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workers'  
government

# Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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## Help the Kurds defeat ISIS!

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Join the global rally for Kobane on 1 November

## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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



### We stand for:

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

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# Labour's plans are too weak to cut inequality

By Colin Foster

**Former Labour minister Alan Milburn is not left-wing. When Labour lost office in 2010, he did not start campaigning against the Tory and Lib-Dem government.**

He took a job from that government, running its "Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission" with a Tory, Gillian Shepherd, as vice-chair.

Probably he is speaking out now, in the second report of that commission, published on 20 October, because he thinks his term is coming to an end anyway.

But by stating a few facts, and drawing obvious conclusions, he ends up criticising the current Labour leadership from the left.

"2010-2020", his commission reports, "is set to be the first decade with a rise in absolute poverty since records began in the early

1960s".

The official target for reducing child poverty by 2020, set by the Blair government, supposed to be legally binding, and not officially rejected even by the Tories, is nowhere near being met. One child in five lives in poverty, and it is getting worse.

"Social mobility" is different from equality: it measures the chances of people moving from the "bottom" to nearer the "top" of an unequal society. On the whole, it is decreasing.

Young people from better-off backgrounds are six times more likely to go to university than the worse-off.

University courses today are more often "calling cards" for access to better-paid jobs (usually not or scarcely using the knowledge gained in the degree) than means of access to knowledge. The report finds that "top employers recruit

from an average of only 20 out of 115 universities"; in other words, even if young people from worse-off backgrounds get to university, most likely they get to universities whose degrees are poorer "calling cards" than the better-offs'.

And "non-graduate routes are limited". Apprenticeships are few, and mostly offer no routes to get to much better jobs.

Milburn notes that £33 billion of cuts are coming just from the flow-through of government decisions already made, and that the Tories' plan to make further cuts in the real value of working-age benefits will make things worse.

But, he says, Labour's promise to increase the minimum wage is far too minimal (despite the outcry from the bosses who denounce it as over-generous).



Alan Milburn

He proposes that it should be official policy to make Britain a "Living Wage country".

The commission proposes a series of other measures: more early-years provision, higher pay for teachers, more apprenticeships, longer-term private tenancies, pressure on top universities to admit more students from worse-off background, a ban on unpaid internships.

**Labour and trade union activists should ask why Labour's official policy remains even weaker than these modest proposals from a Blairite and a Tory.**

## Cameron plays to UKIP on immigration

By Rosalind Robson

**David Cameron chose a visit to Ford Dagenham to announce his intention to review several different policies aimed at curbing migration to the UK from inside the EU.**

Cameron is under pressure on the issue from UKIP's electoral successes and from some in his own party. But all likely curbs will fall foul of EU rules (one is to cap the number of national insurance numbers issued to EU immigrants with low skills). They will also put him in an open confrontation with Europe's political leaders.

Other EU countries are much less inclined to restrict freedom of movement for labour in the EU. European capitalists (UK ones included!) want a plentiful and free flowing supply of the right kind of labour. Freedom of movement is therefore one of the cornerstones of EU capitalist economic policy and it is written into the EU's Treaty.

Cameron's announcement, together with even

firmer promises on an in-out referendum, staves off some Eurosceptic pressure but also a real possibility that the UK might quit the EU altogether. Quitting may not be Cameron's intention (he wants some sort of loophole or concession) but it is the policy that his party may fall into.

Britain is isolated in Europe on the issue of restricting freedom of movement, but other countries are far from immigrant friendly. Many take advantage of the EU law which allows them to crack down on unemployed migrants and those claiming benefits.

The French government has said it wants to crack down on "abuses" of benefits.

**Last year the Belgium government sent out 2,700 letters of unemployed migrants saying they were an "unreasonable burden" on the Belgian welfare state and had no right to remain. And Germany is about to limit to six months the right of residence for unemployed migrants.**



## Workers need a fightback

By Dan Rawnsley

**On 18 October, around 100,000 people joined the TUC "Britain Needs a Pay Rise" march through central London.**

Pay has stagnated for workers over the past seven years, making this the longest period of falling real wages since records began. In this context, with the rich seeing their incomes ballooning at the expense of the working class, the slogan "Britain Needs a Pay Rise" has the potential to mobilise workers already in unions and connect with those outside of the organised labour movement.

A lot of this potential was wound down in the imme-

diated run-up to the march. The leaderships of Unison, Unite and the GMB cancelled strike action on pay by local government and school workers to ballot members over a poor pay deal.

Prior to this the NUT leadership opted to consult members, rather than join in with a week of industrial action leading up to the demonstration.

In this context of de-escalation, it is impressive that 100,000 people came out to march against austerity and for a pay increase.

**This demonstrates that a constituency exists in the labour movement that is prepared to organise and act on low pay.**

# Germany: train drivers strike for pay rise

By Gemma Short

**Train drivers for German national rail operator Deutsche Bahn struck for 50 hours from Saturday 18 October.**

The strike is the fifth in recent weeks. The union is demanding a five percent wage hike and a shorter working week of 37 hours.

Deutsche Bahn has accused the union, GDL, of "running amok" as the 50 hour strike tactically hits a holiday weekend in Germany. The dispute is the largest within the train network since 2008 and is one of the largest disputes the country has seen in recent years.

The strike comes as the German grand coalition government is working on legislation to stop workers like train drivers using their

industrial muscle. By enforcing "unified bargaining", it would limit union rights to the major union in each sector, barring action by smaller unions representing subgroups like train drivers, pilots, and engineers.

Recently pilots within the Lufthansa group of airlines have struck, with more planned, in a dispute over

retirement benefits.

The train drivers union, GDL, wants to represent other groups of employees within Deutsche Bahn such as conductors, catering staff and dispatchers.

**The German government seems determined to push through anti-union legislation that will limit the industrial power of unions in key industries.**



Train drivers from union GDL picket a train station

# Rome march just the start

By Hugh Edwards

**"In these last years the world of work has been shattered. The degree of electoral abstention has further increased.**

"Conditions have worsened for everyone. To build a shared outlook among workers is more difficult. But in our union and in CGIL a growing consensus is emerging that makes me think that the 25th [date of Rome national demonstration] will be the beginning of a real struggle.

"To go on to the streets is no longer enough. We need to pose the difficult question of how to stop a government... We need to go further. The debate in parliament is over — it is no longer the place where opposition to Renzi can change anything."

So speaks Maurizio Landini, general secretary of the metalworkers union FIOM, a week ahead of the national demonstration organised by Italy's largest union centre CGIL, in protest against the reforms to labour laws that have been fundamental to the protection of conditions and job security since massive battles in the late 60s and early 70s.

The success of the coalition government has further emboldened Renzi to redefine for the worse living conditions for Italy's workers in order to reinvigorate the historically moribund Italian capitalism. No wonder the chief of the country's main industrial organisation acclaimed Renzi's success and generosity in cutting taxes as "beyond our wildest dreams".

It is such remarks that throw into relief the ostensibly militant remarks of Landini. While he laments both the state of the workers' movement, the widespread suffering, despair and confusion, and the no longer effective one-day strikes and demos, he sidesteps many questions and issues. Why only now, after three successive governments dedicated to outdoing one another in inflicting devastation on workers, is there this minimal display of trade union response, and that from only a part of the union movement?

The union leaders know well they stand exposed as directly responsible for the deepening debacle. They desperately want to believe the protest will repeat the three million brought onto the streets in 2002 by the

former CGIL leader, Sergio Cofferati. That action thwarted the Berlusconi government from doing what Renzi has so far achieved without any demonstrations, never mind a strike — something which for these leaders is still taboo!

What is certain is that it will take more than a march to stop the little Bonapartist Renzi, flush with success and accolades from Europe, America and elsewhere.

Any show of resistance however cynically ritualistic for those who have initiated it, will see workers in large numbers on the march. But the bureaucrats must not be allowed to claim any credit. They should be drowned in a tsunami of protests, ridicule and demands for their dismissal.

The demand for an all-out general strike must be the battle cry from the ranks in Rome.

**The fight to maintain the dynamic of resistance is the best and only way to rid the working class movement of its betrayers, rebuild a mass democratic movement that will be the bedrock of the fight not just for reform but for socialist revolution in Italy and elsewhere.**

# Solidarity with the Kurds!

**SHEFFIELD**  
**Around 300 Kurds from across Kurdish territory in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria demonstrated outside City Hall 12 October.**

The rally was lively and, whilst there were few speeches, protestors engaged passers-by with leaflets and with clear demands on Turkey to allow fighters, aid and weapons in to Kobane through a corridor across the Syrian border.

This rally followed a demonstration the week before in which 3 Kurdish protestors were arrested by South Yorkshire Police under the Terrorism Act, for vocal support of the PKK, before being released.

**Feminist and leftist Kurdish activists will be speaking at Sheffield AWL branch public meeting "Solidarity with the Kurds - how do we defeat ISIS?" on Thursday 30 October, 6:30, United Reform Church, Norfolk Street.**

**MANCHESTER**  
**On October 17 there was mid-sized demo through the city.**

After some Kurds took part in a "say no to anti-semitism" rally on 19 Octo-

ber which was largely populated by Israeli flags.

There were — perhaps not oddly — Israeli flags on the Kurdish demo with some of the local Zionists making capital out of the "left" ignoring the plight of Kobane and equivocating over intervention and the character of ISIS.

Going forward there's a facebook group — fb.com/FriendsofRojava-Manchester, set up by young lefties to show solidarity.

**Again, like in London the communication between the Kurdish community is very good, but the rest of us find out second-hand.**

**LONDON**  
**On Thursday 16 October, Youth for Kobane held a demonstration outside the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).**

Youth for Kobane brings together various Turkish and Kurdish youth and community groups in London, in solidarity with the Kurds resisting ISIS in the Syrian town of Kobane.

In their flier, the group expressed its anger with Turkey which at the time had been preventing Kurdish fighters from crossing

the border, and expressed no confidence in the "coalition" put together by the United States who are intervening for their own strategic reasons. It also called for the recognition of "the autonomous cantons in Rojava Kurdistan (Northern Syria)."

At the same time, as one speaker said, if the US was hitting ISIS with airstrikes, they would not agitate against that.

A speaker on behalf of Workers' Liberty said that much of the left was focusing purely on agitating against intervention, and stressed instead the need for positive demands and solidarity with the Kurds.

**While we do not give support to the US or Turkey intervening, the most important thing is to demand Turkey allow aid and fighters into Kobane to take on ISIS, and open the humanitarian corridor for refugees.**



Kurdish solidarity in Manchester

# Hong Kong: social workers protest police violence

By Andrew Casey

**Hundred of members and supporters of the Hong Kong General Social Workers Union marched onto the Hong Kong police HQ on 15 October.**

They were there to protest the treatment of Ken Tsang a prominent HKGSWU member, a political activist, who works with street kids and was bashed by police during democracy protests earlier in the day.

Lee Cheuk-yan, the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions leader, told local media: "Hong Kong police have gone insane today, carrying out their own punishment in private. Hong Kong's values and its rule of law really have been completely destroyed by police chiefs."

A local TV station has

played, and replayed, footage of the police violence showing how they dragged Tsang into a darkened passage and then repeatedly hit and kicked him.

Photos of Tsang, released after he left hospital, re-ignited the Hong Kong democracy protests.

While the video footage has gone viral media workers at the TV station are protesting that the original footage was edited.

Seven media unions in Hong Kong have thrown their weight behind the TV stations' journalists.

The Hong Kong General Social Workers Union — an affiliate of the independent Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions has been one of the more active unions taking part in the protests.

At the end of September the social workers union re-

sponded to a strike call by the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU), backing the street protests after earlier police violence, with a mass meeting of 2000 members voting to support the campaign for universal suffrage.

HKGSWU members occupied the streets outside of the Police HQ for hours — filing into the police station in small groups, one after each other, to make written protests about the treatment of their comrade.

**While the HKCTU backs the protestors the other Hong Kong union centre, the pro-Beijing Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions, is seemingly now organising its unions to attack the democracy movement.**

• www.hkctu.org.hk

# Students and solidarity with Kurds

Left  
By Beth Redmond



**The National Union of Students, compared to recent years, has a stronger base of “left-wing” activists and full time officers on its National Executive Committee. This makes it hard to see why they recently voted down a motion to make solidarity with the Kurdish people.**

That motion was written by activists in the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty (including NEC member Daniel Cooper) and by Roza Salih, a member of the Scottish executive committee of NUS. A similar motion had been passed by NUS Scotland before the NEC meeting. Roza is a left-wing Iraqi-Kurdish woman, who has been campaigning to make solidarity with Kurdish people.

A similar text was proposed at the first NEC meeting of the academic year but was not discussed due to time constraints. It was proposed a second time on 16 September by Daniel Cooper and seconded by Shreya Paudel, the international students’ officer, and Clifford Fleming.

Versions of motions had been circulated to all NEC members twice with no amendments proposed by anyone.

If no one was aware of the motion on 16 September, if they didn’t read their emails or bother to think about the issues in advance, they still had the option on the day of “deleting all and replacing with” something simpler or more to their liking to make solidarity with Kurdish people. But that didn’t happen.

No wonder Kurdish students are angry at the people who spoke and voted against the motion; from their point of view the urgency and perilousness of the situation is being sidelined in favour of what can only be described as petty factional point-scoring.

There is an idea that the AWL submitted this motion to “spread our agenda”. Yes! We do indeed want to spread our

“agenda” of solidarity with the Kurdish struggle, just as we want to spread our wider agenda of liberation, democracy and socialism.

The NUS Black Students Officer (BSO), Malia Bouattia, claimed that the motion was Islamophobic, racist and pro-US intervention (despite containing the following line: “To condemn the IS and support the Kurdish forces fighting against it, while expressing no confidence or trust in the US military intervention”...). No time was given to clarify where those accusations came from or what they meant.

This was the line which people found racist: “Encourage students to boycott anyone found to be funding the IS or supplying them with goods, training, travel or soldiers.” It has been argued that it is encouraging the government to further spy on Islamic Societies and Muslim students, to further marginalise a group of people who are already scapegoated by the government and the media. But it doesn’t call on the government or college authorities to do anything of the sort! For the record the AWL categorically opposes government “Prevent” policies. This was a call on students.

But fair enough, if people disagreed with the wording of that part of the motion, it could easily have been deleted or amended.

## REPORT

**Subsequently Daniel Cooper posted a report of the NEC meeting on the NCAFC website as is a routine thing for him to do. At the time the report was met with little or no response.**

The right-wing media got hold of it and used it as an opportunity to whip up a media storm. They accused Bouattia of supporting ISIS. I, the AWL and NCAFC strongly condemn this. Not one of us has spoken or will speak to any right-wing media outlet about this.

The NCAFC subsequently published a response to Cooper’s article by Bouattia, which lacked political substance and didn’t explain any of the points made by Cooper. It said

that a new motion would be submitted to the next NUS NEC, which would support the Kurds but not “pander to Western imperialistic intervention”. That’s fine and good — if true — apart from the six week delay!

The fact that the media used quotes from Cooper’s report in their articles was enough for some people to blame him, and by association, both the AWL and NCAFC. If people are so insistent on looking at this set of events as a chain reaction then why stop there? By that logic anyone who spoke and voted on the motion on either side of the debate should also be blamed.

Cooper has been accused of not pointing out in his report that Bouattia condemns ISIS. But it is blindingly obvious that the NUS BSO is not an ISIS supporter; in so far as there was any coherent argument at the NEC it was over issues about Western intervention! How was Cooper to know that anything he didn’t say would be used so maliciously by the capitalist press?

In hindsight, for the sake of comprehensiveness this point could have been included. But it would not have stopped the sensationalist headlines of “NUS BSO won’t condemn ISIS because it is Islamophobic”. The right-wing media will use what they want to suit their own agenda. In this case presenting “lefties” as holding wildly incoherent and reactionary positions. Being honest about one’s own actions is one thing, to self-censor because of how the media or internet trolls might twist our meaning is another. That is a recipe for political paralysis.

The leap people have made between Cooper making criticisms of the NUS and accusing Cooper and others of orchestrating a witch-hunt of Bouattia is too big to make any kind of sense.

**A bad political decision was made by people on NUS NEC. We should have a debate about why that happened and more to the point, take action to put right NUS’s lack of solidarity with the Kurds.**

# Not everything is the fault of evil capitalists

Letters



**Paul Valley (Ebola’s victims: “only Africans”?, 8 Oct) runs the risk of weakening a case by overstatement.**

When Ebola virus broke out this year, no one had any reason to expect it would take such a hold. The average death toll had been 67 a year since its identification in 1976. The current official total of 4500 is already three times that of all previous recorded deaths in the last 37 years. Who could have predicted that? Who would have been brave enough after the fuss about bird ‘flu where millions of doses of vaccine were stockpiled unnecessarily? Niels Bohr’s quote about prediction is particularly apt.



Experimental treatment ZMapp was given to African doctors

Indeed, it might be argued that the international response is actually much better than ever before. Only because of the runaway growth of the epidemic is it seen in hindsight to be inadequate. The World Health Organisation has actually admitted that its response to the epidemic was too slow and foreign governments could justifiably say they were waiting for a lead from WHO. Now, however, it is right to call for the most urgent action to deal with not only the medical emergency but the disruption of food production and distribution. Governments in Equatorial Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia can plead lack of resources, but they are also plagued by corruption. The Liberian government also managed to provoke a strike of health workers, some 100 of whom have died of Ebola from treating patients.

It is also interesting to observe that in Democratic Republic of Congo the outbreak has been successfully contained, with only about 70 cases. The outbreak there was due to an unrelated strain of Ebola but the different course of the infection seems to depend on two special conditions: in DRC, Ebola tends to occur in remote villages, whereas in the three worst-hit countries it has taken hold in more accessible areas; and crucially, while Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia have never had Ebola before, DRC has had six outbreaks since 1976 and its response time is shorter and the measures taken more effective.

The most unfair aspect of Dr Valley’s article concerns use of the experimental treatment ZMapp. First, he criticises the use of an untested drug; then he accuses someone (medical authorities? Mapp Pharmaceuticals?) of racism for not giving this possibly ineffective and potentially harmful treatment to an African doctor, rather than just white (?) Westerners. These Westerners were in any case also risking their lives to help Ebola victims for humanitarian reasons. However, as a top South African AIDS researcher said, [if ZMapp had been given first to Africans] “It would have been the front-page screaming headline: ‘Africans used as guinea pigs for American drug company’s medicine.’”

In fact, there were only a few doses of ZMapp and African doctors were among the recipients: supplies ran out in August. Some recipients of ZMapp died but most survived. Is this because ZMapp works or because the other care given was effective or because of luck? No one knows.

It is also odd to criticise the use of quarantine to prevent the spread of Ebola. It is in everyone’s interests if people likely to have Ebola infections are prevented from travelling but treated promptly. Even when no cure is available, the best way to avoid spread is to limit travel.

Failing this, people who are unwell and have come from areas where Ebola is rife need to be treated as potential victims and given all appropriate treatment to try and save them. This did not happen with the Liberian Thomas Duncan. Duncan was not ill when he flew to Dallas but went to a local hospital when he developed symptoms. Through phenomenal incompetence and complacency, Duncan was not identified as a potential Ebola case even though he said where he had come from. Diagnosed as simply having a virus infection and lacking health insurance, Duncan was sent home with (ineffective) antibiotics (appalling bad but inexpensive practice) to potentially infect family and friends.

He was admitted to hospital when he was seriously ill. The medical authorities still didn’t get it and allowed at least two nurses to be infected by not providing proper protective clothing, and then agreed for one of them to be allowed to fly when already showing symptoms. Duncan died when he might have survived and, if there are not several more deaths in Texas, it won’t be thanks to the Presbyterian Hospital, Dallas.

**Many things are the fault of evil capitalists, but not everything.**

*Les Hearn, north London*

• See What is Ebola virus; where does it come from? (*Solidarity* 339, 8 Oct)

# Help the Kurds defeat ISIS

**Fighting has continued across Syria and Iraq between ISIS ("Islamic State") forces and Kurdish militia and Iraqi military. Airstrikes around the town Kobane (in Syria near the Turkish border) of by the US-led military coalition have intensified, and the march of ISIS has been slowed.**

However the airstrikes have not forced back ISIS in either Iraq or Syria. The prospect of a drawn-out conflict remains. Four hundred ISIS fighters are reported to have entered the Iraqi towns of Fallujah and nearby Karma. The town of Hit, 80 miles from Baghdad, has also been claimed by ISIS. While ISIS has been driven away temporarily from several towns and strategic infrastructure, it has also managed to take and retake territory. The chronic inability of the Iraqi army to maintain discipline and troops on the ground following bouts of fighting is a big factor here.

According to diplomatic sources, 12,000 Iraqi troops have deserted since June and a further 6,000 have been killed. The Iraqi state claims their army is 60,000 strong but almost two-thirds are said to be "ghost soldiers", people who have their salaries paid direct to their commanding officers but do not fight. One anonymous Iraqi general told Reuters, "Our forces are starting to buckle in the face of repeated assaults by the Islamic State."

Fighting has been particularly fierce in Anbar province where the US, with the support of Sunni militias, forced out Al-Qaeda in 2007. The centre of hostilities there has been the strategic roads through Ramadi and the other western areas that link the cities with the desert where ISIS is strongest.

An estimated 30,000 ISIS fighters are spread over Iraq and Syria, with a ready flow of foreign fighters and supporters who are able to join them with vast military experience from previous conflict. With the weakness of Iraq's military and reluctance of the Sunni minority to fully commit to destroying the ISIS, the fear is that Baghdad could not survive a prolonged attack without outside assistance.

US airdrops to Syrian Kurds fighting under the organisation of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) have provided some heavier weapons. That will help the People's Protection Units (YPG) to continue their fight to defend Kobane and the now largely autonomous Kurdish region. The air drops put the US at odds with the Turkish government, which has consistently opposed the demands of the Kurds in Syria including help with getting arms.

## KOBANE

**Turkey's refusal to directly aid the Kurds in Kobane stems from a long-running hostility; they see them all as members and supporters of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) which has have fought a guerilla war with Turkey for over 30 years.**

There is evidence of growing support for ISIS fighters in Turkey, and even that activities of small cells of ISIS supporters and the stockpiling of weapons has been tolerated.

The PYD enjoys the patronage of the PKK and the support of its fighters. Its aim is to self-govern the three cantons which include Kobane and make up the area known as Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan).

The attempted kidnap of Syrian rebel Abu Issa by ISIS as he was being driven through Turkey has further fuelled speculation that the Ankara Government has done little to quash the influence of ISIS and even sees them as a potential "solution" to the problem of the PKK.

Turkey has continued to suppress Kurdish demonstrations that call for aid. Its troops remain at the border with Syria preventing weapons and fighters from Turkey getting into Kobane.

However a deal has now been brokered between Turkey and the Kurdish regional government (KRG) in Iraq so that a unit of Peshmerga fighters (the official KRG military) can go to Kobane with weapons and bolster defence of the area. Whilst Turkey is happy to maintain a standoff with Syria's Kurds, it has strong economic ties with the KRG. Additionally, Turkey wants to bolster KRG forces in opposition to PKK-inspired forces.

In 2013 a deal was reached between the KRG and Turkey to complete a pipeline that would link oil fields under the KRG into the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline, Iraq's largest



**A brother mourns at the grave of a YPG fighter killed in Kobane.**

pipeline for the export of crude oil. This deal helped to cement a close relationship between Turkey and the KRG.

The KRG's far closer relationship to Turkey has increased animosity between the KRG and PYD forces in Syria. The friction between Kurdish groups has been a block on the necessary support needed to successfully defend Kobane.

Going back to before the 1991 Gulf War, the PKK has had an uneasy relationship with other Kurdish forces, particularly in Iraq. Nonetheless in the late 1980s and early 1990s it was able to operate across the borders of the states, maintain training camps, and become a major player in drug trafficking. In the aftermath of the war the heroin trade was increasingly run through Iraq.

An increase in its income and allies allowed the PKK to renew attacks against Turkey without having to base its forces there. It was able to protect itself from destruction through arrest or fighting.

In 1997 warring Kurdish factions in Iraq fought for control of the KRG. The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) fought the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The PKK backed both sides at one point or another.

## PROTECT

**Turkey intervened, ostensibly to bring about a ceasefire, but also to protect its economic ties and create a relatively stable Kurdish administration.**

One of the conditions of its brokering of a ceasefire was for both factions to cut their ties with the PKK. This led the PKK to relocate their base to Syria. Turkey renewed its operations to destroy the PKK. PKK eventually disavowed by the Syrian government. Its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was deported and eventually arrested in Turkey.

A new deal has now been reached which potentially carves out new Kurdish autonomy. The Syrian PYD and the parties that retain close ties to the KRG could govern a 30 member council with equal representation. Both the KDP and PUK will seek agreement with the PYD over the ongoing defence of Rojava and resolve the governance of Kurdish majority areas. Negotiations concluded that the PYD and KRG would take 12 seats each on the council, with the remainder open to small organisations and representatives of minorities within the cantons.

The Iraqi Kurdish website Rudaw reports the KDP as saying, "This agreement brings us together, and itself is a significant answer to enemies who did not intend the Kurds to be

united." Salih Muslim, the leader of the PYD, has declared that "All Kurdish people are under attack, so they should be united."

However the PYD say they are in favour of political representation and freedom for all parties and groups, but the military command in Syria must be led by them and other groups who wish to join the fighting must do so under their direction. The PYD has asked that no further troops are sent to Kobane without their approval. In part this is to prevent the influx of unarmed and untrained Kurds into the area, but it is also to maintain their control of the region and prevent an armed take over by one of the Iraqi based parties who they distrust because of the close relationship with Turkey.

The PYD's governance of Rojava is meant to represent a practical attempt to govern the area with a change of style from the nationalism and Kurdish separatism of the PKK. Formerly the PKK no longer considers itself a nationalist organisation. It says it is part of the "Kurdish freedom movement". Although it remains committed to armed struggle in defence of Kurds says it will no longer attempt to dictate the way it or groups like the PYD will liberate the Kurds.

The Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK) is the umbrella organisation that brings together the PKK and all its international affiliates, political parties and campaigning organisations. The change of line followed the imprisonment of Öcalan. He has now written 40 books and begun to develop an ideas on governance which he calls "Democratic Confederalism".

Under the extreme pressure of war, Kurdish groups are realigning and discussing new possibilities for Kurdish territorial and political autonomy. Past attempts have been stopped, often with brutal repression.

But there are of course much more immediate dangers for the Kurds and other peoples in the region from ISIS.

**The duty of socialists is to express clear solidarity with the Kurdish forces fighting in Kobane, demand that countries in the region continue to allow arms and fighters across the borders to reach Kobane, and highlight and oppose the Turkish government's repression of its own Kurdish citizens and Kurdish refugees from Syria.**

**Solidarity 342 will be out on 5 November**

# Arm the people to defeat Daesh!

**Muayad Ahmed is the secretary of the central committee of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq. He is currently in Britain after spending time recently in Sulaimaniya (in Iraqi Kurdistan) and in Baghdad. He spoke to Martin Thomas about conditions in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan.**

**MA:** People's daily life has changed dramatically. People are worried, always expecting the worst — carnage, slaughter by Daesh [the "Islamic State" movement or ISIS], and so on.

A very bad atmosphere exists in Kurdistan. And every day in Baghdad, people see the effects of Daesh, their killings, car bombs and so on.

When Daesh seized the city of Mosul, confidence in the government, the army, and the police collapsed. After those terrible things happened in Mosul, many people in Baghdad believed there was no-one to defend them. They feared an advance by Daesh on Baghdad, and there are always lots of people in the media whipping up fear.

Everyday life, especially for women, the unemployed, the poor and the oppressed, has become more dramatic, more tense, more difficult after the collapse in Mosul.

People did not previously believe that Daesh was a real threat especially to Kurdistan. They saw them as crazy people, doing wild things, who would find no support. They never thought them capable of occupying cities and taking over a third of Iraq.

Many people have escaped from the areas taken by Daesh. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced.

Some young people in Mosul are struggling against Daesh, fighting them individually, in their own way. We knew that from left activists who have been in touch with those people.

People from areas under Daesh control close to the city of Kirkuk have described the brutality of Daesh to me. Daesh killed a lot of people, many more than we heard about in the

media, when they took over places. They killed people who had been armed by the government, unemployed people who took up arms in pay of the government.

In those areas, many young people whose relatives have been killed by Daesh are furious and wait for the right time to attack Daesh and get rid of them, but they can't do much while Daesh is advancing.

**MT: What kind of resistance in Mosul?**

**MA:** We have heard that some people have tried to plant bombs in Daesh places to kill militants and defend themselves.

People were resisting the Maliki government. They weren't expecting Daesh. And then suddenly they find themselves under occupation by a much more aggressive force. It took them by surprise.

It is not only the minorities — the "Christians", "Yazidis" and the "Shi'a", described as such by the media, who have run away. Many members of the local "Sunni" Arab majority have also fled.

Yet women try to resist, too, in a low-level way.

**MT: Is this resistance limited by the attitude of both the KRG forces and of the Shi'a militias? I am thinking about the reconquest of Amerli from Daesh, where KRG and Shi'a militias were reported as having met at a nearby village where all the local Sunni Arab people had fled, and agreeing between them that they will not allow those Sunni Arabs to return to their village.**

**MA:** I don't think that is a big factor. There is no political space with such a force as Daesh. People are suffering from the brutality, and they are united to defeat Daesh. Other abuses are regarded as minor compared to that.

**MT: What do ordinary people think in Sulaimaniya, about the PKK [the main Turkish-Kurdish nationalist force] and the YPG [the main militia among the Syrian Kurds, linked to PKK]?**

**MA:** We must accept that the perspectives of Kurdish nationalism are dominant, in Iraqi Kurdistan in particular. But at the same time people have years of experience of the rule of the Kurdish nationalist parties.

Any act by the nationalists is amplified by the media which they control, to promote them. The resistance in Kobane is important, a symbol for everyone who will stand up to Daesh; but the nationalists wish to benefit from that, to turn it to their advantage. The majority of people are supporting that resistance.

The PKK present themselves as left. The parties in Iraqi Kurdistan, the KDP and the PUK, do not do that today.

But at the beginning, even the KDP used to adopt a sort of "Marxist" rhetoric. The main wing in side the PUK called itself Marxist-Leninist during the late seventies. At present PKK considers itself a Kurdish nationalist party and acts accordingly. If it takes power, it will behave like the other parties (KDP and PUK). They are nationalist, and their rhetoric makes no fundamental difference: they behave in accordance with their class basis.

On Kobane, we are clear: we strongly support the resistance of women and men fighting Daesh. We want this resistance to be repeated, viewed as a model. But we do not want the nationalists to use this resistance to further their agendas.

## ANTI-ARAB FEELING

**MT: I talked a couple of months ago with Dashty Jamal of the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan, who had been in Sulaimaniya. He reported some anti-Arab feeling in Sulaimaniya, but he said it was limited and people were speaking out against it. Has that got worse or better?**

**MA:** I think that has got better. Now people see that the prob-



**Muayad Ahmed**

lems underlying Daesh are more complex. They see that the PUK and KDP are agreed on staying in Iraq.

The US has much greater powers in Iraq now than before. This alignment has had an effect in Kurdistan, pushing people back away from a more hard-line nationalist way of speaking. You used to meet some people who were very nationalist, some even almost racist. You get less of that now.

**MT: Dashty reported very bad living conditions for refugees in Sulaimaniya. How is it now?**

**MA:** There has been very little economic activity there even before the Daesh advance — since February 2014, when Baghdad cut off redistribution of tax revenues to Iraqi Kurdistan because of a dispute about oil contracts. Money is not coming from Baghdad for teachers, government employees, etc. Many people are going with one month's pay every three months.

Many young people are unemployed. Work has stopped on many construction projects. Recently refugees have been in a slightly better situation than they used to be, but it depends on the weather. There was rain the other day and the area round many refugees' tents turned to mud.

The future of their children and their livelihoods are in a mess. There have been over a million displaced and refugees in all Iraq during the last few months.

**MT: That will get worse as it gets colder in the winter?**

**MA:** Yes, and other people will be at risk if Daesh makes other attacks.

**MT: What do people think about what the US is doing now?**

**MA:** In Kurdistan, most people, under the influence of the nationalists, accept the narrative that the US got rid of Saddam. They don't mind further intervention. They accept it.

But they feel that they have not benefited from the rule of the nationalist parties. Unemployment and uncertainty is widespread. The gap between the rich and the poor is very wide. Some people have got very, very rich. The KDP and PUK have implemented a complete neoliberal agenda. The idea has become widespread, influenced by this neoliberal agenda, that having private services, education, and health provision is fine and the government is not responsible for providing education, health and so on.

There are a lot of generous corporate handouts from the government; there is a new layer of capitalists now.



**Everyday life in Baghdad is very tough — aftermath of yet another car bomb**



## A Global Rally against ISIS, for Kobane, for Humanity has been called for 1 November at 2pm.

**MT:** In Baghdad, how much more visible and powerful are the Shi'a militias since the collapse of the army in Mosul?  
**MA:** In Baghdad, those militias are now everywhere, running checkpoints, doing the work of the police and so on. There are lots of checkpoints.

The militias are hand-in-hand with the government, but their link with the government is not regulated. They do what they want. Even in Basra, the Shia militias have used the situation to get control of security matters. The militias are even killing people especially in Baghdad, mostly Sunni people. People are afraid.

Asaib Ahl Al-Haq is the most powerful Shi'a militia. They are a split from the Sadrists, now linked with Maliki and others in the Shi'a political Islam camp. The second biggest is the Badr Corps, which is linked to the Supreme Islamic Council. And there is the Sadrist group, Saraya al-Salam. But Asaib Ahl al-Haq is the most frightening.

Most people in Iraq are living in hope that the security problem will be resolved through the establishment of a stable cabinet. So when the new cabinet arrived, people felt that there would be a change, at least a bit more security and a slightly better life.

Nowadays, after the Daesh advances, people in the South are losing what little confidence they had in the government.

In Baghdad, everyone has got arms at home. I think that people in Baghdad will fight Daesh. The displacement of eight million people would be unimaginable for the people there. And people in the city know that everyone there will be considered as Shi'a by the Islamists of Daesh.

**MT:** What is your party's assessment of the new government in Baghdad, the Abadi government?

We see the Abadi government as a result of the collapse of the Maliki government, but it does not mark a dramatic change in the overall Shi'a sectarian and regressive outlook of the government.

Under Maliki, Sunni Islamists and Arab nationalism felt that they were sidelined, they needed to assert themselves. Daesh was previously seen as a very marginal political force, but it has become clear that it is a real force. With these new developments Sunni Islamism and Arab nationalism have again become a tangible power in the so called "political process".

We say that we must fight to defeat Daesh. There can be no life under Daesh. It must be resisted by force of arms. Our slogan is for people's defence units, both in areas controlled by, and areas threatened by, Daesh. We call on people to arm themselves to stand up to Daesh, and for the government not to prevent the people from arming independently — otherwise they will be giving people up to Daesh for the slaughter. We have begun creating our own armed units and working to arm the people.

If the people were able to defeat Daesh anywhere, then there would be a greater push for direct intervention into politics by the people, and an opening for the left.

### SPANISH CIVIL WAR

**MT:** In the conflict between KRG and IS, we see an analogy with the Spanish civil war of 1936-9. In Spain our comrades were on the side of the Republic against the fascists, but also on the side of the workers and left-wingers who were against the bourgeois and Stalinist government of the Republic which repressed the workers and eventually lost the war. Similarly, we are on the side of the KRG against Daesh, but on the side of the workers and the left against the KRG.

**MA:** We don't consider Daesh as a political force. They are gangs of criminals and they should be defeated. We don't agree with anyone who will accommodate this kind of group in Iraqi politics. They are terrorists, slaughtering people.

But we do struggle against the government, against the bourgeoisie parties: the nationalists and political Islam parties, against any parties which are ruling.

We deal with the reality. We want Daesh to be defeated. It is impossible to do anything under Daesh. A clear line must be drawn against Daesh, against any accommodation with them.

Daesh drew its strength from the regressive nature of all the parties acting in Iraq. We said that the regressive and backward nature of Iraqi politics helped give rise to Daesh. We say: do not mix with any of these parties, find your own independent path.

**MT:** It seems to me one of the big political lessons is the need for secularism. Some would say that the Islamic wording in the Iraqi constitution is harmless because most peo-

ple there are Muslim, but particularly in this situation in Iraq, but it isn't harmless. It gives rise to politics based on what you think religious teachings are, which by definition can't be debated democratically.

So the idea that secularism is a good idea but is something for the distant future is refuted by these events.

**MA:** It's not only a secular basis we need. There's a failure of all the sectarian and nationalist politics, we've got nowhere with these trends and political currents. This conflict in the Middle East did not come out of the sky. It comes from the political, economic and social infrastructure, or base.

Just secularism would not be an alternative to the political and social trends in the Middle East. In my view, socialism is the only real alternative that can bring change to the region, and the material base of this socialism is there, the problem is the political readiness for doing it. Otherwise this cycle of violence will be repeated for decades and decades.

In Iraq, even in the 60s and 70s, people were much more socially free and women had stronger positions than they do today. The current regression isn't a product of natural evolution. It has been brought about by politics in the interests of capital.

**MT:** What is your attitude to the US bombing, and how do you explain it? We would say, if the US bombs push Daesh back, that's good, but you can't support or have confidence in the US because of the record in Afghanistan, because the bombing is an alliance with corrupt regimes which helped create the Daesh problem, and because of the nature of the US state.

On the other hand you have people on the British left saying that the main thing is to stop the bombing, and saying that will stop the war, which is just not true and has the effect of minimising the danger from Daesh.

**MA:** It's a problematic issue. We have to think about it very carefully. It's similar to the argument about Saddam Hussein. We went against the US intervention in Iraq. It's a war, it's not about the change of regime, or supporting the people to change the regime, it was an imperialist kind of war. That will also apply to the US's war now.

Help the people defeat Daesh, but not help the US intervention. You need to put the whole thing in context.

# Ready to stand up for reforms

Gough Whitlam has died. He led Australia's reforming Labor government of 1972-5, which was sacked by the Governor-General (as representative of the Queen) following a budget crisis.

By Janet Burstall

**I feel frustration at the lack of Labor leaders who are forthright in speaking and acting for broad ranging equality and reform as Gough Whitlam did.**

Labor after Gough chose Hawke and Keating as leaders. They proved, with tripartism, that the Australian Labor Party (ALP) had rejected Gough's failures as seen by the ruling class.

As [Australia's current right-wing prime minister Tony] Abbott and his dinosaur government are doing their best to dismantle the last of Gough's reforms, the breaks and continuities in the ALP illuminate the challenge of achieving reforms as significant as those of the Whitlam government.

The opponents of the mining tax and the price on carbon brought in during the Rudd and Gillard governments were rabidly mad. Even Labor's recent reforms to education and disability support are firmly rooted in competition and outsourcing, giving to some working-class people at the expense of others.

Never since Gough has there been an ALP leader who will

assert even basic social democratic reformism, let alone propose the policies and organising needed to prepare the labour movement to withstand and turn back the attacks the Australian ruling class launches to protect their privileges from the most minor threats.

Gough didn't claim that his project was for a socialist Australia. He had faith in the processes of parliamentary democracy to resolve political differences fairly. After The Dismissal and the election of [Tory] Malcolm Fraser [to replace Whitlam] many of us concluded that the ruling class exercised power in ways that the working class did not, and could not under capitalism. But Labor leaders concluded from The Dismissal that Labor needed to seek election on terms acceptable to the ruling class, and not on a platform to resume and extend the Whitlam reforms that Labor supporters find inspiring. The latter would have meant Labor seeking office on terms that would require an accompanying strategy of opposition to the capitalist class. It would require political leaders seeking the support of the labour movement to challenge both in and out of parliament, the power of the whole ruling class not just the parliamentary Tories.

Gough had in common with his successors in the ALP a faith in national unity and parliamentary politics as a classless level playing field. He attempted to even-handedly balance competing interests e.g. the wage-price freeze, which really affected wages not prices. In the weeks after The Dismissal, Gough as Labor leader, and Hawke as ACTU [Aus-

tralian TUC] leader moderated their initial language of rage, and opposed moves for industrial action against Fraser.

Where Gough differed from the current crop was that he had an intellectual commitment to a set of reforms and values, and enough self-confidence to continue to press them despite opposition. And in 2014 the ruling class is much more on the front foot, the labour movement is weaker in many ways, and it takes a lot more guts and persistence to stick to principles and not dissolve into the soggy "pragmatism" as Labor leaders have done since Howard won government. That "pragmatism" clearly is delivering neither political office to the ALP, nor sinecures to Labor careerists, nor effective and durable reforms much needed by the working majority.

It is especially in contrast to this state of affairs that Gough Whitlam is inspiring to radical reformists now.

Mealy-mouthed and uninspiring leaders who drop any positive sentiments and policies when they come under pressure from the powerful will continue to be thrown up by the labour movement, until radical reformists and socialists develop a positive program of reforms, a grass roots democratic strategy against the ruling class, organisational coherence and effective spokespeople.

**The enthusiasm that people are showing for Gough's reforms four decades on suggests that a program of radical reforms could shift the terms of Australian politics for the better.**

## When the Queen's man sacked Labor

The following article (first published 1996, abridged here) analyses the left's response to the Kerr coup.

By Janet Burstall

**On 2 December 1972 the Australian Labor Party won office after 25 years of unbroken, stifling conservative rule.**

Labor's leader was Gough Whitlam, and his government took Australian troops out of Vietnam, introduced a publicly-funded health service, opened higher education to those who could not afford fees, repealed the "White Australia" immigration policy, and made a start on redress for Australia's Aboriginal people.

It was a reformist regime: when hit by the world capitalist downturn of 1974-5 it floundered and started to turn against its working-class base.

On 11 November 1975 John Kerr, Governor-General of Australia, acting under the Queen's authority, sacked the government after the Upper House of Parliament blocked Whitlam's budget. The widespread working-class gut reaction to the dismissal was that "our government" had been struck down by the ruling class.

The early 1970s in Australia were a time of radicalism and spontaneous mass working-class outrage. Intellectuals had been writing and talking freely about socialism and revolution. The movement against the Vietnam War had brought tens of thousands on to the streets. There was a large and hungry audience for left-wing ideas.

To the left of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) had a few thousand members and, allied with ALP left-wingers, sizeable influence in the trade unions. It had loosened up, breaking with both Moscow and Beijing, and was under the pressure of an organised Left Tendency.

The Socialist Workers' Action Group, forerunner of today's Solidarity and Socialist Alternative groups in Australia, had about 20 members in Melbourne. On 14 November it managed to lead some 15,000 workers to the Stock Exchange, from an official labour demonstration 50,000 strong. Also very new, but a bit larger and more "orthodox Trotskyist", was the Socialist Workers' League, based in Sydney (and forerunner of today's Socialist Alliance).

These left groups united with broad sections of the working class and social movements to agitate for the reinstatement of Labor and the defeat of Malcolm Fraser, leader of the Liberal [Conservative] opposition.

Whitlam and the ALP, however, saw this as a matter of re-electing Labor to show Fraser that the Australian people

would not stand for the constitution being undermined. The ALP did not use its majority in the House of Representatives to defy Governor-General John Kerr. It accepted Kerr's election schedule — and Fraser won the election on 13 December.

The CPA responded to the crisis with energy, publishing their paper *Tribune* daily. On 12 November *Tribune* argued: "The Communist Party calls for action to continue and rise still higher. A national stoppage should be called, and united action committees set up in factories, offices and localities to resist Fraser and campaign against him."

However, the powerful Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU), led by CPA and left ALP officials, did not attempt to override the inertia of the ACTU (Australian TUC) by starting a strike movement on its own and even put the brakes on the movement for a general strike.

ACTU [Australian TUC] leader Bob Hawke argued Labor was in bother for being too radical, and excessive militancy would scare the electorate.

The CPA, like the ALP, made "democracy" the key focus. A vote for Labor, in their view, would be a vote for parliamentary democracy and a rejection of the undemocratic actions of Kerr and Fraser. This approach required only the mildest criticisms of Labor.

### CLASS

**Workers felt a mixture of class sentiment about "our government" and outrage at "unfair play" by the rules of parliamentary democracy; but the CPA's activity was all based on "defence of limited capitalist democracy."**

The CPA had been arguing for the election of Labor, and for the strengthening of the official left factions in the ALP, as the way to social progress ever since the 1930s. The Left Tendency of the CPA had begun to criticise this approach, analysing the ALP as an obstacle to socialism and anti-working class in government. Its views tended more to sectarianism than to an appreciation of the contradictory role of the ALP, but in any case were too abstract to equip it to publish any practically useful proposals during the political crisis.

A united front of the Marxists could have threatened to win over sections of the CPA, and pressured the CPA leaders into taking the initiative, defying the ACTU, and setting up the "united action committees" called for in *Tribune*. The combined strength of this left would have been quite formidable. Instead, the rest of the left didn't even seem to notice that the CPA was in a position to influence industrial action. The CPA got away with its left rhetoric and inaction unchallenged. General strike agitation was popular, but remained vague.

The left doubted the opinion polls which showed Fraser in the lead, seeing them as part of the conspiracy to defeat Labor. They thought a vote for Fraser was a vote for dictatorship, a vote for Whitlam a vote for democracy, and obviously most people would not want to vote for dictatorship.

The fact, however, is that parliamentary democracy continued in Australia after the coup much as it had done before.

*Direct Action* [published by SWL] (27 November) argued that "The offensive of the coalition [conservative] parties can only be effectively countered and the living standard of the working class maintained and extended by fighting for socialist policies. This is why the Socialist Workers League is standing candidates in the coming election." The SWL election platform was a catalogue of reform demands on wages, education, women's rights, Aboriginal land rights, etc. — not an outline of a policy for workers' action in the crisis to attack the power of the ruling class.

The SWAG concentrated on warning how vicious Fraser's attacks on workers would be: vote Labor, they said, but rank and file action was what we really needed. In the context, they were saying that the working class could not aspire to government even when highly mobilised in a great political crisis. They left out politics.

The new groups of Marxists in Australia in 1975 had little experience of their own to draw on. Neither Rosa Luxemburg's writings on the mass strike, nor the Communist International's discussion in 1922 on the united front and the "workers' government", was ever a reference point during the crisis. The crisis focused attention on the sources of bourgeois power. Agitation for a workers' government could have concretised that focus, on the role of the Senate (the Upper House), the Governor General, the law, the media, and repressive methods. As it was, the Marxists floundered as they tried to express simultaneous support and criticism for Labor ("critical support").

The time for general strike agitation which could perhaps have shattered the strong hold of the union bureaucracy was from about mid-October to late November — about five weeks. Maybe the revolutionary left was too weak to win whatever it said and did.

The terrible shame is that despite the mass upheavals and the heady days of working-class fightback in 1975, the story that took hold in the following years was that a radical Labor Government could not survive.

**This history, told and sold, lent momentum to the drive of Bob Hawke and the right in the labour movement, to reshape the ALP as the solid reliable party of capitalist**

# The public face of the activist world

Martin Thomas reviews *La Lutte Des Signes: 40 Ans d'Autocollants Politiques*, by Zvonimir Novak

Zvonimir Novak argues that in France, progressively over the last 40 years, the autocollant has become the “means of expression of those who do not have access to the mainstream media”.

Not just in France, but (he says) in Calcutta, in Dakar, worldwide.

I don't know why the autocollant is still rare in Britain. *Solidarity* and Workers' Liberty are now pioneering this field, producing a first range of autocollants.

The relative rarity of autocollants in Britain reflects in the fact that there is no special English word for them. The English word “sticker” covers a much wider range.

The small sticker, usually round, maybe three or four centimetres diameter, worn on clothing or such, is a species of autocollant, and exists also in France.

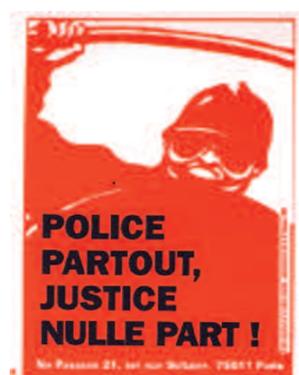
In France, though, the typical autocollant is about A6 size (about 15cm by 10) and rectangular. It may be stuck on your jacket, your bag, your helmet, your car, or your notebook, but it is also stuck on

public places — lamp-posts, bus stops, walls, wherever.

It is, says Novak, “coming to displace the poster” as a means of publicity by the not-well-off, because it is so much more flexible. In the late 40s, according to Novak, walls in Paris were plastered with political posters, but posterage is now more difficult and expensive. Political posters are in decline.

The autocollant is both highly visible and “the centre of an underground world, the world of the activists”.

It is the descendant, argues Novak, not of the poster, which



evolved from wordy wall-newspapers, but of punchier “vi-gnettes” and “papillons”. He reproduces “papillons” — small pieces of gummed paper, which had to be moistened to become sticky — produced by the CGT, the revolutionary-syndicalist trade union movement, in its heyday around 1905-6.

The technical breakthrough which enabled autocollants by allowing for the printing of self-adhesive papers was made in 1935 in the USA. The first use of political autocollants on a large scale was in the 1960 US presidential election. Then, they were mostly “bumper stickers”, to be stuck on cars.

Autocollants reached France in 1969, in the presidential campaign of the mainstream-right candidate Georges Pompidou. At that time, they were expensive, an option only for well-off organisations.

They became cheaper, took off rapidly after 1974, and have proliferated since.

Novak largely limits himself to the autocollants produced by political parties. He surveys some produced by anti-fascist, international-solidarity, and feminist campaigns, but explicitly (to keep the range manageable) excludes autocollants produced by trade unions and pressure groups.

Novak's book was put out by an anarchist publishing house. He gives much space to anarchist stickers, and with some justice. Some anarchist groups have developed verve and talent in the production of visually striking autocollants with short, striking words.

There is a “branding” to French anarchist autocollants, for example in their almost-always red-and-black colour schemes.

The main French Trotskyist groups also display a “branding” in their autocollants. Lutte Ouvrière's autocollants are distinctive in their plain, straightforward style: a short text, a bit longer than from the anarchists, maybe a dozen words, in a standard typeface, on a plain background, without pictures.

Novak is, I think, too sour about LO's output. Some LO autocollants may be dull, dour, and formulaic; but LO has also had autocollants, not reproduced in the book, which were witty.

The “Lambertist” POI “brands” its stickers with a characteristic colour scheme, almost always red-on-yellow.

The autocollants from LCR and the NPA have been more experimental, with varied colour schemes, “busy” use of graphics and images, and varied type-faces and alignments of text.

A series of autocollants over the years, and over decades now for many activist groups in France, is thus not just a series of messages, but a visible, accessible public identity for the group.



We will be distributing the above autocollants for a small price. If you are interested in ordering some please call 07891714146 or email [bethredmond93@gmail.com](mailto:bethredmond93@gmail.com)

More designs may be made available dependent on interest in this batch



# Ukrainian left: growing but from a small base

Marko Bojczun from the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign attended the conference "War in Ukraine and the Politics of the Left" in Kiev in September. He spoke to *Solidarity*.

**The conference brought together people from European countries including Russia, Sweden, Moldova, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Britain. It reviewed the situation in Ukraine, particularly the war and discussed the response of the international and Ukrainian left.**

Labour movement speakers addressed attacks on living standards and wages; others talked about working with refugees coming out of the zones; we heard from lawyers monitoring the erosion of democratic and civil rights. And Russian comrades spoke about their anti-war movement there.

The Ukrainian left is quite small, with much less influence on the politics than the left in Britain. This is because of the experience of Stalinism and Ukraine's incorporation into the Soviet Union for 70-odd years. It has left a deep mark on the popular consciousness about socialism and communism. Since independence it has been very difficult to mount any left political response to the rise of capitalism in Ukraine.

People from the left did take part in the Maidan protests but didn't really benefit because they were dominated by the nationalist forces. However after the separatist movement emerged in the east, Russia invaded Crimea and intervened in the Donbas, there's been a very interesting and positive evolution. We've seen the emergence of a number of different left-wing groups, including the National Communist Front in the Donbas, Anti-Imperialist Action in Kharkiv province, Autonomous Resistance in Western Ukraine.

Young people involved in the protests have evolved to the left. They seem to have re-interpreted the situation and the politics of national self-determination and human emancipation and evolved towards a socialist position. So the left today is more heterogeneous, is larger.

In addition to the groups that came out of Trotskyist politics in the 1990s, or came out of the Communist Party Youth, you now have people who have evolved from Ukrainian nationalism.

The Ukrainian Left at the conference, and those from elsewhere, view the war in eastern Ukraine as a combination of an internal civil conflict/civil war and a foreign intervention by Russia. There are disagreements on the nature of the civil war in Ukraine, such as the extent to which there is popular participation on the side of the separatists. Or the extent to which this movement is really inspired and financed by big oligarchs that were driven out of Kiev after the fall of Yanukovich, and who mounted a revanche in eastern Ukraine in order to defend their property in the Donbass and mount a comeback.



No one on the Ukrainian left doubts that there has been a Russian invasion and annexation of Crimea and now an intervention by Russian forces into eastern Ukraine. What is the response to that? To demand the withdrawal and removal of all foreign fighters from the territory. To call for the participation of only Ukrainian citizens in the rebuilding of legitimate local government in Eastern Ukraine.

To say there needs to be a process of de-centralisation of power in Ukraine. But unless Russia ceases to have influence then any kind of federal arrangement for Ukraine really becomes a recipe for Russia to continually interfere in not only the domestic affairs of Ukraine but also its foreign policy.

Another most commonly held position [at the conference] was opposition to intervention by all the imperialist forces into Ukraine, Western or Russian. There has been a discussion about the extent to which western governments have been involved in the conflict. But it's pretty widely agreed that Russia really has taken the initiative, has introduced force, has crossed borders and NATO's and the EU's response

has been rather mild and hesitant.

There is a long ongoing struggle to incorporate Ukraine either into an Eastern-organised Eurasian economic union or a Western-organised European single market. Russian capital as well as West European capital has been investing heavily in the Ukrainian economy over the past ten years. Now that struggle has taken military form, but it's the Russians that have taken the first big step. But there was in Ukrainian society, and in the Kiev government, a hope if not an expectation that NATO would more energetically and forcefully come in on the side of the Kiev government against Russia. However the EU has been fairly deeply divided about not only what support to give to Ukraine but about what level of sanctions should be put on Russia.

If you take the British left in a really broad sense, then the supporters of Putin, of the Russian campaign in Crimea and the separatist movement, are not a very big contingent in British society. The overwhelming majority of British society, I would say, is sympathetic to Ukraine's claims and opposed the Russian intervention. On the left, there is an abiding and long-term tradition of support for the Soviet Union which has, since the collapse of the USSR, morphed into support for the geo-political enemies of America, and Russia is one of these. So therefore there is this rather unrealistic and in many ways absurd support for Putin's Russia as though it stands in for an absent Soviet project. The accompaniment to that position is to paint the Maidan protesters in Ukraine as universally fascists and reactionaries.

There's many people in the trade unions and in the mass media that were on the left before the collapse of the Soviet Union, that were allied to the Communist Party in one way or another, who don't really want to point out the absurdity of this position.

I think it's the responsibility of the left that understands what's going on and is in contact with the Ukrainian and Russian Left, who are fighting both the Russian intervention and the capitalist government of Kiev in order to support the Ukrainian workers and students and pensioners to patiently and persistently explain the nature of the social and political forces that are lined up on either side of this struggle.

I think it's very important that we bring to the British left, and to the British public the authentic voices of the left in Ukraine as well as in Russia.

**We are translating the statements from the labour movement in Ukraine, the official trade union federation, the left-wing organisations. A lot of the stuff coming from the pro-Putin or pro-separatist left is really a recycling of material from state agencies and from long-standing lobbyists and apologists for the Kremlin. We need to hear authentic voices from Ukraine.**

## Don't believe what you read in the Mail

Press  
By Harry Davies

Daily Mail

**Over the last fortnight the national press has picked up a story about a violent incident at Hinde House School in Sheffield.**

To take the version initially printed by the *Sheffield Star* and then picked up by the *Mail*... three Roma Slovak pupils attacked another boy following an argument "about a football". The victim was "punched to the ground" and left with a broken nose. The school has now, the reports continue, been presented with a 1,600 name petition demanding that, in the words of one parent "something be done".

Other reports breathlessly describe pupils being "stabbed, mugged and nearly kicked to death."

Except the real story is somewhat different.

According to sources at the school — as opposed to the collection of random, angry, anonymous internet commentators and bored Mail hacks — a small group of pupils had been making inflammatory remarks to Roma students throughout the day. This escalated into a brief scuffle, during which a student (possibly a bystander) was indeed attacked.

The main description by witnesses — again, let's just define that as people who were actually there — suggest that it was a tiny minority of pupils and that staff acted in a professional and decisive manner to end the incident almost immediately. Far from it being the chaotic, violent scenario slavered over by the *Mail*, one pupil went out of his way to praise the school and go on record about how safe he felt there.

As for that petition, no matter how many time the right wing press repeat the lie, it doesn't have 1600 names. It had the names of around six parents, plus a page or so of other

signatures who were unknown to staff and therefore have no connection with the school. It also had a huge wad of blank pieces of paper attached, which made it look very impressive.

So what we have is a story about a unfortunately everyday incident of clashes between students. It was, as is very usual in schools, both provoked and unacceptable.

Rather than look at the real causes, at an education system that is ill-prepared and unable challenge the real causes of racism, the local and national press decide to try and stir up another Rotherham style scandal. Regardless of who else gets hurt in the process, regardless of what damage it does to a community that's been abandoned and neglected for generations.

**There are lots of victims in this case. The tragedy is that the press couldn't care less about any of them.**

# University staff vote to strike over pension proposals

By Lucy Clements

University and college Union (UCU) members voted by 78% for strikes over changes to their pensions schemes on a 44.5% turnout.

This is the highest turnout for a ballot the UCU has had since its formation.

The cuts to pensions will see some workers lose over 25% of their income in retirement.

The proposals will end the final salary scheme, which was already closed to new members, and shift everyone onto the poor career av-

erage scheme (on terms inferior to TPS, the scheme that covers post-92 universities and school teachers).

Worse still, for the first time a proportion of the pension will have a "defined contribution" basis. That means the risk is shifted onto individuals rather than institutions. Although the plans suggest this is a small element of the scheme, there is no doubt that if we accept this now the employers will try to increase it in future.

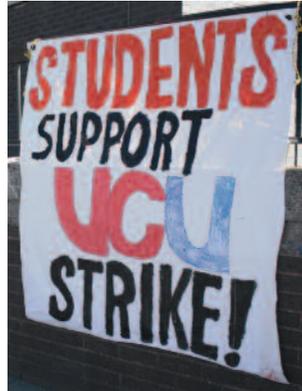
There is plenty of spare cash to pay for staff pensions if universities chose to prioritise them. Instead, since student fees were

hiked up to £9k there's been an increasing tendency to spend on big, showy capital projects the better to impress potential "customers" at Open Days. Money is being poured into hiring senior managers to run these schemes and PR people to market them.

Recent UCU disputes have been characterised by lack of an industrial strategy that can win, with spread out one day strikes, or strikes for only a few hours. If the pensions proposals are to be pushed back more creative and hard hitting action will need to be taken.

Students should support

university staff in their struggle for a decent pension.



Student banner on the last UCU strike

# Disabled people say "sack Freud!"

by Janine Booth, co-Chair, TUC Disabled Workers' Committee (personal capacity)

On 20 October, disabled activists demanded the resignation of Welfare Minister Lord Freud after his comments that disabled people could be paid less than the minimum wage.

David Cameron has so far refused to sack Freud despite widespread outcry about his comments.

He suggested that some disabled workers could be paid as little as £2 per hour.

This incident is not simply a one off "offensive" remark. Freud let slip a prejudice that many Tories and employers hold.

The government does not simply offend disabled people, it has systematically attacked disability rights, benefits and support. Orchestrating a nasty campaign to portray disabled

people as "scroungers" in order to justify these attacks, leading to a dramatic rise in "hate crime" against disabled people.

Paula Peters, of campaigning group Disabled People

Against Cuts, told *Solidarity*, "Disabled people are not stock, we are human beings, and as disabled people we are worth the very best life has to offer — not to work for £2 per hour.

"We should have the same rights as everyone else, decent access to employment with the right support, a decent salary, decent healthcare, social care, education and the right to live as independently as possible.

"Disabled people will fight for those rights."

The Labour Party is to table a motion of no confidence in Freud.

However, campaigners want more concrete commitments from Labour for the reversal of benefit cuts if it gets into power.



Protesters outside the Department of Work and Pensions

## Defend Julie Davies

Suspended Haringey NUT secretary Julie Davies has been allowed back into schools, but has not yet been reinstated.

The NUT is balloting members in Highgate Wood and Fortismere Schools over Julie's suspension. Strikes may happen in the week starting 3 November.

Union members should have the right to decide on their own union representatives — defend Julie!

## Radiographers strike over NHS pay

By Rhodri Evans

On Monday 20 October members of the Society of Radiographers struck for four hours as part of NHS strikes over pay.

They are affected by the pay freeze for NHS staff, but didn't co-ordinate action with Unison, Unite and Royal College of Midwives members due to a different ballot timescale.

Richard Evans, the Society's Chief Executive Officer, said "Because of

inflation, staff in the NHS have been taking a year-on-year pay cut. Unless we show the government that we are serious about our claim that NHS staff should be treated fairly, they will continue to take advantage of our goodwill.

"There is a shortage of radiographers, which already has an effect on the timely delivery of diagnostic examinations and the treatment of cancer, which has direct negative consequences on patients."

## E15 campaign broadens out

Focus E15 Mothers campaign followed up their occupation of an empty property on the Carpenters Estate with a packed public meeting on 20 October.

The meeting was a chance for supporters of the occupation to come together. A range of people active on housing and other related social issues attended.

Campaigners included people from West Hendon Estate who face an uncertain future due to redevelopment. They are using direct action to "block Barratts" from accessing a building site.

## Charity workers' 7 day strike

By Gemma Short

Workers at St Mungo's Broadway, a housing charity, are on strike for seven days over restructuring which results in pay cuts.

Management have reduced the pay of new starters and for existing staff being restructured by £5,000-a-year; taken pay out of collective bargaining; imposed new and draconian policies and procedures.

Meanwhile the new management have been given pay rises of up to £30,000!

Unite union members have picketed several workplaces every day as well as organising protests outside local authorities that use the service.

• Messages of support to Branch Secretary [suz.muna.unite@gmail.com](mailto:suz.muna.unite@gmail.com). Financial donations greatly appreciated.



Strikers on one of 14 picket lines this week

## Ritzy cinema backs down

By Charlotte Zalens

Last week *Solidarity* reported that Ritzy cinema had reneged on its deal with workers.

Since then, under threat of more strikes, Ritzy has

agreed to keep to the deal achieved in negotiations last month. Back pay to the workers will now be paid in full.

Ritzy workers thanked supporters on their facebook page for their continued solidarity.





## Trade unionism should not be a crime

By Gemma Short

Shahrokh Zamani and Reza Shahabi are just two of many who are in Iranian jails, locked up by the government for organising independent trade unions and workers' organisations.

Whilst trade unions are not technically illegal under Iranian law, state sponsored unions are used to quash independent unions. Activists like Shahrokh and Reza are charged with offences such as "propaganda against the state" and "acting against national security by establishing or membership of groups opposed to the system."

Shahrokh was initially arrested in June 2011 and charged with "acting against national security by establishing or membership of groups opposed to the system" and "spreading propaganda against the system". He was sentenced to eleven years in jail starting in January 2012. Shahrokh is a founding member of the Paint Workers' Union in Tehran.

Since he has been in jail Shahrokh has been further charged with "insulting the leader". Shahrokh has suffered interrogation and torture, and has been moved between prisons unexpectedly several times. In March and April 2014 Shahrokh went on hunger strike over one such move, demanding he be placed in a prison wing for political prisoners.

Shahrokh's hunger strike left him weak and with health problems, during his hunger strike he was refused access to medical treatment unless he ended the hunger strike.

Workers' Liberty has been campaigning for Shahrokh's release, gathering support from student and labour movement organisations.

Reza Shahabi has been in jail since June 2010, charged with "propaganda against the state" and "acting against national security".



He is the treasurer and executive board member of the Bus Workers' Union in Tehran.

Reza was brutally beaten during his arrest and in subsequent interrogations. He has been left with multiple health problems, including severe neck and back pain from spinal injuries. He has repeatedly been denied access to health care. Twice during his time in prison Reza has resorted to hunger strikes to get access to urgent medical treatment. In September this year he finally got some of the sur-

gery that he needs.

Workers' Liberty will be campaigning for the release of both Shahrokh and Reza, and for all charges against them to be dropped. We aim to collect 10000 signatures by 11 February 2015. This date marks the anniversary of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

**It is now officially celebrated as a nationalist and religious event – but it should belong to the Iranian working class, who overthrew the Shah in 1979 and are resisting the ruling class of the Islamic Republic today.**

## Backlash against Hong Kong democracy protests

By Charlotte Zalens

Talks between protestors and the government in Hong Kong reopened on Thursday 16 October.

Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying will not be attending as protestors have refused to talk to him!

On Tuesday 21 Leung said that while Beijing would not back down on vetting candidates (for 2017 elections for the Chief Executive), the selection committee could become more democratic. This has been described by the government as an "olive branch". It is a long way from the core demands of the protestors for full democracy.

Violent clashes with police have become more frequent. On Wednesday 15th police attempted to clear protestors from Admiralty, arresting around 30. On Friday 17th police dismantled barricades in the Mong Kok area in dawn raids.

By Saturday 18th around 9,000 protestors attempted to reoccupy streets in Mong Kok; 26 arrests were made but police were largely pushed back. Protestors remain in Mong Kok and some other areas of the city.

Use of violence by the police has risen. It had been toned down a few weeks ago after international atten-

tion. Use of pepper spray and batons has injured many protestors. Protestors have been using umbrellas, the symbol of the unrest, to protect themselves.

Protestors continue to be attacked by China-loyalist thugs. Some taxi and haulage associations have threatened to take their own action against protestors' barricades if they block key roads.

The acts of civil disobedience which have been the character of the protests so far are a useful tactic. But they have to be one tactic among many. With police repression, and lower numbers of people on the street, a need to regroup and develop more effective tactics is indicated.

Early in the protests the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) called out its affiliated unions in support of protestors.

**Strikes by teachers, dockers and workers in bottling plants had pro-democracy slogans and demands. It is to be hoped that students and occupy activists can link up with the HKCTU union member to discuss tactics, defend each other, and avoid being worn down by the more organised CCP-funded thugs and the police.**

### Will you help Shahrokh and Reza?

- Take a petition around your union branch meeting, ask your work colleagues to sign, ask your friends to sign, pass a petition around a university lecture you are in.
- Organise a regular street stall; make banners and placards, ask members of the public to sign the petition.
- Share the online petition - [bit.ly/freeshaohrokhandreza](http://bit.ly/freeshaohrokhandreza)
- Change your facebook and twitter pictures to support Shahrokh and Reza.
- Write to your MP and ask them to sign the Early Day Motion tabled by John McDonnell.
- Join us outside the Iranian Embassy, London, on 11 February to hand in our petition signatures.

