



For a
workers'
government

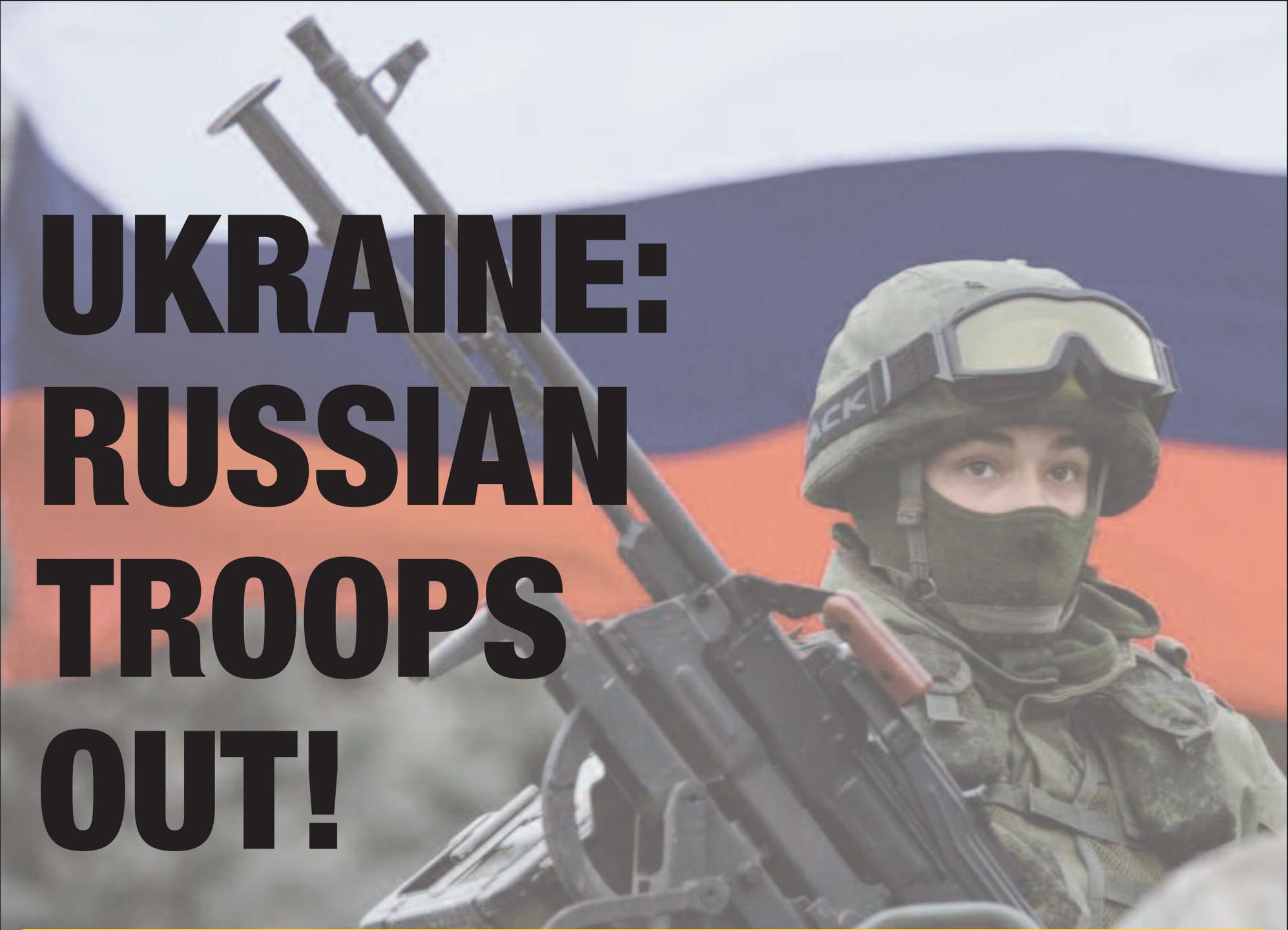
Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 316 12 March 2014 30p/80p

www.workersliberty.org

**Support Ukraine's national rights,
back Ukraine's left against the chauvinists**



**UKRAINE:
RUSSIAN
TROOPS
OUT!**

US, EU: cancel Ukraine's debt. See page 5

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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



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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

- 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

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Australian labour on back foot

By Rhodri Evans

Australia's right-wing prime minister Tony Abbott has called for a Royal Commission into union "corruption", as a way of paving the way for new anti-union laws, which he can't introduce straight off because he lacks a majority in the Senate (upper house).

The comment by former Labor minister and former ACTU [Australian TUC] president Martin Ferguson on Abbott's anti-union drive focuses some of the problems in the labour movement's response.

He says he is pleased that Abbott is suggesting what he calls "sensible industrial relations reform". Gas bosses, he says, could lose billions "because of over-regulation". And "high labour costs" — not high profits, not high pay-outs to bosses — are a problem. "High labour costs and low productivity are an unsustainable mix. And therefore elements of the Fair Work Act must be looked at".

Ferguson made his entire career in the labour movement, starting off with a straight-from-university job as a union research officer.



Martin Ferguson with former Labor prime minister Julia Gillard. Then he attacked her for... "class war rhetoric"

He was reckoned to represent the "soft left".

There's no evidence that he had his fingers in the till, as some union leaders have had. (You notice, though, that no-one is doing a Royal Commission into the world's big banks, despite one huge scandal after another being revealed as they've come under more strain since 2008!)

But Ferguson exemplifies a deeper corruption in the unions — the corruption constituted by the fact that

being a union official has become more a career option than a chance to serve rank and file workers.

After quitting Labor politics in March 2013 with a blast against then Labor prime minister, Julia Gillard, of all people, for "class war rhetoric", Ferguson is now chair of the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association.

The ACTU and Labor leader Bill Shorten have opposed the Royal Commission; but weakly. The labour movement still has not regrouped to fight the Abbott government, or the aggressive conservative state governments such as Campbell Newman's in

Queensland, or even Dennis Naphthine's minority administration in Victoria.

Latest opinion surveys show that the "union corruption" ballyhoo has helped the Liberal-National coalition recover from its sag in the polls after winning the federal election in September 2013.

Labor has opposed Abbott's repeal of the carbon tax, but again had a limp, defensive response to Abbott's blatant policy of favouring profits now over longer-term environmental safety.

Rudd's and Gillard's terrible record in government on asylum seekers gives Labor little chance to build on the widespread anger against the Manus Island atrocities. "Those who have been appalled by the policies of both parties have no reason to see Labor as 'less bad', though now they do know that Labor is 'less effective' at being awful", as one newspaper columnist put it.

Nor is there much effective campaign by the labour movement against the coalition's refusal to guarantee the federal funding for schools called for by the Gonski report.

Campaigns like that against the road tunnel in Melbourne show that there is a base for resistance. The task of socialists is to turn the labour movement out to link up with that resistance.

Swedish fascists attack left and feminists

By Förbundet Allt åt Alla (abridged)

Several people were been attacked in central Malmö by members of the fascist Svenskarnas Parti (Swedes Party), on their way home after having taken part in celebrations for International Women's Day (8 March).

The incident occurred after a night time demonstration against violence against women.

One person is now in intensive care with serious head injuries and a further three have suffered knife wounds to the arms and lung, amongst which was a member of [socialist group] Allt åt Alla Malmö.

The attack on demonstrators can't be seen as an isolated incident. Neo-nazis have carried out violence, intimidation and arson against left-wing activists on a number of occasions in recent months and years.

According to witnesses, a high ranking member of the Swedes Party, Andreas Carlsson, was involved in the attempted murder. He was seen attacking feminists with a knife.

The Security Service and police have ignored the far-right violence, depicting the murder attempt as a "gang war" between "opponents on opposite fringes".

Fascist parties have become powerful political forces across Europe, giving impetus to fascists at home in Sweden. Swedish right-wing extremists have gained weapons training and street fighting skills during their visits to Jobbik in Hungary, Svoboda in Ukraine and Golden Dawn in Greece these last few months.

Today, they stand for violence in the streets. In September, they stand for parliamentary elections.

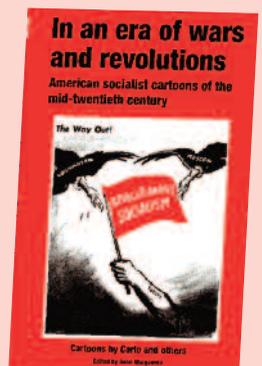
- <http://alltatalla.com>

New book rediscovers US socialist cartoons

A few bold strokes by an artist can convey an idea more vividly and fix it more firmly in the viewer's mind than an editorial or an article would.

The cartoons collected in a new book depict US politics, workers' struggles, America's "Jim Crow" racism, Roosevelt's "New Deal" and Harry Truman's "Fair Deal", and Stalinism in its era of greatest prestige and triumph, as revolutionary socialists saw them at the time.

You can buy online here — price includes postage and packaging. Or send £10.60 to AWL, 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London SE1 3DG



<http://www.workersliberty.org/socialistcartoons>
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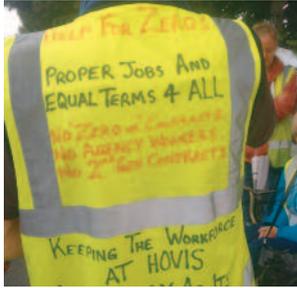
Half a million on zero hours

By Michéal MacEoin

New figures have shown that 582,935 workers were on zero-hours contracts in 2013 – more than double the government's own estimate.

The upward revision comes after a change in how the Office for National Statistics (ONS) calculates its figures, as it emerged that many employers were not reporting the use of the contracts.

Zero-hours contracts guarantee workers no minimum hours or benefits, effectively placing them "on call" when their employer



Hovis workers struck against zero-hours contracts

needs them.

Often thought to be a marginal element of the labour market restricted to hotels, catering and similar sectors, zero-hours contracts are in fact more likely to be found in the voluntary

and public sectors. A report in September 2013 from the University and College Union (UCU) found that 53% of UK universities use them, with just under half employing more than 200 staff on the contracts.

The spread of zero-hours contracts is a symptom of greater casualisation and the erosion of workers' rights. Despite the much-vaunted "flexibility" for workers, the reality is that this usually only cuts one way.

Many bosses expect the same level of commitment to the company from staff on zero-hours contracts as they do from more perma-

nent staff, but with none of the benefits of stability, pensions and other rights.

Workers live in fear that work will be withheld, or that they will be told that they are no longer needed. Some contracts even contain "exclusivity clauses" which forbid workers from working for other employers because they must make themselves available at all times.

The labour movement should demand that zero-hours contracts be banned and put pressure on Labour to increase workers' rights more generally.



Sheffield council move in for the kill on libraries

By Charlotte Zeleus

On Friday 7 March, Sheffield City Council voted through a budget that contained a host of cuts to services in Sheffield.

The main bulk is library cuts, which campaigners in Sheffield have been fighting since consultations started in the summer of 2012. The cuts involve a 40% cut to library staff across the city, cuts to the mobile library service and huge cuts to the local studies and archives library, including the trade union archives.

A flawed consultation asked questions which led people towards suggesting they preferred one method of cutting or another, rather than being able to oppose cuts outright.

Following the "consultation" the council proposed that 14 local libraries be cut, with the remaining libraries becoming hub libraries but with little visible addition to their staffing levels and opening hours to deal with the increased usage.

The 14 libraries set for closure were given three options. Five of them could become community run libraries with some financial support from the council, the rest could become community libraries with no financial support from the council or "independent libraries", meaning businesses taking over library buildings and stock to run as they please.

One local library still has a bid for it from a bar/cafe which wishes to set up a cafe with books!

Vibrant and committed campaigns across the city, centred around libraries threatened with closure have kept the council under pressure.

Last month, in an attempt to show that it was listening, the council updated the proposals; all of the libraries threatened with closure

would be given three years of funding to support them as community libraries run by volunteers, not paid staff. But these libraries will still be sold off, outside of council control. The council has not yet provided an answer to what happens if these libraries fail or what happens after the three years of funding runs out.

Throughout this whole process the Labour controlled council has played dirty games and hidden behind grand-standing speeches blaming the situation on central government cuts.

By promoting volunteer run libraries, providing resources for local groups to prepare bids (in many cases local Labour party people are leading the community groups bidding for libraries) the Labour council has been able to claim that it is not shutting any libraries.

This is yet another example of the voluntary sector, and well meaning volunteers, being used to help councils privatise and shed swathes of public services.

To add insult to injury, Labour councillors proposed an amendment to the budget that condemned the position they have been put in by central government and promoted their own "Fairer Deal for Sheffield" campaign, a campaign that weakly points out councils in the south of England are receiving less cuts per head than cities in the north. Presumably making all the cuts equal would satisfy Sheffield's Labour councillors.

Campaigners in Sheffield will continue to fight to preserve a library service under council control, with no staffing cuts, continued funding and democratic accountability. We want to safeguard a crucial resource and service for generations to come.

Bob Crow, 1961-2014

"The labour movement can ill afford to lose straight talking class fighters at any time but, at a time of such meek trade union resistance, the loss of Bob Crow is a serious blow to workers everywhere", wrote one Workers' Liberty trade unionist on 11 March, after the sudden death of RMT rail union leader Bob Crow.

"This has been a real shock to RMT members and the wider trade union movement, as the hundreds of tributes have shown. We've agreed with Bob about many things, and disagreed about a few things too. He was one of the best union leaders in the country, if not the best. His vilification by the right-wing media is testament to that", added a Workers' Liberty railworker.

Whenever railworkers struck to defend pay or conditions, the Sun would cover it as Crow being a "union bully" who caused "misery for millions of commuters". They would denounce him for living a council house, and "expose" him every time he went out for dinner or took a holiday.

To a greater degree than other union leaders, he would support his union members when they wanted to take action. He would champion their cause forthrightly, rather than apologising for or appearing ashamed of the action.

Socialist Labour MP John McDonnell described Bob as "one of the finest trade union leaders of his generation".

Solidarity will carry an obituary in our next issue.



Against Lib-Dems, but what are we for?

Around a thousand marched in York on a TUC-organised demo against Lib Dem Spring Conference on 8 March.

Unlike at some of the marches against Tory conferences, there wasn't a police sniper or nine foot tall metal barrier in sight, even though we marched past the conference venue.

The demo was mainly trade unionists, although there was also a prominent Keep Our NHS Public contingent. There was, however, few student activists.

It's good that the TUC organised this demo, and on International Woman's Day to highlight way that austerity is disproportionately affecting women. However the political basis of the demo seemed vague, and there was a lack of slogans or chanting. We need louder and sharper politics to inspire and make an impact.

UCL win

Workers' Liberty member Omar Raii has been elected as a sabbatical at University College London student union.

For several years UCLU has been a strong base for the left, including the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts. But the UCL left split over this particular election. A few leftists whipped themselves into an anti-AWL campaign.

We were accused of being "sexist" and "Islamophobic" — despite Omar's background as an Afghan refugee, and despite his support from the president and leading activists of the Islamic Society.

While our (non-Muslim) opponents slandered us online, Omar's supporters



concentrated on student housing, defence of international students and support for campus workers' struggles.

The result shows how thin, and lacking in credibility among Muslim students and workers, is the agitation by some leftists which claims that AWL's hostility to Islamism makes us "Islamophobic".

Several other left candidates standing on a slate with us were elected. Omar told Solidarity: "The job now is to continue to build UCLU as a strong campaigning union".



Anti-abortionists challenged

Anti-abortion group Abort67 appeared outside Sussex campus on 6 March, giving only several hours notice of their unwanted arrival.

The group of seven people (mostly men over 40) carried with them a large banner with graphic, distressing images of abortions and similar leaflets that they attempted to distribute.

They were met by about 100 Sussex students aiming to confront and disband the group.

Though they refused to leave immediately it was a victory that there was such strong opposition to this regressive group.

Socialists and male circumcision debate

Letter



Camilla Bassi's "basic socialist demands" regarding male circumcision have no foundation in Marxist tradition, give legitimacy to racist and anti-Semitic arguments, and are wrong.

Bassi admits to learning only recently about the calls for a ban on male circumcision from an article by Frank Furedi. Furedi refers to a debate in the Nordic countries and *Solidarity* chose to headline the article with a reference to the "Scandinavian debate".

This softens the blow, because Scandinavians, after all, are modern, progressive people. Though there's been a rise in the far Right in some Nordic countries, it's not like the "ban circumcision" stuff started in Germany. I mean, that would have more than a whiff of anti-Semitism.

But the debate did start in Germany. Not in Scandinavia.

In June 2012 a German court banned male circumcision, and though the court decision was eventually overturned, it made headlines at the time.

Not only did Jewish and Muslim leaders across Europe condemn that ban, but they were joined (according to a piece in the *Guardian*) by women's leaders. They opposed the linking of male circumcision to female genital mutilation, which is already banned in some European countries.

The campaigns across Europe for a ban on circumcision are closely linked to calls for a ban on Jewish and Muslim ritual slaughter, which are seen by some as being cruel to animals.

These campaigns, like the calls for a ban on the building of minarets, are rightly seen by Jews and Muslims as racist attacks on their communities.

The one positive thing about these attacks is that in some places, including the UK, they have led to rare displays of unity between Jews and Muslims. (Just Google the phrase "Jews and Muslims unite".)

Bassi writes that the correct socialist position would place the Left in opposition to those communities.

She calls for "the right of children to bodily integrity; the right of children to the sexual autonomy of their adult life; non-therapeutic, ritual circumcision only be carried out when the person to be circumcised is mature, informed, and able to consent to the procedure."

Almost as an afterthought, she adds opposition to racism, support for socialism, whatever.

Using the same reasoning, why not also support the ban on kosher and halal slaughter? After all, socialists like all right-thinking people oppose cruelty to animals, right?

And while we're busy banning these things, why not close down all faith schools, because after all, they're not teaching children what we'd like them to be taught, and they're forcing children to accept their parents' religion? Shouldn't that decision be reserved for adults who are "mature, informed and able to consent"?

These views — banning male circumcision, banning ritual slaughter of animals, closing down faith schools and so on — have nothing to do with socialist views.

Socialists have always defined religion as a private matter. Socialists defend the freedom of religion, and of course the right of people to have no religion.

But that's all on the level of theory.

In practice, the European far Right is on the upswing, and Jewish and Muslim communities feel threatened with a new wave of anti-Semitism and racism. Is this really a good time to take a stand against the Jewish and Muslim communities of Europe?

The task of socialists in a debate like this one is clear: defend religious and ethnic minorities from racist attack, and fight anti-Semitism and Islamophobia across Europe.

Eric Lee, London

Seumas Milne's shoddy arguments for Putin

The Left
By Martin Thomas



In the *Guardian* of 5 March, Seumas Milne, associate editor of the paper, argued for blaming the conflict in Ukraine entirely, or almost entirely, on the USA and the EU. "The clash in Crimea is the fruit of western expansion".

Of course the USA and the EU wish to pull Ukraine more fully into the capitalist world market, as a rich source of raw materials and cheap labour-power.

But Milne's objection is not to the logic of the capitalist world market. He does not, for example, raise the call for the USA and the EU to cancel Ukraine's crippling foreign debt and thus short-circuit IMF plans to impose drastic neo-liberal policies there as a condition for bail-out loans. Or give any reason why we should think that being under Russian domination would shelter Ukraine's people from the withering blasts of the world markets.

Milne is concerned about threats to Russia's position in the world, not about threats to Ukraine's working class.

"The US and its allies have... relentlessly expanded Nato up to Russia's borders, incorporating nine former Warsaw Pact states and three former Soviet republics into what is effectively an anti-Russian military alliance in Europe... That western military expansion was first brought to a halt in 2008 when the US client state of Georgia attacked Russian forces in the contested territory of South Ossetia..."

Milne sees it all as an anti-Russian plot.

In reality, US and EU capitalists want to do profitable business with Russia, but not to conquer it. The basic drive is much more that small states, recently escaped from the Tsarist then Stalinist empires, turn to alliances with the US and EU to bolster their new-found independence. (See

bit.ly/osseti for Georgia, and Milne's comments at the time).

We don't endorse or approve the smaller states' alliances. But Milne endorses Moscow's attempts to regain imperial power as just an understandable defensive reaction: "it is hardly surprising that Russia has acted to stop... Ukraine falling decisively into the western camp".

He concedes that Putin's excuses for invasion are "flaky" and that Putin's "conservative nationalism" and "oligarchic regime" have little "appeal". But to him those are secondary objections: "Russia's role as a... counterweight to unilateral western power certainly does [have appeal]".

Milne's other argument, highlighted at the head of his article, is that the EU and US have "put fascists in power" in Ukraine.

It is true, and worrying, that fascists hold positions in the new government in Kiev. But a long rollcall of writers and researchers into the far right in Ukraine, from across the world, have issued a statement warning that "The heavy focus on right-wing radicals in international media reports is... unwarranted and misleading" (bit.ly/ukr-right).

The fascists do not dominate. Opinion polls for the presidential election due in May show Svoboda on just 3%. Petro Poroshenko (an "oligarch" of slight social-democratic pretensions) and Vitaly Klitschko (close to Germany's Christian Democrats, and, as it happens, someone who has Russian as his first language and is relatively hesitant in Ukrainian) lead the polls. Both are neo-liberals, but not fascists.

Far right figures in Russia, such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, have at least as much weight in Putin's circles as Svoboda has in Kiev.

Somehow, in the minds of people like Milne (a former member of the "Straight Left" diehard-Stalinist splinter from the Communist Party), Russian state policy always has an aura of leftism, or at least anti-imperialism, even when it is straightforwardly right-wing and imperialist.

Help us raise £12,000 by October

University campuses across the country are bustling with activity as student union elections

take place. Workers' Liberty members are taking part in them and arguing for socialist ideas. But elections are just a tiny part of what we do on campus. Whether it be campaigning against fees and cuts, fighting to democratise student unions, or running discussion groups, Workers' Liberty plays a key role in building a left-wing student movement.

Please help us in our work by donating money.



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

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

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

This week we have raised £78 in book sales and small donations.

Grand total: £1924

Ukraine: Russian troops out!

On 16 March the new government of Crimea will hold a referendum which, it says, is to ratify the government's decision to split Crimea off from Ukraine and join it to the Russian Federation.

The Crimean Tatars are the indigenous people of the area. They were deported, all 200,000 of them, by Stalin in 1944, and banned from resettling in Crimea until 1989. They are now only 13% of the population there.

Most Tatars will boycott the referendum in protest, and so probably will many Ukrainians living in Crimea. That makes a majority for joining Russia almost certain. The majority will be a product of Russia already having taken over Crimea militarily, rather than the Russia invasion being assistance or auxiliary to a revolt by the majority in Crimea.

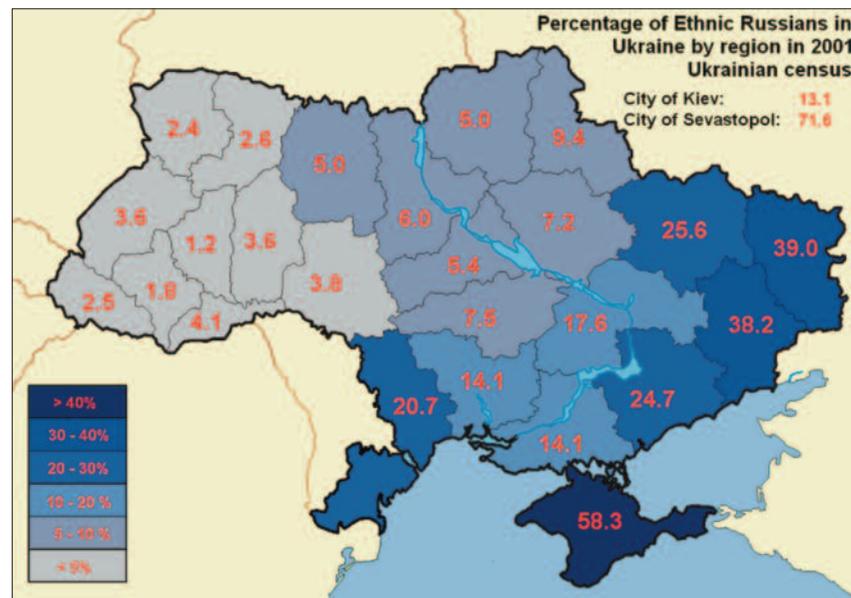
On 24 February, a Russian military takeover, only two days after the fall and flight of Yanukovich in Ukraine, installed a government in Crimea based on a party which got a tiny minority in Crimea's last elections. The last opinion poll taken before then showed 41% for joining Russia, a smaller percentage than in 1991 when 56% voted for separation from Russia as part of Ukraine.

Crimea is distinct from the rest of Ukraine (and already has autonomy within Ukraine). It was transferred to Ukraine only in 1954, as an administrative measure within the old USSR. In principle it should be free to vote to secede from Ukraine or to join Russia. But the 16 March referendum, under Russian guns, is not a democratic choice. The question for the referendum was changed only on 6 March, to one between staying in Ukraine with greater autonomy or joining the Russian Federation.

Violence by Russian troops and Russian-organised militias makes counter-campaigning difficult. Already a number of Ukrainian military posts have been overpowered and taken over by Russian troops.

What happens after the referendum? On Tuesday 4 March, Russian president Vladimir Putin said he did "not foresee the possibility of the Crimean Peninsula becoming part of Russia". Since then he has hedged.

He may annex Crimea formally. Or he may play a longer game, continuing with Crimea's formal status unchanged,



but with de facto Russian control over it, and with the referendum result to strengthen his hand in haggling with the new Ukrainian government and with the USA and the EU powers for a deal to secure Russian influence in the whole of Ukraine.

He has another option: to use his actions in Crimea to provoke confrontations between Ukrainian and Russian armed forces, which can then give him cover for sending Russian troops into other parts of Ukraine.

There have been (small) pro-Russian demonstrations in some cities in the east of Ukraine, and (plausible) reports that they were boosted by people bussed in from Russia.

Putin's position is strong, and not because pro-Russian sentiment in Ukraine is strong. There are large Russian minorities in the most easterly areas of Ukraine, enough to give Putin a base for meddling.

Yet many even of the Russian minority do not want Russian control. 92% of the people of Ukraine, both east and west, voted to separate from Russia in 1991; the smallest majority in any of the districts of Ukraine other than Crimea was 84% in Donetsk.

After long years of Russian domination, Ukraine has many people whose first language is Russian. (Most people in Ukraine speak both Russian and Ukrainian: the two languages are similar). Russian-speaking Ukrainians, however, do not necessarily favour Russian rule over Ukraine, just as English-speaking Irish people do not necessarily favour English rule over Ireland. Some say many of the anti-Yanukovich protesters in Kiev's Independence Square were Russian-speakers.

The USA is most reluctant to intervene militarily, and the EU powers will not do so without US involvement. The USA is keener on economic sanctions, but EU powers like Germany, which relies on Russian imports for one-third of its gas, are reluctant.

Some experts think that financial-market sanctions against Russia could hit hard, but it looks unlikely that the USA and EU will agree on harsh sanctions. That also strengthens Putin's position.

We solidarise with the Ukrainian people's right to self-determination, and with the protests against Russia's invasion and intervention made by the left in Russia.

• Correction: In last week's *Solidarity* we said that the new Kiev government had suppressed Russian language rights in Ukraine. The parliament voted that way, but the new president vetoed the measure, and it has not been re-raised. Russian language rights remain as they were under Yanukovich.

Russian and Ukrainian socialists speak out

In a statement issued on 1 March, the Russian Socialist Movement denounced Putin's invasion of Crimea.

"War has begun. With the aim of protecting and increasing the assets of the oligarchs in Russia and in Yanukovich's coterie, Russia's leadership has undertaken an invasion of Ukraine..."

"It goes without saying that the peoples of Ukraine have a right of self-determination, of full autonomy and independence. But what we are seeing today has nothing to do with the democratic will of the masses. It is a brazen and cynical act of Russian imperialism, aimed at annexing foreign territory and converting Ukraine into part of Russia's protectorate..." (bit.ly/rus-soc)

Today, the struggle for freedom in Russia is a struggle against the foreign policy adventurism of the current regime, which seeks collusion in forestalling its own end. The RSM calls on all sincere left and democratic forces to organize anti-war protests.

The "Left Opposition" group of Ukrainian socialists has declared:

"We are for the self determination of Crimea only after the withdrawal of the Russian armies that are carrying out this flagrant intervention. We are for the self determination of the people, and not of the mercenary elite who self determine so as to protect themselves from Crimeans with the muzzles of Russian automatic weapons. The outcome of separatism in Crimea will become the rebirth of the Russian empire, which threatens a world war.

"Down with Russian imperialism! Down with the Ukrainian chauvinists! Long live the workers' independent Ukraine!" (bit.ly/lo-ukr)

Reports from a rebellion

Two Ukrainian socialists spoke in London on 10 March: Volodymyr Ishchenko, an editor of *Commons: Journal for Social Criticism*, and Zakhar Popovych, a leading member of the "Left Opposition" group.

Both speakers rejected the idea that the ousting of Yanukovich was a "coup". The "change of elites" was the result of a popular rebellion – pressure from below. EU foreign ministers or opposition politicians did not drive the movement against Yanukovich. They were willing to do a deal to keep him in power.

Zakhar Popovych spoke about his experience on the Maidan (Kiev's main square) protests. He had with him his red flag (with an EU-style circle of stars — representing "Socialist Europe"). Popovych and his comrades were physically attacked by the far right.

Despite the influence of the far right, the Maidan protests were, he said, a popular, grassroots movement, not manufactured. Popovych described the anger of the protestors: against an economic and political and tax system shaped and controlled by oligarchs; against employers disregarding workers' rights. The protests raised the demand — sign the EU association agreement but without a free trade agreement.

Popovych's impressionistic description was of Ukrainian-speaking western Ukrainians in the tents, and "hipsters" from Kiev (mostly Russian-speaking) throwing Molotov cocktails.

But the overall picture was of a mass revolt of Ukrainians — of different language groups and ethnicities — for democracy. As the movement gained confidence, it became more inclusive and diverse, less stratified.

Compared with 2004, this revolution is "loud" — lots of public discussion in the open air and in occupied buildings. Left Opposition was able to intervene in a rally held by the leftist Student Assembly which had occupied Ukrainian

House (the largest convention centre in Kiev). Popovych spoke and gained widespread support for "Social Restoration" (comprehensive social and economic justice including expropriating the oligarchs).

Ishchenko said that Svoboda is a xenophobic, homophobic, anti-democratic party with an ethnically exclusive membership. It proposes that the government should be at least 80% ethnic Ukrainian. The far right was not numerically dominant on the Maidan protests, but it had political sway.

Far-right activists engaged in very determined, proactive chanting — teaching their slogans to the crowds in Kiev. The far-right were also at the forefront of clashes with the police and in controlling some of the occupied buildings.

Svoboda has gained greatly — ministers in the new government; increased visibility; now established as normal part of Ukrainian politics. Far right activists are a real danger — to trade unions, to democracy, to leftists etc.

Ishchenko argued that western military intervention would be an extremely bad idea — likely to accelerate a bloody break-up of Ukraine. Socialists in the West can make demands on their government to provide economic assistance to Ukraine (including writing off its foreign debt — about \$75 billion) without the neo-liberal/privatising/austerity conditions currently being imposed on Ukraine.

Instead, the demand should be for democratic conditions — in particular, for new elections as soon as possible. He argued that economic support for the new Ukraine would give the people of Crimea a strong incentive to want to stay with Ukraine.

Ishchenko said the reasons for Russia to invade Crimea could not be straightforward. It's a poor part of Ukraine, an economic burden, and it would be for Russia too. It would seem to reflect a longer-term strategy on Putin's part.

NEW UNIONISM 2014

An activist conference

29 March 11am-5pm

University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HY



Cleaners' in the Netherlands struck in 2012. Cleaners' organisation is an international issue

Rebuilding working-class power

The “New Unionism” of the 1880s saw hundreds of thousands of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, many of them migrants, and prominently including groups of women workers like the Bryant & May match workers, launch mass organising drives that shook up the old labour movement.

Their struggles challenged the orthodoxy of the existing unions and confronted conservative attitudes about whether such workers could, in fact, organise. The struggles of that period, and the “Great Unrest” which followed early in the 20th century, paved the way for the modern labour movement.

On 29 March 2014, working-class activists will gather for a conference that both looks at the history of “New Unionism” and discusses what new approaches are necessary to reinvigorate and rebuild labour power today.

New Unionism 2014 is sponsored by Workers' Liberty, the University of London branch of the Independent Workers' union of Great Britain (IWGB), the Ruskin College branch of the University and College Union (UCU), the Independent Left grouping in the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), and the Lambeth Activists group in the Lambeth Local Government branch of Unison.

The IWGB will tell the story of their “3 Cosas” campaign, which has won significant victories for outsourced cleaning, catering, and security workers at the University of London.

Another session will look at experiences of micro-unions, “pop-up unions”, and breakaway unions, their relationship to transformative struggle inside larger unions, and the limitations and potentials of each approach.

Kim Moody, US labour activist, author of books including *US Labor in Trouble and Transition*, and co-founder of the *Labor Notes* journal, will speak on the fate of the organising model in the US and the UK, and Mike Treen, National Director of Unite (New Zealand), will speak via Skype on his union's organising drives in the fast food industry, including the 2006/2007 “Supersize My Pay” campaign. Activists from the Turkish rank-and-file network UID-DER will also speak via Skype.

Lambeth Activists, a rank-and-file network in the Lambeth Local Government branch of Unison, will lead a workshop on how to transform a union branch, and Gemma Short, a Workers' Liberty activist in the Local Associations National Action Campaign in the National Union of Teachers, will lead a workshop comparing and contrasting rank-and-file networks to existing “broad lefts” within unions.

Colin Waugh of the Independent Working-Class Education Network will present on the legacy of independent working-class education, from the 1909 Ruskin College strike and the “Plebs' League” to today.

Some sessions will look at key episodes from labour history — Edd Mustill, also from the IWCEN, will lead a workshop looking at 200 years of British labour history, focusing on moments of reinvigoration and recomposition, and Jill Mountford of Workers' Liberty will give a talk on the life of Mary Macarthur and her role in the 1911 chainmakers' strike.

Rail workers and RMT activists Becky Crocker and Chrissie Willetts will report from the recent International Transport workers' Federation (ITF) Women's Conference in India, as part of a session looking at women transport workers' struggles against sexism in society, in the workplace, and in the labour movement.

The conference aims to provide labour-movement activists with opportunities to discuss where our movement is at, and how we can rebuild it.

Basic information

Tickets are priced at £10/7/5 (waged, low-waged, unwaged, including lunch), and can be purchased online at workersliberty.org/newunions.

The conference has a dedicated blog, where speakers will post reading material in advance, at newunionismconference.wordpress.com.

The conference has a professionally-staffed crèche, and will include a social event on Saturday night.

• For more information, email awl@workersliberty.org or ring 077966 90874.



Could the miners have won if...

The beginning of this month marks the thirtieth anniversary of the great miners' strike. This article, by Sean Matgamna, written in 1992, at a time when the Tories were pushing through many pit closures, discusses the lessons of the heroic miners' fight, and the effects of their defeat.

It is a famous picture, the one of Arthur Scargill being arrested at the “Battle of Orgreave”, on 30 May 1984, where miners fought a long battle with troops of police and with police cavalry at a coke depot outside Sheffield. It was one of the turning points of the 1984-5 miners' strike.

What happened in 1984-5? Mrs Thatcher's police thugs beat down the miners with physical violence and they were able to do it because the labour movement left the miners to fight alone.

For the Tories and the police it was no holds barred. They had been planning and organising to beat down the miners since the early 1970s. They had a centralised semi-military police operation all prepared. Margaret Thatcher said, during the strike, that if the police needed any laws changed to enable them to beat the miners, then changed they would be.

As the police smashed into picket lines and became an army of occupation in many pit villages, it was, once again, the situation depicted back in 1848 in the famous *Punch* cartoon in which a government “Special Constable” tells a labour movement Chartist: “If you kill me, it's murder. If I kill you, it's nothing.”

In 1984, the miners had either to fight in the unfavourable conditions they found themselves in, or let the Tories win a crushing victory over them peacefully. The Tory class warriors controlled the British state, and used it with grim resolve to make war on the labour movement.

All the patronising “sympathy” now — some of it, the *Sun's* for example, half-gleeful — cannot undo the effects for the last eight years of the Tory victory over the miners — communities devastated and ruined; jobs lost; and the labour



miners in 1984-5?

movement, which had played an immense role for many decades in “civilising” British capitalism, marginalised.

There is no substitute for victory! There are no replays in the class struggle! Those who lose suffer the consequences.

Could we have beaten the Tories in 1984?

Yes we could! Despite all the police preparations and all the Tories’ determination they could have been beaten and overwhelmed in 1984 as they had been in 1972 and 1974. It could have been more difficult but it could have been done.

What, in 1984-5, would have made the difference between defeat and victory? Solidarity! General labour movement action! The leaders of the TUC and the Labour Party could, had they backed the miners instead of openly and covertly undercutting them, have rallied the industrial and other support necessary. But they are what they are — tame trade union officials and second-string Westminster politicians. That being so, only an organised network of revolutionary militants in the trade unions, trades councils and Labour Parties, pursuing a common strategy, could have rallied the labour movement to a common battle together with the miners.

That was what was missing in 1984. That was what the miners needed in 1984 and no trade union alone, however heroic, could provide it.

Serious working-class politics demands, centrally, the integration and co-ordination of the different fronts of the class struggle — trade unions, politics, and the fight against the ideas and propaganda of the ruling class — into a coherent strategy against the common capitalist enemy, with an organised force to push through that strategy. Given the character of the entrenched leaders of the labour movement, trade unions and Labour Party alike, only an organised network of socialists can achieve this, and such a network has to be built up over years, in advance of such big confrontations as the miners’ strike.

Such a network did not exist. Just as the organisations of the broad labour movement were split up into unions acting

at cross purposes, refusing to synchronise their efforts, and sometimes acting against each other, and a Labour Party whose official leaders served as auxiliaries of the Tories, denouncing the “violence” of the miners in chorus with the Sun and Mrs Thatcher — so too is the left divided. The reason are different, but the effect is the same.

The left is broken up into a plethora of groups, factions, and coteries, with nothing like a common strategy. It took the SWP, the biggest revolutionary group — immobilised by a deep pessimism and defeatism about a downturn in the class struggle — some six months to even begin to engage in miners’ support work. Never in 13 months — not until eight years later, in fact — did they get round to advocating general labour movement strike action to stop the miners being ground down.

And in the conditions of 1992 it was a joke demand, called to “catch a mood” and win recruits.

They abstained on principle from activity in the trade unions’ political wing, the Labour Party, though the rank and file of the Labour Party were usually active supporters of the miners, despising their own leaders.

Militant, which in 1984 controlled the local Labour Party and the council in Liverpool, and might have brought the city of Liverpool into a common struggle with the means to defeat the Tories, chose instead to do a stupid short-term deal with the Tories. The miners beaten, the Tories came back and carved up Liverpool a year later. Then Kinnock inside the Labour Party finished the job on Militant.

Many other examples could be cited. The revival of the labour movement, which has been semi-dormant since the miners’ strike, shows how urgent now is the creation of an adequate network of revolutionary socialists, active in both the trade unions and the Labour Party.

The class struggle does not end. It goes on. If the working class is quelled it rises again. The class struggle is the pulse of social life under capitalism. The job of socialists is to learn from the class struggle and from history and to prepare and organise the workers’ side so that we can win the major class struggle confrontations like the miners’ strike.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, an independent revolutionary socialist organisation, exists to do this work. It groups together and coordinates trade union and Labour Party activists to fight the class struggle and works to win support for socialist politics by combatting bourgeois ideas in the labour movement. It works to overcome the chaos and disorder on the would-be revolutionary left.

That chaos is rooted in the long chain of defeats suffered by revolutionary socialism at the hands of the Stalinists and the bourgeoisie. The conditions which have reduced the would-be revolutionary movement to an archipelago of often irrational sects are only now beginning to lift.

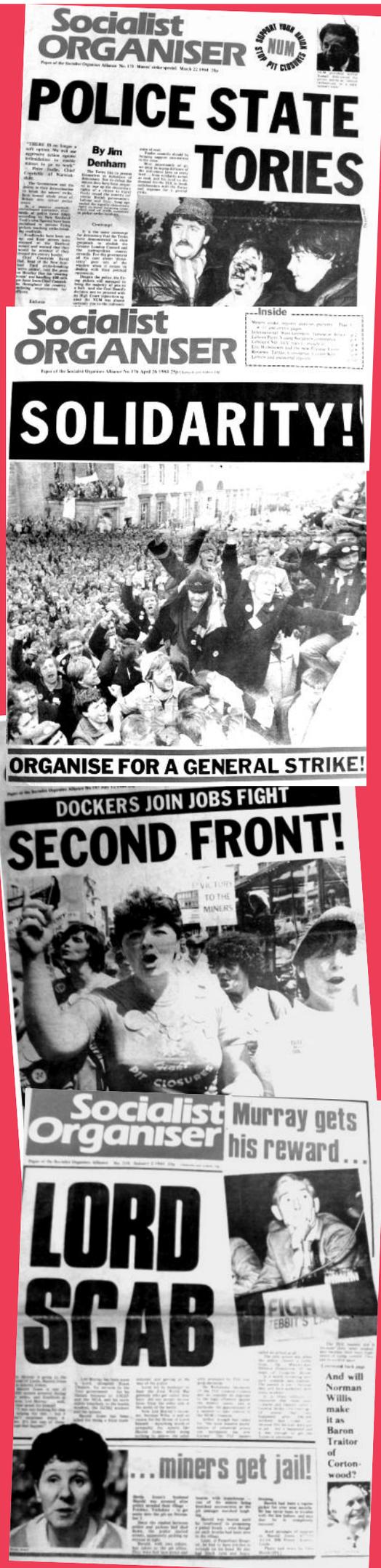
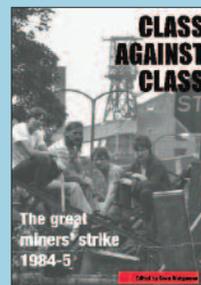
Against the sectarians with their airtight undemocratic organisations, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty counterposes open, rational discussion, combined with proposals for practical cooperation and coordination in the class struggle — unity in action, dialogue about our differences, and recognition of the fact that revolutionary socialism in the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky and Luxemburg must be recomposed, re-elaborated and redefined for the conditions in which we live now.

Class Against Class The great miners’ strike 1984-5

Edited by Sean Matgamna.
Fully illustrated, *Class Against Class* tells the story of a year of class struggle.

£8
Publication date: 28 March.

More details
www.workersliberty/minersstrike



Scenes and headlines from the 1984-5 miners’ strike. Front pages of *Socialist Organiser* (forerunner of *Solidarity*). Top to bottom: 22 March 1984, 26 April 1984, 12 July 1984, 3 January 1985.

Class and democracy in Bosnia's protest movement

By Mike Carey

Over the past month in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) mass protests originating in workers' struggles have evolved into autonomous citizens' plenums [assemblies] calling for radical social and political change.

Since the close of the Balkans war in 1995 an increasingly corrupt, nationalistic bureaucratic class married to a project of economic neoliberalism has developed in the country. The dire social consequences have been the seed-bed of a new "movement of the dissatisfied".¹

Jasmin Mujanovic describes the political economy of the Bosnian elite as "accumulation through dispossession", disguised by indignant ethno-nationalistic rhetoric.² He echoes the Marxist geographer David Harvey, who argued that capital's "inability to accumulate through expanded reproduction on a sustained basis has been paralleled by a rise in attempts to accumulate by dispossession",³ the continuing primitive accumulation of capitalism through predatory behaviour.

BiH is a clear example of this, a culture of multinationals buying up enterprises on the cheap, facilitated by the bureaucracy, only to asset-strip them, reduce employment levels, and increase the rate of exploitation drastically before selling the gutted industries off once again.⁴

The result has been an extraordinarily high level of structural unemployment, strong black market participation by the labour force, and soaring inequality, all overseen by a corrupt politico-bureaucratic class linked to a transnational oligarchy accumulating capital at the expense of the mass of workers.

Moreover, the existing channels of struggle have been discredited in the eyes of many working class people. The Social Democratic Party, governing since 2010 in coalition with nationalist parties, has also proved impotent and corrupt.⁵

One striking worker from Dita, a detergent factory in Tuzla, a key industrial centre of BiH, spoke of the conservative nature of the trade unions as a major barrier — "the union abandoned us. They were the first to abandon us. They told us to stop complaining. That we would lose our jobs, etc."⁶ When the union declined to support the Dita workers despite the failure of the owner to pay wages for 27 months, and being left to survive on loans kindly granted by the factory owner himself, the workers fought back on their own, through wildcat strikes and hunger strikes.

TUZLA

This was the context for the strike by workers at five Tuzla firms, firms which went bust after privatization and asset-stripping; their protests began at the beginning of February, triggering what has become known as the "Bosnia Spring".⁷

Violent clashes with police in the days left around a hundred protesters injured, leading to a wave of sympathy and the broadening of the movements' social base. Stef Jansen, a Belgian anthropologist with an interest in BiH, and a participant in the Sarajevo plenum, distinguishes the recent protests from previous fragmented action:

"This time, protesters joined forces... it wasn't that the workers from one company wanted one thing, the pensioners another, the farmers another still. It was a wondrous moment, and I don't know where that moment came from... when all those people realised that they have the same problem, that they could publicly speak about it and that they could put it on the political agenda."⁸

A number of outrages against labour have boosted the protests, including an assault by thugs with baseball bats on the president of BiH's Union of Independent Labour Unions, Josip Milić.⁹ By 7 February, local government offices had been torched. As Mujanovic reports, "BiH's three Presidents, two entities, one special district, ten cantons and internationally appointed High Representative — the entirety of its bloated bureaucracy — witnessed the storming of their government offices in the cities of Tuzla, Sarajevo, Zenica, Bihac and Mostar."¹⁰

In stark contrast to unrest in Ukraine, nationalistic sentiments have been roundly derided as one of the pillars propping up the regime and blinding the eyes of the people. Expressions of solidarity across national dividing lines are common: "We, the workers, are here from different nations, but we are all united."¹¹

Spontaneous self-governance arose in the form of the

plenums, organised (particularly through social media) by committees which then dissolved themselves immediately. Moderators are elected for the duration of each plenum, subject to recall, and voting on the publishing of specific demands follows discussion and speech-making.

As Rudi Supek, a prominent Yugoslavian Marxist of the Praxis school, wrote in 1981, "It is significant that whenever the working class acts spontaneously against bureaucratic regimes, it creates councils as its form of government ... The seizure of factories and the creation of workers' councils reflect the nature of the revolutionary movements of the working class."¹²

The positive working class character of these councils is clear, despite the protestations of liberals who see only the venting of steam, the idea that the people had found their voice for its own sake, and not for the purpose of material changes in society. The blogger behind the Bosnia-Herzegovina Protest Files drily commented on such an attitude: "Well, damn it, it seems that the buildings of the cantonal governments went up in flames because they wouldn't let us have plenums earlier!"¹³ Interviews have highlighted the underlying causes: "Class differences are huge ... Nowadays we have just rich people and poor people ... What is happening now is a product of poverty, dissatisfaction and revolt."¹⁴

Serbian philosopher Zagorka Golubović, also of the Praxis school, wrote quite rightly that "Socialism and democracy must become one, otherwise there will be no socialism."¹⁵ The importance of the plenums lies not only in their fact of existence, but in the social demands they are being used to fight for, and in what they have the potential to become.

SOCIAL

Common demands include the protection of protesters, the resignation of office-holders and the establishment of a non-political government of experts in the various local cantons, until new elections are held, the equalization of government wages with workers' wages, the reversal of privatisations and the inclusion of workers in the management of public and private companies.¹⁶

Mostar's plenum raised demands for the employment of social workers in schools and increased support for unemployed mothers, while Zenica called for the support of students and the protection of the local environment,¹⁷ as the gutted and downsized steel mills have become far more pollutant than "even at the height of their Yugoslav-era production".¹⁸ Prijedor's plenum demanded the realisation of conditions required for the creation of independent trade unions in all private enterprises.¹⁹ Even the Belgrade Police Union threatened to join the protests, and the Serbian Veterans' Association called for a "showdown with the tycoons who created empires in our country and abroad at the cost of the suffering workers and by manipulating all of us."²⁰

Some of the rhetoric of Titoism has re-emerged, particularly in the call for "self-management"²¹ and in the anti-nationalism of the protesters, but it appears in a radicalised, bottom-up form which changes its character completely. In seeking an end to "the larceny of this society cloaked in politics" through the realisation of economic, political and social demands, the desires of the plenums can be seen as necessary preludes in order to prepare for their over-arching goal: "a society based on social justice and welfare", the building of "something new for all of us."²²

Where will this movement might go next? A call by one citizen at the Sarajevo plenum for a nation-wide "People's Assembly of BiH, that would be an alternative parliament of the people", was met with thunderous applause.²³

According to Mujanovic, "the key organisers in Tuzla ... already form the basis for an interim government, one composed of the representatives of students and workers."²⁴ In Sarajevo, the plenum has already created twelve working groups focusing on specific departments, with one more overseeing cooperation among all the canton's workers, in order to prepare organised pressure on the non-party government of experts they seek.²⁵ Moreover, it urges citizens "not to enter into negotiations with the government, but rather, following Tuzla's example, to come to the plenum and open discussion of equals."²⁶

Jansen, however, discourages this kind of thinking, writing, "I don't believe that the plenum could replace political structures in this country which is part of a bigger, global system ... I definitely believe that it could exist as a parallel and additional form of political activity."²⁷

The official structures of state could never tolerate the existence of dual power in BiH for any protracted period of time. Defining the plenums as a loyal opposition correcting the mistakes of neoliberal "democracy" in order to maintain social order denies the centrifugal forces of which the plenums are, up to now, the most sophisticated expression and contradicts the militant demands of the workers who flock to the assemblies and onto the streets.

The successful organisation of a national plenum along the lines advocated by the speaker in Sarajevo would be an enormous step forward, and we should orientate ourselves towards it in the same manner as Karl Marx in relation to the short-lived British Labour Parliament of 1854, which arose in similar circumstances.²⁸

Formed initially out of the attempt of striking textile workers in the North West to create a national support network for trade union struggles, Marx wrote "the mere assembling of such a Parliament marks a new epoch in the history of the world."²⁹

"If the Labour Parliament proves true to the idea that called it into life, some future historian will have to record that there existed in the year 1854 two Parliaments in England, a Parliament at London, and a Parliament at Manchester — a Parliament of the rich, and a Parliament of the poor — but that men sat only in the Parliament of the men and not in the Parliament of the masters."³⁰

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Facebook: the medium, the message and the Marxists

By Bruce Robinson

Martin Thomas' article 'Socialism, CPA and Facebook' (SCPAF) in *Solidarity* 305 outlines some problems that emerge from the integration of social media into everyday life and its interaction with the culture of the left. Constant "noise" and distraction leading to a neglect of serious reading, erosion of the conditions for serious debate given a lack of depth to high speed responses, on-line abuse and diversion from offline politics are all real.

The article relates these factors to more general social effects of the internet such as the decline of print media, an individualised access to knowledge and a tendency to behave with less constraint online, which in turn feed back into the culture and practices of the left.

All the things he describes exist to a greater or lesser extent. Recent examples of the damaging impact of social media on the left include the feminist flame wars in the US discussed in *The Nation* and the role of Facebook in the split in the International Socialist Network. Where I wish to supplement and criticise his article is in his analysis of why they occur and his suggestions for remedying them.

SCPAF ascribes them to psychology ("continuous partial attention"), technology, specifically Facebook, and politics in the form of a general decline in left culture relating to both the legacy of Stalinism and defeats in the class struggle. His article fails to link these factors or contextualise them in terms of recent developments in capitalism. As a result explains the problems as individual failings in the face of a technology which bears down on its users. Consequently Martin's solution is just to urge the left to turn off their computers more often and read more books.

What then are the causes, how do they relate to the technology of Facebook and the culture of the left? A good starting point is the shifts in the relationship between time and information in the capitalism of the last 25 years, which have been both enabled by and helped shape developments in information and communication technology.

Speed up has taken place not merely in the sphere of capital accumulation with shorter product cycles, financial transactions undertaken at close to the speed of light, and fast responses to changes in market conditions. It also occurs at work where the time taken for many activities is closely monitored and the line between work and leisure time is often blurred. In everyday life outside work, time pressures continue, change is faster and the expectation — or demand — is of constant and rapid communication.

At the same time the amount of information available has grown massively. Globalised capital is dependent on computerised information flows to manage complex international production processes, to respond rapidly to changes in demand, to enable financial activity and to advertise. Both in and out of work, more information is delivered in an unending cycle and growing quantity. Personalised media such as blogs have added in the last ten years to an expanding volume of interlinked and easily accessible online information which is constantly changing and becoming ever more central to everyone's everyday living.

Once one's online social connections or interests go beyond a certain minimal level, it becomes impossible to deal thoroughly with all the information one seeks and receives, making filtering a necessity whether we undertake it ourselves or leave it to the software of search engines, spam filters and social media.

FILTERING

The situation of having too much information, too little time, leads to pressure on the individual's attention and ability to absorb and process the information in depth.

This is recognised not merely by the advocates of an "attention economics" who adapt mainstream economics by making attention a scarce resource, but also by left commentators such as Jodi Dean and Franco Berardi for whom the domination of the Internet by the interests of capital leads to a breakdown in communication as a result of "a massive, circulating flow of increasingly valueless contributions insofar as each



Does Facebook give the left a bigger platform, or undermine the political content of the message?

can command less and less attention". (Dean)

Both Dean and Berardi point to psychological consequences of the constant demands on attention which is neurologically limited so that "attention cannot be accelerated beyond a limit... The exhaustibility of psychic resources is the limit of the cybersphere." (Berardi) Attempting to deal with these demands on attention can lead to oscillation between acting impulsively and withdrawal, doing nothing. (Dean)

For Dean, the consequence is "a foreclosure of politics": "The cost of the exponentially expanding circuit of information and communication is particularly high for progressive and left political movements. Competition for attention... in a rich, tumultuous media environment too often and easily means adapting to this environment and making its dynamic our own, which can result in a shift in focus from doing to appearing... Infinite demands on our attention... appropriate political energies of focus, organization, duration, and will vital to communism as a movement and a struggle."

DISTRACTION?

The problem with this argument is that it is too all-embracing and leads to contradictory conclusions.

It is not merely that everything from football and fashion to consumerism and rock music has at one time or another said to distract leftists from the class struggle. It is Dean's view that under her model communication is impossible because "Uncoupled from contexts of action and application — as on the Web or in print and broadcast media — the message is simply part of a circulating data stream. Its particular content is irrelevant." This is belied however by her acknowledgment of the role of social media in the "Arab Spring" not to mention numerous other occasions where the internet has served as the means to enable international solidarity or for serious political debate.

Politically valuable communication is possible through the internet. The consequence is not foreclosure of politics — rather some benign and some malign impacts on the left that need to be identified. That Dean appears to acknowledge this goes against her own theory.

In contrast to Dean and Berardi's picture of the total domination of the internet by capital there is space for radical content that has an impact on the world offline, for alternative institutions such as Indymedia, for forming links of solidarity and for the producers of free and open source software. A more useful starting point is seeing the internet as a contested space with its institutions, major players and dominant lines of development under the control of capitalist interests but still leaving considerable space that can be exploited by the left.

This means that a more nuanced and concrete analysis that examines specific technologies and their use is necessary if we are to identify how Facebook and left culture interact.

In discussing political campaigning through Facebook, we

need to consider "the double articulation of code [software] and politics that reshape informational processes, communicational constraints and possibilities and political practices" (Langlois et al). Platforms such as Facebook are neither a neutral conduit without influence on the behaviour of its users, nor an overawing influence that determines the outcomes of the different goals and politics users bring to it. The platforms constrain and enable different modes of operation and interaction — so there is a "like" button but not a "dislike" button in Facebook — and the "articulation of code and politics" can have either mutually reinforcing or contradictory effects.

It is argued here that in the case of left culture, Facebook amplifies but does not create the problems Martin Thomas refers to. As a result, urging the left to abandon or restrict their use of Facebook is not likely to be effective in solving the problems of the culture of the left.

Before looking at the precise ways Facebook and left culture interact, it is useful first to debunk two myths about the impact of social media.

Firstly, short of intervention by the state or law or damage to their own reputation as a result of user content, Facebook and Twitter do not generally seek pro-actively to censor what users post as it is both impractical given the volume of material and would ultimately lead to users going elsewhere thus harming their commercial interests. The recent outcry over Twitter's inaction over misogynistic posting is one example of their reluctance to intervene.

Secondly, as against what Martin Thomas wrote earlier following Malcolm Gladwell, there is nothing inherent in these modes of communication that only permits superficial discussion or prevents the formation of "strong ties" adequate to serious solidarity and organised political action. (Whether "strong ties" are necessary for that is also dubious but that's a different discussion.) Any form of two-way interactive communication can potentially form "strong ties" — think of love letters!

There are some advantages to face-to-face discussions — more visual clues, easier clarification of confusion, more flexibility — but their absence is not an absolute obstacle to serious discussion. The benefits of social media do not just come from their one-way broadcasting capabilities in doing things such as advertising meetings.

The disadvantages of Facebook lie then not in an absolute block to communication but in the way the platform structures it. Firstly, it amplifies the pressure of information on attention. In Facebook and Twitter the "feed" or "timeline" produces a constant flow of consecutive postings. The average Facebook user has 200 "friends". If each posts or shares three times a day, that is 600 postings to be considered — one every two and a half minutes — discounting advertising, spam and other distractions.

Much of this will be trivial or only worthy of "partial attention" but which part? In reality, one either arbitrarily just ignores much of the input, potentially missing important information; uses some filtering mechanism provided by Facebook or spends all one's time on Facebook. The nature and speed of the flow — let alone other time pressures — do not encourage deep thinking about a post before responding. There is pressure to add one's contribution before the flow moves on to other things. This creates a fast and furious form of debate which does not encourage clarification of issues.

There is a parallel here with a particular aspect of left culture to be found both in the "apparatus Marxism" of groups like the SWP and often among dedicated unaligned left activists.

Namely that the imminence of "the next big thing" or the demands of activism leave little time or space in our attention for considering or debating the politics of what we are doing. To do so would be to participate in "a talking shop" and necessarily detract from our ability to deal with the urgent de-

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Facebook

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mands of the immediate. Analysing the success or, more likely, the failure of the last “big thing” is not necessary.

They just move on. In practice, this means deferring to the accepted lowest-common-denominator “wisdom” of the left or leaving it up to the select of the leadership to do the thinking for one and hand down the line. Serious debate becomes an unnecessary burden on one’s time and all that is needed is for these verities to be reiterated and opponents anathematised.

A second failing of Facebook that has echoes on the left is what has been called “me-centricity” where any activity “takes place through a heavily individualised and personalised perspective.” (Langlois et al) The individual’s network is the centre point both for the information the user receives, recommendations generated by Facebook and the social links he or she makes. One consequence is the application of an unconscious filter that not merely limits the range of information received but also plays a role in defining both an individual and group identity. One tends to “knock around” on social media with people who broadly think the same way.

Social media can thus serve as an echo chamber in which one overestimates the real influence of one’s ideas and sees an already convinced circle as one’s sphere of operation rather than a broader public so that “it can be sometimes easy to forget the disparity of opinion between your Twitter feed and the majority of the electorate” (Brennan).

Another crossover with left culture occurs therefore where an inward-looking and self-sustaining orientation born out of the isolation of the left leads to leftists’ activity not going beyond the left itself. Ideas only have to connect with this restricted audience. Thus online activities can substitute for “giving sufficient consideration [to] how to effectively communicate radical ideas on a genuinely popular level... Don’t worry if right-wing hegemony poisons public opinion and creates horrible social divisions: you can find a quick release for your rage on an obscure ‘lefty’ blog that a few of your mates might read.” (Brennan)

IDENTITY

Social media also reinforce a kind of politics in which presenting and defending a personal identity becomes more central than in written debate, which may explain the intensely personal nature of many online political arguments. This is bolstered by the resurgence of identity politics and an individualism in sections of the radical milieu.

Given these issues with both Facebook and the culture of the left, is there a way out? Harking back to a time when the left supposedly did things better does not get us far. Nor does blaming the problems on recent defeats in the labour movement. While the isolation of the left has played a part in the decline of open debate, expecting things to improve automatically as a result of an upturn in class struggle dragging internet activists from Facebook into the streets is utopian. Social media are too embedded in the way people live now. Even in a time of mass revolt, even on the street, the new communication technologies will continue to play an important role for the left, as the upheavals of 2011 showed.

Martin Thomas’s hope that activists can be talked away from their computers to more serious things or Dean’s correct but abstract proposal that political organisation is decisive both ignore the social pressures, potential access to the massive number of Facebook users and the genuine benefits of communication keeping people on Facebook even though, as Martin remarks, they may not enjoy using it much.

If the issues identified arise from the interaction between the way many on the left “do politics”, the pressure on attention and the way social media technology forms online behaviour, it is unlikely that there will be an easy or immediate solution. Perhaps, in the short term, we can only really try to change the culture of the left.

Rather than calling on activists to leave Facebook for the benefits of face-to-face communication and serious study — a call that is guaranteed to fail — we are left with pointing out the bad practices of the left, online and offline, in interacting with other socialists and with the broader working class and with proposing alternative ways of operating.

Rebuilding independent working-class education

Colin Waugh from the Independent Working-class Education Network spoke to *Solidarity* about their draft manifesto*

Q: In the preamble to the manifesto, it is said that the document could be used as a pamphlet in order to build the network. What do you see as the main purpose of the IWCE network, and towards what end do you see it being built?

To me, the central purpose of the network is to draw together a group of people who want to rebuild a form of independent working-class education that is in the spirit of the Plebs League but adapted to present-day circumstances.

Through speaking engagements and our own meetings since my original pamphlet about the Plebs League came out in 2009 we have built up a mailing list of two or three hundred people, and the idea, as I see it, is to use the collective drafting of the manifesto to make this “network” a bit more coherent, to a point where it can reach out to grassroots activists in union branches and other campaigns, and involve them in devising and implementing educational programmes within the broad areas of economics, history and philosophy.

Q: In your contribution you stress that an ahistorical understanding of independent working-class education would be a mythology and not a guide to practice in the here and now. What do you think are the main issues facing activists with an interest in IWCE today, and how can the history help us to orient ourselves?

To me, the main issues are a. that the “legacy” of IWCE has been largely lost, through a complex history which we need to investigate more thoroughly, and b. that, ultimately because of the “de-industrialisation” that started in the second half of the 1970s, and which also has such a history, there are not many concentrations of industrial workers, which would have been the obvious place in which to start rebuilding it.

Q: The original movement for working-class education soon brought middle-class sympathisers such as Raymond Postgate and J F Horrabin into its fold. Did this fundamentally change the nature of the project? What do you think the relationship between working-class activists and those with more formal higher education should be?

I think that the more fundamental change resulted from, on the one hand, the victimisation of mineworkers and others who were sent by their unions to the Central Labour College [the institution set up in 1909 by the Ruskin College strikers and their supporters as an independent alternative to Ruskin College], and, on the other, the lack of money to support any of the IWCE activities.

For example, after the steelworkers’ leader Arthur Pugh joined with the WEA in 1919 to set up the Workers Educational Trade Union Committee (WETUC), i.e. as a direct attack on the Plebs League from the right, the IWCE side formed the National Council of Labour Colleges (in 1921) as a way of competing for the support of union leaders, and it was through this, especially after the General Strike, when funding became even tighter, that JPM Millar and Christine Millar, two other essentially middle-class sympathisers, came to exercise a bureaucratic dominance that continued till the TUC shut the whole thing down in 1964.

On the second question, I think that from an early stage in the development of class societies the ruling class has monopolised what Marx and Engels called “the means of intellectual production”, and specifically what Gramsci called the “elaboration” (i.e. as distinct from the creation) of thought, and today this monopolisation takes the form of a massive material and intellectual apparatus centred on the dominant universities, research institutes, publishing houses, IT design and the like.

In the end, education properly speaking, as opposed to miseducation, and as distinct from both training and schooling, is that which seeks to overthrow this monopoly. But equally, the fact that this monopoly exists, means that any IWCE-type movement must draw to its side people who

have been produced through the dominant system as — again in Gramsci’s terms — “traditional intellectuals”, and the workers who are building that movement then have to develop ways of dealing with what the Bolsheviks called ‘the problem of the bourgeois specialists’, i.e. how to stop the involvement of formally educated people becoming a weak point through which people from other classes take control of the IWCE movement itself.

Q: Some labour movement education initiatives (Unionlearn, for example) have a more narrow focus on skills and training. What is your assessment of such bodies, and how do you think the state of labour movement education relates to the broader political health of the movement?

We should defend the jobs of trade union tutors in FE colleges and the like. But we should also try to work towards a situation where a rebuilt IWCE becomes an intrinsic part of a broader democratic renovation of unions from below, and in particular we (i.e. the network) should try to establish IWCE as a necessary condition of efforts to organise workers in precarious employment.

Q: How should IWCE work with attempts to reform the mainstream education system for working-class people?

In terms of post-compulsory (which to me still means post-16) provision (including sixth forms, FE colleges, HE and adult education), I think that socialists who are employed as teachers or lecturers in these sectors should try to organise themselves across institutional boundaries with the aim of defending and extending valid teaching and learning within and against the grain of dominant curricula, dominant assessment measures, and dominant teaching and learning procedures. At the same time, and not as an afterthought or luxury, these socialists and those involved in IWCE should talk to one another, so that insights from each field can feed into the other.

Q: What do you think the impact of the decline of independent working-class education and non-vocational adult education has been on mainstream education and academia? EP Thompson wrote about how “adult education provided not only an outlet for the university but also an inlet for experience and criticism” and how this was “profoundly necessary for the intellectual health of the academy itself.” Is this an assessment that you share?

Both the IWCE movement and, at the outset at least, the WEA emphasised that they were not about helping individual workers to rise out of their class through access to higher education. On the other hand, if the Coalition’s decision to abolish funding for non-STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths] subjects in HE is driving less well-off students — and especially mature students — out of it, the openings for dialogue, both between those students and the better-off young people within it and between them and lecturers, must surely get narrower, and that is not a good thing.

Q: Is there anything else that we need to consider?

People who want to get involved in IWCE need to be prepared to work with anyone who wants to work with them, even if their conception of socialism is different from our own. Secondly, even though the Network is small we do need to have a global perspective — for example to think about what forms of IWCE could be, and maybe already are being, developed both amongst agricultural workers, and as for example in China, industrial workers who are close to a rural background. Thirdly, as I tried to say in the draft manifesto, we need to learn more about the real history of IWCE and similar initiatives, especially so as to avoid repeating past mistakes.

Lastly, I feel we need to think more about “pedagogy”, i.e. about what theory and practice of teaching and learning is appropriate for IWCE-type work.

* Manifesto here: <http://bit.ly/1dMfuPQ>

Cleaning workers celebrate International Women's Day

By Emma Rickman

Around 50 cleaning workers, their families, and their supporters marched through Kingston, south west London, on International Working Women's Day (8 March), with red flags flying.

We marched from the train station to Kingston University, for an event organised by the London Cleaners and Facilities branch of the Independent Workers' union of Great Britain (IWGB, the same union whose University of London branch has been waging the "3 Cosas" campaign). A contingent from the University of London IWGB branch, including Workers' Liberty members, joined us later in the day.

Kingston University's University and College Union (UCU) branch hosted the event. Kingston was chosen because of university management's decision to "honour" former student Ruby McGregor-Smith, now the CEO of outsourcing firm Mitie, which employs many of the cleaners and has a foul anti-worker, anti-union,



anti-migrant, and anti-women record. IWGB women wanted to organise an event which, in the spirit of the original International Working Women's Day, would honour the solidarity of working-class women against the exploitation and abuse of capitalists like McGregor-Smith.

It was a great day. All labour movement events should be more like it. There has been a lot of discussion in the student movement recently about "intersectionality". This was an extremely "intersectional" audience and "intersectional" event: majority women, majority Latin American, racially diverse, with discussion focused on the connections

between different forms of oppression and struggles against them.

After a welcome speech from Rebecca Galbraith of Lewisham College UCU, Marlene Jimenez of the IWGB explained how the class system of capitalism works and argued for a movement which organises working-class women to struggle for their rights against the "privileged class", alongside working-class men. Her speech touched on many issues including sexism, racism, migration, education, war, and the destruction of the environment.

A number of women cleaner activists spoke about their experience working for Mitie and other companies, and their experience of organising in the IWGB. Everything was translated so that it was in English and Spanish. A researcher from Corporate Watch spoke on Mitie's expanding role in running "detention centres" (immigration prisons) and its abuses there.

But it was not just a day of speeches. There was a piece of theatre about sexual harassment in the

workplace, with audience discussion and interaction shaping the outcome. This included discussion of the problems and challenges which mostly precarious, migrant women workers face in such situations.

There was lots of food and socialising. The room was decorated with banners, with anti-Mitie cartoons drawn specially for the IWGB and with a mural created by the English/Spanish language exchange the union runs. The day finished with a Peruvian folk dance routine created by the Expresion Inka group and performed by IWGB members' children.

This was an excellent opportunity to discuss the politics of working-class women's struggles, and the relationship between the labour movement and women's liberation.

Activists from other unions and organisations who took part hopefully learned something about how to organising events that are enjoyable as well as politically productive.

• This report is abridged from bit.ly/iwgb-iwd

Unite sets "cunning plan"

By Gerry Bates

The giant Unite union announced on 5 March that it will reduce its numbers for affiliation to the Labour Party from one million to 500,000.

This move is part of a would-be cunning plan through which the big unions hope to neutralise the Collins proposals to rejig union affiliations to Labour.

At the Labour Party's special conference on 1 March, union leaders made speeches denouncing the Collins proposals, but... calling for votes for the proposals. Evidently they reckoned that Collins's final draft was "the best that could be achieved by negotiations".

Collins changes little immediately. But it contains a timebomb. In 2019 unions' affiliation numbers will be cut to equal the number of individuals who have ticked a box to say that they want some of their union dues to go to Labour.

Labour right-wingers say openly that they want to use that cut to reduce the unions' vote in Labour structures and so further insulate the Labour leadership from working-class pressure.

The union leaders' plan to reduce the affiliation

numbers in advance, so that there is no sudden drop in 2019, and thus no sudden boost to the right-wingers.

The GMB, another big union, said in September 2013 it would cut its affiliation numbers more severely, from 420,000 to 50,000. The word from insiders is that it will revise that to a smaller reduction, more like Unite's.

The third big union, Unison, has a sort of "box-ticking" system for political levy payments already.

The quirk is that new members are asked to tick one box or another to direct political levies either to a Labour-affiliated fund or to an unaffiliated one; quite a lot of recruits tick neither box, and a union office will allocate them one way or another randomly.

Unison has no plans to reduce its affiliation numbers. In fact, Unison leaders seem pleased about the fact that Unison will now be the biggest vote-wielder in the union bloc.

Socialists should respond with a forthright argument for the principle of the collective trade-union voice in the Labour Party.



Teachers need a strategy

By a NUT member

Nominations for General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) close on 30 April.

Martin Powell-Davies, secretary of Lewisham NUT, is standing as the left candidate for General Secre-

tary, with the support of the rank-and-file activists' network Lanac, along with Patrick Murphy (Leeds NUT secretary and an AWL member) for Deputy General Secretary.

The NUT plans a one-day national strike on 26 March, but the condition of the union's campaign against

education minister Michael Gove's frenzy of right-wing policies underlines the need for a left challenge in the union elections and a proper debate.

The one-day national strike was first scheduled for November, then remitted to February, and now arrives in March. It is a portmanteau strike, about pay, pensions, and workload, and the union leaders anxiously stress that "Gove... can avoid this strike if he talks to us, and shows he is willing to consider compromises..." Just to consider compromises, not necessarily to make them...

Activists will make 26 March as strong and lively as possible. But the policy of one-day strikes once every year or so, pioneered by another supposedly left-wing union, PCS, is not adequate to win anything.

Powell-Davies and Murphy will take into the union elections Lanac's longstand-

ing argument for a proper ongoing, planned calendar of action.

The old left caucuses in the union — STA and CDFU, which for some time have held a majority on the union's Executive — are mostly backing the re-election of the present leaders, Christine Blower and Kevin Courtney. So is the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). However, many rank-and-file activists see the need for a contest.

The GS ballot will run from 4 June to 25 June. DGS nominations close on 1 December, and the ballot runs from 5 January to 26 January 2015.

London NUT pre-strike rally: Wednesday 19 March, 5.30, NUT HQ, Mabledon Place WC1H 9BD

London strike day demonstration: Wednesday 26 March, 11.30, Duchess St, London W1A, near BBC Broadcasting House.

Probation officers to strike

By Darren Bedford

Probation officers in England and Wales will strike on 31 March and 1 April against the proposed privatisation of their service.

Members of the National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO) also struck in November 2013, only the fourth strike in the union's history. NAPO general secretary Ian Lawrence said:

"The Coalition's plans to sell off the management of offenders to private providers so that they can make a profit from the justice system is a recklessly dangerous social experiment that presents massive risks to the safety of communities."

Unions fear that privatisation will damage the service as well as potentially harming workers' terms and conditions.

Crossrail worker killed

By Jonny West

A 43-year-old worker on the Crossrail construction project in London has died after being struck by a piece of falling concrete.

Although this is the first worker to die because of a work-related incident on a Crossrail site, it is far from the first accident.

In October 2012, part of the excavation infrastructure at Crossrail's Paddington site collapsed, and in December 2012, a Crossrail worker suffered 70% burns after coming into contact with a live

cable.

The project has been the target of sustained trade union campaigning after unions accused construction conglomerate BFK of operating a blacklist to keep union organisers off sites. The campaign succeeded in winning reinstatement for sacked union rep Frank Morris.

A statement from the Unite union said: **"We now expect BFK to meet with Unite as a matter of urgency. The contractor must explain how it intends to do everything in its power to ensure that a tragic incident like this does**



Met police spied on Lawrence family

By Michael Johnson

The Metropolitan Police are in the spotlight again, as a new report reveals evidence that Scotland Yard sent an undercover officer to spy on the family and supporters of murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence.

The independent inquiry, carried out by QC Mark Ellison, was prompted by allegations from former undercover police officer Peter Francis that he had been “tasked to find intelligence ... to smear the Lawrence family.” It has now pushed the Home Secretary Theresa May to announce a public inquiry into police spying.

The initial claim that the Met sought to smear the family was difficult to substantiate due to the routine destruction of intelligence reports. Ellison did find, however, that officers from the Met’s Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) infiltrated the campaign to bring Stephen’s racist killers to justice, and in the course



of this also gathered personal information on Doreen and Neville Lawrence.

He also found that in autumn 1993, in the highest reaches of the Met, there was “clear evidence of a strong feeling of indignation and a degree of hostility” towards the family, feelings strong enough to motivate obtaining sensitive material that could be used to improve the image of the police.

Most shocking was the revelation that in August 1998, one of the officers — known only as N81 — met with Richard Walton, the Met’s current counter-terrorism commander, who was then part of the team preparing the police submission to the Stephen Lawrence inquiry into the force’s failings during the murder investigation.

Ellison called the meeting “a completely improper use of the knowledge the MPS

[Metropolitan police service] had gained by the deployment of this officer” and said that Walton’s account of this meeting was “less than straightforward and somewhat troubling”.

Ellis also found activities had been deliberately kept off the record. A note from one special branch commander said that he knew an officer was getting briefings from undercover police but that “it was essential knowledge of the operation went no further” and no written record should be left. The Met also destroyed four years’ worth of material on the Lawrence case in 2003, under then Commissioner

Lord Stevens.

In 2000, Doreen and Neville Lawrence were suing the Met, under Lord Stevens, for misfeasance after years of bad treatment following their son’s murder. It has emerged that the Met suppressed intelligence that linked a detective sergeant on the original murder investigation to the father of one of the prime suspects, in order to protect the position of the Commissioner.

This report offers more evidence, were it needed, that the Metropolitan police is an utterly rotten institution and that the existing accountability mechanisms are toothless and feeble. But it is not just the Met; the experiences of Hillsborough and Orgreave show that South Yorkshire Police are no better, to give only one example.

From everything that is known about the police, the only reasonable conclu-

sion is that a culture of secrecy and self-protection, enduring racism and prejudice, and a woeful inability to actually prevent or solve crimes are not aberrations but are intrinsic to the current police force.

While we can and should fight for greater scrutiny and accountability, and for the abolition of the secret state and the political police units, we should be clear that the police fundamentally exist to protect the capitalist ruling-class. In this sense, the police cannot be fundamentally “reformed” or “democratised”.

In any case, the only force capable of making this happen would be a workers’ government, and it would need to go further; to survive in power it would be need to dismantle the entire machinery of the capitalist state and replacing it with a force directly accountable to local workers’ councils.

Government wins on hospital closure law

By Tom Harris

Two protests in defence of the NHS took place outside Parliament on 10 and 11 March to coincide with a parliamentary debate on the Care Bill, clause 119 of which gives sweeping powers to close hospitals without full local consultation.

At the last stage in the Parliamentary process, the government won, with a vote of 288 to 241.

The clause says services can be closed or downgraded within 40 days; it was inserted into the Bill following Health Minister Jeremy Hunt’s failure to close the emergency and maternity services at Lewisham Hospital. Following a large and militant campaign to save the hospital, a court of appeal ruled that Hunt was acting outside his authority.

Now GP commissioning groups can be overruled by



the bureaucracy, and no consultation with local authorities will be necessary. The time allowed to consult with the public will be far too short to allow any new and complex plan to be held to account. The government will be able to close “failing” hospitals, without a clear, measurable and consistent definition of what “failing” would mean.

An expected backbench

Tory/Lib-Dem revolt petered out.

At the first protest, 70 people gathered outside Parliament to lobby MPs. Andy Burnham addressed the meeting, promising to repeal the act if Labour come to power, and to put the NHS in the hands of clinicians and communities.

The campaign to stop hospital closures now needs to reorganise and rebuild.

Over 65% of cuts to come

By Rhodri Evans

According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, 65% of the Government's already-decided cuts to public services are still to go through, and 42% of its cuts to benefits are yet to come.

Yet in the Budget on 19 March, chancellor George Osborne is set to announce even more planned cuts.

Although he claims that Britain is now in an economic recovery — and for the rich, it is — he says he will keep on adding cuts if the Tories are re-elected in 2015.

In order to win votes for 2015’s election, Osborne hints he will cut income tax. He may raise the income-tax threshold — the level of wages below which you pay no tax — and claim that as a great boon to the low-paid.

However, much of the benefit of a raised threshold goes to the higher-paid (the amount they pay tax on decreases); quite a few low-paid workers are now below the threshold anyway; and those low-paid workers who do gain from the raised

threshold will lose much more through Osborne’s cuts.

Some Tory MPs are pressing Osborne instead directly to cut income tax for the higher-paid, raising the limit for the 40p bracket or reducing the 40p rate to 35p.

Missing is any clear Labour alternative. In February both Ed Balls and Ed Miliband said that a Labour government after 2015 would continue cuts, only slower than the Tories.

Ed Balls now proposes taxes on bank bonuses, bank balance sheets, and the most expensive houses, to fund a youth jobs scheme. But the amounts are token compared to total taxes and total cuts; and the money would subsidise bosses, by enabling them to employ young people without paying wages because the state pays instead.

The labour movement should demand that the rich be taxed heavily, that the banks and high finance be taken into public ownership and democratic control, and that benefits, services, and useful, properly-paid jobs be restored.