



Solidarity

AND WORKERS' LIBERTY

For a
workers'
government

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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www.workersliberty.org

Equalise the wealth



SAVE THE NHS

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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



We stand for:

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

Contact us:

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Renzi cows the unions

By Hugh Edwards

On Tuesday 2 December Italy's Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, won his six week long battle with the country's major trade unions. His Jobs Act became law.

This fundamental attack on workers' job security and labour rights went through the Senate without a promised rebellion from the "left" of the Democratic Party, thus averting a government defeat and new elections. To square their conscious, but save the government, the rebels trooped out of the Senate chamber just before the vote was taken.

This entirely predictable anti-climactic farce turns the spotlight back onto the leaders of the unions, CGIL/FIOM, protagonists of the several days of national protests and strikes against Renzi's reactionary measure.

Here the stakes have risen dramatically, and the idea that a further one-day general strike (on 12 December) will serious worry a more arrogant and confident Prime Minister seems remote. On 2 December, as the



bill was being debated and voted on, and thousands of students and militants were protesting outside the Senate, there was no sight of the unions.

On the day before CGIL leader Susanna Camusso had announced that the campaign of protest would from now on be focused on persuading the European Commission to intervene.

Camusso's earlier militant rhetoric and the guff from her sidekick, metalworkers' leader Maurizio Landini, about occupying the factories have been long forgotten. The millions of workers and other protesters who will dutifully strike and march on 12 December can be almost certain of one thing — the government has won.

From the moment he took

office, Renzi has been in the driving seat in his relationship with the union bosses. Having delivered a working class movement to the chopping block of an ever-worsening austerity the union leaders have failed to recognise the sinister significance of the turn of events of Renzi's declaration to make reform of the world of work the litmus test of rescuing and modernising the chronically declining Italian economy.

Instead of launching a campaign, stirring up a warning, and making preparations for a united mass resistance — a potential just hinted at in the days of action just undertaken! — they sat on their hands until the Bill reached its final stages in both of Italy's parliamentary houses. Their belated,

pathetically vacuous rhetoric, merely underlined the desperation of a parasitic caste, as cowardly before its real masters as it is criminally irresponsible before the people who pay their comfortable wages.

But the several days of action point once more to the potential for creating a mass democratic collective of resistance. Despite the sell-outs, the setbacks, across the country there are hundreds of disputes and struggles, strikes and occupations. The 35 women miners now in their 14th day of occupation at the bottom of their pit in Sardegna are just the most heroic example.

There is a burning need for the creation of a vanguard revolutionary socialist force able to lead towards the defeat of the class enemy in Italy.

Workers' Liberty are campaigning for the release of Shahrokh Zamani and Reza Shahabi, two Iranian trade unionists.

Shahrokh is part of the Tehran paint workers' union and has been in jail since 2011. He was sentenced to 11 years in jail for "propaganda against the state" and "acting against national security by establishing or membership of groups opposed to the system." Reza is the treasurer of the Tehran bus workers' union and has been in prison since 2010 on the same charges.

We have now collected 2310 signatures of our 10,000 target. As well as petitioning you can get involved in various events. We will be holding a protest outside the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in London on January 16 to protest the ILO allowing Iran to attend its conferences despite Iran's record on jailing trade unionists, a fundraising gig on January 10 in London and a protest outside the Iranian embassy on February 11.

More info: fb.com/free-shahrokh

Death sentences for political crimes

By Phil Grimm

An Egyptian court has sentenced 188 people to death by hanging for their alleged involvement in a riot which killed 14 policemen.

This is the most recent of a series of mass death sentences for political crimes.

Over a thousand Egyptians charged with offences related to political unrest have been condemned to death this year alone. The military government is tightening its strangle hold on political life, absolving its allies and crushing its opponents in the process.

The court's decision came just days after the former dictator Hosni Mubarak and seven of his security chiefs were cleared of responsibility for the killing of 239 people during the protests that

overthrew Mubarak's government in 2011. Mubarak remains in prison, but this is due to inconvenient evidence of a massive embezzlement of public funds, and not because of the brutal violence with which his government attempted to cling to power.

Most of those sentenced to death last week are thought to be members or supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, the right-wing Islamist movement that was toppled by the army last year. Hundreds more are in prison waiting for their trials. Some of them have now been waiting for a year.

The recent batch of death sentences were handed out under extremely dubious circumstances — defence lawyers were not given proper time to present their cases, and the judge flagrantly ignored what evi-

dence they were allowed to present. The defendants were examined and sentenced as a bloc, with little effort made to distinguish whether particular individuals had been involved in the rioting or not.

The Muslim Brotherhood is a deeply reactionary organisation, no friend of the left, of democrats or of the oppressed. But the systematic repression that is being meted out to its supporters is part and parcel with a general anti-democratic, authoritarian push by the new regime to criminalise opposition to the state, and to let the murderous officials of the Mubarak regime off the hook.

This drive affects socialists and working-class activists as well. It must be opposed by the international left.

Rebirth of the student movement

By Beth Redmond

Following the success of the national demonstration for free education on 19 November, which saw 10,000 students march across London in an energetic rebirth of the student movement, the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts called for further days of action on 3 and 6 December.

Actions took place in Teesside, Manchester, Bath, Sussex, Warwick, Birmingham and on various other campuses on 3 December, calling for free education by taxing the rich, and for the liberation and diversification of the curriculum.

We reject the idea that people should get a degree merely for the sake of serving the capitalist system when they finish.

Activists from Cambridge targeted the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills offices in the early hours of the morning, defacing the front windows with slogans such as "our education, not your business". Students from both campuses in Bath blockaded entrances, causing disruptions to deliveries at the corporate end of the university.

Students from London occupied the offices of Universities UK for the afternoon, a

company which does its best to catalyse the marketisation of our higher education institutions.

Both Sheffield and Lancaster went into occupation, leaving when university management conceded to some of their demands; management at Lancaster promised to enter into dialogue with occupiers about stopping any more increases in hall rents and tuition fees, and the Vice Chancellor at Sheffield has agreed to consider lobbying the government for the complete abolition of tuition fees.

On 6 December, marches took place in towns such as Chichester, Brighton, South London, Hastings, Birmingham and Bath.

Many places where both actions and free education or anti-cuts groups are springing up have come as a surprise due to their previous apolitical traditions, such as Chichester and Hastings, places which incidentally had demonstrations (and now free education activist groups) set up by new NCAFC members in FE.

The strength of the politics these actions are putting out cannot be ignored. There is a clear anti-capitalist message from a brand new generation of activists who are not only angry at their individual situation within the education system and the

system as a whole, but who are passionate enough to carry on each action with the same energy as the last one.

It feels as though the anti-students-as-consumers ideology is more prevalent than before. People are recognising that one of the reasons the government and management are implementing such measures is to smash the ever-important solidarity between students and their lecturers, which gives the movement a lot of potential for growth among the broader community.

In such a fast-paced movement it is easy to gloss over the politics of the slogan "free education". Aaron Kiely of Student Broad Left wrote an article for the *Huffington Post* in which he claimed we were fighting for free education because it would give Britain a good stake in the global economy. We're not. We don't care what is good for business, and the discussions at meetings and in occupations has reflected the idea that we should value education for the sake of education.

For all of this mobilisation to happen in the face of the NUS's recent betrayal is positive and one would hope that the leadership are embarrassed that their job is being done for them.



Free education demonstrations at Chichester and Bath, and an occupation of Universities UK in London

CS spray used on students

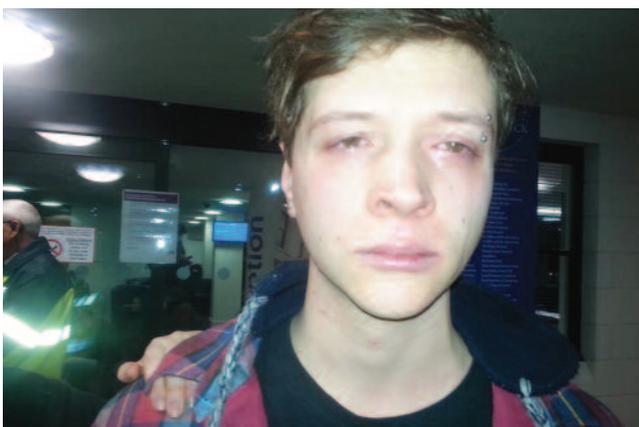
By Rachael Barnes

The free education campaign at Warwick University held a rally and peaceful occupation on the day of action on 3 December.

The occupation was broken up by the police after a couple of hours, who sprayed students with CS spray and threatened them with tasers before arresting three, an unprecedented level of action in the UK for such a small, peaceful protest.

A demonstration was called for the next day in solidarity with those affected by police brutality, where over 1000 students came to show support. Hundreds then occupied a suite in the Rootes Building, the corporate centre of the university where the vice chancellor holds dinners and galas.

The occupation is still on going.



Autocollants (large political stickers which are widely used in other countries but not until now in Britain) are ready to order.

There are seven designs and will be available to buy for £8 for 40, with a discount for larger orders.

If comrades have any more ideas for designs and slogans, or are interested in more posters and autocollants being produced, please email bethredmond93@gmail.com.

Order from workersliberty.org/autocollants



SWP: not vanishing, not improving

The Left
By Sacha Ismail



The 2014 conference of the Socialist Workers Party is in December. The content of the three conference internal discussion bulletins is a reminder that the SWP is not about to disappear.

It is still capable of organising activities and intervening in struggles on a scale not matched by the rest of the activist left except sometimes the Socialist Party — for instance, in the important workers' struggles at Care UK in Doncaster and Lambeth College. It still has, in proportion to the left and trade union movement, a significant layer of union activists.

It still has branches across the country and, unless some of the information contained in the bulletins is straightforward lying, some of them are growing. It is far more active than either of the groups which split from it in its recent crises, International Socialist Network and RS21.

Although the SWP has lost the vast majority of its student base, it is very busy trying to rebuild it. Its success so far has been limited, but real: for instance at Sussex University, where one bulletin discusses how they have rebuilt a group and defeated the attempt to ban them from the student union. (They are less keen to talk about Goldsmiths, where they did not even turn up to the student union meeting that banned them.) A re-emergence of the SWP on the student scene is certainly not out of the question.

POSE

But the documents make clear that, whether or not the SWP recovers from its recent losses, it will not be a gain for socialist politics. Fundamentally, the SWP is still lying not just to others but to itself.

The bulletins are full of lies: from Nick Griffin losing his Euro-seat because of the SWP's campaigning (rather than because of the BNP's self-implosion) to their membership and recruitment (they claim to have 5,868 members — but only 36 percent even make a regular payment to the organisation).

Despite quoting the Marxist classics on the workers' united front, the SWP's conception of "united fronts" is very much as it was before — populist lash ups organising showbiz antics, preferably under the tight control of itself. Hence the paeans to "Unite Against Fascism" and trade union front "Unite the Resistance" (and more tentative praise of "Stop the War", since it's run by SWP-split Counterfire).

The SWP are currently striking a pose as radical left critics of the trade union leaders, and that is reflected here. But the union they single out for most praise is the National Union of Teachers, where they operate as the marginally more radical allies of the "left" bureaucracy. The contributions ignore ac-

tual rank and file/class struggle-oriented initiatives in the unions as in the student movement.

Recently the SWP has made calls for unity on the left: our response to one can be read at www.workersliberty.org/node/24316. These documents confirm our analysis that what they are concerned about is not greater unity on the revolutionary left across Britain, but unity in Scotland with "left reformists", for which read left-wing and other nationalists. The bulletins contain not a hint of disagreement with the SWP's pro-Scottish nationalist line.

This line functions to convince SWP members and those they influence that there is a major opening for social progress coming quickly where is none. The political basis is the idea that what matters is not so much the growth of working-class organisation and consciousness, as "resistance" to and "rage against" the status quo and the opportunities this gives the organisation to recruit.

A central purpose of revolutionary organisation is to continuously hammer out a clear and truthful analysis of the world, and fight for it, in order to help workers become conscious of themselves as a class. A socialist organisation which does the opposite is useless and even harmful.

This is one context in which the failure of the SWP to learn anything serious from its crisis in connection with the Martin Smith sexual assault/rape cases should be considered. Where the crisis is mentioned, it is a cursory and dishonest way. Such an approach cannot withstand serious discussion: hence the SWP's undemocratic internal regime, which the bulletins suggest the leadership is further locking down.

The leadership now claims there is a need to limit debate to make the workings of the SWP accessible. Hence a new word limit on contributions — members can now sign their names, individually or collectively, only to submissions of up to 4,000 words in the first bulletin and 3,000 in the second and third. This year's bulletins are only 28, 31 and 32 pages



long, with quite a lot of organisational filler, as against 91, 104 and 140 last year — this in an organisation which claims 6,000 members. Meanwhile the Central Committee can submit as many contributions as it wants.

The reality is that the CC operates largely independently from any wider control — as described vividly by the only member to make any significant oppositional contribution to the bulletins, "national member" Andy W. "National member" means he has been suspended from branch membership. Andy W is running for the National Committee which supposedly holds the CC to account, but will almost certainly not be elected, though there are only 53 candidates for 50 places.

The SWP has not changed for the better. It is "struggling" in the negative but also in the positive sense of fighting hard to recover its position. It will remain a significant force.

While we will work and argue with individual SWPers, we need to take the short-term opportunity provide by its falling back to build a better revolutionary left and, in the first instance, build Workers' Liberty.

Not so red

On 5 December, Bodo Ramelow became the first state premier in Germany from Die Linke, Germany's Left Party, which is a composite of remnants of the old ruling party of East Germany and a left split (mainly in West Germany) from the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 2005.

He heads a three-way "red-red-green" coalition with the SPD and the Greens in Thuringia.

There has been outcry from the German right against an alleged return of the old East German Stalinist dictatorship, which this isn't. But, for Die Linke's newer, more left-wing, post-Stalinist members, the prospects aren't good.

The coalition agreement for Thuringia includes no hint of using the state government as a platform to mobilise against the right-wing government and against capitalism in Germany. Instead, it includes only a few small reforms (more wind power, hiring more school teachers), calculated to be possible without confrontation.

Die Linke has already taken part in coalition governments in Berlin (2001-2011) and in Brandenburg (since 2009), where it has compromised itself by taking part in pushing through cuts.

Letters



Verbal inflation blurs

Mumsnet defines a rape apologist as "someone who seeks to excuse rape. Normally by finding a way to blame the victim..."

Finally, a *Feminism 101 Blog* summarises: "A rape apology is any argument that boils down to the myth that rapists can be provoked into raping by what the victim does or does not do".

Cathy Nugent (*Solidarity* 346) defends her claim that the SWP is "rape apologist" by quoting reports from SWP oppositionists of responses by SWP members in the "Comrade X" and "Comrade W" cases. They are bad. But not all bad is "rape apologist".

The reported responses are not "yes, there was sex without consent, but such-and-such excuses it". And we are even further from proof that the SWP corporately, collectively, institutionally, is "rape apologist".

Anger against the SWP is justified. Verbal inflation blurs, not clarifies.

Martin Thomas, Islington

Why so irate?

I thought Duncan Morrison's complaint (*Solidarity* 344) about Jon Lansman's column (343) was that Lansman implied we should push motions praising Ed Miliband, and wasn't really anti-cuts (since anti-cuts was mentioned only in the headline).

But now (*Solidarity* 345) Duncan says only that Lansman's column was bland. Why the irate complaint, then?

In 1994 and 1992, we had no choice about whether there was a Labour leader election, because the predecessor had died or resigned. But, if not, at both times we would have disliked a whispering campaign by right-wing Labour MPs to get Smith or Kinnock to resign in favour of a more right-wing leader (Blair or Smith).

Are left leader candidacies possible in today's Labour Party? Yes, there is one right now in the Scottish Labour Party, which is in a worse state than the English.

Colin Foster, North London



Equalise the wealth!

According to NHS bosses, the Health Service needs an extra £8 billion a year by 2020 to cope with an ageing population and new medical technologies. Or a total of £30 billion on top of the Government's projections.

Those figures, £8 billion and £30 billion, are both big numbers. They are much bigger than the £2.5 billion which the Labour leaders have promised to add to the NHS budget from a mansion tax.

They are also small. They are small compared to the £297 billion which is the total wealth of just the hundred richest people in Britain.

They are not big compared even to the £40 billion extra which those hundred people added to their wealth in just the one year 2013-4. A tax on wealth could save the NHS, and do much more besides.

Worldwide, a tiny minority, just the richest 1%, own more than 48% of global wealth. Just 85 of the world's richest people own £1,000 billion between them, as much as the poorest 3.5 billion of the world's population.

The right wing argues that economic inequality is all right because, by making space for incentives, it encourages growth and thus indirectly helps us all.

Inequality is oppressive even if poor people have mobile phones and TVs. Anyway, one third of wealth in the UK is inherited, not "earned" by people following "incentives" even if you accept that a big shareholder getting dividends "earns" his or her part of the wealth which the company's workers produce.

The OECD — no socialist body, but a coordinating agency of the world's richest capitalist countries — concludes that overall economic growth in the richer countries has been *held back*, not speeded, by rising inequality.

According to the OECD, rising inequality in the two decades after 1985 shaved nine percentage points off UK growth between 1990 and 2000. The economy expanded by 40% during the 1990s and 2000s but would have grown by almost 50% had inequality not risen.

Both inequality of wealth and inequality of income are in-

creasing. The top 10% in the UK owned 51.5% of all household wealth in 2000, and 54.1% in 2014. The richest fifth of the UK population had incomes £940 bigger in 2013 than in 2012. But incomes were down by £250 for the other 80% of the population... and by £381 for the poorest fifth.

The answer is not just a petty mansion tax. It is collective organisation to take over the wealth monopolised by the top few per cent, to bring the main concentrations of productive wealth under common ownership and control, and to operate them so as bring good services and good living standards to all.

Along the way, and immediately, we should demand heavy taxes on the rich to save and improve our National Health Service.

Solidarity 348 will be out on 6 January. Xmas wishes to all readers!

Osborne's double message

In his Autumn Statement on 3 December, Tory Chancellor George Osborne both boasted about economic recovery and promised huge cuts if the Tories win the next election.

His planned cuts are big enough to reduce public spending, as a percentage of the economy, to the level of the 1930s, before there was a National Health Service and when most children left school at 14.

He aims to combine a message that it's all going well, so he should be congratulated and the rich should get tax cuts, with a message that it's all precarious, so the worse-off must suffer even more, for many years to come.

He can get away with it to any extent at all only because of the weakness of the Labour leaders' response. Ed Balls dare not even say what he said, rightly, back in 2010, that a slump calls for increased, not decreased, public spending.

Osborne's measures have not even reduced government debt. It continues to rise. The annual deficit — the increase in the debt — has shrunk a bit, but not much, and not nearly as much as Osborne claimed it would.

Other governments in Europe have also planned drastic cuts — in Belgium and Italy, where there have been big demonstrations and strikes in response.

The background is not an acute financial crisis like 2008. Ireland is now out of the bail-out. The Greek government hasn't done as it hoped, and got out of the bailout in 2014; but it's still afloat, which seemed unlikely two years ago.

The medium-term plan now across the European Union is "structural reform" — cuts, reducing workers' rights — supposed to make economies "competitive". It can't make them all more competitive. They're in a race for the bottom.

The supposed greater competitiveness can't get big results by way of exports outside the EU, either. The Chinese government is deliberately slowly down its economy. The "emerging" economies — Brazil, Russia, South Africa — are stagnant. The USA is growing a bit faster, but with fast-increasing inequality, and so a limited consumer market to suck in imports. The oil-exporting countries are in trouble because of the fall in the price of oil.

Capitalism promises continued economic depression as far as we can see ahead. Capitalist governments want to use that depression to batter down working-class rights and standards and thus shift the frame for coining profits in eventual recovery.

Osborne has made many of his cuts by way of local government. If Labour councils had a real will to push a Labour government into reversing cuts, then they would be using reserves and financial juggling to avoid cuts in April 2015 budgets, and aiming for a revision after May. In fact councils, Labour as well as Tory, predict huge cuts.

They deliberately paint so bad a picture that even a slight wriggle can make it seem that they've made it not so bad. But the cuts are axing more and more basic services.

Workers' Liberty activists everywhere will be striving to rebuild local labour movement anti-cuts campaigns. This may be difficult: those campaigns have declined, or sometimes dissolved, in the wake of the labour movement's defeat over pensions in 2011.

The flurry of national anti-cuts initiatives in 2011 has subsided, leaving only the People's Assembly. Some local People's Assembly groups have large-ish meetings and have taken over from the local anti-cuts campaigns set up by



Osborne: it's going so well we will have to make cuts

Trades Councils and the like. But they are patchy, and tend to be more vehicles for occasional public meetings than for day-to-day organising.

Rebuild the local anti-cuts campaigns! Demand the labour movement campaign to tax the rich and reverse the cuts!

Solidarity and criticism

By Simon Nelson

Some anarchist, autonomist Marxist and libertarian communists have hailed the regime in Rojava (western Kurdistan/Syria) as a revolutionary democracy.

Workers' Liberty backs the Kurdish struggle and the YPG defence of Kobane against ISIS. But that does not mean we have to endorse the Rojava regime as a model of revolutionary democracy. And we don't.

The YPG (Democratic Union Party) are closely linked to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party). Historically the PKK was a Stalinist, cult-like organisation engaged in a long-running war with the Turkish state.

Some western activists argue the PKK has shifted from its Stalinist roots and adopted something akin to the "democratic confederalism" first propagated by the ex-anarchist theorist Murray Bookchin.

Roarmag.org has been most enthusiastic about the supposed evolution of the PKK. An article by Rafael Taylor of the Australian Anarcho Syndicalist Federation claims, "The PKK/KCK appear to be following Bookchin's social ecology to the book." The National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCB), which Taylor describes as the "broader revolutionary leftist coalition in Syria of which the PYD [affiliate of the PKK] is the main group... has now embraced the project of democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism as a possible model for Syria."

But the NCB is widely viewed as the tolerated official Syrian opposition to President Assad. Enthusiasm for its revolutionary leftist credentials seem misplaced. The PYD have had an opaque relationship with the Syrian state. Previously Syria supported the PKK in the war against neighbouring Turkey, but the relationship has cooled. Syrian state troops left Rojava without much of a confrontation with the PYD.

COMMUNAL

Taylor also makes a point of the PKK's involvement in an international gathering of anarchists in St Imier, Switzerland, in 2012.

A speaker from Fekar, the Federation of Kurdish Associations in Switzerland, stated that, "[the PKK] is now a model for forms of 'communal' social life... in which there is respect for differences and where the aim is to achieve a good ecological balance in nature."

Many of those who support Fekar's and Roarmag's view have emphasised the apparent shift in the PKK, which is also documented by Murray Bookchin's biographer, collaborator and partner Janet Biehl. However others in the same milieu such as the International Communist Current and the Anarchist Federation have taken a different view.

Historically the anarchist left have been hostile to the concept of self-determination for oppressed nations and view national liberation struggles as a distraction from the class struggle and/or the immediate abolition of the state and its institutions. This sectarian stance leads some anarchists and "left communists" to be dismissive of the current struggle against ISIS and to reject calls to arm the Kurds, unless it is done independently of the PYD. However, much of their analysis of the PKK and PYD is worth reading.

The Anarchist Federation rightly preaches caution on the nature of the popular assemblies in Rojava. The PYD is both the largest organisation and also in effect the state there, as it controls the food, financial resources and all the guns and weaponry. They quote Zafer Onat, a libertarian communist from the region,

"First of all we must identify that the Rojava process has progressive features such as an important leap in the direction of women's liberation... a secular, pro-social justice, pluralist democratic structure is attempting to be constructed and other ethnic and religious groups are given a part in the administration. However, the fact that the newly emerging structure does not aim at the elimination of private property, that is the abolition of classes, that the tribal system remains and that tribal leaders partake in the administration,



shows that the aim is not the removal of feudal or capitalist relations of production but is instead in their own words 'the construction of a democratic nation'."

Unlike AFED we are not hostile to the aim of 'a democratic nation' its entirety, but it is right that activists recognise that the PYD is not moving beyond this goal, and that a "pluralist democratic structure" can also be under threat from its authoritarian and Stalinist origins, including the shutting down of an independent radio station and an attack on demonstrators in Amuda in 2013.

AFED also quote Shiar Neymo, a Syrian-Kurdish anarchist:

"This political pragmatism and thirst for power are two important factors in understanding the party's dealings with the regime, the revolution, the FSA, and even the Kurds themselves..."

"The PYD's forces have also assaulted members of other Kurdish political parties and arrested some of them under a variety of excuses.

FOOD

"They have been controlling food and financial resources in the Kurdish areas and distributing them in an unjust manner on the basis of partisan favouritism, and so on and so forth.

Such practices remind people, rightly, of the oppressive practices of the Assad regime."

Zafer Bayer of the Haringey Solidarity Group states that during a meeting between the PYD and other opposing parties:

"The answer to every single question was positive. No arrests were made, no restrictions on freedom or organizing demonstrations. But all of them shared the point that they do not want to take part in the DSA (democratic self-administration).

"The reasons were that the Tev-Dem (Movement for a Democratic Society), which is a PKK initiative, compromised with the Syrian state and replicates some of the same practices as experienced under Assad."

In an interview from 2012 with the Kurdish Anarchist Forum, carried by anarkismo.net, KAF there is a comment on the PKK and its ideas,

"We are aware that Ocalan's ideas have changed since he has been in prison. But we are not very optimistic about these changes. Also these changes have not, at least for the time being, been reflected in practice or organisationally...It is certainly true that the PKK has got many followers among the Kurdish people and have a big impact on Kurdish mass movements. They also talk about federalism.

"But none of this makes them in any way Anarchist organisations. They are, in fact, as far as one can get from Anarchists and Anarchism because Ocalan has not given up his authority and dominance over the mass movement."

The best way to support democratic and working class forces in Rojava is to be honest about the political alliances and groups that currently exist. We do no favours to these forces by promoting the PYD uncritically or failing to examine the different experiences of Kurdish groups and activists who support the struggle against ISIS.

London's

Day-Mer is a Kurdish and Turkish community organisation in London. Oktay Cinpolat, who is part of the management of Day-Mer and Day-Mer Youth, spoke to Solidarity.

Day-Mer was set up in 1989 by a group of community activists, some of who had known each other in Turkey.

We work with and on behalf of Turkish and Kurdish people living and working in London, to help them solve their problems and promote their cultural, economic, social and democratic rights; to strengthen solidarity amongst themselves as well as local people; and to help their integration into society.

We have a Day-Mer community centre in Newington Green and work closely with another community centre, North London Community Home.

We are not a membership organisation, but we have quite a lot of supporters and people who are actively involved. Most are Kurdish but some are non-Kurdish Turkish people. Some of our supporters are trade unionists; but beyond that we have a wider political orientation to working with the trade union movement and getting our community to look towards it. We are not only concerned with our community, but with the wider interests of the labour movement and the whole working class.

Our youth and student membership is organised in Day-Mer Youth, set up in 1996. I got involved around 2000, after the movements against the original introduction of student tuition fees. There is a secondary school group, a college group, a university group and a young workers' group, all of which are quite active.

We have no permanent relations with other left organisations, but we will work with anyone genuinely on the left, with progressive organisations that promote the welfare of the people and the labour movement. We've worked quite a bit with the SWP and with the Socialist Party. For instance we've supported some TUSC candidates.

Can you say something about your activity in relation to Kobane and the Kurdish-ISIS struggle?

We've been involved in supporting the Kurdish struggle for a long time. For us it didn't begin exclusively with the ISIS crisis. But since the battle around Kobane began the issue has got much wider attention and Kurdish communities in the UK, as all over the world, have been very much stirred up. We've seen mass demonstrations for the first time in many years.

Day-Mer is part of a coalition campaigning around these issues, with a variety of Kurdish groups, some leftist and some more nationalist. We took part in the three mass demonstrations in London, including the biggest one in Trafalgar Square.

We've held public meetings with various left groups. We've also brought people over from Turkey and from Kurdistan to speak about the issues involved. We've collected money for charities and organisations helping people in Kurdistan.

Day-Mer Youth organised a meeting of about 40 or 50 people, together with some other Turkish and Kurdish youth organisations, and out of that there were street demonstrations, blockades, direct actions, and so on.

We've raised these issues with the trade unions. The TUC discussed it at their general council, issued a statement, and raised it in the European TUC. Perhaps this also had some impact on the statements other unions issued.

Now the people of Kobane are no longer on the defensive, so there's a bit of a breathing space. But for us the issues have not changed.

I want to stress the democratic nature of what is happening in Kobane and in Rojava more generally. Now, we can't say that these governments are socialist, exactly. But they are progressive and democratic, creating a framework in which Kurds and other peoples in the area can live together on the

Kurdish community campaign



basis of secularism and equal rights. We value this greatly.

I also want to stress the issue of women's rights, which is a very important part of this. 30 or 40 percent of the Kurdish fighters against ISIS are women. Of course women want to fight because they have a lot to lose, because ISIS is such a brutal misogynistic organisation. It also reflects women's mobilisation and participation in the cantons of Rojava, including for equal rights, which seems to be quite extensive.

What is your analysis of the rise of ISIS?

It did not come out of nowhere. Let's look back at the invasion of Iraq, in 2003. The action of the US and British imperialists disorganised and destroyed Iraqi society, in many places leaving nothing but dust and stones. And as it destroyed social bonds it helped strengthen sectarian polarisation, and sectarian political forces. The US backed a sectarian Shia regime which drove some people into the arms of Sunni sectarian forces like ISIS. ISIS also had help from elements of the former Ba'athist regime.

The sectarian conflict in Syria has also had an impact. And of course the US doesn't know who to back. At one point it backed some Sunni sectarians against Assad. Now it is attacking the Sunni-sectarian groups.

ISIS is an ideological group, but it is also an economic force, a brutal form of capitalism attempting to take control of oil resources and so on in the name of a particular community. It is a product of the crisis of imperialism in the region, though of course it is not anti-imperialist.

What do you say about the US interventions in the region?

Our statements have been very clear, that we give no support to Western intervention. We do not invite them to play a role in the region. We take a clear stand against both ISIS and Western imperialism: if the two gangs want to murder each other, that is not our concern. Between these two groups

of reactionaries, we stand for the third camp of democratic forces, in particular the Kurdish struggle. We take the same approach in Syria: against the Assad regime and against ISIS, for democratic forces and the Kurds.

Having said that, the Kurds, most of all in Kobane, are in a life and death situation. Opposing imperialism does not mean condemning the fact they have received military support from the US. To call for the bombing of ISIS outside Kobane to stop would be suicidal; it would mean undermining the Kurdish struggle.

In general we oppose imperialist intervention: for instance the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, or Israel's war against the Palestinians. That is not at all in contradiction with what we are saying here.

Why do you think the British left has been so hesitant to get involved in solidarity?

Bear in mind that even in our community there has been a slowness in waking up to what is going on. We had to speak to people on the ground in Syria and Iraq, and who had visited there, in order to find out more and then gradually form a picture. So one on level the British left lagging behind is natural.

However, that does not make it right. Undoubtedly the British left should do a lot more.

What's your assessment of the Turkish government's role in the Middle East?

Turkey has "neo-Ottomanist" ambitions to dominate the region. [The Ottoman Empire was the Turkish empire which at its height stretched from southeastern Europe and north-west Africa to Iran, surviving for hundreds of years until 1923.] However, this cannot go beyond the wishes of US imperialism, which it is strongly bound by. In this sense, Turkey is not an imperialist state.

Since the AKP [Justice and Development Party, the conser-

vative religious party in government in Turkey] came to office in 2002, it has argued that Turkey's economy has grown and prospered, and that there has been more democracy. But this is only appearance. The AKP has implemented policies which attack the majority of the population, for instance in terms of trade union rights, women's rights, education, police brutality, exploitation of the Kurdish peace process. The bulk of the population did not get a chance to taste real democracy or see real improvement in their living standards.

On the other hand, groups and individuals around the AKP government have become multi-millionaires, setting up various industries and buying out companies worldwide. One of them is United Biscuits in England, which is owned by the AKP-affiliated Ulker.

The lack of real democracy became apparent in 2013 when a national rebellion broke out, motivated by an accumulation of social and economic issues.

You participated in the 19 November student demo. What do you think?

After the protests in 2010-11, which were the biggest student rebellion in British history, it's not surprising that we're once again seeing young people on the streets.

The demands of the movement, for free education and so on, are absolutely correct, legitimate, progressive. Any government which wanted to see a new generation of young people grow up with a decent life would support them.

The protest showed that young people are ready to fight for their rights. And it gives the left, the labour movement and so on a role, an opportunity, but also a challenge – to not just mobilise but organise many of these young people and to try to carry the dynamism and momentum into the trade union struggle as well.

In 2011, I remember the police working hard to prevent demonstrating students from linking up with the sparks on strike. They know very well that when such links are built it can generate real mass movements.

On the role of NUS: what NUS did [not supporting the demonstration] was wrong, and not in the interests of students. That doesn't mean we should abandon or refuse to work with NUS. Wherever possible the student movement should work within NUS and attempt to pull them to our side. Yes, organise independently, and yes criticise when they get it wrong, but not at the expense of organising within the structures and working with the people they organise as well.

What's your view on the general election and on wider political trends in Britain?

The problem of UKIP, the threat it poses to migrants in particular and the working class in general, is a very serious one. But it is not just about UKIP. The three established parties have prepared the way for it by their policies of blaming migrants, blaming the poor, attacking the unions and so on. UKIP grows out of the wider social situation, the wider crisis of capitalism and imperialism.

We need to fight racism wherever it raises its head, UKIP, the BNP, the EDL, but also when it comes from the mainstream parties.

There is a lot of anti-Toryism around, and that's fine, but the left also needs to argue for a more systematic criticism of capitalism itself. It's difficult, because we're not in a strong position and time is short, but that's what we should use the election to do.

Of course there is left struggle inside the Labour Party, and we will work with these comrades. We don't rule out a more powerful movement inside Labour, but that is not what we advocate.

We advocate a new mass workers' party – a party set up not by left groups but by the trade unions, based on the unions but taking their fight for workers' interests into the political arena.

Jerusalem: the unholy city

By Uri Avnery

Jerusalem has been in flames — again. Two youngsters from Jabel Mukaber, one of the Arab villages annexed to Jerusalem, entered a synagogue in the west of the city during morning prayers and killed four devout Jews, before themselves being killed by police [18 November].

Jerusalem is called “the City of Peace”. No city in the world has seen as many wars, massacres and as much bloodshed as this one.

Jerusalem was annexed (or “liberated”, or “unified”) immediately after the Six-Day War of 1967.

The annexation was presented to us (I was a member of the Knesset at the time) as a unification of the city, which had been cruelly rent asunder in the Israeli-Palestinian war of 1948.

If the intent had really been unification, it would have looked very different.

Full Israeli citizenship would have been automatically conferred on all inhabitants. All the lost Arab properties in West Jerusalem, which had been expropriated in 1948, would have been restored to their rightful owners who had fled to East Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem municipality would have been expanded to include Arabs from the East, even without a specific request.

The opposite happened. Arab inhabitants were not accorded Israeli citizenship, but merely “permanent residence”. This is a status that can be arbitrarily revoked at any moment — and indeed was revoked in many cases, compelling the victims to move out of the city. Arabs were allowed to apply for Israel citizenship.

OCCUPIED

The authorities knew, of course, that only a handful would apply, since doing so would mean recognition of the occupation. For Palestinians, this would be paramount to treason. (And the few that did apply were generally refused.)

In theory, Arabs are entitled to vote in municipal elections, but only a handful do so, for the same reasons. In practice, East Jerusalem remains occupied territory.

The mayor, Teddy Kollek, was elected two years before the annexation. One of his first actions after it was to demolish the entire Mugrabi Quarter next to the Western Wall. The inhabitants, all of them poor people, were evicted within hours.

But Kollek ostensibly established friendly relations with the Arab notables. Kollek built more new Israeli neighbourhoods on Arab land than any other person in the country.



Only few knew of a secret directive from Kollek, instructing all municipal authorities to see to it that the Arab population — then 27% — did not rise above that level.

Kollek was ably supported by Moshe Dayan, then the Defence Minister. Dayan believed in keeping the Palestinians quiet by giving them all possible benefits, except freedom.

A few days after the occupation of East Jerusalem he removed the Israeli flag which had been planted by soldiers in front of the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount. Dayan also turned the de facto authority over the Mount over to the Muslim religious authorities.

Jews were allowed into the Temple compound only in small numbers and only as quiet visitors. They were forbidden to pray there.

The government was able to impose this decree because of a quaint religious fact: Orthodox Jews are forbidden by the rabbis to enter the Temple Mount altogether. According to a Biblical injunction, ordinary Jews are not allowed into the Holy of Holies, only the High Priest was allowed in. Since nobody today knows where exactly this place is located, pious Jews may not enter the entire compound.

As a result, the first few years of the occupation were a happy time for East Jerusalem. Jews and Arabs mingled freely.

This atmosphere changed gradually. The government and the municipality spent a lot of money to gentrify West Jerusalem, but Arab neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem were neglected, and turned into slums. The local infrastructure and services degenerated. Almost no building permits were issued to Arabs, in order to compel the younger generation to move outside the city borders.

Then the “Separation” Wall was built, preventing those outside from entering the city, cutting them off from their schools and jobs. In spite of everything, the Arab population grew and reached 40%.

Political oppression grew. Under the Oslo agreements, Jerusalemite Arabs were allowed to vote for the Palestinian Authority. But then they were prevented from doing so, their representatives were arrested and expelled from the city. All Palestinian institutions were forcibly closed down.

Kollek was succeeded by Ehud Olmert and an Orthodox mayor who didn’t give a damn for East Jerusalem, except the Temple Mount.

Secular Israelis are leaving Jerusalem, which is rapidly becoming an Orthodox bastion. In desperation they decided to oust the Orthodox mayor and elect a secular businessman. Unfortunately, he is a rabid ultra-nationalist.

Nir Barkat behaves like the mayor of West Jerusalem and the military governor of East Jerusalem. He treats his Palestinian subjects like enemies, who may be tolerated if they

obey quietly, and brutally suppressed if they do not. Together with the decade-old neglect of the Arab neighbourhoods, the accelerated pace of building new Jewish neighbourhoods, the excessive police brutality (openly encouraged by the mayor), they are producing an explosive situation.

The total cutting-off of Jerusalem from the West Bank, its natural hinterland, worsens the situation even more.

To this may be added the termination of the so-called peace process, since all Palestinians are convinced that East Jerusalem must be the capital of the future state of Palestine.

This situation needed only a spark to ignite the city. This was duly provided by the right-wing demagogues in the Knesset. They started to visit the Temple Mount, one after the other, every time unleashing a storm. Added to the manifest desire of certain religious and right-wing fanatics to build the Third Temple in place of the holy al-Aqsa Mosque and the golden Dome of the Rock, this was enough to create the belief that the holy shrines were indeed in danger.

REVENGE

Then came the ghastly revenge-murder of an Arab boy who was abducted by Jews and burned alive with gasoline poured into his mouth.

Individual Muslim inhabitants of the city started to act. Disdaining organisations, almost without arms, they started a series of attacks that are now called “the intifada of individuals”.

The two cousins who killed four Jews in a synagogue and also an Arab Druze policeman knew that their families were going to suffer, their home be demolished, their relatives arrested. They were not deflected.

Immediately after the synagogue killing, the Israeli choir of politicians and commentators went into action. They did so with an astonishing unanimity — ministers, Knesset members, ex-generals, journalists, all repeating with slight variations the same message. Mahmoud Abbas was to blame for everything, a “terrorist in a suit”, the leader whose incitement causes the new intifada. No matter that the chief of the Shin Bet testified on the very same day that Abbas has neither overt nor covert connections with the violence.

Binyamin Netanyahu faced the cameras and repeated again what he has said many times before: more police, harder punishments, demolition of homes, arrests and large fines for parents of 13-year old children who are caught throwing stones, and so on.

Every expert knows that the result of such measures will be the exact opposite.

• Abridged from www.avnery-news.co.il

GRAMSCI IN CONTEXT

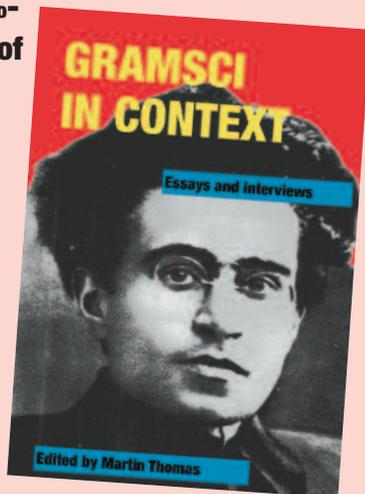
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Books on war and revolution

War and revolution has been a theme of 2014. Workers' Liberty comrades were asked to recommend some books on that theme, all readily available, and ideal for reading over the holiday period.

The German Revolution 1918-23 by Pierre Broué,

This book is the most in depth account of a pivotal period of the twentieth century I've ever read. It has huge lessons for us today on the united front, transitional demands and the concept of a workers' government.

Paul Hampton

Regeneration by Pat Barker

The first book in this trilogy about World War One starts by quoting 'A Soldier's Declaration', Siegfried Sassoon's July 1917 statement of protest against the war and beings with that moment in Sassoon's life.

Rather than court-martial Sassoon and turn him into an anti-war martyr, the military declared him insane and sent him to Craiglockhart, a War Hospital for treating shell-shocked soldiers. The book is set mostly in Craiglockhart. The main character, the psychiatrist Rivers, treats characters for the psychological trauma they have undergone at the front. Rivers encourages his patients to talk, so we can glean the horror of the front, with the added poignancy that by the time we're hearing of them, the events have already led to psychological breakdown.

Sassoon, an already-established poet and Wilfred Owen, who was yet to be published, met in Craiglockhart in 1917. The book plays on this chance historical encounter and imagines their conversations, including one where Sassoon amends the opening line of 'Anthem for Doomed Youth' to say, "What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?"

The fictionalised conversations between Rivers and his patients and between Sassoon and Owen invite you to think emotionally and psychologically about the events of World War One. I am now reading book two of the trilogy, *The Eye in the Door* and can't wait to read the third, *The Ghost Road*, for which Pat Barker won the Booker Prize.

Becky Crocker

The Home Front by Sylvia Pankhurst

We are less than half a year into four years of commemoration of the centenary of the Great War, a sanitised celebration

which glorifies and justifies the war. There will be some mention of the terrible sufferings of the men in the trenches, but little of the appalling hardships opposed on the people on the "home front".

Sylvia Pankhurst's book, first published in 1932, tells the brutal truth about the women who struggled to raise families with no welfare state, the returning wounded soldiers abandoned by the government that sent them to war, the conscientious objectors who faced the most severe of punishments for refusing to go along with it. Keep alive their memory, and see how the British ruling class was not their champion but their enemy at home.

Janine Booth

The Third Reich by Richard J Evans

This is the second part of a trilogy on Nazi Germany. There is an industry of history books about the Nazis but there are fewer serious histories. Most are written from a liberal or conservative point of view. Evans in contrast gives a Marxian (if not Marxist) analysis.

Evans is very interested in and very lucid about the class nature of Nazism and the disastrous role played by the leadership of the mass working-class parties, the reformist SPD and the Stalinist KPD. Evans analysis coincides with Trotsky's in that he thinks a united front between the two parties before 1933 could have stopped the rise of the Nazis.

The Third Reich In Power shows how the Nazis built a cultural, political and ideological hegemony and the brave but mainly doomed attempts to resist this. Evans's prose really brings to light the monstrous horror of it all and makes you angry that this could have happened within living memory.

Dave Kirk

The Lost Revolution: The story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party by Brian Hanley and Scott Millar

In December 1969, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) split into two wings, with its political wing, Sinn Féin, following suit in early 1970. The most well-known, the "Provisional" IRA, were the Catholic nationalists who, after contributing in no small part to thirty years of sectarian violence, now share power with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in Stormont. This story is well known.

The Lost Revolution tells the story of the "Official" IRA and its political wing, the Workers' Party of Ireland, a political

force which, in its own different way, did much to shape modern Ireland.

A collaboration between an academic and a political journalist, this book is well-written, with the pace and drama of a good novel.

The Workers' Party still exists, though greatly diminished from its height of seven TDs and an MEP. Its former President Sean Garland has only recently fought off attempts by the US to have him extradited for alleged involvement in a North Korean plan to forge counterfeit dollars.

In 1991, the party split, with many of its elected representatives forming the social democratic Democratic Left. In 1997 it merged with the Irish Labour Party, with Proinsias De Rossa become a Labour MEP. In 2011, Eamon Gilmore became Labour's leader and the Irish Tánaiste, a post which he held until last July.

How did the "Official" IRA reach such an unlikely set of destinations, from its roots in the traditional republicanism of the early 1960s? The answer is complex, with many bizarre and often deadly twists and turns in between.

Michael Johnson

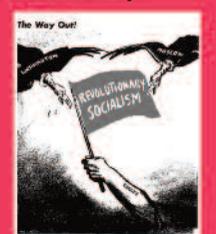
Stuck for Christmas present ideas?

The cartoons collected in this 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.

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Fight for the private renters!

Rich and poor

By Matt Cooper



There were only muted howls of anger from the rich who lost most from the changes to stamp duty on house sales in George Osborne's Autumn statement.

That's because those who will be paying an extra £163,750 on their £5 million house can afford it and they realise that this is a bid by the party of the rich to cling onto power in next year's general election.

It's those in private-rented housing who are really suffering. After years of growth in home ownership, the numbers able to afford to buy are in decline, many people are reliant on private rentals. The 2011 census showed that the number living in private rented accommodation had increased by 69% since 2001, while the proportion in mortgaged homes has declined by 15 per cent. It is mainly younger people, many with families, who are priced out of the property market.

The alternative to both private renting and home ownership has been social housing, offering greater security, better quality and lower rents. At the time of the 1981 census 31 per cent of households were social housing. By 2011 that figure was 18 per cent. Over the same period private rentals have increased from 11 per cent to 18 per cent of households.

Earlier this year the government told social landlords to

charge "affordable rent". This piece of Orwellian language disguises a policy of pushing up social rents to 80 per cent of the market rents — unaffordable to most people on average incomes.

Thus, private rented housing has become the only option for many, but it is often an insecure one. In recent weeks the threat to force the tenants out of the New Era estate in Hoxton has caught the headlines, but this is the tip of a very dirty iceberg.

According to Ministry of Justice figures, the numbers being evicted by private and social landlords are at an all time high. The number of court orders to evict has been increasing since 2010, with over 40,000 a quarter now being issued and in excess of 30,000 repossession notices issued in July to September 2014. Shelter estimates half-a-million people were threatened with eviction in the last year. In some of the most disadvantaged areas of London nearly one-in-twenty tenants were threatened with eviction in the last year.

Why is this happening? Cuts in housing benefit, the impact of the bedroom tax, and rent arrears are the main reasons. There is also a tendency in the private-rented sector for landlords to respond to the shortage of housing by increasing rents while allowing their property to fall into worse repair.

Worse, tenants who complain can find their rent increased in retaliation and, because they can't afford the increase, are evicted. A recent Private Member's Bill to outlaw rent increase retaliation was talked out by a pair of right-wing Tory

MPs.

According to research by the Joseph Rowntree Trust and Heriot Watt University, if current trends continue one person in five will be living in privately rented accommodation by 2040. Renters will face a projected rent increase of 90 per cent, rent rises that will be twice as much as income. At the same time social housing will continue to be squeezed.

We need a labour movement campaign to fight these trends. We must demand an end to benefits cuts combined with new social housing at rents that are truly affordable. A maximum rent in social and private housing. We need legal regulation of private sector housing. Slum landlords should have their property confiscated and converted to social housing.

But we need a movement that can build a campaign for these demands. Since 2008 Spain has seen a movement against the repossession of homes where the mortgage is in default. In the USA there have been community-based organisation against the destruction of social housing and foreclosure on mortgages (there vacant properties have become derelict and whole areas have become semi-populated wastelands).

The New Era estate campaign and Focus E15 campaign on the Carpenters Estate in east London show the potential of housing to become a major focus in the UK. Without that fight back, housing will become less affordable, of poorer quality and more insecure.

Save our schools!

By Duncan Morrison

A packed Stop Academies in Lewisham (SAIL) meeting on Monday 8 December heard that Lewisham NUT has begun indicative strike ballots in five secondary schools which are considering going for academy status.

The meeting also heard from school students who are planning walk outs and have already organised petitioning of their fellow students in the schools affected.

Parents explained how they were attempting to put pressure on the governors of the schools, local councillors, the local authority's education department and the directly elected mayor.

At Sedghehill School, which seems to be the trail-blazer, the local education authority is trying to dismiss the governing body and appoint an Interim Executive Board. This is against the wishes of the students, the parents, the teaching staff and the leadership of the school.

The purported reason for the move is a dip in the school's exam results, following a previous Ofsted inspection grading of "Requires Improvement". However, in the aftermath of the Ofsted inspection the school was given time and was addressing the issues raised by the inspection. The fall in results was in line with other local secondary schools and a fall in exam results across the country.

The real reason for the attempted academisation is financial and ideological. It is an attempt by the council to cut costs and also to get some of their mates' snouts in the trough. These motives are underlined by the council giving the governing body only one week to make the case why they shouldn't be disbanded.

In response to the attempt to impose an Interim Executive Board, there will be a lobby of the council on Friday 12 December at 4pm at Lewisham Town Hall, where a petition will be handed to the council by students, parents and staff at the school.



Stop Academies in Lewisham in the local news

£22m spent on academies

By Harry Davies

A recent study by the Local Government Association has revealed that the cost to local authorities as a result of academy conversion could be well in excess of £22 million.

Only 150 authorities provided data, suggesting that the real figure could be as much as double. The costs were largely generated by a combination of legal fees and budget deficits within the converting schools, which were met by the authority concerned.

A statement from the Independent Academies Association suggested that this was the result of bad management on the part of the authorities concerned, with the strong implication that the academy programme (and, by definition, the creeping privatisation of education) was the only possible solution. Given the slashing of education funding to local authorities and the discontinuation of school rebuilding and renovation projects, this is a point of view and a "solution" utterly disconnected from the realities that face education workers every day.

The Department of Education commented that "Local authorities are only required to cover a school's deficit costs if it has become a sponsored academy after a prolonged period of underperformance."

Needless to say, "underperformance" is very much in the eye of the beholder, as anyone who has suffered under an Ofsted inspection will confirm.

Left challenge in NUT

By Patrick Murphy

I am standing for the Deputy General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) against incumbent Kevin Courtney and right-winger Ian Grayson. I stand for a radically different way of running the union, for a union that is organised from the bottom up not just one that has "left wing" leaders at the top.

Power in the workplace

We can only improve the lives of members if the Union is strong at work. I want to see workplace branches recognised and given democratic power in the Union. Union power comes from workers collectively organising at a workplace level, being able to challenge management on a day to day basis. I stand for one union for all school and college workers; not just for "professional unity" of teachers but a union where we can organise alongside all workers in the same workplace. The union should carry out an organising drive in all academies. Academy chain members should be able to choose their own representatives and control negotiations with academy chain bosses. There should be a trained rep in every workplace, not just someone who can put up union posters but a trained troublemaker, ready to organise members collectively.

Worst attacks in a generation

The abolition of national pay scale and a "work-till-we-drop" policy which forces teachers to work to 68+, as well as paying more for a worse pension and the endless rise in workload, with teachers working 60 hours per week amount to the worst attacks on teachers in a generation.

We have not done all that we could to resist these attacks.

Over the past four years there has been no strategy for winning the pensions and pay dispute. Occasional one-day protests have substituted for a serious strategy to beat back government attacks as well as squandering momentum and confidence amongst members. A lack of a vision of how the union can build strength at a workplace level and use creative tactics has hampered the leadership. I argued and organised

for an alternative. A quick, intense response when attacked; a calendar of action published to members in advance- members and government should know we are serious; acting jointly with other unions where possible but act alone where necessary.



National Campaign, National Demands

The demands of the campaign have been unclear at best, at their worst involved demanding that "Gove must go" and giving no positive demands of what we want instead of Gove's policies. We should demand a national contract to apply to all teachers in state-funded institutions including academies. The reinstatement of a national negotiated pay scale, an immediate £2000 increase for all teachers. The union should put in a new pay claim every year to cover increase in living costs. A limit on classroom hours and at least 20% planning and preparation time to provide a better education for students.

A teachers' leader on a teachers' salary

If elected I will stay on my teacher's wage. Union leaders should only get a pay rise when they win one for their teachers. As a revolutionary socialist and member of Workers' Liberty I stand for a radically different trade union movement to the one we have today. A trade union movement rooted in the workplace, not in union leaders' London offices, with elected and accountable officials on a workers' wage.

I am also part of the Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC), a delegate-based organisation which argues for a different strategy in the union and organises for it on the ground.

Teachers: cut the hours!

By a London teacher

Nicky Morgan replaced Michael Gove as education minister in July. Tory prime minister David Cameron wanted her to continue Gove's drive for academies and free schools, but smooth the sharp edges and win back some of the Tories' lost support among teachers and others concerned with schooling.

She asked teachers for ideas on easing workload, in a survey which closed on 21 November, and says she will announce plans in the New Year.

In my inner London secondary school, the National Union of Teachers school group did a survey of members. Our mean working week is 61.5 hours, the median is 61, and the range goes up to 79 hours. And many of those hours are more intense than in other jobs. About 50% of newly-trained teachers drop out of teaching within five years.

Teaching would probably be one of the more demanding jobs even in a socialist society. The vehemently un-socialist English system is much more oppressive than where teachers' union organisation is stronger.

Part of the cause is not cuts, but the opposite — the inflation of managerial staff in schools. My school in London has 11 vice-principals and assistant principals, where a school of similar size in Australia would have two. These people were good teachers, and now are mainly managers. There are countless "managers" and "directors" and "officers" doing what in Australia would be done by a single school business manager.

The system of six people doing the work of one leads to endless meetings, crackpot "initiatives", showers of emails, difficulty in getting definite answers on anything, and much less efficient administration.

For classroom teachers such over-management, and the fact of the managers being terrified by Ofsted and league tables, mean:

- fussy regulations about how students' work should be marked, data should be logged, and lessons should be planned;
- unnecessary meetings;
- punitive and oppressive lesson observations and "performance management" systems.

Theoretically teachers in local authority schools, and some academies, have a limit of 1265 hours a year on their "directed time". Some schools, however, put heavy pressure on teachers to be on site between 7.30am and 6pm; and, unlike in other countries, there is no set limit on classroom hours.

In Finland, which tops international rankings for schooling outcomes, teachers do 20 classroom hours a week. In Queensland, Australia, it is 20.67 hours. In France, the standard requirement for teachers is 24 classroom hours a week. For "professeurs certifiés" in junior and senior high schools it is 16.5 hours. In Germany it varies from state to state. For Gymnasium (like grammar school) teachers in Hamburg it is 21.4 hours.

The NUT has formulated eight demands on workload (bit.ly/nutwkld). Unfortunately the headline demands are all quite vague: where there are specifics, for example a limit to three observations a year, they are in the small print.

Patrick Murphy, the left candidate for NUT deputy general secretary, has made workload a theme of his campaign: "a national contract to apply to all teachers in state-funded institutions including academies".

This contract needs to include definite ceilings on meetings, required written reports and data-entry, and performance-management impositions.

Firefighters strike over pensions

By Darren Bedford

Firefighters in England began another 24 hours of strike action as Solidarity went to press, as part of the FBU's long-running pensions dispute.

The FBU also called a demonstration in Aylesbury, Buckingham on the same day, to rally activists for the pensions fight and to show solidarity with FBU executive council member Ricky Matthews, who was sacked during the four-day strike in November. Firefighters gathered in Aylesbury to demonstrate their anger with government proposals to make them work to 60.

The FBU has also had success with its political campaign to get the regulations going through Westminster

annulled. An early day motion has been turned into a "prayer" — in the arcane language of parliament — that if debated and voted upon, could annul the new scheme. So far, a remarkable 260 MPs have signed it — far more than union-backed EDMs get. Although initially sponsored by left Labour MPs, it now has the support of Ed Miliband and the Labour front bench, as well as 16 Lib-Dems and other opposition MPs.

The only visible dissent from the FBU leadership's strategy is from some London, Essex and the North West officials, who have organised meetings calling for "a more hard-hitting programme of strikes". However they are not clear about the duration of further strikes, with some pushing for two days and others for



Firefighters picketing Euston fire station

eight — nor on the objectives of such an escalation, with most simply seeking more protection for long-serving firefighters.

This does not seem like real rank and file dissent — FBU branches and commit-

tees even in these brigades have consistently voted for the leadership's strategy.

Rather it is currently the manoeuvring of some well-placed officials, with little echo among FBU members.

Shelter strike over pay

By Dale Street

Unite members employed by housing charity Shelter have voted 70% to 30% in favour of national strike action.

Strikes are scheduled for 16 to 18 December inclusive, and 12 to 16 January inclusive.

Shelter proposes to cut pay, up to £5,000 a year for new advice and support workers, and up to £3,000 a year for existing frontline staff.

Shelter is also proposing to create different pay scales for frontline and non-frontline staff. This would leave some Shelter workers earning £3,000 a year less than other staff on the same grade but in a different role.

The strike is the latest dispute to be triggered by the "contract culture" and "race to the bottom" which is now embedded in the so-called "not-for-profit" sector. In October workers at St Mungo's Broadway struck against contract changes and won.

To win NHS or council contracts, "not for profit" employers cut back on rates of pay and training for their staff. Some employers do this before bidding for a contract, others do it after winning a contract. This "race to the bottom" means different employers seek to



Ken Loach visiting Shelter picket lines in 2008

win contracts on the basis of the lowest bid — at the expense of their employees' living standards, and quality of service provided.

At the same time, grotesquely large salaries are paid to senior managers and chief executives, as they are supposedly the ones doing the "real" work — putting together the bids which will win contracts.

The "not for profit" sector is turned from an agency which challenges inequality in society into a mechanism for reproducing and maintaining that inequality — by creating its own low-paid workforce, and by providing minimal "sticking plaster" services levels to their client groups.

Bosses argue decent terms and conditions for employ-

ees would mean worse services for clients, or even the loss of the contract. According to its Chief Executive, Shelter has "a simple but painful choice: keep the higher pay levels, cut our services and make some roles redundant, or maintain the number of people we help and reduce salaries for new staff."

Shelter employees often work in small workplaces, making it easier for management to bully staff into not striking.

Trade unionists should rally round and support Shelter strikers, with financial support, practical support with leafletting and media campaigning as well as picket line visits.

Cleaners strike again

By Gemma Short

Cleaners employed by Interserve at London Waterloo train station struck again on Friday 5 December.

This follows two strikes last month in an ongoing dispute about racism and bullying from managers.

The dispute was sparked when a manager was overheard to say that the company should not employ black people.

The RMT union says bosses have refused to address the allegation through agreed procedures. The union also says Interserve has underpaid wages, as well as victimising, bullying and harassing staff.

Interserve bosses at Waterloo have struggled to maintain a skeleton cleaning service at the train station, even though they have bussed in agency cleaners from across the capital.

Interserve cleaners across the Bakerloo, Victoria and Central underground lines are due to be balloted over unpaid wages and management bullying.

Tube ticket office closures

By Ollie Moore

London Underground has announced its schedule for closing every ticket office on the Tube, starting from early 2015.

It has done this despite the publication of a passenger survey conducted by independent watchdog London TravelWatch which shows the strength of public opposition to the closures.

TravelWatch says that its wider research, from 2013, "clearly demonstrated the strong feeling that passengers place significant value on the presence of ticket offices". It also says that the data from its 2014 survey "indi-

cates that ticket offices are more used by minority groups, and the loss of ticket offices could present a significant barrier to travel for the elderly and those who consider themselves to have disabilities in particular.

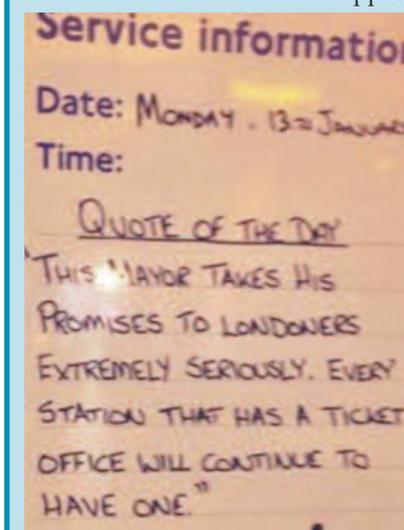
"Some passengers have also commented that they experience considerable difficulty in using ticket machines, especially if they have learning difficulties or dyslexia and the needs of these passengers will have to be further considered."

Despite LU's claims that its closures, which will be accompanied by drastic staffing cuts of nearly 1,000 posts, are about improving service, the public opposition shows that they

are motivated by pro-austerity ideology driven by Boris Johnson's City Hall.

Tube union RMT and campaign coalition Hands Off London Transport plans a series of demonstrations at Tube stations, including those hit by staffing cuts of up to 50%.

• handsofflondon-transport.wordpress.com



Tube information board points out Boris's broken promises

London bus drivers balloted over pay

By Charlotte Zalens

Unite is balloting over 20,000 bus drivers across different London bus companies over disparities in pay from company to company.

In a consultative ballot in November returned 96% in favour of strikes.

Bus drivers in the capital do not have a collective pay agreement, meaning pay is negotiated company by company leading to disparities. This results in pay gaps of over £2 an hour for new starters with pay varying

from £9.30 to £11.46 an hour depending on the company.

Wayne King London regional officer for Unite said: "Pay on London buses has become a farce. You have drivers doing the same work, driving the same routes at the same time of day, but being paid different rates."

"Rather than one set of negotiations covering all of London's bus drivers we have 18. It is not only inefficient but it is leading to pay inequality."

The ballot closes on 18 December.



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US protests spread

By Gemma Short

The news that police officers involved in the death of black man Eric Garner will not face criminal charges has sparked protests across the US.

In a situation similar to that of the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, a New York Grand Jury decided not to indict the officers who choked Eric to death using a stranglehold.

Eric was stopped by police on suspicion selling illegal cigarettes in July. After a struggle Eric was tackled to the ground and held in a chokehold, banned by the New York Police Department (NYPD), even as he gasped "I can't breathe". He was later pronounced dead in hospital.

An autopsy found Eric died as a direct result of the chokehold, compressions to his chest and prone positioning during his restraint by the police. A New York city medical examiner ruled that Eric's death was homi-

cide and called for criminal charges to be brought.

NYPD outlawed the use of chokeholds two decades ago. Yet between January 2009 and June 2014 the independent agency that investigates police misconduct in the city, received 1,128 civilian complaints over chokeholds. The NYPD has been criticised for its "broken windows" policing philosophy which emphasises cracking down on petty crime, such as selling un-taxed cigarettes.

NEW YORK
Reportedly the policy also includes deliberate racial profiling, daily harassment of black people on the streets by police.

Since the Grand Jury decision on 3 December protestors have gathered in Times Square and Union Square nightly, thousands have blocked Brooklyn Bridge and more still blocked the Staten Island ferry terminal and Lincoln Tunnel. Protesters also staged "die-ins" at

road intersections as well as in high profile shopping locations such as Macy's.

American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten was arrested in protests on 4 December, along with 200 others. On Monday 8 December protesters staged a "die-in" at City Hall.

Protests have also taken place in Brooklyn over the shooting by police of another unarmed black man, Akai Gurley. Police are claiming that the officer's gun fired "accidentally", though it is as yet unclear why he was patrolling with his gun drawn and ready to fire.

Protests have continued in Cleveland, Ohio, after the death of 12 year old Tamir Rice shot dead by police on 22 November. Video footage released by the state police department showed police officers shot Tamir less than two seconds after arriving on the scene. It has also emerged that the officer who shot Tamir has been judged unfit for duty, and to



handle live firearms two years ago. Another enquiry into Cleveland police found that officers "violate basic constitutional precepts in their use of deadly and less lethal force at a rate that is highly significant". A 13-year-old boy was repeatedly punched in the face. A semi-naked hostage was shot at as he fled his captors.

In Phoenix, Arizona, another unarmed black man Romain Brisbon was shot dead by police on 2 December. Romain was delivering McDonalds food to his family from his car when police approached him on a sus-

pected drugs crime. Police say they thought Romain was reading in his pocket for a gun – it turned out to be a pill box.

"It gives you the impression that it's open season on killing black men," Ann Hart, chairwoman of Phoenix's African-American police advisory council, said in a television interview.

Protests in Berkeley, California have been held to mark the 50th anniversary since the college administration shut down the Free Speech Movement, which fought for freedom of political expression on campus

particularly in solidarity with civil rights protests, with the arresting 800 students who were staging a sit in. Police have used tear gas and rubber bullets against today's students at Berkeley, and arrested over 150.

On 4 December fast food workers across the US struck in the continuing campaign for \$15 an hour and union recognition.

Strikers in St Louis staged "die-ins" at fast food and convenience stores across the city, chanting "hands up, don't shoot!"

Belgium: general strike on 15 December

By a correspondent in Liège

The three union confederations in Belgium – the FGTB, linked to the social-democratic parties; the CSC, the Catholic confederation; and even the liberal-linked CGSLB – have called a general strike for 15 December against the new right-wing government's cuts plans.

There have been regional general strikes on 24 November, 1 December, and 8 November, and a demonstration on 6 November.

The demonstration was the biggest labour protest in Belgium for many years. The regional strikes have been well-supported too: in each area, nothing has moved on the day of the strike. Teachers have struck

nationally for the first time since the 1980s.

Even the demonstration on Thursday 6 November was a sort of strike. Most people on the demonstration had struck in order to join it. There were running battles with police, and cars set on fire.

The strikes have been well-supported in the Flemish areas as well, although politically those areas are dominated by right-wing political movements, such as N-VA [a right-wing Flemish nationalist party now in the coalition government]. Hundreds of Antwerp dockers formed a visible and noisy presence on the 6 November demonstration.

N-VA has built itself up off the back of the far-right Flemish nationalist movement Vlaams Belang, super-

seding it in something like the way Thatcher gazumped the National Front after 1979. To some extent, commonplace anti-immigrant rhetoric has been transmuted into talk about the supposedly "lazy" French-speaking inhabitants of Southern Belgium. Nonetheless, the strikes have been very well-supported in the Flemish north.

The trade union bureaucracy here in Belgium is behaving better than its equivalents usually do in England these days. The point at which a deal will be cut, or maybe a sell-out, is a long way down the track. There will be a lot of dispute before that.

There are voices in some unions for "grèves au finis" – indefinite strikes.

In the strikes we have had working-class unity across

the different union confederations, even though some unions are affiliated to parties in the government. Speakers at the rallies say things like "we don't want a Thatcher here". The economic policies are an attempt at an accelerated version of the monetarism we saw in England in the 1980s.

The social-democratic parties [Belgium has two, the French-speaking PS and the Flemish sp.a] have generally been supportive. The mayor of Brussels was on the 6 November demonstration, and got attacked for that in the press.

They support the movement only because they are in opposition at the federal level. A lot of anti-working-class measures had already been put through by the previous government, or

put in the pipeline. The protests will also include strikes against the devolved regional governments in Wallonia and elsewhere.

A lot of the PS support for national action against the federal government is aimed at bypassing local action against things the PS is doing in regional government.

The union leaders seem to be digging in for a hefty winter of discontent.

The government's plans include cuts in public services, but the issues most talked about on the demonstrations are the increase in the pension age and the measures to cut wages. Belgium has a legal requirement that wages be indexed so that they rise in line with inflation. The government plans to delay an indexation-increase, so that pay is

cut in real terms.

The current coalition government was formed in October after negotiations following Belgium's general election in May, and then moved very quickly.

In Belgium, a lot of old social-democratic gains have not yet been removed in the way they have been in the UK. Some gains have been hollowed out, but not abolished.

I don't think the government will be able to get everything it wants. Thatcher had years to prepare and the government in Belgium does not have anything like that time period in which to prepare its attacks.

If the opposition melted away, the government would go for the lot, but I don't think that will happen.