



For a
workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 319 2 April 2014 30p/80p

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TO RICH,

See
page 5

NOT OUR



BENEFITS!

Households with
disabled people have
been hardest hit by
benefit cuts

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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



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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

The editor (Cathy Nugent), 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

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French right and far right make gains

By Michael Johnson

Francois Hollande's governing Socialist Party (PS) lost control of around 155 towns and cities in France's municipal elections on 30 March. There was a strong showing for the far-right Front National (FN) and a boost for the centre-right UMP.

In what is already being dubbed "Black Sunday", voters sought to punish Hollande — who is now polling as the most unpopular President of the Fifth Republic. His only consolation is that the PS held Paris, with Anne Hidalgo succeeding Bertrand Delanoë to become the city's first woman mayor.

Hollande reshuffled his government on 1 April, with Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault standing down. He was replaced by Interior Minister Manuel Valls, a self-described "Blairiste" and "Clintonien".

Valls is on the right of the party, and is often compared to former President

Nicholas Sarkozy for his ambition and hard-line stance on crime and security issues. His promotion has already led to the departure of Cécile Duflot, one of the Green ministers in the government, and threatens to further divide the ruling PS.

Voters were discontented with rising unemployment, which currently sits at around 10%. Working-class voters are angry at cuts intended to reduce France's budget deficit, while the more wealthy resent tax rises, especially the abolition of former President Sarkozy's "tax holiday" on overtime.

In *Le Monde*, Jean-Luc Mélenchon from Front de Gauche blamed Hollande and his "turn rightwards, the government's preferred alliance with the [French employers' organisation] MEDEF, and its submission to European austerity policies. These have produced a disaster."

The FN won in 11 towns of over 9,000 inhabitants, surpassing their previous

high-point in the mid-90s when they were briefly in control of four town halls. Though most of the towns are small, the FN now also controls the diverse 7th district of Marseilles, home to 150,000 people in France's second city. This gives them a strong base on which to build going in to the European elections in May, in which they are expected to poll in second place ahead of the PS.

Nonna Mayer, research director at the Centre of European Studies at Sciences Po (Paris Institute of Political Science), told the *Guardian*: "It's the first time the Front National has organised such an electoral dynamic in local elections... Voters are so tired of the economic situation and they have the feeling that the left and the right have been unable to find a solution... They say we have tried everything, why not try the Front National."

This was echoed by the former Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste (NPA) presidential candidate Olivier

Besancenot, who pointed to the 38% abstention rate as proof that "the political system has been reduced to ashes" and called vaguely for a "democratic insurrection."

The Socialist Mayor of Farciennes in Belgium has suspended relations with its "sister city" Beaucaire, which elected an FN mayor. The Mayor of Arlon, twinned with Hayange, has proposed the same. These symbolic actions will, of course, be little consolation for those at the sharp end of the FN's racism in France.

The main victor in the election was the centre-right UMP opposition, which has sought to undermine the government's legitimacy by offering a power-sharing arrangement.

Exit polls show that the UMP won around 49% of the vote to the PS's 24%. It captured the city of Toulouse, as well as a slew of towns traditionally run by the left, including Limoges, which had been left-controlled since 1912.

March in March: Australian indignados?

By Riki Lane

It seemed to come from nowhere, then it was everywhere. It was against everything, but not clearly for anything.

It was the largest political mobilisation for years, but the mainstream media virtually ignored it. It was inspiring and revitalising for workers, union and community activists, but had little support from the larger campaigns and parties.

"March in March" on March 15-17 brought over 100,000 people onto the streets against the Abbott government's policies — over 30,000 in Melbourne. Rallies were held in all cities and dozens of regional towns. Initiated through social media by a few rural individuals, the call spread rapidly, meeting the broad feelings of discontent with the attacks on so many fronts. Refugees, climate change, union rights, civil rights — these were prominent issues, but among dozens.

Like almost all the left, I was surprised by the numbers. Awareness crept up as I realised friends and family who do not usually attend rallies were going to this one. Clearly this form of broad non-specific protest met the mood: people sick of the constant attacks from governments of ALP and Coalition alike. There were echoes of the "indignados", of generalised opposition to neoliberalism.

March in March was not built by the larger campaigning groups and parties such as GetUp, Amnesty International the Greens or the ALP.

The organisers' politics were mild, summed up in their overall slogan of "Australians united for a better government". They emphasised after the rally that they were not "the left" but all people.

Yet this very broadness and lack of control by larger groups allowed an enormous range of smaller community groups, campaigns, unions and parties to mobilise. In my case, it was building a rally for a local campaign against



an environmentally destructive and economically ridiculous Tollway (the Melbourne East-West Tunnel).

The marches marked the re-emergence of a fighting spirit amongst tens of thousands of workers and activists. Yet mass media coverage was minimal — both of the lead up and the rallies themselves. The little coverage focussed on angry slogans directed at prime minister Tony Abbott and the government — complaining these were "hateful". You would of the Murdoch press, but the usually left-liberal ABC, SBS and Fairfax media also found little worth reporting.

There are plans for follow up marches on 30-31 August 2014

- www.marchaustralia.com
- www.greenleft.org.au/node/56111
- redflag.org.au/article/march-march-and-fightback-we-need

Students discuss six months of struggle

By Beth Redmond

The National Union of Students conference (8-10 April, Liverpool) comes after six months which have seen important struggles.

There have been two main issues: workers' rights on campus and repression against student activists.

The two are connected,

because the relatively big movement for "cops off campus" at the end of last year was sparked by management and police repression against student solidarity actions with campus workers.

The biggest flashpoint was University of London, the site of the very important Tres Cosas campaign by outsourced cleaning and

maintenance workers, and of heavy repression against student protests supporting it. The other two universities to suffer the worst repression, Birmingham and Sussex, have also seen student action in support of workers' struggles.

Campaigns uniting students with workers on their campuses (often Living Wage campaigns) have been appearing, all over the country, although at a relatively low level.

NUS is heavily bureaucratized and politically right wing. But these kind of battles will find some expression at its conference because of the intervention of the left-wing network National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC), which includes AWL students.

NCAFC-sympathetic student unions have proposed policy to the conference on these issues, including spreading the example of campaigns like Tres Cosas, support for the upcoming lecturers' marking boycott, the demand for a maximum pay ratio in education, and the demand for police not to be allowed on campus without permission from the student union.

They have also submitted motions on NUS's demands and strategy over education funding, cuts, student housing, jobs and rights at work,

anti-racism, the NHS and the general election.

As well as contributing to these proposals, Workers' Liberty students have successfully pushed for the submission of more "political" motions on issues including expropriating the banks, Ukraine, commemorating the miners' strike – and Europe.

Shockingly, UKIP feel confident enough to stand a candidate for NUS President. Our motion seeks to commit NUS to a serious fight against nationalism and anti-migrant bigotry, and against UKIP in particular.

The NCAFC will hold

fringe events and produce a daily bulletin. It is also standing candidates for NUS's national executive, both for the full-time officer positions — including AWL member Daniel Cooper for President — and for the part-time "Block of 15".

In the year running up to the general election, with the Tories refusing to rule out higher fees and Labour currently putting forward no clear policy, NUS's lack of political radicalism and drive could be disastrous.

The consolidation of an effective, confrontational left-wing bloc inside NUS is important.

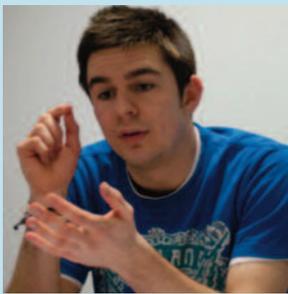
• More: anticuts.com

Left candidate for President

Daniel Cooper is a member of Workers' Liberty, Vice President of University of London Union, and the left's candidate for NUS President. He told *Solidarity*:

"NUS has had little if anything to do with the most dynamic, exciting student struggles of the last year. As mounting repression is used to help impose marketisation on our education system, it has stood aside. It is sleepwalking into the year of a General Election, with big threats and opportunities for the student movement.

"NCAFC's [National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts] campaign has given a political expression to grassroots student struggles, and raised the possibility of a national



perspective for the student movement radically different from the timidity, management speak and bureaucracy of NUS. I hope it will succeed in consolidating a stronger left inside NUS, linked to grassroots activists and struggles.

"We need to use the conference as a launch pad to get the student left better organised, more united, more active and more political."

Birmingham: justice on our side

The 13 students who were arrested at a demonstration in Birmingham on 29 January have had their criminal investigations discontinued, and the remaining two out of five students who had been suspended have been reinstated.

The win came at the end of an eight week long battle with university management, who have unsuccessfully tried to bully a minority of students into silence and out of activism on campus.

On 20 February management reinstated three of the five after an open letter condemning the university's actions was signed by 5,700 people, including Clare Short and Noam Chomsky.

The remaining two students still had no access to their personal tutors, seminars, lectures, welfare and

counselling services, and were not able to hand in any academic work, and the Student Loans Company was demanding money from them due to their studies being "interrupted".

A demo was called for Wednesday 26 March, and people from Edinburgh, Liverpool and London came together in Birmingham to help build for the demonstration.

An open letter was published the same week, signed by 228 staff members and academics at Birmingham University and delivered to the Vice Chancellor.

The day before the demo, the two suspended students were informed they could continue their studies. Despite being initially unresponsive, the Guild of students backed the demonstration, as did UCU, and it

went ahead.

One of the final two suspended students, Kelly Rogers, spoke to *Solidarity*: "The campaign brought out people from every corner: students from Birmingham and around the country, academics, support staff, MPs, members of the public. It was a broad campaign centred on the basic principle of innocent until proven guilty, and justice.

"That's why it won. Ultimately, it's completely untenable for universities and the police to continue singling out and punishing students before trial.

"The support was appreciated more than I can say, and I think we have shown that when students do get singled out, there is a national network to support and defend them."



Spanish students strike against cuts

By Rachael Barnes

Students from universities all over Spain went on a 48-hour strike last Wednesday, called by the national students' union.

They struck to oppose cuts to education spending, to demand the resignation Minister of Education Jose Ignacio Wert, who has introduced the education reforms, and to protest against new restrictions on access to grants for both living costs and tuition fees. In order to get a grant, students must obtain a certain grade in their entrance exams.

The funding cuts and grant restrictions are justified as stabilising Spain's public finances. They have come at a time where unemployment is 26%, and it is reported that two million young Spaniards have had to leave university because they could no longer afford to study.

Thousands of people have come together in Madrid since 22 March to protest against poverty and EU-imposed austerity.

On the first day of the

strike, protesters at the Complutense University in Madrid, set fire to bins and used them to build barricades to block traffic on the main road through the university. An occupation of a student services building had been ongoing and at the request of the university was emptied by around 100 police officers. 53 people had been arrested by the end of the first day.

Around 150 students built barricades on the second day of the strike while many others marched, but all police vans had left Complutense University's campus in the morning.

This was one of 70 protests nationwide, with university students, school students, workers and parents.

On our website:

Report of Left Unity policy conference
bit.ly/1s3BgF2

Report of Campaign for Labour Party Democracy
bit.ly/clpdagm

Threat to annuities

Robin Blackburn, author of *Age Shock: How Finance is failing us* and other books, comments on pension changes made in George Osborne's Budget.

I can understand why there has been a reluctance to criticise allowing holders of pension plans to cash out their pension pot rather than being forced to buy an annuity at retirement. In recent years, with miserable interest rates, annuities barely keep pace with inflation.

However this measure will offer greatest rewards to those with higher incomes. About half of all tax relief goes to the top 10 per cent of earners. To those with small pension pots — say, £10,000 or £20,000 — it will bring welcome flexibility but is not a big deal.

A dwindling number of people are covered by "final salary" or "defined benefit" schemes, and the measures will probably not have major impact on them.

For the majority the new arrangements will do nothing, or very little.

Osborne claims that he is enhancing "choice", but the likelihood is that he will be destroying or degrading the workings of the annuities market. Annuities work best when large numbers are obliged to pool their risk — in this case the risk of outliving your pension.

If the well-off are to get a handsome bonus, and if annuities are threatened, it would be only fair to come up with benefit for those left out — and, if possible, to make sure that annuities survive and prosper.

These desirable outcomes could be secured by setting up a publicly owned and guaranteed annuity scheme to be financed by a share levy on banks and other corporations, equivalent to 10 per cent of their annual profits, along the lines I outlined in *Age Shock: How Finance Is Failing Us*.

Membership of this scheme would be open to all and it would furnish a second pension to all. It would offer reasonable annuity rates to any extra entitlement that a member wished to purchase from the National Annuity Fund.

It would be set up so as to deliver the advantages of risk pooling to all taking part.

Pursuing alternatives

Letters



Martin Thomas' article, 'A "trade-union" party'?', (*Solidarity* 318) ends by saying: "If the idea (for the unions to set up their own semi-party tied to Labour) gains support at the CLPD (Campaign for Labour Party Democracy) AGM, then further discussion will be needed."

No one could disagree with that. Indeed the mere fact that CLPD is discussing such a proposal suggests we need more discussion now regardless of the result of their AGM vote. CLPD, which was founded in 1973, describes itself as "a pressure group within the Labour Party advocating changes in the party to make it more accountable to rank-and-file members". That now a significant number in this organisation are considering at least a partial detour from work solely through the Labour Party's structures should give us all pause for thought.

The realignment of the unions and the Labour Party in a common defence against the cuts that the Coalition were imposing, which some of us envisaged in 2010, has not materialised. There is, as indeed there was during the Blair/Brown government, some unity between the leaders of the unions and the leaders of the Labour Party, but this has been to prevent any meaningful opposition to the cuts, not to promote it.

Despite the union leaders protestations, they have accepted the Collins report and seem ready to allow themselves to be sidelined even further from any influence in policy making within the party. Given this, it is surely revolutionaries' duty to pursue all alternatives for re-founding some sort of workers' political voice.

Rather than pointing out the potential problems with the proposed semi-party as Martin does in his article, we should welcome this potential development.

We should consider it as one of the possible tools we might utilise to gain working-class political representation alongside work within the Labour Party and standing independent socialist propaganda candidates.

Duncan Morrison, Deptford

• Report of CLPD AGM: bit.ly/clpdagm

One-sided culture

Discussing why the old Italian socialist movement had failed so badly in and after World War One, Antonio Gramsci saw it as having been dominated an oratorical culture, lacking the theoretical depth for which a stronger stream of written debate would have been needed.

Registering the difficulties facing the internationalists in Germany in World War One, Rosa Luxemburg noted ruefully that her comrade Franz Mehring was interested only in literary efforts, not in getting out onto the streets and into the factories to agitate by word of mouth.

Gramsci was not dismissing speeches, and Rosa Luxemburg did not think that articles and pamphlets were useless. Each argued only that a one-sided culture limited the left.

Discussing the harmful effects on the left of a one-sided culture dominated by Facebook and smartphones (bit.ly/fbcpa), I argued that the "root of [the problems is] not technology but defeats for the labour movement... [etc.]"

Bruce Robinson (*Solidarity* 316, bit.ly/fbk-br) presents me as "explain[ing] the problems as individual failings" and



Antonio Gramsci diagnosed a one-sidedly "oratorical" culture in the Italian socialist movement

"psychology", and "calling on activists to leave Facebook". The reader probably gets a picture of me as a old sourpuss scratching away with my quill pen.

I use Facebook. I no more want to suppress new technologies than Gramsci wanted to stop Italian socialists making speeches, or Luxemburg wanted Mehring to stop writing articles.

Gramsci's understanding of the broad social and historical reasons for the "oratorical culture" in Italian socialism didn't oblige him to say: "Ah well, there are big social reasons why the comrades don't read. And anyway there is no absolute barrier to acquiring complex ideas by oratory alone. No point urging individuals to read. Go with the flow".

Equally, Luxemburg wasn't obliged to conclude: "It's just history. No point urging anyone to get out and agitate".

Understanding the roots of Facebook culture in "recent developments in capitalism", likewise, does not debar us from urging our comrades to read and to talk face-to-face when we see them relying on Facebook to learn about world news — or inform themselves about debates, or sending people Facebook messages about activities as a substitute for actually talking with them to explain and motivate.

Bruce writes that it is "utopian" to think that "an upturn in class struggle [will] drag internet activists from Facebook into the streets". He surely can't mean that. Is the only upturn in class struggle we can hope for an increase in "likes" on left-wing images and pages on Facebook?

When those who now find face-to-face politics, or "heavy" political reading, too much, and who prefer to limit themselves to "knocking around on social media with people who broadly think the same way", find the confidence to come on the streets, they will want more than a Facebook status as their intellectual sustenance and their active contribution.

The sustenance they'll find, and the channels for activity they find, will depend on how many individuals we have "dragged from Facebook into the streets" (and the meetings, and the study groups) in advance, to create an active and educated on-the-streets socialist movement.

Martin Thomas, north London

RS21 has public launch

The Left By Martin Thomas



About 120 attended the political weekend organised on 29-30 March by RS21, the most recent splinter from the SWP.

A few of us from AWL attended. There were also a few from ISN (the group which split from the SWP in early 2013). No other left groups chose to attend.

Generally, the discussions were interesting and open. There was much less of the tone of "a therapy session, not a political meeting" about this event than there was about the public launch event of the ISN in June 2013; much less of a mood of relief at being out of the SWP and no longer having to sell papers or do street stalls or such, and being able to spend time Facebooking and blogging instead.

RS21's next large public event is a one-day conference on ecosocialism, organised jointly with Socialist Resistance, on 7 June. RS21 will launch a regular publication in May. It has already produced a small bulletin.

Jen Wilkinson, summing up for RS21 in the final session, said that RS21 had not yet formulated its perspectives, but was resolved to work at doing so: "We can't just sit around for the next 12 months saying we need a perspective. We need to start doing it".

The ISN circulated a leaflet entitled "a letter to a RS21 member", asking RS21 to join the unity talks which ISN has with Socialist Resistance, Workers' Power, and the remnants

of the ACI. That suggestion was not discussed over the weekend.

Speaking in the final session, I proposed on behalf of AWL that RS21 and ourselves should deal with each other on the basis of unity in action where we agree, and honest debate where we disagree.

I proposed specifically that RS21 and AWL should work together to defend free debate on university campuses and stir up opposition to the current mood to ban the SWP. A number of leading RS21ers with whom we talked were very clear against the "banning", and they said they would discuss, in their steering group, action to promote that opposition.

As an example of an issue on which AWL and RS21 would probably disagree, I cited Europe. I was pleasantly surprised to be told by an RS21er after the session that RS21 does not necessarily accept the long-standing SWP line of "get Britain out of the EU".

I was disappointed that the weekend included almost no explicit examination of the SWP's political record and tradition, and of what from that RS21 plans to continue and what to replace. Maybe I'm being unfair on the basis of only one meeting. We'll see.

The job for AWL, I think, is to adopt the same approach to RS21 as we advocate they approach to us: unity in action where we agree, honest and comradely debate where we disagree.

• Abridged from a longer report at bit.ly/rs-21.



UID-DER, Turkish trade unionists speaking over Skype in the final session

Building the new, transforming the old

Over a hundred people, from all over the country and from a wide variety of trade unions and workplaces, took part in the New Unionism 2014 conference Workers' Liberty co-hosted with other groups on 29 March.

Growing debate and discussion about "new unionism" is being driven by a need for a revived trade union movement in the face of the Tories' assault and equally obvious failure of the unions as they currently exist to meet this challenge.

Discussions included: the experience "new unions", like the IWGB among London cleaners and facilities workers and the "pop up union" at Sussex University; struggles to renovate and transform existing, bureaucratised "mainstream" unions.

Despite some gaps, it was a thought-provoking, inspiring and useful day. Workers' Liberty would like to thank all the organisations and individuals who helped to organise the conference and took part. And we would like to invite others in the labour movement and on the left who want to pursue these issues to discuss with us about how to do so.

Cap pay-outs to the rich!

On 26 March the coalition government voted through a law to “cap” welfare benefits for future years. Most Labour MPs voted for the “cap”. Only 13 rebelled.

We should instead “cap” the huge pay-outs being made to the rich.

Inequality in Britain has been rising since 1979, and is now soaring. Real wages, on average, are still going down, despite all the talk of economic recovery.

The average household will have lost £760 a year by 2014-5 from the welfare cuts already made by the coalition government. Poorer households lose more than the average, and households with disabled people lose most of all.

At the same time, bankers’ bonuses increased by an average of 29%, worldwide, between 2013 and 2014. Pay for the average boss of a top-hundred (FTSE 100) company was up to £4.3 million in 2012, an increase of 10 per cent on the previous year. In 2010-11, FTSE 100 bosses took an average pay rise of 12%.

But the government sees the economic threat as one of the poorest getting too much, not the billionaires getting too much. Its new law aims to guarantee that if there is economic difficulty, then the burden falls first on the worse-off, regulated by the “cap”.

Or, if economic output booms, then the gains go to the rich, and the worse-off are debarred by the “cap” from recouping some of what we have lost since 2010.

The Labour leaders’ excuse is that the “cap” excludes some benefits — Jobseeker’s Allowance, housing benefit for the unemployed, and the state pension — and anyway could be adjusted by an incoming Labour government.

But they accept the principle: in boom times, the rich should scoop the gains; in slump times, the state should spend as much as it takes to protect the rich, but protection for the worse-off should be “capped”.

That is how New Labour did things in the financial crash in 2008. The government laid out fully £1100 billion (in purchases of bankrupt concerns, in loans, and in guarantees) to bail out the banks, while it continued the cuts in benefits for the disabled which the coalition government has speeded up.

As Karl Marx put it in *Capital*: “The production of surplus-value is the chief end and aim of capitalist production... [in capitalist terms] a nation’s wealth should be measured, not by the absolute quantity produced, but by the relative magnitude of the surplus-produce”. In capitalist terms, “the ‘wealth of the nation’ (i.e., the formation of capital, and the reckless exploitation and impoverishing of the mass of the people) figures as the ultima Thule [ideal] of all statecraft”.

A boom, and high profits, will open opportunities for workers to win higher wages. But that is secondary and consequential, and dependent on how well-organised workers



Benefit cuts have led to huge demand at food banks

are to take those opportunities.

The benefit “cap” is in line with capitalist principles, and shows up the brutality of those principles.

The labour movement should instead go for a “cap” on pay-outs to the rich. The only way that “cap” could be enforced effectively is by taking the big industries under public ownership and democratic control.

Call Labour MPs to account

These are the 13 Labour MPs who voted against the benefit cap. If your Labour MP, or a Labour MP whom your union sponsors, is not on the list, propose a motion to call them to account!

Diane Abbott, Ronnie Campbell, Katy Clark, Michael Connarty, Jeremy Corbyn, Kelvin Hopkins, Glenda Jackson, John McDonnell, George Mudie, Linda Riordan, Dennis Skinner, Tom Watson, Mike Wood.

Graphics on left from Equality Trust



Help us raise £12,000 by October

This year, Workers’ Liberty will celebrate May day by marching in London with our Iranian comrades and by hosting a “Marxist Revival” event geared toward sharing experiences of class struggle with people from all over the world. In collaboration with the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists’ Tendency, the Turkish revolutionary socialist group Marksist Tutum and Workers’ Liberty Australia, we have produced the first issue of a new journal of international discussion among revolutionary socialists.

In order to continue developing these links with international revolutionaries, by hosting events and producing literature, we rely on donations from people who support our work.

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

You can set up a regular payment from your bank to: AWL, sort code: 08-60-01, account: 20047674, Unity Trust Bank, Nine Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2HB). Or send a cheque to us at the address below (cheques payable to “AWL”). Or donate online at workersliberty.org/payment. Take copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college, or campaign group, or organise a fundraising event. And get in touch to discuss joining the AWL!



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

This week we have raised £650. Includes an increased standing order and donations. Thanks to Colin and Dan.

Grand total: £2654.

Cuba's new oppositions

By Sam Farber

55 years after Cuba's revolution overthrowing the Batista dictatorship, its original generation of leadership has begun to pass away and the future of its "socialist" project remains uncertain.

Will it experience capitalist "shock therapy" like the countries of the former Eastern bloc? Will it follow the state-capitalist road established in China and Vietnam? Will economic liberalization be accompanied, as some claim, by an expansion of political freedoms and tolerance for dissent? A socialist democracy may not be on the cards; if so, what does that mean for the nascent critical left on the island? What we know about these new tendencies is limited and few Cubans speak openly about their political preferences, but we can still sketch out the changing landscape of politics on the island.

[Raul] Castro's political programme has prompted the release of most long-term political prisoners, greater acknowledgment of and efforts to mitigate racial and gender discrimination, and the opening of some migration out of and into Cuba. There has been a relaxation of administrative rules, and concessions to popular demands, without recognizing any citizen rights independent of the government's discretion, and a significant degree of political and cultural liberalization. Yet there has been no concomitant democratization that would allow a challenge to the Cuban Communist Party's monopoly on power.

The focal point of Castro's economic reforms is an attempt to revitalize the Cuban economy through the adoption of elements of the Sino-Vietnamese model — a state-capitalism that retains a monopoly of political power through a single party, which controls the strategic sectors of the economy, such as banking, while sharing the rest with a private sector both foreign and domestic. But unlike in China and Vietnam, Cuban economic liberalization has been obstructed at key turns — not at the grassroots, but by sectors of the bureaucracy afraid that the implementation of Chinese-style reforms could erode their power.

Cuban social scientist Camila Piñero Harnecker, in particular, has discussed the influence of "statist" elements whom she describes as a group of "middle-level administrators and state functionaries who fear losing their jobs and the ability to benefit from the state through corruption."

They advocate for the improvement, as opposed to the elimination, of state socialism along these self-interested lines. Although Piñero Harnecker limits the scope of this resistance to mid-level bureaucrats and names no names, her analysis could also be extended to the functionaries higher in the bureaucratic food chain like hardliner José Ramón Machado Ventura, who was until recently Raúl Castro's pre-



"Many poor and working-class people, particularly those who do not get remittances from abroad, see no alternative to emigration or law-breaking"

sumed successor.

Besides fear about the march towards the Sino-Vietnamese model, little is known about the prevailing attitudes among the population as a whole towards these reforms. The views of the managers and technicians administering the island's most important enterprises — including joint ventures with foreign capital — within and outside the military can't be assessed.

Like their peers in the collapsed Eastern Bloc, one might expect managers of state companies to be strong supporters of Raúl Castro's reform program and advocates of a sharper turn to state capitalism, but there's no concrete evidence that's actually the case. The steps already taken have been relatively modest: allowing state companies to keep 50 percent of profits for recapitalization and the freedom to make decisions about minor investments and wage raises. These measures were enacted as part of a 2012 Communist Party program aimed at establishing enterprise autonomy, which promised (but by and large has not delivered) bigger changes like partially decentralizing prices and terminating poorly-performing state companies through liquidation, privatization, or conversion to cooperatives.

MIXED ECONOMY

Castro's economic reforms have garnered institutional support from a group of economists working at the Centro de Estudios de la Economía Cubana (CEEC). Despite voicing concerns about his program's limited scope, they have dubbed it a welcome step towards the establishment of a state-directed mixed economy.

Most prominent of these advocates are Omar Everleny Pérez-Villanueva and Pavel Vidal Alejandro. For Piñero Harnecker, who also works at the CEEC but does not share its politics, this group, which she labels as "economicists," advocates economic growth as the principal objective of socialism. The CEEC also hints, though not openly, at the advantage of private capitalist management.

According to Piñero Harnecker, these "economicists" see autonomous enterprise guided by private interests as the most effective and efficient way to coordinate economic activities. Concerns regarding the consequences of privatizing the economy — that it would increase inequality and speed environmental deterioration — should, in their view, be largely left for later. Measures can be taken to mitigate them, however, such as a tax system to regulate the income gap and the adoption of laws that protect customers, workers, and the environment — a stance reminiscent of Third Way social democrats in Europe.

According to Piñero Harnecker, the "economicist" perspective is most fervently shared by the administrators of state enterprises, who look forward to reforms that drastically increase management autonomy as a step towards the final elimination of planning and the restoration of private ownership.

It is not clear whether they have a direct nexus with the CEEC, but the CEEC "economicists" have had a role proliferating pro-market ideas in Cuba's political-intellectual establishment. The prominence has put the group in a bureaucratic crossfire.

The University of Havana's rector singled out Omar Everleny Pérez-Villanueva as being too critical of the Cuban economic system and subsequently prevented him from attending the meetings of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) in Washington in 2013, which several of his like-minded CEEC colleagues were able to attend.

Yet Pérez-Villanueva appears undeterred, continuing to act, along with CEEC associates, as economic advisor to Marino Murillo Jorge, the Minister of Planning and Economy.

Up until a few years ago, it would have been inconceivable to think of the Catholic Church as a major player in Cuba's

political life. Throughout its history, the church maintained a relatively weak (by Latin American standards) presence on the island.

Yet Castro's government has granted the Church a number of concessions, allowing it to organize religious processions, establish a web presence, and to print bulletins and magazines. Moreover, Castro has permitted the Catholic Church to operate the Félix Varela Cultural Center since 2011. It has become one of the few public spaces in which critics of the government can express their opinions openly.

While one may question what the Cuban government has gained from these concessions, it is clear that the Catholic Church has gained a great deal. The church is among the most efficiently managed organization on the island, second only to the military. Strategically and tactically conscious of how to pursue its goals, it aims to become a formidable moral force on the island, as a "neutral" arbiter standing above every conflicting social and political interest in Cuba.

To that end, the Church is attempting to shape its identity as the long-time custodian of Cuban cultural traditions, emphasizing features of Cuban culture associated with popular Afro-Cuban religion, like the worship of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, the Patron Saint of Cuba known as Ochún in the Yoruba tradition (while at the same time seeking to distance itself from that "pagan" cult). In donning its "custodian" clothes, it has worked hard to dodge such thorny historical and political issues as its militant support for Spanish rule, particularly during the last War of Independence, and its ties to right-wing opposition during the early years of the revolutionary government.

The Cuban Catholic hierarchy would likely prefer a Cuban transition with an important political party tied to Catholic traditions, like the Christian Democratic parties that exist in Europe and Latin America. The Church knows, however, that a party of this kind, which already exists in exile, does not have popular roots on the island and would not be allowed to legally function in the Cuban version of the authoritarian Sino-Vietnamese model. It has thus opted to push for the implementation of a Catholic social agenda that advocates "reforms" limiting abortion and divorce, expanding its role in higher education and instituting religious education in public schools — a demand of the Cuban Catholic hierarchy since the first half of the 20th century.

"PATRIOTIC"

One of the editors of the Catholic magazine *Espacio Laical*, Lenier González Mederos, a lay spokesperson for the Church, has used it to implicitly propose a political pact between the Church and the military. He describes the two institutions as likely to remain "unscathed" for the next 200 years, arguing that "the Armed Forces, together with the Catholic Church, has the patriotic and moral responsibility to watch for and facilitate the best of possible futures for Cuba."

While using *Espacio Laical* to project a liberal and social-democratic image, the Church has also been publishing *Palabra Nueva*, the official organ of the Archdiocese of Havana, to promote conservative views. Setting the political tone of the magazine, its editor, the Archdiocese's official spokesperson Orlando Márquez, declared in his article "Sin miedo a la riqueza [Without Fear of Wealth]" that the emergence of an affluent stratum is a welcome symptom of prosperity on the island and rejected the notion that there is anything problematic with burgeoning economic inequality.

What has happened to the left of Cuba's political center? Since the economic crisis provoked by the collapse of the Soviet bloc, a liberal Communist tendency critical of various aspects of Cuban society but loyal to the regime has been developing among the elite academic circles on the island. This liberal Communist camp is best represented in *Temas*, which has become the most important social science and in-



Raul Castro

lectual journal in Cuba with an audience encompassing intellectuals, academics, and artists. It often publishes factually rich and critical articles, but characteristically avoids even an indirect questioning of the one-party system, much less its principal leaders.

Rafael Hernández, *Temas'* principal editor, is a shrewd academic and political operator with a keen sense for identifying the mood among Cuba's populace. If he has identified popular discontent, he has been unafraid to publish a diluted version of that discontent — but always within the bounds of acceptable discourse set by the regime.

As for the development of left-wing protest on the island, potential key figures include those critics who, like Rafael Hernández, are loyal to the system but are propelled by their own political integrity and rebellious spirit to voice fully their dissent in spite of the costs. Another such critic is Esteban Morales Domínguez, a black professor who used to frequently appear as the US expert in Mesa Redonda (Roundtable), the most important political program on Cuban television.

Breaking taboos, he warned that the people in the government were strengthening their own positions to transfer state property into their own private hands as soon as the current regime falls — exactly as it happened in the Soviet Union. In response to his article, the authorities pulled Morales off the Mesa Redonda and suspended his membership in the Cuban Communist Party, but was reintegrated at a later date.

RACISM

Morales Domínguez has also written critically about racism on the island.

Although he has not yet touched the political “third rail” of advocating the independent organization of black Cubans outside official state organizations, he has recently been raising “dangerous” questions like whether “institutional racism [has] truly disappeared” in the country and has directly questioned the regime's attitude towards racism, stating that it “has disappeared only relatively, for our state institutions still do not offer us the results we would expect from them were they actually designed to combat racism.”

Morales later denied that institutional racism still exists in Cuba but continued to insist that “a lack of political will and an excess of bureaucratic hurdles” prevented the government from doing as much as it should to mitigate racism. He has also challenged, albeit implicitly, the old official government line about racism being the legacy of Cuba's capitalist and colonial pasts, arguing that “these phenomena aren't entirely inherited from the past; they are also the result of flawed social systems that contribute to their reproduction. These flaws we continue to perpetuate stem, to a considerable extent,

from the flawed mechanisms of different State institutions.”

There are other critics who are loyal to the system but, like Morales Domínguez, have gotten into trouble with the authorities for their views. This includes the three academics at the University of Matanzas, just east of Havana, behind the blog *La Joven Cuba* (LJC). The blog was established in 2010 with the purpose of “defending the Revolution,” but also to facilitate an “internal debate about its present and future.” Although it has strongly attacked dissident bloggers such as Yoani Sánchez, the blog provides a platform for its visitors (many of them Cuban exiles) to offer their own critiques in comments, and it has debated these assessments respectfully.

This feature of the blog, along with its repeated criticisms of the official Marxism taught in Cuban schools and the party newspaper *Granma*, and the slow pace of the implementation of the resolutions adopted at the 2012 Party Conference, is likely the cause of the ten-month blocking of the site from July 2012 to April 2013, imposed by University of Matanzas administrators.

There is also a decidedly open left-wing critical current that has been developing in the island. Although they avoid the label of “dissidents” for fear of being associated with the free-market economics and allegiance to Washington that has characterized a good part of the moderate and hard right-wing dissident politics in Cuba, they have mounted an openly critical stance. This crosses the line drawn for Cuban authorities, who see any form of criticism of the regime as oppositional. These left-wing critics have thus been subjected to official harassment and the loss of benefits, such as the paid trips to conferences abroad that are permitted to those who may be critical but “respect” the system. Like all those left of Cuba's center, they are mostly students, academics, artists, and intellectuals, but the faction has been especially active trying to reach people outside their own milieu and engage in popular causes.

Most striking about this new critical left is the ideological consensus it has developed around the centrality of workers' self-management, a notion with shallow roots in the Cuban political tradition. This focus is shared by groups with different origins that occasionally collaborate with each other to form a critical left-wing milieu. One of these organizations has coalesced around retired diplomat Pedro Campos Santos, who is trying to marshal the traditions of classical Marxism to develop ideas for a participatory and democratic management.

The most visible group of that left-critical milieu is the Red Observatorio Crítico, made up mostly of young people whose politics are not based on a hard program but a loose ideological front that includes ecologists, anarchists and even left Catholics. The Observatorio has attempted to promote a

wide variety of causes related to the environment and gay and women's issues, which perhaps explains why members of the Observatorio have been specifically targeted by the authorities and occasionally arrested.

Also active in this milieu is the Proyecto Arcoiris (Rainbow Project), which is dedicated to gay liberation and seeks to establish its independence from the official Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual (CENESEX) led by Mariela Castro Espín (a daughter of Raúl Castro) and the Observatorio de los Derechos LGTB, associated with moderate and conservative dissidents. Another independent group formed by Afro-Cuban critics of the system, the Cofradía de la Negritud, has collaborated with the Observatorio Crítico in activities intended to highlight the role of black Cubans in Cuban history. One such effort was to commemorate the massacre of the five Abakuás, members of an Afro-Cuban secret society, for having tried unsuccessfully to defend eight white medical students from being executed on November 27, 1871, for desecrating the tomb of a Spanish military officer.

In spite of their efforts, Observatorio and other elements of the critical left have not yet been able to establish a deep relationship with any major social group, a difficulty shared also with right-wing dissidents. Official repression, the government's stranglehold on the mass media, and highly limited Internet access explain why few Cubans are exposed to the critical thinking anywhere on the political spectrum.

An unfortunate byproduct of the emphasis on local self-management has been a relative lack of attention to the elephant in the room: the all-controlling, all-encompassing, undemocratic one-party state.

WAGES

Discussions of self-management have tended to ignore the necessity for planning at the national level and the fact that the CCP will inevitably dominate that planning unless its political monopoly is abolished.

The Yugoslavian experience of the last century shows that authentic self-management at the local level can only function when there is economic planning that is national in scope, but does not neglect democratic workplace participation. Decisions concerning vital questions such as accumulation and consumption, wages, taxes, and social services affect the whole society and significantly limit what can be decided in each work center — new structures are needed to facilitate exchange between them.

In the case of Observatorio Crítico, its lack of attention to the party and the state may be due to the growing influence of anarchism, a political ideology that predominated the Cuban labor movement in the late 19th and early 20th century but was virtually eliminated by the rise of the Communist-led unions in the 1920s. Some of today's Cuban left-wing critics have begun to turn to anarchism — which, whatever its many flaws, has had an honorable political record on the island — as a past that validates their own politics.

Cuba's ongoing process of moral decay and social breakdown, denounced even by Castro himself, is a reflection of a political and socioeconomic system to which many poor and working-class people — particularly the 40 percent of the population which does not receive remittances from abroad — see no alternative to emigration or law-breaking.

With the passing of the historic generation of revolutionary leaders in the next five to ten years, a new political landscape will emerge where oppositional political action may resurface. Some could argue that since socialism of a democratic and revolutionary orientation is not likely to be on the immediate agenda, there is no point to put forward such a perspective. But it is this political vision advocating for the democratic self-management of Cuban society that can shape a compelling resistance for what is likely to come. Through cultivating solidarity with those most vulnerable and calling for class, racial, and gender equality, a future movement can build a united front against old and emerging oppressors.

In that vision lies hope for the people of Cuba and the broader region.

• First published in *Jacobin* online magazine. Slightly abridged here.
Full text: bit.ly/sf-cuba

Welcome China's unions back into the family?

Eric Lee



At the end of March, the International Labour Organisation's Bureau for Workers' Activities (known as ILO-AC-TRAV) and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) signed a Memorandum of Understanding "to promote Trade unions South-South Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region".

The Director-General of the ILO, Guy Ryder, said "we need to find a way which so that the ACFTU can work more closely with other parts of the international trade union movement, sharing common objectives."

Ryder is a former General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, which has decided to invite the ACFTU to attend its upcoming World Congress in Berlin in May.

These two events illustrate the fact that the trade union leadership in much of the developing world now seems keen on putting the past behind us and welcoming China's trade unions back into our "global family".

This is the culmination of efforts going back several years, and the British TUC has played a prominent — indeed, enthusiastic — part in this process.

I think that this is a problem for the trade union movement because the officially sanctioned, legal trade unions in China are not trade unions in the sense that we understand them in a country like the UK.

Historically, the ACFTU differed not one iota from, say, the "All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions" in the USSR. In fact, it was set up based on the Soviet model.

And that model had nothing to do with worker representation, collective bargaining, or class struggle.

In the Soviet model, unions were organs of the Communist Party and the state, designed to enforce workplace discipline and provide some welfare benefits to workers.

I think few would deny that the Chinese unions fit that description perfectly, at least up until a few years ago.

For that reason, for many decades the ACFTU was quite isolated in the international trade union movement. Like trade unions in Cuba, North Korea or Vietnam, it was seen as a "state labour front" — and not a union.

What has changed in the last few decades is that China has embraced the free market. And as a result, there is the sudden re-emergence of class struggle.

Strikes occur every day, all over the country, and they are often allowed to run their course — winning workers improved wages and working conditions.

The Communist Party seems to have decided that it is best to let workers let off steam this way, rather than attempting to suppress every strike and protest.

So strikes are tolerated — but it stops there. The regime does not tolerate, and cannot tolerate, the emergence of truly free and independent trade unions controlled by their members.

The formation of a nationwide Chinese version of "Solidarity" is a nightmare scenario for the ruling Party elite.

In most cases, the strikes taking place are local with very little nationwide coordination. The organisations set up by workers spontaneously tend to fade away fairly quickly.

In some cases, local officials of the ACFTU unions support the workers or even lead them.

But the ACFTU as a whole remains firmly in the grasp of the Communist Party.

OFFICIAL

Its leader, Li Jianguo, is a member of the Politburo of the Party. His entire political career spanning some 40 years has been as a Party official. He was given the task of the leading the ACFTU in early 2013.

Just to emphasize — Li rose up through the ranks of the Communist Party, not the unions. As a very senior Party leader, he was brought in to take charge of the ACFTU. This is typical of the authoritarian, top-down style of Chinese politics — and trade unionism.

Just before his elevation to the leadership of the Chinese unions, Li faced public accusations of favouritism. He was accused with promoting his nephew to a plum position.

The website of the ACFTU speaks a great deal about how the organisation protects workers:

"The fundamental task of the Chinese trade unions is to carry out the various social functions of the trade unions in line with the guiding principle of reflecting and safeguarding concrete interests of the workers and staff members in a better way while safeguarding the overall interests of the people throughout the whole country, and, united with the broad

masses of workers and staff members, strive for the realization of China's socialist modernisation.

"The major social functions of the Chinese trade unions are as follows: 1. to protect the legitimate interests and democratic rights of the workers and staff members, 2. to mobilize and organise the workers and staff members to take part in the construction and reform and accomplish the tasks in the economic and social development, 3. to represent and organize the workers and staff members to take part in the administration of the State and social affairs and to participate in the democratic management of enterprises, 4. to educate the workers and staff members to constantly improve their ideological and moral qualities and raise their scientific and cultural levels."

That was quite a mouthful, but the operative phrases emphasize the ACFTU's role regarding the "overall interests of the people" rather than its own members, and its striving for the country's "socialist modernization". It includes in its job description the accomplishing of tasks and taking part in construction and reform — all of this being code for supporting the Communist Party.

The Orwellian language about improving the "ideological and moral qualities" of its members reflect the ACFTU's origins as a Soviet-style state labour front.

But it may be a bit more complicated than that today.

NUANCED

The authoritative — and fiercely independent — China Labour Bulletin offers a nuanced view of the ACFTU:

"The ACFTU is China's sole official union. It has traditionally been an adjunct of the Chinese Communist Party and government, serving as a 'bridge' between workers and management in state-owned enterprises. With the economic reforms and development of the private economy over the last two decades the ACFTU's role has been blurred.

"It has sought to unionise the private sector but thus far has failed to encourage the development of genuinely representative grassroots unions. It has adopted a top-down approach, imposing unions and collective contracts on enterprises without consulting the workers themselves. However CLB believes the ACFTU, especially at the local level, can play a positive role in the future development of grassroots unions."

An example of that kind of local initiative could be seen earlier this week, as the *Financial Times* and others reported that China's "normally reticent official union" has been "involved in at least one of three protests that have erupted at [Walmart] stores slated for closure this month."

While there may well be local examples of ACFTU bureaucrats taking the workers' side, no one seriously views people like ACFTU leader Li Jianguo as anything but a Communist Party hack. And a corrupt one at that.

The vast majority of trade unionists in Britain or elsewhere in the developed world know very little about the Chinese trade union movement, and presumably trust their leaders' decisions to engage with, or not engage with, the ACFTU.

The issue is unlikely to be addressed at a congress of the TUC, or even at the ITUC's World Congress in Berlin.

And yet it should be — for two reasons.

First of all, because in order to genuinely help Chinese workers, the international trade union movement should fully support real unions, democratically controlled by their members — and this includes first and foremost the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions.

The principle of trade union independence (from both employers and the state) should be defended.

Chinese workers are not helped by pandering to the likes of Li Jianguo and his Communist Party bosses.

And second, by blurring the distinction between state labour fronts and actual trade unions, we lose something of importance.

We lose a sense of who we are, and of what it means to be a trade union.

We don't need more handshakes and photo-ops in Geneva and Berlin, nor trade unionists flying off on junkets to Beijing to be wined and dined by Communist Party officials.

We need an open and honest discussion of these issues — for the sake of our Chinese brothers and sisters, and for ourselves.

UKIP: whose favourite party?

By Rosalind Robson

In the run up to the May European elections UKIP has been getting a lot of attention.

A new book, *Revolt on the Right*, by academics Matthew Goodwin and Robert Ford argues, more or less convincingly, that UKIP is now similar to, and as stable as other "radical right" populist parties around Europe (such as the Freedom Party of Austria, the Swiss People's Party or France's Front National).

It has expanded its political base to take in older, precariously employed or unemployed working-class voters (mostly men) and broadened their appeal to become anti-immigration as well as Eurosceptic.

The left should take UKIP seriously. We need to combat their anti-immigration populism; we need to rebuild and create a labour movement which will fight for *all* precarious workers, migrants and UK-born. We need to win the arguments over how to fight for more jobs, homes and decent benefits for all.

Taking UKIP seriously is one thing, giving it credence is another. Channel Four's documentary by Martin Durkin chose to give UKIP uncritical airtime ("Nigel Farage, Who are you?" 31 March).

Durkin is a former member of the Revolutionary Communist Party, an organisation which disbanded in 1997. The RCP was a very strange group, which habitually took up pretentious or deliberately contrarian and sometimes offensive views (e.g. denied that Bosnian Muslims were being ill-treated in camps set up by Serbs during the Balkan War

of the early 1990s).

Many ex-members of the RCP have done very well for themselves. Claire Fox is a regular "talking head" on BBC radio. Munira Mirza is Boris Johnson's Director of Policy for Culture. And Martin Durkin?

He is a film maker who's long-ploughed the RCP-contrarian furrow (the dangers of silicone breast implants have been exaggerated, global warming may not be caused by human activity...). He says he has moved from the left and is now a "straight libertarian", whatever that means.

It means lazy and dumb, to judge by his approach to Nigel Farage. A posh bloke follows another posh bloke for six months... and finds out what?

UKIP is Britain's favourite party! Farage talks from the gut! He's a swaggering cowboy! What a trouble maker! He loves his beer and fags, just like working-class people! "I love Europe, me (its wine, its cheese, its beer)".

Durkin's script is non-existent. He just lets the man himself do the talking... and talk he does... and talk... and guffaw. What a lad this ex-City boy is! Bugger bureaucracy! Up free trade!

Queue the James Bond music...

Durkin probably thinks the kind of serious, historically situated and evidenced analysis in *Revolt on the Right* is pofaced, "politically correct" or some kind of establishment conspiracy. If the last point is Durkin's point, I suggest he looks in the mirror.

So why did Channel Four allow this Barbour-jacketed dilettante to make a political broadcast on behalf of the really nasty party?

Which side are you on?

Tim Cooper reviews *Look Back in Anger* by Harry Patterson — an account of the 1984-5 miners strike in Nottinghamshire

From November 1983 the members of the National Union of Mineworkers were implementing an overtime ban in protest at threatened job losses and pit closures. Coal stocks were nowhere near as high as the Tories hoped for, if they were going to come after the miners.

MacGregor had met with Thatcher six months before the strike to discuss drawing the NUM into battle. With the overtime ban biting, he announced accelerated closures and 20,000 job cuts. Scargill insisted that 70,000 were really planned. This would turn out to be an underestimation! When the first closures of a handful of pits were announced, thousands of Yorkshire miners were already on strike. They insisted on solidarity.

The NUM didn't blunder by calling the strike. The miners themselves insisted on striking, and without a national ballot. Their principle was that one set of miners shouldn't sell out a minority facing job losses.

Some may say with hindsight that, with 61% showing in favour of a strike in opinion polls, it was a mistake not to call a ballot. But the flying pickets and appeals to solidarity had worked before, and the miners showed at a Special Delegate conference that they did not want a ballot. The Yorkshire miners (the biggest area) were to the left of their leaders!

Not just the Notts scabs should shoulder the blame for defeat. Leaders of unions and the Labour Party failed to lead and encourage the millions of trade union members to solidarity. Solidarity strike action could have won the strike.

The early chapters of this book take us through the history of Notts and the miners. In the 1926 General Strike, Notts miners struck for months before being starved back to work. A Labour MP, George Spencer, led an eventual breakaway company union which many see as the precursor of the breakaway UDM led by people like Roy Lynk.

The author focuses rightly on the fact (now proven by papers released under the 30 year rule) that Thatcher and the Tories planned revenge on the NUM for their defeat in 1974; the Ridley Plan (to use bribes to other key workers, anti-union laws, the media, a highly mobile militarised police force and a scab workforce and transport) would be used.

The collusion with right wing businessman, Tories, police and even secret services by right-wing leaders in the Notts area NUM is brought out in detail as are the historical rea-

sons (higher wages, the fact that many Notts miners had moved from other areas after their pits had closed and constant reassurances that their pits were safe).

Unfortunately, there is little discussion of the rank and file Notts NUM strike committee led by its secretary Paul Whetton, which was crucial to the resolve of the deservedly praised Notts strikers. However, there is mention of some of the finest examples of solidarity action; the railworkers who defied the anti-union laws and refused to move coal, or the miners' support groups including the black communities, LGBT communities and others all over the UK and beyond.

The Tory press celebrated the "bravery" of scabs and the "violence" of pickets. What the miners needed was equally unequivocal support from trade union leaders and particularly Neil Kinnock. Kinnock claimed he was behind the NUM, but regularly said he condemned their violence.

One death that was hysterically seized upon was of a taxi driver ferrying a lone scab into a solidly striking South Wales pit. Yet little attention was drawn to the thousands of families terrorised in their own villages, thousands of pickets arrested on trumped up charges, hundreds injured and jailed, two pickets killed, and three children killed scavenging for coal as the striking miners were left with little food and heating.

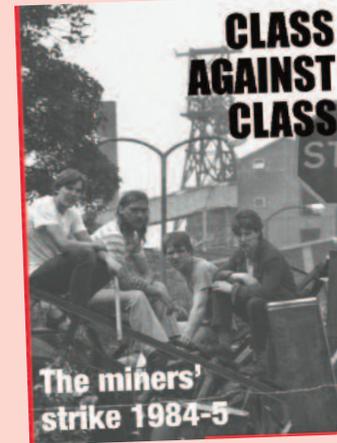
Striking Notts miners collecting in the centre of Nottingham that told me food and demos and money in tins were welcome but not enough, that I should throw myself into the battle being waged in the Labour Party to get the leadership to back the miners. That led to me meeting *Socialist Organiser* (forerunner of *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty*), reading "Whetton's Week" in the paper, going to political discussions in miners' welfares, and selling the hugely popular *Magnificent Miners* pamphlet.

I saw Billy Bragg on his first appearance on Top of the Pops singing "Between the Wars" just after the end of the strike. I bought loads of copies to give to friends and relatives just for the B side, "Which side are you on?", summing up that in such a battle as the miners' strike you have to take sides. The striking miners of Notts (and Leicestershire, Derbyshire and other scabbing areas) chose the right side.

"Those that cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" reads a quote at the beginning of the book. This book is an important tool in that remembering.

• *Look Back in Anger* is published by Five Leaves, PO Box 8786, Nottingham NG1 9AW.

Class against Class



To mark the 30th anniversary of the 1984-5 miners' strike, Workers' Liberty has reprinted our history of the strike. The new book contains a new introduction giving an overview and a context to the heroic strike, as well as a blow-by-blow account and a comprehensive timeline.

A gallery of front-pages of our newspaper of the time (*Socialist Organiser*) shows what revolutionary socialists were saying, and how the strike posed political questions about the state, the police, and how society should be organised.

Class Against Class also contains material on the role of women in the heart of the resistance, showing the transformative impact of class struggle.

An appendix charts how Polish miners in Solidarnosc offered support and solidarity to their British counterparts, in a display of internationalism against both capitalist and Stalinist rulers.

The defeat of the miners paved the way for the dramatic triumph of neo-liberalism in Britain and the wider world. Yet it is from these defeats, wrote Rosa Luxemburg, that we draw our "historical experience, understanding, power and idealism."

Class Against Class seeks to re-acquaint an older generation and educate a new generation in this historical experience and its lessons for the class struggle today.

Buy it online at www.workersliberty.org/miners — £9.60 including p&p. Or send a cheque (to "AWL") to 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

Frank Little: lynched for combatting war fever

Songs of Liberty & Rebellion



Frank Little was a revolutionary American trade unionist who, at the time of his death, sat on the General Executive Board of the Industrial Workers of the World.

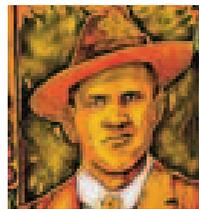
He was lynched in 1917 by six masked vigilantes; his "crime" was organising workers and denouncing the government and World War One in his speeches. He called US troops "Uncle Sam's scabs in uniform".

Little was born in 1879 to Native American and white parents. Before joining the IWW he was active in the Western Federation of Miners. He became heavily involved in the IWW's campaigns for free speech, most notably in Missoula, where Little was arrested for making a speech on a soapbox.

In solidarity, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, another IWW organiser, called for assistance. So many IWW members were voluntarily arrested that the jail became full, and officials had no choice but to drop all charges, that the fight for free speech was won.

Little was known for organising miners, unskilled fruit workers, oil field workers. At one point he was imprisoned for 30 days simply for reading the Declaration of Independence. In 1913, he was kidnapped and held at gunpoint during a strike against unsafe conditions on the Great Northern Railway.

In August 1917, Little travelled to Montana to organise a



miners' strike. He was kidnapped from his hotel room, beaten, and then lynched from a railway trestle, with a note pinned to his chest containing the initials of other union leaders and the words "Others take notice. First and last warning."

Frank Little dedicated his entire life to organising workers, and never compromised his revolutionary principles.

We'll remember you, Frank Little!
They couldn't still your voice,
So they strangled it;
They couldn't chill your heart,
So they stopped it;
They couldn't dam your life blood,
So they spilled it.

We'll remember you, Frank Little!
They didn't come in the broad of day
And warn you that in a world
Being made safe for democracy
There was no safety for you.
In the dead of night they came
And pounced on you,
Dragged you out as if you were an animal
Without daring to let you put your clothes on
Or bind up your broken leg.
They spared you no indignity,

They withheld from you no shame;
Afterward, no doubt, they washed their hands
With the air of men who've done their bit
In the cause of freedom.

We'll remember you, Frank Little!
The papers said: "So far as known,
He made no outcry."
No, not you! Half Indian, half white man,
All IWW.
You'd have died ten thousand deaths
Before you'd have cried aloud
Or whimpered once to let them
Enjoy your pain.

We'll remember you, Frank Little!
Long after the workers have made the world
Safe for Labor,
We'll repeat your name
And remember that you died for us.
The red flag that you dropped
A million hands will carry on;
The cause that you loved
A million tongues will voice.
Good bye, Frank Little!
Indian, white man. Wobbly true.
Valiant soldier of the great Red army,
We'll remember you!

From *The International Socialist Review*, September 1917

How Norway's Labour helped Stalin against Trotsky

Paul Hampton reviews *Trotsky in Norway: Exile, 1935–1937* by Oddvar Høidal

When Leon Trotsky published his autobiography, *My Life* (1930) aged 50, he had already experienced three periods of exile.

The first, from 1903 to 1905, took place between two spells of underground work, two prison terms and two banishments from Tsarist Russia.

The second, between the two Russian revolutions (1905 and 1917) and including the First World War, was spent in Austria, the Balkans, France, Spain and then the US.

His third and final banishment began in 1929, following a year of internal exile in Central Asia, and commenced with his expulsion to Turkey. With some justice he could describe his situation as living on the planet without a visa. Yet Trotsky would spend a further decade outcast, in France (1933–35), Norway (1935–36) and finally Mexico (1937–40), where he was murdered by Stalin's assassins.

Oddvar Høidal's *Trotsky in Norway: Exile, 1935–1937*, presents a fascinating account of Trotsky's eighteen months asylum in Norway, including his deportation to Mexico. It is the first detailed English-language account of that time. The book is an updated edition of Høidal's Norwegian-language study published in 2009 and brings out more clearly than previous accounts the Norwegian context of Trotsky's exile.

That context was highly paradoxical. In the 1935 elections, the Labour Party of Norway won the most seats in its parliament (the Storting) and formed a minority government. The party was unusual. It had joined the early Communist International and after its departure, blocked internationally with the Independent Labour Party and other centrist parties. Such a party in government might have been expected to offer safe haven for Trotsky. Sadly, by the end, it proved a bitter stay.

Previous English-language accounts of this period have been brief and sketchy. Isaac Deutscher's trilogy (1963) allots only 40 pages (out of nearly 1,500) to his time in Norway, while Robert Service's miserable and petty biography (2009) devotes just two and a half pages to it. *The Revolutionary History* magazine published some recollections of Nils Kaare Dahl, a Norwegian Trotskyist from the 1930s, but otherwise most of the sources have not been translated. Høidal is not a Trotskyist or even in sympathy with Marxism, and this is reflected in some of his judgements and understanding of debates. However there is still much to learn from this well-researched history.

Trotsky's 18-months in Norway can be divided into four periods: first, from his arrival on 18 June 1935 to his hospitalisation on 19 September 1935; second, the month he spent in hospital and his further rehabilitation until the end of 1935; third, the first half of 1936, when he wrote *The Revolution Betrayed*; and finally the remainder of year, when harassed by Norwegian fascists, Norwegian Stalinists and the Russian government, Trotsky was first interned and then expelled. On 19 December 1936, the Norwegian "socialist" government deported him with an escort on a specially-commissioned tanker bound for Mexico.

Høidal challenges a number of interpretations of Trotsky's time in Norway. He asks who was responsible for Trotsky's admission into Norway in 1935. Most accounts foreground the role of Walter Held (Heinz Epe), a German Trotskyist exiled in Norway. However Høidal credits the Norwegian Labour Party leader Olav Schefflo, who had known Trotsky a decade before when he sat on the Comintern executive, and whose "background, authority and network of contacts" exerted the "decisive influence". For his first year in Norway, Trotsky lived with socialist journalist Konrad Knudsen in Wexhall.

It has been said that Trotsky regarded Martin Tranmael, one of the leaders of the Labour Party and undoubtedly soft on Stalinism, as his chief opponent in Norway. This dated from earlier attempts to involve the Labour Party in regroupment after Hitler's accession to power in 1933, a drive that ultimately led to the creation of the Fourth International.

Trotsky coined the term Tranmaelism to sum up the tendency, between centrism and reformism, which refused to draw the conclusion from the German defeat that new workers' parties and a new workers' international were necessary. Høidal accepts that Tranmael articulated the government's line as editor of the Labour Party paper *Arbeiderbladet*. How-



Trotsky and friends in Norway

ever he believes Trotsky's principal adversary was prime minister Johan Nygaardsvold (rather than Tranmael or justice minister Trygve Lie) and that this made his expulsion inevitable.

The usual interpretation is that Trotsky's exile was abruptly terminated because of pressure from the Stalin's government, particularly with the launch of the Moscow trials.

Max Shachtman wrote in his preface to Trotsky's *Diary in Exile* that "Russian government pressure succeeded in securing his expulsion" from Norway. Deutscher's account emphasises this external pressure. In the summer of 1936 the Norwegian foreign minister Koht went to Moscow and was ostentatiously feted there, much to Trotsky's alarm.

On 14 August 1936, the Moscow trials of Zinoviev and Kamenev commenced. On 26 August, a day after the end of the trial, government immigration officers called on Trotsky to tell him, on the orders of Trygve Lie, that he had offended against the terms of his residence permit. They presented Trotsky with draconian new restrictions on his permission to stay. When Trotsky refused, he was placed under house arrest. On 29 August, Jakoubowitch, the Soviet ambassador, delivered a formal note demanding Trotsky's expulsion. The ambassador would send Trygve Lie a bouquet of pink tulips upon Trotsky's expulsion from Norway.

NORWEGIAN POLITICS

Høidal does not believe pressure from the USSR was decisive. He brings to light the subtle interplay of Norwegian politics.

The Nygaardsvold government began to exhibit disquiet after the French press complained about Trotsky's role in the mass strikes in France in May-June 1936. In Norway, the fascist National Sammling led by Quisling made Trotsky's asylum a political issue in the summer of 1936. On 5 August, Trotsky's residence in Wexhall was burgled by fascists (who were also tapping his phone). Although the perpetrators were caught and put on trial, the "evidence" obtained in the burglary was used by the government to make the case against Trotsky.

Trygve Lie said as early as 11 August that his department would investigate whether Trotsky had respected the terms of his asylum, a step he would not have taken without the approval of the prime minister. Of course the Norwegian Stalinists joined the chorus.

Internal pressures within the Labour Party were also significant, and even these were permeated with the politics of Stalinism. For example Jonas Friis combined backing for the popular front with uncritical support for Moscow, including for the trials. He would later publish a pamphlet, *Trotskyism: A Poison Plant*, a phrase he took from Tranmael. Høidal acknowledges that relations with the USSR, including security considerations were important to Nygaardsvold's calculations, though he discounts the threat of a trade boycott. No account can ignore the external role of the USSR, but this book indicates how these fused with domestic conflicts.

Trotsky's supporters described his four-month internment at Sundby as a "monument of shame". He enjoyed fewer rights than he had as a prisoner of the Tsar, with only his lawyers and Schefflo allowed to visit. Trotsky was allowed only an hour's walk twice a day, and otherwise was totally isolated indoors, unable to answer the slanders against him in public. His supporters called this incarceration "the first

Norwegian concentration camp". In December 1936 he was escorted onto the freighter Ruth and accompanied by a fascist police chief to ensure he arrived in Mexico.

Trotsky's own verdict on his treatment in Norway was biting. He compared himself to Dr Stockman in Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, ostracised and hounded for telling the truth. He wrote while on the way to Mexico: "When I look back today on this period of internment, I must say that never, anywhere, in the course of my entire life — and I have lived through many things — was I persecuted with as much miserable cynicism as I was by the Norwegian 'Socialist' government. For four months these ministers, dripping with democratic hypocrisy, gripped me in a stranglehold to prevent me from protesting the greatest crime history may ever know."

From the book, we also learn the fate of the principal characters after Trotsky's departure. This was made all the more tragic by the onset of war, the German occupation and the Quisling regime. In 1937, Trotsky's supporters formed an organisation and published the paper *October*, although the group only had eight members and did not survive the war. Schefflo's ill-health continued, until he died of a heart attack in 1943 while on the run from the Gestapo. Another Norwegian sympathiser, Håkon Meyer, joined the NS during the war and afterwards was sentenced to forced labour. Konstad, the passport office head who investigated Trotsky, and Jonas Lie, the police officer who escorted Trotsky to Mexico, both collaborated with Quisling.

Tranmael fled during the war and returned to edit *Arbeiderbladet*. He died in 1967. Trygve Lie famously became the first secretary-general of the United Nations. Nygaardsvold headed the government in exile in London, and died in 1952. Knudsen escaped to the US through Russia, returning to serve as a minister until his death in 1959. Walter Held was not so lucky — he too sought to escape the Nazis through Russia, but was caught and perished in a prison camp during the war. Trotsky's lawyer in Norway, Puntervold, pursued him for money owed. Although Puntervold died the following year, Trotsky still had to settle with his estate. The Norwegian government pursued Trotsky for unpaid taxes, which he also had to settle.

The Norwegian saga was the prelude to Trotsky's ultimate place of exile in Mexico. These last years have been described with verve by Bertrand Patenaude in Stalin's Nemesis: The Exile and Murder of Leon Trotsky. We now know much more about the vicissitudes and traumas of Trotsky's final years, which make his achievements all the more remarkable.

His defence and development of key Marxist ideas during that time remain irreplaceable in current politics.

New book rediscovers US socialist cartoons

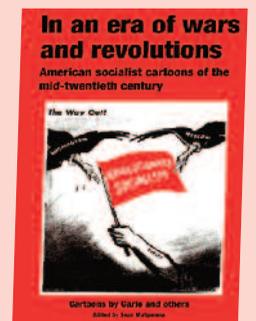
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Probation officers and solicitors strike

By Ollie Moore

Probation officers and criminal solicitors struck at the end of March, in a dual protest against the outsourcing of 70% of the probation service and a huge cut to the budget for legal aid.

Probation officers struck on 31 March, while solicitors struck for two days to 1 April.

Solicitors and barristers previously struck on 6 January and 7 March, massively disrupting the function of courts across the UK. The £215 million cuts to the legal aid budget will restrict barristers' pay, and make it harder for anyone other than the rich to access top-quality legal representation or bring cases against powerful individuals or institutions. Criminal barristers reached a deal with the government on Thursday 27 March, and did not participate in the walkout.

The probation officers' strike, organised by their union, the National Association of Probation Officers



(NAPO), aims to stop what workers and their union see as the near-total privatisation of their service. Speaking to *Solidarity* about the proposals in 2013, one probation worker said: "The proposals are not evidence-based; there is not a single shred of evidence to suggest the service will be more effective with a privatised, payment-by-results system. The probation service has in

fact been successful in reducing re-offending rates year on year, so there is simply no reasonable argument to privatise. It's purely ideological.

"In my office, many workers of all grades are no longer content with their position within the service, and many people are talking about leaving because they are sick of the constant threat of redundancy. I've

spoken to plenty of workers over the last few years, and the same themes keep coming up: 'We're getting sold to Serco aren't we?' 'I might just take redundancy and get another job somewhere else.'"

Ian Lawrence, NAPO general secretary, said: "The government plan to outsource 70% of the probation service is untried and untested.

"It is a dangerous social experiment that we believe will lead to a reduction in rehabilitation and fragment risk management, placing the public at risk. These reforms are ideologically driven and being pushed by a political timetable."

Solicitor Matt Foot said: "This is the first time in history when solicitors, barristers and probation officers have taken joint action not to work the courts.

"All but the rich will suffer because of these cuts — which is why we are united and determined to stop [justice minister] Grayling."



More car job cuts

By Darren Bedford

Car workers suffered another blow on 25 March, as Honda announced a plan to cut 360 permanent and 160 agency jobs from its Swindon plant.

The actual job losses suffered could be as high as 500, as businesses elsewhere in Honda's supply chain are hit by the central cuts.

Unite described the job losses as "a devastating blow", and "a wake-up call to the UK government", but despite saying it was "determined" to save the jobs, the only concrete action proposed was an "appeal" to Vince Cable from Tony Murphy, the union's national officer for car manufacturing, to "work with us to find ways of persuading Honda to think again on jobs and investment."

Cosy chats with Vince and Tony are unlikely to make Honda think again about anything much. Industrial action, even at this late stage, might.

Honda's announcement

is the latest in a series of significant cuts to car manufacturing jobs in Britain, following the loss of 1,500 jobs at Ford plants in Dagenham and Southampton in 2012.

Although local unions organised demonstrations to object to the cuts, workers in the plants were not confident enough to take the kind of action that might have saved jobs — sit-down strikes and occupations.

The kind of confidence needed to take that action isn't easy to build, but union leaders can help to build it by encouraging militant reps, stewards, and activists in factories and helping them agitate amongst their workmates, rather than restricting themselves to merely bemoaning the cuts and meekly appealing to Lib Dem ministers for help.

The local labour movement in Swindon can help by assisting reps and stewards at the plant and building a public, community campaign to demand that jobs are kept.



Teachers strike

Teachers in England struck for one day on Wednesday 26 March, in an ongoing dispute with the government over pensions, pay, and workload.

The strike was strong across the country, shutting hundreds of schools. Over 10,000 strikers and supporters marched in London.

The Local Associations Network, a rank-and-file caucus in the National Union of Teachers, is pushing for the dispute to escalate beyond scattered one-day strikes.

Workers fight halls closure

By Jonny West

Outsourced workers at the University of London are fighting the closure of the Garden Halls, a university halls of residence, which they say could lead to job cuts.

A petition campaign has attracted support from hundreds of students.

The campaign is run by the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) University of Lon-

don branch, which is also integral to the "3 Cosas" campaign for sick pay, holidays, and pensions.

IWGB is also fighting a recognition battle, with the managements of both the outsourced companies and the university itself insisting that they will only



speak to Unison, now a minority union amongst outsourced staff.

Workers' Liberty members in the IWGB University of London branch help produce the Open Book bulletin, which provides a forum for discussing workplace experiences and union campaigns.

The next bulletin is due out on Wednesday 1 April.

For more information, see iwgb.wordpress.com

Ritzy strike

Workers at the Ritzy Cinema in Brixton, south London, have voted by an 85% majority to strike to win the London Living Wage.

Ritzy workers have waged a long-running battle for the pay increase, but Picturehouse Cinemas, the chain that runs the Ritzy, has so far remained intransigent, to the point of banning local publication *Brixton Bugle* from the cinema for running an article supporting the workers.

The workers are members of BECTU, which represents workers in theatres, cinemas, and the television industry.

- For more, see facebook.com/ritzylivingwage

Local government pay

The GMB union will consult its 220,000 members in local government on a 1% pay offer from employers, with a recommendation to reject and move to industrial action.

More next week.

Lambeth college strike

By Darren Bedford

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) at Lambeth College in South London have voted by 95% to strike, in a fight over proposed changes to terms and conditions.

Union activists say the changes would increase staff workload, but reduce sick pay and holiday entitlement, leaving workers at Lambeth working longer hours than almost every other Further Education college in London.

UCU regional official Una O'Brien said: "Lambeth College cannot expect to simply force through punitive changes to staff's terms and conditions."

The union has yet to name strike dates.



Solidarity

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Putin: hands off Ukraine!



By Martin Thomas

Russia's ruler Vladimir Putin has demanded that Ukraine adopt a federal constitution. The move is a gambit to gain Moscow more leverage in Ukraine.

Ukraine is diverse, but it is a distinct nation, with a right to independence from Russia; and, despite Russian claims, it does not divide neatly into two sectors.

The west is poorer, heavily dependent on remittances from Ukrainians working abroad, and mostly Ukrainian-speaking; it was not part of the USSR until 1939.

In the middle, Kiev, the capital, and centre of the movement which ousted the corrupt pro-Russian

president Yanukovich in February, is mostly Russian-speaking. Rural areas are more often Ukrainian-speaking.

The eastern edge is the site of most of Ukraine's heavy industry and natural resources. It is more heavily Russian-speaking, and a significant minority are actually Russian. (Workers from elsewhere in the USSR moved to eastern Ukraine's factories and miners during Stalinist industrialisation).

Whether this diversity is managed by federal arrangements or not should be Ukraine's choice. Putin's government has no rights in the matter.

Since February Putin has militarily occupied and annexed Crimea and massed

troops on Ukraine's eastern borders. As we go to press on 1 April, Russia is said to be reducing that military build-up.

Within Russia, itself theoretically a federal state, Putin has transferred the bulk of tax income to the centre, and abolished direct local elections for regional governors in favour of having them appointed from the centre.

On Saturday 29 March, representatives of Crimea's indigenous people - the Crimean Tatars, deported en masse by Stalin in 1944 and allowed to return to their homeland only in 1989 - met and voted to seek "territorial autonomy" within Crimea. Their experience under Stalin and Brezhnev

has made the Tatars fearful of Russian rule, and most of them boycotted the rigged 16 March referendum to join Crimea to Russia.

New presidential elections in Ukraine are scheduled for 25 May. The front-runner is Petro Poroshenko, an oligarch of slight social-democratic pretensions.

Russia: hands off Ukraine! Keep Russian troops out!

Western governments: cancel Ukraine's debts!

The labour movement should back Ukraine's left in its efforts to create "third pole" against both Russian imperialism and the Ukrainian oligarchs.

Nationalise the energy companies!

By Rhodri Evans

The official regulator for the energy industry, Ofgem, reported on 27 March that suppliers' retail profits — from selling energy to households and businesses — had risen to £1.1 billion in 2012 from £233m in 2009. No austerity for the energy bosses!

It also found "a pattern of suppliers raising prices more rapidly and to a greater extent in response to an increase in costs than they reduce prices in response to a fall in costs".

Ofgem has called for another official body, the CMA, to investigate the industry and report whether collusion and lack of competition is allowing the big energy companies to gain super-profits. First comes a consultation, closing on 23 May, before the investigation gets under way.

Knowing that the Ofgem report was coming, one big energy company, SSE, tried to cover itself by announcing on 26 March that it would freeze prices until January 2016. Since SSE increased its prices last September by 8.2%, it can well

afford the freeze.

SSE's move exposes the squawks of complaint made last autumn by energy bosses when Ed Miliband proposed a freeze. They said a price freeze would make the industry "unsustainable" and doom it to "economic ruin".

But it also shows that energy bosses can afford a short price freeze and still pocket large profits.

Solidarity says that the entire energy industry should be taken under democratic public ownership, with workers in control in the workplace. Immediately, the profit principle can be abolished along with the complex market structure of Suppliers, Agents, Distributors and Generators.

That public and democratic control would also ease the way for energy generation to be de-carbonised and shifted to renewables and new-generation nuclear, in tandem with programmes to improve housing and public spaces.

Up to 69% back public ownership of the energy industry in opinion polls.

Time to see off the bedroom tax!

By David Kirk

To mark the first anniversary of the bedroom tax (1 April), the BBC commissioned an investigation.

It found 6% of tenants previously claiming (and now no longer receiving benefits for spare rooms) have moved. 28% of tenants affected have fallen into rent arrears for the first time.

The amount "saved" by the measure is at least £140 million less than predicted.

From the start it was obvious the bedroom tax was just part of a general assault on social housing and social security. There are a negligible number of one-bedroom social homes available, and so affected tenants have been forced into the expensive, unregulated private rental sector that costs more in housing benefit than any council or housing association equivalent.

The bedroom tax has become a byword for all that is cruel, arbitrary and vindictive in the government's assault on the poor.

The fight back has had some clear victories: exemptions for the severely disabled, carers and foster parents had been dropped by the time the policy was implemented.

Since then some councils and housing associations have been forced to curtail or drop thousands of court cases.

The key fight, however, is to get councils and housing associations to adopt no-eviction policies. There have been some successes in this field but it requires the mobilisation of the labour movement in a sustained alliance with tenants. In Scotland this kind of pressure eventually yielded a no-eviction pledge from the Scottish government.

One key area of struggle is the Labour Party. Labour's leadership did oppose the bill, but then refused to say whether they would repeal it. Relentless pressure forced Miliband into a firm commitment to repeal if elected.

However even though the Labour Party opposes the tax, Labour-run local authorities continue to enforce the policy, with few exceptions.

Saturday 5 April is a national day of action against the bedroom tax. Marches and protests are planned in many cities. We should also use these as an opportunity to discuss the next steps in the struggle and how to pressure councils and housing associations into adopting defiant no-eviction, no-implementation policies.

A start can be made by asking local Labour councillors to sign the "Councillors Against The Cuts" statement.

Victory on the bedroom tax is a real prospect if our movement gets serious about the struggle. Such a victory could turn the tide in the war being waged against the working class. Let's make sure this policy doesn't see a second anniversary.

• 5 April protests: bit.ly/PeJRFp