

Solidarity

For a
workers'
government

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 315 5 March 2014 30p/80p

www.workersliberty.org

For Ukraine's national rights!
For Ukraine's left and labour movement!

**Hands
off
Ukraine!**

RUSSIAN TROOPS OUT! SEE PAGE 5

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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



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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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Shut Australian detention centres!

By Riki Lane

Protests around Australia against the attacks on asylum seekers on Manus island have been well attended, horrified and angry. However, we are far off breaking the "off-shore processing" policy, shared by the conservative Abbott government and the Australian Labor Party (ALP).

You might think that refugees being murdered and severely bashed by security guards would cause a rethink. No.

Asylum seekers have been "transferred" to makeshift detention centres on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea since 2013, when the ALP government negotiated a deal with the PNG government.

In the lead up to the federal election won by Tony Abbott's conservative Coalition, ALP PM Rudd (having just replaced Julia Gillard) warned that he was ready to create an island



Reza Barati

from hell in PNG. So now, when that hell results in one murder and many serious injuries to asylum seekers, the ALP can only complain about a lack of transparency and poor management.

They continue to stress the importance of off-shore processing as a deterrent to refugees getting on boats instead of languishing in camps in Indonesia for years, with little hope of ever getting to Australia.

Immigration minister Morrison was forced into an embarrassing back down — admitting that he was "misinformed" when he said inmates were attacked outside the centre, having escaped. Instead, he now says most were hurt inside the centre, but due to their violent protests.

Their supposed violence does not seem to have been well directed: 0 security staff injured versus 1 dead and over 70 injured asylum seekers.

The stories from many inmates and employees is quite different — that local employees of G4S security firm and PNG police riot squads rampaged through the compound, pulling people from their rooms and beating them, using rocks and machetes. A number of shots were fired, and one asylum seeker was shot in the buttocks — while fleeing.

An Iranian asylum seeker spoke to people treating his injuries on the wharf of the

Australian accommodation centre boat, the Bibby:

"I did nothing, I wasn't involved in the protests, I was in my room, being good, trying to sleep. They came in my room, six local G4S, they dragged me out of my bed and beat me, they had huge rocks in their hands and they hit my head and my body with them. They got me because I was in the first room, I had no chance".

The Iranian Kurdish refugee Reza Barati was killed — detention centre employees say he had a head wound and cuts to his neck, and that he was not involved in the protests at all and must have been dragged from his room.

If we want to succeed in shutting down these detention centres, we will need an unprecedented wave of organising and support from within the labour movement.

● More: <http://bit.ly/aus-ref>

Egypt: strikes rock new government

By Tom Harris

Egypt's new prime minister Ibrahim Mehlab used his first speech in the role to plead for an end to strikes and protests.

The former Housing Minister, ex-chief of giant building company Arab Contractors, called on Egyptians to "stop all kinds of sit-ins, protests and strikes" and to focus on "building the nation".

Mehlab was appointed prime minister by acting-president Adly Mansour after the previous cabinet resigned in its entirety. The ministers stepped down amid increasing public anger over shortages of fuel and electricity, as well as a major strike wave in a number of different sectors.

Workers' demands vary from industry to industry, but the most common call is for the new minimum wage to be implemented throughout the country.

The military holds real control in Egypt and is worried that strikes and protests will disrupt the transitional period between its coup last year and the presidential elections in the spring.

The government had previously enjoyed the passive



Textile workers on strike for minimum wage

support of many Egyptians relieved to see the back of Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood. But the absence of improvements in people's wages and conditions has caused that popularity to seriously

fracture.

Strikes have spread among bus workers, weavers and refuse collectors, as well as in key public sectors such as health, where an estimated 87% of doctors struck for higher

wages and an increased health budget.

The state response has been panicked.

The army was drafted in to run the bus system and militants have been victimised.

Union leaders warn that if workers' demands are not met, they may no longer be able to keep a check on anger.

"Who is going to meet our legitimate demands?" said Tarek Elbehiry, vice-president of the bus drivers' union. "I'm disappointed indeed, and I'm afraid of a third revolution that will be carried out by the workers."

New book rediscovers US socialist cartoons

A few bold strokes by an artist can convey an idea more vividly and fix it more firmly in the viewer's mind than an editorial or an article would.

The cartoons collected in a new book depict US politics, workers' struggles, America's "Jim Crow" racism, Roosevelt's "New Deal" and Harry Truman's "Fair Deal", and Stalinism in its era of greatest prestige and triumph, as revolutionary socialists saw them at the time.

You can buy online here — price includes postage and packaging. Or send £10.60 to AWL, 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London SE1 3DG

<http://www.workersliberty.org/socialistcartoons>
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In an era of wars and revolutions
American socialist cartoons of the mid-twentieth century



Unions speak against Collins, but vote for it

By Martin Thomas

The Collins review, with its time-bomb provision to recalculate all the unions' affiliation numbers in 2019, was soft-soaped through the Labour Party special conference on 1 March 2019.

24.26% of the constituency Labour Party (CLP) delegates voted against.

Among the affiliated organisations (primarily the trade unions), only 3.16% voted against. As far as I know, that 3.16% was the Bakers' Union and Young Labour.

Off the conference floor, one union leader described his speech to me as "speaking against the report, but voting for it". All the trade union leaders' speeches had something of that about them.

It was as if, with the Labour Party leaders, they had done what they see as standard trade-union practice when faced with bad things from an employer: negotiate, talk it round into something not quite so bad, and then tell the members they should accept the result as the best that can be got.

Everything now depends on the class struggle over the next five years. The Collins changes make not much difference immediately. But many Labour right-wingers want to use the recalculation of union

affiliation numbers in 2019 — reducing them only to those who have ticked a box to say they want part of their union political levy to go to the Labour Party — to cut back the union say in the Labour Party and thus insure future Labour governments against future working-class demands.

We should urge trade unionists to tick the box. And union leaders say they will do that — but in a way that gives no grounds for confidence about easily getting good results.

Five activists got to speak against Collins — Pete Firmin from Hampstead and Kilburn CLP, Steve Brown from Wansbeck, Richard Johnson from Bedford, Gary Heather from Islington North, and Simon Clarke from Islington South.

WORKING-CLASS
They explained that the way to build a working-class mass membership in the Labour Party is by Labour leaders carrying through conference policies.

Policies like renationalisation of rail; that the Collins changes open the way to chopping collective trade-union input into the Labour Party; that the changes have been rushed through undemocratically; that they will undermine Labour finances, and thus push towards either reliance on wealthy donors, or state funding.



Arguing with delegates

They had to contend with a blizzard of blather pretending that the Collins changes are the way for "the voice of working people to be heard louder in our party", and "Labour to become a movement again", as Ed Miliband put it in his opening speech.

There was more talk about Labour being the party of the working class than we've heard for many a long year.

In fact the changes are mainly about removing from some trade unionists (those who do not tick the box) the chance they already have to vote in Labour leadership elections. That no more enhances political involvement than trade unions' industrial effectiveness would be increased by a rule banning

trade union members from taking part in strike ballots and strikes unless they have previously ticked a box to confirm that they want part of their dues to go to strike funds.

The Collins changes are supposed to give CLPs direct access to box-ticking union members in their areas. How well that will work remains to be seen. In any case, union members will be stirred to attend meetings not by emails from CLPs, but by a Labour Party which can be seen to defend workers' interests and in which attending meetings gets you a real democratic say.

Yet Angela Eagle opened the conference by responding to the Tories' recent sally about the Conservatives being "the workers'

party" by declaring: "There's only one workers' party — it's the Labour Party".

Jon Ashworth summed up the debate in similar tones: "Labour is the party of the workers... These changes are about getting working men and women into our party... We want to hear the voice of working people louder than ever... The collective voice of the unions in our party is staying".

Similar words came from pro-Collins floor speakers, like Labour Students honcho Sally Jameson: "The trade unions have always been at the centre of our party, and these reforms will keep them there", or Carlisle parliamentary candidate Lee Sherriff, who suggested that the changes would bring more workers as Labour MPs (how?). Margaret Beckett declared: "The Labour Party is the political wing of the trade union movement".

The trade-union speakers mostly made it obvious they believed none of this.

Paul Kenny of the GMB said that the union's collective voice in the Labour Party was "not for sale, not up for discussion". He

warned darkly that it would be difficult to shape the "registered supporters" scheme so that it "stands scrutiny".

Dave Prentis of Unison said: "The whole episode has been a distraction... should never have happened". Working-class people, he said, are "not interested" in the Collins measures, but "want a promise set in stone to rebuild our NHS".

Len McCluskey of Unite was more credulous, claiming that the Collins measures "take us down the road of involving more trade unionists". But he gave most of his speech to rebutting the allegations made against Unite over Falkirk CLP, and calling for support for Stevie Deans, victimised "because of unnecessary arguments within our own party". (There was a standing ovation for McCluskey on that).

"To those who want to push us out", McCluskey, evidently recognising that there are leading Labour politicians who do want to push the unions out, retorted: "This is our party".

It will be only if the unions actively fight to make it so.

Blairites turn to the Sun

By Michael Johnson

Blairites in Young Labour have smeared young trade unionists in Murdoch's Sun, in response to the growing influence of the left in the party's youth wing.

Their crime? Asking their trade unions to help out with the cost of Young Labour and Labour Students' much-too-expensive and inaccessible annual conferences.

The smear is retaliation for being defeated at Young Labour conference in the debate on the Collins Review; Young Labour delegate Simon Darvill was forced to vote against it at the Special Conference.

"Hardline union chiefs", screeches the *Sun*, have launched a "crusade to radicalise Labour by targeting the party's young wing." The claim comes from "worried insiders", who compare the presence of young trade union delegates to "the Militant Tendency".

We hear from "a senior Young Labour figure" playing dress-up as a Blair-era spin doctor. Revealing his hysterical paranoia our hapless Little Lord Mandelson bleats that: "This is where the money from the political fund is going — they are bussing in the Trots. It's a return to the infiltration we saw in the 1980s."

Adding an element of

cloak-and-dagger intrigue, we are told that the source "insisted on remaining anonymous for fear of reprisals."

The article even comes complete with a comment from rent-a-quote Tory chairman Grant Shapps (or whatever his real name is) to the effect that: "It's clear Ed Miliband has lost complete control of his party and allowed the unions to take it over."

The Blairite leadership of Young Labour and Labour students care little that their destructive little lash-out may be damaging the image of the wider party.

From the tone of its spokesperson, the Labour Party is plainly unamused

at these antics. The Blairite clique that has so long controlled Labour Students and, through it, the National Union of Students (NUS), is more isolated in the party than ever. Even worse — it can no longer now even control the "Trots".

No doubt some future careers have been ruined by the clique's failure to subdue the left and secure the correct result in the Collins debate. At least they've now opened up the possibly of future employment — as hired muck-rakers for the Tory gutter-press.

Things can only get better...



Defend mental health services in Norfolk and Suffolk!

On Saturday 1 March over thirty trade unionists and campaigners demonstrated outside Helleston Hospital in Norwich in support of a continuing campaign to defend jobs and mental health services in Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust (NSFT)

They opposed the closure of 20 acute psychiatric beds and 13 pre-discharge beds at the hospital.

The campaign was started because of an appalling deterioration in services, the sudden rise in the suicide rate, and £20 million of cuts.

**More protests are planned:
www.norfolksuffolkmentalhealthcrisis.org.uk
• Full report: bit.ly/cuts-nfst**

Pat Yarker

Assessing Scandinavia's ritual circumcision debate

By Camila Bassi

Reading Frank Furedi's article 'Culture War: the narcissism of minor differences' (Spiked Online) I became aware of the debate in Scandinavia on whether to ban the ritual circumcision of boys. The way Furedi framed this debate alerted me to the need to think through a socialist response. Take his opening paragraph:

"On Sunday, a majority of Swiss voters said yes in a referendum on imposing quotas on the arrival of immigrants from EU countries. On the previous weekend, there were mass demonstrations in France, at which protesters chanted slogans in defence of the traditional family and denouncing the school system for planning to indoctrinate their children with 'gender-equality' sex education. On the same weekend, thousands demonstrated in Madrid against tough new anti-abortion laws drawn up by the Spanish government. In Norway and other parts of Scandinavia, a cultural crusade against the circumcision of boys is gaining momentum. Meanwhile, Russia has become the focus for international protest over its discrimination against gay people."

Furedi groups together reactionary waves of anti-immigration, anti-gay, and anti-abortion sentiment and action, with a public and political discussion on whether male minors should be ritually circumcised without their consent. His common denominator is "culture war".

Culture war, Furedi argues, is the defining feature of our post-Cold War society, as political ideologies have been worn out and cultural issues take their place.

Anyone familiar with the works of Antonio Gramsci will know that struggles over culture are not new, and are intrinsically bound up with class (and political) interests. Nonetheless, Furedi concludes:

"The new cultural politics rarely recognises itself for what it is. It cannot openly acknowledge its ambition to monopolise moral authority. Although advocates of lifestyle and identity causes always claim to be tolerant, inclusive and pluralistic, in truth they cannot accept the moral legitimacy of their opponents [...] There are no progressive causes that can be advanced through the medium of culture. Those who flatter themselves as enlightened and inclusive are no less complicit than their opponents in creating a climate of intolerance."

But what about the politics of independent working class culture? In other words, as socialists, feminists, and labour movement activists, what do we "independently" think about the practice of ritual circumcision amongst male minors, and how does this relate to the Scandinavian debate and the political trends and forces involved?

In a statement — "Let the boys decide on circumcision" — released in Oslo on 30 September 2013, and signed by the Ombudsmen for Children from Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, and Greenland, as well as eleven paediatric experts from it is declared:

"Circumcision, performed without a medical indication, on a person who is incapable of giving consent, violates fundamental medical-ethical principles, not least because the procedure is irreversible, painful and may cause serious complications. There are no health-related reasons for circumcising young boys in the Nordic countries.

"Circumstances that may make circumcision advantageous for adult men are of little relevance to young boys in the Nordic countries, and on these matters the boys will have the opportunity to decide for themselves when they reach the age and maturity required to give consent. [...] We see it as fundamental that parents' rights in this context do not prevail over children's right to bodily integrity. The best interests of the child must always be a primary consideration, even if this can reduce the rights of adults to perform religious or traditional practices. [we] wish to work towards a situation where circumcision without medical indication may only be carried out if a boy, who has reached the age and maturity required in order to understand the necessary medical information, chooses to consent to the procedure. [...]"

According to the Nordic Association of Clinical Sexology: "The penile foreskin is a natural and integral part of the normal male genitalia. The foreskin has a number of important protective and sexual functions. [...] As clinical sexologists, we are concerned about the human rights aspect associated with the practice of non-therapeutic circumcision of young boys. To cut off the penile foreskin in a boy with normal, healthy genitalia deprives him of his right to grow up and make his own informed decision.

"Unless there are compelling medical reasons to operate before a boy reaches an age and a level of maturity at which he is capable of providing informed consent, the decision to alter the appearance, sensitivity and functionality of the penis should be left to its owner, thus upholding his fundamental rights to protection and bodily integrity. Every person's right to bodily integrity goes hand in hand with his or her sexual autonomy."

The response of some to the Scandinavian debate has been to state that it is part of a wider wave of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism. That, implicitly, seems to be Furedi's position and others associated with *Spiked Online*.

Indeed, the pressure from political forces stressing this argument appears to have stalled any banning. The *Copenhagen Post* reported that in December 2013, a delegation of Israeli

Knesset politicians attempted to overturn a human rights-based resolution, which was passed in October 2013 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE):

"The PACE resolution 1952 recommends that member states start moving towards abolishing all kinds of physical assaults on children, including non-therapeutic circumcision of boys and girls. [...] In the Israeli media, readers have repeatedly been told that the widely-held European stance against ritual circumcision is rooted partly in anti-Semitism, and partly in fear of an expanding Muslim population in Europe."

Noted in Israel's *Arutz Sheva* from February 2014: "Foreign Minister Børge Brende of Norway told the Center of European Rabbis and the Union of Jewish Associations in the European Union... that his government has never considered and will never consider putting a ban on ritual circumcision (brit milah in Hebrew)." It is worth registering that in Norway, political party support for [the ban] comes, in the main, from some in the Labor Party and not from the right-wing Progress Party.

EUROPEAN RIGHT

My first response is to emphasise that, yes, anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism across Europe is on the rise, and Scandinavia is no exception to this reactionary social and political trend. An article in the January 2014 *Economist*, assessing the rise of Europe's right-wing, observes:

"The populist right is nowhere to be found in austerity-battered Spain and Portugal. But it thrives in well-off Norway, Finland and Austria. [...] From 2001 to 2011 the Danish People's Party under Pia Kjaersgaard swapped parliamentary support for a succession of centre-right minority coalitions for tighter legislation on immigration. [...] To the consternation of liberal Scandinavians, Norway's nationalist-right Progress Party, which secured 16% of the vote at recent parliamentary elections, has been welcomed into a minority coalition government. Its leader, Siv Jensen — a sort of Norwegian Marine Le Pen, who talks about the "rampant Islamification" of Norway — has become the finance minister."

My second response is to untangle and reassemble the Scandinavian debate on the ritual circumcision of boys — in which not all of the forces can be crudely and crassly labelled and reduced to anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism — and a climate of rising anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism across Europe, in order to work out an independent socialist perspective.

On assessing the debate and the related evidence, some immediate and basic socialist demands can be concluded:

The right of children to bodily integrity; the right of children to the sexual autonomy of their adult life; non-therapeutic, ritual circumcision only be carried out when the person to be circumcised is mature, informed, and able to consent to the procedure; opposition to the rising intolerance of immigration across Europe; opposition to anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism, and all forms of racism and xenophobia; for an internationalist and independent working class culture and politics.

This leaves open the question of "punishment" if the principle of the right of the child to bodily integrity is carried through into law? Evidence of the varying outcomes from the application of the law against female genital mutilation (FGM) suggests that the solution to achieving a phasing out of this practice lies in education.

Whilst France does not have a specific law against FGM, since the late 1970s it has prosecuted parents and "cutters" under existing legislation relating to grievous bodily harm and violence against children. Despite common perceptions this has not led to a deluge of convictions; over the last 34 years there have been 29 trials, and approximately 100 convictions.

Alongside legal application there has been an intense educational campaign in France, including the training of health and education professionals on this issue, and the systematic examination of girls during routine health checks as babies.

The *Independent* notes: "In the early 1980s, analysis of the examinations showed that if a mother had been "excisée" (mutilated), there was an 80 per cent chance that her daughter would also have been subjected to FGM. A survey in 2007 suggested this had been reduced to 11 per cent."

Help us raise £12,000 by October

To coincide with the anniversary of the 1984-5 miners' strike Workers' Liberty will be re-publishing our long out-of-print analysis of the strike. With illustrations of the front pages of our newspaper of the time, *Socialist Organiser*, the book tells the story of a tumultuous class struggle which still shapes our political present. Help us expand our book production by donating to our fund!

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. 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 / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.

This week we have raised £90 in book sales and small donations. Grand total: £1846.

Hands off Ukraine! Russian troops out!

Ukraine got independence only in 1991. Ninety per cent of its people, west and east, voted to separate from Russia after the old bureaucratic command-economy regime collapsed.

They had been under foreign rule, Russian or Polish, for centuries. By 1991 they had been under especially vicious foreign rule — Stalinist terror, deliberately-sustained famine, then police-state bureaucratic “Russification” — for six decades (east) or five (west).

Russia’s creeping invasion of Ukraine is a drive to restore that foreign domination.

Probably Russia’s ruler Vladimir Putin does not aim at the old direct rule from Moscow. Instead, he wants “semi-colonial” domination.

In addition to the economic influence which Russian capital is almost bound to have on a capitalist Ukraine, given geography, he wants political domination which ensures that Ukrainian governments are acceptable to Moscow and follow Moscow’s wishes on big issues.

As we write, an ultimatum from the Russian military to the Ukrainian armed-forces bases in Crimea (already surrounded by Russian troops) to surrender by Tuesday morning 4 March has passed without action. It is possible that Putin may settle for what he can get by threats.

It is at least equally possible, though, that the threats will slip over into open war and a full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops.

Putin’s troops may even march on Kiev to overthrow the new Ukrainian government, chosen by Ukraine’s elected parliament after a mass popular revolt and the flight of the hated pro-Russian president Yanukovich, and to reinstall Yanukovich or impose a new government of reliably pro-Russian people.

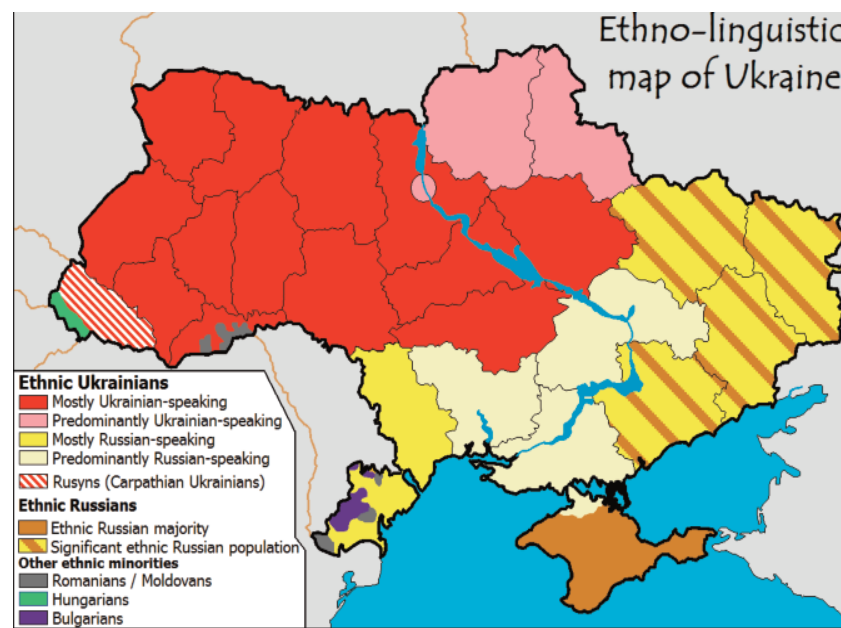
Russian troops have already effectively seized Crimea. They may seize more slabs of Ukrainian territory, then either use them as bargaining counters to impose what Russia wants on the whole of Ukraine, or annex them, formally or informally, to Russia.

Against all those variants, socialists and labour movements should support Ukraine’s right to self determination. We should support its right to political independence and freedom from invasion.

There are many other dimensions to the conflict. They should not be ignored. *Equally, they should not be used to blur support for Ukraine’s national rights.*

The new Ukrainian government is right-wing. It includes outright fascist ministers. It is ready to impose on Ukraine’s working people the neo-liberal economic measures (cuts in subsidies, etc.) which the EU and the IMF demand as the price for bail-out loans.

It has, stupidly and undemocratically, rescinded laws which made Russian a second official language in Ukraine.



Russians and Russian-speakers in Ukraine

We must back the Ukrainian left, and such elements as exist of an independent Ukrainian labour movement, against this new government. But the Ukrainian left will not be helped by a Russian invasion. Just the contrary. A Russian invasion will not make Ukraine less dominated by thieving oligarchs, less illiberal, or less harshly unequal in economics. Just the contrary.

The Western governments which back the new Ukrainian regime are self-interested, predatory, and hypocritical.

It was a bad joke when US Secretary of State John Kerry used these words to condemn Russia: “You just don’t in the 21st century invade another country on a completely trumped up pretext”.

The US and British governments used dodgy and “sexed-up” dossiers about invented stocks of weapons of mass destruction as their pretext to invade Iraq in 2003.

DEBT

The Western governments will seek, as their condition for bail-out loans, imposition of the same sort of economic measures which the EU authorities and the IMF have imposed on Greece. They will seek to subject Ukraine fully to the rules of the capitalist world markets.

We demand that those Western governments instead cancel Ukraine’s crippling foreign debt, and give Ukraine a chance to recover economically from the pillage by Yanukovich and his cronies.

We do not endorse Western economic sanctions on Russia (unlikely to be very strong, since, for example, Germany would be worse hit by a stoppage of its gas imports from Russia than Russia would be by a stoppage of its gas exports to Germany). We do not support Western troops being sent to Ukraine (again unlikely, given the USA’s desire to avoid

another Iraq, but possible).

But there is not complete symmetry here. Both Russia and Western governments have predatory aims, as, in general, do all capitalist governments in the world economy; but Russia is the old colonial power in Ukraine, Russia has sent troops in, Russia is seeking outright political domination. Ukrainian political self-determination needs support against Russia.

Many Ukrainians, especially in the east, have Russian as their first language.

That is not surprising, since for decades the Russian language was actively imposed by Moscow. It does not mean that the Russian-speakers want to be ruled by Russia.

Most Russian-speakers in Ukraine identify as Ukrainians who happen to have Russian as their first language. Most people in Ukraine speak both languages (they are similar). Those who have studied language in Ukraine report that “often you hear two people having a conversation where one is speaking Russian and the other Ukrainian. They may not even realize that this is going on”; and “large segments of the population speak a mixture of the two languages that leans either towards Russian or Ukrainian”.

As you move east in Ukraine, the proportion of Russian-speakers, and the proportion of people who identify as Russian (much smaller, and always a clear minority) increases too. The most easterly parts of Ukraine were major centres of industry for the whole USSR in Stalinist times, had higher wages than elsewhere in the USSR, and attracted Russian workers. The more centre-east parts, more rural, have many Russian-speakers, but also still-live memories of the killing of millions of Ukrainian peasants in Stalin’s deliberately-sustained famine of 1932-3.

In short, the equation “east = pro-Russian” is a huge oversimplification. It does not contain enough truth to excuse Russian military pressure or invasion.

Crimea is different. It was not historically part of Ukraine, but was allocated to Ukraine in 1954 in an administrative re-organisation within the USSR. Its indigenous people are mainly Crimean Tatars, Muslim in religion.

Russian settlers started arriving in numbers during the 19th century. In 1944 Stalin deported the entire Crimean Tatar population to remote regions of the USSR. They were banned from returning to their homeland until 1989, and are now a minority there, with about half the population Russian and a larger minority Ukrainian. On all accounts the Tatars prefer being part of Ukraine to being part of Russia.

Crimea voted 56% in 1991 for Ukrainian independence. In principle there is a case for separate self-determination for Crimea. But what is happening there now is not that. It is Russian military intervention to cut off Crimea from Ukraine or to use the threat of cutting it off as a lever to win Russia’s political demands on the whole of Ukraine.

A referendum held in Crimea under Russian military occupation cannot be reckoned as free and democratic self-determination by the people.

Ukrainian leftist speaks out

Volodymyr Ishchenko is the editor of *Commons: Journal for Social Criticism*, based in Kiev

I hate the bastard [Yanukovich] who clung to power despite dozens of deaths and who now wants to return to the country on foreign tanks...

I hate the tyrant in the Kremlin, who needs a little victorious war to strengthen the rouble and his own, almost unlimited power.

I hate all these “deeply concerned” EU and US bureaucrats, which introduce sanctions only when the government is all but toppled and give aid under conditions resembling daylight robbery.

I hate Ukrainian and Russian fascists, who cannot get used to the reality of a multicultural and multilingual country, and are ready to destroy it.

I hate those “liberals”, who were ready to cover for and never distanced themselves from the fascists present on the Maidan [Kiev’s occupied central square] to give a chance for a truly all-Ukrainian democratic movement rather than pushing the country to a civil war.

I hate myself and other leftists for spending most of our time in mutual recriminations rather than the building of a powerful political organisation.

“Stop The War” says... don’t stop the war

The “Stop The War” coalition (run by the SWP splinter Counterfire with Communist Party of Britain member Andrew Murray) has put out a statement... deploring protest against Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

“Those who demand anti-war activity here in Britain against Russia are ignoring the history and the present reality in Ukraine and Crimea”.

Western governments are bad, many Ukrainians speak Russian, the new Kiev government is right-wing — STW’s excuses are many. They do not justify condoning Russia’s invasion.

• bit.ly/stw-prowar

Russian leftists say “troops out”

The Praxis Centre in Moscow, “an independent, voluntary collective, founded in 1998 by scholars and social movements activists grouped around the Victor Serge Public Library in Moscow”, declared on 2 March:

“Today in Moscow two rallies against the war were organised, but dispersed by the police. Of 1500 participants, over 400 have been arrested.

“We call on you to demonstrate outside Russian Embassies, and to draft and sign petitions calling for a halt to Russian military intervention in Ukraine. It is truly very urgent in the current situation”.

Bosnia: “Death to nationalism!”

By Dora Polenta

Protests continue in Bosnia, taking the form of a widespread revolt. The artist Damir Niksic says: “It’s a new paradigm, a new Bosnian example. In other words, we do not talk any more about nationalities, tribes, races and nations. We are now talking about the proletarians, the unemployed, the reserve army of labour.”

“This is no longer a riot, it’s a social revolution”, says Sakib Kopic, president of the Polihema union.

Demonstrations unite Muslims, Croats, Serbs and “Yugoslavs”. Demonstrations with similar social demands are taking place in at least 36 cities across Bosnia, which since the war of 1992-5 and the Dayton Agreement of 1995 has been intricately divided into Muslim, Croat, and Serbian areas. There have even been protests in Banja Luka, capital of the “Serbian Republic” within Bosnia.

The angry protesters have attacked all the nationalist parties, setting fire in Mostar to the offices of both the Muslim SDA and the Croatian HDZ.

The uprising began in Tuzla, one of the industrial centres of former Yugoslavia. It was sparked by a demonstration of workers calling for payment of back wages.

A factory had been sold after the end of war to an old friend of the director. After asset-stripping it, he went bankrupt. A court upheld the workers’ claim for back wages, but the judgment remained on paper.

On 5 February workers from four factories which had been privatised and then shut down organised a protest. The sacked workers were joined by fans of the local football team and unemployed. The demonstration led to clashes in which about twenty people were wounded. On 6 February demon-

strations continued in Tuzla, and led to clashes between police and protesters resulting in 130 injured. Dozens of protesters tried to attack government buildings.

On the same day organised demonstrations of support took place in Zenica, Mostar, Sarajevo and Bihac. The government announced that on 7 February all schools would be closed, and claimed that “those responsible for the events in Tuzla were just hooligans”. Yet on the 7th, mass protests took place in thirty cities.

Bosnian Muslims, Croats and Serbs went onto the streets — and in many cases hand in hand — against both federal and local governments. A union leader said: “I saw 15 year olds being beaten up by special police. The police are attacking unarmed people. If necessary, we can also arm ourselves. I repeat, we did not intend to arm ourselves but if we are forced to do it we will do it”.

In Sarajevo the headquarters of the local government was on fire. In Mostar protesters stormed two government buildings. In Banja Luka, capital of the “Serbian Republic” within Bosnia, there was a great demonstration of support for the mostly-Muslim protesters of Tuzla.

All the leaders’ efforts to play the card of nationalism to stop the spread of the protests have so far failed: “I’m hungry, in three languages”, was the inscription on a banner in Sarajevo. (Before 1991, “Serbo-Croat” was recognised as the common language across Yugoslavia. Now nationalists insist that it is in fact three languages, Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian).

In the old Yugoslavia, Tuzla became a major industrial and cultural centre. From 2000 to 2010, the old publicly-owned enterprises were privatised and sold to individuals who stripped the assets, stopped paying the employees... and then

shut down.

For example, the detergent business Dita formerly employed 750 people. According to the privatisation contract of 2007, the new business owner was committed to maintaining jobs for three years and production for five years. The new boss has not fulfilled his commitments and has not made the compulsory social security contributions for the workers; they cannot retire because they do not have the contributions record. A police investigation in 2010 showed that the new business owners had broken the law, but the case remains blocked.

The Sontaso factory in Tuzla produced 80% of the salt of Yugoslavia until 1991. In 1999, production had fallen to one tenth, but still 2,500 workers were employed. In 2002 the factory was privatised, and in 2013 only 422 workers were left, all of them unpaid.

The local government offices in Tuzla set ablaze in February still carried the insignia of Sontaso: it was once the firm’s headquarters. The protesters splashed the slogan “You must all resign. Death to nationalism!” on the building.

The massacres between communities stopped at the end of the 1992-5 war, but only to be replaced by a merciless war against the poor under the auspices of the Dayton Accords, the US, the European Union, and the international organisations.

Bosnia’s working class has been devastated by a massive program of privatisations, put through by a divided state ruled by rival national bureaucracies under the supervision of a transnational imperial bureaucratic elite.

Unemployment has reached 44%. Even those who are working get 250 to 450 euros per month. One Bosnian in five lives below the poverty line.

NEW UNIONISM 2014 An activist conference 29 March 11am-5pm University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY

This conference will seek to learn from experiences of organising the unorganised in history and today. It will hear from working-class activists on the frontline of today’s class battles, and of struggles to reshape trade unions.

Sessions will include

Is the “organising agenda” a model? A look at the US SEIU, with American labour movement activist Kim Moody

Micro-unions, pop-up unions, and more: what role for “independent unions” in transforming the labour movement?

The story of the 3 Cosas campaign, with activists from the IWGB at University of London

The heroic years of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-14

How bosses use “performance management” to wage class war

“Broad lefts” or rank-and-file networks?, with activists from the NUT rank-and-file network LANAC

Many “New Unionisms”: the last 200 years of the British labour movement, with Edd Mustill, Independent Working-Class Education Network

“Back to the Workplace”: How to transform your union branch, a workshop led by Lambeth Activists



Women rail workers fighting sexism in the workplace, in society, and in our unions, with women activists from the RMT

Independent working-class education past, present, and future, with Colin Waugh, author of *Plebs: The Lost Legacy of Working-Class Education*

How New Zealand fast food workers took on McDonald’s, and won with speakers including Mike Treen, National Director of Unite New Zealand (via Skype)

Mary Macarthur and the 1911 chainmakers’ strike, with Jill Mountford

Speakers from UID-DER, Turkish workers rank-and-file network (via Skype)



daniel.cooper@ulu.lon.ac.uk 07840 136 728 www.workersliberty.org/newunions

! Factories to the workers!”



Demonstration in Tuzla

As well as the protests spreading within Bosnia, for the first time since the break-up of Yugoslavia, solidarity marches have been organised in the capital cities of the neighbouring states with slogans like “One working class, one fight”. While the protests in Belgrade, Zagreb and Skopje were just a few hundred strong, the symbolism was very strong.

The leading politicians of the three ethnic groups in Bosnia all rushed out statements in the first days of the protests, each group claiming a conspiracy to hit their particular ethnicity.

The prime minister of Serbia visited the Serbian Republic of Bosnia, where local politicians claimed that Serbs would not participate in the demonstrations, and the Serbian Republic remained an oasis of stability. The protests in the Serbian area have in fact been smaller, but surveys have shown that 78% of Bosnian Serbs are sympathetic to the demonstrations.

In Serbia itself unpaid rank and file factory workers, not under the direction of any union, have blocked railways and highways.

The Croatian foreign minister visited Mostar, trying to influence the Croats who are the majority of local residents. His Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoglu, meeting the whole leadership of Bosnia and Herzegovina, stated in Sarajevo that Turkey would help with loans to calm the protests.

But the protesters have already forced the resignation of at least five local governments.

MEDLEY

The movement includes a medley of views, and procedures reminiscent of the “indignant citizens” movements in Spain’s and Greece’s squares.

Demands range from calls for capitalist modernisation and a cleansing of the capitalist system from corruption through the formation of a government of technocrats under popular control, to such working-class demands as self-management of factories and resources for unemployed mothers.

There are also differences in demands from city to city. The most advanced demands come from the assemblies of Tuzla and Mostar.

The popular assemblies are held regularly and are open to everyone. They decide issues by vote, and appoint their des-

ignated “representatives” as and when needed, mainly for statements to the media.

They do not involve the “whole population”, only the most active part. But that active part is not a negligible minority. Hundreds or even thousands of people are involved in assemblies.

Marina Antic writes:

“The plenaries are valuable structures of ‘primitive accumulation of power’ through which the vanguard of the working class can coordinate and plan its action. Potentially they can become organs of self-organisation in the hands of the working class and the popular majority...”

“Bosnia is like a society coming out of depression”.

All assemblies demand the fall of their local government, while many call for the overthrow of the central government. In the political discourse of the insurgents, the target is not only a government party, but the whole political system. So far the emphasis is on “nonpartisan”, “capable” “independent” technocrats who have not “exercised governmental power at any level.”

This is the “anti-politics” that has characterised many movements internationally in recent years. It reflects a protest against the whole “political elite” which has served the interests of the capitalist oligarchy; but simultaneously it highlights the fact that capitalist ideology and its values dominate the workers’ consciousness, even in the most advanced sections, and does not disappear automatically even in riots. After years of neoliberalism, the myth of the “capable technocrat” remains a reasonable alternative to the professional politicians in the minds of many people.

However, in Tuzla, the assembly demands that the local provisional government of technocrats “submit weekly plans and reports for work for approval by the assembly”. In Sarajevo, the assembly required the postponement of the formation of the local government of the canton until the views and demands of the assembly were made clear and demanded that “the new local government should be coordinated with the demands of citizens”.

In Brcko, the assembly called “for a government of experts”, but said: “There will be no agreements behind closed door. There is only the assembly where all citizens together will decide on the solutions to the problems we all face”.

The assemblies accompany the call for a new government with a program that this government should implement. The direction of that program is towards economic equality.

Recognition of pension and social security rights of workers. Investigation and punishment of all economic crimes. Confiscation of illegally obtained private property. Cancellation of projected privatisations and revision or review of completed privatisation schemes.

Re-employment of all workers being made redundant when factories shut down. Recruitment of more workers in schools. Resources for unemployed mothers. Increased pensions. More jobs. Favourable conditions for organising independent trade unions in private enterprises. Free health care for all.

RETURN THE FACTORIES!

One demand from Tuzla has a weight all of its own: For all factories to be returned to the workers, to be placed under public scrutiny, and to resume production.

The Dayton Agreement has institutionalised national divisions that bloodshed Bosnia, and resulted in the creation of a complex system of governance which puts political life in the hands of the “national” parties, with the EU playing the role of the omnipotent referee.

The majority of the participants in the protests are Bosniacs (Muslims), but that is largely because the large industrial center have a Muslim majority. All the demands have a class character and challenge the national divisions. The slogan “They must all resign! Death to nationalism!” is at the forefront,

The first international reaction came from the High Commissioner for Bosnia-Herzegovina, who said that in the event of an escalation of the unrest, the mobilisation of military units from the European Union should be considered to restore order.

EU and US representatives have blandly reassured the protesters that they share their anger and frustration against their national leaderships but condemning the violence of the “hooligans”.

The EU is worried, though in Bosnia there are still strong illusions about the benevolent nature of the EU, seen by a lot of Bosnians as a catalyst to democratise the Bosnian state and cleanse it of its vices and corruption.

Despite the role of the EU and IMF in imposing neo-liberalism, no demand in any assembly has yet been directed against the international “protectors.” Although it was they who created the fragmented, dysfunctional structure of Bosnia and nurtured the local bureaucratic elites, the international elites have been left, for the time being, untouched by the protests.

So far the Left has almost no presence in the protests. A small role is played by the New Socialist Party and some leftist autonomous collectives. Yet the protests may be a prelude to the strengthening of the Left, provided that it is responsive to the protesters’ legitimate demands.

It would be naive to argue that everything will automatically evolve for the better in Bosnia and propagate throughout the Balkans. But these moments of concrete examples of self-organisation, class politics, internationalism are vital for the whole of the left and the working-class movement.

Only the rise of workers’ struggles and the rebirth of the Left can break the vicious cycle in the Balkans. In some parts of the Balkans, groups of the anti-capitalist left are trying to pick up the threads from the Balkan revolutionary Marxists of the early 20th century who saw the unity across the Balkans as the working-class response to the competition from local bourgeoisies and the intervention of imperialist patrons from West or East.

For the slogan of a socialist federation of the Balkans to gain strength, particular political responsibility lies on the shoulders of the Greek movement and the Greek left.

How New Labour privatised the Tube

Solidarity concludes our series of our extracts from Janine Booth's new book, *Plundering London Underground: New Labour, private capital and public transports 1997-2010*.

When New Labour came to power, they were keen to distance themselves from the demands of the labour movement and to appeal to big business for support. This led them to privatise industries that even the Tories had never dared to touch. In this extract, Janine looks at how this disastrous approach was applied to London Underground.

The London Underground Public-Private Partnership is an indictment of New Labour, whose turn away from the working class in search of credibility with capital was not only unprincipled but a spectacular failure.

To assess why Labour did this, we need to look at its history. Trade unions – including RMT's predecessor, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS) — set up the Labour Party at the start of the twentieth century, with the aim of enabling workers to elect their own representatives to Parliament. By 1945, thirty railway workers were Labour MPs, opposite just two railway bosses on the Conservative benches. But the Labour Party, while born of the working-class movement, sought to improve capitalism rather than to overthrow it. A 1922 Communist Party pamphlet argued that “even before the [1914-18] war, the Labour Party had become quite distinctly a class organisation of the proletariat which was dominated by that section of the middle class whose profession it was to organise trade unions”. Lenin described it as a “bourgeois workers' party”.

There was conflict between these two poles – bourgeois and working class – for example when Labour's left argued in the 1930s for workers' control of industries such as London Underground rather than Herbert Morrison's “public corporation” model. By the 1980s, the fragile balance between the two class poles was wobbling. A rank-and-file attempt to pull Labour towards internal democracy and socialist policies was defeated by the leadership, which instead hauled Labour rightwards, fixated with the view that the Party must jettison left-wing stances in order to be electable. “New Labour”,

rebranded by Tony Blair, preoccupied itself with proving that it would be moderate and responsible in government. Journalist Nick Cohen wrote: “Blair was left holding the ‘centre-ground’ – a prize plot of land whose mortgage was paid by emptying the Labour Party of meaning.”

“New Labour” was continuing 1980s Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's project of driving the working class out of politics. In place of left-wing policies came a lexicon of buzzwords, chief of which was “modernisation”. As Dexter Whitfield explained: “The driving force [behind New Labour policy] is primarily ‘the modernisation agenda’ and the belief that partnerships with private companies are, per se, the only way forward. The feast of large multi-million-pound contracts under Labour [made] the Tories' Compulsory Competitive Tendering regime look like a roadside picnic.”

PPP

“New Labour” privatised services that the Conservatives had thus far left untouched: the Royal Mint, National Air Traffic Service, Belfast Port and more.

The Conservatives had not yet privatised London Underground, even when they sold the rest of the railways. Maybe privatising the Tube would have been too complex, too unsafe, more controversial; maybe there were more marginal constituencies and more opponents in London; maybe the private sector itself was not interested.

No such obstacles would deter “new Labour” from its particular brand of privatisation, the PPP. New Labour was repackaging Conservative policies rather than departing from them. Tony Blair's 1995 description of British Rail privatisation — “a hotchpotch of private companies linked together by a gigantic paper-chase of contracts – overseen, of course, by a clutch of quangos” – became an accurate summary of his own government's policy for London Underground.

Many within Labour's own ranks opposed the Tube PPP. Branches and conferences passed resolutions, MPs and councillors spoke out. But the Party leadership did not listen. The

unpicking of Labour Party democracy over the previous two decades had left Labour's members unable to make their leaders do what the Party wanted.

Whitfield remarks that Labour's idea of “Best Value” contains lots of Cs — clients, commissioning, contracts and more — but adds that “there is one ‘c’ word which is missing — class.” New Labour had chosen to serve not the working class that created and elected the Labour Party, but the capitalist class that exploited the working class. Granada chief Gerry Robinson said that “business can do business with new Labour”; he added, “That in my view is one of the healthiest changes in British politics for a very long time.” For Robinson and other company chiefs, what was “healthy” was that they once again had two parties competing with each other to represent their interests. “New Labour” listened avidly to trade associations and lobby groups devoted to the pursuit of business interests, mostly funded by the same corporations that benefited from the results.

Of course Jarvis plc, Carillion plc and Amey plc funded the New Local Government Network's lobby for private sector involvement in public services: they stood to make a fortune from it. But it was Labour leaders' own choice to listen and bend to this lobbying while dismissing the views of their own party's members and affiliated unions. London Underground Ltd Managing Director Mike Brown could see the paradox: “The Treasury in particular was absolutely obsessed with being seen to be the friend of big business, the friend of capitalism, which was ironic for the first Labour government for a long time.”

Tony Blair said in his election victory speech on 2 May 1997, “We have been elected as New Labour and we will govern as New Labour.” But I would suggest that Labour had been elected because it was not the Conservatives, so should not have governed like Conservatives.

Its lifelong tug-of-war between aspiring to represent workers and operating within capitalism had been pulled far over to the capitalists' end of the rope. New Labour was, as Peter Mandelson said, “intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich”.

Expulsions, exclusions, and “punishments”

The Left
By Gerry Bates



“Punishing” the SWP

Some union branches which previously nominated SWP members as left candidates in union elections have not done so this year.

The motive is to register a protest against the SWP's 18 months or so of crass mishandling of charges of sexual harassment and then rape against a leading organiser.

Some of those refusing to nominate explain that in the actual vote between an SWPer and a right-winger, they will vote for the SWPer. The refusal to nominate is intended as a gesture of reprimand.

It's not clear if any significant number of left-wing union activists actually intend to vote for the right-wingers, or abstain, when an SWPer is the left candidate in a union run-off.

Such a vote or abstention would be foolish. It would help the right wing, which is surely no better than the SWP on sexism, and worse on direct class-struggle issues. It would probably consolidate people in or close to the SWP in their closeness if it looks to them as if the main critics are people who don't care about helping notorious sell-out operators in the unions.

The “refusal to nominate” is on a different level, but doesn't seem very productive. If a union branch nominates an SWPer who is the only left candidate in a union contest, but links that with sending him or her a letter saying it has nom-

inated despite concerns, and asks for a response to those concerns, that will help more.

The flat “refusal to nominate” will be noticed by most union members only in the right-wing candidate's list of nominations comparing a bit better with the left candidate's.

The preferable and the fundamental answer is to create left-wing forces in the unions better than the SWP (and win over current SWP members to them).

Short of that, sometimes we have better left candidates and back them against SWPer; sometimes we back a candidate against an SWPer who, while having a basic class-struggle allegiance, is in formal terms to the “right” of the SWPer but is more reliable, less capricious.

Those things are true now as they have always been. If the row in the SWP spurs more union leftists to pull forward better left candidates, that's good.

But in the cases, still numerous enough, where an SWPer is in fact the left candidate, and the alternative is in fact a clear right-winger, it should also be true now as ever that we vote with the left.

We will change the left only by participating in it, not by excluding ourselves; by pressing for unity in action where there is common ground, and honest debate on differences.

ISO excludes minority

In mid-February the International Socialist Organization (ISO) of the USA first excluded its small “Renewal Faction” from its convention and then expelled it.

• Background and comment here: bit.ly/iso-rt

SP suspends dissidents

On 12 February the Socialist Party's Scottish section suspended Bruce Wallace from membership.

Wallace has for a while been the main dissident in the SP's international network, the CWI, whose internal life is usually very quiet.

He argues that the CWI neglects Marx's theory of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and (consequently, so he says) its agitation on economic issues is minimalist, going not much beyond appeals to stop the cuts.

Even the notoriously tightly-controlled SWP has allowed public debate on similar issues at times. As far as I can make out Wallace has had no hearing or right of appeal. He just got a letter saying he was suspended because of his “continued public campaign of attack against the party through elements of social media” (a reference to a Facebook page).

Wallace's suspension has been followed by at least one other, of Steve Dobbs from West London SP. Dobbs was suspended on an emergency motion in his branch, on grounds of “his public attacks and accusations against the branch secretary, the branch, the leadership of the party, the CWI...”

According to Dobbs, the SP constitution allows only the Executive and National Committee, not branches, to suspend members.

Myself I think Wallace is wrong on the “tendency to fall”, and right about his criticism of the CWI's economic agitation. Whether he is right or wrong, a living Marxist organisation has to have enough breadth to allow debates on such issues.

Ludwig Feuerbach: the “true conqueror of the old philosophy”

By Martin Thomas

Among Karl Marx's most famous writings are his *Theses on Feuerbach*. But who was Feuerbach?

Ludwig Feuerbach was brought up a devout Protestant, and started at university as a student of theology. He then became one of the most brilliant students of Hegel at Berlin university in the 1820s, and a Hegelian academic philosopher, though, as Engels remarked, “a never quite orthodox Hegelian”.

In the years after the publication in 1835-6 of David Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, which subjected the Bible stories to the same sort of critical sifting of historical evidence as other stories of long ago, Feuerbach changed.

He rejected Hegel's moderate liberal politics and Hegel's rationalised version of Protestant Christianity. He became an atheist, a republican, and a communist.

“What do I take as my principle? Ego and alter ego, ‘egoism’ and ‘communism’... Without egoism you have no head; without communism you have no heart” (FB p.295).

He published a series of writings between 1839 and 1843 demolishing Hegel's system and calling for “a new philosophy”, empiricist and what he might have called humanist had the word been current then.

The full-length book among those writings was *The Essence of Christianity*, published in 1841, which argued Feuerbach's view that “only in man's wretchedness does God have his birthplace. Only from man does God derive all his determinations. God is what man would like to be: he is man's own essence and goal conceived as a real being” (POF p.48).

“The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or rather the human nature, purified, freed from the limits of the individual man... contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being” (EOC p.14).

“The history of mankind consists of nothing else than a continuous and progressive conquest of limits, which at a given time pass for the limits of humanity”. But religion turned away from that progress to an idealised human essence seen as God (EOC p.152-3).

“Religion is truth only when it affirms human attributes as divine, false when in the form of theology it... separates God from man as a different being” (EOC p.333).

This was somewhat one-sided, in that it saw the religious God only as an alienated form of human love and sympathy, and not also, as it is, an alienated form of human vengefulness, malice, and cruelty. As Engels would remark, Feuerbach “appears shallow, in comparison with Hegel, in his treatment of the antithesis of good and evil... it does not occur to Feuerbach to investigate the historical role of moral evil”.

Nevertheless “the liberating effect of this book” in the conditions of the time was, so Engels wrote later, immense.

“With one blow, it pulverised the contradiction, in that without circumlocutions it placed materialism on the throne again. Nature exists independently of all philosophy. It is the foundation upon which we human beings, ourselves products of nature, have grown up. Nothing exists outside nature and man, and the higher beings our religious fantasies have created are only the fantastic reflection of our own essence. The spell was broken; the [Hegelian] ‘system’ was exploded and cast aside, and the contradiction, shown to exist only in our imagination, was dissolved...”

“Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians. How enthusiastically Marx greeted the new conception and how much — in spite of all critical reservations — he was influenced by it, one may read in *The Holy Family*” [a joint work of Marx and Engels, written in 1844].

Mary Ann Evans [George Eliot] would translate *The Essence of Christianity* into English in 1854.

“We just don't want any more theology”, wrote Feuerbach. “The place of belief has been taken by unbelief and that of the Bible by reason... religion and the Church by politics” (FB p.148). “Contemporary man is turning to politics [because] he has found out that the religion of Christianity is poison to his political energy” (FB p.151). “Once we have abolished the Protestant dichotomy between heaven where we are masters,



and earth where we are slaves... Protestantism [i.e., for Feuerbach, the ethos of human love and community which he took to be represented by Protestantism in mystified form] will soon lead us to a republican state” (FB p.152).

Ludwig Feuerbach's older brother, Karl Wilhelm Feuerbach, a gifted mathematician, had in fact turned to radical politics as a student. Jailed for that reason in 1827, Karl Wilhelm suffered a breakdown, attempted suicide, never regained his health after release from jail, and died at age 34, in 1834.

Ludwig Feuerbach himself proved unable to do what he preached. He could get no academic positions, partly because of his radical views, and partly because of his awkward personal manner. From 1837 until his death in 1872 he lived in small villages, subsisting first on his wife's property income and then on help from friends and comrades.

Engels wrote to Feuerbach, trying to draw him into political activity, but failed. Feuerbach had a sort of political following in the literary, sentimental “True Socialism” which flourished briefly in 1845-7, and is criticised in the *Communist Manifesto*; but Feuerbach himself had no active relation with the “True Socialists”.

INFLUENCE

In the revolutionary years of 1848-9, he was elected to the Frankfurt Parliament and accepted an invitation from students in Heidelberg to give lectures on his philosophy. He played little role in the parliament, and soon he returned to his village.

Soon after Marx's *Capital* was published in 1867, Feuerbach read it and joined the German Social Democratic Party. By then he was old and ill, and did not do much. The party helped him by financial aid in his last years.

Feuerbach wrote a series of books as follow-ups to his gushing and aphoristic writings of 1839-43, but none of them had success then or since; none have been translated; none moved on properly from critical discussion of theology to positive investigation of the world.

As Engels commented: “Cobweb-spinning eclectic flea-

crackers had taken possession of the chairs of philosophy, while Feuerbach, who towered above them all, had to rusticate and grow sour in a little village... This reclusion... compelled him, who, of all philosophers, was the most inclined to social intercourse, to produce thoughts out of his solitary head instead of in amicable and hostile encounters with other men of his calibre”.

Marx is often described as having been a follower of Hegel in his youth. In fact Marx's attitudes had been shaped by Feuerbach's slashing critique of Hegel long before the young Marx began to develop his own independent views; and there is no evidence that Marx ever went back on his acceptance of Feuerbach's critique of Hegel.

The title of Zavar Hanfi's recent selection of Feuerbach's writings comes from a January 1842 article attributed to Marx, which declared: “There is no other road for you to truth and freedom except that leading through the brook of fire” [Feuerbach, in German, being literally fire-brook].

Chris Arthur (*The Dialectics of Labour*, ch.9) reports that the 1842 article is “now thought not to be [Marx's] work”. However, “it expresses very well Marx's attitude to Feuerbach” in the early 1840s.

Marx certainly declared: “Feuerbach is the only one who has a serious, critical attitude to the Hegelian dialectic and who has made genuine discoveries in this field. He is in fact the true conqueror of the old philosophy” (1844 Manuscripts).

Further: “Who revealed the mystery of the [Hegelian] ‘system’? Feuerbach. Who annihilated the dialectics of concepts, the war of the gods known to the philosophers alone? Feuerbach. Who substituted for the old rubbish... Man? Feuerbach, and Feuerbach alone. And he did more...” (*The Holy Family*).

When Marx and Engels decided to “settle accounts with our former philosophical conscience” in *The German Ideology*, the parts of the unfinished text dealing with other writers were scornful polemic. The part dealing with Feuerbach is critical of the semi-religious character of Feuerbach's concept of what is to replace religion, and the way he converted the term “communist”, which “in the real world means the follower of a definite revolutionary party”, into a mere moralising category.

Yet it is respectful, not scornful; and the bulk of the part on Feuerbach is not discussion of Feuerbach, but a positive attempt to develop Marx's and Engels's own understanding of historical and economic development. Marx and Engels thought that it was Feuerbach, above all, whom they must go beyond, and that it was only by developing actual theory of real history, and not by narrowly “philosophical” critique, that they could go beyond Feuerbach.

The theses which Marx wrote in 1845, later famously described by Engels as “the first document in which is deposited the brilliant germ of the new world outlook”, were theses on Feuerbach. Engels himself also wrote theses on Feuerbach that same year, which overlap with Marx's but add illumination on some points.

Feuerbach criticised not only Hegel's system, but also his dialectical method, and proposed a different dialectics, one of the development of knowledge through dialogue between the investigator and reality, self-critical revaluations, and dialogue between different investigators.

For Hegel, dialectics was more or less a synonym for idealism, which was more or less a synonym for philosophical science. It denoted the inbuilt process by which determinations generate contraries, and then a third element, and then “pass over” into higher determinations. Hegel, not one to undersell himself, described his dialectics as “the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind”.

Feuerbach responded:

“Dialectics is not a monologue that speculation carries on with itself, but a dialogue between speculation and empirical reality. A thinker is a dialectician only in so far as he is his

“Secret letter” scandal exposes fragile power-sharing

By Micheál MacEoin

The recent crisis in Northern Ireland over secret letters from the British Government to republican “On the Runs” (OTRs) underscores the fragility of the power-sharing institutions.

The crisis emerged after the trial of John Downey, accused of the 1982 Hyde Park bombing, collapsed. It emerged that he received a letter in 2007 from the British Government telling him he would not face trial. Northern Ireland’s First Minister, Peter Robinson, threatened to collapse the power-sharing Executive if the British Government failed to call a judge-led inquiry into the “get out of jail free cards” (in fact the letters leave open the possibility of prosecution if further evidence emerges).

It has since transpired the letter was sent to Downey by mistake. He was, in fact, still wanted by the Metropolitan Police, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) failed to inform the British Attorney General or the Northern Ireland Office of this.

The issue arose because the 1998 Good Friday Agreement granted early release to those convicted of paramilitary crimes but did not cover those suspected but not charged of crimes committed before 1998, or those who had been charged with or convicted of offences but had escaped.

Negotiations continued after the Agreement, as Sinn Féin sought clarification on the legal status of escaped prisoners. The issue was linked to the IRA putting its weapons beyond use, and once that was confirmed in September 2005, the then Secretary of State Peter Hain announced that the Government would legislate for the OTRs.

The resulting NI (Offences) Bill was initially welcomed by Sinn Féin. However, the remit of the bill was much wider. As SDLP MP for Foyle, Mark Durkan, wrote at the time: “This legislation applies [also]... to every unsolved murder by loyalists — even if they do not end their activity or decommitment a single bullet. It even applies to state murders.”

On the BBC’s *Hearts and Minds* programme, Martin McGuinness, appeared relaxed about this, saying that he did “not envisage that any people who were involved in the murders of nationalists... is ever going to be brought before a court in this day and age.”

Sinn Féin then reversed their position, under sustained pressure from other republicans, victims’ groups, and the SDLP, and the bill collapsed. In 2006, Tony Blair wrote to Gerry Adams that the Government was putting in place new mechanisms for dealing with OTRs, including “expediting the existing administrative procedures”.

It was this clandestine system for reviewing the legal status of OTRs that was fully revealed with the collapse of the Downey trial. 187 letters have been sent to republicans assuring them that they will not face prosecution on the basis of existing evidence.

Predictably, some Tory MPs are now demanding that the threat of criminal prosecution is lifted for the paratroopers who murdered 14 unarmed civilians in Derry on Bloody Sunday in 1972. One MP has said: “I’m damned if they [the republicans] should be given an amnesty and former soldiers left hanging there; uncertain over whether they might face prosecution.”

The issue has pointed up the secretive nature of many of the peace process negotiations.

It has exposed the hypocrisy of the Unionists, who have consistently opposed investigations into murders by the British state yet are happy to grandstand on the issue of OTRs months.

It has also exposed the self-serving motives of Sinn Féin, who have opened up the issue of immunity for loyalist and state murderers by pursuing a secretive process dealing exclusively with outstanding republican cases.

The “true conqueror of the old philosophy”

From page 9

own opponent” (FB p.72).

“The absolute philosopher said, or at least thought of himself — naturally as a thinker and not as a man — ‘La vérité c’est moi’, in a way analogous to the absolute monarch claiming, ‘L’État c’est moi’. or the absolute God claiming, ‘L’être c’est moi’. The human philosopher, on the other hand, says: Even in thought, even as a philosopher, I am a man in togetherness with men. The true dialectic is not a monologue of the solitary thinker with himself. It is a dialogue between ‘I’ and ‘You’” (POF p.71-2). “Not alone, but only with others, does one reach notions and reason in general” (POF p.58-9).

Feuerbach is sometimes thought by Marxists to have represented a reaction from Hegel into a crude reductionist materialism, which Marx and Engels had subsequently to correct. One famous saying by Feuerbach gives credence to this view: “Man is what he eats”.

Feuerbach was a scatter-gun writer, fond of resounding phrases not to be taken literally; and this was one of them. (In German, it is a pun: the words for “is” [ist] and “eats” [isst] are similar). The phrase occurred in a passage of a book review where Feuerbach condemned the poverty which left many people in Germany then with inadequate food. “If you want to improve the people, give them better food instead of declamations against sin. Man is what he eats”.

Feuerbach himself, in his own lifetime, complained about the misuse of the single sentence to present him as a crude materialist. (See *Feuerbach’s ‘Man is what he eats’: a rectification*, by Melvin Chernov, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24/ 3, 1963).

In fact Marx’s, and Engels’s, later criticism of Feuerbach was that he did not follow through consistently enough on his materialism. Feuerbach found it difficult to see materialism as more than a passive, registering-the-facts empiricism, and thus sometimes argued that what was needed was a sort of synthesis of materialism and idealism.

The first point against Hegelian philosophy, for Feuerbach, was to start with empirical reality and test our ideas by empirical reality. At one point he wrote, defiantly: “The writer of these lines would not mind at all if... he is accused of subscribing to empiricism” (FB p.137).

“The deepest secrets are to be found in the simplest natural things, but, pining away for the Beyond, the speculative phantast treads them under his feet” (FB p.94).

He showed, in a first sketch of an argument that would be more developed by Marx, that Hegel’s dialectics appeared to dissolve the empirically-given by critical analysis, but always ended with speculative “proofs” of the supposed logical necessity of what in fact it knew only empirically. “At first everything is overthrown, but then everything is put again in its former place” (POF p.33-4).

Feuerbach insists on the ineradicable variousness of reality, which can be assayed only by empirical investigation, and condemns the speculative method which would deduce all that variety from a single principle.

“The form of both Hegel’s conception and method is that of exclusive time alone, not that of tolerant space; his system knows only subordination and succession, not coordination and coexistence...” (FB p.54).

And in Hegel it is not even real time. “Speculative philosophy has turned into an... attribute of the Absolute the development which it has detached from time. This detachment of development from time is... the conclusive proof that the speculative philosophers have done with their Absolute what theologians have done with their God who possesses all emotions of men without having emotion...” (FB p.162).

[Real] “time, and not the Hegelian dialectic, is the medium of uniting opposites, contradictories, in one and the same subject” (EOC p.23). Things change because they develop in time, not because dialectics tell us that they unite opposites within them.

Feuerbach wrote of a “genetico-critical method” which would replace the speculative method of Hegel by one which would start with real things in order to examine and question their origin and development (FB p.85).

Science, wrote Feuerbach, is a process of working “to elevate something from being an object of ordinary, everyday life to an object of thought — i.e. an object of knowledge” (FB p.136).

Philosophy should “take as its starting point not its distinction from the empirical science but its identity with it... To be

sure, an empiricism that is unable or unwilling to raise itself to the level of philosophical thought is limited and poor. But equally limited is a philosophy that is unable to descend to the level of empiricism” (FB p.137).

“Life and truth are... only to be found where... activity is united with passivity” (FB p.164).

But tending, inconsistently, to think of human recognition of reality as only a passive registering of facts, Feuerbach wrote of this unity of activity with passivity as a sort of synthesis of idealism and materialism: “German metaphysics [united with] French sensualism and materialism” (FB p.165). “Reason is the light of nature — and this truth is the barrier against crude materialism” (EOC p.286).

Feuerbach put the argument in terms shaped by the sexist prejudices of his time.

“Hegel represents the masculine principle of self-autonomy and self-activity; in short the idealist principle. Schelling [another German philosopher of Hegel’s time] represents the feminine principle of receptivity and impressionability; in short, the materialist principle” (FB p.166).

We see the origin of Marx’s comment in the *Theses on Feuerbach* that “the active side was developed by idealism”. “Activity” appears as “the idealist principle” because Feuerbach leaves out of the scheme labour, production, construction, manufacturing, even experiment.

Elsewhere in Feuerbach’s writings are hints of a way beyond the dichotomy. Nature is not something passively given. “There are even plants and animals that have changed so much under human care that they are no longer to be found in nature” (FB p.293).

He even prefigured part of Marx’s idea in the famous 11th Thesis on Feuerbach (“the point is to change it”):

“‘Science does not resolved the mystery of life’. That may be true. But what follows from this?... That you turn to life, to praxis. Doubts that theory cannot resolve are resolved by praxis” (FB p.293).

Sometimes, too, Feuerbach writes of going beyond philosophy altogether, as Marx would. “Desire not to be a philosopher, as distinct from a man; be nothing else than a thinking man” (POF p.67). “No religion! — that is my religion; no philosophy! — that is my philosophy” (FB p.296).

UPSIDE DOWN

Feuerbach also coined the idea, famous now because of Marx’s use of it in a preface to *Capital*, of turning Hegel “upside down”.

“We need only turn the predicate into the subject... that is, only reverse speculative philosophy. In that way, we have the unconcealed, pure, and untarnished truth” (FB p.154).

Feuerbach knew that human nature was not an essence inhering in every individual, but constituted only by a community of different people. “Truth is only the totality of human life and of the human essence. The single man for himself [does not] possess the essence of man... The essence of man is contained only in the community and unity of man with man” (POF p.71).

Often, though, he would slide back into seeing progress in a new philosophy that was half-idealist, half-materialist; or in a new code of life that was “communist”, but communist as a sort of new moral code or demystified religion.

He never managed seriously to investigate the development of human communities as a historical process. As Engels put it, “to him history is altogether an uncanny domain in which he feels ill at ease”.

Thus Feuerbach was never able to carry out his own recommendations, to turn from speculation to science and to politics.

Engels: “The cult of abstract man, which formed the kernel of Feuerbach’s new religion, had to be replaced by the science of real men and of their historical development. This further development of Feuerbach’s standpoint beyond Feuerbach was inaugurated by Marx...”

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Uni cleaners strike

By Michael MacEoin

Outsourced cleaners at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in central London struck on 4 and 5 March to win the same holiday entitlement, contractual sick pay, and pension scheme as directly-employed staff.

The cleaners, who work for the outsourced company ISS, have been involved in the long-running Justice 4 Cleaners campaign at SOAS. The strong ballot of 100% in favour of strike action on a 62% turnout is a testament to the strength of the campaign and the local SOAS Unison branch.

The union was approached by ISS and the company said it wished to meet the union on 3 March if the strike was called off beforehand. A well-attended meeting of UNISON ISS members unanimously agreed to re-



ject these conditions and to continue with the strike action because no details had been provided of the proposed "offer." The union says that it is happy to meet ISS to resolve the dispute but without preconditions.

Branch chair Sandy Nichol said: "The position of the SOAS Unison branch is clear. Our outsourced members have the full and unconditional support of

all our members. We reject the two-tier workforce and will continue to support our members working for ISS until they win the same sick, pay, holiday and pension entitlement as those of our members working directly for SOAS."

The fact of the strike ballot is also related to the enduring influence of the 3 Cosas Campaign, around the corner from SOAS at the University of London.

Regional organiser Ruth Levin, who played a shameful role in undermining the struggle of outsourced workers at the University of London, has changed her tune on cleaners' struggles. In the SOAS dispute, which is for very similar demands to 3 Cosas, she is on record saying that: "The outcome of this ballot should be a wake-up call to ISS and SOAS. They need to listen to their staff and improve terms and conditions. Our members shouldn't be unable to pay their rent if they happen to be ill."

Clearly the region does not want a repeat of 3 Cosas, where its bureaucratic interference cost the union over a hundred members. Don't mistake this for an overall change of heart in the regional headquarters, however. At the last Unison National Executive Committee meeting it was reported that Unison had sanctioned 32 industrial action ballots recently. However, the Greater London Region has only sanctioned one — the ballot at SOAS.

It is a testament to rank-and-file organisation and the strength of the SOAS branch that they were able to wring a ballot out of Greater London Region.

It shows what is still possible in Unison, even in a region as woeful as Greater London.

3 Cosas Aramark win

By Ira Berkovic

The Independent Workers' union of Great Britain (IWGB) University of London branch's "3 Cosas" campaign has scored another win.

Aramark, the company which runs catering work

at the university's central facilities, has announced it will offer improved holidays and sick pay to its staff, bringing them in line with the terms recently won by cleaners, security staff, and porters after the IWGB's strikes in November and January. A 3 Cosas

campaign statement said: "This means that within the next couple months, there will no longer be any outsourced workers at the University of London on statutory sick pay or holidays."

For more, see facebook.com/3coca

Amazon petition



By Ira Berkovic

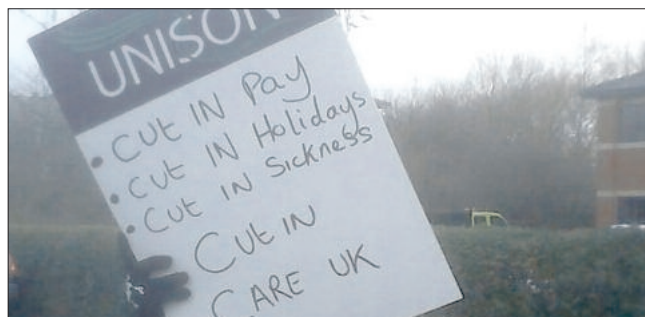
Campaigners presented online retail giant Amazon with a 56,000-strong petition demanding it pay living wages.

The hand-in, which took place on Friday 28 February, was the latest action in an ongoing media campaign to expose exploitation in Amazon warehouses.

Campaigners have now set up a blog where Amazon workers can share and discuss experiences of working life.

• More amazonanonymous.org

Yorkshire care workers' seven-day strike



By Ollie Moore

Workers at Care UK in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, struck for a week from Thursday 27 February.

Care UK, which won the

contract tendered by Doncaster council to provide its supported-living service for adults with learning disabilities, has flagrantly disregarded TUPE agreements and plans to axe unsociable hours payments. Due to the nature of

the work, which requires a large amount of unsociable-hours working, some workers could lose up to £7,000 per year if the cuts go through. For some staff, this amounts to a 50% pay cut.

Care UK is threatening to sack and re-engage staff if they don't agree to the new terms by 21 March.

The workers, who are members of Unison, voted by a 90% majority to strike.

Their seven-day strike saw them picket Care UK's offices, as well as holding demonstrations and rallies in Doncaster town centre.

Tube unions to resist driverless trains

By Jonny West

A London Underground "Employee Bulletin" of 19 February announced Tube bosses' plans to commission driverless trains on several lines.

The Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers' union (RMT) and drivers' union ASLEF have launched a dispute over the issue. The announcement, in the midst of an ongoing RMT and TSSA fight against job cuts and closures on stations, is an extraordinarily belligerent act by management and an indication of the extent of their plans to automate and destaff the network.

An RMT statement said: "We reaffirm our position that every train must have a driver to ensure the safe and effective running of the Underground. We believe that the travelling public also strongly want a driver on the front of the train for their own safety and security."

"This announcement is not only a reckless direct attack to the safety culture on London Underground but is also an attack to the train driver grade as a

whole. This trade union will fight to defend the train driver grade on London Underground! We demand a cab at the front of every train; a train driver on the front!"

ASLEF General Secretary Mick Whelan promised an "all-out war" to stop the introduction of driverless trains. Bob Crow, his RMT opposite number, said: "Any attempt to introduce driverless trains on the system will result in an all-out campaign of industrial action."

Meanwhile, talks over LU's "Fit for the Future — Stations" cuts plan continue. Although the 4-6 February strikes forced bosses into a limited retreat, many union officers and activists believe more strikes will be necessary to win real concessions.

The rank-and-file bulletin *Tubeworker*, published by Workers' Liberty, is pushing for the unions to make a clear, public statement of intent that, if the talks fail to yield concessions, strikes will be reinstated.

• More: workersliberty.org/twblog

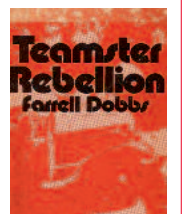


Teamster Rebellion

Workers' Liberty activists in London have been running a reading group studying *Teamster Rebellion*, American Trotskyist Farrell Dobbs's classic account of his participation in the 1934 Minneapolis teamsters' (truck drivers') strike.

The story describes how a core of revolutionary workers turned a previously moribund and bureaucratic union branch into a democratic fighting force that took on company bosses and local police to win huge gains for workers.

Sessions continue on Wednesday evenings at the University of London Union at 6.30pm. See bit.ly/dobbs-group for more.





Banker = thief? Take them over!

By Colin Foster

Giant Swiss bank Credit Suisse stands accused of helping US plutocrats avoid tax by, among other things, shredding documents, holding meetings in a secret elevator, and hiding bank statements inside copies of *Sports Illustrated*.

The same bank also recently agreed to pay the US Securities Exchange Commission \$196.5 million for another misdeed: cross-border brokerage and investment advisory services it provided to unregistered US clients.

14 other banks are under investigation by US authorities on the tax-avoidance front.

Late last year an even bigger, J P Morgan, did a deal with US authorities to pay a fine of \$13 billion to mop up another scandal, mis-selling of mortgage-backed securities. J P Morgan is holding a scarcely-imaginable \$23 billion in reserve for other fines or compensation on the same principle as an individual might keep a stash to cover parking fines.

Banks have effectively admitted rigging the Libor interest rate, a central factor in transactions between banks. British banks are paying fines and compensation for mis-selling payment protection insurance to personal credit-card holders and fobbing off dodgy credit schemes on small businesses.

Several banks also stand accused of rigging currency foreign-exchange rates.

All this has come out since the 2008 finan-



cial crisis put banks under closer scrutiny. And that crisis happened after many years in which we were assured that banks were more securely and efficiently regulated than ever, and in which, every time TV news wanted an "expert judgement" on anything economic, they would go to a financier

standing in a City dealing room.

As the conservative *Financial Times* columnist Martin Wolf wrote, a while back: "Banks, as presently constituted and managed, cannot be trusted to perform any publicly important function, against the perceived interests of their staff [meaning their top bosses, not the ordinary workers]. Today's banks represent the incarnation of profit-seeking behaviour taken to its logical limits, in which the only question asked by senior staff is not what is their duty or their responsibility, but what can they get away with".

As if to reinforce his point, banks have responded to EU limits on bonuses for top bankers by, in the current bonus season, making similar pay-outs but calling them "allowances" rather than "bonuses".

The TUC should campaign for the policy for "full public ownership of the [banking] sector and the creation of a publicly owned banking service, democratically and accountably managed", decided by its 2012 congress.

Unions should press for the Labour Party to take up the demand.

Scrap disability benefit regime!

By Rosalind Robson

IT giant Atos wants to ditch its contract to assess ill and disabled people claiming out of work benefits, but it has not given up assessing people with long-term ill-health and disability for the new Personal Independence Payment.

Atos wanted out because the government told them they weren't up to the job of implementing the Work Capability Assessment. A National Audit Office report shows Atos is also not up to the job of implementing PIP (replacement for the Disability Living Allowance).

According to NAO, on the Atos-run north-east PIP pilot, new claims are taking on average 107 days, instead of the target 74. Claims by terminally ill people are taking 28 days, instead of the target of 10 days.

The assessment regime for ill-health and disability benefit — first introduced by Labour — is designed to chuck people off benefits.

Three million people currently receive DLA, but the government say the introduction of PIP will reduce that figure by 600,000.

Maybe Atos *can* do that dirty job for the government, but delays have had consequences too. Thousands of people awaiting news about PIP are living in



Mark Wood

fear, insecurity and desperate poverty.

Benefit cuts destroy lives, a fact highlighted in the press recently by the tragic story of Mark Wood. Mark Wood's life collapsed after he had his benefits cut by Atos. No one from Atos asked

Mark Wood's doctor about his state of health, relying, as they always do, on a cursory assessment. Mark Wood had a number of serious mental illnesses, and difficulties caused by his Asperger's syndrome.

Mark Wood's relatives believe the cut in benefit made his eating disorder worse and as a consequence he starved himself to death.

This benefit regime should be scrapped!

Wages still squeezed

Economic recovery? Only for a few. Wages are still lagging behind inflation. The average annual increase in wages is still only 1.0%, while prices (even on the conservative CPI measure) are going up about 2% per year.

Real wages (wage growth minus inflation) have been falling consistently since the end of 2009. It is certainly the longest squeeze since modern records began in 1964, and probably the longest since the 1870s.

Average house prices have risen, relative to wages, from five years' worth to ten years' worth, since 1997. As the *Daily Mirror* pointed out (11 February), wages would now have to double to make house-buying as affordable for workers as it was in 1997.

Rents have risen faster than wages, too — 10%, or 3.1% per year, between October 2010 and October 2013.

Unions should organise to seek real wage rises.