

# workers power 5



Hovis strike victory



Russia and US stitch up Syria



The road to Black Power

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Monthly paper of the British section of the League for the Fifth International

## TIME FOR ACTION!



**The TUC's recent call for a mid-week day of action was a response to pressure from the rank and file – and pressure from the rank and file is needed to make it happen**

TWELVE MONTHS ago, the 2012 TUC Congress passed a motion from the Prison Officers' Association (POA) calling on the unions to consider "the practicalities of a general strike" to halt the Con-Dem austerity offensive. Yet talk of a general strike remained just that for our leaders – just talk. If we leave the decision for the day of action voted for in Brighton to the same people, then we will get the same result. But as last month's 50,000 strong demonstration at the

Tory party conference in Manchester showed, whenever unions have called on their members they have answered in their tens of thousands.

This even more true at a local level, where grassroots activists have not sat back and waited but, faced with threats of imminent closures, have sprung into action. At Lewisham Hospital, 25,000 demonstrated in January and eventually forced a judicial review and a temporary halt to the wreckers. In Stafford,

50,000 people mobilised in April to save their hospital, followed by 20,000 marching the day before the national demo in Manchester.

So if the rank and file does respond to calls for action, how can we overcome the divisions within the resistance, above all the hesitancy or outright sabotage of the union leaders?

We can use the People's Assemblies that are being planned right across the country, not as rallies for celebrity speakers and not just to

"share experiences", but as places to argue and decide on the strategy we need, both locally and nationally, to stop the government's demolition of our services.

We can create local delegate-based councils of action, meeting regularly, to coordinate and lead the resistance.

We can form a rank and file movement in every union to democratise them, to recruit the unorganised, working with the union leaders when they fight and without them

when they do not.

We can demand the TUC leaders who voted for a mid-week day of action name a date and unite the ongoing and planned disputes – teachers, postal workers, firefighters – into a veritable strike wave, from which an all-out indefinite general strike to bring down the Coalition can be put firmly on the agenda.

We need to unite unions, student and youth organisations, and immigrant communities, to oppose and halt the

marches of the English Defence League and British National Party, both by mass mobilisations and by effective self-defence for all who come under attack from them.

We need to set about building a new working class party with an active membership, not just an election machine, organised and recruiting in every workplace and community, and we need to win it to a programme that is openly and boldly socialist, anticapitalist and revolutionary.

# Where we stand

THE CAPITALISTS' property must be expropriated, with not a penny paid in compensation.

Capitalism must be abolished across the globe and a world without class division, state repression or the oppression of women, subject races and nations, must be created. That is what revolutionary socialists call communism.

All power must pass from the capitalist elite into the hands of democratic councils of delegates from the working class, the peasantry and the poor directly elected by the masses and subject to instant recall. These councils must be supported by the armed working class and its allies.

The resistance of the exploiters must be broken by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution. Armed workers must forcibly break up the police and army that exist to support the rule of private property.

All production and distribution must be organised democratically and sustainably, without private ownership and the blind and brutal dictatorship of market forces.

Social inequality and the underdevelopment of whole continents must be overcome through the planned allocation of humanity's resources: raw materials, means of transportation, communication, technology and labour.

Imperialism, the highest and most violent stage of capitalism, means the exploitation of billions in all countries, it means blockades, invasions and occupations.

We support all resistance to imperialism and its agents and demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. We demand the withdrawal of all British troops from abroad including from Northern Ireland. We demand the dissolution of

Nato and all imperialist pacts.

We support the Palestinians' struggle to free their homeland from Zionist occupation and to create a single country "from the river to the sea", in which Arabic and Hebrew speaking citizens can live in freedom and equality.

There is only one road to this freedom. It is the road of class struggle and revolution, the fight against all forms of exploitation and oppression.

We demand equal rights for minorities, an end to all racist discrimination and an end to the lies of the racists in the mass media, which whip up violence against black people and other oppressed communities and ethnic groups. We fight against all immigration controls: they are inherently racist.

We fight for women's liberation: from the burden of childcare and domestic labour, which must be socialised; from rape, physical and mental abuse, from unequal pay and discrimination at work.

Women alone must control when and whether they have children, not the state or the churches. This includes defending and extending the right to free abortion and contraception on demand.

Lesbians, gay men and transgender people must be defended against harassment on the streets, at work and in the schools. They must have equal legal rights to marry and bring up children.

We fight the oppression of young people and demand an end to their harassment by the police, the government and the press. Young workers should have equal pay and equal rights with other workers.

We fight for free, universal education, under the control of students, teachers and other education workers themselves. We fight for an autonomous, revolutionary

socialist youth movement.

We fight the catastrophe of climate change, resisting corporations which pollute the earth, governments that refuse to take action against the emission of greenhouse gases, and policies which put the profits of big oil, the auto industry and the power generators before the very survival of our species.

We oppose reformism and the pro-capitalist policies of the Labour Party. Capitalism cannot be reformed via elections and peaceful parliamentary means; it must be overthrown by the masses through force.

We oppose the control of the trade unions by unaccountable bureaucrats. Union members should have full democratic control. All officials must be regularly elected, and subject to instant recall; they must earn the average pay of the members they claim to represent. A rank and file movement to carry out this transformation.

In the fight against austerity, we call for a united anti-austerity movement pledged to oppose every cut, for local councils of action, and for mass industrial and direct action, up to and including a general strike to halt the assault on the NHS, the welfare state and education and to kick out the coalition.

We fight for a workers' government based on the fighting organisations of the working class and the socially oppressed.

We propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in Britain to build a new working class revolutionary party. Workers Power is the British section of the League for a Fifth International. It fights for a world party organised across national boundaries on a programme for world revolution.

## Tory Party Conference plans seven more years of austerity

Rebecca Anderson

THIS YEAR'S Tory party conference saw a bonfire of human rights, welfare and hope for an end to austerity. Chancellor George Osborne revised his deficit reduction estimate and announced a further seven years of cuts; Home Secretary Theresa May announced plans to scrap the Human Rights Act; and Prime Minister David Cameron proposed further attacks on the unemployed.

The Tories promised to "cut the deficit, not the NHS" in the 2010 election, but instead have increased the deficit and are privatising our National Health Service. A demonstration to defend the NHS saw 50,000 people march outside the conference centre.

### Austerity until 2020

As it happens, Osborne has had to make cuts more slowly than planned – and even more slowly than Labour proposed in 2010. But this still flies in the face of the Trades Union Congress's "wait for Labour" strategy. Without a real alternative to austerity, we face even worse attacks than we have already endured.

Average hourly wages have dropped more than 5 per cent since 2010, worse than in Spain where over half of the country's youth are unemployed. Conservative aides told *The Daily Telegraph* that a further £25 billion of cuts are needed after the election to clear the structural deficit. As if to prove the point, Cameron floated the idea of denying under-25s access to Jobseeker's Allowance and Housing Benefit.

### Attacks on the under-25s

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) figures show more than a million people between the ages of 16 and 24 not in work, education or training. Cameron's response is to remove the social safety net, saying: "Today it is still possible to leave school, sign on, find a flat, start claiming housing benefit and opt for a life on benefits. It's time for bold action here. We should ask, as we write our next manifesto, if that option should really exist at all.

"Instead, we should give young people a clear, positive choice: go to school. Go to college. Do an apprenticeship. Get a job. But just choose the dole? We've got to offer them some-

thing better than that."

However, he failed to offer them anything at all, beyond the threat of being driven to destitution and homelessness. He used this platform to gauge the response to a policy that if implemented could cause an even bigger rebellion than the hiking of university tuition fees.

TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady said that Cameron's proposals would "simply push hundreds of thousands of young people, including those with young families, even deeper into poverty. Young people suffered most in the recession. Today the prime minister has pledged that they will suffer most during the recovery too."

Labour's response was less encouraging, as they posed Labour's "youth jobs guarantee" workfare scheme as an alternative to destitution, rather than real access to jobs, education and training.

### Work(fare) for all

Not wanting to be outdone by Cameron, Osborne announced that the hated workfare schemes will be rolled out to all those who have been unemployed for three years, forcing people to work for free to access the benefits they rely on to live. Social media has been buzzing with the news of this trust fund millionaire telling the country: "No one will get something for nothing."

Indeed, while this is posed as part of the deficit reduction plan, it won't actually have much effect on the deficit. Disability campaigner Sue Marsh pointed out that the unemployed take up only 3 per cent of the welfare budget, and that 94 per cent of jobseekers find work within two years, meaning that Osborne's announcement would address "just 0.15% of the total benefit bill". Its main impact will be to drive down wages, by giving employers a free supply of forced labour.

### Scrapping human rights

Theresa May, widely considered to be the likely next Tory leader, announced that the Tories would scrap the Human Rights Act if re-elected.

One of Labour's few progressive policies when last in power, this law allows people to use the British courts to assert rights under the European Convention on Human Rights, which Britain signed in 1950.

The civil service union PCS

unsuccessfully tried to use this act to challenge the Coalition's attack on public sector pensions; others, however, have successfully used it to challenge police brutality. Its repeal would mean a return to the days when human rights violations could be addressed only by an expensive process involving the European Court in Strasbourg.

May's pretext was the apparent scandal of migrants who are convicted of criminal offences while living in Britain. She argued that there should be no restrictions on the government's right to deport convicted criminals, albeit without mentioning that some deportees could face torture or execution in their country of origin.

### The 'nasty' party is back

This conference represented a turn to the right for a party that has already made countless attacks on our public services, welfare state and general standards of living. The demonstration to save the NHS was a long time coming but could be used as a launch pad for industrial action to halt and reverse privatisation.

Labour's pledges to repeal the Health and Social Care Act and to scrap the Bedroom Tax are not enough. Huge pressure is needed to force Labour to make good on these pledges, and they say nothing about those already evicted or those parts of the NHS already privatised.

The Tories recognise that the unions are the greatest potential threat to their plans, announcing measures to tighten up the already draconian anti-union laws. This includes the banning of "check-off", the direct deduction of union subscriptions from members' wages, a measure that could lead to disorganisation for some public sector unions. More importantly, ballots would only be valid if 40 per cent of members vote – a rule that is not applied to general elections.

If we want to get rid of the Tories then we need to fight now, and this means that the teachers', firefighters' and postal workers' strike action planned for the autumn needs to be escalated and spread. All unions should walk out over austerity and the TUC must be forced to coordinate and generalise the strike action. A general strike could deal the final blow to this hated government.

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# Labour's left turn – and what we need to do about it

Jeremy Dewar

ED MILIBAND surprised supporters and opponents at the Labour Party conference this year. If they were expecting a copying of the Coalition's policies, and defiant rhetoric aimed at the unions, then they were well wide of the mark.

The sense that this was a break from Tony Blair's New Labour was captured when Miliband did a photo-shoot from Brighton Promenade.

"When will you bring back socialism?" heckled a man at the back.

"That's what we are doing, sir," came the reply.

## Left turn?

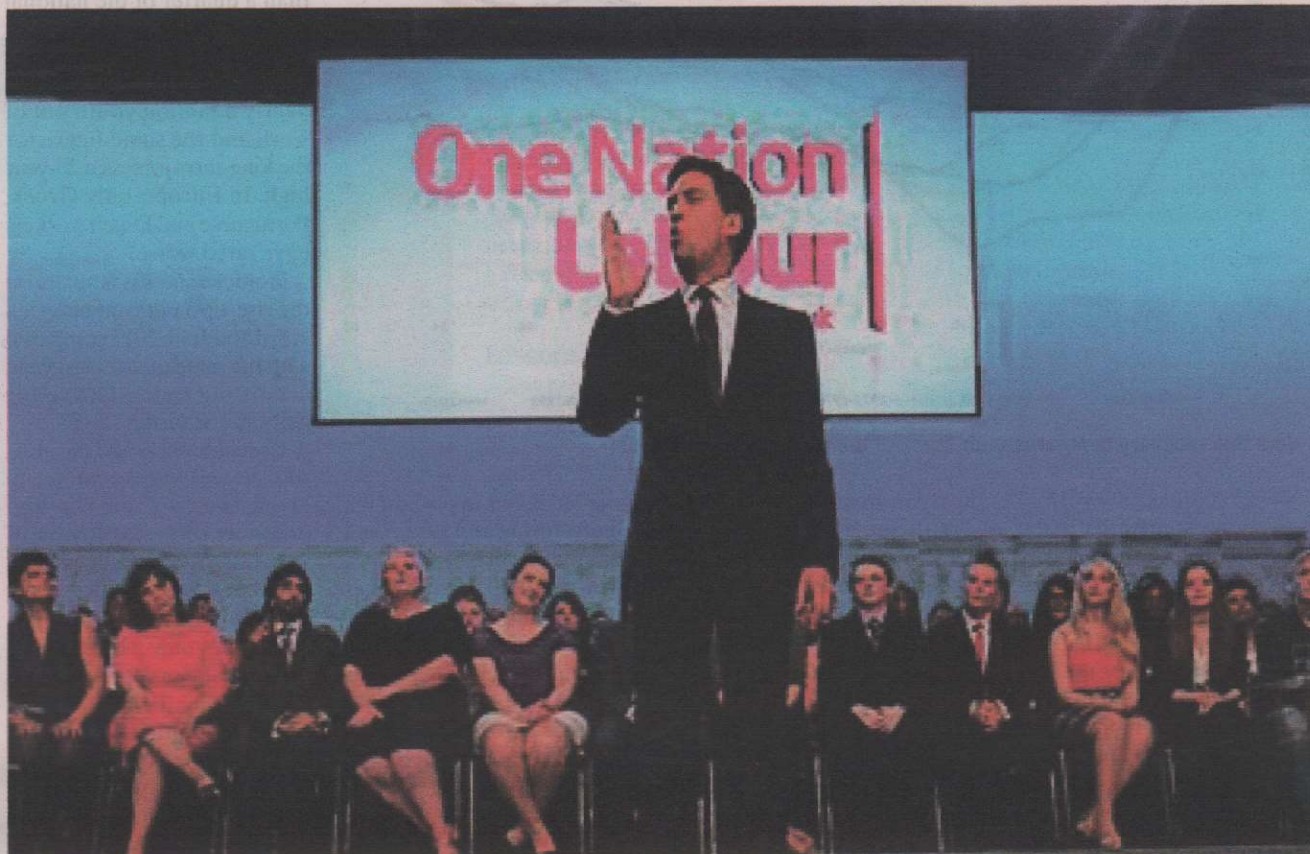
On the crucial question of housing, Miliband promised to abolish the bedroom tax, which has, according to the National Housing Federation, already caused over 330,000 households to fall into rent arrears. He said that if elected, Labour would start a house-building programme that would reach 200,000 new homes per year by 2020.

He also threatened property developers sitting on "land banks" to "either use the land or lose the land". Councils would be granted the right to fine landowners, who refuse to build on vacant plots preferring to wait for house prices to leap upwards, and issue compulsory purchase orders to those who refuse. This was enough to lead that other Bullingdon Boy, Boris Johnson, to compare Miliband to Robert Mugabe!

Low pay is another issue that millions of workers suffer from week in week out. On this, Miliband said he would raise the maximum penalty on bosses paying less than the minimum wage tenfold from the current paltry £5,000 to £50,000.

He also announced plans to set up a review to assess the present, totally inadequate minimum wage and recommend higher levels in certain sectors, like catering and retail. He also issued a vaguer promise to investigate the abuse of zero-hour contracts.

The biggest explosion – from the bosses – came when Miliband pledged: "If we win



the election 2015, the next Labour government will freeze gas and electricity prices until the start of 2017." Needless to say, the privateers, who have made billions since the sell-off of Britain's utilities and have overseen a 40 per cent price hike in home fuel bills in the last five years, were apoplectic at this proposition, threatening to shut down all new investment in infrastructure and renewable energy production. They lights will go out they threatened.

There were other popular announcements: "wraparound childcare from 8 to 6" as primary schools are kept open; switching business tax breaks from the handful of top multinationals to the 1.5 million small businesses; and forcing some businesses to fund apprenticeship schemes in return for employing skilled non-EU nationals.

Labour's shadow health secretary Andy Burnham popular with the party membership, but hated by the Blairites, raised loud applause at the Manchester NHS demo when he pledged that a Labour government would repeal Andrew Lansley's Health and

Social Care Act in its first year of government.

## Where's the catch?

So is this all that it seems to be? Has Miliband, this summer's scourge of the unions, turned into Red Ed overnight? Do the Daily Mail's smears that he is a chip off the old block of his Marxist dad "who hated Britain" indeed give some hopes we can expect red-blooded socialism from the son?

Well, no and – no. But what it does represent is something of a departure from Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's strategy of "triangulation", taking the workers and trade unionists' votes for granted, while moving policy as close to the Tories and the selfish middle class electorate as possible. Curiously the Tories are doing the same thing in the opposite direction.

With the threat of Nigel Farage poaching their members, Cameron feels obliged to consolidate the Tories' traditional base amongst the reactionary middle classes: more racism, more hammering the "skivers" and the unions. Cameron, once a hoody-hugging Clarke Kent, has had to do

a quick change into the Thatcherite Superman.

But Labour's left turn is still more a matter of style than substance.

The two Eds have made it clear that all these promised measures would be financed from existing budgets, not from extra borrowing or taxation. They will keep to the Coalition's spending limits for at least two years, until 2017. Shadow Chancellor Balls even offered to send his proposals to the Office for Budget Responsibility to check this is so.

Remember, a verbal contract is not worth the paper it's written on. These pledges are not in the bag of the manifesto yet. Before the 1997 election John Prescott, Labour's transport spokesperson, promised a "publicly-owned, publicly-accountable" railway system. Conference resolutions demanded it. New Labour's Manifesto said nothing of the sort and, of course, Virgin and Stagecoach are still ripping us off after 13 years of Labour in the "boom years".

This year, Labour conference adopted a resolution for the renationalisation of Royal Mail. Within days, shadow busi-

ness secretary Chuka Umunna told the press that a future Labour government would not reverse the sell-off.

Then we have to look more carefully at the pledges themselves. The house-building promise is the most substantial. But 200,000 new starts by 2020 probably does not mean, as some have claimed, a million homes in five years – but rather the maximum annual build. And the shortage of affordable housing is between two and four times that size. Way back in 1955 the Tories pledged 300,000 council homes a year and met their target!

And if this is left to the private sector, then it will also be tied to a guarantee of future profits, which will impact on rents and quality. In short, unless it is council housing built by direct labour teams then the programme is very likely to fall short of expectation and need.

The proposed energy price freeze drew hysterical threats from the big gas and electric companies that the lights would go out. This too is also bluff; because the energy bosses, who have been ripping off consumers in boom time and crisis alike, know that they can cir-

cumvent any well-signalled, time-limited price freeze by raising prices just before and after the period.

## Labour and the unions

Throughout Ed Miliband's speech, the TV cameras flitted across the beaming faces of the union leaders, especially Unite's Len McCluskey. And why not beam? This speech does represent an olive branch to the union leaders and they will doubtless sell it to their members as proving Labour, for all the summer's rudeness to the unions, is still "our party" and "the only game in town".

Revolutionaries of course have to criticise all this for the humbug it is and warn of coming sell-outs. But it is also a timely reminder that Labour – for all the right wing binge of the past two decades – remains what Lenin and Trotsky originally called it: a bourgeois workers' party. It still remains capable of promising reforms to win workers' votes. Therefore we cannot just "kill it with curses", as Lenin himself warned.

It means that revolutionaries – whilst working to win thousands of the frontline fighters against the Tories to building a new workers' party – also have to reach out to the millions who will vote Labour thinking it offers something different to the ConDem misery.

We have addressed each and every Labour promise that could open up a clash with the capitalist class, but demand their deepening and extension – encouraging the unions and Labour's constituency membership to press for this.

If Labour weasels on its promises, we will convince far greater numbers of the need for a break with Labour.

If Labour on the other hand is forced by pressure from its own supporters to adopt measures that provoke ferocious resistance from the bosses, this will sharply raise and politicise the class struggle and enable revolutionaries to find a place in the front rank of a united front with Labour supporters to defeat the parasites.

# Recovery or not, workers will have to fight

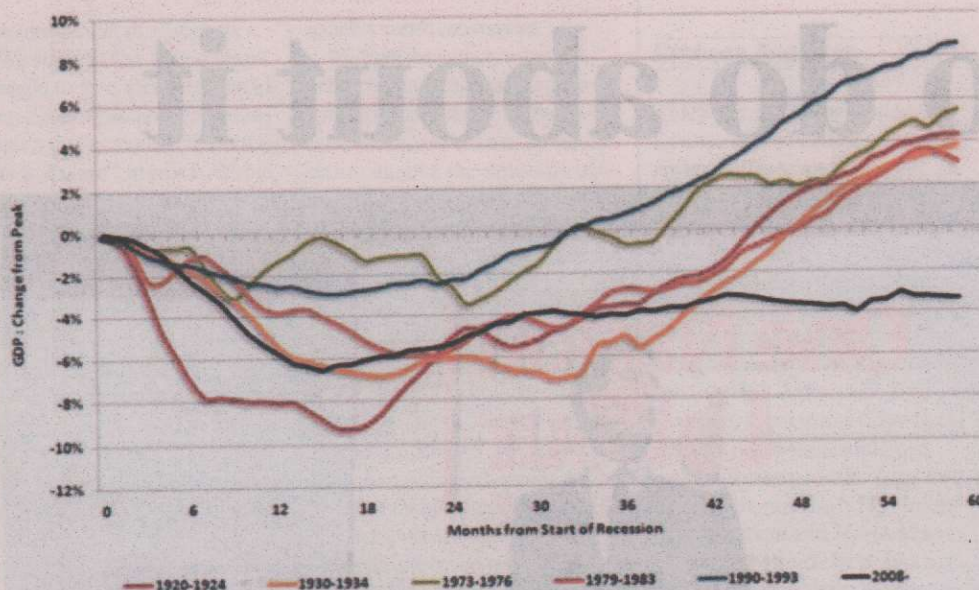
AS THE ECONOMY shows signs of growth, the bosses are determined to take the lion's share

George Osborne boasts that Britain's economy is "turning a corner" and that "those in favour of a Plan B have lost the argument".

This bragging seems to be based on little beyond the latest Gross Domestic Product figures, which show the economy growing by 0.7 per cent between April and June this year. On top of 0.3 per cent growth in the first quarter, growth is predicted to reach one per cent for the third quarter.

Yet statistics show that has been the slowest recovery from a recession for 100 years: a nil-growth economy for the past three years. It is now 66 months since the start of the recession in 2008, and UK GDP is still 2.9 per cent below its starting level.

This contrasts unfavourably with the severe recessions of 1920-24 and 1930-34, when GDP was nearly 7 per cent higher after the same length of time. And Thatcher's deliberate slump of 1979-1983 saw GDP growth of 5 per cent within five and a half years. Since the fourth quarter of 2010, growth has been lower in the UK than in Canada, France, Germany or the US.



How this recovery compares with those of the past. Source: NIESR

Nevertheless, a cyclical recovery, boosted by that in the US, is undoubtedly now underway. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has upped its forecast for the UK to 1.5 per cent growth in 2013, but below the 1.6 per cent it forecasts for Japan and the 1.7 per cent for the US.

However, this recovery still has powerful elements of artificial stimulation, just as the stronger US recovery is based on massive increases in money

supply, or quantitative easing.

With one eye fixed on the 2015 election, Osborne's encouragement of private debt has an explosive contradiction built in. Economists expect his mortgage subsidies, designed to give homeowners a "feel good factor", to create a new housing bubble.

So the artificial boom economy of the pre-crisis years is still central to the cyclical upturn. Osborne denounces public debt but wants expanding private debt to fuel a con-

sumer-led boom, in place of the manufacturing and export-led boom that he predicted.

However, this "recovery" has yet to bring any feel good factor to working people. Average wages have fallen in real terms by 5.5 per cent, almost £1,500 a year, since 2010. All state pensions and benefits have lost value too, as rising food, fuel, transport and housing costs cause millions to fall below the breadline and thousands to resort to food banks.

Child poverty has risen to 3.5

million, more than one in four. Almost 60 per cent of jobs created since spring 2010 have been in lower-paid sectors, such as residential care and retail, where median hourly pay is less than a quarter of the national hourly average.

The number of unemployed remains at 2.5 million, with nearly a million youth out of work and the same figure for the long-term jobless, a 20-year high. In Europe, only Greek, Portuguese and Dutch workers have fared worse.

Homelessness is actually on the rise, up 5 per cent between April and June 2013 compared with the same quarter last year, according to the Office for National Statistics.

If indebtedness and the pressure on real wages continue to grow, then so too will the prospect of an explosion of wage struggles, especially amongst workers with skills in short supply. Unless they can do this, not only will they continue to suffer a depressed standard of living, their share of the national wealth will also continue its 30-year decline in comparison to profits and the income of the 1 per cent.

Already health secretary Jeremy Hunt has urged the pay review body to cancel the miserly 1 per cent pay rise due

to 1.3 million NHS workers, despite Osborne saying we could afford it. Now is the time for the unions to implement the TUC resolution calling for coordinated strike action over pay.

Political factors can also be critical here. Cameron has shown himself to be far from a sure-footed operator in the way he grossly underestimated the willingness of the population (sensed even by many Tory MPs) to undertake another military adventure in the Middle East.

If Cameron and Osborne try to use parliament or the law to repress industrial or community resistance, then they could face a major explosion. We should not forget that great upsurges of workers' struggles in Britain in 1924-26, and in France and the US in 1934-36 all came after a severe depression and in conditions of weakened union strength. Indeed this is exactly what prompted the desire to act "all together" rather than continue to be picked off sector by sector.

This article is based on an extract from *Workers Power's autumn political perspectives, which can be read in full at [www.workerspower.co.uk/2013/09/political-perspectives-autumn-2013/](http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2013/09/political-perspectives-autumn-2013/)*

## Daily Mail launches hateful attack on Miliband

Jeremy Dewar

THE DAILY MAIL is a rabid, racist and reactionary paper. It has history. So it was no surprise to see it fighting against Labour's left turn.

But even by its standards, its attack on Ed Miliband's dead father was shocking. In an article titled, "The man who hated Britain", the *Daily Mail* quotes a private diary entry by the 17-year-old Ralph Miliband in 1940:

"The Englishman is a rabid nationalist. They are perhaps the most nationalist people in the world... you sometimes want them almost to lose (the war) to show them how things are. They have the greatest contempt for the

Continent... To lose their empire would be the worst possible humiliation."

The paper then describes how Ralph rescued furniture from bombed-out houses in the Blitz and went to the London School of Economics, a top university, implying that he was on the make, using Britain without giving anything back.

It failed to mention the fact that the young Ralph Miliband joined the Royal Navy to fight the Nazis as soon as he could. But that wouldn't fit its selective narrative of an ungrateful, scrounging immigrant though, would it?

The *Daily Mail* then describes some of the Marxist Ralph Miliband's more mature and public views, such as his support for nationalisation, his belief that modern capitalism is

dominated by a "relatively small number of giant firms" and his call for Labour to stand for "the social ownership and control of the means of production, distribution and exchange".

These are basic socialist principles, rather than anti-British views. But for the *Daily Mail*, anticapitalism and anti-Britishness are blended together in a cocktail of hatred that only the English Defence League could swallow.

The paper has to dive into Ralph Miliband's private correspondence to try and prove its point:

"Eton and Harrow, Oxford and Cambridge, the great Clubs, the Times, the Church, the Army, the respectable Sunday papers... It also means the values... of the ruling orders, keep the workers in

their place, strengthen the House of Lords, maintain social hierarchies, God save the Queen, equality is bunk, democracy is dangerous, etc.

Also respectability, good taste, don't rock the boat, there will always be an England, foreigners, Jews, natives, etc. are all right in their place and their place is outside..."

But who really believes that to despise Eton and Harrow is to hate Britain? And who doesn't recognise some of these bigoted views - UKIP, anyone?

Let's offer another list of great British heritage: Wat Tyler and the peasants' revolt; the Levellers in the English Civil War; Captain Swing and the Luddites; the revolutionary Chartists; the world's first trade unions; the 1926 General Strike; the

1984-85 Great Miners' Strike; the Poll Tax Rebellion.

The *Daily Mail* hates every one of these, so is it also anti-British? All this proves is that Britain is divided into two great opposing classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. If calls for the abolition of privilege, exploitation and oppression are anti-British, then our own paper is proudly anti-British.

The *Daily Mail* is an extreme example of the pro-Tory bias of Britain's press.

Rupert Murdoch's *The Times* and *The Sun*, *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Express* will all come out with lies and distortions in the bid to get their preferred party, the Tories, elected.

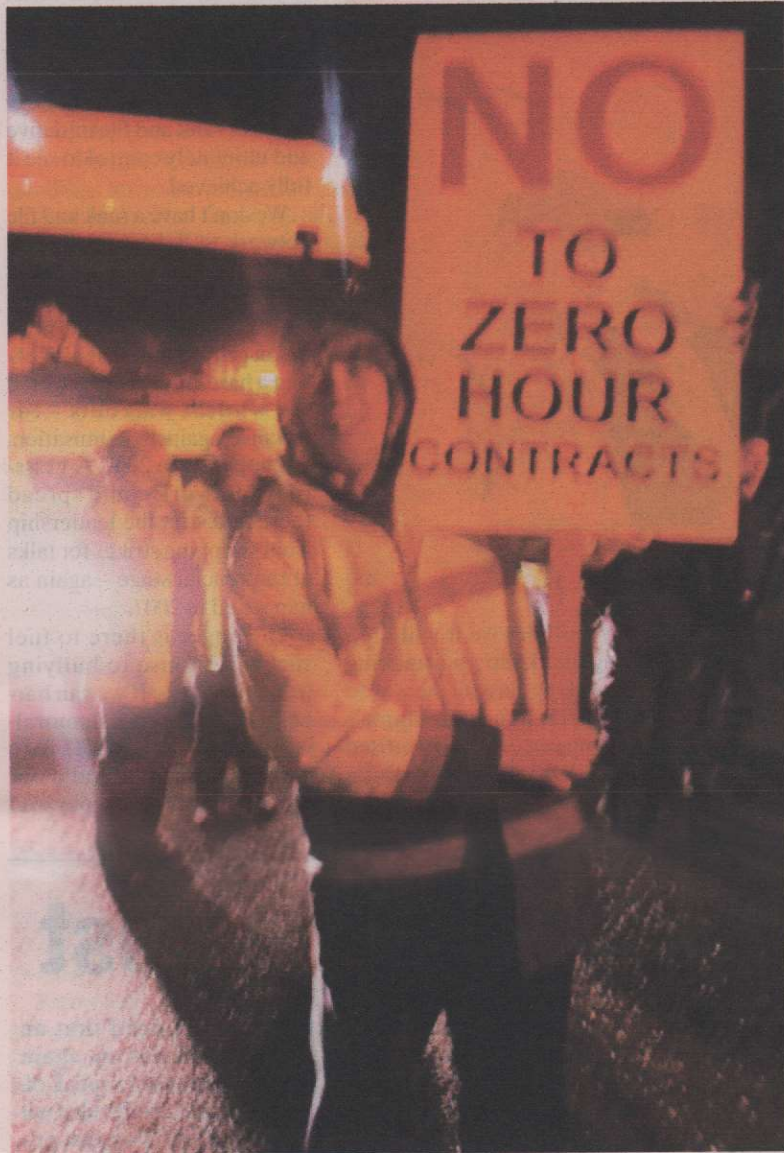
Anti-immigrant racism and Islamophobia, lies

about "benefit scroungers" and bile-filled editorials denouncing any group of workers who fight back are their stock-in-trade. It is obscene that in a modern democracy a few individual millionaires should control the mass media.

We demand their nationalisation without compensation. Their presses and websites should be placed at the disposal of political parties and civil society in proportion to their support among the general population.

While Ed Miliband may not agree with these democratic proposals, his father Ralph and a majority of the British working class would surely approve.

# Hovis workers don't just want the crumbs, they want the whole bakery



James Copley

A CRUCIAL VICTORY was won this month in Wigan, with workers in bakers' union BFAWU forcing bosses at the Hovis factory to employ workers on full time rather than zero-hour contracts, and to put an end to the routine use of agency labour.

These precarious workers are super-exploited, not knowing from one week to the next – often one day to the next – whether they have work and can pay for food, rent or transport. Yet they are expected to be on call all the time.

Since February, 30 per cent of the workforce had been made up of agency staff that Premier Foods management had insisted were “emergency cover”. Since then, management has ignored workers' complaints and tried to drive down pay and conditions for the rest of the workforce.

In the face of this attempt to “streamline” the workforce came a pair of week-long strikes, with a third lined up before management caved in. The first strike was well supported; around 220 machine workers and cleaners came out on picket lines in the early hours, successfully disrupting goods deliveries.

The second strike was as strong as the first, again disrupting deliveries both by preventing trucks from leaving and by convincing drivers to join their action, despite a heavy police presence and the arrest of three pickets.

## Zero-hour zeroised

By the time it ended, management had already shifted on zero-hour contracts. Buoyed up by a partial victory, the strikers refused to compromise and demanded an end to the use of agency labour.

With their profits severely hit, management finally caved in days before the planned third strike. Some 24 workers on zero-hour contracts were taken on full-time, and management agreed that agency staff would be taken on only after overtime had first been offered to full-time workers, with a review of staffing levels to be taken within three months.

## Lessons

What can we learn from this victory? The first lesson is that the Hovis workers were striking to win, not just to protest. When the bosses ignored their first strike they didn't just give up but struck again, and were prepared to carry on doing so until they won. This is a lesson that other unions could do well to learn; the CWU postal workers' union fighting privatisation is the first that comes to mind.

The second lesson is that militant pickets are effective; by preventing deliveries from leaving the factory with pickets of up to 80 blocking the roads and gates, the strikers hit the bosses where it hurt them most, their profits. Indeed, these pickets in the middle of the night were well supported not just by workers from the factory but also by members of other unions and their wider supporters.

Finally, this shows that strike action can beat back zero-hour contracts. Other unions should now start to mobilise against the systematic threat that zero-hour contracts represent.

## Spread the action

There are at least 200,000 workers on zero-hour contracts in Britain today, probably many more. Over 90 per cent of McDonald's workers are subjected to these humiliating contracts – but even Buckingham Palace employs 300 staff on zero-hour contracts.

If workers in Unite, UCU, CWU, PCS and Unison were to launch a wave of strikes against zero-hours contracts, drawing in the agency workers that are being used to bring down their wages, then there is a real possibility that we could start to reverse this damaging trend.

Ultimately we cannot expect the union leaders to start these campaigns however; it is up to the rank and file workers across all of the unions to start organising for action. The bakers have shown us what can be achieved with militant action, now it is up to workers across all sectors to rise to the challenge and fight, because it is only when we fight that we can win.

# Schools out!

Bernie McAdam

THE TEACHERS' unions NUT and NASUWT called the second and third of their regional strikes this month as they step up their fight against Education Secretary Michael Gove's attacks on their pay, pensions and workload.

Teachers from the Eastern, Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside areas took one-day strike action on 1 October. Several well-attended demonstrations were held, including over 3,000 people in Birmingham and 2,000 in Sheffield. The next regional strikes take place in the North East, Cumbria, London, South East and South West areas on 15 October.

The unions have also promised a national strike before Christmas, but no date as yet has been named.

## Attacked on three fronts

Teachers are facing attacks from the Tories on a number of fronts. The changes to pensions have already seen teachers paying in more to work longer and to get less. Now the Government is forcing through career average pensions by April 2015.

The attacks on pay and conditions of work are breathtaking. Gove's plans involve scrapping automatic incremental progression on the pay scale. Performance related pay becomes the norm. In total teachers' pay has decreased by 15 per cent in real terms since the Tories have come to power.

Gove has also served notice that the school day and terms will get longer. Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time for teachers and “rarely cover” protection will be attacked.

Teachers will revert to the days when clerical and administrative tasks become a key part of their workload. Gove wants to remove any statutory protection, which at present gives a limited safeguard against excessive workload.

## Fight Gove all the way

All these attacks are part of the government's overall strategy to smash up the comprehensive education system. The growth of academies and free schools is designed to dismantle local authority control over schools. This creeping privatisation will ride roughshod over teachers' trade union rights, which in turn worsens their ability to protect their pay and conditions of work.

Teachers will now be expected to negotiate their pay with the head teacher based on a teacher's “performance”. This is nothing less than an attempt to eradicate national pay bargaining.

Teachers have every right to be angry, but strike action should not just be a means of letting off steam.

NUT General Secretary Christine Blower, in justifying the strikes, complains that we are “faced with a coalition government that is refusing to listen” and that Gove should “enter into meaningful dialogue with the NUT and NASUWT”.

## Gove won't talk

This is the real reason why our union leaders had finally called for a little more action: to force the government to negotiate, when we should be striking for real concessions... but in any case Gove won't talk.

The future of our education system is at stake, and teachers' role in that is up for grabs. Facing up to a historic attack requires from our union leaders a plan of action. To date all we have had is dithering and delay.

It is two years since we had our last one-day national strike over pensions. Gove's response to pleas to negotiate has been to up the attacks. Buoyed up by his victory on pensions, he sticks the boot in over pay. He doesn't want to talk; he prefers action!

We need a union leadership prepared to act for our class the same way that Gove does for his. So deep and wide-ranging are the attacks, but yet so shallow and narrow is their response.

The nature of this struggle requires a call to arms for all workers in the education system, and not just teachers. A campaign to protect our schools must involve all education workers and their unions, parents and students. Local action councils in every area should be formed to mount a fightback.

## Strike to win

The NUT as the biggest and best placed of the unions could have a pivotal role in this struggle. However it must develop a winning strategy that seeks to mobilise all those involved in education. It will only be taken seriously if, as the leading teachers' union, it is seen as deadly serious about defeating Gove and mobilising its members for an all out fight.

The present strategy of intermittent and delayed one-day action will not be sufficient. Long drawn-out disputes which only serve to exhaust union members' real progress, rather than clinch victory.

The NUT has to spell out the terms of a victory. We need to escalate to an all-out, indefinite strike with clear demands in defence of teachers and comprehensive education.

Joint strike committees that reach out to the local community should be formed in every school. If our leaders are incapable of developing a winning strategy, then we need a movement from below based on the strike committees, which can proceed without them.

# Postal workers need a big 'Yes' vote and strike despite Royal Mail sell off

## A CWU postal rep

THE COALITION have put two fingers up to Royal Mail workers and the great majority of the population who oppose privatisation. They have gone straight for a sell-off, and of all the days they could have picked to announce it, they chose the day the result of the CWU postal union's ballot for strike action comes out.

Unfortunately this propaganda stunt has bite. The sell-off has started, with a series of pre-arranged sales to investors to kick it off. There is a 12-day period for applications for shares up to 8 October. Full-scale selling on the stock market begins on 15 October, an "unusually tight turnaround" as *the Guardian* put it, and a deliberate poke in the eye for those who deliver and rely on the mail day in day out.

Rumours suggest that the shares issued so far are being snapped up. If true then no wonder, given Royal Mail bosses' promises of up to 50 per cent dividends next year. Sky News has reported that the Singapore government's investment fund has bought some, attracted by "Royal Mail's promise of a robust dividend policy".

So much for the lie that privatisation would raise funds for investment: this is about taking profits out and putting them in the pockets of the rich, not into machinery and new technology.

It is also aimed at busting the CWU, one of the few remaining industrial unions with a history of rank and file militancy. Ultimately, the drive for profit will undermine the Universal Service Obligation, Royal Mail's commitment to deliver to every home in Britain six days a week.

## A strike we must win

As we explain below, we shouldn't be in this predicament. We've had plenty of opportunities over the past six years to see off the privatisation threat, but our leaders have blown them all.

But we are where we are; we still need to fight with all our might for our future even while – and after – Royal Mail is privatised. The bigger the turnout

Coventry postal workers were among several CWU branches which took strike action this summer – despite their leaders' inaction



in the ballot and the larger the "Yes" vote, the stronger our position. A "No" vote won't just restore the status quo, it will give Royal Mail managers and the new owners the green light to impose cuts, attack union militants and members, and push the union back.

Royal Mail says their three-year pay deal is a good one compared to other workers, but the wage "rise" on offer is below inflation and comes from cutting our pensions in future years. That's the pathetic bribe for getting postal workers to accept the wholesale destruction of our jobs and conditions. No thanks!

Let's get the "Yes" vote out and push for a strike. We don't need to wait for "negotiations" – we've negotiated for months with precious little result and, besides, Royal Mail will only use the time to organise scabbing operations.

Secondly the more we escalate the strike, the more concessions we can squeeze out. Like the Hovis bakers have shown, striking for a week at a time and continuing even after any initial concessions can win far more than one-day strikes. Ultimately an all-out strike will be needed to achieve the leadership's goal of an all-inclusive 10-year deal.

An appeal for solidarity and an all-out strike, coordinated with other striking unions like the teachers and firefighters

and alongside CWU members currently on dispute with Crown Post Offices, could wrestle the Tory-led coalition to the ground. The 50,000 trade unionists and activists who marched on 29 September at the Tory Party Conference in

Manchester would respond to such an appeal.

The government is getting weaker as the election approaches and the Coalition parties pull apart; it could, if given a good, strong push, fall. But we need to give it that

shove, otherwise it will limp along and keep on attacking the working class all the way to May 2015, like John Major's government, which privatised the railways nearly with its dying breath. Alternatively, the fall of a government in the face

of mass workers' action could make it extremely difficult for any new government to resist calls to renationalise the post.

## Rank and file

Every step in a fighting strategy requires rank and file initiative and ultimately control to see it fully achieved.

We don't have a rank and file network to fight privatisation now. However, one can be built "in the breach" if activists, reps and the fighting wing of the union get organised. It is likely that a hard-hitting strike would see wildcat walkouts – for instance against victimisation, as happened in 2007. A grassroots network could spread these and stop the leadership from swapping strikes for talks at the crucial stage – again as happened in 2007.

The anger is there to fuel such a response to bullying from managers. If we can harness it, we can turn demoralisation at the sell-off into determination to rebuild our union and save jobs, pay and conditions.

## CWU leadership lost in the post

### A CWU postal rep

IF ALL THE local areas currently on strike and all militants across the union were to walk out, coordinate their actions and appeal for everyone to come out, postal workers could still wreck privatisation and defend jobs and the union.

CWU leaders Dave Ward and Billy Hayes would object that an unlawful strike would see the union's funds seized, its HQ raided, maybe even put them in prison. But the Tories would hesitate to take such radical measures, because it could spark a strike wave that could break what is fundamentally a weak government.

Where there's a will there's a way, but the history of the last few years shows that Ward and Hayes would never do it. Unfortunately, with a low level of unofficial organisation in the CWU and a small, disor-

cannot organise the necessary action either.

But the rot set in long before this. Back in 2007, postal workers already knew privatisation was on the cards. Rival private carriers TNT and UK Mail had begun cherry-picking the juiciest parts of the business by taking over giant contracts with large corporations and undercutting Royal Mail's prices, while depending on the public sector to deliver "the final mile". Now these cuckoos in the public sector nest have grown so big they have launched their own door-to-door delivery service in Manchester.

The strike of that year nearly crushed Royal Mail management with unofficial action spreading like wildfire from Edinburgh down to Watford. A court injunction and a fresh offer of talks, plus of course Ward and Hayes' willingness to accept anything to stop the strike, saved the day for them.

Two years later another

of hand. Again it was called off just as it was beginning to bite. The terms agreed at the end of the strike amounted to a no-strike deal while the most militant mail centres, like Oxford, Liverpool and East London, were closed.

And what have the left done? In 2007, the Socialist Workers Party closed down their fake "rank and file" paper, *Post Worker*, for the whole duration of the dispute. Their leading figure, Jane Loftus, then president of the union, even voted for the rotten deal to end it.

It is truly shocking that the SWP now aims to re-launch this useless paper on the back of Billy Hayes addressing its Unite the Resistance conference. Hayes should be heckled and put on the spot, rather than praised as some kind of fighter.

In 2010, as soon as they came in, the Tories rushed through a vote to privatise Royal Mail again. The union leaders did nothing. Then in April of this

Cable announced that an autumn sale was on, again with no response to speak of.

Our leaders firmly ruled out any strike action against privatisation as being illegal, but the "wink and nudge" from CWU officials in private was that while we would ballot on pay and conditions, the strike would aim to derail privatisation. But with a sell-off taking place the day before the ballot even ends, they've completely missed the boat.

The large majority of CWU members work for Royal Mail; without them the union would collapse. Yet this leadership has allowed them to be privatised without a fight. Such a leadership has lost all right to lead.

A rank and file movement, capable of leading action without the official leaders when necessary and replacing them with class fighters from below as soon as possible, is desperately needed.

# Building a revolutionary youth organisation

KD Tait

THE REVOLUTIONARY Socialists, formed around a core of former Socialist Worker Student Societies (SWSS) groups, have hit the ground running with successful interventions during Freshers' Fairs at universities in Leicester, Leeds, Liverpool, London and Sheffield.

With meetings of up to 50 students, three local zines launched, and a large presence on the 29 September TUC demonstration in Manchester, members of RevSoc, working alongside Manchester Anticapitalist Students, have shown that an independent organisation of young socialists is not only possible – it is a process which has sparked a surge of creativity and engagement with revolutionary ideas and activity.

Despite the defeat over tuition fees and Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in 2010, despite the crackdown following the 2011 riots, and despite the poverty and insecurity for young people created by mass unemployment, the threat of worse to come means we need the organisation and political strategy to fight back more than ever.

An independent socialist youth organisation will be able to develop its own methods of working to challenge the specific forms of oppression faced by young people. From poverty pay and zero-hour contracts to racist harassment, sexual abuse and legal discrimination, there are huge fields of struggle where, as yet, the far left and socialist ideas are absent.

## Students

Since the Tory-Liberal coalition came to power in 2010, it has waged a systematic attack on the living conditions and opportunities of young people.

Predictably education was the first area to come under attack. After slashing the funding for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses, the government unveiled plans to triple tuition fees.

The trashing of the Tory HQ at Millbank on 10 November 2010 inspired walkouts by 100,000 students on 24 November. Student assemblies were created across the country, and the break with the tame NUS leaders was vital to a strategy of mobilising on the streets in the face of violent police repression.

However, inspiring as it was, the movement proved unable to consolidate the assemblies into a long-lasting structure, one capable of challenging the NUS leadership on the basis of "what parliament does, the street can undo".

Although, on the streets the movement had increasingly become a movement of school and college students, its leadership was based in competing student campaigns. After the vote on 9 December, these leaders were in no position to fight the scrapping of Educational Maintenance Allowance, which was rushed through during the Christmas break.

With the exception of a few universities, the campus anti-cuts groups withered, as demoralisation and disorganisation set in.



The Revolutionary Socialists contingent on the 29 September demo in Manchester

## Universities in crisis

Many universities face financial collapse as a result of the predictable decline in student numbers as young people shied away from the prospect of a crippling £30,000 debt. Some have seen a drop of up to 20 per cent.

The government's attack on London Met was part of a wider crackdown on international students, with a massive cut in visas granted and an escalation in police harassment of foreign students.

The privatisation that has followed, as the necessary and intentional consequence of the cut in public funding, has seen sporadic and localised resistance at some universities. Sussex, with its militant tradition of direct action and occupation continues to act as a beacon for students fighting course closures and job cuts on their own campuses.

The Coalition's trail of destruction in education is shocking and its impact will be felt for decades to come – if we fail to turn the tide and reverse the damage now. But we have to recognise that the student struggle in education must be rebuilt from a low base. The failure to have anything more than weak national campaigns with tenuous links to campuses comes down above all to the sectarian behaviour that has plagued the student movement.

The existence of three competing student oriented campaigns – Youth Fight for Jobs and Education (Socialist Party), Education Activist Network (Socialist Workers Party (SWP)) and the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (over which the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) has established hegemony) has proven to be a barrier to united action and must be overcome.

The Student Assembly Against Austerity on 2 November is a welcome step, providing the potential basis for a united and democratic student movement. If it is to become a catalyst for unity then it needs

to achieve two things:

1. It must agree a democratic basis for creating local and regional student assemblies, which elect delegates to a national coordination.
2. It must be able to take democratic decisions. It should not close with a simple invitation to struggle, but with a mandate to launch a national campaign in defence of education at every level.

But the Student Assembly itself faces the continued problem of an almost exclusive orientation to university students and the limited potential for wider social action around campus issues.

In education more generally, school and college students in Britain have very few rights to organise in their place of study, to take part in shaping their education or to oppose the bullying and racist, sexist and homophobic abuse and discrimination endured daily by thousands of students.

School and college students make up the majority of the young people who are at the sharp end of unemployment, police harassment and financial insecurity.

The NUS has failed these students; in schools there is no right to democratic representation, and, with a few exceptions, the NUS in colleges is a toothless entity with little relevance to students.

Where the NUS can be pressured into investing more resources into these areas, good. Where it can't then we must develop student assemblies that are credible and concerned with the issues faced by younger people. The rise in the school leaving age to 18 with no financial support will drive thousands more young people and their families into poverty.

The relative autonomy and financial independence that university education provides is the basis for student radicalism. But this basis is a transient one which can only be solidified by involving large numbers of school and college age youth.

## Youth

The important fact about young people's struggles is that new generations of fighters can emerge quite rapidly after even serious defeats. And today there is plenty for them to fight over.

The Tories used their Party conference in Manchester to launch another spiteful attack on young people. They announced that there would be no housing benefit or JSA available for the under-25s if they refused to spend 35 hours a week in a Job Centre, using broken computers to look for unpaid internships. This is their vision for a Tory Britain after the 2015 general election.

Already things are bad enough. Twenty per cent of 16-24 year olds are out of work or education. This rises to 50 per cent among young black people. In 2010, police carried out 140,000 drug-related stop and searches on under-21s – a massive and systematic persecution in which black people are six times more likely to be searched on flimsy pretexts.

Funding for youth services in many inner cities areas has been slashed by up to 70 per cent. This isn't just youth centres; it affects drug rehabilitation, sports facilities, and policies to reduce gang violence.

The academies programme has been the flagship policy of the government's ambition to privatise education. And the result? In two years almost half of primary school districts will have more students than places; in some areas the crisis will mean a shortage of 20 per cent.

Attacks on teachers' pay, pensions and working conditions means many schools are struggling to recruit enough teachers. Instead of providing the resources to improve educational achievement, the government fiddles exam grade boundaries – denying thousands of students the chance for higher qualifications.

## What is to be done?

Today's graduates are competing with school leavers for minimum wage jobs. Between graduates who won't get professional jobs and school leavers who can't afford university, the spectre of a lost generation hangs over the political landscape.

At a time when the revolutionary left has failed to grow out of resistance to austerity, the role that can be played by revolutionary youth in Britain is central to the task of developing a credible alternative strategy to overcome the capitalist crisis.

Guarding our political and organisational independence, but allying with those forces we agree with – the militants in the trade unions and the women's movement, for example – the youth of the RevSoc groups are determined to build a growing and vibrant force.

Our message is simple. Capitalism offers no future for young people; a socialist alternative is the only solution; alongside militant workers, youth can rebuild the revolutionary movement.

<https://twitter.com/therevsocs>  
<http://revsocs.wordpress.com>  
<https://www.facebook.com/revsocs>

School and college students make up the majority of the young people who are at the sharp end of unemployment, police harassment and financial insecurity

# From civil rights

**Richard Brenner**

ON 1 FEBRUARY 1960, an impulsive and practically unplanned act of bravery by four black college students sparked the great civil rights' revolt in the US. The students went into a Woolworths store in Greensboro, North Carolina and then sat down at a lunch counter that was reserved for whites.

A waitress asked them to leave and they courteously, but firmly, refused. Despite the fact that their actions were a direct challenge to the system of segregation, they encountered no force, no repression and no arrests. One of the students, Franklin McCain later recalled:

"Now it came to me all of a sudden. Maybe they can't do anything to us. Maybe we can keep it up."

They stayed right until the store closed, then went back to the college and began to organise. The next day they built a bigger protest, the day after a bigger one still. By 4 February, hundreds of students had been drawn into the protest.

## Sit-ins

The sit-ins spread throughout North Carolina and beyond. By mid-April, every state in the South was affected by the movement, which had drawn in 50,000 participants. The demonstrations and sit-ins were marked by dignity in the face of mounting repression, and by a pervasive attitude of restraint and refusal to be provoked.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced "Snick") was created as the first attempt to give an organisational structure to the spontaneous revolt of black youth against segregation. In the years after its founding meeting in Raleigh on 16 April 1960, it was to become one of the most radical organisations in America.

The extreme dedication and bravery of the young militants was linked to the notion, derived from Martin Luther King, that white America could be shamed into granting equal rights by demonstrations of the "capacity of black people to suffer". Under the influence of a large delegation of Nashville students committed to Gandhi's principles of nonviolence and to Christian pacifist ideals, SNCC adopted a code of conduct that included:

"Don't strike back or curse if abused... Show yourself courteous and friendly at all times... Report all serious incidents to your leader in a polite manner. Remember love and nonviolence."

It was the Freedom Rides campaign that really brought SNCC to the centre of the revolt. In early 1961, SNCC, together with the Congress of Racial Equality, organised bus journeys across the South in which groups of black militants would attempt to use segregated eating facilities at bus terminals.

As the rides went on, the activists suf-

fered increasingly violent attacks from white racists, local authorities and police who were often linked with the Ku Klux Klan. In Armiston, Alabama, racists burnt out a bus and activists were beaten up by a vicious mob. By 21 May, disorder had reached such a pitch that martial law was declared in Montgomery.

The extent of repression meted out to the black protesters exposed the weaknesses of pacifism in the movement. The freedom riders were not "left alone"; they were hounded and beaten to within an inch of their lives.

Activists were soon beginning to question the innocent ideals of pacifism. As the struggle assumed truly mass proportions, more radical youth were drawn in. They were less inclined to be courteous to gun and club-wielding racist mobs or deferential to Democrat politicians who sat on their hands while the thugs ran riot.

Many activists started to realise that self-defence was vital in the face of police and Klan brutality. But the leaders were still relying on protection from the Kennedy-Johnson wing of the Democrats.

The Democratic Party could see the value of additional votes from Southern blacks. But their aim was to "support" the movement in such a way as to divert it away from struggle. Kennedy suggested that SNCC should turn its attention to a drive to register black voters.

Although black people were time and again promised the vote – in solemn amendments to the Constitution, in decisions of the Supreme Court, in laws passed by Congress, "Jim Crow", the name for the southern states' disenfranchisement of their black citizens, was still dominant in the South. All manner of obstacles were put in the way of voters wanting to register, including intimidation and brutal violence from white authorities when they tried to so.

This early period of the movement climaxed with the famous march on Washington, led by Martin Luther King, in August 1963. Millions have heard and been moved by his "I have a dream" speech, which envisaged a society free from racism, but few know that SNCC's John Lewis drafted a rather different speech which rejected Kennedy's proposed civil rights bill as utterly inadequate and failing to protect people who were fighting for their rights in the South.

Lewis planned to tell the 250,000 people at the Washington rally:

"I want to know, which side is the federal government on?"

He intended to declare:

"...the revolution is at hand and we must free ourselves of the chains of political and economic slavery."

Though Lewis remained committed to non-violence, he wrote:

"We will not wait for the President, the Justice Department, nor Congress, but will



take matters into our own hands and create a structure of power, outside of any national structure, that could and would assure us of victory."

His mistake was to show this speech to other civil rights leaders first. They forced him to change it because, otherwise, the Archbishop of Washington would not appear on the platform. On the day, however, he still launched into a bitter attack on the Democrats and the Republicans.

## Anger

SNCC workers started to discuss organised self-defence of black communities, as well as openly investigating pan-Africanist and socialist ideas. A number of members of the SNCC staff were also members of Students for a Democratic Society, which was to become one of the main "New Left" organisations that flourished during the radicalisation of youth at the time of the Vietnam War.

By 1964, Stokely Carmichael was emerging as a leader of the radical wing of the movement. Born in the West Indies, Carmichael had family and personal connections with black members of the Communist Party of the USA. When he joined the Nonviolent Action Group and then the full time SNCC staff in 1964, he brought with him an emphasis on economic and social issues, such as demanding the nationalisation of the top corporations and the breaking up of large landed estates.

He wanted to see "more than 100 people control over 60 per cent of the industry". At the same time, he began encouraging SNCC staff to "stop taking a defensive stand on communism." SNCC leaders

began an African tour where they met, among others, Malcolm X and discussed collaboration with his newly formed Organisation of Afro-American Unity.

In early 1965, events took a sharper turn. Attempts to organise a mass march from Selma to Montgomery met with sustained police attack and barricades. On 10 March, Martin Luther King, at the head of a demonstration, angered local residents and SNCC staff by unilaterally deciding to call off the march, turn around and go back. SNCC, under the leadership of the militant activist Jim Forman, seized the opportunity to challenge King's leadership. He argued firmly for not flinching from a confrontation with the police, saying, "If we can't sit at the table of democracy, we'll knock the fucking legs off."

Out of the work around the Selma marches the next year, Carmichael fronted a campaign to build an independent political organisation in the rural area between Selma and Montgomery, the Lowndes County Freedom Organisation. It adopted the emblem of a snarling black panther, and soon changed its name to the Black Panther Party. According to one historian of the movement, Clayborne Carson, it was not at first intended to be an exclusively black organisation, but became so because no whites wanted to join it. It provided the model for the future organisation of the Black Panther Party for Self Defence of Bobby Seale and Huey P Newton.

By 1966, Carmichael was becoming heavily influenced by ideas of black consciousness, of pride in blackness, the positive promotion of black culture and the construction of black institutions. He



# to Black Power



insisted, in response to attacks from liberals against this approach, that his position was "... not anti-white. When you build your own house, it doesn't mean you tear down the house across the street."

But it was not until the events surrounding the Mississippi march of 1966 that this orientation began to take shape and the new slogan of Black Power was to sweep the USA.

In June 1966, James Meredith began a solo walk across Mississippi as a demonstration of the right of black people to live without threats and fear of violence. He was shot three times and hospitalised.

Martin Luther King, Congress of Racial Equality leader Floyd McKissick and Stokely Carmichael joined forces to lead a protest march that would also boost local voter registration efforts. King viewed the march in much the same way he viewed the whole campaign, a strictly peaceful protest. But SNCC was adopting a more militant stance than before.

## Black Power

Sick of years of beatings, shootings and arrests, Carmichael argued that an organisation called the Deacons of Defence provide armed protection for the march. At mass rallies

across Mississippi, Carmichael spoke against the nonviolence line being pursued by King, and condemned the federal government for failing to provide any real protection against racist terror. In Leflore County, Carmichael told a meeting of hundreds after he had been detained in jail:

"This is the 27th time I have been arrested. I ain't going to jail no more ... What we gonna start saying now is 'black power'."

What did Black Power mean? To many SNCC workers, to poor blacks from Mississippi to the ghettos of the big cities, it meant an end to compromise, to nonviolence, to reliance on white liberals. These liberals expected a political pay-off for their support: the renunciation of the right to self-defence (something no liberal ever demanded of whites) the censoring of Lewis' speech to the Washington rally in 1963 and King's attempt to get SNCC to call off a demonstration against the Vietnam War in August 1966.

SNCC's refusal to tie the movement's hands in return for the illusory support of fair-weather bourgeois allies was a real political step forward.

But the idea of Black Power, as Carmichael came to theorise

it in his book of that name, co-authored with Charles V Hamilton, also contained serious ambiguities.

When Carmichael wrote of the need for black consciousness and self-identification as a vital first step, that "only when black people fully develop this sense of community, of themselves, can they begin to deal effectively with the problems of racism in this country", he was not just speaking of the justified need to develop pride and confidence in black culture. He was advancing the principle of black unity, irrespective of class divisions.

Unity of all black people; workers, poor farmers and the urban poor, as well as middle class and even the few rich, became for him a precondition for an effective fight against racism. This is what he meant by his famous statement that: "Before a group can enter open society, it must first close ranks."

## The question of class

The first and most fundamental problem with this approach is that it downplays the central fact of class. To set the goal as the unity of all black people, as blacks, blurred the real conflicts between blacks of different classes. It blurred the differences between those who advocated reliance on the Democrats, and those who fought for militant action.

It was a "unity" that contained the real possibility of holding back the black struggle.

At the same time, it cut off, in advance, the possibility of building fighting unity between black and white workers against the common enemy. Certainly, in many cases, the white working class and their unions had proved themselves to be racist. Insofar as Black Power meant not holding back the struggles of black people until white workers became anti-racist it was right and justified. But, for Carmichael, it was not simply this.

He went on to ignore the real material difference between white workers and their white bosses, and the potential for anti-racism to be built within the white working class because of this difference. As he told a meeting in Watts,

Los Angeles, "the only reason [whites] suppress us is because we are black". In this analysis, white society was conceived simply as a monolith, with no fundamental contradictions between the interests of its respective classes.

Carmichael all but wrote off the trade unions, as "coalitions between the economically secure and the insecure". Racism in unions had to be recognised and fought. But Carmichael threw out the baby with the bath water, downgrading the rich experience of black workers, indeed black women such as Dora Jones of the Domestic Workers' Union, Floretta Andres of the New York Teachers' Union and Miranda Smith and Velma Hopkins of the Food, Tobacco, Agriculture and Allied Workers' Union, who played leading roles in the rise of industrial unionism and the CIO union federation.

These experiences proved that it was both necessary and possible to challenge racism within the working class and build unity in struggle. For a minority in the movement, such as Julius Lester, Black Power meant an increasingly hard-line separatist stance, involving rejection on principle of collaboration with whites. Lester gave one of his pamphlets the title *Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama!*

Although Carmichael did not rule out coalitions with whites, he did argue they could arise only after black people had first united.

However, others within SNCC did try to get to grips with the political and class differentiation within their community. As Jim Forman acutely observed:

"Are the problems we face only ones of colour? ... What is upper, lower, middle class? Do they exist among blacks? Why is there a black banker in one town and a starving Negro in the same? ... Do the problems of a black welfare mother only arise from her blackness? If not, then what are the other causes?"

Whilst for SNCC workers and poor blacks the Black Power slogan was one of militancy, for other more moderate and conservative blacks it meant promoting black businesses, a black middle class and even bourgeoisie, rising not with their class but out of their class.

Thus, Black Power was to become the rallying call not only of the most exploited and oppressed blacks, but also of the most conservative and bourgeois forces within the community.

That is why one Black Power conference was sponsored by black Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, who was trying to subordinate the movement to the Democrats and who, as Carmichael admitted, was "talking about stopping the throwing of Molotov cocktails and not stopping the causes that bring about the throwing of the cocktails".

A new layer of moderate community leaders was able to consolidate around the Black Power slogan, holding conferences sponsored by, among others, the white owned corporation Clairrol.

This was in line with the attempts of US capitalism to co-opt a privileged layer of blacks as its answer to the urban uprisings and mass struggles of the 1960s. How

easily this could be co-opted can be seen from the words of Republican President Richard Nixon:

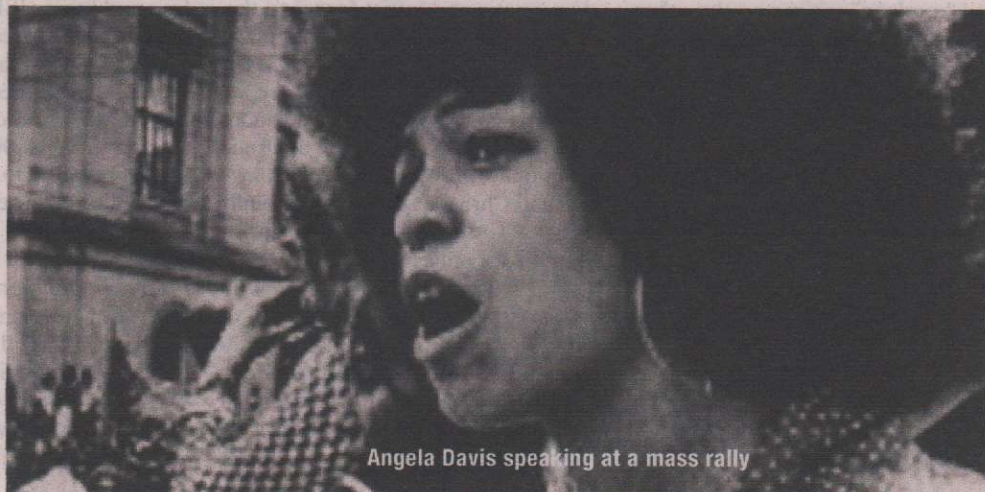
"What most of the militants are asking is not separation but to be included in, not as supplicants, but as owners, as entrepreneurs, to have a share of the wealth and a piece of the action. And this is precisely what the federal central target of the new approach ought to be. It ought to be oriented toward more black ownership ... black pride, black jobs, black opportunity and yes, Black Power ..."

## Power

In the end, the Black Power slogan and the approach it represented proved not only ambiguous and capable of being adopted by conservative forces, but also disorienting for some of the most militant civil rights fighters.

As SNCC declined under the twin blows of external repression and internal ideological incoherence, Carmichael himself turned to the pan-African nationalist "socialism" of Nkrumah and Sekou Touré, President of the bourgeois republic of Guinea. Carmichael ended up accepting Touré's offer of moving to Guinea and acting as his personal secretary in 1968, taking the name of Kwame Ture and joining the leadership of Guinea's ruling party in 1972.

The notion of uniting black people of all classes before, and as a precondition for, fundamental social change led him to support a government which, despite its radical rhetoric, upheld the capitalist system, which is the soil out of which racism grew and still grows.



Angela Davis speaking at a mass rally

# Imperialists agree to preserve

Martin Suchanek

“A HUGE VICTORY for the international community” – that is what US President Barack Obama called the 27 September United Nations Security Council Resolution 2118 on chemical weapons in Syria.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also praised the document to the skies, while German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said that it had overcome years of paralysis.

Even UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon went so far as to call the text “historic”.

It was so historic, in fact, that Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad promised to cooperate with the UN and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, welcoming both the resolution and the US and Russian brokered “peace talks” scheduled for November in Geneva. When all the thieves in the UN kitchen agree so heartily, you can be sure that some really poisonous dish is being cooked up.

The victims are the Syrian people, who two and a half years ago rose up against a totalitarian regime that oppressed them for decades. It is therefore no surprise that the



Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama shake hands on the deal

Syrian opposition did not join in this hypocritical chorus.

Although the resolution requires the Assad regime’s cooperation, and even envisages further measures without it, it does not specify any measures to be taken to enforce this. Rather, it requires the Security Council to pass a further resolution first. Here of course Assad’s Russian and Chinese sponsors will protect him with their vetoes, as ever.

This “historic” resolution means that all the major impe-

rialist powers, both in the West and also Russia and China, have agreed a common approach for the pacification of Syria. In essence, this represents a complete triumph for Russia.

This triumph is embodied in the resolution, which states that “the only solution to the current crisis” is through “an inclusive and Syrian-led political process based on the Geneva Communiqué of 30 June 2012”, emphasising “the need to convene the international

conference on Syria as soon as possible”.

Thus after more than 100,000 dead and at least 2 million refugees, after the civil war that the Assad regime has waged against its own people, the tyrant’s state apparatus is to remain.

At best there might be some “transitional solution” that could enable the “reasonable” elements of the opposition – that is, the most easily corrupted – to participate in a future government.

## Russia wins out

Only a few weeks before the resolution, the world was awaiting a very different outcome. The French and British governments loudly demanded air strikes on Syria in response to the Assad regime’s 21 August poison gas attack on the rebel-held Ghouta region, in which hundreds including many children were killed. Obama grudgingly threatened “limited military action” to punish Assad for crossing the “red line” he had declared a year

previously.

But this brought all the lies churned out by George W Bush and Tony Blair to justify their invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan back into the spotlight. It became clear that an overwhelming majority of the population in Britain and the United States were opposed to another war in the Middle East.

First to fall flat on his face was David Cameron, who suffered a devastating rebuff in the House of Commons, following which he had to state unequivocally that Britain would not participate in any bombing of Syria.

Barack Obama also felt obliged to consult Congress, despite being able to use his powers as commander-in-chief to authorise a strike. He could hardly have been unaware how unpopular another war would be in the context of the ongoing Afghan morass that US troops are still mired in, alongside the daily terrorist outrages in a supposedly “pacified” Iraq.

Deciding that discretion was the better part of valour, he passed the buck to Congress, seeking a mandate from both Houses for intervention. It became clear that Congress would in all probability pass the buck straight back to him.

After this pitiful display of “leadership”, Obama trooped off to the G20 summit in St

# Is the Syrian Revolution over?

MANY VOICES in the Western media (as well as on the left) now describe the situation as an arch-reactionary struggle by “jihadists” on one side and a brutal but at least “secular” and “modern” regime on the other. They say that Assad, at least, did not want to destabilise the region. But this is just a grotesque smear against the Syrian revolution.

By contrast, the work of organisations like the Syrian Revolutionary Left Current shows us that we are dealing with a legitimate revolution of the masses. Contrary to the claims of Assad’s apologists on the European left, there are indeed impressive forms of self-organisation of the masses in the “liberated areas” by the local councils and the Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs).

Among the armed opposition, the

FSA has the largest number of fighters, estimated at 100,000.

However, their loose associations have relatively poor quality weapons. Politically, they range from bourgeois-democratic and leftist forces to the Muslim Brotherhood. Their fighters are indeed mostly Sunni Muslims, hardly surprising given that they constitute a majority of Syria’s population.

But members of national and religious minorities such as Kurds, Alawites and Christians can also be found among them, as also can some women’s organisations.

The exiled National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces is trying to exercise a monopoly on the revolution’s international representation. It is this force that has most earnestly sought an alliance with Western imperialism, feeding fatal and

illusory hopes of their rescuing the revolution from military defeat.

It is also true that reactionary Islamist formations, in particular Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have grown in power and influence. This is due to the much stronger financial and military support that they receive from abroad. They have trained foreign fighters among their 10,000-strong armed units, operating mainly in the north and near the border with Iraq.

Their goal is an Islamic theocracy, and they use terror to impose it on the civilian population, methods similar to those of the regime. In the resistance they play a directly counter-revolutionary role, including through attacks on the Kurdish areas. Their militias have also clashed with the FSA.

Although they pose an extremely

serious threat, the appearance of demonstrations and actions against their spread makes it clear that they are in a minority among the masses, albeit one that poses a danger to the revolution and harms the fight against the Assad regime.

Moreover, the Kurdish population is an important component of the opposition to the regime. In the majority Kurdish areas, their militias and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which has political ties to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), control a large part of the resistance.

As part of the revolution, Syria’s Kurds have been able to achieve a degree of freedom and autonomy. Rightly, they have fought back against al-Nusra and the ISIS, which pose a deadly threat to the hard-won rights of the Kurdish people, whose self-

determination can only be secured by the revolution’s victory.

This victory will certainly never come from the Geneva talks with Bashar al-Assad at the negotiating table. FSA commanders have rightly criticised the UN Resolution as an agreement that benefits Assad, and not the movement against the regime.

But it also shows how futile were the hopes of the exiled opposition leadership in the National Coalition that the Western imperialists would prove to be friends of the Syrian revolution.

The two gangs of imperialist thieves wish to restore an order in the Middle East that preserves their assets: economic, military and political. The fate of Syria’s revolution is at best merely a pawn, to be sacrificed at the table in Geneva if need be.

# Syria's dictatorship

## Solidarity with the Revolution

Petersburg, still publicly determined to proceed with a "punitive mission", while in reality looking for help from his fellow world leaders to get him out of the hole he had dug for himself.

A "hard line" statement from Western participants was cobbled together, though only France could promise actual military support. But, in addition to Brazil, Russia, India and China, South Africa made clear its opposition to any US military strike. Germany vacillated uneasily between signing the statement and trying to mediate between the two sides.

After some delay Germany took the former course, but in reality would not be involved in any action.

Back in the US, Obama could not ignore the likelihood that a Congress majority in favour of a strike had receded even further. Top military figures and even the President's own advisers revealed deep reservations.

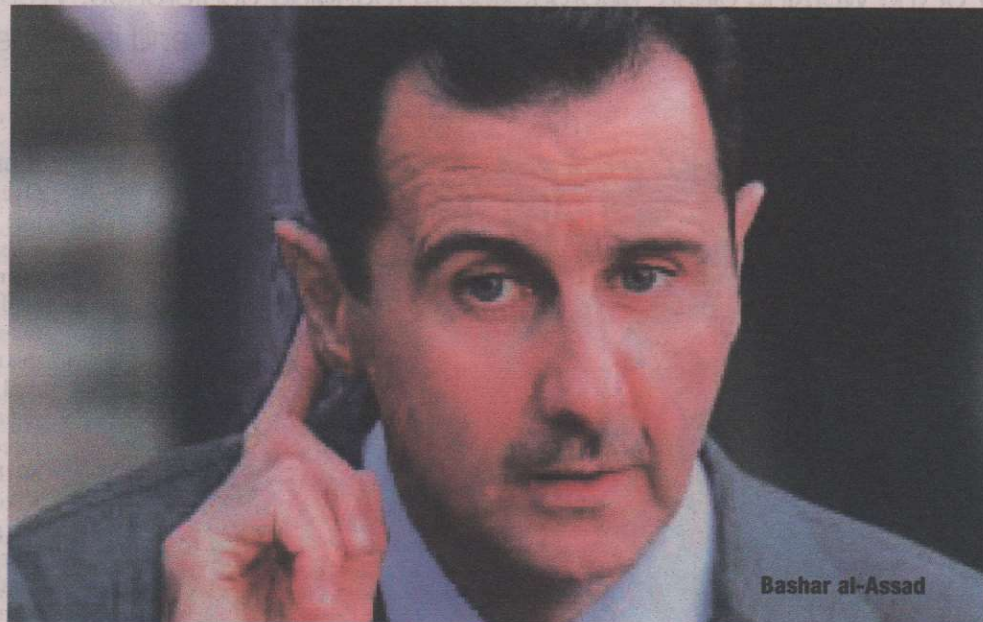
There was widespread criticism of Obama's lack of any clear strategic objective. Any plan to install a "new order" in Syria – if it ever existed – was clearly out of the question. In fact this was never Obama's serious intention, whatever conspiracy theorists right and left might think.

That was also why, from the outset, it was the weaker imperialist powers like France and Britain that set an aggressive tone, alongside regional powers like Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the tiny but rich and proactive Qatar. Each with their own objectives, they either demanded intervention or, in the case of the latter group, actually intervened, far more openly than the US.

### Two camps theory

Events have shown how badly a section of the so-called "anti-imperialist" left in Western Europe and North America misread the situation. Following the hand-me-down "two camps" theory of Stalinism, they still imagine that the US is the only serious imperialist power, and that it is always hell-bent on war.

In fact not only in Syria, where it is plainly quite unwilling to intervene at all, or even Libya, where Britain and France pressed for intervention, the US is now very cautious about throwing matches



Bashar al-Assad

into the Middle East powder keg, as well it might.

Obama was eager to avoid another defeat in Congress on a question of foreign policy, which is constitutionally the President's prerogative. He wanted to throw a share of the political responsibility for any strike onto Republican warhorses, like Senator John McCain.

Here Putin and Lavrov proved that "a friend in need is a friend indeed". They must have enormously enjoyed seeing the distressed president of the strongest world power acting as a supplicant for a climb-down deal.

### Putin's price

The US at last has had to recognise what the last decade, and especially the years since the 2008 global financial crisis have shown time and again: the weakening of its position as sole imperialist superpower, as the "world hegemon".

Although US Secretary of State John Kerry claimed that Assad (and by implication Putin) would never have agreed to the resolution without the threat of unilateral action, they can scarcely hide the fact that it was Russia that dictated to the American colossus what it has to do.

Prestige aside, and for the world policeman that is no small matter, the US is not entirely unhappy to have an understanding with Russia on Syria.

Whatever one-dimensional "anti-imperialists" might think, the US did not actually wish to see regime change in

Syria, if this meant the triumph of a popular revolution with all the uncertainty of what a democratic (or for that matter Islamist) regime might mean for itself and its Israeli attack dog.

The highly unstable result of the 2011 revolution in Egypt, the possibility of a changing relationship with Iran, the increasingly chaotic situation in Iraq, its difficulties in extricating itself from the Afghan and Pakistani imbroglio and the fact that the Arab revolutions are very far from over, are forcing the US to seek Russia's cooperation, rather than the confrontation that Obama stumbled into only a few months ago.

Obama's problem is that there is a growing mismatch between the USA's role as world policeman, and its own economic and strategic interests. Its own allies' demands for US intervention against their rivals or enemies clash with its own need for a scaled down policy.

Obama's strategy – his real "red line" – is that any settlement must preserve Syria's existing state apparatus, in order to avoid a repetition of Iraq's experience after the fall of Saddam Hussein. There, the destruction of the Ba'ath regime, without any effective or reliable allies to reorganise the country already in place, rapidly led to chaos. Israel's dismay at any popular revolutionary overthrow of Assad confirms that the Syrian revolution is no "colour revolution" dreamed up in Washington, as some on the left have claimed.

### Blow to the revolution

For Assad's murderous regime, the resolution and the Geneva conference are a relief. It can continue and even step up the war against its own people, so long as it sticks to conventional methods of mass slaughter; and thanks to Russia they have limitless supplies of them.

They have armed forces ten times the size of the rebels', even if most are unreliable in combat; they also have battle-hardened auxiliaries from Iran and Hezbollah. Indeed their battlefield successes since the spring are undoubtedly due in no small measure to these "foreign fighters".

In the regime's worst-case scenario, the Geneva conference will lead to a compromise where Assad "shares power" with the least militant and least popular part of the opposition, allowing him to preserve the repressive Ba'athist state.

In the best case, the talks will split the opposition and win Assad time to mop up resistance and re-conquer some of the areas lost to him in the war.

Weapons deliveries to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) are a long way off, whether from the Western powers or their regional allies. They are badly needed to combat the regime's airpower and reply to its heavy artillery, tanks and rockets.

The "upgrading" of the FSA, talked about in the summer, was in reality little more than a rhetorical exercise by the West. To date, the bulk of their weapons are captured, brought over by deserters or purchased from corrupt members of the regime.

THE ONLY REAL assistance the Syrian revolution can look to is from the other revolutions in the region and from the workers' movements across the world. The left in the West has a special responsibility, since it is "our" governments that have promised so much and delivered so little. Unfortunately a large part of this left is still influenced by the legacy of Stalinism, or prone to believing that the height of strategic wisdom involves simply putting a plus wherever our rulers put a minus. They are playing the part of "useful idiots" for Putin's Russia and Assad's bloodstained regime.

While they rightly oppose any Western imperialist intervention, they industriously hush up Russia's equally imperialist and indeed more practical and deadly intervention, and the counter-revolutionary role of Iran and Hezbollah.

Above all, they have failed to show any solidarity with the mass movement, especially after the struggle against Assad took the form of an armed conflict. A popular revolution against a brutal dictatorship that has killed more than 100,000 people and created millions of refugees was a "side issue" for them, or even mere puppets in an proxy war being waged by the West.

Joseph Daher, a Syrian revolutionary activist and a member of the Syrian Revolutionary Left Current, presently exiled in Switzerland, has reported on the popular movements in his country:

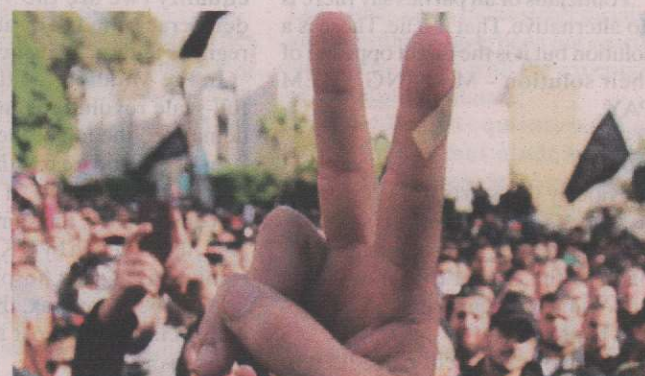
"From the outset of the revolution, the main forms of organisation have been the popular committees at the village, city and regional levels. The popular committees were the true spearheads of the movement that mobilised the

people for the protests. Then, the regions liberated from the regime developed forms of autogestion [workers' control] based on the organisation of the masses. Elected popular councils emerged to manage those liberated regions, proving that it was the regime that provoked anarchy, not the people...

"A prominent example of self-management of the masses is the city of Raqqa, the only provincial capital that has been liberated from the regime (since March 2013). Still under regime shelling, Raqqa is completely autonomous and it is the local population that manages all the civil services for the collectivity. Another equally important element in the popular dynamic of the revolution is the proliferation of independent newspapers produced by popular organisations. The number of newspapers went from three before the revolution – that were in the hands of the regime – to more than 60 written by popular groups.

"In Raqqa, the popular organisations are most often led by the youth. They have multiplied, to the extent that more than 42 social movements were officially registered at the end of May." ([syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com](http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress.com))

This testimony graphically shows that there is a progressive side that can and must be supported. This is a side that needs our material support, including the provision of weapons, to successfully fight back against Assad's army and its allies. And it is a side that needs our vehement political support and solidarity against its enemies, including those on the left, who have up to now taken up a position on the counter-revolutionary side of the barricades.



# An action programme for Left Unity

As Left Unity, the project to form a new party of the working class, approaches its founding conference, Workers Power supporters are calling for the new organisation to adopt fighting policies to combat the Coalition and its austerity drive. We offer this programme for discussion, amendment and adoption

THE EFFECTS OF the Great 2008 Recession still blight Britain. One in 10 workers and one in five young people are out of work. Real wages have been in decline since 2007. Public sector wages have been frozen for two years.

Cameron and Clegg's cabinet of 23 millionaires continues with its slump policies even whilst Osborne is claiming a recovery.

The National Health Service (NHS), public education, the entire post-1945 welfare state are under attack.

Benefits for the disabled and the long-term sick have been cut. The degrading fit-for-work tests conducted by Atos have driven people to suicide.

More than 50,000 people face eviction from their homes, thanks to the bedroom tax.

Claimants are forced onto work-for-dole schemes to massage the unemployment figures.

Students in higher education face £9,000 tuition fees.

They have raised our pension funds and raised our retirement age.

They have sabotaged the fight against climate catastrophe by cutting investment in renewable energy and clean technologies by 70 per cent.

But austerity is not just a series of cruel and immoral attacks on the most vulnerable in our communities; it is the capitalist solution to the crisis this system itself has caused.

The bosses' believe recession and stagnation can be solved only by boosting profit rates and cutting "unnecessary overheads" – i.e. spending on health, welfare and education.

This means sacking hundreds of thousands of workers, freezing wages, pushing millions into temporary and insecure employment (the rise of zero hours contracts).

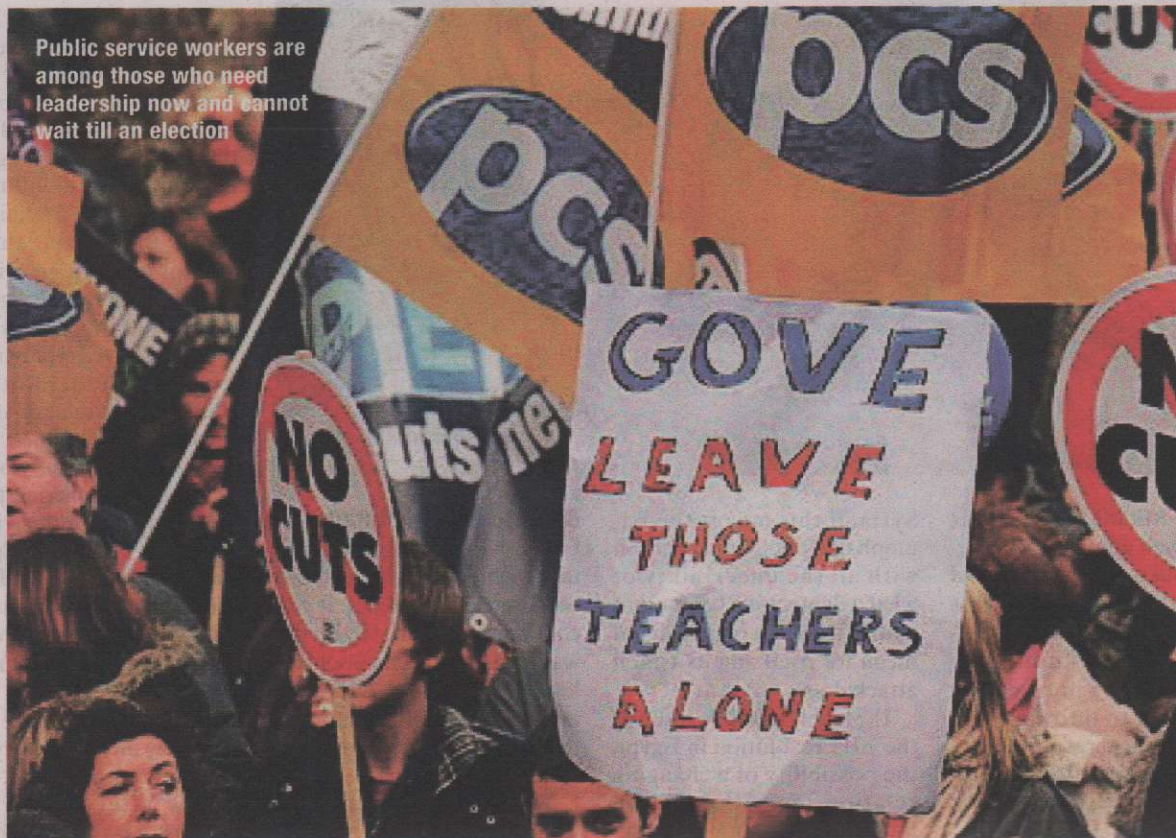
That is why their "recovery" will be a jobless one, with continued austerity, precarious low wage conditions, and mounting inequality. Put simply, it means making the working class pay for their crisis.

Politicians of all parties say there is no alternative. That is a lie. There is a solution but it is the direct opposite of their solution – MAKING THEM PAY.

## How?

Obviously this starts from resistance to all these attacks. It means strengthening, increasing and uniting the fight-back to the extent that it makes it impossible for Cameron and his cabinet to govern.

To wait for an election in 2015 is to



accept another historic defeat for the working class like that Thatcher imposed on us in the 1980s. She destroyed or privatised the industries where the unions were strong. Cameron wants to destroy the welfare state – the remaining bastion of strong trade unionism. But the Tory wreckers and their Lib-Dem hangers on can be stopped.

Around the world we have seen massive protests against the effects of the crisis and the governments, dictatorial or "democratic", who unload it onto the backs of ordinary people. In Greece we have witnessed a long series of one-day and then multi-day general strikes.

The Occupy Movement in the USA and the Indignados in Spain, the square occupations of the Arab Spring and in Greece were copied in many countries. They inspired calls for equality (we are the 99%), direct democracy, the fall of authoritarian regimes and social justice.

In the Middle East they fed into full-scale revolutions, as the people demanded the fall of the regimes.

In Britain too we had the school and uni student protests of November-December 2010, the summer riots in 2011, direct action by UK Uncut, local campaigns against hospital closures and the bedroom tax, the strikes by electricians, and most recently the Hovis workers strikes.

Such struggles show we do have the capacity to mount an effective fight-back. If we are bold enough in our vision and unite our forces we can kick out this government before it is too late.

## What's holding us back?

The reason we have not done this so far lies in the actions – or rather the lack of them – of the official leaders of the union movement.

The biggest scandal is that two years after the Coalition announced its intention to break up the NHS, only in September 2013 did the TUC or the principal health unions call a mass national demonstration.

For all their talk of coordinated action they have failed to coordinate and unite our resistance.

The pensions struggle of 2011 was sold out after only one day of mass action. Union leaders right and left have tamely allowed the anti-union laws to prevent a class-wide response to a political attack on the entire welfare state.

But the last three years have also shown that spontaneous, "leaderless" movements that will not or cannot frame any clear objectives nor develop the form of organisation to decide on a strategy and tactics to achieve them simply fade away or worse – as in the Arab world – are co-opted by existing organisations of the old order.

To prevent such sell-outs or sabotage we need to build a rank and file movement in the unions to take control of all disputes and negotiations, to make officials fully accountable and recallable, and employed on the average pay of their members.

Our watchword should be: with the union leaders where possible, without them where necessary.

We need the local People's Assemblies, trades councils and union branches to create delegate-based action councils which are organising centres against the cuts and provide active solidarity for all those fighting them.

They must be bodies made up of delegates sent by workplaces, campaigns, housing estates, schools and colleges.

With such grassroots organisation – building up to a national focus – we can increase and coordinate our struggles all the way to an all-out, indefinite general strike.

This cannot be left in the hands of the union leaders – but controlled and directed locally and nationally by councils of action.

But to coordinate all these coordinations we need a new type of political party – democratic not bureaucratic, armed with a democratically agreed and developed strategy, a programme.

That is what Left Unity is setting out to do.

## A programme for resistance

Over the year ahead we will campaign for:

- The TUC and the unions to organise the midweek day of action they promised in Bournemouth and make it a full-scale one-day general strike, to use this mass mobilisation to initiate industrial and direct action up to and including an all-out political mass strike to force the abandonment and reversal all the cuts and the privatisations.
- Solidarity with all wages struggles in the private and public sectors, for an increase in pay to compensate fully for the loss of real wages over the past year, fully indexed against inflation. Stand against zero hours contracts. Raise the minimum wage, pension and social security payments to a level everyone can decently live on.
- A programme of essential public works – including a huge building programme of socially-owned housing, schools, nurseries and local health clinics, providing accessibility for the disabled, phasing out nuclear power and laying the foundations of a sustainable energy and transport policy. No one should be denied work while such crying needs confront us. This programme must be carried through under workers and users' control and funded by taxing the wealth and the profits of the banks and big corporations.
- Halt and reverse the cuts and privatisations in health, education and welfare. Repeal Lansley's Act; bring all foundation hospitals back into a fully nationally controlled system. Abolish the academies and free schools, nationalise the public schools, restore the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) at a living level, abolish tuition fees, reinstitute maintenance grants and cancel the student loan debt.
- Halt the attacks on women's jobs, services and rights; defend and extend high quality childcare provision for all; fight for access to jobs, pay and conditions fully equal to men; strengthen zero tolerance of domestic violence and rape.
- Fight all expressions of homophobia, transphobia, and the bullying, physical and mental violence, it leads to; illegalise all discrimination and grant full and equal civil rights, including marriage.
- End police harassment against ethnic minorities. End stop and search. For the right of all refugees and migrant workers to come, live and work here with full citizenship rights.
- Solidarity with Muslims and other ethnic minorities against abuse and violence; stop the marches of the EDL and other fascist groups by mass

mobilisations and by organising militant self-defence of communities and meeting places.

- Make our struggle international – for solidarity actions with those in other countries, like Greece, fighting austerity, unemployment and racism.
- Oppose all attempts to take Britain into new wars and invasions on false humanitarian or human rights pretexts; but mobilise material support for all those fighting for freedom in Syria, Egypt, Palestine, etc.
- Fight for the defiance and repeal of all the anti-union laws, and the restoration of legal aid.
- Fight for the right of the Scottish people to decide for independence or not, free from any threats or intimidation, and should they do so the immediate recognition and implementation of their decision.

### Beyond Labour

Despite Ed Miliband's 2013 conference pledges to abolish the bedroom tax, freeze fuel bills and build 200,000 affordable homes a year by 2020, over the past three years the Labour Party has:

- Backed the Tories' public sector pay freeze.
- Denounced the 30 November 2011 pensions strike.
- Said it would not reverse the coalition's cuts and keep to its spending levels for two years.
- Supported the Tories' benefits cap.
- Attacked unions who demanded policies in their members' interest in return for the millions they contribute to Labour.

The Old Labour "socialism" of reducing social inequality has disappeared without a trace; the identification with the unions and the working class has been abandoned; the domination of nakedly pro-capitalist ideas in Labour is total. The representation of the Labour left in parliament, in local government, in the constituencies has shrunk to an all time low.

Labour cannot be converted into an instrument of socialist transition. That is why we need a new party of the working class, a party of struggle against capitalism, based on those fighting in the here, and now. A party that can win working people to the only real solution that is in their interests – a socialist solution.

It is one that starts today from making the rich pay for saving our services, for creating jobs and a future for the young and a decent retirement for the old. But it goes on to the socialist transformation of society: to organising production on a rational basis, planned democratically by us, to meet social need not private greed.

Putting a socialist solution back on the agenda is not primarily a question of elections – it must be a do-it-yourself solution – carried out by the direct action of millions not just voted for. In the words of Karl Marx, "The emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself."

That is the foundation of what Left Unity is fighting for. Join us.

# A broad, European Left Party? No thanks!

The Left Party Platform in Left Unity has called a public meeting on 17 October "to present the case for a broad left party". **Dave Stockton** argues why this should not be our model

WORKERS POWER shares one thing at least with the framers of the Left Party Platform. We want to see a real mass influx of working class militants both from the unions and from Labour Party members and voters even if, as we recognise will be the case, many of them will inevitably be "socialists" in the traditional Labour Party (i.e. reformist) sense.

But we also believe that it is the duty of revolutionary communists – people who unashamedly call themselves Marxists, Leninists and Trotskyists – to win these people to a programme based on these principles. In short we want Left Unity to become a revolutionary party. How? Not by presenting this as an ultimatum to them but by demonstrating in practice, in the class struggle, the superiority of these methods to those of reformism and centrism.

The point of our Class Struggle Platform, which we have submitted to Left Unity's founding conference in November, is to prove that its demands and slogans are both objectively necessary and contain elements of a transitional method – rank and file movement, councils of action, self-defence groups, a workers' government – to guide today's struggles. On the page opposite, you can read an action programme, which we intend to submit to the conference.

Unlike the supporters of the Left Party Platform and Socialist Resistance (British section of the Fourth International), Workers Power believes that trying to build a significant left reformist party in Britain today is neither desirable in principle nor is it possible in practice.

We do not believe that left reformist parties will suffice for some sort of pre-ordained stage of "defending the welfare state and presenting an economic alternative to austerity". On the contrary, in periods of deep capitalist crisis reformist parties will disastrously betray the working class.

What Left Unity must become if it is to survive and play an important role is to grow into a party of grassroots activists, who can address the strategic confusion of the British Labour movement. This means an organisation that dares to say what is, whatever the present leaders of the resistance try to limit us to. And one that sets out to build real, democratic organs of the fight-back – neither under the domination of a left sect nor under the even more dangerous rule of the union general secretaries.



**The Left Party Platform, formed by Kate Hudson, Andrew Burgin and Socialist Resistance, is pushing ever more openly for Left Unity to base itself on the model of Germany's Die Linke or the Greek Syriza**

We believe this can best be done around an immediate action programme both to guide the struggles ahead and to spread its message by standing candidates where this is realistic.

### European models

The proponents of copying the model of the European Left parties, in Italy, Germany, Greece, Spain etc. – most seriously theorised by Socialist Resistance – start off from the proposition that the move to the right of Labour and European Social Democracy in the 1990s means that a political space has been vacated that positively invites "broad parties" to fill it. They will be able to win seats in parliament, by offering old-style pro-working class reforms – effectively the defence of the welfare state plus a peace oriented foreign policy.

Sounds familiar? It should; it is the programme of the Labour left and the latter day Communist Parties (especially the Eurocommunists).

While it is empirically true that parties like Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, the PDS-WASG and then Die Linke in Germany, the Front de Gauche in France and Syriza in Greece did indeed expand into a

"space" abandoned by the old reformist parties (respectively the PCI-DP, the SPD, the PS and Pasok), it is false to say this space was destined for left reformism. In France the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) made serious electoral progress and its membership rose to nearly 10,000 on a programme that was verbally revolutionary at least. But in most cases the space was far from empty. It was already occupied by post-Communist (Stalinist) parties and these, with their electorates, MPs and councillors, became the core of all the new parties, thus enabling them to get a flying start. To these were added groups of refugees from social democracy and a range of far left groups.

The actual records of these parties were far from inspiring, unless you always focus exclusively on the latest "rising star", such as Syriza was last year. Rifondazione, with its left reformist leadership, wrecked the Italian left and virtually destroyed itself by joining a government led by a Romano Prodi, a Christian Democrat and supporting austerity and the use of US bases for military interventions.

The PDS and then Die Linke have formed cuts coalitions in the German provinces. The Front de Gauche sup-

ported the French imperialist intervention in Mali. Syriza is rapidly backtracking from its 2012 rejection of all austerity and its call for a halt to debt repayments. None of these parties were able to play a vanguard role in resistance to the right, concentrating instead on electoral politics with a dash of community and libertarian rhetoric.

In short these reformist parties are not what the working class needs in a deep and prolonged crisis of capitalism. At a critical moment they will let down the masses, spreading confusion and disillusion. For revolutionaries not only to fail to challenge, but actively to sow illusions in them is criminally irresponsible.

### Left Labour still an obstacle

But apart from the unprincipled (from a Marxist, Leninist or Trotskyist point of view) character of such a project there remains one other reason for not adopting it, which even a pragmatic Anglo-Saxon might consider worth sparing a thought over.

The forces which on the continent set up and developed these broad parties are either absent in Britain or otherwise engaged.

The Communist Party of Britain is, publicly at least, absolutely wedded to voting Labour in 2015. The trade unions – all but the RMT and one or two others – are still wedded to Labour or – like the PCS and NUT – constitutionally bound into an apolitical stance. This will be even more so if Miliband hews to his present line.

The Labour Representation Committee and the Labour left, from veterans like Tony Benn through stalwarts like John McDonnell to a young tribune like Owen Jones, are all utterly committed to Labour for the foreseeable future.

The sizeable far left groups (those equivalent to the left in Syriza) have been made extremely unwelcome in Left Unity. Even those small socialist groups within it have been not exactly warmly treated – with the exception of Socialist Resistance.

So the British equivalents of all those forces that made up such "broad" or "new left" parties in Europe are vehemently opposed to Left Unity or any sort of breach with Labour "yet". The Left Party Platform view that we should model ourselves on the "broad", "plural" parties of the continent is an impractical utopia and in principle a reactionary one as well.

# From below? No, reformism from above

*Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* was a seminal book in the 1980s. It has been reissued with new essays by the original authors. **Joy Maccready** looks at whether it holds answers for going beyond today's fragments

ON 30 AUGUST 1980, 3,000 mainly women activists gathered at Leeds University for the Beyond the Fragments conference, among them revolutionary socialists, feminists, anarchists, Labour members, community activists, trade unionists and students.

Only a year earlier Margaret Thatcher, Britain's first woman prime minister, had defeated a Labour government discredited by its attempt to impose austerity on public sector workers, provoking a "winter of discontent". Thatcher immediately launched a series of vicious attacks on the unions, driving up unemployment and deliberately deepening the recession. The first wave of anti-union laws was enacted.

The conference did not deal with that, or with how to resist it, but instead focused on the fragmentation of the left and the women's movement, the main themes of the book of the same name written by Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright.

What was central to the organisers was their rejection of the Marxist position on women's liberation (based on Frederick Engels' and Clara Zetkin's class analysis) and of a revolutionary socialist programme to achieve it. Theirs was a reformist perspective, albeit one with a libertarian gloss.

At a time when the orientation of the women's movement should have been firmly towards the class struggle that peaked in the Miners' Strike of 1984-85, with its own huge involvement of women, the conference instead focused on the problems of organisational methods, structures and so on.

Not that these questions are unimportant but, outside of the context of organising for action, such an approach necessarily ends up oscillating between utopian attempts to prefigure a socialist society in the way that we organise our movement now, and concentrating on those small scale, localised reforms that are immediately achievable.

By focusing on individual experience, the authors and their co-thinkers also pushed into a distant future the working class struggle for state power, as the central strategic goal of revolutionary socialists. They rejected, and still reject the need for revolutionary political leadership in the form of a vanguard party. These are replaced by a striving for "socialist", pre-figurative forms under capitalism, through changed lifestyles, relationships and organisational structures.

Sheila Rowbotham, in a new contribution for the 2013 edition, acknowledges that the 1980 conference was a damp squib, but places the blame on small groups stymying a



Women Against Pit Closures – unfortunately not Wainwright's model

large gathering, not on its lack of a clear political strategy.

Many of these ideas are not new, coming mainly from libertarian and anarchist traditions; but they have recently resurfaced in debates on the left.

## A question of organisation

Hilary Wainwright, speaking at a Left Unity event in London, said that the book was written as a conduit between feminism and the left, and came out of a frustration with the state of the left. The authors contended that the left could learn a lot from the women's movement in terms of organisation and structure.

From their personal experiences of far left groups, particularly the International Socialists (now the Socialist Workers Party) and the International Marxist Group (IMG), they drew conclusions highly critical of the Leninist-Trotskyist method of party building, which they saw as being intrinsically hierarchal and undemocratic. They regarded "democratic centralism" as the main reason for the "bad culture" experienced by not just women within left groups but also by men in the rank and file membership.

Like similar arguments today, which developed during the crisis of the SWP in the wake of the leadership's failure to deal with rape allegations, *Beyond the Fragments* jumps from these genuine painful experiences, and their systemic character within spe-

cific organisations to blaming democratic centralism as their cause. This is quite a jump.

After all, what is democratic centralism? It is a method of organisation in which an issue is debated out openly and democratically; and then once a decision has been made, usually following a vote, it is put into practice by the organisation as a whole. When the task is complete and its results are clear, there is once more a democratic discussion to see whether the policy was right, or mistaken and with bad effects.

This same principle applies to the election of leading bodies; their personnel are chosen democratically and regularly reassessed and replaced if they are found wanting. In short, democratic centralism is just workers' democracy in action. It is the centralism that is experienced in any strike and in any united action, when decisions are put to the test of practice with the organisation's full and united strength. No serious organisation could implement in practice a policy that would mean carrying out several conflicting strategies at once.

In reality, many unions, parties and labour movement organisations violate these principles. A purely formal democracy may disguise the control of an entrenched bureaucracy. This has happened time and again in the trade unions but only the most individualist anarchist would reject trade unions altogether as a result. However, an opposite

distortion can also occur; disciplined unity can break up into individualistic chaos and resulting impotence.

This divergence between theory and practice is certainly not unique to democratic centralism. Such a contradiction was recognised within the early women's movement in Jo Freeman's famous 1970 essay, *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, which showed how, in the name of avoiding having leaders, the women's movement had produced informal elites (cliques) or "stars", selected not by democratic means but as individuals whose access to the media, journalism, publishing and so on led to their becoming public figures.

Many have commented that a similar process repeated itself in the Occupy movement. Certainly, it was the case in the anticapitalist movements of the early 2000s. The mantra of leaderless movements, organised "from below", does not escape this problem one little bit.

Rowbotham and Wainwright's bad experiences in the IS/SWP and in the IMG (the predecessor of today's Socialist Resistance and Socialist Action groupings) led them to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Both organisations violated the principles of democratic centralism. The IS did so by banning members' rights to form factions, by closing down *Women's Voice*, and by not allowing women members to caucus. And the IMG did so by glorifying the existence of per-

manent factions that obstructed unity in action. Neither represented a genuine expression of Leninism or Trotskyism.

Wainwright has retained these views consistently to this day, and they are reflected in her new essay in the reprint. Here she outlines her principles as:

"Prefigurative politics acting consistently with the values of the society you are trying to create and emphasis on process of change to draw on the sources of power we have 'from below', not focus on the end goal of winning government or making a revolution."

## A reformist programme

Nevertheless, whilst she might downplay "winning governmental power", the various projects she mentions to recommend her model in fact prove this is vital. Indeed, not one of them would have got off the ground without it.

The Lucas Aerospace shop stewards' plan was funded and sponsored by Labour under industry minister Tony Benn. It was the Greater London Council (GLC) under Ken Livingstone that funded the various women's centres in London. The Brazilian participatory budget process could take place only under a Workers' Party (PT) state government in Porto Alegre. Indigenous autonomous organisations in Bolivia are flourishing under Evo Morales' presidency.

When these mayors or ministers, presidents or parties lost power, support for these projects was usually axed. They then generally collapsed, along with the movements that depended on them, not only for funding and premises, but also for political leadership.

In fact, this entire method requires someone go to the trouble of building a party and fighting and winning elections, in order to be in a position to carry out these partial, but certainly not insignificant reforms.

Instead of dealing with these lessons of real political experience, Wainwright is content with tiny reformist utopias, including attempts to create what she calls, "glimpses of an alternative socialised market" whose "coordination and regulation do not require a single controlling centre."

And if we want to transform society radically, to end exploitation and liberate women, we will need a party that can make a revolution. Here Lenin and Trotsky have far more to teach us than *Beyond the Fragments*. All that the book can offer is a reformism from below, which is necessarily parasitic on reformism from above.

# Golden Dawn: can the left seize the initiative from the far right?

To the surprise of many, the conservative Greek government has launched a crackdown on the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn. KD Tait looks at the reasons for this and what it means for the working class movement

SIX MPs AND around 30 party activists, including Golden Dawn's top leader, Nikolaos Michaloliakos and his deputy, have been arrested and charged with two murders, eight attempted murders, dozens of racist attacks, a bombing and the illegal possession of weapons and explosives.

No antifascist will shed a tear because a few dozen Golden Dawn members have been locked up. Thousands of immigrants and leftists will walk the streets safer with these thugs behind bars for a time. But no one should believe that this is more than a temporary blow to the neo-Nazis. Indeed, it could simply provide a pretext for a parallel crackdown against "extremists" on the left.

Mobilising with the slogans "Greece for the Greeks" and "Clean up the Stench", Golden Dawn is one of Europe's biggest neo-Nazi organisations. At the last election, it polled 7 per cent. Recent opinion polls put it on 15 per cent before the arrests. Its leaders have called for a "civil war" in Greece, and the party's paramilitary cells prepared for this by stockpiling weapons and carrying out various murders and political attacks. Its "assault squads" patrol neighbourhoods in groups of 50 or 60 on motorbikes attacking migrants.

In Parliament, its MPs are consistent supporters of pro-business policies and the government's persecution of immigrants. Police sweeps for undocumented workers are backed up by Golden Dawn pogroms attempting to "ethnically cleanse" Greek cities.

According to the Racist Violence Reporting Network, there were 154 racist attacks in 2012, with 104 this year already. Although Golden Dawn is behind most of the attacks, the figures do not represent the true scale of the violence. The police turn migrants who report attacks by Golden Dawn away. Most attacks are not reported.

Contrary to what many lazy bourgeois journalists think, the Golden Dawn did not "appear from nowhere" in 2012. It sprang from the political, social



Antifascists march with a banner portraying the murdered rapper Pavlos Fyssas

and cultural crisis provoked by the austerity. Behind the Nazi imagery lies an organisation with a programme that expresses real social roots.

The Greek economy has shrunk by 20 per cent. In conditions of massive social instability, the petit-bourgeoisie feel oppressed by the ruinous financial policies of the IMF and European Central Bank and are terrified of losing their social status. They are attracted to the fascist programme that promises protection against both the real tyranny of the IMF and the supposed tyranny of the organised working class.

Against a background of numerous brutal attacks, it was the murder of antifascist rapper Pavlos Fyssas that sparked a series of mass protests and violent confrontations with the police. These were an important factor in forcing the government to act to head off a social explosion.

## Penetrating the police

Playing the "law and order" card first against Golden Dawn is a chance for the New Democracy-led government to divert attention from austerity and towards "stability" and "security". The government is under pressure from the IMF to drive through even more job cuts and faster privatisation in return for the next €1 billion bailout. It

faces a challenge from the right, Golden Dawn, and from the left, Syriza.

At the same time, the masters of the Greek state were alarmed by the growth of Golden Dawn influence in, indeed penetration of the police and the security apparatus. So far, a top police chief, a senior intelligence chief, the man charged with investigating Golden Dawn and several more commanders, including the head of the riot squad, have been sacked.

Among rank and file police, the infiltration is even greater. Online footage regularly shows Golden Dawn members attacking left-wing protesters alongside police. Fascists in Dawn T-shirts can be seen jumping out of a police carrier. In the 2012 elections, ballot boxes used exclusively by on-duty police officers registered up to 40 per cent support for the party. The purge of top police officers will not fundamentally change the loyalties of the thousands of rank and file Golden Dawn supporters amongst the police.

Leftists should have no illusions in the state's neutrality. The government will use the new situation to appeal to the "sensible" majority and try to repress equally the "two extremes". A state ban may drive Golden Dawn underground, but if the government

continues with its programme of mass impoverishment, the party's message will retain its appeal. Only a fundamental break with the politics of making the working class pay for the crisis can start to roll back support for the fascists.

The bosses, bankers and career politicians who rule Greece are only looking out for the interests of their class. When Golden Dawn's squads were useful in this, they tolerated them and, if they think it necessary, they will let them loose again.

Without conceding to the state the right to ban parties or endorsing New Democracy's actions, the left must now mobilise to completely rout the fascist organisation and build up working class and immigrant defence committees.

## The socialist alternative

Unfortunately, the alternatives posed by the two dominant sections of the left are completely inadequate both when it comes to fighting fascism and in putting forward an immediate solution to the burning needs of millions suffering under austerity.

On the one side, there is Syriza, topping opinion polls, but progressively dumping last year's intransigent rejection of the European bankers' austerity for a more "reasonable" approach, as part of its

"pragmatic turn".

It is seeking to persuade both the European and Greek bosses that there is nothing fundamental to fear from a Syriza election victory; the party will engage in negotiations over the debt rather than renounce it. In short, at home and abroad, the capitalist agencies are all pressurising Syriza to revert to the policies of Pasok.

Its leader, Alexis Tsipras, once called "the most dangerous man in Europe", is doing all he can to live down his former image. Yet it was precisely when he was at his most radical in rejecting austerity that Syriza's votes nearly quadrupled and thousands of members joined. Now the party is playing the role of a loyal parliamentary opposition rather than leader of the resistance on the streets.

The party does not see the need, nor does it agitate for workers' defence squads to protect the workers' organisations or the immigrants who are beaten and hounded by the fascists.

To Syria's left, in terms of anti-EU language, there is the Greek Communist Party (KKE). Its sectarian practice keeps it divorced from any collective working class counter-offensive against the austerity government, and its refusal to form a rejectionist coalition

with Syriza last year helped New Democracy to hang onto power. This sectarianism is true also in the antifascist movement where, despite having its own defence teams, it will not take the initiative to create a force that could easily crush the thugs of Golden Dawn

The dramatic rise in the fortunes of fascism over the past year is integrally linked to the paralysis in the workers' movement against the crisis. More than two dozen one- and two-day general strikes have failed to shift the austerity government.

The fascists appeal to the petit-bourgeoisie, small business people and professionals ruined by the crisis, and the lumpenproletariat, the unemployed who have turned their rage against the working class, the left and the immigrants. They are the party of social despair. The working class needs a party of social hope, of social transformation.

If the workers' movement remains paralysed, passively waiting for the next elections, capable only of repeated protests but no decisive action to drive the austerity government from power, then fascism will recover from any blows the bourgeois state and the mainstream capitalist parties inflict on it.

A militant and decisive working class advance to drive out the parties of austerity and mass sackings, however, would immediately weaken and scatter the fascist forces and undermine their social base. It would draw the middle classes and the unemployed around the left. This requires an all-out and indefinite general strike to drive out the austerity parties and put into power a workers' government based on the mass organisations created to lead and defend the strike.

Greek working people could finally escape the nightmare of endless impoverishment by seizing ownership of the economy and planning it democratically to produce for the needs of all, not a tiny elite, on the basis of social need, not private profit.

## Defend the Antifascist 286!

ON 7 SEPTEMBER, the Metropolitan Police arrested 286 antifascists for venturing away from the police-determined route for a demonstration against the English Defence League in Tower Hamlets. The arrest and detention of the 286 represents a further attack on our already eroded right to protest, and indeed on our human rights.

Lawyers for the 286 believe that the demo restrictions were almost impossible to discover, and so almost all the arrestees will eventually be freed without being charged. You cannot be guilty of ignoring restrictions you were never told about.

However, it was probably never the intention of the Met to convict – or even to charge – 286 antifascists. They are basically out to intimidate workers, youth and the black and Asian community from defending their areas from fascist attack, and cynically to gather information.

Having recently lost a court case in which the tactic of “kettling” protesters, taking their pictures and recording their identity before allowing them to disperse was declared illegal, the Met have simply upped the stakes – by first arresting all those in the kettle, and then taking mug shots, prints and DNA swabs from them.

But the response of the antifascists has already shown that the Met will not succeed. A defence campaign is being organised, and plans are already afoot to keep the militant wing of the antifascist movement on the streets.

### Breakaway

The mobilisation against the EDL in Tower Hamlets saw the most decisive break so far from the dominant tactics of United Against Fascism. The UAF protest followed the usual pattern of a static rally in Altab Ali Park under conditions imposed by the police, followed by a “victory march” staged long after the EDL thugs had departed.

This time, however, roughly half the 1,000 or so anti-EDL protesters, led by the Anti-Fas-



Police wrongfully imprison and detain antifascists on 7 September – a worrying trend

cist Network, broke away from the rally on news that the EDL had started to march towards the borough, which is home to a wide range of ethnicities, including many thousands of Bengali Muslims.

With 3,000 police and 10 rows of vans and Territorial Support Group on the streets to prevent any clashes, getting within range of the racist EDL thugs was always going to be nearly impossible for the vast majority, if not quite for all of the AFN breakaway march. But whatever their prospects on this occasion, the decision to try and defend the local community from the EDL provocateurs was a correct one. It showed there is another way to confront the EDL.

The display of force by the Met and the near total silence by UAF and the Socialist Workers Party on the arrests have led

many to question a strategy based on collaboration with the state and anti-working class forces, a strategy that abandons control of the streets to a racist and violent police force.

Antifascists are tired of the “official leaders” who claim the tradition of Cable Street and Lewisham in one breath, and in the next denounce those who organise self-defence against police or fascist violence.

The events of Tower Hamlets open up the possibility of rebuilding the antifascist movement on the principle of independent working class unity, not hemmed in by the limits set by the police or by what liberal “allies” can stomach.

Considering the proportion of the UAF rally in Altab Ali Park that joined the AFN bloc, it’s clear that a majority of demonstrators were prepared to do something to disrupt the

fascists’ plans on the day.

### Relying on the state

No doubt the UAF leaders – effectively the SWP – will counter that the EDL had no chance of marching through Tower Hamlets, and that the state and the police had good reason to limit this particular provocation.

The consequences of allowing a fascist march through Tower Hamlets would negatively affect relations between the police and various establishments “community leaders”. To allow “football hooligans”, as the police undoubtedly view the EDL, to antagonise the youth, encourage local racists and in general provoke a headache for the police was not in their interests at all.

On the contrary, the police rely on institutionalised community relations: a web of

police chiefs, councillors and the conservative leaders of small business and religious organisations.

The trade-off for not getting a state ban in this instance was that the police would keep the EDL out of all but a few square metres of Tower Hamlets, and in return their allies in the borough would organise only a token counter-demonstration. It is widely believed that SWP organiser Weyman Bennett was complicit in this arrangement, as has happened many times in the past.

But relying on the state to beat back the fascists is fatal. Firstly, the state will not always be willing to face down the far right. Indeed when capitalism is in a severe crisis, threatened by a militant working class, the ruling class will turn to fascism to unleash its attack dogs.

Secondly, whenever the state

does use its powers to deny the fascists their “right” to intimidate, beat up or even murder their opponents, it will also use its force to crush the antifascists even more ferociously. Just look at the arrest figures: 14 EDL supporters, 286 antifascists.

### Working class unity

Instead of secret negotiations with the Met’s Gold Commander, instead of the slippery slope of state bans favoured by council bosses, instead of appeals to stay at home in fear, instead of all these methods of disarming and demobilising a working class presence on the streets, we should organise for the fullest possible independent action of the working class, youth, and black and Asian people.

In fact the decline of UAF’s ability to put people on the streets on the day is the clearest evidence that their strategy is wrong. If you build pacifistic celebrations of multiculturalism in ways that give patronising self-appointed “community leaders” a platform from which to deliver a top-down event stage-managed by the police, then it should be no surprise that those harassed daily by the police and racists don’t show.

And this is not a good thing, at least in the sense that the UAF enjoys, if only on paper, the support of the bulk of the labour and trade union movement. We need a workers’ united front against fascism, one that mobilises the mass base of the trade unions. Instead of this, the trade union leaders are happy to farm out the day-to-day running of UAF to the SWP, on the understanding that they will run it in a respectable, reformist fashion. It is about time we broke this rotten accord.

We should aim to build an independent antifascist movement rooted in working class estates and communities – one whose approach is fundamentally different to that of UAF.

- Working class unity against racism and fascism
- No platform for fascism
- For organised self-defence