



For a
workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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www.workersliberty.org

Russian imperialism threatens Ukraine

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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



We stand for:

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

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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

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Free education win at student conference

By Beth Redmond

For the first time since 2004, and despite the leadership's strong attempts to stop it, National Union of Students annual conference (8-10 April, Liverpool) voted to support free education, funded by taxing the rich and taking over the banks.

This was one of many significant left victories. Delegates voted for a maximum 5:1 pay ratio on campuses, fair representation for women on the National Committee, a default policy of supporting strikes and for the minimum wage to be raised to the living wage, as well as important motions against UKIP and in

support of migrants rights.

A large majority of the left motions were submitted, and fought for on conference floor, by the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts and Workers' Liberty members.

However, the abolition of zero-hours contracts, fighting for maximum rents and the call for a first term national demo were all rejected.

In the debate on police repression, the conference deleted the call for a law requiring the police to seek student union permission to come onto campus.

The continuing process of bureaucratisation of NUS has produced a small and in many ways depoliticised conference (fewer than 800 delegates, against more

than double that 15 years ago). The conference building used to be full of all kinds of political caucuses; now the NCAFC is the only organisation to hold them regularly and on any scale.

Workers' Liberty and NCAFC member Daniel Cooper was beaten in the presidential election, and incumbent president Toni Pearce was re-elected overwhelmingly.

The SWP stall outside the conference venue was attacked by an anarchist group called Liverpool Class Action. Workers' Liberty condemn these thuggish actions and call on others on the left to do the same. We have written about on our website here: bit.ly/1iF2xcK.

The right-wing leadership held onto four of the five Vice President positions, despite NCAFC members Kelly Rogers and Hannah Webb picking up a good vote — no doubt down to their impressive, militant speeches. Only one of the four NCAFC block candidates, Daniel Cooper was successful.

Many new left activists came together during conference to organise action to put pressure on NUS leadership in the run up to the general election.

NCAFC are working with the Young Greens, RS21 and others to put together a national meeting on 15 June about where to go next on free education.

Behind the Blairite "business agenda"

By John Lansman

Alan Milburn was once a Trotskyist, who co-ran a small left-wing bookshop in Newcastle, Days of Hope (aka Haze of Dope).

Now he is better known as the New Labour politician and former Secretary of State for Health whom David Cameron appointed as his "social mobility Tsar". He is also one of those Blairite heavyweights who are occasionally wheeled out to deliver the line that those Blairites left within the shadow cabinet feel unable to deliver.

[On 13 April] in the *Financial Times*, he called on Labour "to embrace an avowedly pro-business agenda and match it with a more overtly pro-business tone".

Labour's leadership needs "more than a repeat of John Smith's famous prawn cocktail offensive", he says, to overcome widespread business scepticism towards the party, and Ed Balls needs to go "further and faster" to rebuild bridges with business, to show Labour is on the side of wealth creators, including opposition to a 50p top rate of tax.

It doesn't take much digging to reveal the interests behind Milburn's plea.

His media and consultancy company, AM Strategy, made £1,357,131 in profits in the last two years. Among the companies he works for are venture capitalists Bridgepoint Capital, which has a big interest in the healthcare sector which



His future's bright

it notes, with costs rising at 5% a year and ageing populations, offers "significant opportunities".

These "opportunities" include, for example, the "dental market" which Bridgepoint says is currently worth about £7 billion, of which 60% is "patient funded".

Fortunately for Bridgepoint (and Alan Milburn), it has recently acquired the UK's largest provider of dental services, Oasis, worth £185 million.

INTERESTS

Other Bridgepoint (and Milburn) interests in the healthcare market have included:

- Alliance Medical Ltd, which provided MRI scanning services to the NHS. A contract worth £95 million a year with the NHS was announced in 2004 when Milburn first worked for Bridgepoint shortly after he

stopped being Health Secretary.

The deal was announced by his long-standing friend and flatmate, John Hutton, who had been Minister for Health in his time.

- Renal care provider Diaverum which Bridgepoint says operates "in a sector with attractive long-term market dynamics where the number of patients requiring dialysis treatment is growing by 5-7% p.a due to ageing populations and increasing incidence of chronic kidney failure".

Lucky Diaverum. Alan Milburn is a director.

- Care UK — acquired for £480 million in 2010 and "a leading provider of health and social care services, working with local authorities and the UK's National Health Service to provide a range of outsourced services including residential, community, specialist, primary and sec-

ondary healthcare".

- Mental health provider Ansel.

- Tunstall, a provider to individuals and care homes of telecare systems (principally for use by the elderly and infirm).

Milburn's healthcare interests also include:

- Lloyds Pharmacy, which reportedly pays him £30,000 a year and operates pharmacies primarily in community and health centre locations. He joined Lloyds in 2006.

- PricewaterhouseCoopers where he heads their health oversight board about which he says: "I'm delighted to be working with PwC in this new role. The health industry in the UK offers strong opportunities for growth in the wider economy and for PwC. My aim is to bring together a panel of industry experts to help catalyse change across the health sector and to help PwC grow its presence in the health market."

- iWantGreatCare of which Milburn is Chairman. It says it "delivers a comprehensive range of patient experience solutions direct to NHS hospitals, primary care and community providers as well as independent healthcare providers..."

We want a Labour government that uses the state to help businesses grow, not to help businesses rip off the state. Let's pay no more attention to Mr Milburn and his ilk.

- Taken with thanks from www.leftfutures.org

Russian imperialism threatens Ukraine

By Rhodri Evans

Russia is increasing its pressure on Ukraine. The US, and even more the EU, anxious for gas supplies from and lucrative financial deals with Russia, hesitate to respond.

On 21 April Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said that Russia, which has 40,000 troops massed near the border, might intervene to “rescue” eastern Ukraine. “There are more and more calls to Russia for rescue from this lawlessness”.

In the east Ukrainian city of Slavyansk, on 20 April the mayor installed by pro-Russian forces which have seized the city hall called for Russian troops to come in. According to the *Financial Times* (22 April), “Russian special forces like those seen in Crimea before its annexation now operate openly” there.

Pro-Russian armed men now control the city halls of about a dozen cities in East

Ukraine. In several they have promised referendums before 11 May (and so well before the scheduled Ukrainian presidential election on 25 May) on issues of local autonomy or merger with Russia.

A deal was signed on 17 April in Geneva between Russia, the US, the EU, and Ukraine, providing for the pro-Russian local coup-makers to withdraw from public buildings. Only result: the Ukrainian government retreated from already-hesitant moves to take back the buildings. The Ukrainian government (formed after mass protest ousted pro-Russian president Yanukovich on 22 February) fears that any large clash between Ukrainian forces and the coup-makers will be taken by the Russian army as licence to invade.

The pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine disdain the deal; the Russian government says the local coups are nothing to do with



them; evidently the US, the EU, and the Ukrainian government felt so weakly placed that a vague deal and vague hope seemed to them the best they could achieve.

The same day, 17 April, Russian president Vladimir Putin referred to a large sweep of Ukrainian territory as “Novorossiia” (“New Russia”, the Tsarist

term for it). He said he could not understand why the Bolsheviks, at the end of the 1917-22 civil war in which the Russian workers’ revolution held out against reactionaries and invading troops from 14 countries, ceded “Novorossiia” to Ukraine. (Answer: the area had and has a Ukrainian majority, despite large numbers of Russians in the

upper social layers in the cities, and the Bolsheviks upheld the rights of oppressed nations. But Putin would not understand that).

Putin’s declaration was a coded signal about re-annexing that territory to Russia. Probably what he wants is an overall deal giving Russia decisive influence over all Ukraine, rather than a forced partition of

Ukraine unlikely to achieve international recognition; but the threat of a forced partition may help him get a deal.

The city-hall seizures in east Ukraine are not just operations by the Russian government. There is a large ethnic-Russian and pro-Russian minority in the area (25% or more); much wider distrust of the oligarch-dominated Kiev government; and fear about the social implications of the decline, which may be accelerated by closer links into world markets, of the old Stalinist-built heavy industry of the area.

Help for the frail Ukrainian left in its advocacy of socialist alternatives which could unite workers across Ukraine against the oligarchs is urgent. So is support for Ukrainian self-determination, and if necessary self-defence, against Russian imperialism.

Homophobic legacy of the Empire

By Paul Penny

Intimidation, arbitrary arrests, and beatings are hideously commonplace for LGBT people in Zimbabwe,

Behind these conditions stands President Robert Mugabe, now in his 34th year as leader of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

He continues to spearhead attacks on the rights of LGBT Zimbabweans. Any obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee the rights to non-discrimination, liberty and security, privacy, freedom of expression and thought, and association and peaceful assembly have always been ignored.

Zimbabwe is a very socially conservative country where homosexuality is a big taboo. Mugabe’s anti-gay stance resonates with many Zimbabweans, and he uses his hate-speech as a purposeful distraction to divert attention from the political corruption, economic

mismanagement, high unemployment, and human rights infringements of his government.

Mugabe frequently conflates homosexuality with zoophilia, and has told the West to “keep their sodomy, bestiality, stupid and foolish ways to themselves, out of Zimbabwe”. His use of animal analogies is without bounds and he has described gay people as “worse than pigs and dogs, goats and birds”.

Mugabe ran his 2013 election campaign on the platform that if his ZANU-PF party won, he would assure “hell for gays” and behead LGBT people. And throughout the 2013 election campaign he pledged he would introduce laws that would imprison LGBT people for life.

The impact is of this unrestrained homophobia is incalculable on Zimbabwe’s LGBT community, who live in constant fear of intimidation, arbitrary arrests and beatings from Zimbabwean authorities and police.

Celebrating his 90th birthday at a rally in Harare last week, Mugabe told a crowd of thousands “The Europe of yesterday is gone, we

have a Europe of today which has no principles at all”... “let Europe keep their homosexual nonsense there and not cross over with it here”.

Forty-one out of fifty-three countries of the Commonwealth of Nations still criminalise homosexuality and other forms of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. A 2013 study, commissioned by the Kaleidoscope Trust, found that nearly eighty percent of Commonwealth countries are enforcing anti-gay laws perpetuated by leaders who are “willfully turning a blind eye to homophobia on a massive scale”.

That’s something to remember when the Commonwealth Games are held in Glasgow this summer.

The majority of Commonwealth countries retained homophobic laws following independence.

The homophobic stain of British Empire that continues to ruin the lives of so many LGBT people across the world must be eradicated once and for all, and now!

• www.rainbow-international-fund.org

UK’s “in your face” sexism

By Rachael Barnes

Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, has said that Britain has a more “in-your-face” sexist culture than many other countries.

Manjoo’s conclusion comes in an interim report of her visit to eight British cities in a 16 day tour earlier this month.

Manjoo also mentions positive developments in response mechanisms to violence against women, including improvements to access to justice, services and support for victims and witnesses, but she noted that such developments were not being established or applied consistently across the country.

Changes to the visa system have resulted in migrant domestic workers becoming even more vulnerable to psychological, physical and sexual abuse, low pay or even non-payment and in some cases not being allowed to leave their place of work alone. Sexual bullying and harassment has become the norm in schools, with one in three 16-18 year olds experiencing “groping”.

Manjoo says the Government’s approach to dealing with violence against women and girls has shifted from gender-specific to gender-neutral. This means that the already disproportionate way in which women are discriminated against made worse. The approach not take into account the social and economic situation of most women.

Manjoo proposes a working group be set up to deal specifically with the experiences and needs of black and ethnic minority women who have a higher rate of victimisation.

Austerity is affecting women not only di-

rectly, in the form of violence against women services being cut, but in poverty and unemployment, which are “contributory factors towards violence against women and girls”.

Third sector services are now required to spend more time and energy raising money than helping service users. Cutting these funds makes women and children more vulnerable not only to victimisation but re-victimisation too.

Manjoo had heard of disabled women being deemed “unfit parents” after failing to protect children from an abusive partner. She found women are reluctant to go through the criminal justice system with sexual abuse cases because of the “lack of a responsive, supportive environment”, which can “prevent trauma and re-victimisation” and because of the “low levels of prosecution and convictions”.

Manjoo repeatedly tried to visit Yarl’s Wood immigration detention centre, to which she thought she had been granted full, unrestricted access. This is the place where just recently Christine Case, a 40 year old Jamaican woman due to be deported from the UK, died. Manjoo said “if there was nothing to hide, I should have been given access”.

She states that it is important to recognise and remember the history of women’s violence and to be more gender-specific with regards to incarceration.

The United Nations Human Rights structures are very limited. Nonetheless Manjoo’s final report (due in June) should provoke wide public discussion – and action – on the feminist and socialist left.

What's the purpose of gender quotas?

Kate Harris



A few weeks ago, University of London Union President Michael Chessum (who also happens to be my housemate) asked me what I thought of gender quotas (1) at the National Union of Students. He seemed to be rather surprised by my answer, a swear-free version of which would be, "I don't care".

This isn't because I don't care that women are underrepresented in the student movement — far from it. I was shocked that the left at NUS National Conference hadn't asked more women comrades to take "big speeches" on controversial issues such as the Free Education amendment. It is something I think we need to address immediately, especially as we were not short of militant, fantastic women at that conference.

My apathy towards gender quotas in NUS is not because I don't care that only 30% of conference delegates are women. I think that's really crap. And it isn't because I'm scared, as Socialist Appeal are, that "class fighters" will be left out because of their gender (2) — because the best class fighters I know are women.

There are two reasons why my response to gender quotas in NUS was a hefty "meh".

Firstly, it's about the political direction of NUS. The NUS President, Toni Pearce, who was re-elected at conference, is a woman — but I don't like her "leadership", policies or way of operating. She is probably a lovely person, I have no idea — this is purely my political feeling. I'm a revolutionary socialist, in fact I would say a third camp Trotskyist, and she is on the right of the Labour Party.

I also can't really say that the NUS Women's Campaign is politically any better. The NUS Women's Campaign has just elected, by a narrow margin, ultra-bureaucrat Susuana An-

tubam: the sort of person who tells you she has misgivings about "Marxism" or "Trots" but is unable to explain any further what this means. She also objected to NCAFC Women's pamphlet on the basis that we were asking people to have honest and open debates, I believe because she thinks that is not women-friendly.

So I don't think that having more women delegates or more women on the National Executive Committee, as an end in itself, is a very good one. It depends what those women stand for and how you treat the women you don't agree with. It seems women with a socialist perspective aren't very welcome in the Women's Campaign, and it would seem that we also aren't made very welcome at national conference, and are forgotten about even by our own comrades sometimes.

So, what will this do to help socialist women get our voices heard in a bureaucratic and right-wing union? Probably not very much.

The second reason I'm apathetic towards gender quotas in NUS is that it's a bureaucratic solution to a deep-rooted, societal problem, and doesn't really address that deep-rooted problem (societal sexism). I'm not against the quotas, and no NUS policy is ever going to get rid of societal sexism altogether, I just think they're rather depressing. Manchester SU's Women's Officer, Tabz O'Brien Butcher, said during her speech, "we don't live in a meritocracy, we live in a misogyny". We do live in a deeply sexist and misogynistic society, in which respected actresses like Joanna Lumley minimise and dismiss sexual assault and around 95% of rape cases do not result in prosecution.

But I'm not sure how gender quotas address this. It's a coup for a small number of women at different institutions around the UK who may be elected more easily, or may feel encouraged to run, but it's only for them — there are millions more student women who have no contact with NUS. Again, that's not really an argument against it, it's just another reason why I don't really care about them.

There needs to be a deep shift in the thinking of people in the student movement, across the political spectrum. Instead of men assigning work and leadership activities to do amongst themselves, but being simultaneously terrified of being accused of sexism, we all need to have a long, hard look at ourselves, and start by getting women to do these things, not because they're women, but because they're bloody good.

(1) <http://fairrepresentationnus.wordpress.com/>
(2) <http://www.socialist.net/marxist-students-argue-for-socialist-policies-at-nus-conference-2014.htm>

• Kate is Women's Officer of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts



Joanna Lumley recently minimised sexism by saying "being patted on the bottom is not sexual assault".

Unions and smartphones

Eric Lee



In recent weeks, I've gotten a few requests for information about a survey LabourStart did a couple of years ago. It's odd because we've not done anything to publicize this. So I asked one of those who wrote to me where they'd heard about it.

It turned out it was on a website for business people, in an article about how advanced unions were in their use of the net. Author Jessica Miller-Merrell warned companies that "While HR is slow to adopt and understand social media, unions on the other hand are very open to using this online technology."

I think anyone who has spent time working with unions and new media will smile reading that sentence.

Because even if we've managed to get a website for nearly every union, we still lag far behind, and run the risk of disappearing completely from the online world if we don't catch up.

I'm thinking specifically of the problem known in the IT world as "responsive design".

What this basically means is that every website should render correctly on every device, regardless of screen size.

There should be no need to scroll horizontally, or squint at tiny letters, or any of the other problems that might come up when trying to view a website on a phone or tablet.

If a union does this right, if its website appears correctly on a smartphone, it may not even need a dedicated app. There are huge advantages to this, as apps need to be written to work on specific operating systems (ones that work on Apple devices won't work on Android phones) and apps can be expensive to create.

If a union were to embrace responsive design, it would already have what is sometimes called a "web app" -- which is essentially a website that works correctly on small screens.

This is important because increasing numbers of people access our movement's websites on smartphones and tablets.

16% of the visitors to LabourStart last month came on small screen devices, and 19% of the visitors to our online campaigns were on such devices as well.

This is probably because people often visit a website by clicking on a link in an email message.

As anyone who's been on a bus in the UK in the last few years knows, millions of people now routinely access their email on their phones.

The notion of responsive design for the web was first raised in a groundbreaking article by Ethan Marcotte in May 2010.

I doubt if any trade union communication officers read it then and I doubt if many of them are familiar with Marcotte's arguments even now.

Here is a nutshell is what he said:

"Rather than tailoring disconnected designs to each of an ever-increasing number of web devices, we can treat them as facets of the same experience. We can design for an optimal viewing experience, but embed standards-based technologies into our designs to make them not only more flexible, but more adaptive to the media that renders them. In short, we need to practice responsive web design."

So four years after his article, and with many thousands of websites now taking on board his arguments, how do union websites in the UK rate?

Can our members correctly use their union's website on a smartphone or tablet?

Let's have a look.

The TUC website gets it right, sort-of. Viewed on a small

screen, it correctly displays just one column. Unfortunately, that column is essentially a menu of everything on the site. To see the latest news, which is prominent on the full-screen version, you need to scroll down quite a bit.

The GMB works pretty much like the TUC website, with the same problems.

The RMT to its credit does a better job, showing not a menu, but the main news story on top of the page.

But UNISON gets it all wrong. Imagine if someone printed out the UNISON home page as you'd see it on your desktop PC -- and then cuts off the upper left corner, taking about a fifth of the page width. That's what you'll see on your phone. Click on the link to News, and you'll see just the first few words -- you need to keep scrolling left and right to see the whole thing.

Look at the websites of Unite, the CWU, PCS, NASUWT and NUT and you seem the same thing: a site that just doesn't work correctly on a small screen device. Do members of these unions not use smartphones and tablets?

Some unions, like UNISON, have invested heavily in apps for smartphones. UNISON's app, for example, works on Apple's iOS devices, Android phone and tables, and even on Blackberry phones (which have an absolutely tiny market share these days).

Why invest in expensive apps when a web app can do pretty much the same thing at a fraction of the price?

Why reinvent the wheel when a union's existing website can be fairly easily adapted using the principles of responsive design?

As our union websites become an increasingly important part of how we communicate with members and with the outside world, it's essential that we get this right.

Four years after Ethan Marcotte's call to arms, most unions are still lagging far behind.

Why socialists should side with Ukraine

A military conflict between Russia and Ukraine is looming. While supporting the working class and internationalists in Ukraine against the Ukrainian government and right, Workers' Liberty sides with Ukraine against Russia. Why?

Because Russia threatens Ukraine with national oppression.

Is Ukraine oppressed?

Since 1991, Ukraine has been independent. But for the majority of their history the Ukrainian people were occupied, controlled and savagely repressed by neighbouring bigger powers, and mostly by Russia. Russians, mostly Russian-born, dominated Ukraine and there was a policy of Russification, discriminating against the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian culture. This was true for hundreds of years under Czarism, and it was true under Stalinism, which in the 1930s deliberately starved millions of Ukrainians to death to break the Ukrainian national movement. The decade after the Russian Revolution and the years since 1991 have been relatively brief interludes of national freedom.

The recent Ukrainian revolt was determined in large part by a desire to avoid renewed Russian domination. And now Russia has seized control of Crimea and is conducting operations in the Eastern areas of Ukraine. It may soon invade on a larger scale.

Surely Ukraine is more of a regional power, like Iran or Iraq pre-2003, than an oppressed nation?

Even Iraq's status as a small, regional imperialist power did not stop us focusing on our opposition to US hyper-imperialism in the 1990-1991 and 2003 wars (while also opposing Iraq's imperialism). The same would be true if the US invaded Iran.

But Ukraine is different. All capitalist states have imperialist tendencies, or the potential to become imperialist, but despite its large size Ukraine does not play that role in its region. It is a poor country, poorer than its neighbours, with no possibility at present of dominating them. Since, in the mid-1950s, Iraq escaped its previous semi-colonial domination by Britain, the Iraqi state has ruled over a large national minority (Kurds), invaded neighbouring states in search of aggrandisement (Iran 1980, Kuwait 1990), and been a regional power (with more or less clout at different times). Even when temporarily occupied, Iraq was not at risk of long-term political control by Britain again. Ukraine is not a regional power, and is at risk of being dominated by Russia (its historical and recent oppressor), like Chechnya, Belarus, etc.

Against all that we support the national rights of Ukraine.

NATION

Why talk about nations in this way? Aren't socialists internationalists?

Socialists oppose nationalism as an anti-working class ideology and force, but we also oppose national oppression — both because we are against oppression generally, and because it prevents the free development of the class struggle. We support the right of every nation to determine its own future free of foreign control, in so far as this does not conflict with the rights of another nation (or the higher goal of working-class liberation). In this case: Russia is an imperialist country attempting to negate Ukraine's self-determination and subordinate it.

We support the Ukrainians' strivings for national freedom just as we support strivings for freedom by other oppressed or potentially oppressed nations.

Shouldn't we side with Ukrainian and Russian workers against both ruling classes, not with one nation against the other?

Socialists should always side with workers against capitalists, whether "their" domestic capitalists or foreign ones. Naturally we stand with the workers, socialists, anarchists, etc of Ukraine against the Ukrainian ruling class, and with the workers, etc of Russia against the Russian ruling class. That does not answer the issue of our attitude to the clash between Russia and Ukraine.

When we talk about the "Third Camp" that means always trying to develop movements of organised workers and op-



Russian supporters and Ukrainian supporters meet each other in Simferopol, Crimea, before Crimea was annexed by Russia

pressed people as a force independent of every ruling class, but it does not mean neutrality in every clash between capitalist forces. If there is a genuine democratic issue involved, we take sides, while trying to remain independent. National self-determination is one such issue.

An important element of solidarity with the left in Russia is support for the Russian anti-war protesters calling for the withdrawal of Putin's forces and an end to the threats against Ukraine.

Hasn't there been a right-wing coup in Kiev? The Ukrainian government is far-right, nationalistic and chauvinist.

The Ukrainian government is indeed right-wing (neo-liberal, nationalist), and there are fascistic organisations active in Ukraine. But the far right is a small minority — 5 or 6 percent according to opinion polls. Despite the alarming role of these forces, the movement which overthrew the government of Viktor Yanukovich — also right-wing and neo-liberal, but more tied to Russia — had elements both of a revolt for greater democracy and a revolt against the threat of Russian domination.

The character of the Ukrainian government and the threat from the right and far right in Ukraine is all the more reason to support organised workers and the left in their resistance to them. It is no reason at all to defend or ignore Russian imperialism's drive to dominate Ukraine.

In addition, the fascists in Ukraine are not all on one side: Putin seems to be promoting pro-Russian far right groups in Eastern Ukraine and building links with various sectors of the European far right.

Don't Crimea and Eastern Ukraine have the right to break away from Ukraine if they want?

In 1991, despite a majority of Crimeans being ethnic Russian, 56 percent voted to join Ukraine, as against 42 percent to stay in Russia. Shortly before the recent conflict, an opinion poll suggested only 41 percent would opt to join Russia. A huge majority of ethnic Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars (the historic people of Crimea deported en masse by Stalin and only allowed to return in the late 80s) strongly oppose joining Russia, and they account for at least 35 percent of the population. In any case, while we support Crimea's right to secede from Ukraine, we do not support its "right" to be occupied by Russia and annexed in a stitched-up referendum.

In the Eastern Ukrainian province of Donetsk, where Russia is fomenting a series of coups, the picture is even clearer: 57 percent are ethnic Ukrainian, against 38 percent Russian, and in 1991 83 percent voted for Ukrainian independence from Russia. The fact that Russia has some popular support does not change these considerations. In principle, if there were ethnic Russian-majority areas adjoining Russia which wished to secede, they would have a right to do so — but what is taking place is not a democratic movement, it is an

adjunct to Russian imperialism.

Note the difference between Russian-speakers and ethnic Russians. While not all ethnic Russians in Ukraine will be pro-Russia, many Russian-speaking ethnic Ukrainians strongly support Ukrainian independence. Kiev, the centre of the November-February protests, has a Russian-speaking majority.

Doesn't Ukrainian chauvinism pose a threat to the ethnic Russian minority?

It may do. But its strength has been exaggerated by pro-Russians on the international left. And in any case, this real problem does not invalidate the Ukrainian people's right to self-determination.

Solidarity says you support Ukrainian resistance to Russia, including by the Ukrainian army. What if the Ukrainian army represses ethnic Russian people living in Ukraine?

If there was a workers' militia in Eastern Ukraine we would advocate it maintained strict independence but cooperated — in so far as possible — with the Ukrainian army and other bourgeois Ukrainian forces against Russia. Reasons for its independence would include opposing any Ukrainian chauvinist attacks on ethnic Russians and attempting to draw ethnic Russians into the resistance to Russia.

It may not always be easy to draw a clear line between the resistance of Ukrainian forces against Russia and its local supporters, and chauvinist attacks against ethnic Russians because they are Russian. Nonetheless, that is the distinction it is necessary to attempt to draw. Again, this problem does not invalidate Ukraine's right to determine its own future, and to defend that right against Russian imperialism.

What about Western imperialism?

We are also against US, British, etc., imperialism. We do not endorse the trade deal which the EU has got Ukraine to sign. We demand that the Western governments give Ukraine real aid by cancelling its crippling debt to Western banks. But there is not symmetry. The immediate threat to Ukraine's political self-determination comes from Russia — invading Crimea, massing troops on Ukraine's border, fomenting small coups in cities in Eastern Ukraine, and demanding Ukraine fits its constitution to Russian wishes.

Many or most people in Ukraine may be naïve about the reality of Western capitalism and the EU. They are not at all naïve about the reality of the threat from Russian imperialism.

It is possible to imagine the clash between Russia and Ukraine merging into a broader conflict between Russia and the Western powers, with a fundamentally inter-imperialist character and the national rights element submerged. But, despite the role of the West, that is not what is happening now.

Ukraine is not just a token

By Martin Thomas

Many on the left see events in Ukraine only as a clash between Russia on one side, the US and EU on the other. The trouble with this perception is that it fades out Ukraine's right to national self-determination.

From the perception, some deduce support for Russia because they identify "imperialism" solely with the US and the EU. Others see Russia also as imperialist, and deduce "a plague on all houses".

The *Morning Star* (linked to the Communist Party of Britain) often confines itself to bland factual reporting and wishes for peace, but has boosted an article by Jeremy Corbyn, a Labour MP with a good record on British class-struggle issues who is now close to the CPB on world affairs.

"It is the US drive to expand eastwards which lies at the root of the crisis in the former Soviet republic, and it's time we talked to Russia... On Ukraine, I would not condone Russian behaviour or expansion. But it is not unprovoked..." (*Morning Star*, 17 April). Corbyn's article is also boosted by the Stop The War campaign (run by ex-SWP splinter Counterfire).

Socialist Worker confines itself to lamenting the big-power conflict, even-handedly. "The imperial brinkmanship in Ukraine escalated this week... The potential for the situation spiralling out of control remains" (*Socialist Worker*, 15 April).

In its reporting on events the US *Socialist Worker* (estranged

cousin of the British SW) registers, as we shall see, more light and shade. Its bottom-line conclusion is the same as the British SW's:

"As the confrontations play out in eastern Ukraine, there are signs of hostility toward both imperialisms — the US and its EU allies to the west, Russia to the east — and of a desire for an alternative that defends the interests of the working class. But it is exactly this alternative that the imperial powers battling over Ukraine both wish to squelch... As long as Ukraine remains a battleground for imperialist rivals — and proxy forces representing one power or the other — working people in Ukraine will bear the brunt of the poverty, violence and suffering". (Alan Maass, socialistworker.org, 21 April).

The Socialist, paper of the Socialist Party, offers similar generalities. "Only the organised, united working class, with independent and internationalist policies, can decisively counter reactionary nationalism and end big capitalist powers' meddling" (*The Socialist*, 19 March).

In some circumstances, to fade out the specifically Ukrainian issues would be a wise refusal to let secondary issues obscure the gist. During World War One, some socialists argued for backing Britain, France, and Russia on the basis of the "Belgian" and "Serbian" issues, i.e. the rights of the people of Belgium and of Serbia to resist German and Austrian conquest.

Lenin retorted: "Let us suppose that all the states interested

in the observation of international treaties declared war on Germany with the demand for the liberation and indemnification of Belgium. In such a case, the sympathies of Socialists would, of course, be on the side of Germany's enemies. But the whole point is that the... Entente is waging war not over Belgium... England is grabbing Germany's colonies and Turkey; Russia is grabbing Galicia and Turkey, France wants Alsace-Lorraine and even the left bank of the Rhine... In the present war waged by the present governments it is impossible to help Belgium without helping to strangle Austria or Turkey, etc!"

Today, the specific Ukrainian issues are not, or not yet, overwhelmed by a world war over which big power dominates where, a war to which socialists can respond with Lenin's call to "turn the imperialist war into a civil war" or Trotsky's call in 1940 for a "proletarian military policy". Responding as if the Ukraine crisis is world war now produces no more than bland hand-wringing — not so much "third camp" as "no camp".

There isn't even a military symmetry over Ukraine. The US *Socialist Worker*, despite its hand-wringing "symmetrical" conclusion, notes that: "As for the US and its allies in Europe, their reaction to the eastern Ukraine uprisings has been a lot of hypocritical rhetoric about respect for sovereignty and the rule of law — but little action to back it up". It also factors in the historical background: "All parts of Ukraine suffered from Russia's imperial rule — first, for centuries under the

The left and Maidan

The following is a summary of the conclusions of a conference "The left and Maidan" held in Kiev on 12-13 April, attended by aligned and non-aligned left activists who had participated in the Maidan. A fuller report is at: <http://gaslo.info/?p=5181>

The Maidan began as a protest against the government's refusal to sign an agreement with the European Union (EU). It grew into a protest against the government's dishonesty and corruption. Then it became a protest against police violence and attempts to introduce anti-democratic laws.

At first the left paid little attention to the Maidan. Its demands for integration into the EU were not considered to be left demands. The left restricted itself to occasional small-scale interventions, with a focus on the anti-social policies pursued by the EU.

But when the authorities resorted to violence in January, everything changed — both the character of the protests and also how the left related to it.

It was no longer possible to stand aside, doing no more than "educational" activities and wandering round the square with a camera. But the left had no experience of participating in a mass protest movement.

Never before had the country experienced such a powerful popular uprising. The situation changed by the minute. There was no time to discuss strategy and tactics. Everyone simply did what they thought necessary.

Having been slow to intervene, the left found itself in a weaker position than its opponents on the far right. In addition, unlike in Russia, the Ukrainian left lacks experience of physical self-defence and was therefore unprepared for the organised attacks by the far right.

The left therefore had to abandon its visible symbols — its red flags, its black flags — and focused instead on participation in the general democratic processes, on agitation within the broad civil movement.

What was important was giving a direction to the movement. To have openly identified oneself as a left-winger would have "provoked" attacks by the organised far right.

A meeting to create an anarchist brigade, for example, was broken up by armed nationalists. The anarchists therefore worked under the umbrella of the "Student Assembly" — which ended up completely under the control of the anarchist student union "Direct Action" and raised purely social demands.

The Maidan was not per se left-wing. If polls are to be believed, 93% of participants declared themselves to have no particular politics. But at the same time it was left-wing: it was libertarian, a challenge to the authorities, a protest against corruption, an example of the "ordinary" people suddenly becoming aware of their own collective strength.

Most of the totalitarian left were critics of the Maidan and opposed the forms of direct democracy which it practiced. The Communist Parties used their publications to discredit the Maidan and develop the thesis of a seizure of power by a fascist junta.

It was the anti-authoritarian and democratic left which supported the Maidan. And trade unions, organised in the KVPU (Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine) as well.

The Women's Group engaged in criticism of sexism in the Maidan and carried out agitation against right-wing ideology. The Student Assembly prepared a programme for a Free University. One of the most important left initiatives was the "Hospital Guard", which protected wounded people in hospitals from the police. Eventually, over a hundred people were active in it.

SOCIALIST IDEAS

The main focus for the Maidan left was to try to introduce socialist ideas into the movement. But now the Maidan Left is criticised for helping bring to power a right-wing government.

This criticism has no basis in reality. The Maidan, as a broad mass movement, had nothing to do with the new government, or professional politicians and political parties.

Around half of the left activists in the Maidan were anarchists. They were not interested in taking power or participating in it. Their goal was to develop different

anti-authoritarian forms of social organisation and to build social alternatives to state institutions.

The weak side of the Maidan was the insufficient involvement of the trade unions and the working class. Only around 5% to 7% of participants in the Maidan could be counted as workers.

But this was hardly surprising — workers risked being sacked if they simply walked away from their jobs.

But no-one in the Kiev left showed an interest in conducting agitation in the big workplaces and extending the protest movement specifically into the working class. The call by the free trade unions for a political general strike had no resonance.

There was practically no co-ordination between them. The left simply threw itself into the struggle without creating its own organisational forms — unlike the right.

Another problem was the failure to take account of the separatist initiatives in the south-east of Ukraine.

Given that dissatisfaction with the corrupt regime of Yanukovich and with worsening social conditions lies at the basis of the protest movements in all regions of Ukraine, the left had the chance to draw up a programme of demands which could have been supported throughout Ukraine.

But the Maidan failed to focus on the idea of social justice. Instead its focus was the idea of national-democratic identity. There was a failure to speak to Crimeans in a language accessible to them. This facilitated the breakaway of the Crimea and the emergence of "anti-Maidan" protests.

Many Ukrainian citizens are taking part in "anti-Maidan" protests, opposing the new oligarchy in Kiev, demanding federalisation of the country, attempting to form their own alternative organs of power, calling them "popular", and attempting to ban right-wing and nationalist parties.

Such developments will be used by the authorities in Kiev and Moscow to shift the general thrust of politics to the right, leaving the left weakened and isolated. The immediate and long-term perspectives of the left depend on its ability to meet this challenge.

Internationalism must be the basis of everything we do. In any war the working class is used as cannon fodder, while the oligarchs grow rich on its blood and tears. We must agitate against war, placing this at the core of our agenda of the working class of Ukraine and Russia.



Ukrainian mass movement was not proxy for big powers

Tsar; then, after a brief recognition of national self-determination following the 1917 Russian Revolution, under the tyranny of the Stalinist counter-revolution; and now, under Moscow's new empire re-established after the breakup of the ex-USSR..."

The US and the EU are predatory capitalist outfits. But their interest in Ukraine is to integrate it into the capitalist world market dominated by themselves through economic clout, not to subdue it militarily. Neither the US nor the EU is about to send troops to occupy and annex a chunk of Ukraine.

ROOTS OF CRISIS

The crisis in Ukraine broke out not because of conflicts between the big powers for which Ukrainian movements were essentially just proxies, but because of the mass movement in Ukraine which toppled the pro-Russian president Yanukovich on 22 February.

Russia has responded by invading and annexing Crimea, by massing troops on Ukraine's eastern borders, by instigating or encouraging local seizures of power by elements of the ethnic-Russian minority in some districts of east Ukraine. It refuses to recognise the ouster of Yanukovich, and wants to stall the May elections scheduled in Ukraine.

Against those Russian moves, socialists should support national self-determination for Ukraine. If it should come to clashes between Russian troops invading Ukraine, and the Ukrainian army, we are on the side of the Ukrainians, though we give no endorsement or confidence to the neo-liberal, oligarch-dominated government which has replaced Yanukovich in Kiev.

As well as the perception of the events as essentially a EU/US-vs-Russia clash, with Ukraine functioning only as a token, another consideration pushes socialists towards a stance of just wishing that the conflict would go away. That is the right-wing tone of Ukrainian nationalism.

There is some cross-cutting here: the far-right forces in the anti-Yanukovich movement, Svoboda and the Right Sector, are not pro-EU, so if you want to dismiss the movement as a proxy of the EU, then you must fade out the far-right element in it, and if you want to dismiss the movement as far-right, then you must fade out the "EU vs Russia" dimension.

There were strands of anti-Russian Ukrainian chauvinism in the movement, and the rights of Ukraine's Russian minority should be defended. But those elements should not be exaggerated, as they are by many Stalinist nostalgics (both people, sometimes workers, in east Ukraine, and commentators in the West). Kiev is a majority Russian-speaking city.

The anti-Yanukovich movement was dominated by conservative and neo-liberal forces, and the new Kiev government is oligarch-led. Support from socialists world-wide for the frail forces of the Ukrainian left is urgent.

That should not mean fading out Ukraine's national rights. But it does for some.

Thus the French Trotskyist weekly *Lutte Ouvrière* avoids dismissing the conflict as just a proxy battle, but comments: "The popular masses of Ukraine are caught between opposed nationalisms, and called on to choose one or other camp, though neither is theirs". (*Lutte Ouvrière*, 18 April).

SELF-DETERMINATION

Just as the right to free speech is not conditional on saying left-wing things, and the right to vote is not conditional on voting left, the right of nations to self-determination is not conditional on the nation having left-wing leadership.

In the decades after 1945 when dozens of nations won independence from European colonialism, the national movements often had a leftist tinge. But the leftism was rarely solid enough to stop the independent governments becoming crony-capitalist outfits, and sometimes it was the fake-leftism of Stalinism, which would make the independent regimes prison-houses for the workers. Those nations deserved support because of the democratic principle of self-determination, not because their leaderships were left-wing enough.

National self-determination for Ukraine is a right, even when the Ukraine is under right-wing governance.

In a world where big powers jostle for advantage, national struggles by peoples oppressed by one big power will almost always attract support from the rival big power, which will gain advantage from the people gaining independence or moving to some degree into its sphere. The independence struggles after 1945 of Europe's colonies usually got support and encouragement from the USSR; they still deserved support.

The picture of the crisis in Ukraine as being generated by a "US [or EU] drive to expand eastwards" is as disorienting as the old right-wing European imperialist line which condemned every independence struggle as the work of "the communists".

In 1989 the nations of Eastern Europe escaped four decades of stifling Russian domination. Most have sought to cement their independence and seek the least-bad terms for integration into the capitalist world market by joining the EU. The EU is, to be sure, bureaucratic, capitalist, and neo-liberal, as is the world market. In relation to Ukraine, socialists should demand that the US and EU cancel Ukraine's foreign debts, instead of helping the IMF to impose neo-liberal measures as the price for bail-out loans.

But the EU is a capitalist consortium, not a colonial empire like those of the first half of the 20th century. Brussels does not rule Poland or Bulgaria in anything like the same way as London used to rule India and Nigeria. The EU has not stopped the Czech Republic, for example, maybe the East European country most integrated with the "west", being a notorious "awkward squad" member within the EU.

There is no prospect of Ukraine joining the EU soon, because the EU will not admit it soon. A desire by Ukrainians for closer ties with the EU is not a desire to become part of an empire ruled from a foreign city. To see the (hesitant) EU and US support for the anti-Yanukovich movement and the new Kiev government as the symmetrical counterpart to Russia's military imperialism in Ukraine is to skew things badly, and to fade out essentials.

Some groups have not faded out Ukrainian self-determination in favour of just-a-big-power-quarrel or all-nationalisms-are-bad schemes. The "Mandelite" Fourth International issued a statement on 25 February (bit.ly/fi-ukr) in which it was difficult to discern any conclusions at all.

Its writer Catherine Samary, in the French weekly *L'Anticapitaliste*, demands the withdrawal of Russian troops (but seems to feel that this immediate demand is unbalanced unless coupled with the more far-off demand for "dismantlement of NATO") (*L'Anticapitaliste*, 10 April). As a general answer, she proposes a constituent assembly (an elected parliament with constitution-making powers) for all Ukraine including Crimea (27 March). "Against all diktats, military and economic, the defence of social and national rights is the only hope for Ukraine, and only the people themselves can impose that" (17 April).

RS21, the most recent splinter group from the SWP, has generally suggested the same "plague on all houses" line as the SWP. But its website has carried an informative article on the miners of the Donbass: "When protestors in Kiev were attacked by the security forces in December 2013, miners in the Donbass put out a statement that they were prepared to go on all-out strike to bring down Yanukovich: 'People of Ukraine, in 1989, you supported our mass strike for our rights. Today's miners stand with you'. Now the miners are torn. Russia cut its investment in coal by 40% last year, so incorporation into Russia has little to offer; meanwhile, the EU-Ukraine deal will also mean dramatic 'downsizing' of the coal industry, in favour of onshore gas exploration by multinationals..." (Nick Evans, 16 April)

The International Socialist Network (ISN), which splintered from the SWP in 2013, has carried an informative article on the pro-Russian "people's governor" who briefly took over Donetsk in early March. On 19 April its website published an article by Tim Nelson which rightly (in our view) stressed "the direct military threat Russia poses to Ukrainian self-determination".

"The Stop the War Coalition argument that 'the real enemy is at home' slogan was appropriate ceased to be a principled anti-imperialist position, and became nothing more than apologism for Putin's Russia and the regimes he supports. This is not internationalism, as the real enemy for the people of Syria was not the US, but Al-Assad and the Russian state backing him. The same is true for the Ukrainian people now".

As Nelson comments, "the anti-imperialist consensus" — i.e. the consensus in a large-ish circle around the SWP and the CPB that being left-wing in world affairs meant backing whoever fought against the USA — "has largely broken down". Ukraine shows the need for more substantive, less negative, criteria in politics.

Long Live International Solidarity

Saturday 3 May 2.30-11pm

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

A political and social event to celebrate INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' DAY 2014, initiated by Marxist Revival

On Saturday 3 May, socialists from a number of countries are coming together in London to celebrate international solidarity and strengthen our links in the fight for working-class and human freedom.



Afterwards we will have dancing, drinks and Kurdish food, as a fundraiser for a workers' safety campaign in Kurdistan. (Speeches and discussion 4-6, social afterwards.)

*** Marxist Revival is a project launched by revolutionary socialist groups in a number of countries. This event is sponsored by MR-supporters Workers' Liberty (UK) and the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency, as well as the Worker-Communist Party of Kurdistan.**

From Maoism to Trotskyism in Bangladesh

Badrul Alam, a member of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist), visited Britain recently. During his visit he told Sacha Ismail and Martin Thomas from Solidarity about the history of his group, and how it evolved from Maoism towards Trotskyism.

Before 1971, my party was called East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) (EPCP-ML). During the Liberation War [of Bangladesh, from rule by West Pakistan] one part of the party fought against the Pakistani Army and another party fought against both Pakistani Army and the Indian Army which came to Bangladesh to support the freedom fighters.

China supported Pakistan. Mao was totally wrong. Bangladesh was 1200 miles from Pakistan. It was a completely different nation with a different language and different culture. Pakistan acted like an imperial power.

The Chinese had a Chinese nationalist position. They were nationalist. Even though there is a Communist Party in power it doesn't mean anything. They supported Myanmar/Burma, even though there was a military ruler. They were not socialists.

After some years the EPCP-ML leaders came up with the conclusion that after 1971, it was not correct to say that Bangladesh was not independent, and reformed the party as Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist) (CPB-ML).

It was an underground party, but it decided to do open work by forming a peasant organisation called the Krishok Federation, of which I am now president. This organisation has been very active since 1976, especially on the land occupation movement and on issues such as climate change, food sovereignty and genetically-modified foods.

In 1993, we discussed entering politics openly. After a year, we formed an open section of the CPB-ML. Those who were

interested in open politics could join. Those who were not could still be active in the front organisation, like the peasants' organisation. Some of the comrades preferred being underground. Mostly they were living in the rural areas and didn't want to come out.

After 1993, also, we decided to break with Stalinism. We were not attracted to Trotskyism at that time but we studied Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* and we discovered the idea of hegemony and counter-hegemony.

We do not think it is necessary to be underground. We can organise openly and mobilise the people. If we want to change society we have to fight and take risks, organise people democratically and publish our opinions in newspapers.

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

In 2009, I attended a caravan on the threat to the climate at the same time as the international climate summit in Copenhagen. We then went to Copenhagen, and met people closely related to the Fourth International.

A comrade went to one of the Fourth International's schools in Manila. He came back to Dhaka and explained everything.

In 2011, the Fourth International attended our Caravan and invited us to a meeting in Amsterdam in 2012. I came to know the position of the Fourth International and how it was founded by Trotsky. At the same time, I learned that other groups could join who were not Trotskyists. We believe in the idea of permanent revolution. Even Lenin believed in permanent revolution.

In 2012, we took permanent observer status, and this year they gave us the status of the section in Bangladesh.

Now the CPBML has 500 open members across the country. Many members are active in popular organisations and who have local involvement with them.

We also lead the Floating Labor Union and Floating Women Labor Union in the informal sector, including the garment sector. We have Bangladesh Rural Intellectual Fronts inspired by Gramsci's concept of organic intellectuals. We have an indigenous people's association and the Revolutionary Youth Association. We also have the Bangladesh Students' Association, but it's not functioning very well. Revolutionary Youth is very active.

We have a Bangladesh peasant women's association and, recently, one organisation in the garment sector which is called Independent Bangla Garment Workers and Employee Federation. It's new. In the last two years it has engaged with us and worked with us during the Rana Plaza collapse.

After 2007 we were part of the Democratic Left Alliance. In June 2011 we left it. Since 1993 we had accepted the ideas of Gramsci on hegemony and counter-hegemony in society and culture.

We tried to push these ideas in the Democratic Left Alliance and we were strongly criticised. They accused of following Eurocommunism.

In 2011 we held a caravan on climate change and full sovereignty. We took up climate change as a serious political issue. The Democratic Left Alliance considered it to be an NGO issue. They are not engaged on the gender issue and the condition of women either.

They decided to expel us from the Democratic Left Alliance so we left before they could expel us, and are trying to build a new network on the basis of our understanding.

Almost all the groups in the Democratic Left Alliance are Stalinist, and some are Maoist. The Maoists are still underground and are facing problems from the government. Lots of Maoist leaders were killed extra-judicially. We oppose them ideologically but think they should not be killed.

Dave Broady, 1937-2014

By Martin Thomas

Dave Broady died on 4 April. In 1972 he contributed regularly to *Workers' Fight*, a forerunner of *Solidarity*. An excerpt [right] signals the tone and type of his writing.

After joining the Navy, and being jailed and dismissed, Dave became a construction worker, a steel erector. He told me he couldn't tolerate the more controlled environment of a factory.

Dave's then wife Fran Broady joined our organisation in 1970-1, and was a prominent member for a long while. Their older daughter Karen also became an active revolutionary socialist, and now works with AWL in Manchester.

Dave himself, however, never joined a revolutionary socialist group. As the excerpt perhaps conveys, this was not because he lacked anger against capitalism and its servitors.

If anything the contrary: his anger was too hot for him to engage in the sometimes slow and tortuous processes of socialist organising, at least in the conditions of the era in which Dave's generation of trade-union militants were pummeled and dispersed.

He drifted out of our orbit in the 1970s, and travelled wide in search of work. I last met him when visiting Fran several years ago. Dave was by then retired. He was still stronger and fitter than the average person half his age; but, so I understood, even more a loner than ever, spending much of his time on long walks.

His last years were tragic. In February 2008 he got into a late-night street fight. Another man died. Dave said it was self-defence, and neighbours described Dave as "a gentle giant". But he was convicted of manslaughter and jailed.

When he was found dead, on 4 April, in his room at a homeless hostel, his body showed he had been beaten up. Police are investigating.

We send our condolences to Dave's family, especially to Karen and Fran. We redouble our efforts to build a socialist movement broad and militant enough to be a workable environment for new generations of rebels like Dave.

Where have all the grasses gone?

What has happened to servility? We have lost the Empire.

Those who were born as leaders of men are now having that right questioned.

Entry into the Common Market [EU] will force us to accept the existence of all those damned foreigners on the other side of the Channel.

But must we lose all our national characteristics? Are some of the arts we have practised with such expertise to vanish forever?

Will the time honoured practice of fawning and cringing be something of the past?

The Russians may be masters of the chess board, the Americans kings of the athletic field. The Thailander has his badminton, the Basque his pelota.

But no-one has perfected the bending of the back and the touching of the forelock quite like the British.

Yet this art is in danger of becoming as extinct as the dinosaur.

It is a possibility that the son of Master John, the owner of the mill, may never again be confronted with a deputation of cap-wringing individuals uttering those immortal words: "Could you see your way Master, to giving us a few extra coppers. It's for the bairns, Master. They need shoes."

The schools do their level best to teach their charges to have proper respect for their betters, but somehow, somewhere along the line, they have failed in preparing pupils for the outside world.

For instance. There are those amongst the youth of the nation who consider that they have the right to work. Obviously, with this idea in mind, they will approach their interview for employment with entirely the wrong attitude. For as we are all aware, when there are five young men for every job, the Personnel Manager must be approached with the utmost humility.

With a little practice servility can become second nature: Remember you are unemployed.

Remove all traces of pride.

When being interviewed, stoop the shoulders.

Keep your eyes downcast.

Shuffle the feet.

The use of the word "Sir" cannot be over-emphasised.

Being unemployed for long enough can bring about quite a transformation anyway.

What of another of our national pastimes? I speak of informing.

Granted there are still many participants in this old British sport. But I fear this too is on the decline.

It could well be that Mrs Jenkins down the street, who draws national assistance for herself and five children, could one day be able to go out and earn a few quid without a neighbour informing the authorities.

Is Charlie Cunningham to be allowed to clock his brother-in-law in on Monday morning and get away with it?

It could well be. As long as the decline in moral standards continues.

Remember this. Your employer (if you are fortunate enough to have one) cannot always be there to watch over you personally. He could be taking a well earned three months in the Bahamas. Whilst he is there he relies on you to keep the wheels of industry turning.

Don't let him down.

Respect your employer.

Practice makes for perfection, so rehearse humility each day.

Grovelling can bring its own rewards.

Not only could you become a veritable Uriah Heap but you could even reach the dizzy heights of chargehand; or (dare I say it) foreman.

So happy cringing, everybody.

Mussolini and Italian fascism

By Dan Katz

"I am constantly amazed by man's inhumanity to man." Primo Levi

"It is necessary, with bold spirit and in good conscience, to save civilisation. We must halt the dissolution which corrodes and corrupts to roots of human society. The bare and barren tree can be made green again. Are we not ready?" Antonio Gramsci

A rapid and intensive development of modern, industrial capitalism took place north eastern Italy, especially in the area in and between Genoa, Milan and Turin, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two of the twentieth.

The first electric power station in Europe was built in Milan in 1884. Electricity production increased very quickly to three billion kilowatt hours by 1914. Steel production increased 12-fold from 1896 to 1913, and then by half again during the war.

In 1899 Fiat was founded in Turin. By 1914, 44 Italian car firms employed 12 000 workers producing 9 000 cars a year. After the war, in 1918, production had more than doubled.

As the First World War began Italy was tied to Germany and Austria-Hungary by the Triple Alliance pact. However, Italy was manoeuvred into the war on the side of France and Britain in May 1915 with the promise of Austrian territories inhabited by (a minority) of Italians. Nationalist, irredentist agitation had been a feature of Italian political life for several decades and had gripped the ruling class.

However Italian confidence was shaken during two years of grinding, brutal war followed by a major rout after the battle of Caporetto. France and Britain shored up the Italian forces with troops and, more importantly, with coal and steel, which the Italians were desperately short of. During the war 5.7 million Italians were drafted, 600 000 killed and 700 000 disabled.

In August 1917 a general strike began in Turin after police killed two people during a protest over bread shortages. The Turin movement was brutally repressed. Troops armed with machine guns killed over 50 people and wounded 800. 1,000 demonstrators, mainly Fiat workers, were sent to the front.

Many categories of industrial worker were excluded from the draft. However large numbers of peasants were conscripted. This reduced the rural labour force of males over 18 from 4.8 to 2.2 million and created a crisis of food production. It widened the gap between the northern workers and southern peasants. Sardinian soldiers had shot down Turin workers in August 1917.

Many northern factory workers worked under military discipline, unable to get other work under the threat of prison or posting to the front.

During the war there was a tripling of the value of paper money in circulation; wages rose quickly, but inflation was more rapid and real wages fell in value by a quarter.

MUSSOLINI

Benito Mussolini was born on 29 July 1883 in Predappio, a village outside Forli, south of Bologna. His mother was a school teacher and devout Catholic. His father occasionally worked as a blacksmith, and was a socialist who had been to jail for his beliefs; he also drank and had a series of affairs.

Mussolini spent time in Switzerland and worked with the socialist movement there. In 1910 Mussolini was back in Italy, editor of the paper of the socialist clubs in Forli, *La Lotta di Classe* (Class Struggle), with a picture of Marx on his office wall. The paper was anti-military (he was jailed for calling on soldiers to disobey their officers), and anti-church (the priests were "black microbes" and the church was an authoritarian opponent of free thought).

Later, when in power, the Pope claimed Mussolini had been sent by Providence to deliver Italy from liberalism and religious error. And after he came to power copies of his socialist writings disappeared from libraries. Inside the Socialist Party he advocated the far left secede because he considered the fight for reforms through parliament was a waste of time and what was needed was armed insurrection, instead.

When the Liberal prime minister Giolitti declared war on (Turkish) Libya in 1911 Mussolini denounced the war and declared patriotic loyalty as "a lying and outdated fiction".

He advocated strikes and rebellion against the war. In court, charged with stirring up violence, he denied the charges, claiming the people of Forli, in fact, did not like him; his arguments against the war were essentially patriotic. He was jailed for five months. In 1912 he was elected to the party executive and later became editor of the party paper, *Avanti!*

However, on 18 October 1914, after World War One had begun, Mussolini announced in *Avanti!* that Italy should

go to war against Austria. Isolated among the Socialist leadership he resigned and founded a new paper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*, which was nominally socialist. It began publication in November 1914. *Il Popolo d'Italia* was funded by money from armaments firms as well as Britain and France, and by early 1915 Mussolini was using the paper to advocate a "great war" and Italian imperialist expansion into the Balkans and Middle East. Mussolini was conscripted into the army in September 1915 and spent nine months in the trenches until he was injured by a grenade blast.

Invalided out of the army, Mussolini rejoined *Il Popolo d'Italia*, advocating a more aggressive war, and involving himself with right-wing coup plotters. His militancy was still there, but his revolution now had a different, far-right, content.

Following the shock of Caporetto, when the generals blamed the soldiers for cowardice and shot thousands of their own men, Mussolini concluded the army leadership — and more generally the ruling elite — were to blame. He advocated discipline and a dictator who would militarise the Italian nation. Later, in 1919, Mussolini founded the Combat League (Fasci di Combattimento) with 200 members around a core of unemployed veterans. It was characterised by militancy, nationalism and an anti-establishment pseudo-leftism. It became involved in anti-socialist violence.

TWO RED YEARS

In the parliamentary elections of November 1919 the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) got 1,834,000 votes (30%), and 156 Members of Parliament.

The PSI also took control of 2800 local councils (24% of the total) and its overall membership rose to over 200,000. Only two years earlier the party membership had stood at 60,000. By 1920 3,800,000 workers and peasants were organised in



Fiat factory occupation 1920

the various unions. This was five times the pre-war figure.

In February 1919 the engineering workers won a shorter working day: eight hours with no loss in pay. In the summer of 1919 the FIOM (the Socialist-aligned union federation, CGL, metalworkers' section) was involved in a struggle in Lombardy, Liguria and Emilia (three regions in the north of Italy) over the minimum wage and the cost of living index. They were demanding that this be increased in line with the constant increase in the price of basic goods.

In 1919 there were 1,660 industrial strikes (against 800 in 1913). Over one million industrial workers struck that year, three times the 1913 figure. The trend continued in 1920, which saw 1,881 industrial strikes. Peasant strikes also rocketed, from 97 in 1913 to 189 by 1920, with over a million taking action.

The high point of the movement was 1920, with a wave of factory occupations during which half a million workers joined the action in September. The factory council movement was championed by Antonio Gramsci through the paper *L'Ordine Nuovo*. As the wave of workers' militancy ebbed serious right-wing violence, directed at the workers, began in rural areas of the north. In November fascist terror forced the Socialist Party to move their conference from Florence.

Wheat and maize production had fallen. Industrial production had also fallen: by 15% in mining, by 40% in the engineering industry, by 20% in the chemical industry.

The exchange rate with the dollar went from 6.34 lira at the end of 1918, to 13.07 in 1919 and 28.57 at the end of 1920. This led to a huge increase in inflation. The serious economic crisis created widespread unemployment which eroded working-class confidence.

In January 1921 the left wing of the Socialists split and formed the Italian Communist party, led by Amadeo Bordiga and Gramsci. By the end of April 1921 the factory councils had been defeated in Turin — using troops and fascists to back an employers' lock-out.

FASCISM'S DRESS REHEARSAL

Lucy Hughes-Hallett begins *The Pike*, her biography of Gabriele d'Annunzio: "In September 1919, Gabriele d'Annunzio — poet, aviator, nationalist demagogue, war hero — assumed leadership of 186 mutineers from the Italian army... he led them in a march on the harbour city of Fiume in Croatia, part of the defunct Austro-Hungarian empire [and claimed by Italian nationalists for Italy]... by the time he reached Fiume his following was 2000 strong."

D'Annunzio had marched past Italian soldiers who had orders to stop him — killing him if necessary. But he held Fiume until December 1920, in the process undermining the authority of Italian democracy and creating a prefiguration of fascism. Although d'Annunzio hated Hitler and thought Mussolini was a windbag, both Hitler and the Italian fascists learnt a lot from him.

Hughes-Hallett comments, "Though d'Annunzio was not a fascist, fascism was d'Annunzian. The black shirts, the straight arm salute, the songs and war cries, the glorification



Gabriele d'Annunzio

Continued on page 10

“I was angry at something, I just didn’t know what”

How I became a socialist

By Beth Redmond



I refused to engage with what I thought was “politics”, but what I now know to be “Parliament” until I was about 18 years old. My parents had brought me up to know that Labour are good and Tories are bad, but, like a lot of the young people around me, I didn’t think that politics affected me.

The all-girl grammar school I went to didn’t encourage free thought. It was run by an authoritarian woman who idolised Margaret Thatcher and referred to all the students as her little girls, and even when I was at school it was clear she was trying to suppress individuality in order for her to churn out as many Oxbridge candidates as possible. But even then I didn’t see this as politics. It was just something we had to live with until we turned 18.

The first time I came face-to-face with mainstream politics was in the build up to the 2010 general election, when our school put on a mock vote. Somehow, and what seemed to be the trend across the UK at the time, a large proportion of us were convinced that the Lib Dems were the best thing in the world; in my case not because of their policies, but probably just because my parents didn’t like them.

I remember my best friends at the time being really into

communism, and me thinking I was too stupid to ever understand such big theories about the world.

I was taken to various Workers’ Liberty meetings. I found them really interesting, but could never quite understand everything in as much depth as I would have liked. I agreed with the general themes, and as when I first read *Capital* a couple of years later, everything seemed like common sense. I assumed that the majority of people thought that way, and still didn’t realise what it was to call myself left-wing.

I then got to that point where it was assumed I would go to university, and because of the nature of my secondary education I didn’t realise there was any other option. I didn’t study very hard for my A Levels and ended up going through UCAS clearing to a college in Essex.

I think it was here, in a bout of depression, that I started having “radical thoughts”. I didn’t understand what I was doing in Essex, I was angry at something, I just didn’t know at the time that it was the government and my school and capitalism in general. I started questioning things in a way I hadn’t before.

On my 19th birthday I had to have an abortion. I was told by my doctor in Essex that I would have to travel to London for it, that I wasn’t allowed to go by myself and that I had “been a bit silly” in getting to this point in the first place.

I was furious. I didn’t have any friends, I had no one to ask to go with me unless it meant them travelling from the other end of the country, and at the end of it all I wasn’t offered

any counselling or after-care, just a pile of painkillers and a patronising “don’t do this again” look.

The following summer I attended a Workers’ Liberty day-school in London. Much as with the other meetings I had been to, I felt I couldn’t follow what people were talking about as well as everyone else. Until I went to a meeting on sexism.

I can pinpoint the moment a lightbulb switched on in my head, and I realised that all the times I had been raped, sexually assaulted or harassed were not a fault of mine or something I had done, but part of a systemic culture which leads people to thinking it is perfectly fine to sexually abuse, and then for me to think it is somehow my fault.

I wanted to find out more, I wanted to tell everyone about socialist feminism, like it was me who had just come up with it! I wanted to tell everyone that they were allowed, and should be encouraged, to question the way everything is structured, like I hadn’t realised I could for the first 18 years of my life.

Since that day, I’ve committed a massive amount of my time to convincing others of socialism whilst simultaneously exploring literature and learning about other ideologies and theories of the world. I am still very angry, but it feels better to understand what I’m angry at alongside a group of people who are also trying to change the world.

Mussolini and Italian fascism

From page 9

of virility and youth and patria and blood sacrifice were all present in Fiume three years before Mussolini’s March on Rome.”

In the elections of 1921 Mussolini’s followers joined the National Bloc as a minority. Giolitti, the prime minister and leader of the Bloc, believed the fascists would, like fireworks, “make a lot of noise but... leave nothing behind except smoke.” The Bloc won 19% of the vote and of their 105 MPs, 35 were fascists, including Mussolini. The largest vote went to the Socialists (25%, 123 seats); the Communists took 4.6% and 15 seats.

Mussolini created the National Fascist Party (PNF) at the third fascist conference held in November 1921, incorporating various paramilitary groups under a single political command. The programme adopted included a ban on the right to strike, compulsory military service and the supremacy of the state over individual liberty. Mussolini also dropped his anti-church and anti-monarchy rhetoric, and had this warning for the workers: “One hears that the masses must be won over... we do wish to serve them, to educate them, but we also intend to flog them when they make mistakes.”

During 1922 the fascists were on the rampage throughout the north. In August the Socialist Party called a general strike demanding law and order. Mussolini’s response was to call on his squadristi to use terror to break the strike. In Genoa, Ancona and Leghorn Socialist Party offices were burnt down. The strike collapsed.

Triumphant, Mussolini addressed a fascist conference in Naples on 24 October 1922. He declared, “The problem has to be faced as a problem of force... That is why we have gathered and powerfully equipped and resolutely disciplined our legions.” As he sat down the crowd chanted, “To Rome!”

In Rome the prime minister, Luigi Facta, panicked and offered the fascists — still with less than 7% of the MPs in parliament — places in government. Mussolini rejected the offer saying he had no intention of coming to power “by the servants’ door.”

The fascists assembled — 6,000 at Civita Vecchia, 8,000 at Tivoli and 13,000 at Monterotondo. However heavy rain began to fall, railways had been sabotaged and those that were heading for Rome were only lightly armed.

On the 27th the fascists began occupying government offices, railway stations and telephone exchanges. Eventually the King, Victor Emmanuel, signed a notice for martial law and the army quickly began to retake occupied buildings and

blocked the railways and roads to Rome. Later, however, the King changed his mind. After a few hours Mussolini was invited to become prime minister.

A small minority in parliament had been offered power after attempting a military putsch, despite the state’s ability to easily defeat them (General Badoglio, the military commander, correctly told the King the fascists could be quickly dealt with).

The 61 years of government since unification had produced 86 ministers of justice, 88 ministers of education and 94 ministers of the navy. There had been several short-lived governments since the war. Italian bourgeois democracy was weak and since the end of the war the system had decayed further. There was open class war, an increase in lawlessness (robberies, murders) and various services were on the point of collapse (rail, post).

In fact sections of the capitalist class, landowners, the King and liberal politicians had come to the conclusion that the fascists were needed to bring order and stability and to crush the workers’ movement. No doubt many continued to believe they would rule in the background, controlling the fascists. Many liberals went directly over to the fascists.

However, Mussolini had other thoughts. He manipulated the law to rig future elections. The Acerbo law of November 1923 gave the largest party with more than 25% of the vote two-thirds of the seats in parliament. In April 1924 new elections gave Mussolini’s National Bloc 63% of the vote; Social Democratic parties won 11% and the Communists 4%. The elections had been compromised by vast fascist violence — including the murder of a Socialist candidate — and ballot rigging.

FASCISM IN POWER

This was the last election Mussolini intended to hold. He stated: “50 000 guns are better than the support of five million voters.”

However, speaking in parliament on 30 May the Socialist Party deputy Giacomo Matteotti accused the fascists of massive fraud and demanded the election be annulled; Matteotti had a large dossier of documents to back his case, as well as details of bribery and corruption implicating leading fascists. On 10 June Matteotti was grabbed on the street by a fascist gang, bundled into a car, killed and buried in a shallow grave. Matteotti’s murder created a major political crisis — the gang’s car was identified and those responsible linked directly to Mussolini. Mussolini stated, “If I get away with this we all survive, otherwise we all sink together.”

Many fascists left the party in panic. But the workers’ movement had been beaten down, and remained silent, and Mussolini rode the crisis out. Later, in 1925, terror against leading oppositionists was renewed. Censorship laws were brought in as Mussolini strengthened his dictatorship. In

1926, following an attempt at assassination, Mussolini passed a series of emergency laws that removed many of the remaining checks on fascist power. Antonio Gramsci was arrested and spent almost all the remaining years of his life in jail (he died aged 46 in 1937).

By 1928 the fascist party was the only legal party. Unions had been turned into organisations that policed the workers, with leaders imposed from above. Mussolini declared the class struggle was at an end and parliamentary elections were replaced by plebiscites on a single list of candidates.

The fascist dictatorship became a highly personalised affair. Mussolini often held six or seven ministerial posts in his own hands, and quickly demoted any individual who showed talent or competence or independence. For example, the fascist party secretary through most of the 1930s was the obsequious Achille Starace whose police file included accusations of involvement in drugs, prostitution, violence and rape. Starace was, however, narrow-minded, loyal and an efficient organiser. Under Starace the party and state machines became bloated, thoroughly corrupt, and inefficient.

Many of Mussolini’s personal idiosyncrasies — unmediated by others capable and willing to argue with him — went immediately into circulation. Historian Mack Smith describes his mania for uniforms — considered to convey discipline — and quotes a journalist as writing that Mussolini became so overdressed he “looked like a circus performer in off hours.” Handshakes were banned as unhygienic. Umbrellas were considered English (a nation in decline) and so Mussolini never used one.

Starace then invented a rule that stated anyone who entered Mussolini’s office had to run to his desk; after the interview had ended they had to run out at the double, saluting at the door as they left. Mussolini was followed around by an “applause squad” and his Cabinet ministers were expected to stand in his presence, sometimes for hours at a time. His birthplace and the tomb of his parents were made into shrines.

Mussolini became obsessed with proving the supremacy of all things Italian. Great scientists such as Faraday and Pasteur were shown to have merely developed discoveries made in Italy. Einstein was denounced as a Jewish fraud. And it was discovered that Shakespeare had been the pseudonym of an Italian poet.

Unsurprisingly Mussolini acquired a reputation — among sections of the British press, for example — as a pompous buffoon. Although his unrestricted narcissism and bullying pretentiousness were indeed ridiculous, Mussolini’s underlying weakness was the disparity between his aggressive, imperialist posturing and what relatively weak Italian capitalism was capable of. This was a problem Hitler did not have.

The weakness of fascist Italian power was finally — brutally — exposed in the Second World War.

NUT: build at the base!

By a delegate

The outcome of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) Easter conference makes it more important than ever for delegates to build a grass-roots movement capable of challenging the leadership and building local disputes that can increase members' confidence



Left candidate for NUT General Secretary Martin Powell-Davis signs petition for Shahrokh Zamani (see back page)

and capacity and speed serious national action.

As the press headlines say, the conference voted against definite plans for strike action in the autumn term. There will be yet another one day national strike in the summer term. But members cannot be blamed for asking whether this new one day protest is not more of the same tokenism.

We left conference with no more of a strategy than the union has had since early 2011, when it rejected Unison's explicit acceptance of a sell-out on public sector pensions, said it was continuing to fight on pensions, but made no definite plans.

We now have the prospect of yet another survey of members to gauge their willingness to strike. Members have repeatedly responded well to strike calls, even in the absence of clear demands or action strategy from the Executive, and yet we have another survey to ask if we really mean it.

The way to build a member led union is to use strike days to engage members in planning for the next one... and the ones after that!

Strike committees in local areas can form the basis of building union strength, debating future strategy and winning local disputes across the country. This would seriously re-energise the union, develop our lay structures and prepare us for future battles.

In conference a false dichotomy was set up between the political campaign and industrial action. A political campaign is good, but now it is being used to hide the lack of a serious industrial strategy.

Contrast the current RMT dispute on London Underground. The political element – “Hands Off London Transport” – has been tied into fast-moving industrial action campaign, swiftly reactivated when management failed to budge in negotiations.

• More: www.nutlan.org.uk

Ritzy workers strike again

By Clare Ross

Workers at The Ritzy Cinema, Brixton, struck for the second time on Friday 18 April and Saturday 19 April, part of an escalating campaign of action for the Living Wage.

The picket line, timed to coincide with the release of *The Amazing Spiderman 2*, was lively and well attended. The energetic picket activity included a kids' club, face painting, break dancing, music and Spiderman himself.

The BECTU strikers successfully closed the cinema for the second time, for the entire duration of the strike. Brixton, Lambeth, is in the midst of an acute, and worsening, housing crisis with house prices and rents sky-rocketing from already historic highs. In the last year alone, house prices have increased by 31.5%. It is in the context of these spiralling costs of living that the workers have been campaigning for a pay rise in line with the London Living Wage.

The Ritzy is one of the Picturehouse chain of art-house cinemas in the UK bought for £500 million by Cineworld in February this year.

The Ritzy is the most successful art-house cinema in the UK, with profits increasing by 140% in 2012 alone. It's easy to see why the workers feel the London Living Wage is affordable for their bosses.

The Bectu campaign for the Living Wage has successfully played on the Ritzy's brand image of corporate responsibility and justice (it sells only fair trade food, hosts the Human Rights Festival and gives

the impression of a small community picture house).

Given the vast profits the cinema makes and the risk to its valuable brand, The Ritzy is under considerable pressure to settle the dispute. Picturehouse and Cineworld nationally have a lot to lose by conceding to the demands of Bectu.

Ritzy Workers already earn more than those in other cinemas, due to a history of industrial organisation and struggle. A win for these workers sends a message to other cinema workers – joining a union, fighting alongside your workmates, taking a stand against your boss is worth it. In a relatively un-unionised industry, holding out and taking the profit hit is worth it for Cineworld bosses if they can make the strike unsustainable for badly paid, over-stretched workers.

The labour movement and socialists must show the same resolve the bosses are. Bectu have not paid strike pay up until this point. We must start collections to raise money to pay Ritzy Workers taking action. Petition: <http://chn.ge/1ibMCny>



HE pay offer: vote no!

By a UCU activist

Members of the University and College Union (UCU) in Higher Education are being balloted this week over the employers' offer of a 2% pay rise for 2014/15.

The offer comes as branches were preparing to start a marking boycott over the imposed 2013/14 rise of just 1%.

The marking boycott has now been delayed for a week – to Tuesday 6 May – while the ballot takes place. Workers' Liberty members active in UCU will be campaigning for a no vote.

The total offer on the table is now just 3% over two years, plus a little extra on the bottom point of the pay scale that will bring most directly-employed staff up to the Living Wage (though not the many contracted-out employees who're excluded from these negotiations). This is still below inflation, never mind any “catch-up” to compensate for the effective 13% pay cut since 2009. There is no guarantee that members who were docked a full day's pay for each of the three two-

hour strikes held earlier this year will be reimbursed, and there are no guarantees on the equality aspects of the pay claim (addressing the gender pay gap, for example).

The reality is, however, that after months of delay to the start of the marking boycott – originally proposed for January – many members are feeling demobilised. The long delay means that there is less and less marking left this year for the boycott to affect.

The employers' organisation UCEA has threatened immediate 100% pay docking for anyone participating in a boycott: effectively a lock-out. While solid local action might push them back, it will be understandable if many members think that 2% is at least an improvement on the 1% offered in the public sector, and vote to take it, not least because the ballot's been called in the Easter break and activists have little opportunity to put the case to members that action can win.

Nonetheless, we should try to have that argument where we can.

Care UK workers continue fight

By Stewart Ward

Around 80 out of 120 Care UK staff who work with vulnerable people with learning disabilities in Doncaster continue to refuse to sign new contracts.

The new terms would wipe out up to 50% of wages that comes from weekend and evening work, along with other benefits such as reducing sick pay from six months to one month, and not receiving anything for the first few days off.

There have been nearly three weeks of strikes since the dispute erupted in February at the private care company, with Unison members most recently striking over Easter weekend and planning a two-week strike in May.

In addition to the

strikes, workers are attempting to put pressure on Bridgepoint, Care UK's multi-million pound parent company, which also owns Pret A Manger, Fat Face, and Leeds Bradford Airport. This can help build solidarity between workers across the Bridgepoint empire, and raise the profile of the dispute. The public need to know about the profiteers behind privatised NHS contracts and the damage that is being done to workers and the knock-on threat to quality of care.

This erosion in service quality is allegedly already rife. Reports of Care UK's actions during the strike are very concerning, including under-qualified staff and managers ignoring guidance around patient care (for instance around important medication and dietary issues).

Already, more qualified staff are leaving Care UK for better paid jobs, which will likely lead to further depletion in patient safety and high quality care.

Poorly-paid and untrained workers are less equipped to deal with these incredibly demanding jobs, risking future cases of physical abuse such as those seen in the Winterbourne care home in Gloucestershire in 2011.

• Striking workers at Care UK need financial and moral support. Send donations payable to Doncaster, District and Bassetlaw Health Branch 20511, via the Unison Office, Jenkinson House, White Rose Way, Doncaster DN4 5GJ along with messages of support to admin@unison-dab.org.uk

Heathrow Express strike

By Darren Bedford

Workers on the Heathrow Express service, which runs between London Paddington and Heathrow Airport, have voted to strike, as they attempt to



stop a cuts plan that places 201 jobs at risk.

Workers voted by a nine to one majority to strike, and by an even greater one to take industrial action short of strikes.

Strikes will take place on 29 and 30 April, coinciding with London Underground workers' strikes.

John Leach for RMT General Secretary

Workers' Liberty members in RMT are backing John Leach for General Secretary of the union. For more information on John's campaign, see facebook.com/johnforgs



Free Shahrokh Zamani!

Solidarity with workers in Iran!

By Holly Rigby Lewenstein

Jailed Iranian trade unionist Shahrokh Zamani has now been on hunger strike for over a month.

His hunger strike began in solidarity with another prisoner, Gonabadi Dervishes, but was extended after he was transferred to Ghezel Hesar prison, known for terrible conditions, torture and executions. His transfer was unexplained and he was placed in solitary confinement.

We now know his condition has deteriorated further and he has been transferred to the infirmary of Rejai Shahr prison in Karaj on 20 April. According to reports he is very weak and is suffering from some vision loss due to the hunger strike.

It is an outrage that Zamani is being subject by the Iranian state for being a member of and organising the independent Iranian Painters and Decorators Union.

Zamani has now been in prison since 2011 after being sentenced to 11 years for the crime of "spreading propaganda against the regime and forming socialist groups" and "endangering national security". While in prison his human rights have been breached. He has faced much physical and psychological abuse and been denied access to visitors and medication.

Shahrokh Zamani is a class-war prisoner who has been imprisoned for fighting for basic rights to be protected in the workplace. We cannot let the Iranian state continue to abuse him and we must fight hard for his release.

You can help contribute to his release by signing and publicising an online petition on Change.org entitled "Free Shahrokh Zamani".

• There is also a petition you can print out on the campaign website. <http://freeshahrokh.wordpress.com/>



Chinese workers strike over unpaid benefits

By Gerry Bates

Up to 40,000 workers on strike in Dongguan, southern China, in a dispute over unpaid social insurance benefit. The strike began on 14 April and has steadily increased in size since.

The workers, who are employed by Yue Yuen Industrial Holdings, make

trainers for companies like Nike, Adidas, New Balance, and Puma, at a huge factory in the central Guangdong province. Yue Yuen Industrial had sales of more than \$7.58 billion in 2013. The strike is one of the biggest in China's history.

One striker, who spoke to the *New York Times*, said she takes in about 1,300 renminbi, or \$210, a month,

and has paid 100 renminbi a month for social insurance, an amount she had believed the company was matching. "They haven't been paying for us. They're ripping us off," the worker said.

Riot police with dogs have been mobilised against picket lines and strikers' demonstrations. On 21 April, bosses offered to increase wages by \$37 per

month in a bid to end the strike.

China Labor Bulletin, a Hong Kong-based NGO which raises awareness of Chinese workers' struggles says there were 202 labour disputes in the country in the first quarter of 2014, mostly in manufacturing, a year-on-year increase of more than 30%.

Tube workers set for more strikes

By Ira Berkovic

London Underground workers in the RMT union plan five days of strikes to stop the company slashing frontline jobs and closing ticket offices.

Strikes are due to begin at 9pm on Monday 28 April, and conclude on the evening of Wednesday 30 April, with a second strike commencing at 9pm on Monday 5 May and running until Thursday 8 May. Tube workers struck against management's cuts plan in February, forcing a pause in the implementation of the scheme, but extended negotiations have seen management intransigent and revealed the full extent of the cuts.

LU's "Fit for the Future — Stations" scheme proposes to "modernise" the running of London's 270 tube station by reducing frontline staffing levels by nearly 2,000 posts, while increasing the number of managerial roles by nearly 400%. The plan would also see the closure of every single ticket office on the entire network, and its proposals for restructuring the staffing and grading model for station staff could see some workers facing a £12,000 pay cut. Management have also asserted in talks that, while pay cuts for frontline staff are absolutely necessary and inevitable, current senior management salaries, already as high as £670,000 in one instance, are too low!

This first wave of cuts presages longer-term cuts plans, as LU bosses attempt to make frontline staff pay for the effects of a 12.5% cut to Transport for London's funding from central government. LU has already announced plans to commission driverless trains, suggesting that more job cuts are yet to come. The creation of a new grade of frontline station staff, on less money than the existing "Customer Service Assistant" grade, also creates a two-tier workforce on stations and opens the door to more pay cuts and downgrading in the future.

The TSSA, another rail union with a smaller membership on the Tube than RMT, also participated in the February strike. It has so far not committed to the next strikes, with its officials focusing on protecting the terms and conditions of remaining staff rather than resisting the job cuts.

The rank-and-file bulletin *Tubeworker*, published by Workers' Liberty, will argue for the RMT to announce an escalating programme of strikes and other industrial action, supporting the hardest-hit members through the use of hardship funds and strike pay, and developing a public, political campaign of direct action to highlight the impact of LU's cuts on London's working-class communities. The Hands off London Transport campaign has already brought together unions, disability rights campaigners, pensioners' groups, student unions, and others to plan protests, meetings, and other actions.



This campaign has a vital role to play in raising public awareness of the dispute and the issues behind it, and building solidarity.

• For daily updates on the strikes, and information on how you can support them, see workersliberty.org/twblog and handsofflondontransport.wordpress.com