

# Solidarity

For a  
workers'  
government

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 304 20 November 2013 30p/80p

[www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)

## CLEGG AND BLUNKETT SCAPEGOAT MIGRANTS



Prompted by Clegg and Blunkett, Daily Express runs hysterical and false “exclusive”

Clegg: Roma are “offensive”

Blunkett: “We have got to change the behaviour of the... Roma community because there’s going to be an explosion otherwise.”

# Fight anti-Roma racism! see page 5

## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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



### We stand for:

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

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# Berlin reverses privatisation

By Matt Heaney

**On 3 November, 600,000 Berliners voted in a referendum to take back the local electricity production and supply into public ownership — 83% of those who voted.**

This is only 150,000 less than the combined vote of the Social Democrat and conservative Christian Democrat parties (who run the federal state of Berlin) in the last regional elections. The referendum was held after around 230,000 signatures had been collected by the "Berliner Energietisch" campaign, calling for democratic control over and public ownership of the energy supply (and of other basic necessities), 100% green energy, any profits going into public services, and full transparency in the running of the new municipal utility and grid company.

### SOLD OFF

**Berlin's regional government sold off their remaining 51% majority in the local electricity supplier and producer, Bewag, in 1997. Eventually the Swedish state-owned power company Vattenfall took over.**

Its name means "waterfall", but mainly produces power from coal, as well as nuclear energy (and a not insignificant number of potential serious accidents, in Germany at least). Vattenfall had also bought the local electricity works in Hamburg, the HEW, from the regional government.

Two years later, Berlin sold 49.9% of its water board, BWB, to Vivendi (today Veolia), power firm RWE and insurance company Allianz as part of a

public-private-partnership deal. PPP was, as usual, to be particularly expensive for service users, and the citizens of Berlin got the most expensive water supply in Germany as a result. The PPP deal, however, which guaranteed profits to Vivendi & Co., was kept secret by the government and was only released after a long political campaign by the "Wassertisch" and a successful referendum (in the process of which the treaties were leaked to the media, and only then released by the government — before the vote was held, incidentally).

By September this year, the government had bought back the 51.1% from Vivendi and RWE — at "market price", meaning that the company will be run as before and that water and sewage charges are not expected to fall.

The campaign to take (or, as happened, to buy) back the water authority inspired a number of similar campaigns. The suburban rail service, the Berlin S-Bahn, is, since 1994, a division of the state-owned (though run explicitly according to the logic of profit) railway company

Deutsche Bahn AG. Berlin's suburban services are paid for by regional government, yet these subsidies have not been used to improve services or even to maintain them.

Instead they have been run down, with trains being scrapped and works being closed. In recent years, the money has been transferred directly to the main company to improve its books, as DB AG was expected to be sold off to the highest bidder.

Meanwhile any significant cold (or hot!) spell means that local transport comes to a standstill — in a city with the lowest personal car ownership in the country.

A campaign (the "S-Bahn-Tisch") developed to take the firm back into public ownership (like the city's underground, bus and tram services), but the city's ruling politicians still seem to prefer to put sections of it out to tender. They have learned nothing from the experience of water or electricity privatisation. At the same time a referendum on public ownership of the local railways is bureaucratically being blocked through the courts.

Despite the clear result on the electricity referendum at the beginning of this month, similar tactics led to the quorum being narrowly missed. The city government refused to hold the vote on the same day as the general election in late September, which would have guaranteed a significantly higher turnout — and a binding result. Other tricks included — ten days before the referendum — the city government announcing it was to found a new city utility company (as part of the water board) anyway, in order to try and make the referendum seem pointless. At the same time, the government called for a no vote.

It is likely that the city government, run by a "grand coalition" of so-called Social and Christian Democrats, will see the in-quorate result as a confirmation of its course. The two parties, who are in talks to form the national government, have announced that they will not sell off the state-owned railways.

The over 50 organisations who organised the referendum and political campaign for democratic control and common ownership of electricity and other utilities will continue their fight.

They do not believe that the city government really intends to take back Berlin's power grid from private companies or to run it transparently, ecologically, democratically and for the benefit of citizens as opposed to profit.

**In a city where an estimated 19,000 people are cut off per year, this must remain on the political agenda.**

## For social ownership of the energy industry!

By Luke Hardy

**The National Audit Office has predicted 17 years of above inflation rises in energy bills.**

It predicts an 18% increase in energy prices in real terms by 2030, which will hit the poorest in society.

The Tory-led government has been stung by attacks from Labour and by the general anger shown by working class people about these bills. They have

upped their rhetoric against the energy companies. The Lib Dem energy minister Ed Davey pleaded for energy companies to stop treating users like "cash cows".

The government now appears to be being blackmailed by some of the Big Six.

EDF, probably mindful of the public mood, raised its prices by 3.9%; still above inflation, but less than the 8-10% rises of four of the Big Six.

However, EDF also said they will put prices up further if they don't get their way on the cutting of Green Levies and Obligations.

It looks like this blackmail of the government, echoed by Npower, will pay off. George Osborne looks likely to scrap some of these obligations that subsidise renewable energy and insulation for the poor and vulnerable.

Meanwhile press reports state Npower is planning to make more than 2000 work-

ers redundant. The company refuse to refute or confirm the reports.

The unions at Npower have put out a statement condemning the lack of clarification that the workers are demanding.

The answer to this isn't Ed Miliband's price freeze, but social ownership of energy under workers control.

**Then the workers in the energy sector can lead the transition to non-polluting energy generation.**

# Fighting for LGBT liberation in Lithuania

By Janine Booth, RMT Executive (pc)

Recently, there has – quite rightly – been a lot of attention and protest focused on increasing homophobia in Russia.

Its much-smaller neighbour, Lithuania, is also facing a rising tide of hostility to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights.

I recently attended a European TUC conference on gender equality in Lithuanian capital Vilnius, and took the opportunity to raise the issue of LGBT rights and to visit the Lithuanian Gay League (LGL).

The LGL was founded in 1993 – the same year that homosexuality was legalised, and three years after the country declared independence from the USSR. Under the previous regime, homosexuality was illegal, and those found guilty could face transportation for two years.

LGL representatives believe that the roots of homophobia and transphobia in Lithuania are: ongoing prejudice from the Soviet era; the role of the Catholic church; and the activities of populist-nationalists. It is ironic that these three groups have fought each other – often very bloodily

– over the last hundred years of Lithuania's history, but seem to find common ground in hostility to LGBT people.

Despite LGBT people's very genuine fear of openly campaigning for their rights in a climate of homophobia and transphobia, LGL organises important campaigning and lobbying work. It organises for IDAHO (International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia) in May each year, and since 2010, has worked with similar organisations in Estonia and Latvia to organise an annual Baltic Pride event, which alternates between the three countries. This year's Pride event took place in Vilnius, and more than half the posters advertising it were vandalised within 24 hours of being put up. Vilnius is the only place in Lithuania with an LGBT 'scene'; homophobia and transphobia is much worse in other towns and rural areas.

Although there is now full legal equality, for example in the provision of services, for gay people, there is little legal protection for transgender people, many of whom go abroad for gender reassignment.

Right-wing, homophobic groups are active, and have attacked LGBT people and

events. The country's leading anti-LGBT politician, Petras Gražulis of the Lithuanian Christian Democrats, has called for all gays to be expelled from Lithuania, and has equated homosexuality with bestiality, necrophilia and paedophilia. He tried to disrupt this year's Baltic Pride march, but his Parliamentary immunity prevented him being prosecuted, and a proposal in Parliamentary to lift the immunity did not receive enough votes. The only openly-gay member of the Lithuanian Parliament is Rokas Žilinskas.

However, he is a member of the conservative Homeland Union party, and has opposed LGBT equality measures.

## LEGISLATIVE

There are currently five legislative moves against LGBT rights.

They are; a ban on gender reassignment – legal protection for "criticism of homosexuality" i.e. anti-LGBT speech would be fully legal in all circumstances – criminalisation of "public denigration of constitutional moral values" – a new law that "every child has the natural right to a father and a mother", in an attempt to ban same-sex parenting –

a move to make the organisers of public meetings pay the costs of their own security – proposed in response to the 53,000-Euro cost of policing the Baltic Pride event to protect it from homophobic attack.

The first two of these have been opposed by the government, so have failed so far. The government's motivation may be less about opposition to bigotry and more about remaining on good terms with the European Union. Lithuania's current Presidency of the EU may be restraining the homophobes, and LGL is concerned that when this term comes to an end, the bigots may step up their efforts.

I discussed with the LGL representatives the possibilities of linking with trade unions. Unfortunately, they have few such links at present, and are concerned that Lithuanian unions seem weak and low-profile, although they are aware of recent struggles by firefighters, police and teachers' unions. I outlined to them the potential for trade unions to help progress the struggle for LGBT equality, and they were keen to know in detail how unions work and how they can build working relationships.

We also discussed at length LGBT politics and history, ranging from the Stonewall riots of 1969 through the Pride marches and the Gay Liberation Front of the 1970s, Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners in the 1980s and the formation of our own RMT committee from the late 1990s.

The Lithuanian Gay League welcomes international support. RMT and Unison have both written to the LGL offering solidarity. LGL has also received support from the Lithuanian community in the UK.

**Activists will be stepping up our solidarity with LGBT Lithuanians, beginning with a protest at the Lithuanian embassy (see box).**

More:  
• atviri.lt  
• lgl.lt/en/  
• Facebook: "LGL"

## Student campaign builds strike solidarity

By Ed Maltby

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC), an organisation of grassroots student activist groups, will have its National Conference in the University of Birmingham on 23-24 November.

Recent student activism has focused a series of large and important trade union struggles: the fights against privatisation and management attacks at Sussex and Birmingham, the national dispute over pay in Higher Education, and the forthcoming strike of the University of London Senate House cleaning and support staff.

Student activists have been gearing up over this term to make solidarity with workers' struggles, with occupations, demonstrations and blockades in support of the national strike taking place at SOAS, Sussex, Birmingham, Sheffield and elsewhere.

The conference will support efforts of London activists in staging a fundraising gig to raise money for the embattled Senate House workers' strike fund, and discuss ways of making more effective solidarity.

One of the most pressing of the struggles facing the student left currently is police harassment and intimidation of activists. The recent arrest in London of Michael Chessum,



one of the organisers of the 13 November demonstration to save the University of London Union, comes on the heels of a series of violent interventions and arrests by the Metropolitan Police against campaigners at ULU and striking Senate House workers. Activists will make plans to resist these attacks as well as police infiltration and monitoring tactics, which have been brought into the spotlight with revelations of police trying to recruit paid infiltrators into local activist groups such as Cambridge Defend Education.

The conference will also address the crisis in student housing. Students are being ripped off across the country, with universities and private halls companies, as well as private landlords, taking advantage of the housing shortage by charging extortionate rents.

At the end of the first day Israeli military refuser and feminist activist Noam Gur will address the conference.

**To get involved with the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, and for details of its conference, visit [anticuts.com/conference](http://anticuts.com/conference).**

## Bangladeshi wage increase

By Ira Berkovic

Bangladeshi workers have won a 77% increase in the minimum wage, which will rise to 5,300 takas (£43) per month.

The increase comes after months of struggle following the Rana Plaza factory collapse in April, in which over 1,000 workers were killed. A 10-day wave of protests from 21 September saw tens of thousands of workers mobilise, demanding an even higher increase (8,114 takas, a 170% increase). Protests were continuing as recently as Thursday 14 November. Many protests had been met with police



repression, including the use of tear-gas.

The Bangladeshi minimum wage is one of the lowest in the world, with factory owners representing a significant political bloc (with many sitting as MPs).

**Online: socialist wins Seattle City Council seat**

[bit.ly/k-s-win](http://bit.ly/k-s-win)

African LGBTI Out & Proud Diamond Group were joined by RMT union activists and human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell at a demonstration outside the Uganda High Commission in London on 18 November, protesting about two anti-gay "show trials" in Uganda and demanding the release of Samuel Ganafa, Bernard Randall and Albert Cheptoyek.

They have been charged after Bernard's laptop was stolen and his personal videos were leaked to the media. There are fears that both men could face more serious "sodomy" charges, which carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

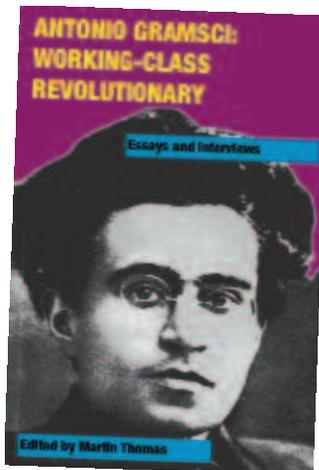
Paul Penny, RMT London Transport LGBT Officer, said: "These charges and court cases are part of a worrying spate of state-sponsored harassment of LGBT people and activists in Uganda in recent weeks. President Museveni must bring an end to the persecution of LGBT Ugandans and uphold Uganda's own constitution and the African Charter on Human Rights".

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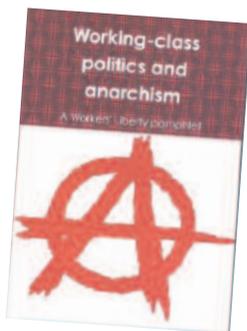
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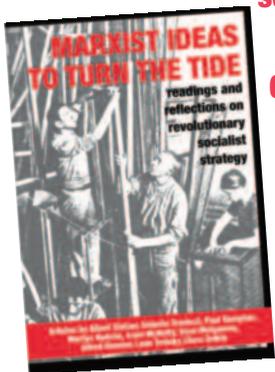
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# Railway workers win in Georgia

Eric Lee



Over the course of two days earlier this month, a drama played on the Georgian railways that showed the labour movement at its best.

This has not always been the case in Georgia, a country whose most famous sons in recent times have been Stalin and Beria.

And yet Georgia has a long tradition of working-class struggle, and Georgian labour and social democratic leaders punched far above their weight in the Russian Social Democratic Party and the Second International in the years up to 1917.

That tradition was largely forgotten in the decades following the 1921 Red Army invasion of Georgia.

But there are signs — such as the recent railway strike — of a new vigour among the Georgian trade unionists.

The issues that concerned the “Georgian Railway Workers New Trade Union” (GRWNTU) will be familiar to workers in the UK and elsewhere.

According to Ilia Lezhava, the deputy chairman of the union, those issues included the following demands: “pay for overtime work, increased wages and bonus system based on experience, as well as a return of the 13th pay system by the end of the year.”

The union called for a nationwide strike to begin on Thursday 14 November, but the railway company did all it could to disrupt the strike and prevent its spread.

While in the capital Tbilisi the strike was solid, in western Georgia, it ran into strong resistance from the employer.

Some key union leaders were uncontactable, and reported that threats were made against them.

As the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) reported — in a language reminiscent of an earlier era, “Some of the attendants at the strike were unknown individuals. They were not in uniform, however we knew that they were working for certain structures.”

The GTUC put out an appeal for help, and got a quick response from the International Trade Union Confederation, based in Brussels.

In a strongly worded statement to the Georgian authorities, ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow wrote “I am very much concerned by the information I received regarding the on-going pressure and defamation exerted by the management before and during the strike. Instead of negotiating, the management interfered in the union internal affairs and in particular its right of assembly. When the notice of

the strike went public, the management started to threaten workers of reprisals in case they joined the strike. To mislead public attention, GR management also tried to slander the railway union and GTUC by speaking of blackmail and sabotage as well as by accusing the GTUC leadership of masterminding the process.”

The employer's efforts to break the strike only made it stronger.

As a leader of the GTUC in Tbilisi put it in an email message, “the workers of the Western part of the railways have been joining the protest all day long and now it resembles a real general strike.”

Within a few short hours, it was all over.

The GTUC issued a statement saying that “Following 6-hour talks a consensus has been reached regarding all three issues raised by the Georgian Railway Workers New Trade Union. The just fight of the railway workers has been successful and the outcome meets the interests of the railway workers. The Georgian Railway has now resumed its operation in a usual mode.”

In Brussels, Sharan Burrow issued a second statement later in the day saying that “Management should have had the good sense to negotiate from the beginning. Thanks to the solidarity of the railway workers and their determination to achieve a just settlement, good sense has prevailed and the workers and their families will now get fair reward for their work.”

For the workers' movement in Georgia, this victory — sweet though it is — is only the beginning.

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## “Reek of McCarthyism” in Lewisham?

Letters



What's eating Toby Abse? In his letter published in *Solidarity* 303 (13 November), Toby accuses me of writing an article that “reeks of McCarthyism” and claims I am part of an “authoritarian bureaucratic manoeuvre” within the broad-based Save Lewisham Hospital campaign.

Firstly, read the article that Toby says “wreaks of McCarthyism” and make your own mind up (“Lewisham: our plans to go on winning”, *Solidarity* 301, 25 October). It's a 1,200-plus word piece on how the South London Hospital Campaign, and within that the AWL, built an impressive broad campaign and what we plan to do over the coming months.

Towards the end of the article I refer to a small but active local group called People before Profit (PbP). Most readers will not have heard of it. I described the group as having until recently played a positive and useful role within the campaign.

I noted that they are a group made of ex-Communist Party members and similar. They are. Toby may well find it hard to reconcile, but the leadership and many of the members

come from a tradition he does not feel politically comfortable with. My advice to Toby is to sort himself out.

At the last general meeting we passed a set of standing orders. This “authoritarian bureaucratic manoeuvre” means we are better able to manage the business of the campaign. I don't know where Toby's been operating for the past several decades but standing orders are commonplace.

Maybe the big issue for Toby is that PbP will no longer be able to turn up on the night with a load of mates who don't normally take part in our meetings, with a motion that few people have seen, and try to steer the campaign to suit their narrow electoral needs.

At the last general meeting PbP were exposed as having registered their group with the electoral commission using the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign name in three different configurations, putting their own sectarian needs ahead of the broad campaign. They never brought this to a general meeting to ask permission, or to try to persuade the campaign it was the right thing to do.

Toby makes no reference to this in his letter, and made no effort at the general meeting to explain or defend the PbP action, or denounce it if he disagrees.

Jill Mountford, South London AWL and Save Lewisham Hospital Steering Committee (pc)

# Fight anti-Roma racism!

**The French philosopher Michel Foucault once said that the way those with most power talk about those with least power always shines new light on the nature of power. We have learned a lot about power in the last week.**

On 11 November Sheffield Brightside MP and former-Labour Home Secretary David Blunkett, claimed that the influx of central European Roma migrants into the Page Hall area of his constituency, was causing so much friction there could be riots. He blamed the Romani migrants. He said:

"We have got to change the behaviour and the culture of the incoming community, the Roma community, because there's going to be an explosion otherwise. We all know that..."

"We've got to be tough and robust in saying to people you are not in a downtrodden village or woodland, because many of them don't even live in areas where there are toilets or refuse collection facilities. You are not there any more, you are here — and you've got to adhere to our standards, and to our way of behaving, and if you do then you'll get a welcome and people will support you."

A day later Nick Clegg (also a Sheffield MP) weighed in. "There is a real dilemma... when you get communities coming into a part of our country and then they behave in a way that people find quite difficult to accept... They behave in a way that people find sometimes intimidating, sometimes offensive."

For Blunkett, all Romani people "know no better". He implies Romani people probably like living in a place with no toilets or refuse collection; he says Roma don't have "our standards" because he wants to say Roma have no standards. If Blunkett was more honest he would have said something like "they live like animals". That is what he meant and that is unmistakably racist.

What does Clegg mean by "offensive"? The *Guardian* did a responsible investigation into inter-community relations in Page Hall and the only substantiated complaint they found was that Romani people sometimes stand around chatting on street corners in summer time. Is that what Clegg meant by "offensive"? Really?

What is offensive is these racist and reductive party political broadsides. (The exchange was party political: Blunkett attacked the government for cutting New Labour's Migration Impact Fund and Clegg whined that a rise in migrant population was "not our fault".)

## ANTI-ROMA RACISM

**Anti-Roma racism, like any other form of racism, is based on ingrained ignorance. In the case of the Roma, it is ignorance generated by years of official, socially-accepted systematic persecution.**

There are ten million Romani and gypsy people in Europe. There are many Romani communities; some are settled some nomadic. They live in both urban and rural areas, and not just the "downtrodden villages". As Romani settlements are increasingly smashed up by local and national politicians, many have become migrants and refugees.

In the UK many gypsies are Irish Travellers, a distinct ethnic group.

Everywhere Romani and gypsy people are some of the most marginalised and systematically impoverished people.

The Roma people have suffered enslavement by landowners (up to the 1850s); near physical annihilation by the Nazis; vicious discrimination under Stalinism and under the East and central European governments which followed Stalinism.

Today, despite anti-discrimination policy in the European Union, anti-Roma racism is getting worse. This lies behind the numbers of Roma migrants coming to the UK — an estimated 200,000 in the last few years.

In Slovakia, where many of Sheffield's Roma migrants come from, Roma people face all the worst forms of exclusion, political hostility and hate crime.

In Slovakia 70% of Roma people are unemployed (compared to 33% of the total population); a hugely disproportionate numbers of Romani children are placed in special and segregated education; 40% of Romani people live in segregated and non-standard forms of housing for whom the

## Violent racist attacks on Romani people are on the increase across Europe

threat of eviction is ever-present. Both private landowners and local authorities demolish homes, at the instigation of other local residents or under the premise that these homes can be classified as "waste dumps".

In recent years there has been a rise in racially-motivated violent attacks against Roma. This has been stirred up by anti-Roma marches and protests — a dozen or so in the last two years.

Many local politicians, just like Blunkett and Clegg, help to stir up local hostility. In January 2012 the mayor of Zlaté Moravce said "... we do order in the city and we will force to leave those who do not work and are parasites on us whites... I promise you, you will have to work and for work you will be paid... no one will be parasites on us and the others... thank you to all citizens... and declare fight against discrimination of whites in the city and whites in this country..."

## DAILY EXPRESS

**That vile message was a few grades up on Blunkett and Clegg in its hatred against Roma, but on a par with the comments that Blunkett's outburst inspired in *Daily Express* hack Leo McKinstry.**

Commenting on the false report that a Roma couple had tried to sell their baby to a Page Hall chip shop owner, McKinstry said: "[this] depraved conduct is part of the world created by the ideology of multiculturalism, where the values of traditional civilisation are constantly undermined."

Incoherent it may be, but to be taken seriously as part of the *Express's* campaign against Romania and Bulgarian citizens being able to come to the UK when restrictions are lifted in January 2014.

General anti-migrant sentiment is also behind Blunkett's tirade. He and another Labour ex-Home Secretary, Jack Straw, have said Labour made a mistake in accepting EU citizens would be allowed to work in the UK. They want

Miliband to be more upfront anti-migrant.

What is it that both "respectable politicians" and street-fighting neo-Nazis gangs hate about the Roma?

They hate the fact that this persecuted people do what any persecuted people would do — stick together, mistrust authority and hold onto their own culture. For bigots the only culture that Roma and gypsy people have is criminality. For others the Roma are an "exotic" people (e.g. the sympathetic but distorted view of Irish travellers in "My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding").

In the UK racism against Roma migrants builds on centuries of officially sanctioned indigenous prejudice. It continues. This government promotes strong action against the "illegal" sites of travellers and gypsies (in the context of a huge lack of legal sites).

When politicians like Blunkett and Clegg demand "integration" they are putting the boot into the powerless. A socialist idea of "integration" is radically different.

We want every Romani child to go to school and to stay in education. We deplore the high proportion of traveller, gypsy and Roma children who are "missing" from education. If good healthcare, social housing and jobs were available to all, there would be a lot more equality and "integration", that is, mutual respect and social solidarity between new migrant and "indigenous" communities would naturally follow.

The politicians who have overseen the decimation and privatisation of services are really not interested in that.

The left has to make it matter of urgency to challenge the "acceptability" of anti-Roma racism, from politicians, from the press. If we do not, racism, anti-migrant prejudice and divisive propaganda from the politically powerful will continue to rise.

**Solidarity with all migrants. Build solid campaigns to reverse the cuts. Fight anti-Roma racism!**

## The history of Israel's refuser movement

By Tom Harris

**From the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, service in the military has been a politicised issue. Given the country's small size and population, the state has relied on conscription to maintain its military capacity.**

When the policy was first implemented, exceptions were made for Arabs. Then ultra-Orthodox Jews could be exempt from service if they were enrolled in religious study. There were also occasional examples of people refusing to serve on pacifist grounds, such as the lawyer Amnon Zichroni in the 1950s.

As Israel became increasingly expansionist, refusal to serve took on greater political significance. In 1982, 168 military personnel were imprisoned for refusing to take part in Israel's war with Lebanon. Yesh Gvul ("There is a Limit") was founded in the same year. It described the war as "an act of naked and futile aggression". A Yesh Gvul petition bearing the names of 3,000 reservists was presented to Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Defence Minister Ariel Sharon.

In 1988, during the First Intifada, Israeli Defence Force (IDF) soldier Adam Keller, a long-term Yesh Gvul supporter, was caught scrawling slogans on walls, toilet doors and even on the sides of tanks. The slogans denounced the occupation and called on fellow soldiers to refuse to serve in Occupied Territories.

Keller was court-martialled and sentenced to three months imprisonment for "spreading propaganda harmful to military discipline". A year later, Workers' Liberty's predecessor, *Socialist Organiser*, organised a lecture tour of Britain for Keller, who has remained a prominent figure on the Israeli left ever since.

The movement re-emerged at the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. In 2002, a public letter was sent to the Israeli government by soldiers declaring their refusal to serve "beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people".

The letter was eventually signed by over 600 military personnel.

In 2003, 27 IDF pilots published a letter declaring their objection to the bombing of a Hamas leader which had killed many civilians. The letter argued that the continuation of the occupation was immoral and untenable. The pilots came under intense public and institutional pressure, with many being sacked not only from military, but also from civilian aviation jobs.

In 2001, a movement of high school students refusing to serve was reformed on the basis of an earlier organisation from the 1970s ("Shministim"). Many of these young people went to jail for their decision. Embarrassingly for the Israeli establishment, some of those jailed were children or relatives of senior military figures, like Omer Goldman, daughter of high-ranking Mossad officer Naftali Granot.

The spread of military refusal to lead to an administrative crackdown and a campaign of moral hysteria from the Israeli ruling class. The right-wing press inveighed against traitors supposedly giving encouragement to Hamas and Hezbollah.

In 2002, the High Court of Justice ruled that "unqualified pacifism" was a legal basis for refusing service, but that refusing to serve in particular territories or campaigns, "selective refusal", was illegal. This created the perverse situation where one can avoid punishment for an abstract or religious opposition to war, but be punished for simply being morally discriminating.

**The refuser movement remains a minority political tendency in a society poisoned by militarism. Nevertheless, the courage of the refusers deserves our support, and reminds us that Israeli society is not a homogenous block of oppressors, but a class society riven with contending political tendencies.**

# Standing up to

sons. There have also been other more specific groups, for instance a group of pilots who refused to serve during the 2006 Lebanon War. And there have been soldiers who served but spoke out afterwards, like the Breaking the Silence group.

It is very important to say that, in addition to these high profile cases, many, many people do not serve and are imprisoned for it, but are never spoken about. In addition to the thousands not conscripted for health reasons, religious reasons, or because they have children, many thousands desert to go back to their families, because they can't live on a soldier's wage and so on.

These refusers are predominantly working-class, and often Sephardi [Arab-background Jews] or Ethiopian. I was in prison with many of them.

**What kind of struggles have you been involved in since your release?**

My main activity is with New Profile, fighting against the militarisation of Israeli society and supporting young people in the way I was supported. New Profile was founded in 1998. It has youth groups it works with all over the country, and I'd say we probably support about 2,000 people out of 14,000 conscripted every year.

We run a summer camp for 100 kids aged 14-18 every year, where they discuss not just anti-militarism, but feminism, queer ideas, animal rights, and the environment. The organisation is not explicitly anti-capitalist but its activists mostly are.

I'm also part of Ta'ayush [Arabic for "co-existence"], which is a group of Jewish and Arab activists taking direct action in defence of the Palestinians against the police and the army, mainly in the South Hebron Hills, where there are many small villages vulnerable to attack from a large number of very extreme Israeli settlers. We do a lot of work helping shepherds and farmers get to their land and go about their business safely.

And I'm part of Anarchists Against the Wall, which is a radical left group that takes activists to the West Bank almost every week for demonstrations. Not all the members are anarchists.

**What response do you get from Palestinians, generally, when you go over?**

With the work Ta'ayush does, people get to know each other quite well, and relationships develop. With the demonstrations Anarchists Against the Wall go to, people are very pleased we've come and keep inviting us back. We get a good reception, and not much hostility. If people don't want Israelis to come, they just won't invite us. There is a growing tendency of people who don't want to cooperate with Israelis, but many Palestinians still do.

Unfortunately, we don't get that much opportunity for political discussion with Palestinian activists, because we're usually working together on the ground and don't end up in the same meetings or social situations so much.

**What's the feminist dimension to the anti-occupation struggle?**

Most Israeli radical left activists believe that all struggles are connected. And some of us try to work in a feminist way, which means in a non-hierarchical way. We do this while highlighting the militarisation of society, in terms of militaristic ideas in schools, soldiers going into schools, and soldiers with guns everywhere in the streets. I believe women's rights cannot be upheld while society is so militarised. And if that's true in Israel, it's even more true for Palestinian women, who are doubly oppressed.

**Noam Gur is 19 years old. In 2012 she was jailed by the Israeli Defence Force for publicly refusing to enlist in protest against Israel's occupation of Palestine. She is currently doing a speaker tour of the UK with Workers' Liberty, and spoke to *Solidarity*.**

**I grew up in a small city called Nahariya. I come from a fairly normal family; both my parents served in the army, and expected me to.**

When I was very young I thought I would serve, and try to do it in a good, positive way. But when I was 16, and studying for national exams, I spent a lot of time at home doing reading, and started to learn what we hadn't been taught in school – the history of the 1948 war and the Nakba [the "catastrophe" which befell the Palestinians]. I learnt about the real history of massacres and mass deportations, and from there started to try to find out about what's happening in Palestine now too. I was a vegan, and through vegan circles I met activists who took me to demonstrations in the West Bank, in the village of Bil'in. It was a very shocking experience for me, because of how violent the army were, with tear gas and rubber bullets.

So I decided to refuse to serve in the IDF. Through my activist friends, I had contact with New Profile, which is a feminist anti-militarist group which supports people in this situation. I was denied conscientious objector status, because the Israeli army only gives you that if you're a pacifist, and their definition of pacifist is extreme. If you speak about the occupation, then you're not a pacifist, for sure.

I was jailed for a month and then got out on psychiatric grounds. That was good, because usually it is more like six months. I've tried to make sure I used my freedom to do as much activism as possible.

**How common is refusing to serve?**

There have been refusers ever since the foundation of Israel. In 1970 the first group of Shministim [Sixth Form students] published an open letter, not refusing but calling on the government to end the occupation. In 1979, the first group refused. There were small groups after that, for instance during the 1980s Lebanon War, but in 2001, during the Second Intifada [Palestinian national uprising], 27 signed a letter refusing. Five were jailed for two years, and it was a very big deal.

Ever since then there have been Shministim letters, sometimes signed by more people, sometimes by fewer. The year I was jailed I was the only one, for various complicated rea-

# to Israeli militarism

I'd say that the radical left in Israel is fairly gender balanced, but it's more often men who go to the West Bank, because of the threat of violence.

New Profile and another group, the Coalition of Women for Peace, have also tried to campaign on the issue of sexism and sexual harassment on the left. Israeli women activists face sexual harassment from soldiers and police, but sometimes also from Palestinian men, and from Israeli men in our own organisations.

While you're risking your life, you shouldn't have to put up with this from your own side! So we are talking about these issues and fighting for other left organisations to act on them. The Coalition of Women for Peace has just published a report on this which is worth reading.

## Israeli politics seems to be moving to the right. Why?

I think the left is tired after a long struggle, and nothing seems to change things. It just gets worse. And the Israeli right simultaneously gains confidence, because it feels it can get away with anything. At the same time, when most Israelis look at the "peace process", all they see is failures and frustration. They think there is violence on both sides, and are worried about security. While this is happening, the militarisation of society deeply affects things too.

## What is the attitude of Israelis to the protests and upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa?

At the beginning, in 2011, people were very impressed and a bit inspired. The result was the huge demonstrations for social justice that swept Israel, which were very explicitly inspired by the "Arab Spring" and raised some similar slogans. At their height these protests mobilised 700,000 in one day, including 300,000 in Tel Aviv [about 7 million people live in Israel].

The issues were things like public housing, public services, privatisation, and living costs. They didn't raise the issue of the occupation, and sometimes the atmosphere was quite nationalistic. Nonetheless, many of us took part, because we thought it was necessary and the logic of the struggle could push things our way.

After some destruction of property, which is unusual in Israel, the media withdrew its sympathy and the police cracked down. Quite quickly the tents from the protest camp were cleared and the movement ebbed away.

A lot of the protesters were quite middle-class, mostly Ashkenazi [European-background Jews, who dominate the Israeli middle and ruling classes]. There were a small group of Palestinian Israelis involved, who set up a "48 tent" and distributed literature about their issues. They suffered a fair bit of harassment.

Interestingly, those who are still active tend to be more working-class and are mostly Sephardi [Arab-background Jews], for instance in South Tel Aviv. When I can be, I am active with this movement, which has protested against cuts and also raised issues like police harassment and assault on demonstrators.

There are also various small, radical union initiatives operating outside the Histadrut [the mainstream union federation]. You know about Ma'an [the Workers' Advice Centre, a small radical union Workers' Liberty has worked with] and there have also been attempts to organise a union for precarious and waitresses and waiters.

In terms of the regional protests, people were inspired again by what happened in Turkey. The only thing which could get people frightened is Syria, both because it is nearer and because it is increasingly a different kind of situation, and a very bad one.

**"Bil'in Salutes The Shminitsim" — a resident of the Palestinian village of Bil'in expresses support for Israeli's sixth-form student refuser movement, the Shministim.**

## How do you see the term "Zionism"?

I'm not a Zionist, because I can't accept this nationalistic ideology which says that the goal is a state for Jews. I want a democratic state. And I can't affiliate with a movement that won its goal through the suffering of another people. Having said that, I'm not particularly an "anti-Zionist" either.

## What do you think the solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict should be?

I think one state for both peoples would be better. It would allow us to solve problems like the Palestinian refugees. At the same time, it would be hard to get. I don't think most Israelis and Palestinians will willingly just dissolve their nations. So maybe two separate states and then federalism can be steps towards this goal.

## What can activists in other countries do?

I support boycotting the Israeli government, and of course the settlements. But beyond that I think maybe BDS has gone too far.

There are lots of positive things that people in other countries can do. Firstly, you should pressure on your own governments to bring pressure on the Israeli government. You should demand no more military aid, no more diplomatic support for what Israel is doing. That can affect our government and it can also have an effect on what Israelis think. Israelis do not simply live in a bunker, they see themselves as part of the world. We need to fight to change the way they think.

A big part of what needs to be done is getting out information about what is happening in Palestine and in Israel, so that more people know and act about it. There are also specific struggles which need solidarity. For instance, on 30 November there will be an International Day of Action in support of Bedouin villagers who are forcibly uprooted from their homes in the Negev.

**It would be great if groups and activists in Britain can spread the word and take action as part of it.**

- 30 November International Day of Action: [bit.ly/stop-prawer](http://bit.ly/stop-prawer)
- Coalition of Women for Peace report: [bit.ly/cwp-report](http://bit.ly/cwp-report)

## Noam Gur tours the UK

### Thursday 21 November

3pm: Glasgow RMT branch meeting, 180 Hope Street, Glasgow, G2 2UE

6.30pm: Glasgow University, sponsored by Glasgow University Labour Club. Boyd Orr 407 (Lecture theatre A)

### Friday 22 November

3pm: University of York — PL005, Physics Building, University of York.

7pm: Sheffield, sponsored by Workers' Liberty — Harrisons 1854, 15-29 Regent Terrace, S3 7QA

### Saturday 23 November

Evening: Birmingham University (after NCAFC conference)

### Monday 25 November

1pm: Sussex University, Building Arts A, Room A05, Sponsored by Sussex Left Forum.

6.30pm: Goldsmiths University — RHB137, Goldsmiths University, New Cross, London SE14.

### Tuesday 26 November

7pm: University College London, sponsored by UCL Left Forum — Medical Sciences 131 AV Hill Lecture Theatre, UCL

# The invaded Australians

Martin Thomas reviews John Pilger's new film *Utopia*

**In June 2007, "remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory were invaded and martial law imposed". So Diane Fieldes put it in the Australian journal *Socialist Alternative*, and she wasn't wrong.**

Six hundred troops were deployed. Aboriginals faced compulsory acquisition of townships; the "quarantining" of a proportion of their welfare benefits; new restrictions on alcohol; and the closure of government programmes which gave some of them part-time employment.

In its initial form, pushed through by John Howard's conservative government in the run-up to the 2007 federal election, this "intervention" included a clause exempting the government from Australia's own Racial Discrimination Act. That was (eventually, in 2010) changed by the Labor government which followed, but the basics of the "intervention" remain in force.

The measures were justified by panic claims about child abuse in Aboriginal communities. Since then, not a single specific prosecution for child abuse has resulted from the measures.

Aboriginal Australians, overall, drink less alcohol than non-Aboriginals. Twice as big a proportion of Aboriginal Australians as of non-Aboriginals don't drink alcohol at all. More Aboriginals have their health dramatically damaged by binge-drinking. That is because of the social conditions they live in, and to be remedied by changing those conditions, not by troops and police.

The intervention is the centrepiece of John Pilger's new film, *Utopia*. Around it he adds coverage of other issues: the massacres of Aboriginals by early white settlers; the Stolen Generation of lighter-skinned Aboriginal children taken from their parents to be brought up in white families; the campaigns against Aboriginal deaths in police custody. (Indigenous people are a quarter of the prison population of

**Bob Anderson, an Aboriginal activist and state organiser of the Building Workers' Industrial Union in the 1960s and 70s, was a pioneer for the integration of Aboriginals into the leadership of the labour movement which can bring equality in Australia. Photo: Ted Riethmuller.**

Australia, though only 3% of the general population).

The film is given an odd tone by being narrated throughout by Pilger himself. Since he has, somehow, lost his Australian accent and got an oddly drawling, posh English one, and is now 74, the story comes across somewhat as an elderly gentleman travelling round Australia, and being naively shocked at conditions in Aboriginal communities and by racist attitudes or bureaucratic stonewalling from white Australians.

Pilger gives Arthur Murray, a one-time Aboriginal union organiser and then a campaigner on deaths in custody, a

chance to speak on film, but most of the Aboriginals in the film come on screen as helpless paupers in remote communities or as members of the small minority of Aboriginals who have got jobs in the media or the art world or official structures.

About 60% of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population lives in big cities or in relatively densely populated parts of the country. Only about 20%, 0.6% of Australia's population, live in remote areas.

The Northern Territory Aboriginal population targeted by the intervention was about 45,000 out of Australia's total of 670,000 Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders; and those 45,000 scattered over a large number of small and remote communities.

That is one reason why the protests against the intervention were relatively small, mostly just the activist left and a small number of Aboriginal activists.

Another reason was that many of the highest-profile Aboriginal political figures — Noel Pearson, Marcia Langton, Bess Price, Warren Mundine — supported the intervention. So far as I can understand it, they did so because they saw no other answer to the social problems of remote Aboriginal communities which have been completely cut off from their traditional modes of subsistence, and forcibly semi-integrated into Australian settler society, but as paupers.

Yet Vince Forrester, a central Australian Aboriginal leader who features in the film, came to Sydney in 2008 for a protest against the intervention, and, despite everything, said: "I feel a change in Australian society. The general population wants to change the situation that Indigenous people are in".

**Many young white Australians are consciously anti-racist. Lacking is a labour movement assertive and strong enough to do more than mouth bland sentiments — to rally those young Australians and help Aboriginals come forward as leaders and organisers for a socialist answer.**

## Stumbling into history

By Bruce Robinson

**Remembrance of historical events tends to take place in formal settings, whether it's the Establishment on display at the Cenotaph or a left-wing meeting to recall events in working class history. It is rarely a part of everyday life.**

The laying of "Stolpersteine" (stumbling stones) in over 800 German cities and towns seeks to fill that gap by placing memorial stones in the pavement naming the Jews who once lived at that location but were killed or forced to flee Germany by the Nazis. The idea is that passers-by should "stumble" on the stones and be reminded of Nazi racial persecution in a way that relates to the fate of individuals.

They may also perhaps see a familiar location in a new way or be prompted to ask questions such as how the property came to be in its present owner's hands. The stones also serve as a reminder in a time where there will soon no longer be any eye-witnesses left to testify to what happened.

I recently attended the laying of stones in the small town in rural central Germany where my mother's family lived and where she grew up until the age of 12. She was the only survivor of her family — a number of lucky chances enabled her to emigrate to Palestine in 1934 — and it was as recently as 2009 that we found out in detail what had happened to the rest of her family. Eight stones were placed at the site of the house they lived in, along with others for some of the other Jewish inhabitants of the town.

About 200 people attended the laying of the stones. While a limited degree of local resistance had been felt when the Jewish population had been remembered on the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht in 1988, this had now disappeared, according to former mayor Helmut Schmidt. The crowd covered a wide age range.

As the only person present with a direct link to those being commemorated, I was asked to speak at the stone laying cer-

emony. After some personal and general remarks I finished up by saying:

"Remembering is about the past. But it is also necessary to draw lessons from it for the present. We live in a time where the same opinions — racial hatred and suspicion of people who are not like us — that then took my family from a happy life to death, are today finding more supporters across the whole of Europe. That cannot be allowed to happen!

**"Remembering the past should therefore be the foundation for taking an active stand for threatened minorities so that we do not again need to lay 'stumbling stones' in the future."**

## Egypt meeting broken up

By Michael MacEoin

**Video footage has surfaced of a meeting held at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) on 18 October being interrupted by protesters, allegedly from the Muslim Brotherhood**

The SOAS Palestine Society had invited Mohammed Nabawy of the Egyptian Tamarrod ("Rebel") movement to speak at the meeting in the Khalili lecture theatre at the University of London college.

However, the talk was forcibly disrupted by around 30 protesters, believed to be from the Muslim Brotherhood, who chanted "fall, fall the rule of the military" while the speaker was ushered from the building by SOAS security guards.

The Tamarrod movement was a popular movement opposed to the regime of the Muslim Brotherhood President of Egypt, Mohammed Morsi.

It did support the military coup against Morsi on 3 July 2013, and the subsequent crackdown during which hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood supporters were killed.

However, the Tamarrod movement is not the same as the Egyptian state. The Muslim Brotherhood, on the other hand, is a reactionary, religious, anti-working class force. As the SOAS Palestine Society said, the protesters disrupted the talk "in order to silence and intimidate our invited speakers and attendees, and to forestall any debate."

The bar for disrupting meetings rather than going along to argue must be set highly — for dictators or representatives of repressive regimes, for example.

**Our general policy must be freedom of speech and opposition to thuggish intimidation, both here in Britain and in Egypt.**



# Debate on Islamism and imperialism

The introduction to a January 2006 pull-out from *Solidarity* — *Workers' Liberty* 3/1, on "Marxism and religion" — has sparked controversy recently, after being moved to a more prominent position on our website as part of our routine circulation of content to make less-ephemeral items from our large archive more accessible. Here we reprint an abridged version of a reply by Sacha Ismail of *Workers' Liberty* to a polemic against the introduction by Simon Hardy of the Anti-Capitalist Initiative.

**Simon Hardy's article criticising "The AWL on Islamism" has the merit of being that, an article.**

One of Simon's central themes is that Sean [Matgamna, author of the 2006 introduction] ignores the role of Western imperialism in the rise of Islamism. "Why is such a crucial aspect of the rise of political Islamic, reactionary movements so absent from the analysis?", he complains.

Before the "war on terror" even began, our propaganda against it predicted that the irruption of US imperialism would "spread the spores of fundamentalism" and produce "new masses of recruits for [al Qaeda] and other terrorist-fundamentalists".

No, the problem is not that we deny or ignore the role of Western imperialism in the rise and, after 2001, revival of Islamism. It is that Simon reproduces the familiar but false "left-wing" idea that Islamism is straightforwardly and automatically a "direct result" of imperialism, largely ignoring the dynamics of the class struggle and ideological struggles in the Muslim world.

That the actions of the big powers provoke angry responses is obviously true. It does not explain the form of those responses. No form of "reactionary anti-imperialist" politicised religion is strong in Central America, which has suffered more US mistreatment than most of the countries where Islamism is strong.

Although the first Islamists did indeed develop their ideas and begin to organise under colonial rule, the era when most Muslim countries were fighting for liberation from colonialism (1920s-60s) saw more secular politics dominate. It took a long time, and many other developments, for Islamism to get a real grip.

Tunisia, for instance, won independence in 1956 under a radically secularist regime; Islamists became a force in the 1980s. Where national liberation struggle continued, among the Palestinians, Islamism was even slower in gaining traction, with Hamas not a mass force until the 1990s.

The same sort of problem is clear in Simon's treatment of the Iranian revolution. Was Iranian Islamism's rise to power

a "response" to pre-1979 US domination in Iran? What about other "responses" — the powerful workers' movement, women's movement, national liberation movements and left-wing organisations which the Islamists smashed?

Simon blurs over the class struggle in Iran, merging revolution and counter-revolution into simply what he oddly calls an "anti-colonial, anti-secular" movement.

**Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of Iran's Islamic counter-revolution**

In some countries, Islamist forces directly repressed the left. In some, they benefited from previous repression, moving into the vacated space to expand networks of religious charities, welfare services and so on. Pretty universally, they benefited from the discrediting of a left closely tied to Stalinism or nationalism. Whatever the mix of these factors, Islamism's role was fundamentally counter-revolutionary.

## COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY

**Iranian revolutionary Marxists, among others, have analysed Islamism on the rise as not simply bourgeois or petty bourgeois, but a form of counter-revolutionary mass movement with similarities to fascism or extreme right-wing nationalism in Europe.**

Of course, secular bourgeois nationalist movements can be and have been repressive towards the working class. Islamism, nonetheless, by and large represented something new and different from most such movements, something fundamentally regressive. That was true across the board, despite the large differences between "Islamisms".

Like fascism, Islamism employs anti-imperialist rhetoric in the service not of limited democratic goals, but utterly reactionary ones.

To dismiss fascism as just "a product of the capitalist regime", wrote Trotsky against the Stalinists in 1934, "means we have to renounce the whole struggle, for all contemporary social evils are 'products of the capitalist system'... Fatalist prostration is substituted for the militant theory of Marx, to the sole advantage of the class enemy.

"The ruin of the petty bourgeoisie is, of course, the product

of capitalism. The growth of the fascist bands is, in turn, a product of the ruin of the petty bourgeoisie. But on the other hand, the increase in the misery and the revolt of the proletariat are also products of capitalism..."

We should not make the same mistake, or anything like it, with Islamist movements and Western imperialism.

Simon [denies] that Islamism is a force in some European cities... Naturally no one is suggesting that British Islamists are a power comparable to their counterparts in Indonesia, or that they can win elections. But Simon seems to have forgotten that at his former university, Westminster, the Islamist group whose Indonesian cousin he cites, Hizb ut-Tahrir, are strong enough to win student union elections. He writes as if blissfully unaware that the East London Mosque's core leaders are Islamists, organised around people who in 1971 actively supported Pakistan's genocidal war against Bangladesh.

Workers' Liberty's record of 'defending Muslims' against oppression is actually better than those of the groups criticising us.

The AWL has always said that, while maintaining sharp political lines, we will stand even with reactionary mosque leaderships and Islamists to repulse racist assaults on Muslim communities (so much for Simon's idea that for us "opposition to political Islam always seems to be prioritised over everything else"). As Sean Matgamna put it in 2002:

"Of course socialists will stand side by side with the priests and Islamic bigots to defend their neighbourhoods against racist attack. We have done that (in my direct experience, in East London). It is very different from standing side by side with those reactionaries against the more emancipated segments of their own communities."

Or as we put it in 2003, while we were opposing the SWP's alliance with the Muslim Association of Britain in the anti-war movement: "We would ally even with the MAB in a practical action to defend mosques against racists out to firebomb or pillage them." We have repeated this point again and again.

My aim is not tit-for-tat point-scoring, and my point is not that Workers Power, the ISN or Simon are the 'real Islamophobes'. It is that their hopelessly tangled view of imperialism and anti-imperialism — and of socialists' attitude to advanced capitalism more generally — have repeatedly led them to support 'reactionary anti-imperialisms', even when these take the form of actual imperialist powers.

**The roots of their support for Islamophobic imperialisms [the USSR in Afghanistan, Serbia in Bosnia and Kosova] and Islamist "anti-imperialists" are the same...**

## AWL on Islamism: analysis without history, words without meaning

By Simon Hardy

**The fact that the article fails to integrate into it any meaningful analysis of [world] power relationship is its greatest political weakness in terms of attempts to explain where political Islam comes from.**

Indeed, it goes to some lengths to let the imperialist West off the hook for the "backwardness" of the Islamic world.

When Matgamna writes, "Political Islam too expresses the disappointments and frustrations of the mass of the people in the Islamic countries with their own deprivation and poverty — on the fringe of the prosperous capitalist world," he doesn't even attempt to explain why one part of the world is rife with disappointment about poverty and deprivation, and another part of the world can be so prosperous.

After all, isn't precisely this imbalance the basis for the radicalisation of so many Muslims across the world? Instead of making this obvious link, Matgamna embarks on a shallow analysis of the rise of modern political Islam.

Matgamna puts forward a dubious right wing claim that the "existence of large Muslim minorities in Europe is making political Islam a force well beyond the traditionally Muslim world". Even if we were to concede that there are more political Islamists in Europe today than there were, say, 30 years ago, what is this caused by?

Implicitly Matgamna is making the claim that it is due to poverty and the collapse of Arab nationalism...

But what does it mean to say they are a "force"? Where in

Europe can Hizb ut-Tahrir organise a protest of half a million calling for a caliphate (as they can in Indonesia)?... Please, explain what it means to describe there being a "political Islamic force" in Europe today.

Of course Islamism has been growing in the Middle East in particular since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, but isn't the over-determining factor that has more recently led to the radicalisation of Muslims across the world precisely the West's War on Terror? In other words, isn't it a response to the continuation of the same aggressive policy of domination and military/political control over the region that has formed the basis of Western foreign policy towards the Middle East since the dawn of capitalism?

The errors in Matgamna's article flow from his outlook, which isolates the growth of political Islam from the historical and social context of the unequal power relationship between East and West, blaming it on endogenous factors that are never clearly explained (envy?). The rise of political Islamism is a direct result of the influence of imperialism and continued post-colonial oppression in the Muslim world, and combating Islamism means combating those forces that galvanise it...

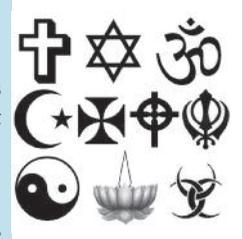
In fact it is precisely the thing that Matgamna dismisses with a brush of his pen that is the primary cause of the growth of Islamism today — the War on Terror.

**Principled and clear opposition to that, including opposition to imperialist occupations in the name of fighting terror, is central to any socialist platform if we want to win people from reactionary ideas...**

## More online

The full text of the articles abridged here can be found at [bit.ly/2013row](http://bit.ly/2013row). Also there:

- Reply to Yassamine Mather
- In defence of comrade Matgamna and Workers' Liberty
- Socialism, CPA, and Facebook
- Marxism and religion: the left is seriously disoriented
- A response to Patrick Smith's resignation
- Political Islam, Christian fundamentalism, Marxism, and the left today [the 2006 introduction]
- Where does political Islam come from? [2002]
- Muslims, Christians, Marxists, free speech: the Muhammad cartoons dispute. An attempt at a dialogue. [2006]
- Real and invented differences on political Islam [2006]
- Review of Chris Harman's pamphlet *The Prophet and the Proletariat* [2002]



# Tories plan new anti-union laws

By Dale Street

**The so-called review of industrial relations announced by the Tories on 17 November is a build-up for new attacks on the right of trade unions to take effective action to defend their members. It is also another stage in the Tory campaign against union-Labour links.**

As a manufactured pretext for the review, the Tories have latched on to Unite's "leverage" tactics, especially its use of those tactics during its recent dispute with Ineos in Grangemouth.

Leverage basically involves trying to put an employer with whom a union is in dispute under pressure from its business partners, "stakeholders", investors, clients — and just about anyone else who can add to the pressure on the targeted employer.

It is not a substitute for union organisation in the workplace, but complementary to it. And Unite, which has used leverage tactics more than any other union, boasts of its success in forcing concessions from employers.

In the free-for-all witch-hunt about Unite's dispute with Ineos, the Tories and their allies in the media denounced Unite's leverage campaigning as thuggery, bullying, harassment and intimidation.

The review's terms of reference include investigating "the effectiveness of existing legislation to prevent inappropriate or intimidatory actions in trade disputes ... (and) the alleged use of extreme tactics in industrial disputes, including so-called 'leverage' tactics, and whether the response in terms of law enforcement has been appropriate."

In plain English, this is a recipe for introducing yet more anti-union laws (to place even more restrictions on what actions a union can take during an industrial dispute) and yet more public order offences (for the same purpose).

That the review will be used as a launch-pad for new anti-union laws is underlined by references by Cabinet Office minister Francis Maude to "industrial intimidation tactics,

including attempts to sabotage businesses supply chains."

Any union which is serious about winning an industrial dispute will maximise pressure on the employer. This includes hitting its supply chains. In fact, prior to the first wave of anti-union legislation in the 1980s, this was seen as a simple — and entirely legal — matter of solidarity action

The other government member to whom the review will be presented is Business Secretary Vince Cable. Cable is claiming that he should be given credit for making the review supposedly more "balanced", because it will look into employers' behaviour as well as that of trade unions:

"I have agreed to a proportionate and rational review of industrial disputes, including leverage and other tactics used by both unions and employers. There are rogue unions but there are also rogue employers. This government will tolerate neither."

According to the "Liberal Democratic Voice" website ("The most-read website by and for Lib Dem supporters. Not paid for by trade unions or millionaires"):

## BIASED

**"This is another example of how Liberal Democrats contribute to making the government much fairer and more even-handed than the Conservatives or Labour could ever manage alone."**

But the law is already massively biased in favour of employers and against trade unions. It is entirely lawful for rogue employers to act as rogue employers. The government not only tolerates them. It gives them legal protection.

And perhaps Vince Cable would care to name the "rogue unions" he refers to in his statement?

The review is to be carried out by Bruce Carr QC, an employers' representative, and a trade union representative. Unite has effectively called for a boycott: "This review is nothing more than a Tory election stunt which no trade unionist will collaborate with". It remains to be seen whether that militant stand sticks.

Carr is eminently suited to the role he has been allocated.

He represented British Airways when it applied to the courts for an injunction to prevent Unite members from going on strike in their dispute with the company. And he represented British Airways again when Unite took the company to court on behalf of 5,000 members for alleged breach of contract.

But it is not just employers of Unite members who have been represented by Carr. When the Ministry of Justice sought, and obtained, an injunction against the Prison Officers Association to prevent it from taking strike action, it was represented by Carr.

## ATTACK

**The Con-Dem review is also an attack on union-Labour links. The union which will clearly be singled out for attack by the review is Unite, the biggest donor to the Labour Party and the target of an ongoing media witch-hunt based on spurious allegations about bogus recruitment campaigns and ballot-rigging in the local Labour Party.**

The Tories have already used such allegations to make all manner of posturing and self-serving demands on Miliband.

They have variously demanded that he should condemn Unite's tactics, that he should demand disciplinary action against Unite officials and members, that he should refuse to accept any more funding from Unite, etc., etc., etc.

The Tories want to portray Unite as an organisation engaged in thuggery and vote-rigging in order to attack Labour on the basis of guilt by association. They also want to portray Miliband as too weak to stand up to the "union barons" and therefore too weak to run the country.

In all likelihood, they will make this a major issue in the run-up to the next general election. The review will present its findings in mid-2014. The Tories will then introduce anti-union legislation into the last parliamentary session before the general election.

If Labour fails to support the legislation, the media will denounce it as being in the pocket of "union barons". And if Labour supports the legislation, it will alienate its core supporters.

**Union activists need to mobilise for: a boycott of the review; opposition to the subsequent legislation, and pressure on Labour to oppose both the review and the resulting legislation.**

## Preparation and determination

We continue our discussion of the lessons of the Grangemouth defeat. Here, a contribution from Mark Best discusses how Unite's "Organising and Leverage Department" can help win disputes.

**Grangemouth was a big defeat. Exactly how big remains to be seen, but the workforce at Grangemouth have accepted massive cuts in terms and conditions and the union has accepted the neutering condition of a no-strike clause.**

What's more, there was no anti-victimisation agreement. Stevie Deans has been disgracefully forced out of his job, and the company is already widening the net to bring disciplinary charges against other stewards. The union seems to have failed to negotiate legal closure, meaning that the company retains the ability to attempt to work up a case to sue Unite for damages caused by the failed dispute.

After a defeat like this it is easy to lose one's bearings in the search for blame and answers. Instead we must rationally take stock, learn lessons, and ensure we are stronger to fight the next battle. AWL has already discussed in some detail, in the pages of *Solidarity* and on our website, what went wrong at Grangemouth, but it is worth focusing here on two aspects of the dispute in particular: how Unite conducts its negotiations, and the role of the "Organising and Leverage Department".

The negotiating strategy and media message seemed confused, to say the least. This seems to stem from a mixture of a lack of resolve in much of Unite (and indeed much of the trade union movement), and a lack of co-ordination (again, a problem hardly unique to Unite). If the union is declaring war on the one hand, preparing to launch a leverage campaign, and announcing industrial action, why are press releases and public statements from its Scottish leadership appealing to Ineos's directors' sense of decency and offering concessions?

A much more strategic, co-ordinated and resolute approach is needed in the future. This implies some reorganisation in Unite's structures — cutting the confusion between

industrial sectors and geographic regions; the heads of media, the negotiating team, organising, political and legal working together to one strategy on important disputes; officials and staff working in managed teams; clear lines of responsibility; greater accountability and so forth. Unite also needs to be prepared to challenge the Labour Party to raise issues like taking key strategic assets such as Grangemouth into public ownership, and it needs to be much more consistently combative in its approach to industrial relations.

Unite's leverage campaigns — against companies including Balfour Beatty, Honda, BFK, and others — boast a near 100% success rate where they have been allowed to actually run their course. In this case the campaign was pulled before it even got started.

We should encourage and support developments in the unions that see them targeting all points of vulnerability in a hostile company and holding to account all parties who profit from or invest in rogue companies. We should suggest improvements and innovations that can make them still more effective.

When we go into dispute with large or determined employers, they prepare. They have strategies to take unions on. In a strike, they will prepare to bring in scabs from other sites, stockpile supplies, and imply that anyone who strikes will miss out on future bonuses or promotions. In short: they do their homework and prepare for a fight.

Unite's Organising and Leverage Department attempts to bring the same preparation and resolve to our side. We should encourage similar initiatives in other unions.

The future direction of organising in Unite has already been set out by its executive — to focus efforts on organising in "critical industries", the key economic areas identified by the Government as vital to the operation of "Great Britain Plc." — docks, airports, power generation, fuel supply, etc.

**The defeat at Grangemouth is undoubtedly a body-blow to this ambition, but Unite should not shrink from the challenge.**

• Abridged from bit.ly/g-lev

## The cuts councillor and the Unite leadership

By Will Greene

**The People's Assembly is often suspected of uncritical support for Britain's trade union leadership.**

It was outdone, however, by its younger sibling, the Student Assembly Against Austerity (9 November), in its relation to the Unite leadership.

On stage with Unite's Steve Turner, Socialist Action's Aaron Kiely lavished praise on the union for "saving jobs at the Grangemouth Refinery."

Not joining shrill cries of "sell out!" is one thing; essentially painting up a crushing defeat as a victory is quite another.

This is, of course, the same Aaron Kiely who paid tribute to the police during the London riots for working "around the clock to restore law and order." And the same Aaron Kiely who, as a Labour councillor in Thurrock, voted for a cuts budget in 2011.

**That this charlatan can still parade himself as a "left" activist on platforms across the country is a joke, and a singularly unfunny one at that.**

## More on Grangemouth:

[bit.ly/g-l-d](http://bit.ly/g-l-d)

# Tube workers set for jobs war

London Underground Ltd will announce its new plan for station cuts on Thursday 21 November. Workers expect huge job losses, ticket office closures, and some kind of reorganisation and restructuring. The background to the cuts is a 12.5% cut to Transport for London's funding from central government. The RMT plans a rally on Tuesday 26 November to prepare for a dispute.

We reprint this article from the blog of rank-and-file bulletin *Tubeworker*. For more, see [workersliberty.org/twblog](http://workersliberty.org/twblog)

## Act immediately

We have all known this is coming for ages. We have had all the preparation time we need. As soon as this is announced, the unions should ballot for industrial action. From the [2010 job cuts] to pay claims, we have lost too many fights in the past because we were slow off the starting blocks and management raced ahead of us. That must not happen this time.

## All grades together

No-one can feel secure in their job. Even if stations jobs are the trigger, our fight must be to defend jobs in all grades. We know that management are preparing for driverless trains, plan to cut service control jobs when the Hammersmith service control centre opens, want to do away with train maintainers under the guise of

'auto-preparation' and think that engineers can also be replaced by automated processes. We know that they are keeping vacancies unfilled or plugging the gaps with agencies.

The company won't be so stupid as to announce job cuts in all grades on the same day; it will try to pick us off one function at a time. Management hope that this will prevent us uniting against their attacks. We must not fall for this; we must act together.

This also means that all unions should take industrial action. This is not a fight for some other grade or some other union. It is a fight for all of us. Management will exploit any division if we let them.

## Winning the propaganda war

When management put out their propaganda, we do not want to wait days or even weeks for a response from our unions. We need quick responses that take apart the company's spin.

We also need proactive materials that tell us the facts and the arguments, and explain how the unions can win and what role we can play.

Publicity should address all workers, but should also address each grade, so that everyone knows how the issues affect us. And it should tackle the doubts and questions that people are raising at work, and the mischievous rumours that management put about.

## Seeking support

Londoners to not want their ticket offices closed, their stations unstaffed, their Tube not maintained properly or their trains driven by robots. They can be our allies in this fight - as long as we mobilise their support.

We can be sure that management, the Mayor, and their lackeys at the *Evening Standard* will be telling them that the unions are kicking off about nothing, that automation rather than staff is the way forward, etc etc etc. We need to work to

win public support - by going to other trade unions outside our industry, by leafleting outside stations, by headline-grabbing protest actions.

## Effective, creative, sustained industrial action

Learn the lessons from past defeats: for a dispute on this scale, 24-hour strikes are a waste of time. Management just staff up the service with scabs. We need to be ready to take sustained action. If we are creative about when and how we take action, we can cause a serious impact for a week or more. Only this can force a rethink from the company's top bosses and the politicians who pull their strings.

## Rank and file in the driving seat

The most effective dispute is one in which rank and file workers set the agenda and decide the strategy.

We need to form a strike committee to discuss tactics and pressure our union leaders to adopt them, and to organise the practical work of visiting depots, stations, control rooms, offices etc, going out to other unions and community groups, strike organisation, picketing etc.

**Such a committee may be open to everyone to attend, but must make its decisions on the basis of balanced representation of all grades and areas.**

# Fighting casualisation in Higher Education

**Higher Education workers will strike again on Wednesday 3 December in a fight against a 1% pay deal. Many HE workers also face battles over zero-hours contracts and casualisation. Here, a UCU activist reports on the campaign against precarious working.**

**Contract-researchers are employed precariously by universities to fulfil short-term projects.**

We may be employed on temporary contracts of various kinds, some of which are termed "occasional" or "exceptional". Each species of contract carries its own set of terms and conditions, and these may differ significantly. Essentially, all such fixed-term contracts, even the least-bad, formalise casual labour.

A handful of colleagues and I were employed on a recent project, but the nature of the contract we were offered seemed to us markedly inferior to other contracts we had been given before to carry out work of a similar kind. Our union, UCU, took up the case and challenged the employer.

The upshot was that although the employer did not formally accept our contention that the initial contract represented an intensification of casualisation, we secured a less-bad, more run-of-the-mill contract for the work.

One of our aims had been to turn the individual grievance into a collective issue highlighting the extent of the university's deployment of casual contracts, and their variety. The UCU branch, after some lobbying, organised for the UCU's national official responsible for tackling casualisation to address members. The pic-

ture she painted of the situation nationally, and at my university, was shocking. Over 500 people were employed to teach at the university on zero hours contracts. Of all those employed by the university only to teach (rather than to research) 82% are on fixed-term contracts. The national average for the sector is 50%, itself a startling figure.

The decision by universities to use the variety of casual contracts at their disposal is largely a political one. Some universities such as UCL and Aberdeen don't use any fixed-term contracts. UCU is pressing for changes to the legislative framework governing employment in the sector, and its public stance is to build collective action to negotiate better policies at local level.

## BUILD

**I'd like to be able to say that this has been evident at my university.**

But despite the positive outcome of the specific grievance I was involved in, it seems as if the issue is still tagged as casework, rather than as a springboard to build collectively, and in the process to recruit to the union.

Recent joint strike-action by all campus unions over pay has understandably shifted the focus of attention. I would like to see the union locally being more proactive in its drive to gather information about the range of casual contracts being deployed on campus, and the extent to which staff are subject to casual contracts of various kinds.

**Then the aim would be to take concerted local action to limit, and over time eradicate, the use of such contracts.**

# Support the "Tres Cosas" strike!

## By Ira Berkovic

**Outsourced cleaning, catering, and security workers at the University of London will strike on 27 and 28 November.**

Their strike ballot returned a 97% vote in

favour of strikes, on a 70% turnout. The workers, who are employed by agencies such as Balfour Beatty and Aramark, have been fighting for sick pay, holiday, and pensions equality with their directly-employed colleagues through

the "Tres Cosas" ("Three Things") campaign.

The campaign has organised regular direct actions, often in conjunction with the University of London Union, and has recently been the victim of attempts to university management to criminalise and undermine protest on campus, with increased, and increasingly aggressive, police presences at demonstrations and the arrest of activists including ULU president Michael Chesum.

The strike also aims to halt the closure of the Garden Halls accommodation

site, which the Independent Workers union of Great Britain (IWGB) says could lead to job losses.

The workers are appealing for donations to their strike fund, which can be made online at [bit.ly/3cosas-strikefund](http://bit.ly/3cosas-strikefund).

Two fundraisers are planned for Saturday 23 November, one at the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts conference in Birmingham, and another at Brixton Jamm featuring hip-hop artists The Nextment, Ty, and others.

**For more information on these events, see [3cosascampaign.wordpress.com](http://3cosascampaign.wordpress.com)**

**Vote Brian Munro for RMT London Transport Region Executive member**

[facebook.com/goformunro](http://facebook.com/goformunro)

**Vote Martin Powell-Davies for NUT Vice President**

[bit.ly/mpd4vp](http://bit.ly/mpd4vp)



## Huge pay rises for bosses, wage cuts for workers

By Gerry Bates

**The average pay rise for directors at Britain's top 100 companies in 2012-3 was 40 per cent.**

The average pay rise for directors at Britain's top 100 companies in 2012-3 was 40 per cent.

They now get an average of £3.3 million. The 40% rise comes after years of big boosts, but is even bigger than the 27% increase the bosses got in 2011-2.

This year's rise was made up mostly of increased returns on shares handed out to directors as part of their pay, rather than of cash wages and bonuses.

Meanwhile, for the rest of us, average total weekly

pay in June-August 2013 was only 0.7 per cent higher than a year before.

In the public sector, pay actually fell, by 0.5 per cent.

In October inflation dropped a little, to 2.6% (RPI measure) or 2.2% (CPI). But it has been around, or over, 3% since 2009, and will probably rise again.

Real wages have gone through the biggest and longest decline since records began, and are at their lowest since 2001.

Young people have been specially hard hit — even the relatively better-off 50% who get to university. Recent graduates now get 12% less, on average, than graduates in 2007-8, and have 60% higher debt.

Such is the shape of George Osborne's economic recovery. Share prices and top pay are rising, but unemployment is static, services and benefits are still being cut, and real wages are still falling.

Even in capitalist terms it is as yet a weak recovery. Profit rates recovered a bit in 2010 from their slump in 2008-9, but have stagnated since then. Business investment is still stagnant or decreasing.

Even a weak recovery offers chances for unions to mobilise and recoup.

**We should demand the Living Wage for all workers, and the reversal of cuts in public services and benefits.**

## Climate failure, capital failure

By Paul Vernadsky

**The failure of capital to get to grips with the threat of climate change is reaching new levels, as they backtrack on even the minimal promises of the past.**

The capitalist owners of the means of production and the bourgeois states that administer their sys-

tem have comprehensively failed to tackle climate change, despite 25 years of warnings from scientists.

As the IPCC prepares yet another report, with more clarity and accuracy in weighing up the risks, more confidence of the role of human activity and yet an even narrower window of dealing with it, so the rulers of the world renege, ignore and backtrack.

So far around 4,000 people are known to have died during the typhoon that hit the Philippines last week. No scientist will assert a mechanical link between a single weather event and climate change. But the typhoon and other forms of extreme weather seen in recent years are precisely the kind of effect predicted by climate models as temperatures rise.

A further cruel irony is that global climate talks took place just after the typhoon hit — in Warsaw, capital of the heavy coal-producing and climate-denying Polish state. And the mood going into the event was grim.

The Japanese government announced it will backtrack on its promise to reduce its emission cuts from 25% to less than 4% by 2020, having closed its nuclear reactors after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

Australia, which did not send a minister to the talks, signalled it may weaken its targets and is repealing domestic carbon laws following the election of the conservative Abbott government.

The Canadian government has pulled out of the Kyoto accord, which committed major industrial economies to reducing their annual CO2 emissions to below 1990 levels.

In Britain, the environment minister Owen Paterson openly denies that climate change is a problem at all, while the chancellor George Osborne embraces fracking and other technologies that emit more carbon. The outriders for the Tories such as the *Spectator* magazine publish articles claiming that "climate change is good for us" and openly call for the repeal of the Climate Change Act.

### REFORM

**The Climate Change Act is a modest reform, hardly revolutionary, but at least an effort to incorporate climate concerns into mainstream, parliamentary politics.**

These Tories blame government regulation for driving up energy prices. In fact, their privatised market and their profiteering sponsors have ripped people off for years.

Socialists don't generally support indirect taxation, because the firms who own and control the means of production can pass on these taxes to working people who have to buy their energy from these sources. However the root of the problem is not which form of taxation or trading scheme or whatever other market mechanism is implemented.

The central issue is that across the globe the major sources of greenhouse gas emissions are either privately owned by rapacious corporations who will pursue profits even at the expense of wrecking the environment, or in the hands of bourgeois states that run energy and transport just like capitalist corporations, without regard to the people who use them or the impact on the planet.

To tackle climate change means to take on the entire capitalist mode of production, its firms, its states, its media, and all the other mechanisms it uses to hegemonise and rule. It requires a massive social and political transformation — a revolution — to destroy the old structures and social relations of capitalism and replace them with collective, democratic, international solidarity relations between all the peoples of the world.

Such a task can only be carried out by a vibrant working class movement. Such a movement, rooted in workplaces and working class communities, has the power and the interest to tackle climate change, and to do so in a way that the vast majority of humanity will not have to pay a heavy price for the transition. A working class-based climate movement can combine the pressing task of climate mitigation and adaptation with the fight against poverty, inequality and oppression.

Such a movement does not exist at present. Right now we are not close to the kind of socialist revolution necessary to achieve these goals. But such a movement can be built around struggles for reforms and the fight for transitional measures to force capital and its states to do more.

Trade unions, environmental NGOs and climate activists can make common cause in coalescing this movement, winning support from workers and developing an ever more radical programme.

**With further capital failure, building such a movement is now an urgent necessity.**