Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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Syrian war degrades

By Rhodri Evans

The civil war in Syria has degraded further into region-wide sectarian conflict.

This follows the Assad government in Syria retaking the town of Qusair, near the Lebanese border, in early June, with the help of the Lebanese Shia-Islamist militia Hezbollah,

In the *Independent on Sunday* of 16 June, Robert Fisk reported: "a military decision has been taken in [Shia-Islamist] Iran — even before last week's presidential election — to send a first contingent of 4,000 Iranian Revolutionary Guards to Syria to support President Bashar al-Assad's forces... Iran is now fully committed to preserving Assad's regime..."

The day before, Egypt's [Sunni-Islamist] president Mohammed Morsi had declared to a mass rally in Cairo that his government had cut off diplomatic relations with Assad. "The Egyptian people supports the struggle of the Syrian people, materially and morally, and Egypt, its nation, leadership... and army, will not abandon the Syrian people until it achieves its rights and dignity".

Morsi, troubled by a petition campaign calling for his resignation which has so far got 15 million signatures, was trying to please the crowd. The Egyptian armed forces are not likely to get involved in Syria. However, the day before, Ahmed Aref, a spokesperson for Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood movement, said that the Brotherhood backed a call made on Thursday 13 June by ultra-Sunni clerics, in a "Syria solidarity week" organised by the Brotherhood, for a "holy war" (against Shiites) in Syria.

US president Obama has said that the US will move on from training rebels at a camp in Jordan, as it has long done, to supplying arms. Syria expert Joshua Landis comments: Obama's "new policy of supplying weapons is not really a change of policy at all, but rather a continuation of his previous policy of pushing for a political solution. But [in fact] this... is a recipe for dividing the country along the present battle lines, give or take a bit" — i.e. for partitioning it into Sunni, Kurdish, and Alawite (Shia-allied) sub-states.

The Geneva conference on peace in Syria, sponsored by the US and Russia, is now indefinitely postponed. At the G8 conference on 17-18 June, Russian president Vladimir Putin refused to accept any comment about Assad stepping down in the official communique, and stridently defended Russia's supply of arms to "the legal government of Syria".

It seems unlikely that Britain's push to end the EU's arms embargo on Syria will be followed any time soon by Britain actually sending arms. But that is secondary. As Fisk comments: "For the first time, all of America's friends in the region are Sunni Muslims and all of its enemies are Shiites. Breaking all President Barack Obama's rules of disengagement, the US is now fully engaged on the side of armed groups which include the most extreme Sunni Islamist movements in the Middle East".

The job of socialists is to warn against the sectarian polarisation, and to support whatever democratic, secular, and working-class forces can sustain a presence in the Syrian cauldron.

Bedroom Tax arrears soar

By David Kirk

Non-payment and partial payment of the extra rent social housing tenants have to pay because of the Bedroom Tax is beginning to put pressure on the policy.

Leeds City Council has said about 50% of its affected tenants are in arrears and this is expected to rise. Many other local authorities and housing associations have similar levels of arrears.

On 7 June 34 Labour local authorities met in Manchester and issued a statement condemning the Bedroom Tax and demanding that it is repealed. This is very welcome; it that puts Labour in local government ahead of the national party which has given no commitment to repeal the policy if they win the general election.

The conference also discussed the issue of non payment, but the contents of this discussion have been kept quiet.

Anti-Bedroom Tax campaigners are now demanding social landlords commit to a no-eviction policy. It's clear that some local authorities like Leeds do have this as their de facto policy but are continuing to hassle tenants for payment and in some cases threatening legal action rather then evictions.

There have been some cases already of housing associations taking tenants to court. Recently Southway Housing Trust in Manchester took Ella Lorelle, a mature student and mother to court to evict her for arrears. Thanks to pressure by local campaigners the case was dropped and Ella is now receiving Discretionary Housing Payment.

Some groups — Disabled People against Cuts and the SWP — have set up the national Anti-Bedroom Tax and Benefit Justice Network. Whilst some local Bedroom Tax groups seem wary of this body, it does seem to be a step forward, based on delegates from local groups.

It has called a day of action on the Bedroom Tax on 27 July.

Solidarity 290 has been printed two days later than usual, on Thursday/Friday 20/21 June, so that it can be distributed at the Ideas for Freedom weekend. Solidarity 291 will be printed on Tue/Wed 2/3 July

Always next year?

By a Unison conference delegate

Unison members in local government recently voted by 59%, on a low turnout, to accept a 1% pay deal.

Although the ballot was already over by the time Unison's Local Government Sector conference met in Liverpool (16-17 June), many activists felt the union leadership had failed to lead. The Local Government Service Group Executive voted by 14-13 to describe the deal as "the best that can be achieved through negotiation", a de facto endorsement.

At the conference, it justified its stance by saying that members had no appetite for a fight, but that it would build for a fight against next year's pay deal — a grimly comic rerun of the scenes from the 2012 conference where Unison leader Dave Prentis took a sledgehammer to a pound sign made of ice, signalling his intent to "smash the pay freeze". One year on, he and his leadership have capitulated.

Although it is true that morale amongst local government workers is low, particularly following the defeat of the 2011 pensions dispute, it is by no means impossible to win the arguments for a fightback if branch, regional, or national leaders actually attempt to have them.

A rank-and-file network within Unison's industrial sectors is also needed.

• Unison's National Delegate Conference voted by a large majority to reject an amendment committing the union to take a more serious attitude towards confronting violence against women.

Opponents of the motion spoke against it on the outrageous basis that it did not mention violence against men — ignoring that violence against women arises from the systemic oppression of women. Many of the speakers in favour of the motion, including from the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers' Party, spoke only weakly, emphasising their qualifications and slight differences with the motion.

That it was voted down is disgraceful, and emphasises the need for a socialist-feminist campaign to transform the culture of the working-class movement.

Hasan Rohani, the rulers' choice

By Morad Shirin, Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency

On 15 June many thousands of people were allowed on to the streets of Tehran and other cities to celebrate the "election" of Hassan Rohani as "president" of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Rohani's "landslide victory" quickly brought about statements from Ali Khamenei, the Leader, and many notable clergy, state institutions and political groupings congratulating him. Even the pasdaran, the so-called "Revolutionary Guards", were quick to pledge their loyalty.

Across the world there has been a sigh of relief: Ahmadinejad will be gone in less than two months and his replacement is said to be a "moderate conservative", nicknamed the "diplomat sheikh". Even Barack Obama has said that he is now "cautiously optimistic: about progress on the deadlocked nuclear negotiations.

RENEW

This "election" was precisely what the regime needed to renew its legitimacy at home.

It wanted to give the supporters of Mousavi and Karroubi someone they could vote for — and to prepare a semblance of unity for future negotiations with the imperialist countries.

Who is Hassan Rohani and what can we expect of him?

Rohani has said that his election" represents the "victory of moderation over extremism" and that he wants "to enhance mutual trust between Iran and other countries".

In reality he is a conservative who has held many security and military roles within the regime, including being chosen by Khamenei to be the head of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) for 16 years.

As part of this role he was the regime's top representative in the nuclear negotiations with the EU during 2003-05. In October 2003, the regime stopped uranium enrichment (and conversion activities) and did not resume enrichment until early in 2006 (conversion restarted in 2005). Although he is praised by the EU and the reformists for negotiating this period of suspension, what they forget is that this was also when the regime was able to take major steps in mastering the nuclear fuel cycle!

Inside Iran his "moderation" has been on full display whenever peaceful protests have had to be smashed, most notably in 1999.

In July 1999, as the head of the SNSC, Rohani said at a rally: "At dusk yesterday we received a decisive revolutionary order to crush mercilessly and monumentally any move of these opportunist elements wherever it may occur. From today our people shall witness how... our law enforcement force... shall deal with these opportunists and riotous elements, if they simply dare to show their faces."

The "opportunists and riotous elements" Rohani had in mind were Tehran University's pro-democracy students. This speech gave the pasdaran and the basij militia the green light to attack the dormitories, to throw students out of the windows, to kill and to maim them.

Rohani is clearly the person that the regime has selected to help mend the public rift between its main factions — which has become so bitter since 2011.

Four years ago — after a wave of killings and repression — they created unity around Ahmadinejad in fear of what the masses could do to the whole regime. However, this collapsed after about two and a half years, with Ahmadinejad even openly defying Khamenei on a number of occasions!

The Iranian bourgeoisie urgently needs to come to some kind of an agreement with imperialism so that at least some of the sanctions are lifted. The more the sanctions stay in place — and earlier this month new ones hitting the non-oil sectors were also introduced — the more the economic problems begin to mount.

With the official rate of inflation at 32%, and food price inflation at about 60%, official unemployment at 15% (and 30% youth unemployment), even most of the hardliners have stopped pretending that the sanctions are not crippling the economy. The Syria crisis has also intensified the pressure on the regime.

Whether the regime can resolve all its 34-year-old disputes with US imperialism, and how long this process might take, revolutionary Marxists now need to concentrate on helping workers to build and co-ordinate clandestine action committees — so that the workers' movement can take full benefit of even the slightest let up in the repression.

We also must develop revolutionary cells that will become the building blocks of a future Bolshevik-Leninist party.

Italian local elections

Over 50% abstained in the second round of administrative elections in Italy — a stark illustration of a continuing political crisis.

The Democratic Party came out ahead but it was hardly an endorsement of their "austerity" agenda. Voting for the 5 Star Movement collapsed.

Meanwhile the unions remain passive in the face of creeping authoritarian reform and cuts.

• Article by Hugh Edwards on our website: bit.ly/it-elect

Brazil: against power, corruption and cuts

By Rosalind Robson

200,000 people marched in Brazil's biggest cities on Monday 17 June against rising public transport costs. Further demonstrations are planned on the day we go to press (Thursday 20th)

Protests began at the beginning of June after Sao Paulo residents marched against an increase in the price of a single bus fare, from 3 real to 3.2 real. That issue was just a spark, bringing to the fore a number of long-standing grievances. Inflation in Brazil (a capitalist success story) is running at 15%; government corruption is widespread; the government is spending vast sums on the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics while social spending is being cut.

Social networking and a protest video (against the money being spent on 12 new football stadiums) has helped to spread the protests.

The marches have met rubber bullets and tear gas from the police. Continuing police repression fuelled further anger, clashes with the police as well as more organised direct action.

Local political rulers in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro have announced that the bus and subway price rises will be rescinded.

But will that stop the protests?

From a statement by the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL)

This dispute that began with the youth is the tip of the iceberg of a huge collective dissatisfaction. The intransigence and police brutality is throwing petrol on the fire.

The escalation of violence by the military police, especially in the recent protests in the state capital, demonstrates that it is the policy of the state and local government not to live with disagreement, criticism and protests. It has resulted in the criminalisation of social movements and protesters. This is unacceptable in a democratic society. We demand the immediate release of all people arrested.

By accusing this broad and legitimate movement of vandalism, the unscrupulous rulers and Brazilian elite try to manipulate public opinion; but there is enormous popular support for demonstrations including a repudiation of coercion and police violence.

Until recently transportation prices were exempt from taxes, and that should have prevented any increase. It is absurd that even with these tax advantages, transport entrepreneurs just adjust prices. They do this with the consent of the mayors and governors. This collusion between business and government is shown by the public transportation companies funding the election campaigns of those who now support increases.

In cities ruled by the PSOL — Macapa and Itaocara — there was no increase in bus fares. That was the political decision of the mayors. We are at the service of workers and youth and do not enter into agreements with entrepreneurs.

We believe that it is possible with a balanced budget and political will to organise free passes to students and even zero tariffs. There is nothing unreal or absurd in these proposals — we want to ensure the citizens' constitutional right to mobility.

Left Unity sets conference for 23 November

By Gemma Short

Left Unity held its first National Coordinating Group meeting in Doncaster on Saturday 15 June. The meeting was attended by representatives from 36 local groups, as well as the 10 members who were directly elected at the 11 May national meeting.

Much of the agenda was taken up with basic organising of the new coalition and with the timetable for a founding conference set for 23 November. Broader political discussions were had between delegates over lunch.

The National Coordinating Group now has the remit to prepare the November conference. Policy Commissions have been set up to draft policy. Amendments on 15 June gained the right for local groups and political platforms to contribute to that process.

Many delegates were unhappy that the directly elected group of 10 had been taking decisions since 11 May without minutes being circulated properly. It was agreed that all minutes be posted on the Left Unity website.

The directly elected 10 had already discussed things such as a broadsheet to be used at the People's Assembly and how to work with the press and the labour movement. These are political issues, yet Left Unity has not yet adopted any policy to guide the content of articles!

I would have been forgiven for thinking that Left Unity had taken the decision to contest the next possible elections and was well on the way to gearing up for it. In fact Left Unity has no formal policy on this — it is meant to be decided at the November founding conference.

Those involved in Left Unity seem to have a wide range of views on the role of a left of Labour political party, its composition, its relationship to the existing left and the wider labour movement and how soon it should come about, if at all — and on the very political basis of such a party, for example whether or not it should be explicitly socialist and committed to working-class struggle. This debate needs to be had as fully as possible before electoral tactics can be rationally discussed.

Thanks to a push from people at the meeting, there is now space for amendments to policy etc. However Left Unity now has a structure very reminiscent of the Labour Party. The Commissions will be made up of Left Unity supporters and "experts in the field" on a variety of topics. These topics are grouped in such a way that would form the sections of an election manifesto *if* Left Unity were to have one in the near future.

These Commissions and the topics look like a collection of left policy areas that wouldn't look out of place in the Green Party manifesto or even, dare I say, the Labour Party one. What they lack is a unifying thread and that should be the bedrock of any initiative, focused on working class representation and orientation to the labour movement.

Left Unity seems to be well on its way to constituting itself as a Party that intends to contest elections, yet the left and the labour movement has not yet had the opportunity to have a serious discussion on working class political representation.

We need to discuss what sort of left unity we need, how to relate to the existing left and the Labour-affiliated unions, and how to transform the labour movement from its current passivity.

• A longer report from the Left Unity National Co-ordinating Group (NCG) on 15 June 2013 compiled by Rugby LU delegate Pete McLaren can be found at: www.independentsocialistnetwork.org

A "show of force" or attempt at shortcut?

The Left
By Jonny West

If the journalist Owen Jones is to be believed, the People's Assembly on 22 June will be a "show of force", and a "launchpad for a missing force in British politics". The "movement" that will emerge from it will "give Labour some real competition" (Jones is a Labour Party member).

Jones's fanfares for the Assembly emphasise its breadth and cross-party nature, although his trumpeting of the involvement of Caroline Lucas and the Greens may now be a little embarrassing given their strikebreaking and scab-herding in Brighton (see back page).

On the far left, only Counterfire — the animating element behind the Assembly — has been unambiguously enthusiastic, but its coverage has mainly consisted of plain-vanilla promotion of the event.

More in-depth analysis of its wider political potential, or any indication as to how Counterfire plans to intervene in it or what it plans to propose, is in shorter supply.

An article by Alex Snowdon from 15 May argues that the Assembly will be the "main basis for co-ordinating resistance to cuts for some time to come", and that it "should be the central strategic priority for the left". The article is shot through with a feverish sense of urgency ("We have to make [the People's Assembly] work. The stakes are too high for us to fail"), and although it sets out to address the Assembly's critics, it leaves some key questions unanswered. For example, how does the call for "long-term […] local coalitions" arising out of the Assembly intersect with existing local anti-cuts campaigns? Will Counterfire be pushing for the creation of local People's Assemblies as alternatives to existing bodies?

The article also approvingly cites the experience of Respect as a model of how an electoral vehicle can emerge from a "mass movement encompassing new forces", implying that something similar could cohere out of the People's Assembly in future.

The Socialist Workers' Party, the crisis-ridden organisation that spawned Counterfire in a 2010 split, has been fairly low-key in its support for the Assembly, describing it in a 18 June editorial as "a chance to fight back", and expressing an expectation that it will be "impressive", but warns against ignoring "the role of union leaders and Labour if we are to make our struggle as strong as it can be." The possible implication here is that the ultra-enthusiasts of the Assembly see it as a chance to find a shortcut to a mass movement against austerity that can circumvent the work of transforming the broad labour movement. That is a perfectly valid criticism of some of the Assembly's more fantastical cheerleaders, but if that is indeed what the SWAP mean they should say so.

How will the Assembly intersect with other anti-cuts campaigns?

The main comment on the Assembly from the International Socialist Network, which split from the SWP in March 2013, has come from ex-*Socialist Worker* journalist Tom Walker, who commented coolly on the Assembly, calling out its lack of democratic structures and Counterfire's top-down organisation of the initiative. The article argues that Kate Hudson's and Andrew Burnie "Left Unity" project, rather than the Assembly, is the basket in which to place one's eggs.

For its part, discussion of the Assembly on the Left Unity site has focused on how much LU (whose entire raison d'etre, according to its central organisers, is to create "a new party of the left") can involve itself in an initiative in which Labour figures like Owen Jones are so prominent.

The Socialist Party has hardly commented on the Assembly at all. It criticised, in passing, union leaders' attempts to "contract out" the discussion of a general strike (which, for the Socialist Party, is a kind of political Holy Grail) to "amorphous groups like Coalition of Resistance and their 'People's Assembly'", but has said little else.

Dream or nightmare?

By Colin Foster

In its latest issue, June 2013, the French revolutionary-socialist magazine *Revue Tout est à Nous*, published by the NPA (successor-organisation to the LCR), carries a dossier on "self-organisation in the people's revolution in Syria".

The introduction is gushing: "forms of struggle and administration from below are more developed in the Syrian revolution than in any other process in the other countries in the region... This revolution [in Syria] is an authentic people's revolution whose social motor forces and the workers and, more broadly, the urban and rural poor".

The documents translated from Arabic fail to substantiate that summary. The most vivid is the third, which headlines the election of a council in Deir Ezzor (northern Syria) as a "democratic dream". It is attributed to the middle-east-online.com website, but with a broken link.

Recent reports from Deir Ezzor available on that website include this, in March: "Jihadists of the Hamza unit in Deir Ezzor paraded through the streets to celebrate their upgrade to brigade from battalion.

"We will fight for Syria to be controlled by Islam', Abu Mohammed shouted through a loudspeaker, as a fellow fighter distributed pamphlets about jihad and martyrdom".

And this (12 June): "'Look Shiites, this is how you will end up, you dogs', cries one man shown in the footage filmed in Hatlah [just across the river from Deir Ezzor]...

"'God is greatest. All the Shiite houses have been burned down... Look at the fighters of the jihad (holy war) celebrating their entry into the Shiite infidels' houses', says a man filming a second video".

The other documents report no direct elections outside Deir Ezzor. The dossier ignores the fact that mobilisation can be "from below" (in the sense of not being organised by an established government) and yet sectarian and repressive. The brutality of the Assad regime does not guarantee that the opposition is liberatory.

The NHS exception?

At the G8 in Northern Ireland on 17-18 June, a start was announced for talks on a free-trade deal between the USA and the European Union.

The talks will take two years at least, and may not produce a deal. They were able even to start only because a fudge was devised on France's demands to have its "cultural exception" (measures which protect, for example, French film production) declared off-limits.

Campaigners in Britain have been demanding that the NHS be declared equally off-limits.

Otherwise future restoration of public service in health, in place of the market allocation the Tories have legislated for, will face legal arguments that it is a breach of free-trade treaties.

Scandals about tax avoidance by big corporations have expanded to the point where the G8 summit, in Northern Ireland on 17-18 June, had to promise some tightening-up.

At the same time, though, and less publicly, new tax loopholes are brought in. New legislation called "the Patent Box" came in from 1 April 2013: corporate profits reported as derived from patents and other "intellectual property" get taxed at 10% rather than the headline rate of 23%.

"Controlled foreign companies" (CFC) legislation, for companies controlled from the UK but resident in an overseas territory, gets some of their income taxed at 5.25% rather than the regular rate.

As accounting professor Prem Sikka puts it, "the colonisation of the state by economic elites [is] a key reason for the continuing failure to tackle organised tax avoidance".

Law professor Sol Picciotto adds: "The only way effectively to reform the system of transnational corporation [TNC] taxation is precisely to move towards treating TNCs as what they are, unitary firms — rather than the current system that treats them as loose collections of separate entities" in different countries, recording their income wherever it will get least tax.

The "unitary" approach was not on the agenda at the G8.

Osborne plans Lloyds and RBS sale

The merry-go-round of high finance stalled in 2007-8, throwing off and injuring millions of people. Chancellor George Osborne is anxious to start it up again, and to stage some privatisations in the run-up to the 2015 general election as distraction from the economic gloom.

In 2008 governments across the world, including the most conservative and neo-liberal of them, stepped in to nationalise and bail out banks and financial institutions, and thus to steady the merry-go-round.

Then, they talked of neo-liberalism being discredited, and of a new era of social regulation. Once the financiers regained their balance, however, they began lobbying. The new regulation has been slight, and the nationalised banks have been run as they would be under private ownership, except that the government's guarantees protect them from going bust.

George Osborne wants at least to start the re-privatisation of Lloyds and RBS before 2015. He is considering a scheme in which people could get shares without any down-payment, and pay the government only when they sell on the shares, which they would do only after the shares had risen above the privatisation base-price.

This little bit of something-for-nothing would be paid for by the government accepting a loss. Lloyds shares are now trading at a bit over 60p, and the government bought its 39% stake in the bank at 80p a share; RBS trades between 300p and 350p, and the government bought an 81% stake at 503p.

In 2008-9 the government disbursed £1100 billion in outright buy-outs, loans, and guarantees, to save the banks. Cash losses could never be anything like that much, short of the comprehensive economic meltdown that the intervention was designed to avert. Loans would be repaid, guarantees would not be called on, assets bought could later be sold.

But when the coalition government sold the "good bank" bit of Northern Rock in 2011, it accepted a loss of about £500 million, and kept the "bad bank" bit (a heap of dodgy mortgages) on which there may be further losses. Even now, conditions for banks are tricky, as the Co-op Bank's crisis shows.

The government won't mind about crystallising a loss of £20-odd billion on Lloyds and RBS if it can do a flashy financial manoeuvre and get the merry-go-round whirling again.

The government also plans other privatisations. Royal Mail is to be sold off within a year. A chunk of student loans will be sold off, and possibly, later, the whole Student Loans Company, with nearly £50 billion of outstanding loans.

The nuclear-fuel processing company Urenco is up for sale, and so are a couple of smaller government enterprises; and contracting-out of large areas of police work is being pushed ahead.

All these moves speed the spiral in which the economic depression enriches a few, while the majority suffer the longest and deepest drops in real wages on statistical record in Britain, and cuts in benefits and public services.

The TUC congress in 2012 voted for public ownership under social control of high finance. The unions should demand that Labour commit to that policy, instead of criticising privatisation only on tactical grounds.

Help us raise £15,000

Our Ideas for Freedom event this weekend (22-23 June) marks the end of our fundraising drive. We will take a collection at the event and print a final total in the next issue.

Although we will (probably) *not* reach our full target, we will have raised the lion's share and this has been vital for sustaining and improving our work.

The extra funds have enabled us to:

- Purchase a digital duplicator
- Set up and produce a new workplace bulletin at Lewisham hospital
- Purchase a nearly new i-Mac computer
- Purchase software for that computer
- Cover a 100% increase in electricity bills
- Finance the printing of books and WL supplements in this paper
- Pay for rent, travel and other expenses.

We want to keep up the fundraising in the autumn, with a heavy emphasis on social activities!

Thank-you to everyone who has contributed.

You can contribute in the following ways:

- Taking out a monthly standing order using the form below or at www.workersliberty.org/resources. Please post completed forms to us at the AWL address below.
- Making a donation by cheque, payable to "AWL", or donating online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.
- Organising a fundraising event.
- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell.
- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL. More information: 07796 690874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.

Total raised so far: £11,524

We raised £450 this week from a one-off donation.

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TV workers' battle reopens Greek pol

By Theodora Polenta

On Tuesday 11 June, after Greek prime minister Antonis Samaras announced that he would shut down ERT (the Greek equivalent of the BBC), and sack all its workers. He would set up a new public broadcaster, with fewer staff and lower wages, in due course.

In a sudden operation on the stroke of midnight, police cut off electricity to the antennas and threatened the workers with arrest if they did not leave the building. The ERT workers responded by occupying the station's main building in Athens and broadcasting a protest program via satellite and internet.

Thousands of protesters gathered within hours around the ERT's main Athens building to support the workers.

On Monday 17 June, the government backed down, by way of a court ruling that ERT must be kept open for the time being. Samaras still plans to replace ERT by a new, hugely-cutback service, but his government has been thrown into crisis.

The same day, the left-wing coalition Syriza organised a rally in Athens to demand new elections.

Now is the time to put into action the statement by Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras after the defeat of the teachers' struggle in mid-May. "From now on the government will not have to deal with the trade union leaders. They will have to deal with all of us. "

As with other recent battles (metro workers, teachers, etc.), the ERT workers' fight combines different fronts: trade unionist, political, and ideological. We now need the Left - united in action - to "declare" civil disobedience and unyielding combat.

Alexis Tsipras's statement that "the government will be overthrown by the people and not by parliamentary means" is correct. The pictures of a coalition of the Left forces (Pame, Syriza, Antarsya) in the courtyard of the ERT headquarters prove that unity is not unattainable, but it is built in action.

We need a social, political, trade unionist front of all the forces of the Left (mainly Syriza, KKE , Antarsya), with a program of transitional demands, aiming to overthrow this government and establishing a government of the Left as the starting point for a workers' government with workers' power and workers' control.

Some political observers have argued that the three coalition partners are almost certain to arrive at a compromise formula in connection with ERT, in order to avoid calling new elections, despite the fact that any such formula will make all three look even more ludicrous!

Some other observers do not exclude the possibility that a "formula" will not be found, and a new coalition government will be created, with another prime minister in place of Samaras.

Yet others think that a radical government reshuffle, with the direct involvement of leading political activists from all three coalition parties, should not be ruled out; and others again expect Samaras to call new elections.

The government was shaken by a great surge of solidarity with the ERT workers. Celebrities like the singer Eleftheria Arvanitaki sang for the protesters. The broadcaster's orchestra performed for some time in the building, and their music was relayed over loudspeakers outside.

On Wednesday 12th, Greek newspaper journalists stopped work in solidarity with the ERT workers. Workers at private broadcasters blocked all news programs until noon and reported exclusively on the ERT protests in later news programs.

On Thursday 13th, Greece's two main trade union federations, Gsee and Adedy, went on a 24-hour strike. Tens of thousands of workers demonstrated throughout Greece. In Thessaloniki thousands gathered in front of the building of ERT3, also occupied by the workers.

Picket outside ERT

Bus drivers, railway workers, and seamen struck in solidarity with ERT employees. Some schools were closed, and hospitals worked on emergency cover only. Air traffic controllers struck for two hours. Journalists announced plans to strike until ERT was reopened.

On Thursday evening a joint meeting of representatives of the different media unions voted to continue a strike on all media until Monday, with the sole exception of the media which put themselves in the service of ERT's workers struggle.

The decision took hours of intense debate. The trade union bureaucracy argued the futility of the ERT workers' struggle, due to the strength of the state's strike-breaking mechanisms, and claimed that the media workers should break their strike in order to inform the public about the ERT workers' struggle.

The most militant of the media worker trade unionists explained that media workers could not backtrack. They could not betray the tens of thousands of workers who stood with them. They could not betray the workers of ERT. They had no right to sell out the struggle as did the leadership of the teachers' federation, OLME.

The same day, Thursday 13th, the Geneva-based European Broadcasting Union (EBU) took the ERT signal from a studio in Thessaloniki and transmitted it back to Greek homes over satellite. KKE also offered the channel of its party broadcaster to transmit the signal from the ERT program. 50 European TV broadcasters that signed a joint declaration against the shutdown.

UPTURNED

The government not only threatened to jail ERT workers if they did not leave the building, but also tried to stop broadcasting. The Greek Communist Party (KKE) station that was broadcasting the ERT programme was shut down.

All the left wing websites and newspapers dedicated their electronic spaces to coverage of the ERT occupation.

The ERT workers' action upturned the "normal" situation where a handful of owners, contractors and bankers control information.

The strikers have answered or started to answer the pressing question: How can the monopoly of media and dissemination of information to the society belong to individuals and not to the democratic institutions of society? What gives the government the right to shut down ERT at the same time that the government has granted asylum to the private channel media barons to continue to use the frequencies belonging to the Greek people?

On Sunday 16th a special festival was organised: "We expect you all to join our voices to the defence of ERT against the erosion of freedom of speech and the intended abolition of democracy".

The activities outside the ERT's building Radiomegaro evoked memories of the May 68 movements. The Sunday program started off with the youth orchestra of the youth followed by a kids' zone with theatrical and other workshops, puppet theatre, juggling, and more.

Between 3 and 6 in the afternoon a social open dinner was organised under the slogan, "Let's eat together" (a reference to the infamous quip by former Pasok minister Theodoros Pangalos when asked about the cause of the crisis: "We all ate together").

Then there was a music festival, with folk bands, traditional music, songs, lyre, violin, dulcimer, and more. The evening concluded by a concert with figures from the Greek indie, rock and hip hop alternative scene.

In another moving event the National Symphony Orchestra and Choir of ERT performed, knowing that they will not fit into Samaras's plan for a cut price broadcaster.

The ERT workers had also decided to publish a newspaper, named *Independent Opinion*. Over the weekend 15th/16th, that was the only newspaper sold, apart from the *Suns* and *Daily Mails* of the Greek press.

The newspaper covered the ERT issues and carried broader articles on the privatisation spree of the government and the selling-off the collective wealth and resources of Greece, the record of the coalition government, articles of support and solidarity of intellectuals, the role of the media barons in Venezuela, and the Turkish rebellion and protests against the autocratic regime of Erdogan.

The front page declared:

"We are the laid-off workers from ERT. We are the striking journalists, technicians, reporters, photographers, directors, musicians. We are the unemployed who are paying for the crisis and the profits of our bosses.

"We are the casual workers who are working overtime with no insurance on newspapers, radio, TV, and magazines.

"We are all of you who are fighting for a free and democratic press outside the lies, propaganda and slander of the Memorandum government and all Memorandum parties. We are all of you who refuse to be subjugated and who fight back against this government and austerity policies.

"We are the voice of the conscripted metro workers, the seafarers, the teachers... of the overexploited immigrants and the millions of the oppressed.

"We are the echo of Tahrir and Taksim Square…We are yesterdays oppressed, today's rebels and protesters, and tomorrow's winners".

The title of the newspaper referred back to the media work-

litical crisis

ers' strike in 1975. Then too striking workers published a newspaper called *Independent Opinion*.

On Monday 17 June, the day before the court decision keeping ERT open, the media workers called off their strike.

Nonetheless, the week showed that workers do not need bosses to run the media. They can create their own media, which will not be propaganda weapons in the hands of the employers, but weapons in the hands of workers and society, instruments of truth, and the democratic and free exchange of views.

Already, before 11 June, the government owed the ERT workers accrued overtime and nightwork pay, and over 10,000 pending days off in lieu.

In the last five months, the Greek government has already three times used a law enabling to conscript workers into the armed forces and put them under military discipline, in order to crush strikes. Demonstrations and protests are regularly attacked by riot police, and journalists are blocked from reporting on them.

These reactionary policies are the direct result of the brutal social attacks dictated by the Troika and implemented by the Greek government.

The latest data released yesterday show a new rise of unemployment to 27.4 percent in the first quarter of 2013. More than 850,000 jobs have been wiped out since the beginning of Greece's six-year recession, with average wages falling 35 to 50 percent in the same period.

SACK

On Thursday evening 13th, Samaras met with senior EU officials to discuss obtaining the next tranche of €3.3 billion in loans. In order to get the money, Samaras has to move ahead with sacking 2,000 public sector workers by the end of the month.

The EU/ECB/IMF Troika have placed observers in every Greek ministry and are involved in every single decision taken. Some 13,500 more public sector workers are to be dismissed by the end of 2014.

Within the coalition, Samaras and his conservative ND party were criticized by the two junior partners, Pasok and the Democratic Left. Pasok and Democratic Left made clear, however, that they support deep attacks on ERT workers, and have only minor objections to Samaras's policy on layoffs, but that they want the ERT to stay open while restructuring is carried out. "We support a radical restructuring of ERT", Evangelos Venizelos, the chairman of Pasok and former finance minister said, "but not with blacked-out screens."

Should Pasok and Democratic Left withdraw their support for ND, which seems unlikely, it can count on the fascistic Golden Dawn party. Its deputy, Ilias Panagiotaros, tweeted: "ERT, that Socialist-Communist shack, is finally closing."

Golden Dawn conceded that "Among the ERT workers who lose their jobs they are family men, who made an honest day's wage, and really worked their hours", but added, "not like the majority of the supposed ERT workers who did not even know the location of the studios."

The fascists viciously attacked ERT as a vehicle for "propagating communism and other subversive ideas", not saying a word against the private TV channels and the atrocious working conditions of their workers. They do not care about all the Greeks who live in remote areas, for whom ERT is their only connection, as there was no profit for the private channels to broadcast there. They ignore the Greeks living abroad for whom their only contact with their homeland has been the state radio and TV show "The Voice of Greece".

Samaras has underestimated the Greek working-class movement. The movement has showed once again that despite the defeats, and despite the successive civil mobilisation orders against strikes, it can stand on its feet and stage grandiose new battles.

We will not be moved

Turkey defies Erdogan

By Martin Thomas

The movement against the authoritarian neo-liberal Erdogan government in Turkey continues in multiple forms despite heavy repression and heavier threats.

It started with a small environmentalist protest against the plans to bulldoze Gezi Park, next to Taksim Square in central Istanbul, and build a shopping mall on the site. It spread after 28 May when the first small protest was attacked with tear gas and water cannon.

As we go to press on 20 June, a Turkish socialist tweets: "Tonight [Wednesday 19th] there are forums in 27 Istanbul parks. Amazing atmosphere". Since Monday 17 June thousands have also protested in public spaces across Turkey by simply standing silent, following a first such gesture by performance artist Erdem Gunduz in Taksim Square.

Workers organised by the KESK public service union and the DISK union confederation joined the protests by striking on Monday 17 June. Police stopped workers gathering in large numbers, but there were still street protests.

According to the workers' association UID-DER, workers' slogans included: "Working people call the AKP to account", "This is only the start; the struggle continues", "Call killer police to account", "Victory to the resistance", "General strike, global resistance", "Long live class solidarity", "End police violence".

As the *Guardian* (16 June) put it, prime minister Erdogan "ditched all efforts at conciliation", when he convened and addressed a mass rally of supporters on Sunday 16th. He denounced the protesters as "terrorists, anarchists, rioters". Simultaneously cops were using tear gas and water cannon to drive protesters out of Gezi Park and Taksim Square. Erdogan had made a concession by agreeing that the bulldozing of Gezi Park would be delayed, and not proceed without a referendum, but he knew that the protests had gone beyond that issue, and wanted to assert that he would offer no more.

Erdogan's deputy prime minister Bulent Arinc spelled it out on TV: "If the police are not enough, there are the gendarmes [militarised police]; if the gendarmes are not enough... there are the armed forces".

"Those who manipulate public opinion and guide demonstrations on Twitter and Facebook will be revealed", added interior minister Muammer Guler.

On Tuesday 18th, according to the *Guardian*, "the Turkish police swooped on dozens of hard-left activists, arresting more than 90 people". Other reports indicate hundreds, not dozens of arrests. The BBC reports Turkish lawyers as saying that "close to 500 people have been detained... Some lawyers have not been given access to their clients [or even] do not know where they are being held... [The] president of the Turkish medical association told the BBC that five doctors and three nurses had gone missing after treating injured protesters".

A new article by the Turkish socialist group Marksist Tutum analyses the clashes as produced by the growing confidence and power of "the AKP bourgeoisie". This is a new "upstart" layer of the capitalist class, drawn often from the rural middle class, which has prospered alongside the old state-centred bourgeoisie since the AKP took office in 2002.

The frame for its rise was set not by the AKP, but by the bloody military coup of 1980 and the Thatcherite "Ozal period" which followed it. "Outsourcing and union-busting activities within the framework of a neo-liberal economic programme" have continued under the AKP, and "provided a comfortable environment for upstart bourgeois exploitation".

The AKP also wanted to push back the military from the overbearing role in politics which it had had since the foundation of the modern Turkish state in 1923. It wanted to get Turkey into the EU, and it wants to negotiate a settlement with Turkey's Kurdish minority, which the old military-dominated regimes dealt with just by denying the existence of any Kurdish identity in Turkey.

Thus, up to and including the 2011 election, the AKP deliberately sought alliances with liberals. It used slogans like "advanced democracy", "civil constitution", and "expansion of freedom", and even carried out some measures along those lines, though not much in the sphere of workers' rights.

Now the military has been tamed by the AKP sufficiently that it feels confident to use it as a threat against the street protests. The AKP no longer needs alliances with liberals, and it is under pressure from the global capitalist crisis.

The workers' association UID-DER comments: "The AKP government is establishing a regime of increasingly repressive and police-state conditions... Our response should be based on the following polarisation: on the one side, the bosses, and the parties defending profit; and on the other, all those defending the interests of workers and their workers' organisations".

Stop minimising violence against women!

Kate Harris

Content warning: discusses rape and partner violence

Sexism is pervasive and omnipresent in our society. A black comrade said recently, "Don't forget that you are white. Society won't let me forget that I'm not." I think that it is similar for women.

We are not allowed to forget that we are women. White women like myself are not subject to horrific racist attacks such as those we see on Muslims and migrants. But women of all races are made to feel that our bodies are not our own. Our experiences of violence are downplayed or dismissed, and in the socialist movement our struggles are seen as secondary or niche, rather than something that should concern all socialists.

As a working-class woman I have little in common with the famous food writer Nigella Lawson in terms of everyday material needs or my relationship to capital. However, bourgeois women are subject to sexism and abuse from men in similar ways to women in my class.

Her husband, the super-rich art collector Charles Saatchi was photographed holding her by the throat, in public, and those photographs were published in national media. Despite this incontrovertible evidence, he was allowed to volunteer to accept a police caution — case closed. Lawson's distress was dismissed by Saatchi as being "because we hate arguing".

I recently was talking to a socialist woman who was dismissing the crisis in the Socialist Workers' Party over rape claims. She said they were "overblown", that "there is rape and there is violent rape" and implied that women should be more sensible in order to avoid being sexually abused by men. This is a profoundly disturbing attitude that blames the victims of sexual assault rather than the perpetrators. It downplays the violent nature of all rape and minimises the validity of victims of sexual violence speaking out and the idea of doing something about that.

There is a profound sickness in society where violence against women is not taken seriously. The conviction rate for rape in the UK is around the 6% mark and has been more-or-less the same for years. Rape cases are difficult to prosecute but nonetheless the "attrition rate" (the number of complaint that never get to court, or fail in court) is horrific.

One-in-four women will experience domestic violence in their lifetimes, according to national government statistics, and one-in-ten will be victims of rape.

One way to combat the culture of violence against women at a societal level would be to educate young people about sexual consent, domestic violence. Consent is not currently part of the sex education curriculum. And guess what? Last week the House of Commons again voted to exclude it.

Clause 20 (an amendment to the Children and Families Bill) was backed by women's charities including Women's Aid, as well as LGBT organisations who were hoping to make sex education in schools less heteronormative. Bourgeois, moralist, anti-woman, anti-LGBT concerns of preventing children from hearing about the wrong kinds of sex and the realities of relationships stopped the clause being passed.

I wonder how those MPs will explain themselves to the children who live in homes where abuse takes place when those children are adults. Or indeed how they intend to explain themselves to the adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse.

The movements for the liberation of oppressed groups suffer another setback as a result of this decision. We are weary and tired but we are used to this. We will continue to fight to stop the oppressions so that future generations will one day be free.

The internet revolution?

Riki Lane reviews *Daemon* and *Freedom* by Daniel Suarez

Cyberpunk as a genre is usually pretty pessimistic about the possibilities of overthrowing the rule of capital. Grim apocalyptic scenarios abound of rampant capitalism, weak states, and power struggles between groups of reactionary organised criminals — huge corporations and gangsters. Heroic individuals fight for something they believe in and meet varying degrees of local success.

Daniel Suarez had produced something different. His states are still weak, and privatising everything, including "national security". Sound familiar? However, large masses of people are set into motion against the power of the corporations and states. The significant individual actors are both heroes and anti-heroes on both sides of the struggle.

Suarez blends a gamer's view of strategy with an intense hostility to the power of the world's huge corporations, and an up-to-date appreciation of technological developments utilising the internet, such as Google glasses, financial data aggregation, automated remote-controlled vehicles and mini-helicopters, and sophisticated distributed attacks on corporate and government data bases and systems, which utilise automated hacking programs — bots and daemons.

A "daemon" is an IT technical term for a "computer program that runs as a background process, rather than being under the direct control of an interactive user", but it has connotations of a demonic entity that changes the world despite the best efforts of humans to stop it.

Suarez's daemon is an independent program created by a dying gaming genius billionaire. It interacts with the world through monitoring news and internet reports, having remote controlled cars and other devices, and recruiting people to its cause.

In *Daemon*, this program emerges as a brutal, terroristic force, killing many police and civilian bystanders. The police and the state seem to be the good guys. However, as the story develops in *Freedom*, the daemon becomes an agent that allows farmers and other to self-organise communities against the control of agribusiness and other corporations — especially a thinly disguised Monsanto. It also organises to electronically and physically attack the finances and personnel of large corporations and organised crime.

But the vision of revolution in *Freedom* is one that has little prominence for the working class as workers. It makes me think of 21st century, internet-savvy versions of the narodniks (19th century peasant-socialist bomb-throwing Russian revolutionaries), under the benign guidance of the internet ghost of a dead capitalist. There is no attempt to replace capitalism just to cut off its head by destroying the largest corporations. There is a vision of almost independent, small scale, cooperative high tech rural communities, growing food from heirloom seeds, relying on renewable energy, etc.

There is a lot to like in these books, especially if speculative fiction is one of your preferred genres. Suarez knows capital and he knows the internet — he works as a "software consultant to Fortune 500 companies". The technologies involved are not science fiction; they all exist, but have not been brought together in such an overarching system.

Despite the resort to a benign dead capitalist as the inspiration, it is refreshing to read fiction that is optimistic about possibilities for social change involving broad masses of workers and farmers in the 21st century, rather than full of gloomy apocalyptic futures.

If you are talking or working with gamers, these books would be a good place to start a discussion about socialism and revolution.

Clément Méric — ni oubli, ni pardon!

By Daniel Lemberger Cooper

On Wednesday 5 June, a young student militant in Paris, Clément Méric, was shopping with his friends. They had an exchange with some individuals who were members of far right organisations who later on confronted Clément and his friends. They severely beat Clément, using a knuckle duster. He was knocked unconscious, and after being hospitalised, was pronounced brain dead.

This is a tragedy, and heartbreaking. Our condolences go to Clément's family and his friends.

Clément was 19 years old, studying political science at university. He was known for being calm and thoughtful. He was interested in politics, he was dedicating his life to building a better world.

In this country you have the EDL and BNP growing, spreading disgusting Islamophobia, and you have the rise of the racist UKIP. The three main parties are intent on scaremongering about migrants while there is a decline in the living standards of the majority.

Fascism is a violent movement, which aims to take power, and is dedicated to civil war against our organisations: students and workers, the left and oppressed groups. We should not hesitate to use force in response to their force. And we cannot rely on the existing state, which serves the same interests as fascism, to do it for us. We need self-organised direct action that physically confronts these groups, which stops their activities and their work.

Physical force is not enough. We need to respond to fascism by fighting the social causes feeding it – the crisis, unemployment, destruction of services — and the system breeding it — capitalism. Only by uniting against our real enemy – the bosses, and the cuts-happy politicians who represent them — can we cut the roots of racism.

I have been very touched by what happened in Paris. And it got me thinking is that we must do as Clément was.

The best way to destroy fascism is to dedicate yourself to fighting the system which creates it, and for a society providing for human need in which all forms of oppression and exploitation can be abolished.

L'homme est mort

A man is dead, who had no other weapon
Than his arms that were open to life
A man is dead who had no other road
Than that of those who hate guns
A man is dead, who is struggling on
Against death against forgetting
Because all that he wanted
We want it too
We want it today
We want happiness to be the light

That shines in our eyes that shines in our hearts
And justice on the earth
There are words that give life
And these words are innocent
The word warmth the word trust
Love justice and the word freedom
The word child and the word kindness
And certain names of flowers and certain names of fruits
The word brother and the word comrade
And certain names of countries of villages
And certain names of women and friends
Let us add the name Clément Meric
Clément Meric is dead for that which gives us life
Let us call him friend his chest is shot through
But thanks to him we know ourselves better
Let us call him friend his hope is alive

A balance sheet on Hugo Chávez

The death of Hugo Chávez earlier this year provides the opportunity for a balance sheet on his rule and what it signified for socialists. Workers' Liberty contended that Chávez was a "Bonapartist" politician who remained to his death within the bounds of capitalism, whatever his rhetoric about socialism and "Bolivarian revolution". Pablo Velasco contributes the first of a serious of four articles.

Marxists understand capitalism as a mode of production in which capital exploits wage labour. These dominant social relations of production determine the class structure of different states across the globe and shape other forms of oppression and domination.

Capitalism generates a working class, the agency with both the material interest and the social capacity to challenge the system and replace it with socialism.

The form of exploitation under capitalism is principally what Marx called "the dull compulsion of economic relations", although these relations are inevitably backed by bourgeois states. The separation of the economic and the political means that capitalists have economic and social power as a result of their ownership and control of the means of production, though they do not necessarily rule politically, either alone or indeed at all at times. Capital's general interests can be safeguarded by a variety of political state-forms, ranging from bourgeois-democratic republics through to fascist and military dictatorships.

To understand the particular nature of the current Venezuelan social formation, it is necessary to know its specific political economy, which rests heavily on the production of oil. As Thomas Purcell has argued in a recent *Science & Society* article, "the peculiarity of the Venezuelan state derives from its role as the nation's landlord". Under capitalist social relations and monopoly ownership, "the Venezuelan state can charge a royalty to international oil capital to produce on its subsoil". This revenue "takes the form of ground-rent, a portion of surplus-profit that capital must cede to the landowner for access to a non-reproducible natural resource".

Venezuela has been a major exporter of oil for almost 100 years, generating huge fiscal resources (ground-rent) separate from domestic production and taxation. The historical development of this feature of Venezuelan society has been termed "rentier-capitalism".

Venezuela has the world's largest oil reserves. Around a half of its oil is sold to the United States, amounting to one in seven barrels imported by the US. This explains the close and interdependent relations between the two states and the manner in which Venezuela was integrated into capitalist circuits. These social relations and the resulting rentier state were developed under the Gomez dictatorship (1908-35) and continued under Marcos Pérez Jimenez (1952-58). They underpinned the Punto Fijo regime between 1958 and 1998, when Venezuela was a "partyarchy" in which the Acción Democrática party (AD) and the Christian Democratic party (COPEI) alternated in power.

According to the *Financial Times* (6 March 2013) the Venezuelan state has spent more than $1 trillion of oil revenues over the past 60 years, with a third of that spending taking place since Chávez came to power. These continuities are fundamental. The Venezuelan state is still a capitalist institution, moulded by an historical legacy of oil rent.

Lenin said that a democratic republic was the best political shell for capitalist development.

Freedom of the press, assembly and organisation give different fractions of competitive capital opportunities to resolve their interests at the level of the state and to uphold their legitimacy and hegemony over other classes. These forms aid capital to promulgate free trade and the free movement of commodities (and labour), which best serve their mode of exploitation. Bourgeois-democratic forms are also the best terrain to organise a mass labour movement, providing the "light and air" for political debate, ideological clarification, legal strikes and open organisation.

However democracy is not a necessity for capitalist development — as proven by the history of the last two hundred years and in the present in places like China.

Marx produced a brilliant, pioneering analysis in his book *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) to understand the "Bonapartist" form of bourgeois rule.

Marx analysed why in certain situations of crisis where the balance of class forces is disrupted, the bourgeoisie ceded its political power to a military figure in order to preserve its social power. Marx explained how such a regime elevated the army as the saviour of society, balancing between a range of class forces (in this case from lumpenproletarians to peasants) who are rallied behind a highly centralised and seemingly independent state. Marx defined the essence of the Bonapartist regime as the "rule of the praetorians", in which the military fused and incorporated a coalition of class actors to rule in the long term interests of capitalism (though sometimes acting against particular fractions of capital).

Engels later generalised Bonapartism, applying it to Bismarckian Germany, where the bourgeoisie also lacked the qualities to rule directly itself and so the militarised state acted as arbiter between contending classes. He argued that Bonapartism was the normal form of the modern bourgeois state. Marx and Engels also regarded Simon Bolivar — one of Chávez's inspirations — as the caricature of a Latin American Bonaparte. Bonapartist forms persisted long into the 20th century, particularly in the newly emerging states.

Leon Trotsky extended the category of Bonapartism to both pre-Nazi Germany and 1930s France. He defined Bonapartism as "a regime in which the economically dominant class, having the qualities necessary for democratic methods of government, finds itself compelled to tolerate — in order to preserve its possessions — the uncontrolled command of a military and police apparatus over it, of a crowned "saviour". This kind of situation is created in periods when the class contradictions have become particularly acute; the aim of Bonapartism is to prevent explosions" (*Again on the question of Bonapartism*, March 1935).

ABOVE

Chávez, just after the 1992 coup attempt

Trotsky produced a pioneering application of Bonapartism to Latin America with analysis of the post-revolutionary Mexican social formation, particularly under Cardenas in the 1930s. He wrote:

"In the industrially backward countries foreign capital plays a decisive role. Hence the relative weakness of the national bourgeoisie in relation to the national proletariat. This creates special conditions of state power. The government veers between foreign and domestic capital, between the weak national bourgeoisie and the relatively powerful proletariat. This gives the government a Bonapartist character sui generis of a distinctive character. It raises itself, so to speak, above classes. Actually, it can govern either by making itself the instrument of foreign capitalism and holding the proletariat in the chains of a police dictatorship, or by manoeuvring with the proletariat and even going so far as to make concessions to it and thus gaining the possibility of a certain freedom toward the foreign capitalists. The present policy [of the Mexican government] is in the second stage; its greatest conquests are the expropriations of the railroads and the oil industries." (*Nationalised Industry and Workers' Management*, 12 May 1939)

Latin American Marxists also used Bonapartism to understand particular regimes such as Peronism in Argentina and the Cuban regime under Batista. Others built on Trotsky to analyse the origins, development and decline of the PRI regime in Mexico. It is on these very solid theoretical foundations that the Bonapartist characterisation can be applied to Venezuela under Chávez.

How should Hugo Chávez's regime best be understood?

In many respects — coming to power after the collapse of the old party system, a period of acute economic crisis, the central role of the military, the appeal to wide sectors of the population, including those excluded from the previous regime — Chavismo strongly resembles classical Bonapartism. The privileged and prominent role of military officers is not an accidental or ephemeral feature of the Chávez movement; it is essential to it. Chavismo began as a clandestine movement within the armed forces in 1982, with the formation of the MBR-200, and was consummated with the coup attempt in 1992.

Richard Gott, one of Chávez's most sycophantic English-language fellow-travellers, has confirmed the centrality of the military in his books, *In the Shadow of the Liberator* (2000) and *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian revolution* (2005). Gott (2005) quotes one senior economic adviser, who told him: "The military are everywhere. It sometimes seems as though there is a secret project that you don't quite know about. There really is a military party".

Gott (2005) says Chávez has "sought to bring the military into civil society, but not as gorilas [i.e. not as brutal repressors]". Chávez recognised that "the military have been going further than mere social work. They have been incorporating themselves, little by little, into the political leadership of the country, though not into party politics". Gott argued that Chávez stood for the tradition of the "military road to socialism". The bitter truth is the contrary: there is no military, or bureaucratic or indeed any road to socialism from above. Gott is wrong and the scepticism towards the military in Latin America (and elsewhere) is absolutely justifiable and borne of bitter experience.

Chávez in power transformed the armed forces into the dominant institution in Venezuela and substituted his personal control for the previous institutional arrangements. The Constituent Assembly changed Venezuela's constitution, lifted the prohibition barring military involvement in politics and granted active-duty members of the armed forces the right to vote (which had been denied under the 1961 constitution).

Chávez took control of military promotions and was able to put his supporters into key positions, while eliminating opponents. In his account of the defeat of the coup in April 2002, Gott makes the following observation (2005): "The coup had collapsed within two days, destroyed by just the alliance between soldiers and the people that Chávez had been so painstakingly constructing over the previous three years." In fact Chávez told him: "It was because of the contacts that had been made between the military and the poorest sectors of society that the people supported the army." After the coup, Chávez forced 60 generals and admirals into retirement, strengthening his group on the armed forces. As Gott puts it: "The armed forces were now more solidly behind the president than before".

Continued on page 10

A civic military parade

There was a strong and unconcealed militaristic bias in Chávez's government from beginning to end. The military was present in the cabinet, in the management of state-owned enterprises and social programmes, and in running regional governments. Chavismo contravened the trend in Latin America of containing rather than expanding the role of the military in governance.

Greg Wilpert, editor of the informative pro-Chávez website Venezuelanalysis confirmed the centrality of the military to Chávez's project. He argued in his book *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power* (2007) that Chávez's talk of "civilian-military unity" was not just for show. Of the 61 ministers in Chávez's governments between 1999 and 2004, 16 of them (26%) were military officers. After the 2004 elections, of the 24 regional state governors, 22 were Chavistas and 9 of them (41%) were military people.

Reliance on the military has been central since the start of the administration and continued to expand. Javier Corrales and Michael Penfold (*Dragon in the Tropics*, 2011: 147) argued that in 2008 eight of twenty-four governorships and nine of approximately thirty cabinet positions were held by active or retired career officers. And according to the Financial Times (7 April 2013), in Chávez's last administration "former military officers run 11 of the 20 state governorships held by Venezuela's United Socialist Party, and account for a quarter of the cabinet".

Chávez relied on hundreds of military officers seconded to positions in the public administration to enforce his authority over the state bureaucracy. The role of the armed forces in development activities also greatly expanded under Plan Bolívar 2000, which channelled large amounts of social welfare funding away from civilian agencies and towards the military garrisons in each Venezuelan state.

Gott (2005) highlighted the central idea of chavismo — the alliance between soldiers and civilians. A clear indication of this was Plan Bolívar 2000, launched shortly after Chávez's inauguration in February 1999. The first stage (Pro-País) involved the armed forces in providing social services, the second (Pro-Pátria) involved the military helping local people, and stage three (Pro-Nacíon) involved economic self-sufficiency and endogenous development. As a result, the armed forces became involved in infrastructure construction, repairing schools and hospitals and even the sale of consumer goods at cut-rate prices in popular markets in an attempt to hold down inflation.

The inflated role of the executive arm, what some have called "hyperpresidentialism", is also evidence of Chávez's Bonapartism.

The 1999 constitution extended the presidential term from five to six years and allowed for immediate re-election, which was previously barred. The president appoints his own vice-president and has no prime minister — and has sole power over military promotions and a significant say in the appointment of judges.

Greg Wilpert acknowledged this facet of his regime. He wrote (*Venezuela's New Constitution* 2003): "Another area of criticism of the 1999 constitution is that it has centralised presidential power even more than the already somewhat presidentialist constitution of 1961. The increased presidential powers include the ability to dissolve the National Assembly, following three votes of non-confidence by two thirds of the National Assembly, declare state of emergency, freely name ministers and their area of responsibility, the extension of the president's term from five to six years, and allowing for an immediate consecutive reelection".

In 2004, Chávez increased the number of Supreme Court justices from 20 to 32, packing the court with loyalists. He also undermined the autonomy of the National Electoral Council (CNE) that oversees national elections, for example by determining the timing of referendums and elections to suit his movement. Despite losing the referendum in 2007 on extending standing again for the presidency, he managed to win a later vote allowing for continuous re-election of all public officials, including himself. This concentration of power in the hands of the executive allows the Bonapartist politician to balance between competing social forces and establish their own hegemony.

CAPITALISM

For the fourteen years he was in power, Chávez administered a bourgeois state and never threatened capitalist relations of production.

He had significant business backing when first elected and his first finance minister had occupied the same position under the previous government. Steve Ellner pointed out in his book *Class, Conflict, and the Chávez Phenomenon* (2008) that in the first years of his administration, Chávez "maintained a dialogue with the private sector and invited numerous businessmen to accompany him on trips abroad". Ellner recognised that "measures approximating neoliberalism" were implemented, such as "austere fiscal policies, overvaluation of the local currency, and the retention of the neoliberal-inspired value added tax with the aim of avoiding inflation and shoring up international reserves".

Chavista governors and mayors ("the boligarchs") grant contracts to capitalist groups for public works. Widespread corruption has facilitated the rise of new bourgeoisie, known as the "boliburguesía". As Thomas Purcell points out in *Historical Materialism* journal (2011), the Venezuelan bourgeoisie dominates the internal market, particularly the area where economic growth is concentrated – the service-sector. As a result, they still command a strong position in the process of national social reproduction. According to the Venezuelan Central Bank, in 2008 the domestic private sector controlled 90% of all imports and 95% of all domestic manufacturing.

Benedict Mander argued in the *Financial Times* that multinationals didn't really hate Chávez (7 March 2013). He wrote: "The truth is, however much Chávez may have liked to rail against capitalist enterprises, a lot of foreign companies, especially those producing consumer goods, have been doing a rollicking business in Venezuela in recent years". When Chávez died, the Venezuelan newspaper *El Universal* carried condolences from almost all the big players in the automotive industry, including the local branches of General Motors, Toyota, Chrysler, Volvo and MMC (a joint venture between Hyundai and Mitsubishi). Other international companies with a big presence in Venezuela like Huawei, Nestle, Mary, Kraft, Telefonica, Avon, BBVA and Mastercard also paid their respects.

The Chávez government's economic policy was rhetorically anti-neoliberal, but in reality Venezuela continued to participate in the global capitalist economy, did not confront multinational capital or foreign creditors and Bolivarian technocrats in state-owned enterprises applied market imperatives to those firms.

Although Chávez's Bonapartism was disenfranchised much of the old ruling bourgeois class — hence their hostility to him — his rule was compatible with other fractions of capital and with the general interests of capital as a whole, which is ultimately about making profits from the exploitation of waged labour.

Labour

While the ages changed and sped
I was tolling for my bread.
Underneath my sturdy blows
Forests fell and cities rose.
And the hard reluctant soil
Blossomed richly from my toil.
Palaces and temples grand
Wrought I with my cunning hand.
Rich indeed was my reward—
Stunted soul and body scarred
With the marks of scourge and rod.
I, the tiller of the sod,
From the cradle to the grave
Shambled through the world — a slave.
Crushed and trampled, beaten, cursed,
Serving best, but served the worst,
Starved and cheated, gouged and spoiled.
Still I builded, still I toiled,
Undernourished, underpaid
In the world myself had made.
Up from slavery I rise,
Dreams and wonder in my eyes.
After brutal ages past
Coming to my own at last.
I was slave — but I am free!
I was blind — but I can see!
I, the builder, I, the maker,
I, the calm tradition breaker,
Slave and serf and clod no longer,
Know my strength—and who is stronger?
BB

(From *Young Spartacus*, youth paper of the US Trotskyists, 1932)

Teachers gear up for strikes

By Patrick Murphy, NUT Executive (pc)

On 27 June, teachers in the North West of England will strike against government attacks on teachers' pay.

Greg Foster, secretary of Chester and Cheshire West NUT, said: "This government has singled out teachers as we are the best-organised, most unionised workforce in the country. The fight back begins in the North West. We can and will win".

Members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and NASUWT, the two largest teachers' unions, will also remind ministers that we remain opposed to plans to make us pay more and work until at least 68 for a meaner pension. The many thousands of messages of support and solidarity activities from areas outside the North West are evidence of a widespread desire to see our unions mount a serious challenge to these attacks.

We have said all along that failure to defend our pensions and pay will lead to yet further worsening of our conditions, with workload and hours next. In recent days the truth of this has become all too clear.

In this latest evidence to the School Teachers' Review Body, Michael Gove has made it clear that he intends to remove every significant remaining contractual protection we have. He has asked the Review Body (which normally does his bidding without question) to consider the following:

- Remove the limits on what teachers can be directed to do, including the 25 tasks
- Reduce the requirements for PPA to be allocated in meaningful blocks of time and on the weekly timetable — so that we could get a few minutes here and there on an irregular basis
- Abolish the entitlement that we have a midday lunch break
- Allow Heads to require us to carry out lunchtime supervision ("to make it easier for head teachers to cut costs", i.e., sack lunchtime supervisors)
- To remove the limit on working hours and days so that schools can enforce longer working days and shorter holiday periods.
- Remove the requirement that we can only rarely be asked to cover for absence
- Require once again teachers to invigilate exams.

The government is intent on the complete deregulation of our job. The question is whether we have the confidence, determination, and organisation to resist.

The North West strike is to be followed, we are told by union leaders, by two further regional strikes in September and October, and then a national strike in November. The dates for those strikes should be announced as soon as possible so that members can focus and prepare and government know that we mean business.

We need to start planning the campaign beyond that. Experience has shown that very occasional one day strikes with no clear follow-up will not shift this government (we have taken two days of national action since the pension changes were announced). We need to plan a much more intense programme of action over a much shorter period of time.

27 June will undoubtedly be an inspiring and well-supported start.

But this should be a determined campaign to win, not a protest at the inevitable. Gove has raised the stakes massively; it's time we raised our game.

More industrial news online

- **Yorkshire Ambulance Service fight — bit.ly/yasfight**
- **RAF breaks strike — bit.ly/rafscabs**

Anti-bullying strike off, for now

By Clarke Benitez

A planned strike against management bullying on 19 June at Bishop Challoner school in East London was postponed after the school management agreed to further talks.

However, many workers felt the management's position — which agreed to look at some concerns around bullying of staff, but not the victimisation of an NUT rep — was not sufficient grounds for postponing the strike.

The ballot mandate has been extended for 28 days, and teachers will meet soon to discuss their next steps, including the possibility of reinstating the action.

"Boris Bike" workers to ballot

By Ollie Moore

The workers who maintain the "Boris Bikes" scheme of municipal bicycles in London, sponsored by Barclays, will ballot for strikes in order to win a pay increase.

Workers are also seeking to reverse the imposition of shift change patterns, and bring an end to bullying and harassment from managers. There is also frustration at bosses' refusal to reach a formal settlement on travelling time and travel allowances for staff.

The workers are employed by Serco, the services multinational which also operates the Docklands Light Railway, as well as running a number of government services including electronic tagging and detention centres.

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow said: "Staff running the London cycle hire scheme are facing a bullying management who are imposing outrageous changes to conditions of service while denying our members a fair pay increase for a massively increasing workload."

Rail union conference to discuss strikes against McNulty

By an RMT member

The Annual General Meeting of the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT), which takes place from 23-28 June in Brighton, will discuss a variety of motions on the union's political and industrial strategy.

In a welcome move, the union's national executive recently agreed to organise eight meetings in cities around Britain for rank-and-file members to discuss the union's industrial strategy and put forward their ideas for responses to the attacks on railworkers following the 2011 McNulty Report.

A motion to the AGM from the train crew conference to consider strikes if guards' jobs are threatened is a step towards national strikes against the effects of the McNulty Report, which Workers' Liberty members in RMT have been arguing for.

Two motions on casualisation suggest different approaches to the issue. One emphasises organising agency workers, while another would commit the union merely to calling on train operating companies to end agency contracts (with no explicit call to directly employ agency workers).

Our experiences in the "Justice for the 33" campaign on London Underground show that a clear demand to "sack the agency, not the workers" is essential to any campaign against casualisation.

A motion backed by the Socialist Party tacks its hollow "general strike" call onto a general motion about "preparing members for action to defend jobs, pensions, and conditions".

Other motions include a call for the union to pursue minimum flat-rate increases in wage negotiations, which would help many lower-paid workers. A motion from Portsmouth branch proposes positive measures to limit the bureaucratisation of full-time reps and hold them to account more effectively.

Political motions include a call for a campaign "for the supersession of the capitalist system by a socialist order of society", a formulation from the union's constitution. Another motion asks for an alternative economic strategy, "committed to progressive politics", in line with the People's Charter Campaign. But both are broad statements of principle, rather than detailed, concrete proposals, and both lack an emphasis on the central role of working-class agency for social change.

A resolution on the Falklands/Malvinas may prove controversial.

The AGM will also debate the RMT's relationship with the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition, with one motion calling for the union to withdraw its blanket support and only back TUSC candidates on a case-by-case basis.

The AGM will also hear motions from the union's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT), Women's, and Black and Ethnic Minority sections, on supporting LGBT asylum seekers and fighting transphobia, organising public speaking training for women members, and retirement rights for emigrants to non-EU countries respectively.

There will also be appeals against some decisions taken by the union executive in the previous year.

One will seek to overturn a decision not to support the Councillors Against Cuts network. The RMT leadership voted not to back CAC on the spurious grounds that the CAC statement includes opposition to rates increase (which RMT leaders said councillors should be free to make in order to fund wage rises for council workers). Now that the Local Government sector conference of Unison has overturned its leadership's decision not to back CAC, it is to be hoped that RMT will follow suit.

There is also an appeal against the outcome of a complaint brought by RMT member Caroline Leneghan accusing Assistant General Secretary Steve Hedley of domestic violence. Many feel the investigation, which found against Caroline, was not properly conducted.

Overturning the outcome would mean that the Executive would have to look at the issue again, and would send a strong signal that women trade unionists' voices should be taken seriously.

Defend Clara!

Tube cleaners' union rep Clara Osagiede faces the sack.

Her bosses, multinational firm Initial, have dredged up accusations from over a year ago to victimise Clara. They took no further action after a hearing into the accusations in February 2012.

The RMT is organising a campaign to defend Clara. For more info, see rmtlondoncalling.org.uk

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Liverpool Uni puts a "gun to the head of its workers"

Liverpool University has said it will sack 2,800 workers and rehire them on inferior contracts — or sack them if they refuse.

Unions representing Liverpool University workers have described this as a "gun to the head".

Jo MacNeill, president-elect of the UCU lecturers' union at Liverpool University, spoke to *Solidarity*.

Everyone from gardeners to managers is in the firing line — it's 52% of staff. We think that this attack is a move towards much more of a "business model" for the university, away from it being an academic institution.

Industrial relations have broken down. They're trying to bully people into accepting these conditions. Looking around the sector, at places like Lancaster, there is a real drive towards a market model.

The Section 188 of TULRA notice was handed out this week. Previously, a 90-day collective consultation period would ensue, but the government has changed that, and the consultation will only last 45 days.

At the end of the 45 days, unless an agreement is reached, the university will issue all 2,803 members of staff with redundancy notices. There will then be a 90-day notice period.

When staff are issued with their redundancy notices the staff will also be issued with a new contract. The current contract will end on 31 October, the new contract starts on 1 November, and anyone who doesn't sign will be dismissed.

We've got a plan of action; we've passed a motion which enables the branch committee to activate a ballot as we see fit. We had an emergency meeting last Monday and the queue was out the door.

Nationally we're getting a huge amount of support. We're looking at getting a lunchtime rally on 2 July of people from all the campus unions. We've got a lot of support from local unions around Merseyside. We spoke at Merseyside Trades Council this week, where we met with great support.

It's not just local, regional or national but it's also international — we're getting messages of support from all over the world. This is one push too far from management.

• Petition: www.ucu.org.uk/liverpool_dismissalpetition

Protecting the public university

Since Friday 14 June students at Warwick University have been against the huge hike in the pay packet of the University's Vice-Chancellor.

From the statement of Protect the Public University Warwick:

In the academic year of 2011/12 the Vice-Chancellor of Warwick University, Nigel Thrift, was awarded a pay increase of £42,000. He now receives £316,000 – earning over twenty-two times more than the lowest paid worker at this university (£14,202).

This is not unusual. Vice-Chancellors of the country's most selective universities have received similar pay increases. This is symptomatic of widening social inequality and a mass transfer of wealth from poor to rich, public to private.

Widening inequality within higher education is driven by the marketisation and privatisation of universities. Institutions that were once for the public good are now being turned over to private, profit-driven interests.

Unlike their Vice-Chancellors, university staff members have experienced a real wage pay cut.

Made in the name of "growth" and "efficiency", these cuts go hand in hand with longer hours, less money and insecure contracts for postgraduate and junior staff members. This puts enormous pressure on staff and visibly reduces teaching standards, forcing us to ask: efficient at what?

At the same time, students are forced to take on the burden of financing higher education. While fees climb to £9,000 a year, bursaries are either cancelled or transferred to "fee waivers"; meanwhile, in universities like Warwick, maintenance costs are driven up by the construction of ever-more expensive accommodation.

This process is changing the perception of higher education from a public good to a private investment, from a communal right to an individual privilege, accessible only by the few.

The widening gap in pay between senior managers and frontline staff, and the debt forced on students, means that the university now reproduces social inequalities rather than contesting them. This undermines the university's democratic function as a space in which free thought, debate and critical inquiry is fostered in order to give people the tools to challenge social hierarchies and play an active role in the public sphere.

We contest these reforms to our university, however the voice of the student body has been reduced to customer feedback and merely tokenistic representation in the gov

We are occupying this council chamber in order to open that space, to start that dialogue and to make our voices heard.

If we are to halt this government's assault on the university we must make ourselves heard together and begin to work towards an alternative.

• twitter.com/PPUWarwick

• www.facebook.com/ppuwarwick

Unison backs Councillors Against Cuts campaign

By a conference delegate

On 17 June, the Local Government sector conference of the public sector union Unison voted to back the Councillors Against Cuts network (CAC).

It voted down a wrecking amendment from its Service Group Executive designed to gut the motion of support of its content. The SGE argued that full support for CAC would place the union in legal jeopardy, as it would mean pressuring councils to set illegal budgets.

One delegate told *Solidarity*: "The union leadership wheels this argument out to block any attempt to do anything vaguely militant. But people have had enough of it."

CAC is a group of Labour and ex-Labour councillors who have committed to vote against all cuts, even if it means defying a Labour whip.

Unison is the main union organising in councils and local authorities, and one of the Labour Party's biggest union affiliates.

If — *if* — it acts on this policy, the union will use its considerable weight within the Labour Party to defend rebel councillors against discipline and sanction from the party hierarchy. It will use its presence in local government workplaces to help mobilise against cuts and bolster rebel councillors' stance. Unison could also demand its sponsored councillors defy cuts or risk losing union support.

CAC, which is backed by the Labour Representation Committee, plans a conference in September.

• councillorsagainstcuts.org

Brighton refuse workers escalate the action

By Ollie Moore

Refuse workers at Brighton Council have announced more strikes in their fight against pay cuts.

Drivers will strike for five days from Monday 24. A five-day strike of all workers employed by the CityClean service came to an end on Thursday 20 June. A work-to-rule, which has been in effect since the end of a sit-down strike on Friday 10 May, will remain in place for all workers.

The strike has enjoyed a high level of support, with many residents attaching posters and messages of support to their bins. Strikers organised daily mass pickets of the main CityClean depot, as well as smaller presences at other sites around the city. A demonstration on Saturday 15 June saw hundreds of workers and supporters march through Brighton.

During the strike, the city's Green Party-led council went back on a pledge not to use agency labour to drive litter collection vehicles. There has also been a spate of "community clean-up" initiatives, some undertaken by well-meaning residents who think they are assisting the strike. A statement from the workers' GMB branch made it clear that street-side piles of rubbish are an unfortunate corollary of the strike, and that for residents to attempt to clear them up is not only dangerous (as they are untrained) but serves to undermine the strike.

Unfortunately, the previously supportive Green MP Caroline Lucas has been prominently involved with one such strikebreaking "clean-up".

GMB union officials say the council has not been negotiating in good faith, and that the union will not continue talks unless the council improves its offer.