

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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HOVIS STRIKE SHOWS HOW TO FIGHT ZERO HOURS

Photo: John Harris/reportdigital.co.uk

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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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US fast food workers fight for \$15

This text is abridged from an article in *Socialist Worker*, the paper of the International Socialist Organization in the US. To read the full article online, visit bit.ly/iso-ff15

On August 29, low-wage workers in some 50 cities across the United States walked off the job at various fast-food restaurants as part of the latest action in the "Fight for 15" campaign for union recognition and a \$15 an hour wage.

Here are reports from activists in [two] of the cities where Fight for 15 workers walked off the job:

More than 100 people in San Diego, California marched and rallied in front of a Wendy's restaurant to demand a raise and union rights for fast-food workers. Six workers from Wendy's, McDonald's and Subway left work and spoke to the gathering of fellow workers and supporters. Jenny Andrade, who works at Subway, said:

"I'm a mom and I struggle because I want to give my daughter the best. I work full-time and go to

school full-time. It's hard, college is expensive, and sometimes, I have to work instead of going to school. When my daughter gets sick, I have to take off both to take care of her.

"I'm here to help my people. It's amazing knowing I can make a change, not just for myself, but for everybody else. I'm trying to make a change by supporting this, and by supporting my dad, who motivated me. My dad is doing life in prison, and he is on a hunger strike."

Diego Rios, who works at McDonald's, was also inspired to take action by family members participating in the ongoing California prison hunger strike:

"We need to make a difference, but a lot our coworkers are too scared to stand up, they know it could cost them their job. Some members of my family are in prison on hunger strike. Seeing them take action inspired me. They could lose their lives in this fight, but I'm only risking my job."

"My grandmother worked at Burger King her whole life and never made over \$3.50 an hour. I don't

want my kids making only \$8 like us now, with no benefits, no vacation and no sick days. Not providing sick days is unsafe — do you really want a sick person handling food? Plus employers find loopholes to get out of giving us our breaks, or paying overtime. "Change won't come tomorrow, but even if we have to wait 10 years, it's important to fight now. This will give people an opportunity for a better life."

Several workers mentioned that while dining rooms in their restaurants are kept cool, the kitchens are not air conditioned, and are uncomfortable and unsafe with the record heat and humidity in Southern California.

The following day, ac-

tivists and rank-and-file members of California Federation of Teachers, SEIU, the Teamsters, and United Auto Workers escorted the workers back to their jobs. There has been no sign of retaliation by employers, but should there be, fellow workers are ready to raise hell. [...]

Courtney Gardner, from Madison, Wisconsin [where public sector unions fought a labour war with local government in 2011] says he had never participated in a labour action before he walked out of his McDonald's job on Thursday. He's been working fast food his whole life, and decided that "something has to change."

Despite working there for over a year and being promised two raises, his hourly wage is still the same \$7.25 as when he started. With this salary, he can barely support his five kids, and is forced to live out of his car.

In this bleak situation, he said the campaign has made him "feel that there's a possibility of change in life." He called the fight for \$15 "a little ray of sunshine."

Evictions loom with Bedroom Tax

By Dave Kirk

Early in September Lawrence Keane walked into a Fife housing office and slit his wrists, telling the horrified staff and users it was because of despair over the Bedroom Tax.

Thankfully Lawrence survived. He told the press: "I got a letter from the council last week and I have stayed inside for 10 days worrying about it. It told me I owed a lot of money and that my rent was going up £28 a fortnight because I had an empty room in my flat... I was getting more and more angry and stressed about it. I woke, got a vegetable knife and went to the community centre."

The Bedroom Tax is now five months old. Hundreds of thousands of social housing tenants are now running rent arrears because they are deemed to have a spare room and can't pay. Arrears for many tenants will now be over £300.

Many social landlords

use the figure of £300 as a trigger for starting to obtain a possession order via the courts. Many councils and housing associations will now be making crucial decisions to go to court.

Yet campaigners against the bedroom tax are winning victories. Lorraine Fraser, from Uddington, North Lanarkshire, was set to become the first Bedroom Tax evictee in Scotland. After local campaigners fought against the eviction, 100 people crowded into a meeting and forced Labour council leader Jim McCabe to stop Lorraine's eviction and to allow no Bedroom Tax debt evictions at least until the end of the financial year (April 2014).

Other key elements in the campaign include the building of a network of tenants, activists, and trade unionists ready to turn out to support those threatened with evictions.

Campaigns should also support tenants in using all appeals and legal channels available to slow and disrupt evictions.

Some campaigns in Scotland, Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester are trying to do all this, and are inevitably stretched. However new layers of people and tenants seem willing to pay a leading role.

Engaging tenants with no prior political involvement and building networks on estates with no recent tradition of activism is hard work, but it is both vitally necessary and a good test for socialists.

PRESSURE

The pressure on Labour in the Scottish Parliament has been intense. Labour's shadow housing spokesperson, Jackie Ballie, has announced she will be introducing a bill to ban evictions for Bedroom Tax arrears and to pay councils and housing associations the shortfall.

This may be opposed by the SNP government.

Baillie may be pushing this policy despite reluctance from the more right-wing Scottish Labour Party leader, Johann Lamont.

South of the border, Labour leaders talk more warmly about repealing the bedroom tax if in government. Even Blairite shadow welfare secretary Liam Byrne has said "ministers should drop the hated tax now". We need to force Labour to commit to the repeal.

The government has been forced to more than double the central government's pot for Discretionary Housing Payments to £65 million. It's a minor concession, but proves the government can be forced to cede ground.

We must still expect councils and housing associations to try to evict tenants this autumn. Small housing associations are struggling financially. They will probably start evictions with single people living alone, as they are an easier group to hit.

We need to do the ground work to resist evictions. This will involve action inside and outside of courtrooms and direct action, throwing bailiffs off estates.

Two “red lines” in union link fight

By Martin Thomas

In his speech at the TUC (10 September) Ed Miliband said: “I want to make each and every affiliated trade union member a real part of their local party. Making a real choice to be a part of our party. So they can have a real voice in it...”

“We could become a Labour party not of 200,000 people, but 500,000 or many more”.

This is a shift from the 9 July speech about “opting-in”, where he said only that unionists paying the political levy to Labour should have to “opt in” to pay, rather than just not “opting out”. What Miliband seems to propose now is a drive to get affiliated unionists to become individual members of the Labour Party,

Paul Kenny (L) and Dave Prentis (R), remaining seated.

with some rights, rather than just “opters-in”, who would have no more rights than those who currently pay the political levy by way of not “opting out”.

According to the Financial Times, Miliband is “understood to be in retreat over [plans] to cut the unions’ large block vote at annual conference and in leadership elections...” The FT reports “Labour insiders” as saying that “a dilu-

tion in [unions’] 50 per cent vote at conference and 33 per cent vote in leadership elections... is likely to happen only if a tiny number of union members — say 50,000 — sign up to Labour membership”.

So far, so good. But problems remain.

Schemes to get more trade unionists to join Labour as individual members are good, but far from new. In 1993, under John

Smith as Labour leader, there was a scheme for unionists to become individual members by paying just an extra £3 a year. Today, unionists can become individual members for £19.50 a year rather than the standard £42.

Improving or extending these schemes would be good — and have no connection with changes in the payment of the political levy.

What’s needed for the schemes to draw in large numbers is a Labour policy which inspires working-class activists — not “we are going to have to keep all these cuts!” — or at least an energetic drive by unions, within Labour structures, for working-class policies. Also needed is an opening-up of Labour Party democracy.

Unions’ rulebooks, not Labour Party rules, govern opting-in and opting-out of the political levy. Miliband still seems to want to change Labour Party rules so as to force unions to change their rulebooks. That’s wrong, and anyway it won’t work.

Already Paul Kenny of the GMB has said his union will cut its affiliation fee to Labour, and Dave Prentis of Unison has said that Unison won’t change its rules whatever the Labour Party asks. An attempt by Miliband to force changes in union rules could well lead to unions disaffiliating, which in turn will discourage workers from “opting in”. It will set up a sort of rolling vote of no confidence in the Labour Party for the period up to the 2015 general election.

Even if that snowballing collapse of the Labour-union link is averted, the

likely sign-up from trade-unionists will probably be more than 50,000 but much less than an extra 300,000. What then?

The same Labour right-wingers who now bide their time, reassuring us that there is no real threat to the block vote, will come

forward to make that threat.

Labour and trade union activists should insist on two “red lines”: no cut in the collective trade-union voice in the Labour Party; and no move to impose rule changes on the unions.

GMB: “You can’t fire us, we quit!”

By Ira Berkovic

The leaders of Unison and GMB have postured in response to Ed Miliband’s proposals to degrade the Labour-union link, with neither showing any real sign of fighting back.

GMB has announced a 90% reduction in its affiliation fee, slashing it to £150,000 from £1.2 million. The figure represents the equivalent of just 50,000 of the union’s 617,000 members “opting in” to Labour affiliation. The GMB Executive expressed its “considerable regret” that “the party that had been formed to represent the interest of working people in this country intends to end collective engagement of trade unions in the party they helped to form”, but rather than fighting the Labour leadership’s plans, the GMB has helped implement a version of them in advance. It is one of the most spectacular cases of “you can’t fire us, we quit” in the history of British working-class politics.

Unison leader Dave Prentis has grumbled in

response to the proposals. He bemoaned the “disunity” that all the squabbling betrays, and said: “Where I was brought up in Leeds, we were taught not to get our dirty linen out in public.”

At the TUC annual conference in Bournemouth (8-13 September), Prentis made his now annual promise of mass strikes — this time over public sector pay. But when local government employers offered his members a deplorable 1% pay increase in March 2013, Prentis and the rest of the Unison leadership capitulated and advised members to accept the deal. The conference passed a motion in support of mass coordinated strikes — but, like the 2012 motion committing the TUC to “consider the practicalities of a general strike”, without any strategy for how to get there or build such strikes when unions are weak and disorganised.

Building independent rank-and-file organisation should be the first priority for socialists in Unison, GMB, and across the British labour movement.

Unite left resolves to defend union link

By a Unite member

The national meeting on 31 August of Unite United Left voted to oppose the Collins-Miliband plans which threaten to seriously damage or to end collective representation of the unions in the Labour Party.

Opening the debate, Jon Lansman argued that the bottom line had to be that Unite would only support schemes to single out those union members who “expressly agree” to pay the political levy to the Labour Party if the unions insisted that there was also a decoupling of the numbers counted as “affiliated” (under the new definition) from union rep-

resentation in Labour Party conference, NEC, NPF, and CLPs. These should continue to be based on collective union strength.

The Labour right has been trying to break the link between the trade unions and the Labour Party for years — and now, from what McCluskey had been saying, it looked like Unite’s votes could help them do it.

Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*) members expressed different views. One of them advocated support for the stance of Len McCluskey and his “chief of staff”, CP member Andrew Murray; but the majority of CPers argued that we should oppose.

The meeting noted that

we could accept that individual “affiliated” members volunteer to join the Party at a subsidised rate, with individual member rights. But the trade unions must still be able to affiliate as organisations, not on the basis of some notional number of affiliated members. Trade unions should be entitled to representation in the Party according to their membership and financial contribution to the party. The basic structure of conference (50% CLP delegates, 50% TU delegates) should remain the same.

A commitment was made that the United Left motion would be acted on at the Unite EC due in the week starting 16 September.

debit instructions by forging their signatures.

Two Unite members of Falkirk Labour Party, Karen Murphy and Stevie Deans, were suspended from party membership.

The former was Unite’s preferred candidate for the selection process. The latter, a deputy convenor in his workplace, was subsequently suspended by his employer, who backed down only after having

been threatened with strike action.

The local Labour Party was placed under “special measures”, meaning that the selection process would be run by head office. A ‘freeze date’ for participation in the selection process was imposed which excluded the hundred-plus Unite members who had joined Falkirk Labour Party.

But now even Labour

Party leaders have had to admit that there was no truth to any of the allegations and that Unite had not breached any Labour Party rules. The two suspended members have been re-instated.

The “special measures” and “freeze date” should now be scrapped. Control over the selection process should be handed back to the local Labour Party.

The dossier of false alle-

gations should be published. Even now the party members who were suspended have not seen any of the ‘evidence’ put forward as a basis for their suspension.

The Labour Party Compliance Unit employee and the member of Scottish Young Labour who drew up the dossier containing the false allegations should be called to account.

So too should all other

Labour Party officials and office-holders who joined in the attack on Unite.

Ed Miliband should publicly apologise to Murphy, Deans, Falkirk Labour Party and Unite.

All party “reforms” proposed on the back of the manufactured scandal about Falkirk Labour Party should be abandoned.

Unite cleared of Falkirk wrongdoing

By Dale Street

The Labour Party has officially cleared Unite of attempting to rig Falkirk Labour Party’s selection process for its next general election candidate.

Over the summer months Unite had been accused of signing up union members as Labour Party members without their consent and filling in direct

The British far left on Syria

The Left
By Cathy Nugent



After the government's motion endorsing immediate military intervention was defeated in Parliament, the Socialist Party wanted to drive home how great an opportunity this was for the left.

"Cameron and Clegg could over the coming days and weeks be forced out. The government itself could be brought down. The trade union movement — particularly the TUC which meets in early September — should finish off this floundering cuts coalition by calling a national day of strike action — a 24-hour general strike — against cuts and austerity."

Whether the government has been substantially weakened is highly debatable. That the TUC can bring it down by calling a 24-hour general strike is utter fantasy. But in the SP's universe, all political roads lead to a 24-hour general strike.

We have to get beyond the half-way point in the same article (bit.ly/sp-syria) to find out what they think about the actual issues at hand — the political events and forces which will decide the fate of the Syrian people. In a short passage the SP say that it opposes the Assad regime and reactionary sectarian forces which dominate the opposition, and the SP wants a non-sectarian mass movement.

Okay, but what do they think about the chemical weapons, the prospect of the Assad regime getting stronger, the likely bad effects of US bombing?

Not important, comrades! The article switches focus again on the UK.

For **Counterfire too**, Cameron's defeat and the great opportunities it presents for the left is pretty much the only thing worth talking about (bit.ly/cfire-syria).

Substitute the Socialist Party's "trade union movement" for "the anti-war movement" for the agency to which the "victory" belongs, and you get the picture.

More precisely (and grandiosely) Counterfire claim a victory for the "long-term strategic aim of the STWC — to break British foreign policy from slavish allegiance to the US".

At the same time, Parliament is "reflecting public opinion" (is it that British "public opinion" is basically "progressive" and anti-US?).

But, as anyone who cares to pay attention to the news will know, the vote in Parliament reflects the fears of a section of the bourgeoisie that a military intervention will make the

Syrian and regional situation more unstable. There was also a degree of opportunism from Labour, who were not opposed in principle to bombing.

Counterfire were also concerned to question the Assad regime's culpability for the use of chemical weapons: "This is not to say that the regime could not be responsible, but rather to argue against the use of speculative claims as the pretext for a military attack. In the meantime, the absence of proof of culpability has not prevented such claims forming an accepted wisdom in most of the subsequent reporting."

The **Socialist Workers' Party** at least tried to be thoughtful in a series of short articles on their website in the week after the Parliamentary vote. In the main article (bit.ly/swp-syria), there was the usual SWP ordering of concerns. They began with western hypocrisy on freedom and democracy, making the not-at-all-unreasonable point that western governments have "stood by while Assad's regime has killed 100,000".

KNEE-JERK

In place of the usual knee-jerk anti-imperialism, the SWP focused on how US bombing will make the situation worse, and could strengthen Assad.

Anti-imperialism is linked to the "cause of the Arab revolution" which, to the SWP, the Syrian opposition represents. Elsewhere on the SWP's website they acknowledge, but underestimate, the threat of the Islamist forces within the Syrian opposition. Joseph Daher of the Syrian Revolutionary Left Current is quoted: "These jihadist groups are reactionary and sectarian — and the Syrian revolution wants to break down sectarian and ethnic division — but they cannot be compared to the Syrian regime." I.e. they are not as bad? Would still be not as bad if they took power?

In the following week, the SWP developed their arguments. They appear to say that the Syrian revolution is an uncomplicated and good process that would likely succeed if unimpeded by military intervention. The Islamists are not a present or real danger to the movement.

"Even if the Americans succeed, they will also have destroyed all the structures and the networks built by the Syrian revolutionaries during their struggle against the regime. All the experience of self-organisation, all the democratic processes put in place by the active masses, all the political developments within them — all of these will be destroyed.

"That will leave an empty space for opportunist forces, the proxies of Al Qaeda and the regressive regimes such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, to take on the leading role."

Other articles on the site talk up the weakness of the British government, but in much less exaggerated terms than either the SP or Counterfire.

The **International Socialist Network** (ISN, the SWP splinter group), **Workers' Power**, and **Socialist Resistance** have issued a joint statement (bit.ly/isn-syria) It has the merit of not letting its ideas on Syria be read backward from thrills about Cameron's defeat, and of mentioning the predatory ambitions of Saudi Arabia, Russia and Iran.

But it lauds the Syrian opposition militias, without qualification, as embodying the "Arab revolution". Why not then welcome the US bombing, which may at least help that opposition a bit? Because, the statement says, the bombing would be a means for the US to gain "control".

In another comment, Gilbert Achcar of SR extends the thought. There he opposes bombing on the grounds that it may help the US engineer a peace deal. So full victory for the most militant parts of the opposition is the desired result?

Incoherently, and always by implication, never by positive statement, the ISN-SR-WP text makes three contradictory demands on the western powers.

1. That they arm the whole Syrian opposition, without conditions;
2. That they supply (only?) "defensive" weapons to the opposition;
3. That they arm (only?) the "progressive and democratic" parts of the opposition.

So there are reactionary parts of it? Will the ISN send a member to the region to advise the US on which opposition groups are "progressive and democratic". Or do they trust the US to exert that control unadvised? But wasn't their objection to the bombing precisely that it would help the US exert control?

The statement has prompted an interesting debate on the ISN website. And that, at least, is progress.

Welfare not warfare? Yes, but...

On the AWL website, Sacha Ismail argues: "Short-term slogans along the lines of 'Spend money on public services, not this war' run the risk of implying that services are being underfunded or cut because there genuinely isn't 'enough' wealth in society, rather than because the ruling class is waging class war in order to increase its wealth." What's your view? Join the debate online at bit.ly/wnw-debate.

Solidarity with arrested anti-fascists!

By Ira Berkovic

Nearly 300 anti-fascists were arrested on Saturday 7 September as a bloc of around 650 activists attempted to oppose an English Defence League march and rally of around 400.

The police blocked, kettled, and then arrested activists after they left a static Unite Against Fascism protest in Altab Ali Park. A small number of the bloc, which was coordinated by the Anti-Fascist Network, managed to visibly confront the EDL, meaning that the racists' march and rally did not pass off without encountering any visible opposition — as the police and, apparently, UAF, had intended and hoped.

The UAF rally was the usually litany of cookie-cutter speeches from union officials, religious leaders, and mainstream politicians, all of whom spouted cross-class rainbow liberalism and vacuous platitudes about community cohesion. Some speakers, including Cable Street veteran Max Levitas, made more explicitly left-wing speeches, but the political discrepancy between Levitas' radicalism and the conservatism of most of the religious and political establishment speakers seemed lost on UAF's leaders.

As the AFN bloc was being kettled and its activists arrested, UAF was crowing about its "triumph". A *Socialist Worker* report, published after the demo, fails to mention



the arrests at all and claims the EDL "did not pass" — despite the EDL having their march and rally, facilitated by the police, without encountering mass opposition.

Arrestees faced detainment of up to 15 hours in total, and were taken to police stations on the edges of London including Col-

indale and Sutton. The pretext for the arrests was the allegation that the activists had breached Section 12 of the Public Order Act (in other words, walking on a street the police don't want you to walk on). The arrestees were eventually bailed with conditions not to attend any anti-fascist demonstrations inside the M25. The police operation, similar to one which took place after an anti-BNP demonstration in Westminster in May, is an explicit example of political policing and the direct criminalisation of protest.

AFN activists, along with Green & Black Cross, provided arrestee support throughout the night, and activists were present to greet those released — even at 9am on Sunday 8 September, when the last arrestees were released from Colindale station.

The day cannot be seen as a victory for the EDL, which mobilised small numbers and was restricted in its move-

ments by the police.

The main silver lining to a day which was also frustrating for anti-fascists, and in which the biggest "winner" was the state, was the number of people who followed the AFN's lead and joined the bloc. Of around 1,500-2,000 participants in the UAF's static rally, between 600 and 700 joined the AFN bloc when its banners and flags began marching out of Altab Ali Park.

This included a large number of local Asian youth — people most the far left has had little direct contact with for a generation.

The size of the response to the AFN bloc shows there is an appetite for a more militant anti-fascism, and that people are not content to stand around in a park listening to platitudinous speeches while organised racists march and rally nearby.

- Green & Black Cross and the Legal Defence Monitoring Group are hosting an arrestees' meeting at Limehouse Town Hall at 7pm on Wednesday 18 September.
- A benefit gig at the University of London Union on Saturday 12 October will raise money for the campaign. Follow @NoFutureNite on Twitter for more info.
- For more info and press releases, see ldn-afn.org (London Anti-Fascists), slaf.org.uk (South London Anti-Fascists), and antifascistnetwork.wordpress.com (AFN national site).

Unions must fight for the worst off

Real wages in Britain have dropped further, and for a longer time, than since records began. The wage share of total income has dwindled since the mid 70s. It has dropped even further since 2010, although usually in economic slumps the wage-share recovers a bit (because profits rise faster in booms, fall faster in slumps).

The overall wage figures tell only part of the story. Both higher “wages” (the pay-outs which bosses award themselves) and higher wages proper (for the best-off workers, managers, etc.) have held up well. At the top end, they have soared. The lower-paid have suffered worst.

Britain now has a bigger proportion of workers in low-paid jobs (paid less than 75% the median) than any other rich country except the USA.

Lower-paid workers are also more insecure. At least a million workers, whose average pay is 40% less per hour than the overall average, are on zero-hours contracts. Young workers are specially hit: for the first time ever, people in their 20s are, on average, worse off than people in their 60s.

The Tories’ benefit cuts, scything about £800 a year off the average person’s budget, also hit lower-paid workers much more than the rest.

Tory economics is engineering both an increased gap between rich and poor, and increasing inequality within the working class itself — between better-paid and more secure workers and the rest.

Solidarity proposes a four-point answer:

One: rebuild trade unions! Large, strong unions both limit the gap between boss and worker, and narrow the inequalities within the working class. They mean that workers with little bargaining-power in the labour market have their wages and conditions pulled up by agreements won by the workers who have more bargaining-power.

Two: make unions democratic, combative, and solidarity-minded. Too often unions retreat into occasional set-piece protest strikes, orchestrated from above by full-time officials outside the control of the members, and geared to limiting the damage for their “core” members, usually older and better-off workers.

We accept that the unions can’t call a general strike tomorrow, or start a forest-fire of militancy with a single spark. They can throw their resources behind each partial struggle that wells up from their ranks — support, publicise, and seek to generalise each struggle.

They can, as Karl Marx argued almost 150 years ago, “consider themselves and act as the champions and representatives of the whole working class... enlist the non-unionised into their ranks... look carefully after the interests of the worst-paid trades... convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions”.

The big unions do not do that yet. That is why we have seen a flurry of micro-unions and “pop-up” unions.

Three: insist that an incoming Labour government increase the minimum wage to the level of the “Living Wage”. It is good that Labour leaders now talk about extending the Living Wage (£8.55 an hour in London, £7.45 outside). It is bad that they deny that the minimum wage should be... a Living Wage. (The minimum is currently £6.19 an hour for over-21s, much less for younger workers, and zero for under-16s).

It is bad that they talk only of “seeing how central government could further extend the requirement to pay the living wage through public sector supply chains” and of selected “Living Wage zones” where the government would nudge bosses into paying the Living Wage by offering them “time-limited cash rebates, or funding for the costs of training or new equipment”.

The government should not try to bribe bosses into paying a Living Wage. It should compel them, and take over the business if the bosses refuse. There is nothing unrealistic about this.

Workers like the Hovis bakery workers (see interview, right), cleaning workers (above), Curzon cinema workers and others are fighting low pay, zero-hours contracts, and casualisation. Unions must support and spread their struggles.

In Australia — not in some imagined utopia, or in an uncertain socialist future, but in capitalist Australia today — the minimum wage is £9.61 an hour. In France — in today’s capitalist France, not in dreams — the legal minimum is £7.93 an hour. In Ireland it is £7.28.

Four: Ban zero-hours contracts, and reduce casual employment. It is good that Labour leaders denounce zero-hours contracts; bad that they commit themselves to no more action than “a summit on the issue of zero-hours contracts... to discuss... what steps can be taken to tackle... abuse”.

BLURRING

Some people claim that zero-hours contracts can’t be banned. They do it by way of blurring the difference between zero-hours and casual work.

They shrug: there will always be short-term tasks requiring short-term workers, always people wanting to work only irregularly or occasionally.

Bosses know the difference. A website offering them model employment contracts explains: “a Casual Worker Contract does not oblige the workers to accept the work offered to them, but a Zero-Hours Contract will oblige workers to accept the assignment(s) offered to them”.

Zero-hours contracts are used by bosses in trades where work is steady and consistent simply to gain more control over workers and limit their rights. Most use of casual contracts has the same motive. It is not driven by work really being one-off, or workers really wanting only odd days of employment.

Bosses used to say that dock work could never be anything but casual. More ships come into a port one day than the next. The work varies. Then dockers got organised — and the bosses found it possible after all to give them more regular hours and a fallback wage if no ships were in port. The same will be done in other trades if unions organise.

Not in hopeful speculation, but in grubby, unequal capitalist Australia today, bosses are obliged to pay workers a 25% higher hourly rate if they employ them as casuals. The same could be enforced in the UK.

Neither a minimum wage, nor a ban on “zero-hours”, nor measures limiting casualisation, can be made to work well without strong trade-union organisation reaching out to the worst-exploited and helping them claim their legal rights. All four points of our answer are necessary.

They will not be won without a strong socialist organisation, consistently active in the ranks of the labour movement, pushing for them. Join us to win them!

Hovis strike shows how to fight zero-hours

Bakers, Food, and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) organiser Geoff Atkinson spoke to *Solidarity*.

We can be an inspiration to other workers facing zero-hours contracts. Sometimes it takes a little person to stand up and fight against a big bully.

We had always managed without agency labour at Hovis. In the past there was always an eight week rolling contract for temporary workers. If you worked 13 weeks, you got a permanent contract.

Now they want to use zero-hours contracts provided by a third party, and they also want to keep the zero-hours workers on minimum wage. They have told us they want to use the Swedish Derogation [from the EU Agency Workers’ Directive], so that they don’t have to match what the agency legislation stipulates the agency workers be paid.

The company wants to use agency labour and zero-hours contracts to cover where they have just made 26 people redundant. That is the issue we are striking about. On top of that, the company wants to reduce the pay of the “as-and-when-ers”, as the zero-hours staff were called, by £5 per hour.

On the back of us going out on strike the company issued permanent contracts to the six zero-hour contracted people who were currently on site, but they still proposed to use zero-hour contracts to cover accidents, holidays and sickness and any uplift in business.

When the redundancies were announced earlier this year, the whole bakery took a cut in hours and salary to prevent the loss of jobs — not to be replaced by either agency or zero-hour contracted people.

The company has flatly refused to re-address shift patterns and reinstate people’s hours and earnings, but say they’re going to use agency labour — zero-hours contracts supplied by a third party.

The company’s spokesperson, Richard Johnson, stated in the *Recruiter* magazine that they would only use a maximum of ten persons on agency labour. Even so, the company refused to give us any assurances about that maximum of ten. Our second week of strike action starts from 6am on 11 September.

When Hovis cut hours, some people lost ten hours a week. The loss of earnings was between £85 and £100 per head. Some shift patterns were 52-hour shift patterns, and they changed to 42 hours. Some are down to 40 hours per week.

Some people had been here for 30 years plus. Those people are being replaced by agency labour, starting not 48 hours after they left the business. It is a cost-cutting exercise.

I’ve been in the industry for 25 years, 22 in a bakery. I understand the fluctuations in the production needs. We have always had temporary staff.

But the union had a national working agreement that temporary staff would be paid the same hourly rate as a permanent employee. And from experience in Wigan, they always managed to cover the fluctuation in business either by addressing shift patterns, or through casual labour.

The support we have received has been phenomenal. I’ve lost count of how many messages of support, how many donations we have received to help us in our fight against this. We are a small union. We’re a small band of people at Wigan.

I hope we have been an inspiration to our supporters, and I hope that people will take the same stance, and join us on the picket line.

We are planning a march from Wigan town centre on Saturday morning 14 September.



Chile: how the army killed reform

By Cathy Nugent

On 11 September 1973 a bloody military coup in Chile ousted the Popular Unity government of President Salvador Allende. Allende was killed defending the Presidential Palace during the coup.

Workers in the factories attempted to defend themselves against the military attacks — but they were not sufficiently organised or sufficiently armed, to stop the onslaught.

The military regime of General Pinochet which followed tortured and killed hundreds of thousands of working-class militants and political activists.

Allende's Popular Unity (UP) coalition government was elected in 1970. The two main parties were the pro-Moscow Communist Party and Allende's Socialist Party. Allende considered himself a Marxist.

The Chilean Communist Party had a stagist strategy for achieving socialism in Latin American countries. The first stage was for the workers to defeat the "reactionary feudal sector", forming an alliance with the "progressive" national bourgeoisie. Then the workers' movement would proceed to a struggle for socialism.

Yet by 1970 Chile was a fully bourgeois society. Even if there had been an important economic distinction between landlords and capitalists, politically the ruling class as a whole was united against working class or struggle.

The Socialist Party was nominally Marxist. In 1973 the overthrow of the capitalist state was still party policy, but not a policy that the party adhered to in practice.

The Popular Unity government came to power on a wave of radicalisation in 1970, boosted by dissatisfaction with a mild reform programme of a Christian Democrat government. Allende promised more.

The Popular Unity government believed Chilean economic development should take place without reliance on aid, loans or investment from abroad, particularly the United States. It stood in the tradition of the 1938-1946 Chilean "Popular Front" government of the Radical Party, supported by the Communist Party and the Socialist Party.

Popular Unity's reforms were far-reaching. By 1973 about 40% of land had been expropriated and turned into smaller plots and co-operatives. Copper and nitrate mines were nationalised, as were the banks and many smaller industries. The government intended to compensate the capitalists but could not afford it! Many nationalisations were on the initiative of the workers.

From day one the US State Department, headed by Henry Kissinger, funded the military and right-wing opposition to Popular Unity. The 1973 coup was actively backed by the CIA.

By 1972 Popular Unity began to be destabilised: the US withdrew credit; financial speculation was rife; agricultural productivity was low; wage strikes continued right through to 1973.

This led to economic crisis and crippling inflation which by 1972 had generated a middle-class and bourgeois reaction threatening the existence of the government.

Instead of building on the mass working-class support for its policies, the government grew less inclined to make concessions to the

workers.

In May 1972 a demonstration in Concepcion in support of further nationalisation, was fired upon by cabineros acting on the orders of the Communist Party mayor.

Instead of acting against the Chilean financiers, the government encouraged wage "restraint" in order to "conquer" inflation.

Allende believed a loyal "constitutional" majority among the officers would not allow a military coup.

In August 1972 the government sent in the police against a shopkeepers' strike in Santiago to try to get them to open up (many of them had been hoarding and conducting black market trading). This prompted violence from the fascist opposition.

In October 1972 the truck owners went on strike against a proposed state-controlled truck company. The strike spread to many other small businesses. In Parliament the opposition tried to impeach four government ministers.

During the middle-class strikes the Chilean workers tried to keep the factories operating, to defend the government and to try to stop the worsening of shortages. But Allende did not build on this support.

Workers' councils known as cordones were formed in several areas of the country. They saw their goal as keeping production going during the crisis, and defending the gains the workers had won under Allende.

Armed detachments were organised to meet the right-wing threat but were nowhere near widespread enough to save the Chilean workers from the savagery of the army.

Large sections of the Socialist Party supported the cordones, but the Communist Party was very hostile to them, seeing them as a challenge to their hegemony in the trade unions.

ELECTIONS

In the March 1973 legislative elections, Popular Unity increased its share of the vote to 45% (from 36% in 1970). By May the right was out in force on the streets

Now the miners struck against the withdrawal of the sliding scale of wages. Under this system — won in the first months of the government — wages were pegged to inflation and would rise automatically with the cost of living.

An attempted coup led by a rebel section of the military took place in June 1973. It was not supported by the whole of the military, only because they had not yet fully formulated their policy.

The government still enjoyed massive support amongst the working class. Only five days before the final coup a million people demonstrated in Santiago to celebrate the third anniversary of Allende's election.

In the event, apart from small armed detachments of workers, the Chilean proletariat was defeated with minimal fighting and then subjected to a terrible butchering.

There followed 16 years — until 1989, when the junta was forced into an election — of the viciously anti-working class Pinochet government.

Marxist socialists have had many debates about the lessons of the coup. They have pointed out that Allende's refusal to arm the workers was decisive in the defeat of the working class. This is true. But it was only the last act in a tragedy at the core of which was the Popular Unity government's decision to try to conciliate the capitalists, trying to convince them to go along with its reforms.

As the elected government, the UP thought they had the power — the armed forces. That is why they did not arm the workers. They learned that when it came to it, the capitalists, not parliamentary democracy, had the ultimate loyalty of the armed forces.

The working class of Chile paid for Allende's weakness, confusion and vacillation with many tens of thousands of proletarian lives.

Bosses won'

Nick Wrack, a member of the Socialist Platform in Left Unity, spoke to *Solidarity* about the lessons of the Chilean coup for socialists today.

***Solidarity*: On the left in Britain now a lot of people are looking to the Syriza majority as their political model. In the majority of Syriza, not in the left-wing minority, the Popular Unity government in Chile in the early 1970s is held up as a model. What light is shed on these models by looking back at what happened in Chile 40 years ago?**

Nick Wrack: I can't comment directly on the situation in Syriza, but the lessons of Chile are of enormous importance still. The coup demonstrated that the ruling class will never give up its power and privilege unless it is completely defeated. It will resort to violence, if it has to, to prevent change.

Everything we've got, the right to vote, the right to form trade unions, the right to assemble, has been forced from the ruling class, not given freely. When those rights come into conflict with their "right" to exploit and to make profits, then they will attempt to do away with the democratic gains of the past.

Anybody that wants to confront capitalism and bring about socialist change has to understand that the state in capitalist society is there to protect the capitalist class and the rule of capital. One of the major problems with the Chilean Popular Unity government was that, while it implemented big reforms, it didn't understand the need to carry change through to the end.

The leading participants in the Popular Unity government used the participation in the government of small parties that were opposed to fundamental change to hold back the movement. And I think the leaderships of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party, too, didn't really want that fundamental change to be carried through, or at least didn't understand what was necessary to achieve it.

***Solidarity*: Often people reply: but that's Chile, that's Latin America, where there are often coups. This is Britain. It is more democratic. There has never been a military coup here. The same considerations don't apply.**

NW: I'm not suggesting that we're on the verge of a military coup in Britain at the moment. But wherever you are, the same rules apply. Chile had a long parliamentary history, and not the same history of military dictatorships as other Latin American countries. The argument was used in Chile that Chile was different, and yet the Chilean ruling class,

t release their grip without violence

with the backing of the CIA and American imperialism, organised that coup.

There are differences. The working class is stronger, and we do have long-established democratic traditions in Britain that will be difficult to destroy. On the other hand, consciousness about socialist change and how to bring it about has fallen back very far. Even basic ideas about socialism are not as well-understood today.

If and when the working class is in a position to fundamentally confront capitalism, there will be sections of the ruling class trying to undermine that through all sorts of methods — constitutional obstruction, economic destabilisation, sabotage, agents provocateurs... If the process looks likely to be successful, then certainly consideration would be given to whether they could get away with a coup or coup-type reaction.

The answer is twofold: to make sure that you have a clear programme and a clear understanding about the state, and to build the maximum working-class support for the process of change, so that the ruling class understand that they have no chance of preventing it.

Any government seeking to represent the working class and push through fundamental change would have to do what Allende failed to do — dismantle the old institutions of the state, the institutions which in the end were used against Allende. It would have to dismantle the standing army, remove the judges, remove the top civil servants, and inaugurate a proper democracy based on election and recallability of all officials.

Solidarity: Aren't there also things in British history we can point to? We know now that in the 1970s, under the Labour government, "fairly senior officers" were discussing the possibility of a coup. We know that in a political system similar to Britain's, in Australia in 1975, a Labor government was sacked by the Governor-General as the representative of the Queen. The use of the permanent unelected state machine to get rid of reforming governments is not something that happens only in Latin America.

NW: Yes. The fundamental points apply no matter how deep the roots of democracy in the country. There are elements in the British state who have already considered what they might do if a reforming government came to power in Britain and challenged the power of capital.

Solidarity: Another response is to say yes, but all this is so far away from where we are now, politically, that talking about it is an unnecessary raising of remote future problems. What we must do now is organise for a limited left-reformist policy which will at least bring some relief. We can deal with all these problems much later.

NW: I don't agree with that response at all. We are a long way from confronting a Chile-type situation in Britain, but we may be much closer to it in Greece. It's impossible to say how the situation in Greece will develop, but when we have 50% of the riot police voting for Golden Dawn, and the relatively recent history of the military regime in Greece from 1967 to 1974, it shows that these issues are nearer than people might think.

And anyway, these lessons are not something that can be put to one side until we are on the eve of the socialist transformation of society. They need to be built into the fibre and fabric of the movement, so that everyone understands what the role of the armed forces, the judiciary, the police, the top civil servants, the secret security forces, is.

The state is not neutral in the class struggle. No workers' government or movement to change society can use that state. The state is there to protect capitalism. A new society would need a new form of state.

Workers march in support of Salvador Allende. Lacking their own programme to replace the capitalist state with a semi-state based on workers' rule, the Chilean working class went down to defeat.

Solidarity: What relevance do these historical lessons have to the debate today in Left Unity about its political platform?

NW: I wouldn't want to drag Chile in by the hair, and construct a forced relevance; but the platform we have drafted makes clear that socialism can't be evolutionary; that it has to be a fundamental breach with capitalism; that the present-day state can't be utilised to implement socialism; that coalitions with representatives of the capitalist class should be completely opposed, because those capitalist allies become a worm in the workers' movement to hold back the struggle, as happened in the Popular Unity government in 1970-3.

The leadership, both Allende and the CP, constantly compromised with the Christian Democracy, and ended up bringing leaders of the armed forces into the cabinet.

We need to build a mass party that wins the support of the majority of people — that is, the working class — and has a clear programme for complete change. We have to start with that attitude from the beginning and win the debates.

It may be difficult to persuade people who say "this is different", or "that was a long time ago", or "that won't happen here", but we have to warn people.

If you watch *The Battle for Chile*, a fantastic film by Patricio Guzman, he has interviews with young women workers who have a better understanding of the state than their leaders had.

They were demanding arms, and saying that they needed to defend themselves and their communities and their workplaces, but the established state forces had arms and they hadn't.



Free Shahrokh Zamani!

Iranian trade unionist Shahrokh Zamani has been imprisoned since June 2011. His crime? Attempting to build independent trade unions to stand up for his and fellow workers' rights.

Shahrokh, a member of the Painters' Union, was charged with "propaganda", "endangering national security", and "participating in an illegal organisation".

International human rights organisations say that Shahrokh has been physically and psychologically abused, denied medication, and denied visitors.

Shahrokh is a class-war prisoner. If we allow the Iranian state to get away with crushing him, it will be a defeat for all those fighting for workers' rights in Iran, and around the world.

Between now and January 2014, we will be seeking to collect 10,000 signatures in workplaces, universities, colleges, schools, and communities to demand Shahrokh's release.

Please support the campaign. Email freeshahrokh@gmail.com or ring 07775 763 750 for more information. Visit the campaign website at freeshahrokh.wordpress.com

Rebel Cities

Andy Forse reviews *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* by David Harvey (Verso Books, April 2012)

After flirting with the Occupy movement in London, I found myself swerving into the Marxist school of thought.

Harvey's book appealed because it examines the nature of the urban environment in relation to capital circulation processes and class struggle via the Marxist method, a twinning that neatly merges the latest two integers in my own political development.

Harvey begins by introducing the concept of "the right to the city", building on the concepts of Henri Lefebvre and Robert Parks, a demand that he proposes should be central to the development of anti-capitalist struggle, and that is already shaping social movements in metropolises around the world.

The first key thread is Harvey's analysis of the role of the urban environment in relation to the mechanics of capitalist crises and economic growth. He demonstrates that routinely, urban development has been used to overcome the problem of surplus disposal and to enable continued growth — so often entailing property bubbles, financial crashes, and human displacement.

The second thread is a review of the history of social movements that have sprung from urban settings. Harvey uncovers a plethora of historical examples, including The Paris Commune, France '68, Occupy Wall Street, and finally El Alto in Bolivia. Through a critique of these he coherently conveys his central argument: that the city as a whole should be thought of as the product of collective labour, and it is this, not simply the workplace, that should be in our sights as the locus of organising revolutionary movements.

Harvey also goes to some lengths to explore the cultural and social sphere, and points towards potential openings that communities could be galvanized around, and he systematically rouses the notion of class relations that dictate so many aspects of urban life.

COMMONS

The question of the commons is probed with Harvey's geographical expertise, and he teases out traditional objections to collective ownership and suggests numerous strategies which could be grappled with.

Rebel Cities appeals as a highly relevant and contemporary work through which to view and engineer the currents of social change that leap from city to city across the globe. There are laborious moments where the technical detail can overwhelm the less critical lay reader, but they are usually augmented by a return to accessible prose and lucidly characterised real-world examples. Most rewarding are the thoroughly engaging final chapters, which provide a wealth of ideas that could offer a serious framework for harnessing the revolutionary potential of the urban realm.

Pleasingly, the text seems to veer starkly away from any hint of an accusation of dogmatism; I counted only one loose reference to Trotskyism. Harvey does take time to briefly justify the need for the revolutionary party, and of course the use of the general Marxist vernacular is inescapable, but this does not appear to create a barrier of accessibility to the dedicated reader.

Throughout, Harvey's originality of thought is endearing and his arguments meticulously supported. Definitely recommended.

The "obscurity" of Gareth Bale?

Edd Mustill



"We speak the language that everybody understands. Instead of me saying somebody was avaricious, I'd say he was bloody greedy." *Bill Shankly*

This summer's football transfer window was a real seller's market. Clubs dug their heels in to keep their best contracted players, and mostly succeeded. Rooney didn't go to Chelsea. Suarez didn't go to Real Madrid. Rooney, Suarez, Benzema, Cabaye, and Higauin didn't go to Arsenal.

One player who did finally move, though, was Gareth Bale, whose transfer from Tottenham to Real Madrid made him the first €100m footballer in history. It was the most extreme of example of the inflated fees flying around Europe.

The Bale sale has provoked much soul-searching among the sport's commentariat. Most has been along the lines of lamenting the silly money sloshing around the top ends of the game, and decrying what football has become since the "money men" got involved (when exactly was this? No-one can say). Some have even asked how Real can spend such money when the Spanish economy is in such a state, as if a) the club is one of the country's economic driving forces and b) €100m is anything more than loose change at the level of national economics.

Bale is now earning £300,000 per week, an amount slammed by, among others, Southampton legend Matt Le Tissier as "obscene." Is it?

We'll never know whether the oft-reported line that a player "wants Champions League football" is a euphemism for "wants Champions League wages." It's reasonable to assume that, as professional athletes, footballers first and foremost want to play at the top end of the game. If someone wants to pay them 56p per second to do so, they're not likely to turn around and say, "I will only take the average wage of a skilled worker and give the rest back to the trade union

movement." There are, alas, these days as few convinced socialists in the game as there are in society at large.

In short, the economic state of the modern game is, and I can't stress this enough, not the fault of the players. For sure, there are football agents stalking the continent for whom the hopes, dreams, and wishes of whole communities of fans are nothing more than a mild inconvenience to be sidestepped. But aren't the players just getting the best deal for themselves from their employer? Isn't that what we want all wage earners to be doing?

Of course it sticks in the craw to think that a man, after his first day on the job, could earn enough money to put a deposit down on a house, which would take a couple two years to save for. How could it not? The screwed up logic of the capitalist labour market has decided that being good at football is a skill worth umpteen times more than, say, care work, giving debt advice, or teaching. This is clearly wrong.

But it's not the greed of footballers that has made the modern game. The reservoir of money in the game comes from the huge TV deals which Premier League and European level clubs are entitled to. Without breaking the grip of huge media conglomerates on broadcasting rights, things will stay that way. The problem is, if we legislated Sky out of English football and had it all on the BBC, English clubs would not be able to compete in the transfer market and the Premier League would get, to put it bluntly, much shitter. Like so many things, it's a problem which can only be tackled internationally.

Bale's transfer may seem silly to the point of being otherworldly to most of us, but it's no new departure for the game. It's just the price we pay for being able to watch great football.

Or at least, watch it on telly. Or at least, watch the highlights on telly. Or at least, watch the highlights on iPlayer, after Tuesday evening.



Paving the way for New Labour

Matt Cooper reviews *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013, Dir. John Akomfrah)

Cinema documentary has undergone a renaissance in recent years, with fine examples exploring subjects as diverse as sushi in *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (2011) and death squads in 1960s Indonesia in *The Act of Killing* (2012).

Nonetheless, a film about the semi-Marxist cultural theorist Stuart Hall is unexpected. Hall was born in Jamaica in 1932, went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar in 1952 and was the founding editor of *New Left Review* (NLR) in 1960. This was a journal which explicitly adopted a "third way" approach between Soviet Communism and social democracy, but was ambivalent about the working class and its revolutionary potential.

After resigning as editor of *NLR* in 1962, Hall became a leading radical academic joining the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University in 1964 and becoming its director from 1968 to 1979. Cultural studies grew out of the New Left interest in the culture of the working class, which had largely been ignored by academia, and was part of a rise in a form of academic radicalism that mixed some real insights in an overly abstract and obtuse theoretical carapace and, like the New Left, often had little relationship with real struggles.

The last phase of Hall's career commenced after 1979, when, despite his earlier rejection of both Stalinism and social democracy, he was one of the key theorists of bringing the two together. Through the pages of *Marxism Today* (the journal of the right wing of the Communist Party), and his own books, Hall argued that Labour needed to form a new progressive alliance in tune with "new times" where the organised working class was a diminishing force.

The problem with Akomfrah's film is that it fails to address

the development of Hall's thought. It is strongest on his part in the formation of the New Left, and here hints at the weakness of this approach. While Hall's co-thinkers were well established in Oxford and London, he reports that he was perplexed by an early encounter with the northern working class in Halifax. Like much else in the film, which is strait-jacketed by its choice to use only the words from radio and TV appearances by Hall, this is left undeveloped.

Similarly, the film moves briefly over Hall's work in the 1970s and fails to communicate what was specific about Hall's understanding of culture — particularly his work on the moral panic over mugging in *Policing the Crisis* (1978).

PESSIMISTIC

Worst of all, the film entirely misses out Hall's analysis of Thatcherism in the 1980s and his increasingly pessimistic response about how the left should respond to it.

Strangely, the film includes a clip of the 1984-1985 miners' strike, but there is no reference to any words from Hall to accompany it. Hall, while clearly sympathetic to the strike, thought it the doomed expression of class struggle that could no longer win. Without any clear sense of transforming society, Hall looked only to create a new more progressive ideology removed from such outdated class struggle. Unwittingly, he was preparing the ground for New Labour (which was more unenthusiastically supported by many of his *Marxism Today* collaborators).

Without much grasp of Hall's place in the movement away from class politics from the 1960s to the 1980s, *The Stuart Hall Project* ends up with a fragmented kaleidoscope of images without any clear narrative.

It neither does justice to Hall's ideas nor shows any critical understanding of them.

When Dutch workers under Nazi rule struck for the Jews

By Stan Crooke

“I looked into the workshop and saw all those girls and the boss. I wasn’t at all accustomed to speaking before a group. I said: ‘Ladies, all of Amsterdam has come to a standstill because they’ve been rounding up Jews and taking them away. We’ve got to join in.’ To my surprise, everyone took to the streets.”

“In the morning somebody from the communists came to the place where I worked and said: ‘We’re going on strike against the persecution of the Jews. Will you join us?’ So we did.”

“The whole city was on strike! On the way to the rally in the Noordermarkt we gave out leaflets calling on people to strike. As we walked, we shouted ‘Noordermarkt! Noordermarkt!’ and everyone followed us.”

“On the day we went on strike everyone’s eyes were shining again after ten months of occupation and oppression. When you take part in a strike like that, it restores your faith in human nature. We openly expressed our solidarity with our Jewish fellow citizens, and that’s something I’m still proud of.”

These are eye-witness accounts from participants in the Dutch general strike of February 1941, staged in opposition to the Nazi persecution of the country’s Jewish community.

The Nazis had needed only four days to conquer the Netherlands in May of 1940. The first anti-Jewish measures were implemented in July, when kosher slaughter was outlawed and Jews were banned from the air-raid defence services.

These were quickly followed by a ban on the recruitment of Jews to the civil service in August, and then the dismissal of all Jews from the civil service two months later. In January of 1941 all Jews and “half-Jews” were required to register with the authorities or face a five-year prison sentence. All Dutch Jews were ordered to move to Amsterdam, and all Jews who had fled to the Netherlands from other countries were sent to Westerbork transit camp.

Jews also faced a rising level of intimidation and physical attack from members of the Dutch fascist party, the NSB, and its paramilitary wing, the WA.

NSB members hung placards saying “No Jews Allowed” outside of shops, restaurants, theatres, pubs, night clubs and public parks. WA members rampaged through the Jewish district of Amsterdam, vandalizing buildings and attacking passers-by.

This escalating discrimination did not go without opposition. Students in Leiden and Delft students went on strike in November of 1940 in protest at the dismissal of Jewish teaching staff. Academics spoke out against the dismissals and were imprisoned for up to eight months for doing so. Staff in one of the biggest hospitals in Amsterdam staged a one-day strike.

The Truth, the underground paper of the banned Dutch Communist Party (CPN), condemned the anti-Jewish laws. An article published in January 1941 declared:

“The people of the Netherlands do not tolerate anti-Jewish pogroms. They hate anti-semitism. The Jews are, and must remain, full citizens with equal rights. The students have already provided an example of how this barbarism must be fought.”

“...In response to these shameless measures what is needed is powerful and united action by the entire population!”

Youth in the Jewish district of Amsterdam organised self-defence squads to beat off attacks by the WA and the “Green Police” (German military police). Dockworkers from Kattenburg, Wittenburg and Oostenburg fought alongside the Jewish self-defence squads, as too did youth from other districts in Amsterdam.

After a WA member had been killed in clashes on 11 February the Nazi authorities cordoned off the Jewish district with barbed wire, closed the bridges across the surrounding canals, put up placards declaring it to be the “Jewish Quarter”, and installed police checkpoints.

After this segregation there followed more attacks by the WA and the Green Police. But the resistance from the Jewish self-defence squads was unbroken.

On 19 February the Green Police attempted to raid an ice-cream parlour in the Jewish district run by Jewish refugees from Germany. The parlour had its own defence squad. The

A statue of a dockworker in Amsterdam, commemorating the strike.

police were driven off after ammonium gas used in the manufacture of ice cream had been sprayed in their faces.

As a reprisal, Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler ordered that raids be carried out on the Jewish district and that those arrested be deported to the Buchenwald and Mauthausen concentration camps.

Over the weekend of 22-23 February, 425 Jewish men between the ages of 20 and 35 were arbitrarily rounded up by the Green Police for deportation. The police raids provoked widespread popular revulsion.

In response, a meeting of the national and Amsterdam leaders of the CPN agreed to call a general strike.

The CPN was loyal to the Stalinist regime in Moscow. At that time Stalin was still denouncing the war as one between rival imperialisms (albeit one in which he showed more sympathy with Nazi Germany). This was to change abruptly four months later, when Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

But, to its credit, the CPN’s loyalty to Moscow did not prevent it from organising against the Nazi occupation and the attacks on Jews.

MEETING

During the daytime of 24 February, CP members toured city council workplaces encouraging workers to attend an open-air meeting that evening in the Noordermarkt.

The evening meeting, which numbered around 250, heard a succession of speakers denounce the mass arrest of Jews and backed the call for a general strike. Some workforces, especially on the docks, had already walked out on strike.

Later the same evening CPN member Jacoba Veltman, subsequently deported to Ravensbruck concentration camp, co-wrote, typed up, and duplicated the leaflet used to publicise the call for a general strike:

“Last Saturday, Sunday and Monday the Nazis behaved like beasts in neighbourhoods with Jewish inhabitants. Hundreds of Jewish youngsters were seized in the streets, thrown into police vans, and taken to an unknown place of horror...”

“These riots against the Jews represent an attack on all the labouring masses! They constitute the beginning of harsher enslavement and terrorism! Proletarian residents of Amsterdam, will you put up with this? No! A thousand times — no!”

Citing the example of the previous week’s strike by 2,000 shipyard workers which had forced the Nazis to drop plans to deport 128 skilled metalworkers to work in Germany, the leaflet called for strike action to stop the Nazi attacks on Jews:

“Organise protest strikes in all factories! Join ranks to fight against this terrorism! Demand the immediate liberation of the interned Jews! Demand the disbanding of the Dutch fascist terror groups! Organise self-defence in factories and neighbourhoods! ...

“Show your solidarity with the Jewish section of the proletariat... Spare the Jewish children from the terror of the Nazi atrocities — take them into your homes! ...

“Shut down all of Amsterdam for one day — shipyards, factories, shops, offices, banks, the local council and enterprises!”

“STRIKE! STRIKE! STRIKE!”

In the early hours of 25 February CPN members organised meetings of tramworkers in all the depots in Amsterdam, resulting in the shutdown of the entire network. Other city services quickly followed, along with teachers and school students.

Department stores did not open for business. The shipyards and the docks were silent. Demonstrations and rallies were staged in different districts of Amsterdam.

The strike continued into the next day, initially apparently ebbing away only to resurge with additional force. Rauter, the SS officer in charge of security in the Netherlands, described events in his report on the strike:

“On 26th about 80% of workplaces were back at work. Nearly all the trams were running again. At ten o’clock in the morning the strike appeared to be ebbing away. Suddenly it began again with a new intensity.”

“Countless illegal leaflets were distributed in all the workplaces of Amsterdam. In the early afternoon almost all local authority workplaces, shipyards and ironworks joined the strike.”

“At the same time the strike spread to the Fokker aircraft works, the Werkspoor factory and the railway goods depot, and all newspapers stopped work. In Amsterdam all shops and restaurants closed and trams came to a standstill. In the suburbs strikers overturned trams which were still running.”

The second day of the strike saw it spread well beyond Amsterdam. Workers in Zaanstreek, Kennemerland, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht joined the strike. So too did workers in Hilversum, Haarlem, Zaandam, Buusum and Groningen.

Overall, 300,000 workers were estimated to have taken part. It was the biggest strike in the history of the Netherlands, and the first mass strike in Nazi-occupied Europe.

But even as the strike spread outwards the Nazis stepped up the level of repression which was to end the strike.

Around 150 strikers had been arrested on the first day of the strike. An SS battalion was despatched to Amsterdam the same day and made arrests throughout the night. Although most of them were eventually released, the remainder were executed in the following months.

On the second day of the strike nine strikers were shot dead by the Green Police and the SS and another 45 wounded. Small businesses which had closed in support of the strike were threatened with permanent closure and confiscation of their assets.

Police were stationed on every tram to ensure that the service was kept running. Factories and newspapers were also occupied by troops in order to prevent further strike action. 60 of the strikers were deported to concentration camps.

After the end of the strike the Nazis imposed fines on three Dutch cities as penalties for their “misconduct”: Amsterdam (15 million guilders), Hilversum (2.5 million guilders) and Zaandam (0.5 million guilders).

The strike failed to achieve its goals. The victims of the mass arrest of 22 and 23 February were not released. Only two of them survived the concentration camps. An attempt by the CPN to stage another general strike in March was an abject failure.

And the Nazi persecution of Jews in the Netherlands did not cease but intensified.

Further restrictions were imposed on Jews in the months following the general strike. Jews were banned from owning radios, going to theatres and cinemas, using trams and trains, and even from cycling. All bank accounts for Jews were transferred to one bank, as a prelude to confiscation.

Mass deportations of Jews began in July of 1942. Of the 140,000 Jews living in the Netherlands in 1940 — many of them refugees from other European countries rather than indigenous Jews — over 100,000 perished in the Nazi concentration and extermination camps.

This amounted to 75% of the total Jewish population — far higher than the figures for France (25%) and Belgium (40%). This reflected the extent to which the regime imposed by the Nazis on the Netherlands was even more ruthless in its anti-semitism than its counterparts in other Nazi-occupied countries.

But even though it went down to defeat, the general strike of February 1941 must count as one of the most outstanding chapters in the history of the Dutch working class.

What should socialists say about fracking?

By Paul Vernadsky

The recent protests in Balcombe in Sussex have prompted a revival of the largely dormant climate movement in the UK.

AWL members have rightly taken part in the mobilisations, which have brought local residents into an alliance with climate activists to thwart drilling efforts and stymie the Tory-led government's "dash for gas" policy.

Shale gas has emerged as a potentially significant new source of "unconventional gas" in recent years, particularly in the US. Its extraction is now possible because of advances in drilling and other technologies, including hydraulic fracturing (fracking). Shale gas production in the US expanded tenfold in the two decades after 1990, now making up around 15% of total US gas supply.

Climate vs fracking

Socialist opposition to fracking is based on a number of strong ecological and democratic arguments. The principal reason to oppose fracking is that the process is at odds with efforts to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

The Tyndall Centre (Broderick 2011) concluded that large-scale extraction of shale gas "cannot be reconciled" with climate change commitments to limit global temperature increases to 2°C. In the UK context, shale gas could undermine the decarbonisation budgets proposed by the Committee on Climate Change.

Shale gas advocates point to the US, where shale gas extraction has coincided with cheaper gas prices and falling emissions. US CO₂ emissions from domestic energy have declined by 9% since a peak in 2005. But another Tyndall report (Broderick and Anderson 2012) estimates that between 35% and 50% of power sector emissions reductions may have been due to shale gas price effects, with the rest was due to renewable and nuclear power.

Even if this is an improvement in the US, it is no argument globally. "Climate mitigation in one country" is not progress if it simply displaces the emissions elsewhere. There has been a substantial increase in coal exports from the US over the same period and globally coal consumption continues to rise. More than half of the emissions avoided in the US power sector may have been exported as coal.

Gas is sometimes advocated as a lesser evil, because gas-fired power stations emit 57% less carbon dioxide per kilowatt-hour than coal-fired plants. However US research has shown that shale gas has higher production-related greenhouse gas emissions than conventional gas. Greater venting of gas includes damaging "fugitive" methane emissions. An LSE report (Bassi 2013) states that "some analysts have concluded that these have been so great as to eliminate the life-cycle greenhouse gas emission benefits of shale gas compared with coal for power generation, although this has been disputed".

Transitional fuel?

Tyndall researchers say the argument that shale gas should be exploited as a transitional fuel in the shift to a low carbon economy "seems tenuous at best".

In the UK, shale gas will not substitute for coal. Currently, around two-thirds of coal consumption is imported, so any reduction in coal demand from the UK could trigger reductions in global coal prices. The Tyndall Centre states: "The supply-demand relationship of relatively liberalised markets makes clear that a reduction in the price for coal will facilitate increased demand elsewhere". Consequently, whilst the UK may be able to reduce its national emissions through indigenous shale gas, this risks triggering a net increase in global emissions from coal, to add to the extra emissions from shale gas.

It is possible that UK-produced shale gas could substitute for im-

ported gas, although it would not negate the need for gas imports. However shale gas could reduce gas prices and direct investment away from renewable energy.

Capital investment in shale gas could potentially displace offshore and onshore wind capacity. It is no coincidence that big oil firms like Shell and BP have moved away from renewables and into shale gas in recent years.

Any short-term financial benefit that may accrue to shale gas heating and electricity risks "locking-in" fossil fuel-intensive energy infrastructure for decades, making future efforts to tackle climate change much harder.

The Tyndall researchers concluded: "It is also important to note that in a market-led global energy system where energy demand worldwide is growing rapidly, even if shale gas were to substitute for imported gas in the UK, leading to no rise in emissions, it is likely that this gas would just be used elsewhere, resulting in a global increase in emissions."

Other environmental arguments

The Tyndall report (2011) found "a clear risk of contamination of groundwater from shale gas extraction", although the LSE report stated that in the UK most aquifers are 300 below the surface, while fracking takes place at a depth of two kilometres, making the upward flow of liquids "highly unlikely".

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is due to produce a study next year on risks to groundwater. At the very least, stiff regulations will be needed if surface pollution is to be avoided. Significant amounts of water are required to extract shale gas and this could put severe pressure on water supplies in areas of commercial exploitation.

The seismic impacts of fracking were brought into dramatic relief when hydraulic fracturing at an exploratory site was stopped after a magnitude 1.5 earthquake on 27 May 2011 near Blackpool. This was preceded by a magnitude 2.3 earthquake on 1 April 2011. An investigation concluded that it is "highly probable" that the hydraulic fracturing triggered the recorded seismic events. There are also significant noise and traffic impacts from the fracking process and concerns about the chemicals used in fracturing fluids.

Jobs and prices

Many of the arguments around fracking have been pitched towards workers, with promises of jobs, lower fuel bills and energy security. David Cameron has said 75-150,000 jobs are possible, while Cuadrilla has promised to create 50,000 jobs across the UK.

However Cornell Labor Institute research found that the Barnett Shale in Texas had created only 3,200 construction and energy jobs over ten years, while the Marcellus Shale had created no more than 10,000 new jobs.

Similarly, grand promises have been made about lower fuel bills, in the context of over 5 million people in the UK mired in fuel poverty (spending a tenth of their income on

fuel bills). However an LSE report argues that because gas prices are segmented, with Britain an even more "liberalised" market than Europe, "it is unlikely that gas consumers would see much, if any, benefit in terms of reduced gas and electricity bills". Energy analysts mostly believe fuel prices will go up in the coming decades, whatever happens with shale gas.

On energy security, there is no agreement as to how much shale gas can be extracted from the UK, particularly from the two main formations – the Bowland Shale in northern England and the Weald Basin in southern England. The LSE report suggests that even on the most optimistic assumptions, there is the equivalent of 2-14 years of domestic gas consumption – a long way from *Times* newspaper reports of 1,500 years of heating for every home in the UK.

So far UK trade unions have not done much about fracking. The TUC Congress 2012 passed a motion opposing it. The motion said: "The principle of precaution should be applied when developing new energies and the health of people and the environment should be put before profit."

It originated from unions and community organisations in the North West. It stated: "The fracking method of gas extraction should be condemned unless proven harmless for people and the environment. This type of energy production is not sustainable as it relies on a limited resource."

"Until now, there is evidence that it causes earthquakes and water pollution and further investigation should be carried out before any expansion." Unions have a vital role in opposing extreme energy and coalescing climate activists into a powerful movement.

Conclusions

Beyond supporting protests opposed to fracking, socialists have significant arguments and strategies to add. First, the wider political point is that the neoliberal energy regime makes tackling climate change harder.

Privately owned energy firms and bourgeois-state corporations run according to market imperatives mean that price signals prompt continued investment in fossil fuels – including extreme energy like shale gas and tar sands – at the expense of expanding less polluting sources such as renewables (and nuclear). Taking ownership and control of these capitalist giants is necessary, so that climate change can be mitigated to the extent necessary and in the time left.

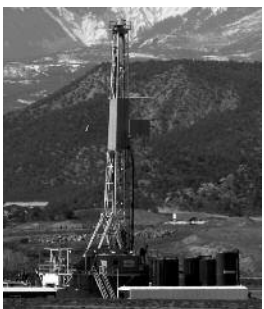
Secondly private ownership and control of energy makes democratic oversight and accountability much harder. This is true at various scales, from getting a global agreement between states to tackle climate change, to government policies (like the Tory tax-breaks for shale), all the way down to local people in the North-West and South-East of England who find the likes of Cuadrilla fracking and preparing to frack without their say-so. Socialists need to advocate maximum democratic control over the economy and energy in particular.

Such demands have great resonance at present. In a ComRes poll for BBC 5 live last week, over two-thirds (69%) of those questioned thought energy companies should be nationalised, while a similar proportion (67%) support having more wind farms in their area. Their rationale was also clear: over three-quarters (77%) thought energy prices are set unfairly, while a quarter (25%) said they have put up with "unacceptably cold temperatures".

What is needed is a mass working class-based climate movement to take up these issues. The labour movement has an irreplaceable role in outlining a sustainable energy policy, fighting for climate jobs and for democratic control at work and in communities over energy.

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Postal workers prepare for national ballot

By Jonny West

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has announced that it will ballot members working for Royal Mail and Parcelforce for strikes from 20 September unless Royal Mail agrees a “legally-binding” deal that guarantees to protect workers’ pay, pensions, and conditions in the event of the privatisation of the service.

The ballot would be due back on 3 October, with strikes expected by 10 October if it returns a yes vote. It would be the first national ballot of CWU’s 125,000 Royal Mail members since 2009.

CWU deputy general secretary Dave Ward said: “We are dealing with a company that is preparing for privatisation with rel-

ish. While the union continues to fight privatisation we are also dealing with the potential realities for workers if there is a change of ownership.

“We are looking to reach a groundbreaking agreement on terms and conditions that sets unprecedented legally binding protection for workers in the event of a sale, and regardless of who owns the company. Postal workers know franchising, break up and sale of mail centres, distribution hubs and Parcelforce, along with the introduction of a new workforce on lower terms and conditions, are real threats in a race to the bottom with mail competitors for any new company.

“We want Royal Mail and the government to put protections in place that are meaningful and lasting.”

Meanwhile, the Bridgwater postal workers’ dispute has ended with a deal that commits managers to seek union agreement for all changes to working practices.

Bristol CWU Branch Secretary David Wilshire said: “Following lengthy and difficult negotiations an agreement has been ac-

cepted that places the union back at the centre of all decisions that are made in Royal Mail Bridgwater. Crucially it states that future changes will not be made until agreement is reached. In addition Royal Mail must realise that unless the management of the office seriously improves in the near future more dis-

putes are inevitable.”

Dave Chapple, Bristol CWU Branch Chair and Bridgwater rep, said:

“110 postmen and women have sustained what is possibly, that epic Burslem struggle apart, the longest and most bitter official dispute in a Royal Mail Delivery Office for 20 years. What were we up against? First, up to 150 Royal Mail managers breaking our every picket line; second, our so-called free country’s laws that makes solidarity strikes illegal. Had it not been for the amazing financial support from CWU branches and other trades unionists nationwide, we would have struggled.

“Thanks to all those who supported us, we remain defiant and definitely undefeated!”

“Boris Bike” rep wins tribunal

By Clarke Benitez

An Employment Tribunal has ruled that Zack Dahou, a leading trade union rep employed by Serco Barclays on the “Boris Bike” municipal cycle scheme, was unfairly dismissed, and that his dismissal was linked to his trade union activities.

The victory comes in the context of union advances in the workplace, with a recent strike against uni-

lateral shift changes and bullying management securing the removal of the two worst managerial culprits and a management agreement to consider union proposals for shift patterns.

The Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT) is growing amongst “Boris Bike” workers, despite attempts by right-wing union Community to undermine it by signing a sweetheart deal with management.

Unions call day of action against blacklisting

By Ollie Moore

Unions at the Trades Union Congress’s annual conference in Bournemouth (8-13 September) have called a day of action against blacklisting for 20 November.

The day will include direct actions and a lobby of Parliament. It is the first cross-union, nationally-coordinated action against blacklisting.

Since the construction in-

dustry blacklist was exposed in 2009, many of the workers named have still not received confirmation that they were on the list, or any recompense from the companies.

The day of action will be buoyed by the recent huge victory against Crossrail construction contractors BFK, who reinstated sacked electrician Frank Morris after a year long campaign.

For more on the Crossrail reinstatement victory, see page 12.

PCS beats Pickles

By Stan Cove

On Tuesday 3 September, the High Court ruled that staff in the civil service Department for Communities and Local Government have a contractual right to have their union dues collected through payroll (“check off”).

The court ruled that the Tory Secretary of State Eric Pickles had acted unlawfully in ordering in the cessation of check off for DCLG staff from the end of August, and awarded costs against him, landing the taxpayer with a total bill of £90,000. The cost of check off in DCLG is around £340 per annum!

Pickles’ decision to halt check off was part of his anti-union drive that has included reducing facility time to 0.04% of the pay bill and banning elected delegates from attending union conferences unless they do so in their own time. He has gone further than any other Minister in his hostility to unions.

According to PCS observers, the judge comprehensively rejected the arguments advanced on behalf of Pickles. One observer described Pickles’ legal case as “pathetically threadbare” and thought it likely that he had been

warned of the weakness of his case before forcing the issue to court and wasting public money.

Pickles appears to be a Tory politician with contempt for contract law. He has lumbered the taxpayer with a £90,000 bill, but the *Daily Mirror* has quoted a spokesman for DCLG as saying: “This is a ruling on a technical point of employment law, based on a staff handbook drawn up under the Labour government.” The “technical point of law” being that he cannot simply repudiate a contractual obligation!

Pickles’ irrelevant reference to the last Labour government — who, PCS officials assure us, really did not negotiate DCLG’s Staff Handbook! — is of course a weak attempt to shift the responsibility for his own incompetence. Presumably, however, Mr

Pickles thinks that a future Labour government could and should repudiate aspects of contracts agreed between the present government and profiteers making enormous sums of money out of the welfare state.

Pickles is a Tory politico who has prospered from the high salaries, the generous pension arrangements, and the second-home arrangements afforded to professional politicians. He continues to do very nicely at the expense of the “taxpayer”. As a man so allegedly keen on “transparency”, Pickles should either resign or be sacked for wasting money like this when a civil servant would be on poor performance or misconduct procedures for such poor decision making.

It is striking, however, that the Tories’ “Liberal” coalition partners endorse Pickles’ and the Tories’ anti-union drive.

With Labour so silent on Pickles and the Liberals so compliant, there can be no doubt that he will continue to bear down on the collective representation of DCLG trade union members and that the 3 September decision was just round one in the fight.

Firefighters move closer to strikes

By Darren Bedford

Members of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) have voted strongly for strike action over the government’s pension proposals, which could see the first national firefighters’ strike for a decade.

FBU members voted almost four-to-one (78%) on a 60% turnout for strike action with the next month — close to an absolutely majority of those balloted.

Although the Public Service Pension Act pushes up the normal pension of firefighters to 60, the union has sought guarantees that firefighters can continue to retire earlier than that because of the physical nature of the job. Even the government’s own review accepts that most firefighters will not be fit enough to carry out emergency intervention and rescues at 60.

The union has not yet named dates for strike action. Unless there is a substantial improvement in the government’s offer, it is important that strike action goes ahead. Taking action would demonstrate that firefighters do not accept the government’s worsening of their conditions or the threat to public safety it would inevitably create.

Strike action may force further concessions from the government. It puts a marker down not just on pensions but on the cuts being wrought against the fire and rescue service.

• Abridged from bit.ly/fbu-strike

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Against Assad, against sectarian militias, against US bombs: for democracy in Syria!

By Stephen Wood

Obstacles to the planned US bombing of the military bases of the Assad regime are multiplying.

Socialist agitation should be one of those obstacles. We are against Assad; but the opposition in Syria, which started off secular and democratic, and probably is still that way in the wishes of many people in Syria, is now dominated militarily by reactionary and sectarian groups.

On the evidence, the opposition military forces rebels currently able to make the biggest gains from setbacks for the Assad regime have nothing to offer the Syrian people beyond further repression and religious fundamentalism.

And informed military opinion is that in fact the bombing will be a "token", serving little purpose except to enhance the position of the USA in politicking around the Syria crisis. We are not for anyone being bombed to enhance the prestige of the rulers of the USA.

The obstacles to bombing are much wider than socialist agitation. Russia and China have declared that any assault without the backing of the UN will be in breach of international law. Russia, in particular, is a key backer of Assad and will resist any action likely to damage military installations full of Russian equipment.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar support US bombing, but Jordan and Lebanon remain concerned that it will speed the spreading of the conflict.

Israel remains cautious. It supports a drive to oust Assad, but it also fears retaliation by Iran or the Lebanese Islamist militia Hezbollah, both of whom are capable of attacking Israel and have fighters on the ground in Syria.

There are now more than 2 million Syrian refugees

Inside the USA, the experience of Iraq has left many politicians, including many on the Republican right, cautious about bombing. President Barack Obama will go to Congress for approval, and says openly that he may not get it.

Now Russia has proposed Syria puts its chemical weapons under international control. Syria has accepted the proposal. The US has been forced to give a cautious welcome. That may put US bombing plans on hold.

INSIDE SYRIA

The Assad regime is reported to have moved its Russian-built scud missile launchers, and shifted troops into places like university campuses which it thinks the USA will not bomb.

The USA and its allies may not be that bothered if bombing has little military effect, since they are as worried about the relative strength of the sectarian militias within the opposition as they are about what Assad does.

The opposition is divided over what bombing may achieve. The *Guardian* (9 September) reports Al Qaeda types as expecting that the US will bomb them, too, "on the side", if it bombs Assad's bases, and less "ultra" groups as wel-

coming the plans to bomb. The *Daily Telegraph* quotes an intelligence report from the defence consultancy IHS Jane's that an attack "is unlikely [to] lead to a nationwide surge in opposition victories and... imminent overthrow of the government".

Jabhat al-Nusra (linked to Al Qaeda) and a group calling itself the Qalamon Liberation Front have recently seized a formerly government controlled Christian town, Maaloula, north-east of Damascus. Unconfirmed reports tell of the torching and looting of churches, forced conversions to Islam, beheadings, by fighters many of whom were from Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and Chechnya.

In an interview with an Iraqi Kurdish website, Syrian Deputy Prime Minister Qadri Jamil has claimed that Government forces are now working alongside the YPG Kurdish militias in Qamishli, Hasaka and Efrin, and helping ensure flights continue between Qamishli and Damascus. The towns continue to come under attack from Jabhat al-Nusra and other sectarian militias.

The PYD, the party ruling most of Syrian Kurdistan, however denies that it collaborates directly with the Assad Government. Thousands continue to flee into Iraqi Kurdistan.

Crossrail bosses beaten on blacklisting

By Darren Bedford

Frank Morris, an electrician sacked from his job on a Crossrail construction site in Westbourne Park, London, in September 2012 for raising health and safety concerns in his capacity as a trade union representative, has been reinstated.

The deal between Unite and Bam Ferrovial Kier (BFK, the construction consortium operating construction work on Crossrail sites) is the result of a year of relentless campaigning by rank-and-file trade union activists.

Frank and his supporters conducted near-daily pickets at the Westbourne Park site, as well as regularly picketing the flagship Crossrail development on Oxford Street, often blockading the road. The role of the rank and file-led Blacklist Support Group in mobilising activists and maintaining the momentum of the campaign was integral. Creative actions, such as an occupation of the Office of Rail Regulation, which is responsible for health and safety on railway sites, on 2 November, helped keep the campaign fresh and supplemented the pickets of Crossrail sites.

In an interview with *Solidarity* on 7 November 2012, Frank Morris said: "We've got to keep turning up and picketing, and increasing the pressure until Crossrail back down. If they get away with removing me and the H&S rep from the site, it sets a very dangerous precedent and will give the green light to any employer, in any industry, to move against elected union representatives in the workplace."

The victory sets the opposite precedent — that employers who victimise workers for standing up for safety and workers' rights will not be allowed to get away with it.

Unite at a national level played a positive role, and certainly more so than in the 2011 electricians' campaign against pay cuts and deskilling, which the union was slow to support and which was initially met with hostility from some union officers.

The union took up Frank's case in a high-profile, direct-action focused way in May 2013, when it began a programme of direct actions targeting Bam Nuttal, Ferrovial, and Kier individually. The union poured huge resources into the campaign, staging over 1,000 protests at meetings of shareholders, investors, and other companies in the BFK firms' supply chains. Actions were even staged in Spain and America.

That Unite resourced the campaign in this way, and backed radical forms of civil disobedience and direct action, is a tribute to the strength of the construction workers' rank-and-file — their refusal, in 2011 and since, to back down, and their insistent demand that their union back their struggles, even when union officialdom seem implacably hostile.

The deal which returned Frank to work also guaranteed union recognition and union access across Crossrail sites. This represents a massive climbdown for BFK bosses and an enormous victory for the whole labour movement. A rare advance for labour against the backdrop of a bosses' offensive, the deal will guarantee Unite organisers time to speak to all Crossrail workers during their induction process. Winning such a deal on an enormous construction project like Crossrail could help Unite rebuild union strength in an industry where it has been declining since the 1990s.

Like Bob Carnegie's victory against construction firm Abigroup in Australia, Frank Morris's win shows what is possible when working-class people simply refuse to back down, even in the face of seemingly intransigent bosses.

Dave Smith, from the Blacklist Support Group, said: "The Crossrail dispute was totemic. It was not just about Frank Morris. It was about the future direction of trade unionism in the building industry.

"Such blatant blacklisting was a declaration of war by the big contractors against all unions. If they thought we didn't have the stomach or the troops for a fight — they were wrong."

Frank Morris