characterised much of the**



School segregation

# socialists and in America



country's white working class.

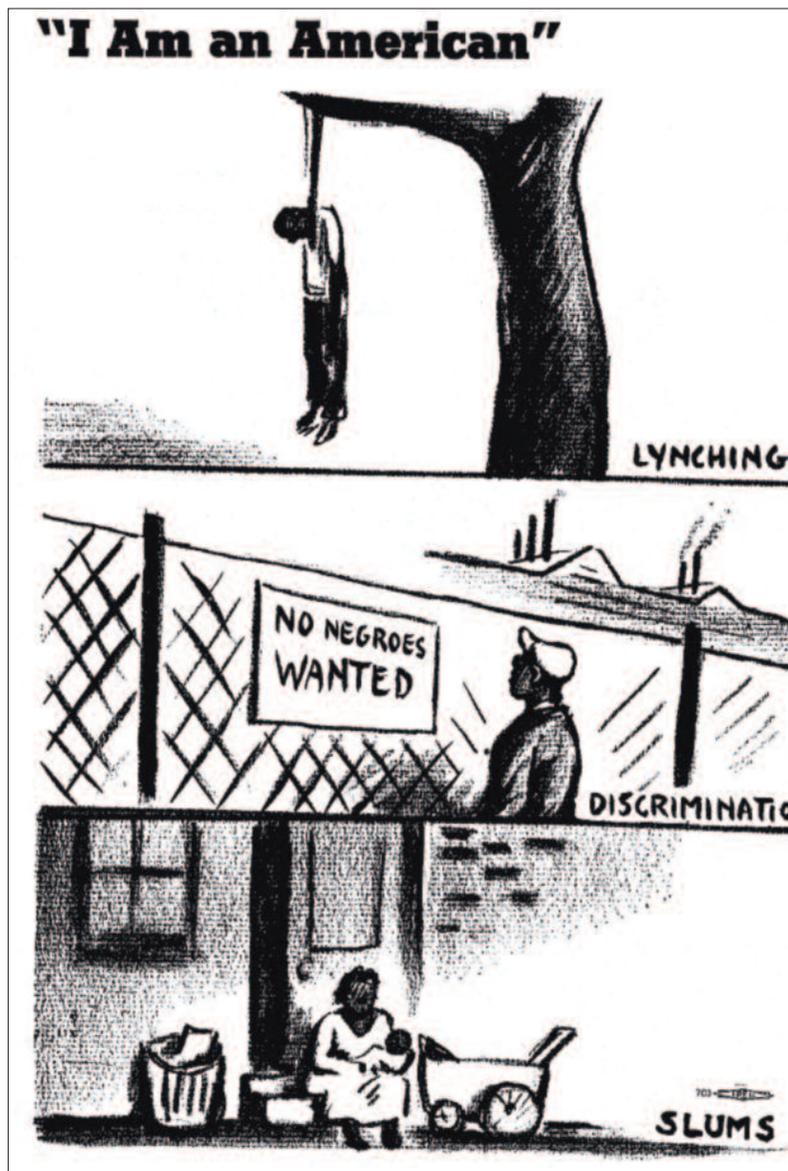
Some more radical unions did organise black workers, but many — particularly the craft unions of the American Federation of Labour — excluded African Americans and other non-whites from membership and fought to keep them out of the industries they organised. The (quite strong) Socialist Party had a racist wing; its anti-racists mostly shared revolutionary leader Eugene Debs' insistence that socialism must be colour blind.

After the war and the Russian revolution, the SP split. Under the influence of the Bolsheviks, the Communist Party formed by the majority argued for a new emphasis on black oppression as a special question to be tackled with special effort. This was the ideological context out of which the Trotskyists who published these cartoons emerged.

Wider post-war trends also prepared a new drive for black liberation.

In 1900, ninety percent of black Americans still lived in the South; up to 1930 almost two million would migrate to the North, and after a Depression-era hiatus, millions more from 1940. There was an increasingly concentrated and powerful black working class in many Northern cities.

In the 1920s, the ruling class utilised the racism of many white workers to pit white against black and prevent the or-



ganisation of basic industry — until the mass industrial union struggles of the 1930s, repeatedly uniting black and white, smashed through.

By 1945 there were well over a million black workers in the unions. Even before the civil rights movement, these struggles sometimes spilled over into vibrant anti-racist campaigns, for instance to desegregate bars and diners near industrial plants.

Radical activists, including the Communist Party and the Trotskyists, played an important role in these class battles.

## TROTSKYISTS

**When the CPUSA expelled Trotsky's supporters in 1928, it had less than a hundred black members out of many thousands. The new Trotskyist group, "ethnically" but not "racially" diverse, had none.**

The Stalinists would recruit thousands of African Americans in the 30s as a result of their work in the burgeoning trade union movement and in anti-racist struggles — for instance in defence of the Scottsboro boys, nine black Alabama teenagers accused of rape in a racist frame-up. In Harlem, New York, the CP became a major force. The Stalinists ran a black activist, James Ford, for Vice President in the 1932, 1936 and 1940 elections.

But like all its principles, the CP's commitment to black liberation was conditional on its defence of the Stalinist regime in the USSR. During the Second World War, the US's alliance with the USSR caused the Stalinists to abandon the fight for black equality on the shopfloor and in the army in favour of increasing production and military discipline, alienating many sympathetic African Americans.

Informed by the pre-Stalinist communist tradition on these questions, the Trotskyists made a major effort to get to grips with black liberation. Extensively discussing various aspects of the question, they on several occasions sent prominent members, including the famous black intellectual CLR James, to discuss it with Trotsky — who from his first letter to his supporters in the US had urged them to make fighting for

black rights central to their work. In 1939, after his visit to Trotsky, James led the creation of a "Negro Department" in the Trotskyist SWP.

This ferment of discussion produced some remarkable writing — and not only in this later period when the arguments and activities of the Trotskyists had won them many dozens of black recruits like James and Ernest Rice McKinney, the unemployed and steelworker organiser who in the 1940s became the national secretary of the Third Camp Trotskyist organisation.

In 1932, three years before WEB Du Bois published his ground-breaking *Black Reconstruction*, Max Shachtman swam against the tide of the then completely dominant racist narrative to tell the truth about Reconstruction and the central role of black people in US history in his polemic *Communism and the Negro*.

The cartoons in *Era* are part of the practical activity which paralleled this intellectual work, part of the Trotskyists' contribution to the fight against black oppression.

Many other images in the book are also relevant to this story — and not just the ones dealing with other forms of racism and with anti-imperialist struggles. For instance, the cartoons exposing the record of "liberal" president Franklin Delano Roosevelt help explain why FDR never challenged the white-supremacist Southern Democrats who were an essential part of his power base. These "Dixiecrats" would not bolt the Democratic Party until the 1960s.

By the late 1940s, mass migration to the North, the growth of the black industrial workforce, over a decade of multi-racial unionisation and the effects of the war had paved the way for a new attempt to "reconstruct" US society. It came when it did, from the mid-50s and not a decade earlier, because of the stifling political climate of the US's Cold War witch-hunt and its traumatic effect on the US left and labour movement.

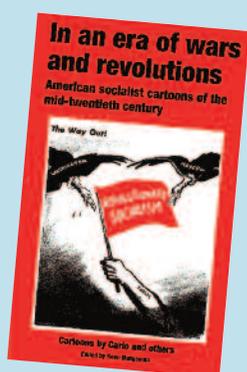
Along with white trade union bureaucrats, many middle-class black leaders accommodated to the witch-hunters. The left was marginalised and the emerging civil rights movement would have to fight hard for white allies.

**Where America's first Reconstruction was defeated, the second succeeded, but only partially. The social revolution needed to achieve genuine equality for black Americans remains to be won.**



Divide and rule

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# Gramsci, philosophy, and working-class politics

By Jelle Versieren

This review of *Antonio Gramsci: working-class revolutionary* is abridged; full text at [www.workersliberty.org/versi](http://www.workersliberty.org/versi). Other sections of the full article discuss Gramsci's idea of "the Modern Prince" in relation to "Western Marxist" criticisms of Lenin. For the book: [www.workersliberty.org/gramscibook](http://www.workersliberty.org/gramscibook)

**The destalinisation debate of the fifties and sixties and May 1968, culminating in the fragmentation of the student movement and the failed reorientation of the communist movement under the banner of eurocommunism, released a new wave of energy throughout the philosophical field.**

Besides the interpretations of Marx through the prism of Hegel, Spinoza or Leibniz, two "moments", as Peter Thomas [in his book *The Gramscian Moment*] describes it in a Hegelian fashion, became the methodological touchstones of future research concerning social formations: the Gramscian paradigm and the Althusserian paradigm.

Martin Thomas, in his discussion of Peter Thomas' appropriation of the Althusserian legacy to get hold of the contemporary Marxist paradigm, denies the importance of this detour (p. 41). Martin Thomas rightly remarks that Althusser never extensively engaged with Gramsci, but he fails to see the bigger picture. Althusser is not only a political question.

First of all, Althusser's endeavour to reshape Marxism as a scientific analysis of history, historical materialism, was intended to discard the theoretical contaminations of Stalinist politics. Hence his emphasis on the relative autonomy of science. In the 1960s and 1970s any debate about the revitalisation of Marxist thought referred to his radical point of view, especially regarding epistemology and the mode of analysis of historical, economic or sociological practices. Whether he was right or wrong, Althusser forced any Marxist to rethink his own scientific or ideological presuppositions. Althusser wanted to correct the theoretical practice because he wanted to invent a new political practice. Furthermore, Althusser is a key figure in the promulgation of post-Marxist thought in the critical human sciences.

Before making certain contextual and methodological asserions about post-Marxist interpretations of Gramsci, it is important to emphasise the fact that, since Althusser, the role of critical philosophy as a public interrogation of the existent political and social structures has changed significantly. Martin Thomas laments the "PhD mill of today's universities", which disciplines the researcher in his speech and goal-setting (p. 41). I fully agree with Martin Thomas that Peter Thomas' book belongs to the realm of theoretical practices. It still needs to interact with the common sense of the working class (p. 46).

Although the "academisation" of critical thought resulted in a further political division of labour between intellectuals — organic intellectuals occupying traditional professional positions — and counter-hegemonic organisations, it is important to turn to another urgent problem: the dwindling of philosophy as the gateway to the good sense. Since the 1980s a new generation of young turks have taken over the French opinion pages as "meta-commentators" on social events. Armed with high profile university degrees, they put themselves in the limelight of the mass-media, writing a hollow prose and narrating the tendency of the day. In a book called *Mediocracy: French Philosophy since 1968* (2001) Dominique Lecourt analyses the origins of their compelling common-sensical ideas.

Post-Marxism did not lower the bar for the interpellation of social phenomena. But it replaced the theoretical-practical nexus of working-class politics with the notion of "radical democracy" (p. 57). Contrary to the "Nouvelles Philosophes" these post-Marxist thinkers did not make an extreme turn to the right. Citing Ellen Meiksins Wood's *The Retreat From Class: A New 'True' Socialism* (1986), renowned authors like Mouffe or Balibar "remain committed to egalitarian goals or to some kind of social justice, have not entirely escaped this contradiction between emancipatory aspirations and the repudiation of any moral or political foundation to support them". But their detours, via Schmitt (politics-qua-politics), Heidegger (post-metaphysical existences), Nietzsche (genealogical methodology) or Wittgenstein (language games), end up in a one-way street.

This detour likewise happened with Gramsci's concept of

hegemony, which serves as a platform for postmodern political theory. While Althusser tried to add something to the theoretical moment of class politics and the post-capitalist transition, Mouffe believes in the emancipatory power of a radicalised democratic practice within a class society. The theoretical practices of the new social movements within this radical democratic framework underscore identity politics and cultural issues as being just as important as the opposition between capital and class. This results in a tendency to autonomise the scattering of ideology and politics.

Following Fredric Jameson in his work *A Singular Modernity* (2002), this autonomisation is in fact nothing more than a late-modern proliferation of a series of breaks within the practices and discourses of contestation groups, because these only subjectively reflect and copy the alienated feeling of social disorientation, loss of political coherence and a fragmented life-world. In reality the dialectic ontology of capital vis-à-vis labour did not change.

This situation, commonly known as postmodernism, results in a defeat for real emancipatory goals of the old socialism and the disconnection with class politics, although the initial purpose entailed a critique of reductionist economism under the pretence of countering hegemonic techniques in the political sphere (pp. 60-63). Although post-Marxist thinkers unerringly pointed out the importance of other social and political struggles, they did not retroactively reconnect these issues with the opposition between labour and capital.

The appeal of Gramsci for post-Marxists is very evident: his historicist project of a renewed integration of politics, political economy, ideology and cultural phenomena eschewed any reductionist orthodox economism. But, as already mentioned, the postmodern superstructuralism not only autonomises every practice, but also refuses to properly deal with Gramsci's strategic questions regarding the global social processes of emancipation by political means.

## ANDERSON

**A word on Anderson's interpretation of Gramsci. Peter Thomas and Martin Thomas agree that Anderson's article "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci" still remains ubiquitous in bibliographies. And they both agree with Anderson's perspicacity that the Eurocommunist interpretation is an instrumentalisation and deformation of the carceral writings.**

Nonetheless, Peter Thomas states that Anderson was wrong to suppose that: a. these writings do not possess a clearly defined and fundamentally coherent project b. his reconstruction by detours of other thinkers elucidated Gramsci's theory in a structural way c. his temporal reconstruction of the philological development of the concept of hegemony was correct d. Gramsci developed a simple opposition between the West and the East deriving from a generic state model e. Gramsci developed a simple and absolute differentiation between civil and political society in order to explain the state-form f. Gramsci did not fully understand the specific political conditions of the Russian social formation and at one point blurred the differences between the political and civil society g. Gramsci's portrayal of the political conditions of the West resembles Kautsky's analysis of the West-European parliamentary states h. the Western bourgeoisie already conquered state power before possessing ideological dominant power.

I fully agree with Peter Thomas' emendation of Anderson's appraisal of Gramsci. It has the merit of avoiding the pitfalls of Anderson's reading on Gramsci as the generally accepted point of view. At the same time, he provides a critique of the Post-Marxist "subalternity" reading.

Martin Thomas partially remits Anderson's attempt to avoid the Eurocommunist appropriation of Gramsci, which can also be read in Gregory Elliott's book *Perry Anderson: The Merciless Laboratory of History* (1998). Elliott underscores the fact that Anderson tried to reinvent the Marxist revolutionary tradition in a time of discredited sovietism and failing Eurocommunist trajectories. "Noting that Gramsci had utilized the concept of "hegemony" ... to essay a differential analysis of the structures of bourgeois power in the West, Anderson sought to dispel the left social-democratic 'illusions' created by one of the models of hegemony decipherable in Prison Notebooks."

In the eyes of Anderson, Gramsci's notebooks could lead to a Eurocommunist interpretation when not rectified by other

Marxist philosophers. His alternative is complex to pinpoint, because he simultaneously had to reevaluate his old reformist illusions (p. 47). The result was eclectic: Anderson's reiteration of Marx's anatomy of the liberal-representative state in *The Jewish Question* does not subscribe to the "dominant ideology thesis" characteristic of Western Marxism (it does not discount the "dull compulsion of economic relations" referred to by Marx in *Capital*). It does, however, identify the ideology of the bourgeois democracy present in the West ... as the cultural dominant of capitalist class power and therewith it repudiates the prioritization of consent in civil society in *Problems of Socialist Strategy*.

An alternative model of Gramsci's, assimilating "civil society" to the state, was likewise considered by Anderson to misconceive the uniqueness of the West and to induce political aberrations — of either a reformist-Eurocommunist genre or an ultraleftist Maoist variety — insofar as the classical notion of political revolution, directed at the state apparatus, was therein dissolved into "cultural revolution". Anderson's greatest concern was the Eurocommunist "culturalisation" of the state, which in fact inverted the old idea of state monopoly capitalism. In both cases the political moment has been reduced to state apparatus or civil society. He also wanted to go beyond the symmetrical ideological relation between the political and civil society in Western Marxism.

Martin Thomas, fully agreeing with Anderson and Elliott, warns about the consequences of the conflation between the state and civil society, because the liberal ideological values of the state concerning freedom of speech and freedom of press are also positive values in a proletarian state (p. 51). But Peter Thomas rescinds Anderson's binary model solution, elucidating Gramsci's unique elaboration of the state-form. Gramsci also understood ideology as a material, semiotic and therefore social practice which runs through this state-form. Gramsci underscored the fact that ideology could only be as effective as the mechanisms for wielding power over the state. But, on the other hand, regarding their respective political coordinates, Martin Thomas asserts that the "scope of disagreement between Anderson and [Peter] Thomas is limited." Peter Thomas is wrong to suppose that Anderson's misconceptions arose from his Eurocommunist sympathies (p. 50). Thus, Peter Thomas is right in negating Anderson's conceptual framework, while Martin Thomas and Gregory Elliott are right in emphasising the Marxist political motivations.

The central question lurking behind Peter Thomas and Martin Thomas' contributions is the following: what is the secret of Gramsci's success in his continuous appeal to leftists as a guide for political action in uncertain and interesting times?

Martin Thomas correctly recalls Gramsci's attention to the understanding of the differences between bourgeois and proletarian historical dialectic of association and organisation as political-cultural material practices (pp. 16-17; pp. 22-23). Working-class politics does not solely aim to question and contest the hegemonic ideology nor does it have to copy the bourgeois form of association. Rather, it needs to posit truth as a practical principle of organisation that channels the potential power of the proletarian association to reconfigure the social relations. Both Gramsci and Althusser realise that ideology is not purely a matter of thought, but consists of a material quality in the social practices, relations and institutions. And both understand that the bourgeois hegemony consist of multiple layers of consent or multiple practices within numerous institutions.

The philosophy of praxis, dependent on the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, consists both of a critique of past philosophies and a new philosophical practice — the practice of searching the truth and the politics of truth (pp. 37-38). The foundations of philosophy can only be changed by the dialectical-pedagogical process between subjects in which the everyday practices of the common sense forms a moral-intellectual bloc with the basic tenets of Marxism. This unity of differences between theory and praxis can integrate the concreteness of daily life, while Post-Kantians still try to find the perennial philosopher's stone behind their desk.

**Martin Thomas' edited essay compilation completes Peter Thomas' monumental reconstruction of Gramsci's unique research project. Thomas and Thomas realise that Gramsci will be a constant inspiration for future critical philosophers and political activists. Marxist thought will always have a "Gramscian moment", because the Italian offers us the necessary tools to interpret and change the world in crisis.**



## Resisting expansion at Heathrow

Barry Wilton, an activist involved in Transition Heathrow, spoke to *Solidarity* about the campaign in the communities around Heathrow to oppose airport expansion bringing increased air pollution, noise and environmental depredation.

The issue of the expansion of Heathrow Airport, which was pushed by the Labour government in 2006-7 but was defeated, after a long campaign, in 2010, has been completely revived.

The Davies Commission into airport expansion in the south east is considering a number of options, several of which are Heathrow-focused. A leak that was published in the *Independent* showed that the non-Heathrow options are not being seriously considered, so expansion has become a real possibility again.

However, it's far from a done deal. Politically, if one of the three main parties comes out firmly against expansion before the next election, that could seriously scupper things. There are powerful elements in both the Tories and Labour who favour expansion, but neither party has yet come out decisively in favour of it.

There is widespread opposition in local communities to expansion. Several local councils have held referenda on the issue, all of which have returned strong votes against expansion. John McDonnell is calling community meetings all over the affected area. A meeting on 16 January mobilised 150 people, well beyond the usual suspects. John Randall, a local Tory MP, also opposes expansion, and a group of councils across London have come out against it too, so there's a lot more official political opposition than there was last time.

The campaign on the ground is beginning to revive, and there is a discussion going on about wider climate politics. The wider climate movement, which is reviving around opposition to the government's "dash for gas" energy policies, isn't particularly switched on to the campaign against airport expansion at the moment, but I think people will come round to it soon.

When we set up Transition Heathrow, we were quietly confident that we were going to win the campaign against expansion. Our aim was to embed a culture of organising and activism within the local community. The main lasting outcome of that was Grow Heathrow, an activist social space we set up on an abandoned market garden in Sipson, near the airport. Grow Heathrow will celebrate its fourth birthday on Saturday 1 February 2014. The intention was to establish a bulwark that could organise against future expansion threats.

Grow Heathrow has been under constant threat of eviction. That threat remains live, and our main resistance to it now is simply to get bodies on the ground and fill the space with as much human activity as possible, to make it difficult to evict us.

Until recently, a big aspect of our eviction resistance has been a legal challenge, which we began in 2010. We were able to get a barrister to represent us pro bono. They were interested in challenging the existing law on evictions and setting a legal precedent which would apply to any occupiers facing eviction — tenants, squatters, homeowners in mortgage arrears, and others.

The challenge relied on an argument that Article 8 of the

European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees the right to a "private and family life", must be taken into balanced consideration in case of eviction. In other words, the right of the landlord or landowner to the property or land has to be balanced against the rights of privacy and private life of the occupiers. We won that case in the lower courts; due to legal aid cuts, we weren't able to take the case to higher courts, but it still sets a precedent that could be relevant for anyone facing eviction in future.

Grow Heathrow's eviction resistance is symbolically significant. We are symbolic of direct-action resistance to the third runway at the heart of the community. As the current proposals stand, Grow Heathrow's location is right at the end of where the third runway would be, so we're in a physically important location.

We hope Grow Heathrow can be a focus for recapturing the energy that will emerge as the campaign grows. Anyone who wants to is positively encouraged to come and visit and get involved.

The airport is running a very effective propaganda campaign about expansion. They've set up fronts like "Back Heathrow", which poses as a grassroots community campaign but is actually run by the airport's PR company. They fund surveys and mine the statistics to try and cast doubt on the widely-accepted narrative that there's profound local opposition to expansion.

From a working-class point of view, there's an interesting intersection as many of the Heathrow workforce are also members of local communities. The airport is pushing two key claims in terms of jobs — one, that expansion will lead to significant job creation, and two, that if the airport doesn't expand, it'll lose out to the proposed "Boris Island" in the Thames Estuary, and may even close.

On the first claim, the proposed expansion plans show that the level of job creation wouldn't actually be that significant, as a lot of the jobs and processes would be automated. The Davies Commission suggests there'd be a taxpayer-funded government investment of around £8 billion, and the number of jobs created doesn't in any way match the level you'd expect for that kind of public funding. The claim that Heathrow might close because of "Boris Island" is also extremely unlikely, as the leaks show the Davies Commission is not taking that option particularly seriously. But it's obviously very powerful scaremongering.

John McDonnell is doing a lot of work to engage with unions on the issue of jobs. There's a different context this time because there's not a Labour government, so the union leaderships may feel they can be more oppositional.

**There's still a need for people in the labour movement with radical climate politics to take up this issue and make the arguments against expansion on a pro-worker, pro-working-class communities basis.**

**Grow Heathrow celebrates its fourth birthday on Saturday 1 March, with events from 1pm. See the Transition Heathrow website for more. • [transitionheathrow.com](http://transitionheathrow.com)**

## "No2EU" is a snare

By Martin Thomas

In his New Year's message to members, RMT rail union general secretary Bob Crow declared: "On the political landscape RMT will be backing a slate of No2EU, yes to workers' rights candidates in May offering a positive alternative to the bankers-led EU and the narrow, right wing opportunism of UKIP. We will offer the working class a real political alternative".

"The only rational course", says Crow, "is to leave the EU and rebuild Britain with socialist policies".

When No2EU was first launched in 2009, we argued that it was a bad move. Crow and his associates do want to defend workers' rights. But it is a nationalist illusion to think that workers' rights will be improved by campaigning to get Britain out of the EU and re-raise barriers between Britain and continental Europe.

The Tory right-wingers who dominate and shape "No to EU" campaigning have a more realistic assessment, and moreover they have the power to put it into practice if they can force withdrawal. They want a Britain operating as a low-social-overheads offshore site — a Britain set off from the EU by the abolition of all the small safeguards, TUPE, Agency Workers' Directive, Working Time Directive, and so on, which derive from the EU. And they want to foster poisonous hostility between migrant workers from Europe and longer-settled British workers.

The tone of No2EU campaigning is illustrated by its revamped website. The lead article, unsigned, screams: "Germany backs fascist uprising in Ukraine".

It dismisses the Ukrainians who prefer an opening to the west to Ukraine continuing under the domination of Russia (as during Stalinism, and under the Tsars) as "an unholy alliance of conservatives, fascists and revanchist groups promoting a cult around former nazi collaborators".

The Ukrainian opposition protests do indeed include a minority of far rightists, but they also reflect the majority of the population in the west of Ukraine, and an authentic revolt against age-old Russian domination.

### MORNING STAR

**The Morning Star (associated with the Communist Party of Britain) has been publicising No2EU.**

The Socialist Party, which backed No2EU in 2009 but was visibly uncomfortable with its nationalism, has signalled that it will back No2EU again, by advertising at least one No2EU launch meeting with an SP speaker on the platform, but has carried (as far as we can find) no public political statement about it.

The SP wants to keep RMT support for another electoral alliance, TUSC, and looks as if it has reached a tacit deal with Bob Crow whereby at the 22 May polls RMT union HQ will focus on No2EU Euro-candidates and the SP will focus on candidatures in council elections, with formal statements of mutual support but, in practice, separate activities. The SP wants TUSC to contest 624 or more of the 4,156 seats being contested across 160 councils on 22 May, so that it can get TV coverage during the campaign. Even if many of the 624 are "paper candidates" — a workable option in council elections, where candidates do not have to forfeit a deposit — that is a big effort.

The Left Unity group launched by Andrew Burgin and Kate Hudson, which constituted itself as a "party" at a conference in November 2013, also plans to contest some council elections. It has taken no formal decision not to contest the Euro-elections; but candidatures seem unlikely, since the costs in deposits and even minimal publicity for the huge Euro-constituencies are so great.

Oddly, the last Left Unity council, on 11 January, rejected a proposal from Pete McLaren for LU to concert efforts with TUSC. If LU sees itself primarily as an electoral enterprise, which it does, accepting that proposal would have been only the simplest common sense.

What LU will say about Europe, or about council finances, in the run-up to 22 May, remains to be decided.

**On all the indications, serious working-class activists will have no option on 22 May but to vote Labour and redouble efforts for the labour movement to force further concessions from the Labour leadership as we have already done on the bedroom tax and the Health and Social Care Act.**

# Can we make Unite a fighting union?

Unite is the UK's largest trade union, with approximately 1.5 million members in industries as diverse as cabin crew, speech therapy, power stations, and car production. It has 100 full-time organisers, organising workers in mainly unorganised workplaces and industries. Its General Secretary Len McCluskey boasts that he has never blocked or repudiated a strike during his tenure, and its "leverage" campaigns have seen noisy protests and intense lobbying beating the likes of Honda, London Buses, and major contractors and firms in the construction industry.

Yet Unite still suffers from the same cautiousness, poor organisation, and worse politics that hamper the rest of the trade union movement. The defeat at the Grangemouth oil refinery, an industrially strategic workplace with a well-organised and previously militant workforce, highlighted the union's shortcomings in a graphic and very public way. In this article, *Mark Best* sets out the case for organisational and political reform within Unite to transform it into a genuinely fighting union.

**The main "left" grouping in Unite is United Left. It is a very loose grouping that fails to coherently describe what it means to be "left" or to outline a radical vision for the union.**

It is dominated by *Morning Star* Stalinists and ex-Trotskyists. It is doggedly loyal to McCluskey and the "left" leadership and officials of the union, and is often hysterically hostile to the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), a hostility which predates the latest scandals to have engulfed the SWP.

Much of what passes for discussion at United Left meeting centres on getting "their" people elected to committees and appointed to positions. A tradition of political appointments in Unite and its predecessor unions, the TGWU and Amicus, results in the raising of some spectacularly incompetent and lazy individuals to positions of authority within the union. The lack of any coherent definition of what it means to be "left" means that many of these fail miserably to put up a radical opposition to the bosses.

At the national official level, the politics of Unite are dominated by the cautious, fake-left, soft-Stalinism of the *Morning Star*. As a result, the union supports Labour almost unquestioningly and tells itself fantasy stories about the left-wing credentials of Ed Miliband, and all sorts of uninspiring prospective parliamentary candidates.

Internationally, Unite seems to have failed to notice the role of trade unions or their need for support in countries like Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Mexico, Indonesia, or Turkey. Instead it spends a phenomenal amount of attention on Cuba, promoting the Miami Five campaign and sending officials on junkets to Havana.

Socialists in Unite need to work together to define what it means to be "left-wing" — supporting workers to struggle to reshape our workplaces and our society in our class interests.

We need to raise the flag for an internationalism that involves lending support to our sisters and brothers fighting the class struggle in countries of the world where they most need our help and where their struggle may be most closely tied to ours (international organising campaigns, taking on international industrial sectors, or TNCs) rather than simply waving flags for the Cuban state.

And socialists need to raise big political questions in the union — the fight for a workers' government, that would take key strategic industries into public hands, would reverse privatisation and repeal the anti-union laws. The left in Unite should argue for a far more critical and nuanced support for Labour — using the link to push socialist policies in the party, targeting support for candidates who support our key aims, holding MPs and the party to account when they fail to back us in action, and so forth.

For socialists, "taking an organising approach", should mean relying on the strength of organisation to drive change; focusing on building membership, activity and, crucially, leadership within workplaces, sector by sector.

Unite has gone further than any other UK union in establishing an "organising department", with 100 organisers focused mainly on sectoral organising. Yet its training still focuses much more on individual representation than on collective campaigning, negotiating, and winning industrial campaigns and disputes. Its officers are still commonly far too worried about upsetting their "good relationship" with



an employer (even when in dispute!) than on taking on and beating that employer through collective action. The common response to a workplace issue is to advise on whether the workers have "a case" (i.e. a legal case) rather than to explore how they might campaign to improve their lot beyond the bare minimum the law states.

This has to change. Socialists should argue for the whole union to adopt a genuine "organising approach" — to campaign, to focus on growth, to fight to win, through sector-wide collective action. The Organising and Leverage Department should continue to grow its strength and ability to take on large corporations and sectors. Training and support of reps should be refocused in this direction.

The success of Unite's leverage campaigns can be measured pretty accurately by the level of hysteria whipped up in the right wing press and the determination of the government to ban it.

Leverage should continue to grow and develop. Using innovative, flexible, fast moving tactics to stay ahead of the bosses leverage can support industrial strength and help redress the imbalance of forces in the class struggle at the industrial level.

The same degree of planning, strategy and resolve needs bringing to unite's prosecution of industrial disputes. The creation of a strike fund is a great first step in supporting strikes but a disputes team should move in to support important battles, just as corporations shift in teams or consultants to oppose unionisation campaigns.

Instead of teaching officers how to avoid strikes, Unite should ensure its reps and employees know how to win them!

## INDUSTRIAL ORGANISING

**Capitalism is primarily organised by sector. Glaxo Smith Kline in Worthing competes with Bayer in Germany. Other pharmaceutical companies are the competitors their board concerns themselves with, not the garage in Chichester or the widget factory in Shoreham. And yet the primary organisational unit of Unite is the geographical region.**

These Regions each have a well-paid Regional Secretary, a finance department, membership department, constitutional committees, and so forth. Branches and even individual membership "belong" to a specific region. One region may refuse to represent another's member or may snatch membership from another. They hold much of the power and political sway inside the union. They "manage" the officers that are based within their geographical area.

By contrast, the industrial sectors will have little more than a national officer and their secretary. They will meet quarterly as a sector committee (NISC) and every few years as a sector conference. The national office(r) doesn't manage or direct the work of officers, doesn't have a team under them working to research, plan, and execute its work within their industrial sector.

This is despite the fact that these sectors look remarkably like old-fashioned industrial unions — Civil Aviation Transport, for example, includes cabin crew, baggage handlers, check-in agents, cleaners and security, porters, and everyone else working in airports across the country. And yet reps from Gatwick will meet reps from Heathrow only occasionally. They will have much closer constitutional contact with other reps from bus companies, IT companies, hospitals, etc., in their local area.

We should argue for much greater power for the industrial sectors. In the modern industrial landscape, it makes little sense to maintain the complicated, powerful and costly regional structures that Unite currently operates.

Unite is far from unique in the trade union movement in tolerating quite unbelievable sloppiness, laziness and ineptitude. Whilst effective management structures are in place in one or two departments, for the most part officers and staff manage themselves — with predictable results.

By introducing very rudimentary management structures into its 100% campaigning, Unite took a campaigning approach that had delivered a few thousand members in five years, to delivery of over 100,000 members in two years. And yet most of this growth is delivered by a minority of officers and a minority of campaigns.

To succeed, the union needs to extend the principle of managed teams, planning and accountability for work throughout its ranks. Training, support, and, where needed, discipline needs to be given to all its employees and the lay officialdom and membership need to be able to take oversight of things like success of campaigns, officers' expense claims, etc.

## COMMITTEES

**Unite is overflowing with committees. There are literally hundreds of them. But they too often lack power, fail to seriously challenge and hold to account the functionaries of the union, struggle to fill seats, and fail to take decisions or to direct work.**

There is no easy fix. To give democratic structures meaning, first a more involved culture needs to be built. A simple prescription of "more elections" is not enough. Activity and organisation — campaigning — is key to this. Much greater openness, publishing pay and expenses, campaign progress reports, etc., online would be a start. Likewise, better training and direction of committees to deliver effective oversight and campaigning would be a move in the right direction. In disputes, creating strike committees with real power would give the workers involved a chance to drive their own disputes and make union officials more accountable.

Some unions, notably in Australia, have set up processing centres to deal with individual issues and to channel contact. This enables them to ensure contact is followed through (through "case management" systems and software), to deal with individual issues promptly and efficiently, and to identify potential organising opportunities.

Instead, Unite, like all other UK unions, handles enquiries on an ad hoc basis. Try calling a Unite local office; it is not uncommon to struggle to get your call answered. If you do get through, it is pot luck if your officer calls you back that afternoon, in the next few days or at all.

Establishing a processing centre could professionalise this work and could free up vital resources for campaigning in defence of members' interests.

Too often the approach from officers and reps is wait and see, softly softly, politely ask... Taking on big, complicated issues or powerful, determined employers is simply not on the agenda if we "don't have a case".

Unite needs to be prepared, politically and organisationally, to take on these challenges. There are few significant "easy wins" out there for our class. We have to fight for them. This takes organisation, preparation, planning and above all a boldness of vision and action.

These, apparently technical problems, stem from the political and organisational problems sketched out above.

**This article is in no way intended as an exhaustive examination of the problems and challenges facing Unite. Neither is it a finished prescription for the change required in our movement. It is intended to focus on a critical area of struggle for socialists and to start a discussion on how we should seek to influence the development of our trade unions.**

# TSSA joins Tube strikes

By Ollie Moore

**The Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) returned a 59% majority for strikes in its ballot over proposed job cuts and ticket office closures on London Underground.**

The majority, on a 52% turnout, means TSSA can join the RMT's industrial action against the cuts. TSSA members will strike on identical dates (4-6 and 10-13 February), and will also participate in the revenue action called by RMT on

7, 10, and 14 February.

The result is an extremely positive development, particularly given the short turnaround for TSSA's ballot, which only began on 9 January.

United action by RMT and TSSA will also put pressure on members of drivers-only union ASLEF not to cross picket lines.

**For regular updates on the action, visit the blog of the rank-and-file bulletin *Tubeworker* at: [workersliberty.org/twblog](http://workersliberty.org/twblog)**

## Teachers' campaign to meet

By Jonny West

**The Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC) will hold a campaign conference in Leicester on Saturday 1 February.**

LANAC is the rank-and-file network which has been central to organising resistance to the National Union of Teachers (NUT) leadership's conservatism and vacillation in the ongoing dispute over pay, pensions, and workload.

The main strategy motion proposed to the conference calls for the NUT to adopt a strategy that includes:

- A calendar of ongoing national action – not just isolated strike days
- Escalation from one to two-day action – warning Gove that more could follow
- Collections for hardship funds to allow maximum participation in strike action
- Co-ordinating action with other unions, including, if they are willing, the NASUWT
- A national work-to-rule to resist any attempt to worsen conditions
- A public campaign to build support for our action and to defend education

The motion also calls for LANAC to stand candidates in the NUT's upcoming General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary elections. A LANAC challenge for those positions could draw clear red lines between the rank-and-file of the union and the current "left" leaders, Christine Blower and Kevin Courtney.

**For more information on the LANAC conference, see [nutlan.org.uk](http://nutlan.org.uk)**

## Uni bosses to dock strikers' pay?

By Darren Bedford

**Bosses at several universities around Britain have threatened to dock a full day's pay from academic staff participating in the University and College Union's two-hour strikes.**

Bosses at Nottingham Trent University, University of Chester, Dundee University, Oxford Brookes University, Glasgow Caledonian University, University of Leicester, De Montfort University, University of Staffordshire, Wolverhampton University, Surrey University and Leeds College of Art all made the threat in advance of the first two-hour walkout, on Thursday 23 January. The UCU has vowed to mount legal challenges to recoup any unlawfully docked pay.

A UCU activist told *Solidarity*: "We won't know until February's payroll if they've gone ahead with the threat, but I think they'll stick with it. They are clearly targeting weaker branches in an effort to scupper the dispute."

The next two-hour strike was due as *Solidarity* went to press on Tuesday 28 January.



ary. UCU members will join with non-academic staff in Unison, Unite, and members of the Scottish teachers' union EIS, for a national one-day strike on 6 February, before another two-hour stoppage on 10 February.

The dispute aims to win a better pay deal for Higher Education workers. Unions say the current 1% deal represents a real-terms pay cut. However, many institutions have already begun implementing the deal, and activists are frustrated with the slow-moving pace of the dispute.

**Unions struck on 31 October and 3 December, but, despite promises of escalation, have not moved beyond one-day strikes.**

## NEW UNIONISM 2014

**An activist conference, organised by Workers' Liberty, 11am-5pm, Saturday 29 March, University of London Union, WC1E 7HY**

**How can we defend ourselves against the bosses' attacks, rebuild working class power and transform the labour movement to change the world?**

**[daniel.cooper@ulu.lon.ac.uk](mailto:daniel.cooper@ulu.lon.ac.uk)  
07840 136 728  
[www.workersliberty.org/newunions](http://www.workersliberty.org/newunions)**



## Ruling shows blacklisting loophole

By Darren Bedford

**A 17 January High Court ruling has highlighted the dangerous lack of rights afforded to agency workers in the UK.**

High Court Judge Mrs. Justice Slade ruled that Dave Smith, a former construction worker leading activist in the Blacklist Support Group, had been blacklisted for his activities as a trade union health and safety representative, but that he has no option for legal redress because he was an agency employee at the time.

The judge stated that Dave had "suffered from injustice from blacklisting", and identified human rights violations, but concluded that UK employment law does not protect to agency workers.

The ruling could provide a dangerous loophole for employers facing blacklist-



## All aboard the 3-Cosas bus!

**On the second day of the "3-Cosas" strike by outsourced workers at the University of London, most of the picket line boarded an open-top bus for a sight-seeing tour of London.**

First stop was the Garden Halls, the University intercollegiate halls of residence at which jobs are threatened by refurbishment this summer.

Next we drove to Parliament. Followed the whole time by a police helicopter, we were met outside the House of Commons by Labour MPs John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn. Their solidarity was very welcome.

Our third target of the day was the Royal Opera House, which hires cleaners and porters through a sub-contract with the facilities giant MITIE. IWGB members stormed into reception for a flash protest and demanded the Living Wage for low-paid staff.

**To remove us, Royal Opera House staff told us that a Living Wage had been agreed and was to be implemented soon! If so, this is a massive victory for the union.**

• More: [facebook.com/3coca](https://facebook.com/3coca)



ing cases, as contracting-out and agency employment is common in the construction industry.

Dave, who plans to appeal, said: "Being a union member is not against the law. Raising concerns about asbestos is not against the law. But despite mountains of documentary evidence proving that construction firms were systematically blacklisting

union members who questioned safety standards, it seems that big business are above the law."

**"Blacklisting is a violation of human rights. We intend to fight this all the way to Europe until we achieve justice. My heroic legal team are already preparing our appeal."**

• For more, see [hazards.org/blacklistblog](http://hazards.org/blacklistblog)



# Solidarity

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## Revolt in Ukraine

By Martin Thomas

**As we write on 27 January, the political flux in Ukraine has reached a level where a wide range of dramatic outcomes look possible.**

Town halls in many areas in the west of the country, and some central ministries in Kiev, have been seized by anti-government protesters and barricaded. According to the BBC, the protests have now spread to the east of the country, previously thought to be the government's main base of support.

On 22 January President Yanukovich introduced drastic laws to suppress the street protests. Then he offered to appoint opposition leaders as prime minister and deputy prime minister (the opposition leaders turned down the offer) and to amend, and then to scrap, the anti-protest laws.

The justice minister, angered by the opposition's seizure of her ministry building, threatened the declaration of a state of emergency. The opposition activists then quit the building, but as of 27 January were still blockading it from outside.

### EU AND RUSSIA

**The ferment started after 21 November, when the Yanukovich regime failed to sign a trade agreement with the European Union, and instead steered towards closer links with Russia.**

Ukraine was dominated politically by Russia for centuries under the Tsars, and then was dominated again, even more cruelly, under Stalinism. In 1932-3 the Ukraine suffered a huge famine, killing maybe five million, as a result of dislocation caused by Stalin's forced collectivisation. To some extent the Stalinist regime deliberately intensified the famine, or let it intensify, in order to break Ukrainian morale and resistance.

Decades later, under the Brezhnev regime, Ukraine was still subjected to attempts at forced Russification.

In 1939 Leon Trotsky made, on the Ukrain-

ian question, one of his sharpest shifts towards advocating revolutionary struggle against the Stalinist bureaucracy, unrestrained by fears of "disrupting the planned economy" or "weakening the USSR against the West". He called for the independence of eastern Ukraine, then ruled by Moscow, and its right to unite with the western part of Ukraine, then ruled by Poland.

Some anti-Stalinist socialists objected that "the separation of the Ukraine threatens to break down the plan and to lower the productive forces". Trotsky replied: "This argument is not decisive. An economic plan is not the holy of holies. If national sections within the federation, despite the unified plan, are pulling in opposite directions, it means that the plan does not satisfy them..."

"Moreover, it is impermissible to forget that the plunder and arbitrary rule of the bureaucracy constitute an important integral part of the current economic plan, and exact a heavy toll from the Ukraine".

That background explains why masses of people in Ukraine see association with the EU as offering more national freedom, and greater chances of escaping their grinding poverty, than renewed subordination to Russia. Ukraine's GDP per capita is only about \$3,500, about half Bulgaria's and maybe 40% of Romania's.

Ukrainians will be aware of the cuts commandments of the EU authorities of southern Europe; however, the Ukrainian economy is already in deep trouble and debt problems, so they are unlikely to think that keeping distance from the EU is a protection from cuts and crises.

The opposition includes the far-right party Svoboda, linked to Jobbik in Hungary and the BNP in Britain. Other opposition leaders, less right-wing, accept Svoboda as a major ally.

**Much depends on the growth of political forces able to champion Ukrainian freedom while intransigently combatting the far-right nationalists.**

## Turkish trade unionists on trial

By Eric Lee

**On a chilly Thursday morning in late January I found myself standing at the entrance to an ultra-modern shopping centre or hotel. An immense atrium, mirror-like glass everywhere, it was certainly designed by architects with ambitions. The building was the main courthouse in downtown Istanbul — the largest courthouse, we were told, in all of Europe.**

I was there in order to attend the opening of the trial of 56 members of KESK, the Turkish trade union for public sector workers. The KESK members are accused of membership in an illegal organisation, and making propaganda for that organisation. A handful of them were accused of being leaders of the organisation.

The organisation they are accused of joining is the Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi (DHKP-C) — the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front — which for more than three decades has conducted an armed struggle against the Turkish state. The DHKP-C is considered a terrorist organisation not only by the Turkish government but also by the European Union and the United States.

On 1 February 2013, the organisation carried out a suicide bombing at the US Embassy in Ankara, killing one person in addition to the attacker and injuring three.

A few days later, Turkish police launched raids across the country targeting the offices of KESK — a fiercely independent union which has challenged the Erdogan government's policies.

There are no proven links between any of the KESK defendants and the DHKP-C. According to the union, their members are being framed and their only real crime is the militant defence of KESK members against the ongoing attack by the government.

Following the arrests, at the request of global and European unions, LabourStart launched an online campaign that generated nearly 13,000 protest messages.

Some 167 KESK activists were detained, most were released, and 56 of them are awaiting trial. Of those, 29 have been held in prison for nearly a year. Naturally their families, union leaders, journalists and others wanted to attend the opening of the trial. But the court decided to hold it in one of the smallest chambers they had, cramming in dozens of people, forcing many to stand in a hot, airless room.

The three judges confirmed the identities of those standing trial and then allowed the defendants one by one to state their cases. The first was a school teacher who spoke at length about the history of

the Turkish trade union movement, crushed first by the military dictatorship in the 1980s and now again by the Erdogan government. The lead judge interrupted her, asking how long she would go on as he was keen to take a break.

"As long as I need," she replied. "I have a lot to say!"

Her speech ended with rousing applause from the audience, which included a trade union delegation from a number of European countries. During the break, the trade unionists joined hundreds of KESK members on the plaza opposite the courthouse in a protest.

Though the demonstrators chanted slogans such as "Down with fascism", Turkey is clearly not a fascist state. (Fascist states don't allow demonstrations of this type.)

But Turkey is a state that recognizes few of the internationally-accepted rights for workers, and won't allow civil servants, for example, to have a collective bargaining agreement.

The trial in Istanbul is part of a broader series of trials that include some 500 KESK members.

There is no question that the Erdogan government is trying to break the union by jailing its leaders. As one of the European union leaders put it, it's an attempt to "decapitate" the troublesome KESK.

These trials, like those which preceded them, have been ignored by the mainstream media. In Turkey, this is to be expected, as the media is in the grip of Erdogan's AK Party. But few journalists in Europe and elsewhere have shown any interest in these events.

**Apparently, unless blood flows in the streets — as it did last spring in Taksim Square and Gezi Park — Turkey is of no interest to the world.**



**Protests outside the courthouse. In attacking KESK Turkish government is trying to decapitate one of its strongest critics**