

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

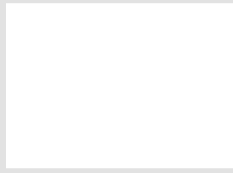


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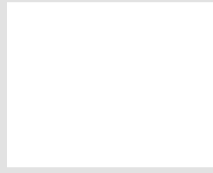
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For a workers' government

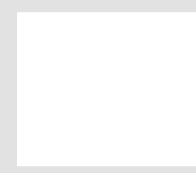
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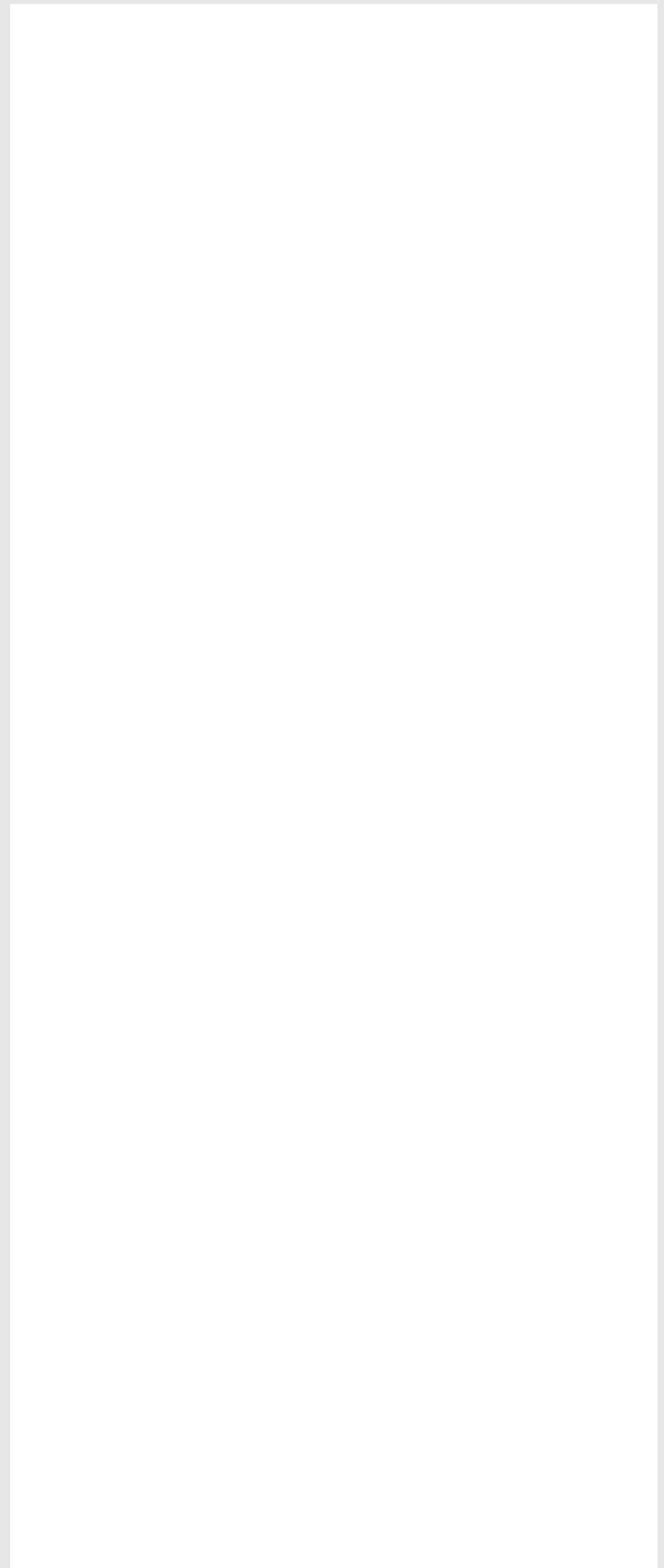


**Capitalism heads into double-dip. Unions  
call for “alternative” and “new economy”**

**REPLACE  
THE RULE OF  
PROFIT BY  
ECONOMIC  
DEMOCRACY**

**March on 2 October  
Strike in November**

**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 and bisexual 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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# EDL racists rally in Edinburgh

By Dale Street

Around 80 supporters of the Scottish Defence League (SDL), including a number of imported English Defence League (EDL), staged a static protest in Edinburgh on 10 September.

Politically, the SDL represents the same lumpen anti-Muslim racist bigotry, leavened by the presence of a number of outright fascists in the ranks, as its English counterpart but organisationally it has always been much weaker.

Since 2010 the SDL has avoided protests in big cities which showed up its weakness. That changed on 10 September.

The City Council refused the SDL permission for a demonstration, leaving the SDL forced to hold a static protest on the edge of the city centre.

In the past the SDL was opposed by an ad hoc alliance — the Glasgow Anti-Fascist Alliance (GAFA) and the Edinburgh Anti-Fascist Alliance (EAFA).

Although GAFA and EAFA both mobilised to oppose SDL events in the smaller Scottish towns, they remained essentially "reactive" organisations, with nothing to hold them together between counter-protests.

The SDL has also been opposed by Unite Against Fascism (UAF), which merged into a broader "Scotland United" initiative to oppose SDL events in Glasgow and Edinburgh in 2009/2010.

On both occasions those groups organised demonstrations which headed

### Scottish Defence League in Edinburgh, 10 September

away from where the SDL was gathering, and did everything possible to dissuade activists from confronting the SDL. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP), in particular, backed such an approach.

Last Saturday's anti-SDL mobilisation began with a UAF rally in the city centre. 300 attending was a smaller mobilisation than previously.

As the rally was opened Simon Assaf (an SWPer wearing his UAF hat) gave the UAF/SWP "line" for the day:

The SDL had already been defeated; they had been unable to march through the city centre; the UAF, on the other hand, was gathering in the city centre; it was staging a demonstration; and the UAF, unlike the SDL, had won support from the people of Edinburgh.

Mick Napier of the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC) used his speech as an opportunity to equate the SDL/EDL with Israel: the Defence

Leagues wave the Israeli flag because both believe in ghettoising minorities and discriminating against them (whites and Muslims here, Jews and Arabs in Israel).

After the rally a UAF demonstration marched a couple of hundred yards along Princes Street and then came to a halt — this was clearly the agreement which UAF had reached with the police.

Small groups of activists broke away from the UAF demonstration to try to get closer to the SDL. But they were too small to make an impact. The police quickly moved in to push them back down towards the UAF demonstration.

**Last Saturday's events in Edinburgh appear to have been pretty much a re-run of the recent events in Tower Hamlets: numerically heavy policing, static protests by the SDL and the UAF, and the UAF/SWP hyping up the day's events into a major victory for anti-fascism.**

## Pensions battle heating up

Continued from back page

government for them to back off and claim success.

The best way to counteract that is work to win the ballots and deliver the action in all of these unions and then to bring tens of thousands of workers into activity. Passive, demoralised union leaders depend on an inactive, atomised membership. A major struggle which reaches down into thousands of workplaces in every community can renew and refresh the labour movement in ways which years of patient organising work would not.

Meanwhile the education unions have called a

mass lobby of Parliament on 26 October — to submit a petition with around 25,000 signatures demanding the withdrawal of plans to worsen the Teachers' Pension Scheme. Parliamentary lobbies have often been substitutes for industrial action and have rarely made any difference. It has not gone down well that this one is in the school half-term too. Nevertheless there is a strong case for building this lobby as strike action will soon follow. It also matters that school workers have activities to build this term and before the likely next strike.

It is vital that local union branches set up action or strike committees to organ-

ise for these actions, involve workplace reps in this campaign and build democratic control of this dispute to the rank and file membership. As the coalition of unions taking action grows it will become urgent to establish cross-union committees in each locality as organising centres to deliver maximum support for the action and put pressure on union leaders to plan the sort of programme of action necessary to win.

**A good start would be to name a number of days of action, national and local, during November and December to demonstrate that this is a fight we plan to win.**

## A pact with the devil

By Tony

"The People's Pledge" is an all-party campaign that seeks a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union by asking voters to promise to only back MPs who support a referendum. The Rail, Maritime and Transport workers' union (RMT) has become the first union to formally back the campaign. RMT leader Bob Crow was already an individual supporter.

By supporting The People's Pledge, unions enter into a deal with the devil. Backing the campaign, which is focused exclusively on the single issue of the referendum, means getting into bed with some very unsavoury characters. Let's look at some of our new "partners":

- Rich-boy Tory MP Zac Goldsmith, who inherited somewhere between £200 million and £300 million of the family fortune when his late father died. Last year a Channel 4 investigation raised questions over his election expenses.

- Daniel Hannan, Tory MEP. Hannan slagged off the NHS during a visit to the USA and has praised Enoch Powell as "somebody who understood the importance of national democracy".

- Nigel Dodds OBE, and Democratic Unionist Party MP, who claimed the highest expenses of any Northern Ireland MP. The RMT's involvement in a campaign backed by DUP MPs may not be to the liking of the union's Irish members, who have a Republican traditions.

- Robert Hiscox, Chairman of the Board of one of the biggest insurance firms in the world.

- Charles Moore. Former editor of the *Daily Telegraph*.

Is the RMT also planning to ally with prominent Europhobe Joan Collins, who, when asked about Margaret Thatcher states "I loved her to bits"? Maybe the unions could meet up with Miss Collins at one of her three homes, in Belgravia, Hollywood or the South of France, to enlist her support?

Nick Griffin of the BNP is also anti-EU; are there any plans to get him on board too?

**We should be building alliances with workers across Europe, not uniting with right-wingers and capitalists!**

# “You need slaves, you’ll get rebels!”

By Hugh Edwards

“You need slaves, you’ll get rebels!”

That was the defiant declaration of one banner as more than one million workers struck on Tuesday 6 September against the Italian government’s most draconian budget yet, with 52 billion euros in cuts.

Large parts of industry, transport and public services closed down. Tens of thousands marched and rallied in the country’s public squares.

The sudden emergence of the present crisis follows a decades-long decline of Italian capitalism. From the mid-1970s Italy has increasingly relied on currency devaluations, an inexhaustible supply of irregular labour, and cheap credit. All alongside massive corruption.

The consequences were felt in the early 1990s with the political scandal of Tangentopoli (Bribesville), the near bankruptcy of the state, and the money markets, as today, dumping Italian Treasury bonds.

The resolution of that crisis was a cynical deal between trade union bureaucrats and the state — illustrated by the fact that the buying power of the Italian working class has risen by only 4% in two decades, as against 30% for the professional and commercial middle classes.

## DEBT

**But the underlying deficit and debt problems of the economy, which is largely made up of small and medium-size firms, remained.**

In the competitive context of globalisation and the Eurozone, the problems sharpened.

Since 1994 both centre-right and centre-left governments have inflicted budget after budget of cuts, to the tune of nearly 400 billion euros!

The current budget is the fifth in the three years of the Berlusconi government, exposing the lie that the country was surviving the crisis better than elsewhere.

Ultimatums from the European Central Bank and former Stalinist Giorgio Napolitano, President of Italy, forced the regime to bite the bullet.

A formal agreement was stitched together to satisfy Brussels and the bankers. The corrupt propertied classes and the politicians who serve them have had their existence and plutocratic lifestyles formally

## Italian general strike, 6 September

and publicly acknowledged. Their armies of corrupt lawyers will ensure that their incomes and wealth will remain untouched. Meanwhile the ruthless pillaging and sacking of the public realm carries on.

It is this reality that was given voice and expression in last Tuesday’s national strike. Parallel strikes and marches by non-CGIL unions took place — by all the neo-syndicalist “Base” unions — but also from significant sections of CISL and UIL, whose “yellow” union leaders had condemned the strikes as a “threat” to the markets and the budget.

The fight for unity of the workers’ movement is the critical test of whether the juggernaut of capitalist austerity can be halted. And by that criterion the leaders of the latest strike fall a long way short.

CGIL and its national secretary Susannah Cammuso, whatever the current differences with CISL and UIL leaders, have sought to ensure that resistance would not threaten the bourgeois order.

In June CGIL, CISL and UIL signed a deal with Confindustria, the principal organ of Italian business, pledging the unions to a common front to “save the country”. Cammuso’s rhetoric about “rejecting” the budget is of a piece

with the union’s political voice, the Democratic Party: a device to cover for complicity with the system, to buy time to turn anger and action away from sustained mobilisation. No concrete declaration was made for further action from her.

FIOM metalworker leaders, former members of the CGIL confederation, justly condemn its record of collaboration but have offered no perspective other than mounting symbolic “protest” tents outside selected factories, public buildings, etc.

They also called for a referendum against article eight of the budget which abolishes workers’ rights in the factories — a recipe for demoralisation and derailing of any further action!

The Base organisations, with a record of anti-capitalist rhetoric, have been floored by a chronic incapacity to offer concrete political answers to the crisis in the system as a whole.

What is needed is strategic and tactical proposals for creating and building united fronts of the workers’ organisations.

**That could address the obstacles of treacherous trade union leaders, the cul-de-sac of reformist parliamentary illusions, and pose the self-organisation of the masses in government — a workers’ government.**

# Welcome to NSWisconsin

By Tom Banks

**Around 40,000 public sector unionists and their supporters turned out in Sydney, Australia on 8 September to protest anti-worker legislation by the conservative Liberal/National Coalition government of New South Wales.**

The Teachers’ Federations struck for the day despite the state government getting a ruling from the

Industrial Relations Commission that the strike was illegal. At stake are the issues of a public sector wages cap of 2.5%, no legal right of appeal to government regulation of working conditions, thousands of job cuts and further selling of public assets.

According to legislation passed in June the NSW government can arbitrarily set working conditions, force unions to trade off existing conditions in order to get more than 2.5% in wage

# Egypt: the workers’ demands

**The Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) made this statement on 5 September**

**Over the coming few days hundreds of thousands of workers will exercise their right to strike and organise sit-ins, in defiance of all attempts to intimidate them and prevent them from exercising these rights, such as the law criminalising strikes and protests.**

The 22,000 textile workers of Misr Spinning in Mahalla have shown that this law does not frighten them, and it will not prevent the strike that they have set for 10 September demanding a new rate for the minimum wage, a 200% rise in bonuses and increased investment and the provision of the raw materials in order for to the company to operate.

Hundreds of thousands of teachers in six provinces are also threatening to join protests on the same day followed by strikes to demand that their colleagues on temporary contracts are given permanent jobs and a 200% rise in bonuses.

Postal workers in several provinces have already been out on strike this week to demand the restructuring of their wages, increased bonuses, equal recognition for educational qualifications and an end to corruption. Even before Eid, 5,000 workers at Kabu textile mills in Alexandria went on strike demanding that corrupt bosses are brought to justice, the payment of delayed wages and permanent contracts for temporary workers. Staff working in cultural centres demonstrated for raises to their bonuses, permanent contracts for temporary workers, an end to corruption and the sacking of management consultants.

Assistant train drivers on the Cairo Metro organised a strike and sit-in demanding permanent contracts and equal rights for fixed-

term workers at Demerdash station yesterday. Today workers at the Aviation Information Centres began an open-ended sit-in. Meanwhile airport workers are also preparing for a strike and sit-in to bring down the Minister of Civil Aviation and his crew.

Tens of thousands of workers in the Public Transport Authority are expected to strike on the first day of the school year if the chairman of the authority does not fulfil his promise to raise bonuses by 200%. Health technicians are also threatening to strike at the end of the month as their demands have not been met, while health institutions and hospitals have been shaken by the anger of workers who have been waiting decades for permanent contracts and the rest of their rights.

## MONTHS

**Eight months after the victory of the 25 January revolution in getting rid of the dictator Mubarak, pressure from the revolutionaries has forced the supposedly revolutionary government to hold a public trial of the tyrant and a small number of the criminals, murderers and corrupt figures closest to him.**

But workers have discovered that governments do not listen to their demands. For more than four years they have argued for a decent minimum wage; three years ago the rate was calculated at 1200 pounds a month. Today inflation has driven this figure up to 1500 pounds a month. Yet the governments of businessmen refuse to implement the minimum wage, claiming that there is no money to fund it. They rejected all the serious studies which proved that it is possible to fund a minimum wage with the very same budgets which have allowed the rich to loot and plunder, by setting some limits to exploitation and corruption such as implementing a maximum wage. It is completely illogical that a worker should be

paid only 50 pounds a month while employees at the top of the payscale receive a million pounds a month.

Likewise, the imposition of progressive taxation on capital gains and other similar mechanisms has been rejected by every so-called revolutionary government.

The EFITU announces its complete solidarity with workers who are exercising their right to strike and organise sit-ins in defence of their legitimate rights, the foremost of which are:

- A minimum wage of no less than 1500 pounds a month and a maximum wage which does not exceed 15 times the minimum, linked to the rate of inflation and price rises.

- Permanent appointment of all categories of fixed-term workers, taking into account years already worked.

- Scrapping the law criminalizing protests and strikes, and an end to military tribunals for civilians.

- Immediate implementation of a law on trade union freedoms.

- Those involved in corruption must be removed and held to account.

- Re-opening of companies which have been closed by their bosses, under workers’ management.

- Reinstatement and financial compensation for all workers who have been arbitrarily sacked.

- Implementation of the law guaranteeing workers a share in company profits.

The EFITU calls on all workers to organise themselves in unions to express themselves and win their rights, and to unite in order to achieve their legitimate demands. Strike, strike — it’s our legitimate right!

**Strike against hunger!  
Strike against poverty!**

**Workers, politics and the left in Morocco: interview with Moroccan revolutionary**  
<http://alturl.com/zfjwk>

union members and their leaderships to fight for:

- Union rights to pursue wage rises and improved working conditions.

- No redundancies: create more jobs for better public services.

- Keep our public services in public hands.

- Defend the right to take industrial action in defence of our public services.

- Mobilise! Talk to your workmates and colleagues. Get our message out to the community!

- Call workplace meetings to discuss the attacks.

- Move motions for serious industrial action to stop the government, and pass these on to your union’s executive.

More information:  
**Power to the People and the NSW Union Activists Network:**

<http://alturl.com/fffqn>  
**Activist Teachers Network:**

[www.activistteacher.com](http://www.activistteacher.com)

**Progressive PSA:**

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

## Are Marxists pro-liberty?



Dave Osler

Normally I wouldn't dream of grassing up the publishers of this newspaper to the Labour Party bureaucracy. But after nearly 20 years, even the dimmest witchhunter has probably by now twigged the subterfuge that saw evil clandestine Trot entrusts the Socialist Organiser Alliance rebrand themselves as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

The name is that bit at odds from the usual unimaginative titles deployed by far-left outfits. What's more, it has a subtly different political flavour.

That much was apparent to me the first time I saw a somewhat shy and retiring young AWLer — yeah, I know ... but there have been some in the past, apparently — selling the first edition of the new publication at some labour movement meeting or other.

Instantly the poor sod was set upon by leading members of a hardcore Trotskyist formation. "Liberty? Liberty? What's that all about, then? Liberty is a bourgeois concept, comrade," they sneered aggressively, with heavy emphasis on the word "bourgeois".

The young man was somewhat flustered and didn't really stand his ground. But perhaps the nasty old sectarians did have a partial point.

I would no longer be a Marxist if I thought that socialism was inimical to, rather than a precondition for, liberty. However, the notion of liberty as a category in political philosophy has, ever since the English, American and French revolutions, usually been associated with explicitly pro-capitalist thinkers.

John Stuart Mill's pamphlet *On Liberty* has been central to contemporary liberalism since it was hot off the presses in 1859. Moreover, as thoughtful critics of Thatcherism regularly observed, that creed was itself closer to classical liberalism than proper Burkean Conservatism, and ideologically owed not a little to Hayek's book *The Constitution of Liberty*.

The significance of this is that from John Locke to Robert Nozick, many brands of liberalism have been pretty upfront in promoting the liberty to own property as the core liberty around which all else revolves. And it is precisely this liberty socialism unapologetically proposes to eradicate.

It is also beyond dispute that the Bolsheviks were egregious violators of liberty as normally defined. Lenin and Trotsky did restrict the right to vote, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, freedom of the person from arbitrary arrest and the right to hold personal property.

The standard leftist justification of these actions boils down to the claim that in the concrete circumstances, they had no other choices. But what happened after 1917 included the imposition of very real inroads into the freedoms of many.

Revolutionary socialists can find themselves facing both ways on such matters, rightly resisting any attempts to erode civil liberty in Britain today while defending the Russian revolution as a point of honour. As a liberal-minded friend of mine likes to joke, Leninists that express unconditional opposition to the death penalty are obviously confused.

So can Marxists be said to stand for liberty in any meaningful sense? The answer here is that aspects of the bourgeois definition of liberty are important, and it is desirable to uphold them wherever possible. But we need to highlight the contradictions bourgeois liberty necessarily entails, and what we offer that transcends it.

In sum, our case is that there is rather more to liberty than mere absence of social and/or legal constraint. Crucially, the liberty of private owners to do what they wish with the property they own withdraws often crucial freedoms from those who do not own it, which by definition is everybody else.

This is most evident with private property in the means of production, distribution and exchange. It is precisely this control that leaves a small minority in society with overwhelming power to shape every aspect of our lives. There can be no real liberty, still less genuine individualism, unless that power is democratised.

**Working-class people clearly do need the basic bourgeois political liberties that liberalism, at least in theory, upholds. Those who hold these gains in contempt would not be my first choice of appointment to responsible positions in a future socialist society. But they need something else as well; you might even want to call it workers' liberty.**

## Behind Obama's Jobs Act



Barry Finger

**US President Obama outlined his new American Jobs Act before a packed Congress, more than half of whom believe the poor and jobless are undertaxed moochers and that the government does not create jobs. The Democrats will have their hands full.**

The Obama speech signifies that he is again in campaign mode. He's challenged the conservative contention that "the only thing we can do to restore prosperity is just dismantle the government, refund everybody's money, let everyone write their own rules, and tell everyone they're on their own..."

Earlier stimulus packages stabilized the economy and arrested its freefall plummet. But it was too underpowered to reverse the downturn. How do these proposals shape up?

According to the Congressional Budget Office, the GDP gap (the difference between actual or projected GDP and full capacity GDP) is 5.1% for 2011. The corresponding unemployment gap, the difference between actual or projected rate of unemployment and "natural" rate of unemployment, is 4.4%. These deficiencies translate into an \$805 billion shortfall in aggregate demand, according to economist William Mitchell. For Paul Krugman, "The lingering effects of the housing bust and the overhang of household debt from the bubble years are creating a roughly \$1 trillion per year hole in the US economy."

Either way the \$447 billion in combined tax cuts and spending outlays that Obama has proposed is still woefully inadequate. Yet, there are few means by which the President can bypass this deeply reactionary congress.

The Federal Reserve has ruled out another round of quantitative easing (the buying back of long term bonds). But this is also a head nod to reality. Placing additional reserves in the coffers of banks is basically useless. Even if quantitative easing was what was needed to provide adequate banking reserves for the expansion of business and consumer lending (which is a widely held myth), banks cannot find a sufficient scale of profitable businesses and creditworthy consumers in a down economy to make this worthwhile. There is no straightforward way to translate additional bank reserves into additional private demand.

### UNIONS

**Inadequate though it may be, the union movement will be behind this plan and will predictably take up the call to pressure congress to enact it. By some measures, the job performance during this "recovery" is even worse than during the Great Depression and this speaks to their level of frustration and desperation.**

But there are no real departures here: an extension of the payroll tax, limited mortgage relief, a continuation of unemployment benefits, infrastructure spending, revenue sharing with the states. Obama is still singing in the austerity choir and these proposals fully reflect this.

All his initiatives are "fully funded," meaning that they are designed not to add to the deficit. If the past is any evidence this will entail, for example, shortfalls in social security revenues occasioned by the proposed cuts in pay roll taxes being made good out of deductions from general revenue. Other government programs will simply be short-changed. And Obama's warnings of cuts to Medicare and Medicaid are ominous harbingers of where offsetting future funds will come. One part of Obama's working class constituency will largely be paying for the benefits for the others. It's hard to find the expansionary thrust to all these "balanced" programs.

Obama, it is true, also proposes to open new revenue sources by lowering corporate tax rates, while closing loopholes. Even assuming that this is acceptable to the Republicans — which it isn't — this would be largely a leap of faith. There is no certainty that this will result in more than a mere wash or worse, as corporations remain ever resourceful in squirreling away their profits in off shore tax havens. The predictable result of "unforeseen" revenue shortfalls will be further cutbacks in social spending to keep the overall project in balance. These proposals simply perpetuate tired old supply-side nostrums — useless under Reagan, self-defeating under Obama.

A private-sector recovery requires 300,000 jobs each month. No series of proposals that cannot adequately supplement aggregate demand sufficiently to create the need for 300,000 jobs each month can be expected to make a dent in the problem. In the black community where unemployment

and underemployment is double that of the population as a whole, the urgency is particularly acute.

As the business sector and workers pay down debts, the government has to offset these by massive injections of net spending. Business has already put Obama on notice that proposed tax incentives will not be a spur to hiring because markets are too weak to justify ramping up production. Obama is boxed into a corner, a corner that he himself helped designate.

The economy needs to deficit spend its way out of this. Otherwise a contractionary spiral will be unleashed. This can come from taxing the idle balances of the wealthy, provided they don't respond by ratcheting up their savings. Or it can come by creating a real jobs program funded by the federal government's ability to create money, without first appropriating resources through taxes or borrowing. This technically adds to the deficit, insofar as government spending would be in excess of tax revenue. But this additional "debt" is owed to no one. Obama might have explained that this is how the TARP was "funded." There were after all no sources in the midst of the financial crises to borrow or tax from.

And the left should remind the public that the ruling class knows full well that this is eminently doable. Its unfunded imperialist wars have been underwritten in the past decade precisely along these lines.

### LABOUR'S RESPONSE

**The labour movement needs to identify and expose the weaknesses of the Obama initiatives, welcome as they may now sound. These proposals cannot provide an adequate basis for a new beginning because they are constrained in their ability to augment aggregate demand. They are welcome only to the extent that they nudge the national conversation from deficits to jobs.**

The labour movement needs to launch a campaign urging government to assume the role of employer of the last resort, call for adequately paying government jobs on demand. These proposed government jobs should come with living wages, COLA provisions to secure workers a share of productivity gains in the larger economy and the right to collective bargain, a right that the President has now so conveniently rediscovered in his jobs speech.

The problem with making sensible demands — and these, with roots in the New Deal, are neither socialist nor radical — is that there is no vehicle at present through which they can be channeled. The Democratic Party remains a company union party. It's not a membership party and cannot be controlled by its voting base. It is forever at the mercy of its wealthy donors to finance its campaigns and it directs its appeals largely on a lesser evil basis.

If the Republicans oppose the President's proposals, the Democrats will argue that the conservatives have again turned their backs on the working class. It will matter little that the administration's proposals are weak tea. This highlights all the political infirmities that bind the hands of workers and minorities.

The Democratic base urgently requires a party that is structurally capable of implementing a consistently progressive agenda, and of transcending liberal constraints if, as socialists believe, those constraints will be obstacles to the achievement of liberal goals. It needs a party that can, in other words, actually defend and advance working class interests — not on our socialist grounds, welcome as that might be, but on the basis of their current jobs and economic security centered understanding of the issues. That requires a party shorn of its corporate tentacles. Such a party may have all the ideological weaknesses and inconsistencies of the Democratic Party. It might not even have progress beyond the Democrats' formal agenda. Objectively it would still serve the interests of capitalism to one degree or another. But it would not be a genetic instrument of social control from on high. It may well be a captive of bourgeois ideology at the outset, but not an organic tool of the existing social order.

American socialists need to connect with the disaffected liberal and minority base of the party by orienting around a perspective that addresses the immediate needs of the that base, a base which would provide the mass constituency of any future socialist party. This means raising the need for a real jobs program, robust enough to actually put the unemployed back to work. If the capitalist duopoly cannot deliver, we can use this to expose the frailty of the political system.

**But socialists need to make clear that our call to break with the Democratic Party does not derive from a sectarian insistence on ideological purity, but from a substantive analysis of why the Democrats cannot consistently represent the mass support of those who are called upon to put it in power.**

# Replace the rule of profit with economic democracy

**At the TUC Congress on 12-14 September, unions backed a demonstration at the Tory party conference in Manchester on 2 October (12:00 from Liverpool Road, Deansgate), and announced plans for a huge strike by many public-sector unions against pension cuts in November (probably 22 November).**

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said that “out-of-control traders and speculators razed our economy to the ground... The less you had to do with causing the crash, the bigger the price you are having to pay”.

In view of “the collapse of the economic model that politicians and policymakers have backed since the 1980s...”, “the task is to build a new economy that delivers for all... an economic alternative”.

## What does the TUC propose as a “new economy” and an “economic alternative”?

The slogans for the 2 October demonstration are “a Robin Hood tax on the banks” and “closing tax loopholes”.

That’s a move towards the essential and simple demand to *tax the rich* — people like the richest thousand in Britain, who according to the *Sunday Times* have total wealth of £400 billion.

The cuts of the Coalition government, drastic in their effects, are small by comparison: £18 billion from benefits and £16 billion from education and other local services, over five years.

## The Robin Hood tax and closing tax loopholes would solve the problems?

No. The Robin Hood (or Tobin) tax is a small levy on financial-market transactions. It stops well short of what we need: a clear assertion that the wealth of the upper classes comes from them annexing the products of the labour of the majority, and that the working-class majority can and should re-annex that wealth for social purposes.

## We need a big tax on wealth, or property, or high incomes?

And not just that. There were high rates of tax (up to 98%) on high incomes in Britain from World War Two until Thatcher took office in 1979.

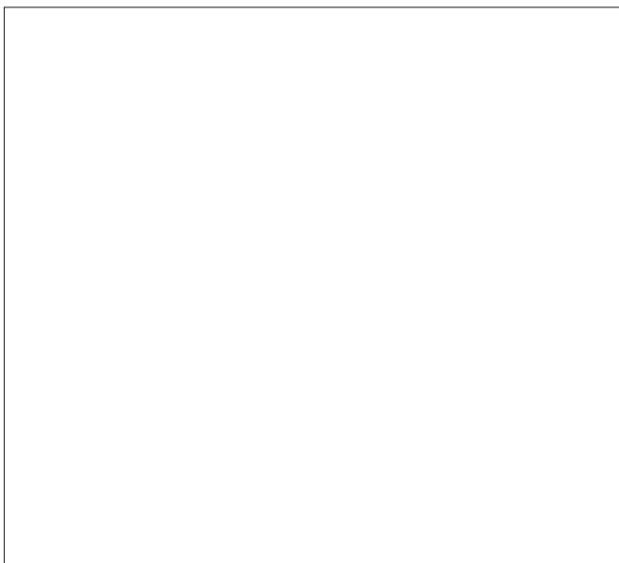
And yet exploitation in the workplace remained. Inequality in society remained. The rule of profit remained.

Economic life was still organised to yield the biggest possible profits and revenues, as fast as possible, to the wealthy minority who owned and ran big business.

That organisation of economic life still generated spirals of speculation and swindling, and subsequent economic crashes, as in 1974-5.

## So, “replace the rule of profit by economic democracy”? What does “economic democracy” mean?

• Social ownership and democratic control of the big enterprises. In the first place of the big banks and financial institutions which, through their control of credit, control the



**Len McCluskey says “don’t let the feral ruling class get away with it”. We need to make McCluskey and the other union leaders fight!**

basic directions of economic life.

• Investment decisions made for social provision, not for the quickest and biggest profit of the exploiting few.

• The main directions of economic life being decided by democratic planning, not by competitive battles for profit among the wealthy few, in which each seeks only maximum competitive advantage, and the social result is a mere statistical outcome.

• Everyone having the right to a decent, useful job with reasonable hours, pay, and conditions, because in a socially-planned economy it can never make sense to leave people’s useful talents and energies idle, or to use them in trades which serve only the competition of one capitalist against another.

• Democratic control in the workplace: election and accountability of managers.

• Equality: once fully developed, economic democracy means “from each according to her or his ability, to each according to her or his need”. Immediately, income inequalities could be reduced to a narrow range, with everyone getting enough for a comfortable life, and no-one getting more than a skilled worker.

When the Government nationalised banks in 2007-8, it bailed them out but left the same sort of people in charge, running the banks on the same principles. It was “socialism for the rich”, or “socialisation of losses and privatisation of gains”. Economic democracy is socialism for the working-class majority. It is much ampler than pallid vote-every-five-years parliamentary “political” democracy.

## What are the economic prospects?

The Institute of Fiscal Studies, a conservative think-tank, has recently estimated that the Coalition government’s cuts will generate an average 10% cut in income for the majority.

Within months or a few years — no-one knows when — the eurozone trouble could escalate into a full-scale crash, which might lead to large parts of the global financial system seizing up as they did in 2008.

Even if nothing that spectacular happens, working-class people are generally *still in the 2008 crisis*, suffering job losses and cuts in services and in real pay.

The rich have seen some upturn since 2009. The less well-off haven’t. In capitalist slumps and depressions, usually inequality narrows a bit because the rich fall further than the poor, but this time inequality is increasing fast.

Even the upturn for the rich is stalling. Production figures are sagging in many countries.

Even in China, where after 2008 the largest fixed-capital investment boom in world history, organised by the government, offset the crisis, production is slowing, and yet the government is still looking for means to hose down the rapid price inflation which has come as a legacy of the investment drive.

**If the unions are going to push for an “economic alternative”, won’t they have to assert themselves politically, and demand Labour commit itself to “alternative” policies?**

Yes. The unions should work out serious policies for economic democracy, and use their clout in the Labour Party to commit Labour to those policies.

The aim should be a workers’ government — a government based on the labour movement and accountable to it, and serving the interests of the working-class majority as the Coalition government serves those of the rich.

By organising for a workers’ government, we can reorganise and revitalise the rank and file of the labour movement, and transform the movement into one capable of achieving that aim.

## Ah. Push Ed Miliband to the left?

More than that!

Ed Miliband made a wretched speech at the TUC. He said: “I believe it was a mistake for strikes to happen [on 30 June]. I continue to believe that”.

He called for “co-operation, not conflict, in the workplace”. When challenged from the floor of the TUC congress, he said he “could not” promise to reverse the change in pensions being uprated by CPI rather than RPI because he “didn’t know where the money would come from”.

He said: “we have to challenge many of the assumptions on which economic policy has been based for a generation”. Like Barber, he called for a “new economy”. Yet he proposed ideas which are waterlogged with exactly the priority-of-profit “assumptions on which economic policy has been based for a generation”.

He said: “Government has to work in partnership with business” and “make sure good regulation lets companies win new markets”. “A new economy will mean... rejecting the view that employee representation must mean confrontation not cooperation”.

## How should we organise now for the strike in November?

• Call on the unions which haven’t yet balloted to start balloting now, and all the unions to name an exact date.

• Organise cross-union committees in every city. Plan for *meetings* of strikers on the strike day, with room for motions, amendments, and debate, not just rallies. In every union, organise democratic control of the campaign by the rank and file.

• Start discussion now on plans for action after the November strike. One day will not be enough. On the strike day, workers should not be told just to go home and wait for word from the leaders. We will win only by the Government being convinced that the labour movement has a well-understood plan for action which we will continue longer than the Government is able to stay stubborn.

• Organise strike-fund levies. Discuss organising for rolling and selective strikes (funded by the levies) as well as the one-day strikes.

• Make the pensions dispute into a general campaign for “Fair Pensions For All”. On 12 September the Government announced that it will probably raise the state pension age to 67 ten years earlier than previously planned, in 2026 rather than 2036. Develop and generalise the fight on the NHS, on benefit cuts, on local services, etc., and link it with the pensions battle.

• Break off scheme-by-scheme negotiations. Talks should be with the Government about the whole framework, not attempts to wheedle a slightly-less-bad deal for one group or another within an unchanged framework.

## Won’t the Government try to bring in new laws against strikes, to add to the strangling legislation which Thatcher put on the books and Blair and Brown kept in force?

At the TUC Paul Kenny of the GMB called for “the biggest campaign of civil disobedience” that the Government “can ever imagine” against threatened new anti-strike laws. “If going to prison is the price to pay for standing up to bad laws, then so be it”.

Len McCluskey of Unite called on trade-unionists not to “meekly accept the law as it stands” and to “plan for anti-union law avoidance”. “Class law should not paralyse our movement”. He said we should not let “the feral ruling class get away scot free with their crimes”.

**He demanded that “the next Labour government... recognise the value to our society of free trade unionism and legislate accordingly”.**

## Is this as good as it gets?

### A conference to discuss class-struggle feminism

**Saturday 26 November, 11.30-5.30**

**University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT**

**Creche; music and comedy in the evening**

**Tickets: £10/£5/£2**

**workersliberty.org/isthisasgoodasitgets**

**Sessions on: education struggles; reproductive justice; Women in the Arab revolution; Sylvia Pankhurst; Marxism and feminism + much more**



# “The main solidarity Libyans need is ideas”

Lucinda Lavelle from the British Libyan Solidarity Campaign spoke to Sacha Ismail and Chris Marks.

**There are a lot of Libyan exiles in the UK; Manchester is the biggest centre, with more than 10,000 people. But activists have tended to write and do things individually, in isolation from one another, with no attempt to build collective campaigns. No one trusted anyone; and there was an element of sense to this, because the community was infiltrated by Qaddafi's agents.**

Before the start of the movement in North Africa this year, there were two issues that mobilised people. The first was the Abu Salim prison massacre in 1996, in which the regime killed 1,200 political prisoners in one day. The other was a campaign around 400 children infected with HIV at a Benghazi hospital. Some thought that this had been deliberate, a collective punishment for the fact that Benghazi has never stopped being in revolt. But it seems more likely that it resulted from the underfunding and running down of the health system in the city — which was in itself a form of punishment.

Our campaign was established in 2006 — at the SWP's Marxism event, believe it or not — by my husband Azeldin, myself and a few others.

In 2007, Tony Blair went to Sirte and shook hands with Qaddafi, and the UK-Libya relationship began to change. After that, we felt our emphasis had to be putting pressure on the British government about its relationship with Libya.

We thought it would be an easy sell to the left. Qaddafi was now collaborating with the West, helping the war on terror, we'd heard about rendition flights to Tripoli, and he was murderously policing the borders to prevent African migrants getting to Europe. But unfortunately most of left couldn't get into its head just how repressive the regime was.

It took a lot of persuading, but we managed to get a fairly large number of Libyans in Britain involved, establishing links wherever there is a sizeable Libyan community. That network has expanded recently.

Of course we wanted the overthrow of the regime, but we posed things more in terms of the fight for basic human rights.

We stepped up our activity from the moment the uprising began in Egypt. We could feel that the wind was blowing a different way. At first many Libyans in Britain were still afraid to speak out in public, but as things began to move in Libya there was a growth of confidence.

Since the civil war began, we've focused on media work and activist training. We also went to meet the Foreign Office, and put some demands. That included military support, weapons and training for the rebels, but no boots on the ground, as well as no strings attached type clauses, and security for aid.

#### What is your attitude to the NATO intervention?

There are different attitudes within the campaign. But I'd say that very few Libyans believe NATO is acting out of humanitarian considerations, or have much trust in them. On the other hand, it's slightly puzzling why they did decide to intervene, given their existing relationship with Qaddafi.

There was huge British investment in Libya, and the regime was investing heavily in property and financial developments in London. I suppose partly they recognised that Qaddafi was very unpredictable and unstable, and could not be relied on long term. And partly they reached a point of no return, where they'd backed the rebels and were left with no other option. There's a parallel with the way the rebels, too, reached their own point of no return, where they could not back down without facing certain death.

#### What do you make of the argument used by some on the left that there would not have been a massacre?

It's ludicrous. Take Misrata. In addition to the thousands killed by regime bombardment, the rebels found mass graves, and there are thousands missing. Qaddafi made it very clear what he planned to do. Of course things are confused, both the regime and NATO accuse each other of being responsible for particular deaths, but the basic picture of mass killing by the regime was totally clear. I can't think of any way to describe denying this except pro-Qaddafi.

I'd also like to stress how close the regime's forces came to taking Benghazi. I was there when two tanks made it into the outskirts of the city!

#### What's your assessment of the rebel leadership?

You have to understand that there was no real political life in Libya for decades.

Take the idea that no ex-regime people should be involved in the new Libya. The leaders were directly responsible for terrible crimes; such people should be prosecuted as criminals. But there were many thousands of people, mainly but not solely at a lower level, who cooperated with the regime in some official capacity because there was no alternative.

The rebel movement, including its leadership, is very underdeveloped politically. They have vague ideas about justice and equality, but no clear, concrete notion of what kind of society they want.

But my experience of the NTC [National Transitional Council, Libya's rebel leadership and now interim government], when I was in Libya, was not very good. My husband and I went to meet them; we had three or four meetings, and in each of them they would listen to what we said, and then sit there in silence. They were not comradely or cooperative; I think they just wanted to find out what we were up to.

There are also many instances of the leadership cracking down on grassroots initiative. There are demonstrations against the NTC in Benghazi's Freedom Square, where different networks and organisations have established a tent presence, similar to Egypt. When people are dissatisfied with

a decision of the NTC, they will come into the square to make it known publicly.

We are seeing the first signs of the NTC keeping power in their own hands; they've changed the deadline for elections from eight months to 20, and I wouldn't be surprised if the self-imposed ban on NTC members standing is reversed. Many key figures are neo-liberals. They have a pro-American orientation; for instance they hosted [US Republican Senator] John McCain. They want a free market economic system.

#### As a left-winger, how do you feel about that?

We want Libya's wealth to be distributed in a more equal way. But the question of how the wealth is generated is more complex. A lot of socialists here have asked me about socialist groups in Libya, but there aren't any. I don't think politics will develop on that Western pattern, necessarily. You can't impose a socialist society on people who don't want it.

#### Now the regime is gone, do you think class struggle in Libya will rise to the surface, and we'll see the development of workers' organisations and workers' struggles?

There is not really much industry in Libya. During the war, oil production stopped completely because it was all staffed by foreign workers, and they ran away. Qaddafi would not trust Libyans with it. The Libyan economy was a sort of, I don't want to say welfare state, a sort of dependency state, which stopped absolute destitution but kept most people on a very basic subsistence level. The economy was not developed. There was no real manufacturing. Libya has hundreds of miles of Mediterranean beaches, but there was no attempt to create a tourist industry. As in many Arab countries, there was vast unemployment, but for different reasons.

I know this sounds odd, but it's hard to say what most people did for a living. I've asked Libyans about this, and they find it difficult to explain. Everyone worked to some extent in the black economy, doing a bit of this, a bit of that, some petty trading, which of course was illegal.

Then there's the issue of corruption. There's a new hospital outside Benghazi, for instance, which has been a work in progress for decades! People joke that it's been under construction as long as Dubai. I doubt more than one twentieth of the money earmarked for it made it to the project.

This may all start to change if the economy is developed. Libyans may take inspiration from the Egyptian and Tunisian examples. Perhaps some of the fake popular organisations and committees run by Qaddafi will now develop a life of their own. But for now I don't know of any workers' organisations in Libya.

#### What is the attitude of most Libyans to socialism?

For Libyans in Libya, it's associated with Qaddafi. Libyans in Britain have been exposed to different influences, and worked with comrades from the left, so many are more sympathetic. But the recent period has not helped in this respect.

The bulk of the left has been hostile to us. We've had good support on a personal level from the SWP organiser in Manchester, but as an organisation they've not worked with us. We asked the Stop the War Coalition to meet us, so that we could work out a common position. We're not naïve; we ex-

## The workers, politics and the left in Morocco

A revolutionary Marxist from Morocco discusses how the “Arab revolt” unfolded in his country.  
[www.workersliberty.org/node/17379](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/17379)



**Women of Benghazi. Libyan women are strong but they live in a deeply patriarchal society.**

pected them to oppose the intervention. We said, fine, let's disagree on that, but can we work out a common position against Qaddafi, and then you can say no to NATO, no to the regime. In fact they haven't even replied to our requests, and have refused to condemn Qaddafi. It's been disgraceful.

**Could you say something about what's happening to black Africans in Libya?**

It's inexcusable. I regard racism as totally unacceptable; it needs to be stamped out wherever signs of it appear.

There have been summary executions of captured black soldiers by rebel groups, and harassment of black civilians. Some rebels believe that all the black Africans fighting were mercenaries, but some were just soldiers in Qaddafi's army. There are migrant workers who are just trying to earn are living. It is a tragedy of this conflict that many innocent black people have become victims of both sides. The thousands that have fled will need a lot of reassurance to return. We will need to work hard on a program of reconciliation.

Racism in Libya is a sad reflection of the divisions Qaddafi created — but the youth in Libya have a strong desire to change this. We have started workshops in Benghazi to promote anti-racism and integration, and they got a good response among youth.

**What's the role of women in the revolution?**

It's changing. Libyan women tend to be quite strong, but they live in a deeply patriarchal, male-dominated society. Quite a few of the women I've met have been very educated but haven't been able to do much with that until now.

I met a group of women who call themselves the Granddaughters of Mukhtar. [Omar Mukhtar was the leader of the

fight against Italian colonisation.] They began by organising support for rebel fighters, cooking a thousand meals a day and so on, but gradually became more and more political in their own right. They started making banners, coming up with slogans, organising demonstrations. They're probably representative of a bigger trend. I'd be very interested to see how that's developed.

I'd also like to say something about the youth. There's a real culture in Libya of deferring to your elders, which is not only a traditional thing, but the culture the regime fostered. Even in workshops we ran with mainly young people only older people would speak. Once the young people get going they have a lot to say. But the inertia and obstruction from above remain.

An interesting example — in Libya the boy scouts are quite a radical organisation, since they were one of the few spaces under Qaddafi where young people could get together somewhat independently of the regime. They've been in the vanguard of the revolutionary movement. One of the scout leaders in Benghazi produced a statement in support of the revolution, and he wanted to get it co-signed by the scouts and Red Crescent. But to do that we had to get authorisation

from the NTC, and they blocked it all the way.

That's not just about young people. It's a more general bureaucratic culture. 42 years of Libyans not being allowed to think for themselves isn't going to change over night, but it will change.

**Can you say something about Islamist influence in the revolution?**

When the uprising began, Qaddafi actually let all the Islamists out of prison, because he wanted to strengthen the Islamist element in the uprising for his own propaganda reasons. I met someone from the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group who had been in Abu Salim who told me this.

The regime called itself Islamic, but was actually very hostile to religious institutions, harassing mosques and so on.

Many Libyans would like more of a Western, secular culture and lifestyle, but a lot are extremely conservative. And that's not the only division. I myself believe Libya should be an Islamic state, but not as we have seen it elsewhere. Most people in Libya are Muslim, so the state should not be separated from religion, but it should be democratic and oriented towards equality and social justice.

**We don't have time to take this argument too far, but that seems to me a contradiction in terms.**

I don't think so. With every ideal, it's a matter of implementation; all ideas can be misused and distorted. The fact that repressive regimes have spoken in the name of Islam doesn't mean that you can't have a democratic Islamic state.

My husband has been involved in setting up a new political party there, Middle Way, which is Islamic but based on social justice. It is focusing on questions such as anti-racism, and also on the environment, which is a huge issue in Libya. The oil economy developed by Qaddafi was extremely destructive ecologically. There is enough desert in Libya that you could easily put up enough solar panels to generate energy for a population the size of Europe, but it will not be done without struggle.

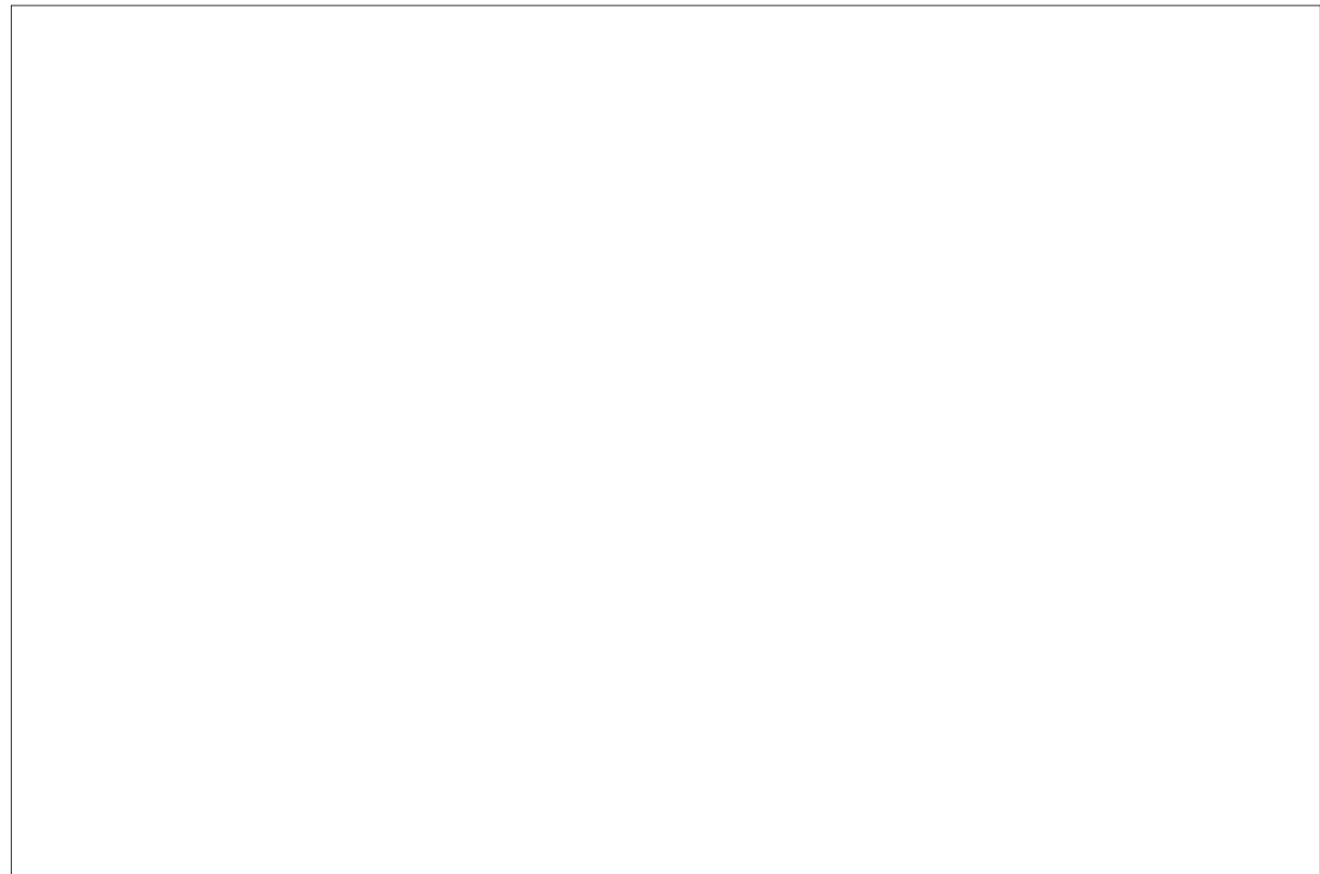
Monarchism is not a serious factor in the situation. Hardly anyone really wants to restore the [pre-Qaddafi] monarchy. People respect Idris [the king overthrown by Qaddafi in 1969] because he led the first united, independent Libyan state, but Libyans do not want a king.

**What do you think activists in Britain should do about Libya?**

The main solidarity Libyans need is ideas about what alternatives are available. Under Qaddafi they had no access to ideas. Now, they're very excited about new ideas. There have been plenty of bad influences coming from the West — deals with the regime, big corporations, private security firms. Some of that will intensify. So there is an urgent need for positive counter-influences from the Western left. The more people who can get out there, take literature and get into dialogues with people the better.

A campaign in the British labour movement is certainly something we'd welcome.

• <http://blsc.org.uk>



**Ali Tarhouni, Libyan economist and member of the National Transitional Council. Now responsible for security in Tripoli. The NTC may be cracking down on grassroots initiatives**

# Fight fees, fight cuts!

## Walk-out and demonstrate

Wednesday 9 November

12 noon, central London

Called by the National Campaign

Against Fees and Cuts [www.anticuts.com](http://www.anticuts.com)

# Ken Loach's banned films

Tim Thomas has been attending the Ken Loach retrospective at the British Film Institute marking Loach's 75th birthday. He begins a series of short reviews.

The first film shown was the one *Save The Children* banned in 1969. "Save The Children", quoting from the BFI press handout, "were unhappy with the content of the film and were determined not to allow it to be screened, successfully persuading London Weekend Television not to broadcast it. However Loach and Garnett (Loach's producer) refused to hand over the negative to Save the Children."

The dispute went to court where it was decided that the film should not be destroyed but sent to the National Film Archive on condition that it would not be shown without "written approval".

What was all the fuss about? Why had it been disappeared for 42 years? The film shows the methods adopted by Save The Children to "help" children from Manchester and Nairobi — all heavily paternalistic, snobbish and with the intention, in the case of the African project, of eliminating African cultural perspectives and installing English school uniforms and ways of life including an unhealthy concentration on literature such as *What Katy Did*.

African children tend to give this text a perplexed look. In Manchester the children seemed happy and energetic but the voices over from the Save The Children staff suggest they are infected by the "laziness" of their parents and inherently inferior.

Afterward the showing there was a Q&A session with Loach and a member of Save The Children who gave the impression of falling into the same trap as his predecessors so many years previously. Not that it was quite his fault. No doubt he was as earnest and sincere in his compassion and belief that this sort of charity did good but, following the comments of African Marxists on the film, it did seem as if Save The Children always were, and always would be, the victims of self-serving British government aid programmes... the unchanging face of neo-colonialism.

These Kenyan Marxists, plus the opposition leader (then in exile), Oginga Odinga, emphasised the burden of aid. Deals were done to supply often unwanted agricultural equipment in London, so the money went straight from the government to the British manufacturers who made a profit and left Kenya impotent and with a debt.

This was a look at the Loach of the 60s: uncompromisingly socialist, shot in beautiful inky B&W. It is a rarity, uncut, and bundled away to avoid ruling-class embarrassments.

## LEADERSHIP

In 1980, after a 13 week national strike in the iron and steel industry, Loach brought together a dozen or so militant trade unionists from various private sector unions to discuss what went wrong.

The result is a powerful documentary whose style is echoed in some of Loach's dramas, especially "Land and Freedom" and "Days of Hope". People here are not afraid of swimming against the tide, of expressing their anger towards the industrial bosses and the mealy-mouthed union representatives.

The film was withdrawn by ATV on the grounds that it "lacked balance". Cuts were made and it was shown only in the ATV region a year later.

Here are men and women rooted in their communities and prepared to suffer hardship for the sake of a cause. The union leaders are all too keen to see the battle fade away as quickly as possible by encouraging individual redundancy packages at £10,000 a piece which, as a striker explains to the camera, means the loss of a job "that belongs to the community here" (in this case, Llanwern, 60% of whose population worked for steel). Militants from car manufacturing, coal, and the docks point out that at the moment when there was a unanimous vote for a national stoppage in solidarity (British Leyland voted 2:1), The union leaders tail-ended the dispute and the demoralised workforce were forced back.

Thatcher had been in office for one year and her method is clearly defined: get the unions, if necessary by closing down whole workplaces and therefore whole communities. You can see the result if you pass through Port Talbot or Corby today.

**It makes for essential viewing by all socialists and trades union members. You can watch it at Mediatheque, British Film Institute for free. Book it!**

• For more, see BFI website: <http://bit.ly/oCWFfR>

# Luxemburg: fiery, sharp, funny, sometimes sad

phlets and longer works. At the time so much had to be communicated and organised by letter, articles sent back and forth, edits and re-edits seen through to the end.

Rosa's frustrations with these arrangements show through from time to time as she chides Leo Jogiches for the corrections he has sent to some of her work: "of course what I am referring to here [are the] thousands of other little gnats and fleas, which under the microscope of your literary pedantry grow to the size of elephants." Turns of phrase such as this come naturally to Luxemburg and make her letters compelling and interesting to read.

Rosa suffers acutely from her separation from Jogiches whom she addresses by all manner of pet names. She writes very eloquently and honestly about her feelings and anxieties about the relationship; so much so that it feels quite intrusive to be reading her words, which were surely intended to be private.

It is clear that Rosa Luxemburg was at times a very unhappy person; she felt the weight of her political work and at times writes of a desire to "just live" free from it all.

Prior to the great revolutionary upheavals of 1905 there is a despondency and sense of depression in her writing and a great desire for the hard work and activity of her comrades to be meaningful and yield results.

In 1898 Rosa joins the German SPD, and almost immediately throws herself into the political fight against Eduard Bernstein, who is leading a revisionist revolt within the party, trying to turn it into a moderate, reformist direction. Rosa produces one of her most important works, *Reform or Revolution*.

As her involvement in German politics intensifies the tone of her letters changes somewhat. She is fired by political struggle, and in her letters to comrades and friends she is thinking all the time about the next steps and what is important to the movement.

Around 1905, as Rosa writes about the unfolding of events in Russia's revolution, she talks about the role of the general strikes; their limitations and what else is needed. There is an inspiring sense of excitement in her words. She is engaged in a frenzy of daily activity, speaking to mass meetings, producing banned socialist papers, as well as continuing to debate.

## CHARACTER

**Something that is striking throughout is Rosa Luxemburg's character. She is not the sort of person to accept an easy answer, to raise an easy slogan, or to change her position under pressure. Nothing is easy. She still frequently talks about her struggles with anxiety, loneliness and physical illness.**

In 1913 she writes to Franz Mehring of her concern that the "parliamentary group in the Reichstag, all are becoming more and more petty, cowardly, and caught up in the parliamentary cretinism". In only a short time those against whom she has warned will throw the weight of the German SPD behind the German war effort, an act which both threw Rosa into turmoil and spurred her and others on to break from the SPD and form the Spartacus League.

Most of the letters during the war are from prison, where she continues to read and study. It is from there that she hears about the Russian Revolution in 1917. Reading the personal letters she wrote at that time, it is clear that for all her cautions and later criticisms of the developments in Russia she welcomes the revolution. She is both scathing and funny in her denunciation of leading SPD member Karl Kautsky, who opposed it on the basis of "statistical analysis" of Russia's ripeness for revolution.

Rosa's final letter is to Clara Zetkin, her close comrade and personal friend. It is written in the midst of the "Spartacist uprising" in January 1919 where Rosa is centrally involved despite her own view that the whole thing is botched and a blunder. Here she is invigorated by the course of events and intensity of the struggle. She writes "One must take history as it comes, whatever course it takes... At this moment in Berlin the battles are continuing. Many of our brave lads have fallen". Four days later she was dead.

**This collection of letters allows us to see the more intimate side of Rosa's life, her vulnerabilities and her formidable strength and drive. The letters also capture the day-to-day hard work, risk and sacrifice that were a reality for her and revolutionaries like her. I highly recommend them to anyone who wants to know more about this inspiring woman.**

**Rosa Luxemburg was a Polish revolutionary socialist who was central to building the great German workers' movement of the early 20th century and was integral to the German working-class's bid for power in 1919. After the defeat of that revolution she was murdered by right-wing paramilitaries.**

Rosie Woods reviews *The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*, published in March 2011 by Verso Books.

**Many women on the left who have their own heroines, women from the past who have inspired them. Sylvia Pankhurst, Clara Zetkin, Minnie Lansbury... Mine has always been Rosa Luxemburg. The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg showed me her personal side.**

Here are letters written to a variety of friends, lovers and comrades, dating from 1891 until 1919, the last written just four days before her murder by the Freikorps (German far right paramilitaries). They are an interesting and at times very moving insight into her life.

Rosa Luxemburg was born in Poland in 1871, but by the age of 18 she had fled her native country to avoid imprisonment for her political activities. While studying in Zurich she met many like minded socialists and with some, including her long term lover, Leo Jogiches, set up the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SD-KPiL). She later became predominantly active in the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). She was a tenacious and bold woman who was uncompromising in her politics, taking a stand against the growing reformism in the German movement, remaining until the end of her life deeply committed to class-struggle socialism.

What I was not expecting in these letters is the focus on her personal relationships, especially that with Leo Jogiches, nor the deeply emotional form of her writing, in which very business-like letters dealing with party business are interspersed with intimate love letters.

The business letters show how much laborious work went into the editing and production of the various newspapers Rosa was involved with, not to mention the numerous pam-



# The banks' crisis and the left's crisis

Leo Panitch, a veteran Canadian socialist, argues for a bolder response by the left to the financial crisis.

**A common response of the left to the financial crisis that broke out in the USA in 2007-08 was often a kind of Michael Moore-type populist one: Why are you bailing the banks out? Let them go under.**

This kind of response was, of course, utterly irresponsible, with no thought given to what would happen to the savings of workers, let alone to the paychecks deposited into their bank accounts, or even to the fact that what was at stake was the roofs over their heads.

On the other hand, the even more common response was all about asserting state responsibility: This crisis is the result of the government not having done its duty: governments are supposed to regulate capital, and they didn't do so. But this response was in fact fundamentally misleading. The United States has the most regulated financial system in the world by far if you measure it in terms of the number of statutes on the books, the number of pages of administrative regulation, the amount of time and effort and staff that is engaged in the supervision of the financial system. But that system is organized in such a way as to facilitate the financialization of capitalism, not only in the U.S. itself, but in fact around the world. Without this, the globalization of capitalism in recent decades would not have been possible.

It was indicative of the left's sorry lack of ambition in the crisis that its calls for salary limits on Wall Street executives and transaction taxes on the financial sector were far more common than demands for turning the banks into public utilities. It was, of all people, the mainstream LSE economist Willem Buiter (the former member of the Bank of England's monetary policy committee, appointed in November 2009 by Citibank as its chief economist) who in his *Financial Times* blog on September 17, 2008 a few days after Lehman Brothers' collapse endorsed the "long-standing argument that there is no real case for private ownership of deposit-taking banking institutions, because these cannot exist safely without a deposit guarantee and/or lender of last resort facilities, that are ultimately underwritten by the taxpayer." And he went further: "The argument that financial intermediation cannot be entrusted to the private sector can now be extended to include the new, transactions-oriented, capital-markets-based forms of financial capitalism... From financialisation of the economy to the socialisation of finance. A small step for the lawyers, a huge step for mankind."

## CREDIT IN THE HANDS OF THE STATE?

**This sounds a little bit, if you've ever read the *Communist Manifesto*, like the call that Marx made — among his list of ten reforms — for the centralization of credit in the hands of the state — which just goes to show that in a crisis you don't have to be a Marxist to have radical ideas if you have any sort of ambition or self-confidence.**

Most Marxists don't have that ambition and self-confidence today. But you do have to be a Marxist to understand that this is not going to happen by bringing some lawyers into a room and signing a few documents. What Buiter was putting forward was the technocratic notion of how reform happens. But fundamental change can only really happen through a massive class struggle, which would involve a massive transformation of the state itself.

Even in terms of calls for better regulation, with a working-class that is not mobilized to put pressure on, you can't expect this state to simply follow policy guidelines that come from technocrats, progressive liberals or social democrats. So we at least ought to be using our opportunity to do more than offer left technocratic advice to a policy machine; we ought to be trying to educate people on how capitalist finance really works, why it doesn't for them and why what we need instead is a publicly owned banking system that is part of a system of democratic economic planning, in which what's invested and where it's invested and how it's invested is democratically decided.

The sort of bank nationalizations undertaken in the wake of the fallout from the Lehman's collapse — with the lead of Gordon Brown's New Labour government in the UK being quickly followed by Bush's Republican administration in the U.S. — essentially involved socializing the banks losses while guaranteeing that the nationalized banks would operate on a commercial basis at arm's length from any government direction or control. All they asked was that these nationalized banks seek to maximize the taxpayers returns on their 'investment.' As sagely put in the 2010 *Socialist Register* essay on "Opportunity lost: mystification, elite politics and financial reform in the UK," this really represented "not the nationalisation of the banks, but the privatisation of the Treasury as a new kind of fund manager."

The most important reason for taking the banks into the public sector and turning them into a public utility is that

**The organised left should argue for taking over, not just taxing, high finance**

you would remove thereby the institutional foundation of the most powerful section of the capitalist classes in this phase of capitalism. That's the main reason for nationalizing the banks in terms of changing the balance of class forces in a fundamental way.

A second socialist reason for nationalizing the banks would be to transform the uses to which finance is put. Let's take an example. Where I come from in Canada, the backbone of the southern Ontario economy, apart from banking, is the automobile industry.

With the layoffs that occurred and the plants that have been closed (this has been going on for three decades, but it was heightened during this crisis very severely) you are not just losing physical capital. You're losing the skills of tool and die makers. A banking system that was turned into a public utility would be centrally involved in transforming the uses to which credit is put, so those skills could be put to building wind turbines, so they could be used to develop the kind of equipment we need to harness solar energy cheaply rather than expensively.

We cannot even begin to think seriously about solving the ecological crisis that coincides with this economic crisis without the left returning to an ambitious notion of economic planning. It's inconceivable. It can't be done.

We've run away from this for half a century because of command planning of the Stalinist type, with all of its horrific effects — its inefficiencies, but even more its authoritarianism. But we can't avoid any longer coming back to the need for planning. The allocation of credit is at the core of economic planning for the conversion of industry. When we on the left call for capital controls, we can't just think about that in the sense of capital controls that would limit how quickly capital moves in and out of the country.

We need capital controls because without them we can't have the democratic control of investment. It's not just capital controls at the border that matter; what matters all the more for socialists is control over capital to the end of directing, in a democratic fashion, what gets invested, where it gets invested, how it gets invested.

## UTOPIAS

**Now, people often say that socialists in the last 20 or 30 years have not laid out a programmatic vision. I don't think that's true. As the *Socialist Register* 2000 volume on *Necessary and Unnecessary Utopias* showed, there were more writings on what a future socialism would look like in the last two decades of the 20th century than probably ever before.**

But the detailed pictures of a socialist order they painted — whether involving some combination of plan and market or participatory economic planning — have been exceedingly sketchy on two crucial things. One is immediate demands and reforms. And the other is how the hell would we get there. What are the vehicles? What are the agencies? How are the vehicles connected to building the agencies?

It is certainly very true that, whatever the vehicle or the agency, you are never going to mobilize people simply on the basis of the need to nationalize the banks for economic planning, when they know that can't come for decades, given the lack of political forces to introduce it. People need to be mobilized by immediate demands, as they were by the demands for trade union rights, a reduced workweek, a public educational system a welfare state, etc.

Some 15 years ago, when the FMLN in El Salvador after the settlement of the civil war turned itself from a guerrilla army into a political party, I was one of the people invited to help them set up a party school. And I had a conversation there with Fecundo Guardado, who had been subcommandante on the San Salvador Volcano, and who later ran for president under the FMLN banner.

He said to me, everybody thinks that the long term is the next election which, since this was in 1995 would have been in 1999 there. He said: they're completely wrong — in fact, that's the short term. What we have to hope is that by 1999 we will be strong enough, have a strong enough base, to be able to make a decent showing in the next election. The medium term is 2010, when we have to hope that we will have a broad enough representation and a deep enough development of our members' capacities that we actually could have an influence on the direction of the country. The long-term is 2020, when we will be able to get elected as a government that can actually do something, that can transform the state.

Angela Zamora, who as the head of party's educational program was hosting me, sat there and listened to this and suddenly said, in that case I'm leaving the party. I can't go back to the people who I've been leading in struggle for 15 years and tell them they have to wait for 2020 for immediate reforms. It's impossible. I can't do it.

## LONGER-TERM

**So one needs to figure out how to combine a clear, ambitious sense of immediate demands with this longer-term vision. But in the current crisis the Left's immediate demand could and should have centered around bringing the banks into public ownership.**

The case for this could have been made in terms of the need for a massive program for public housing. After the Great Society program in the 1960s left-wing Democrats, rather than calling for more public housing to rebuild America's cities, instead called for the banks to lend money to poor black communities — in other words, for the problem to be solved by letting black people, who had been largely excluded from the banking system, into it. It was similar to liberal feminism's demand that women should be able to get credit cards, which they were largely not allowed to do by the banks until the 1970s.

Well, you should be careful what you hope for. One of the effects of winning those demands was a channeling of those communities more deeply into the structures of finance, the most dynamic sector of neoliberal capitalism. Clinton carried those reforms much further in the 1990s, appealing to the Democratic Party constituency (Clinton was known as "the black President" for this) on the basis of we're going to let you succeed at the capitalist housing game. And then Bush, of course, let every crook that he could find into the mortgage business.

Of course, there's no reason why black people or women shouldn't want the same rights as everybody else — why shouldn't they look forward to their homes appreciating in market value? But you need to understand the dynamics and contradictions that are involved in trying to win reforms for people through integrating them more deeply into capitalist credit relations. And the results are now clear.

We should be also demanding universal public pensions, as the private pension plans won by trade unions now are coming unraveled for both public sector and private sector workers. And that would contribute to strengthening the working class, because it would eliminate the kind of competition amongst workers that employers have played on with their private pensions. Indeed, increasingly we see that even the unions in largest corporations today as well as unions of public employees cannot sustain their member's pension plans.

We should also be calling for free public transit — to be available like public libraries, public education and public health care. All of this involves trying to take a crucial portion of what we need for our livelihood, our basic needs,

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# The left's crisis

(Continued from page 9)

and decommodify them as far as possible within capitalism.

People respond positively to such demands even in North America. The trouble with them, however, is that there's not that much room for manoeuvre left for reform in today's capitalism, because in order to have a major program of public housing, in order to have free public transit, you very quickly run up against where are the funds going to come from? It's possible to argue, given how cheap public bonds are today, that you can go to the bond market, but that also means that you become subject to the kinds of pressures from bondholders that is requiring the Greek and the Portuguese and the Spanish states to do what they're doing to their public sector in order to guarantee that they won't eventually default on those bonds. So you come back fairly quickly to the need to at least begin a process of socialization through taking the banks into the public sector.

We need to try to see this moment of crisis from the perspective of what openings it could create. The limitations of a purely defensive response to the crisis lie in not taking advantage of the opportunity that the crisis creates. Despite the 'Another World Is Possible' rhetoric, the left has been more oriented to attempting to hold on to things than to taking things in a new direction. Whether the struggle has been to prevent water privatization, or whether it's been to protest at G-7 and G-20 meetings, however militant the action, it's often primarily defensive in the demands that are articulated.

This is, oddly enough, one of the limits of a perspective that says you can change the world without taking power, without engaging on the terrain of the state, without transforming the structures of the state. What is on the agenda is mainly to prevent the state doing certain things and what is off the agenda is to change the state in such a way that ensures that when new progressive reforms are won they lead on to further structural reforms. We need to appreciate the reasons for the anti-statism that is so on the Left today; the suspicion of talking in terms of building new parties or transforming the state is understandable. But we need to go beyond protest, or we will be trapped forever in organizing the next demo.

## LIMITS

**And as this current crisis is transferred down to the regional and local levels, which every central state will try to do, we will run up against the limits of what can be secured in struggles at those levels.**

We have to learn how defensive and localized struggles can be linked up, and how they can be transformed so they are directed into a struggle for state power. Otherwise, all the protests will run up even more quickly against the kind of limits of the immediate reforms that don't lead on to more fundamental ones.

This is enormously important because we probably are facing the destruction of public sector trade unionism unless there's a shift in the balance of forces in the context of this crisis. Capitalism can only go on so long with the private sector being as limited in its unionization, its density being so low, in terms of collective bargaining rights and recognition, and the public sector being almost universally unionized. It can't continue. Part of the onslaught on state expenditure that is taking place now is to destroy public sector trade unionism. The ability of public sector unions to resist in this crisis is being very severely tested. That's how serious this is.

Speaking more generally, it is increasingly clear that trade unions, as they evolved through the 20th century, not only in the advanced capitalist countries, also in most of the countries of the South, are no longer capable of being more than defensive. They are not able to win new gains, and they are not able to organize in ways that develop the capacities of their members.

**The challenge now is to build a trade unionism that is actually a class organization, one that goes beyond organizing people by the workplace alone and organizes people in relation to the many facets of their lives touched by this crisis.**

• This article originally appeared in e-bulletin no. 536 of the Canadian group Socialist Project, and can be read on their website at [www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/536.php](http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/536.php). Leo Panitch is a political economist and theorist based at York University, Toronto, and is co-editor of *Socialist Register*. His most recent book is *In and Out of Crisis: The Global Financial Meltdown and Left Alternatives* (with Greg Albo and Sam Gindin). This article is a revised version of a presentation at the Delhi University symposium on "Globalization, Justice and Democracy," November 11, 2010.

# Boycott Israel, or link with Israeli workers?

**In Melbourne, Australia, activists picketing the Israeli-owned Max Brenner chocolate shop have caused a stir, and several have been arrested. Workers' Liberty Australia commented:**

There are better ways to help the Palestinians. The focus on Max Brenner has led the chief boycott activists to ignore the long-running Palestinian quarry workers' strike at Salit, and the explosion of strikes by Israeli workers, Jewish and Arab, in recent weeks. Solidarity with those struggles is a better way forward.

Sympathy for the rights of activists arrested on these pickets will be automatic; but it does not follow that the pickets are a wise or effective way to help the Palestinians.

The rationale is obviously not that lack of chocolate treats will cripple Israeli repression. It is that the pickets are a high-profile activity which convey colourfully to the Israeli establishment that its repression of the Palestinians is abhorred, and to the Palestinians (most of whom sympathise with boycotts of Israel) that they have international support.

There are at least four arguments pointing the other way.

1. History tells us that the response in Israel to such actions is a heightening of the siege mentality, and a consolidation of the majority of Israeli society around the chauvinist right wing, rather than an opening-up.

2. Although some supporters of the boycott and protests back a "two-states" solution such as advocated by the main secular Palestinian movements, the groups most active in the Max Brenner pickets, *Socialist Alternative* and *Green Left Weekly*, do not. They do not want Israeli politics opened up so that advocates of "two states" can win a majority there. They want Israel conquered and subsumed in a broader Arab-ruled state.

3. *Socialist Alternative* bills the actions as "Boycott Apartheid Israel! Boycott Max Brenner!", and *Green Left Weekly* defines the aim as "to target apartheid Israel, just as apartheid South Africa was targeted". The boycott of apartheid South Africa was universally understood as a move to isolate and stigmatise the ruling elite in South Africa and its particular laws, to be coupled with extending links to the majority of the population in South Africa. The "apartheid Israel" trope is an attempt to isolate and stigmatise the whole of Israel, and to equate it with the ruling white minority in apartheid South Africa, as an element to be overthrown and subdued.

4. Whatever about the chocolate treats for Israeli soldiers, the Max Brenner chain is targeted essentially because it is Israeli and Jewish-owned. An extension of the boycott movement could not but become a movement against everything Israeli and everything pertaining to that huge majority of Jewish communities worldwide who instinctively identify (though maybe critically) with Israel. Whatever the original intentions of the boycotters, it could not but become an anti-semitic movement.

## RESPOND

**One response on our website, from a user called "Red", defended the Brenner pickets:**

The Hebrew website [of the Strauss group, owners of Max Brenner] says: "As part of our donation program, Strauss' sales division has donated to the Golani brigade's 13th battalion"...

The Golani and the Givati brigades are notorious for carrying out human rights abuses against the Palestinian people...

BDS has never targeted Israeli companies solely because they are Israeli or businesses because they are Jewish. As the recent BDS National Committee statement on the issue note: "Nowhere in the world are BDS activities about targeting specifically business with Israeli ownership, based on the nationality of their owner. Businesses and institutions are rather chosen based on their direct contribution to grave human rights abuses and international law violations of the Israeli state and military, or to rebranding campaigns that attempt to whitewash Israel's crimes".

In relation to WL claims that Israel is not an apartheid society not only does WL give no evidence to back up this claim, in order to make this claim they clearly are ignoring the international legal definition of apartheid. The accepted legal definition of apartheid within international law is articulated in 1973. The International Convention on the suppression punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. Israel ticks just about every box in relation to the definition of apartheid under international law, including in relation to both the territories it illegally occupies and the Palestinian population within the Israeli state; this is why it is designated an apartheid state.

• [bit.ly/qSobrr](http://bit.ly/qSobrr)

**Edward Maltby responds to "Red":**

To argue that socialists should not term Israel an "apartheid state" is not to deny the tremendous oppression and injustices that Israel heaps on the Palestinians.

To argue against boycotting Max Brenner chocolate is not to defend the actions of the Israeli Defence Force. Like Red, we are for the liberation of the Palestinians. The disagreement is not that the oppression of the Palestinian people is not bad or not real — it is over the best way to end it. And the method that Red offers — boycott — is wrong, and can offer no hope to the Palestinians.

Israeli society is not like South African society. In Israel, Israeli bosses exploit Israeli workers. Israelis are not an exploiting caste. They are a nation, divided along class lines. The Israeli working class — including Israeli Arabs and other oppressed minorities within Israel — are right now waging big struggles against their exploiters. This working class is held back by nationalist ideas, to be sure — but it is possible and necessary to fight against those ideas, and build a working-class movement which fights not only for its own rights, but also against the oppression of the Palestinians and against the occupation — and which unites with the Palestinian workers and oppressed.

This fight is indispensable for social progress in the region. Without some element of a united movement of Israeli and Palestinian workers, just about the only agency which could force Israel out of the occupied territories would be a successful military invasion of Israel by her neighbours, an invasion which could only end in even worse horror. And because such an invasion is unlikely, the corollary of implicitly relying on it is to allow the occupation of Palestine to fester. It will continue to breed both Arab and Israeli chauvinism, and that will boost the strength of the Arab and Israeli ruling classes.

To declare Israeli an apartheid state is means to say that the Israeli working class is either so privileged as not to count, or is irredeemably racist. It means accepting defeat from the outset, saying that no positive change can come from within Israeli society. It disorients anti-occupation activists.

## WORKERS' UNITY

**A boycott cuts against workers' unity. It feeds the siege mentality that the Israeli ruling class uses to limit workers' struggles and shore up their authority.**

The boycott tactic aims only to bludgeon Israelis indiscriminately — for in the unlikely event of the boycott having any palpable economic effect, bosses will surely pass the cost onto workers. Discussion of how best to help the Palestinians is diverted into enumerating the crimes of the occupation. Yes, comrade — but the issue at hand is how to defeat the occupation! Red's implication seems that anyone who disagrees with the boycott tactic must not be "really against" the occupation.

The best that Red can say for the boycott is that it chooses its targets carefully, "based on their direct contribution to grave human rights abuses and international law violations of the Israeli state and military, or to rebranding campaigns that attempt to whitewash Israel's crimes" and not on the nationality of their owners. But this definition is impossibly broad!

Given the penetration of the occupation throughout the Israeli economy and the fact that the IDF is a conscript army (and given that Max Brenner's "direct contribution" is to donate chocolates, books and toys to soldiers as part of its marketing strategy), which companies based in Israel could not be accused of making a "direct contribution" to the occupation?

The indiscriminate nature of the boycott tactic is best demonstrated by the academic boycott of Israel, which aims at driving Israeli academics out of global academia, to the point of non-co-operation with individual academics. The criteria are potentially so broad that they encompass basically any academic based in or linked to Israel and even those that are critical of the Israeli government or oppose the occupation.

The logic of the boycott tends towards a *general hostility* towards Israel as such. This is no political programme on which to build Israeli and Palestinian workers' unity — it is a counsel of despair.

**Socialists who want to see the liberation of Palestine should concentrate instead on making solidarity with workers' struggles and social movements in Israel and Palestine, like the Salit Quarry workers' strike or the Israeli "tent" movement — developing the forces that can really fight the occupation.**

## Organising in the citadels of capital

The syndicalist union **Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)** has been organising amongst cleaning workers in the City of London, the heartland of British capitalism. An IWW activist spoke to *Solidarity* about the campaign.

**A lot of cleaners start their first shift very early – at 6am or 7am – and have to be off the premises by 9.**

Many will come back later for a shift in the afternoon or evening, and will often work on two or three different sites during a day or have other jobs.

The conditions are primitive, and bad management practises are rife. Bosses can easily abuse workers as

many are migrants who don't speak English, and there's a lot of corruption and nepotism amongst cleaning contractors who employ and promote their friends and family. The contractors are practised union-busters so it can be hard to organise. Health and safety is also a problem; workers aren't given proper training in handling cleaning products and can't always read the English labels. A huge issue is the non-payment of wages; wages are often paid late and we've encountered instances of them being withheld for up to three months.

Mainstream unions have attempted to organise cleaners but their campaigns have been short-ter-

mist. A lot of resources have been ploughed in for a limited period of time and then pulled. There's a high turnover of staff in the industry, which means that stewards and activists might not be in the job for very long. If you want to organise, you have to be in for the long haul.

### ORGANISING

**We began organising in the sector when workers organised in the Latin American Workers' Association became frustrated with the lack of support they were getting from Unite.**

We were already active in the Cleaners' Defence Committee and could offer a

framework for the cleaners to organise an independent union.

In the past few months things have really kicked off, particularly at Guildhall and Heron Tower near Liverpool Street where we've had big campaigns.

The main issue has been the non-payment of wages, and our first demand in the disputes was for the immediate payment of all wages owed. Beyond that we're also fighting for a living wage. We've had successes in both campaigns, but the dispute at Guildhall in particular is still ongoing.

Our approach is based on direct-action unionism. We develop a set of demands and then keep up a campaign of action until they're

met. That action could include demonstrations, wild-cat strikes or other forms of action. Traditional negotiating tactics can't be relied upon in a precarious industry based on sub-contracting. We also place a lot of emphasis on grass-roots control, so all the decisions about where to go in a campaign are made in meetings by the workers themselves.

We're not looking to take members away from TUC unions; we're organising where mainstream unions aren't. If workers in an industry where there's already a strong, recognised union wanted to join the IWW I'd advise them to dual-card [i.e. maintain their membership of the official union]. We don't want

to poach members, but where we have organised we are fighting for recognition. We're in the early stages of some organising campaigns at Canary Wharf and in some hospitals.

There'll be plenty of actions coming up soon. The new contractor at Guildhall, Sodexo, has suspended one of our activists so we're fighting for his reinstatement.

**There'll be motions going round that other labour-movement bodies can pass and we'll be looking to build the maximum possible solidarity to win his job back.**

• More: [on.fb.me/pBPOWc](https://on.fb.me/pBPOWc)

## Barnet strikers face down lock-out

**By Vicki Morris, Barnet TUC Publicity Officer (pc) and North West London AWL**

**Barnet council locked out workers due to strike from 1pm on Tuesday 13 September when they arrived at work on Tuesday morning.**

Bosses appear to have given up on their (always half-hearted) negotiations with the council unions over their outsourcing plans and has moved to impose an offer to staff. The offer is far short of the "TUPE-plus" the council says it is.

They have also lied about Barnet Unison, accusing

them of acting in bad faith toward their members. They have written to all staff along these lines, and on Thursday 8 September plastered the council offices with posters bearing "An open letter to staff" — repeating the slander and aimed at intimidating those who planned to go on Tuesday 13 September. They gave a letter to some staff, threatening an injunction against the strike, although they later seemed to withdraw that threat.

In short, the council is turning the screw on the Unison branch, on its members, and, by implication, any staff member in the borough that wants to resist being privatised. We can't

stand by and watch them do this without protest.

In the past few weeks and months, we have seen several instances of council union branches around the country being attacked or even de-recognised; several unions have experienced injunctions against planned strike action. Before Barnet Unison becomes another such case, the rest of the labour movement must act to support them.

**The council will be less likely to act if they see that Unison has lots of support.**

- Send a message of support: [john.burgess@barnetunison.org.uk](mailto:john.burgess@barnetunison.org.uk)
- Follow Barnet Unison on Twitter: @barnet\_unison

## Fujitsu workers to strike

**By Darren Bedford**

**1,000 workers at IT company Fujitsu will take strike action on 19 September after bosses tabled a pay offer that the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), which represents some of the staff at Fujitsu, described as "insulting".**

The offer includes pay rises of between 1.5 and 2.5%, even though workers have exceeded or met performance targets. Some workers at Fujitsu are paid

as little as £13,500. PCS leader Mark Serwotka said: "Such a pitiful pay offer to workers, who are paid less than what some senior executives pocket in bonuses alone, is an insult. Our members may work for Fujitsu but they are supporting essential public services, so ministers must recognise they have a responsibility for what happens on behalf of their departments."

Fujitsu workers provide back-office IT support for public sector bodies such as

the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA), Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Office of National Statistics (ONS), which will all be affected by the strike.

Members of Unite working at Fujitsu's Manchester site will join the action, and members in Crewe — who struck in June 2011 in support of a victimised colleague — may also participate.

**For an article on Fujitsu workers' fight over jobs and pay in 2009, see: [tinyurl.com/fujitsufight](http://tinyurl.com/fujitsufight)**

## Bedfordshire council workers call bosses' bluff

**By a GMB member**

**Central Bedfordshire Council has become the latest local authority to attempt to impose worse conditions on its members by threatening to sack them unless they agreed to new terms.**

The council is proposing an across-the-board wage cut of 2%, despite having nearly £4 million spare in the budget after a projected overspend, on which the

cuts plan was predicated, did not occur.

The council has imposed a 1 October deadline for staff to sign up to the lower wages or face the sack. But, less than one month from the council's deadline, 600 staff have still refused to sign.

Martin Foster, the secretary of the Bedfordshire County branch of the GMB union, said: "It's all very well dealing in ultimatums but sometimes people call your bluff. It seems that the

Council has got itself into the position of not knowing how many staff it will have from 1 October."

So far, few employers who have used the threat of mass sackings to impose new contracts have faced stiff resistance.

**If the Bedfordshire workers hold their nerve and face their bosses down they could make it much harder for employers to use similar tactics in future.**

## Southampton battle not over

**By Stewart Ward**

**Refuse workers have begun a new round of industrial action in the long-running Southampton council dispute, commencing a work-to-rule as part of the fight against the Tory council's cuts.**

Despite claiming a recruitment freeze is in place and threatening existing employees with redundancy, the council has now begun advertising for 16

jobs in the refuse collection sector.

Unite regional organiser Ian Woodland said: "We would expect that these posts are filled internally first, because there are people who still face losing their jobs. I think there will be questions asked about recruiting when there is a freeze, and when people are taking cuts in pay."

As part of the action short of a strike, workers were also threatening to refuse to move their vehicles

to the council's new £13 million Dock Gate facility when it opened on Monday 12 September.

Other sections of the council workforce, such as social care workers, are also taking action short of strikes and will meet on Wednesday 14 September to discuss ongoing plans for the dispute.

**A mass meeting on 10 August voted to reject the council's latest offer and to continue with the dispute.**

## More victimisations on the Tube

**By a Tubeworker supporter**

**Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport workers' union (RMT) on the London Underground could soon ballot again for strikes against bosses' long-standing policy of sacking or disciplining union members for minor offences.**

After a hard-fought campaign that won reinstatement for Eamonn Lynch and Arwyn Thomas, and after Central line driver Tunde Umanah had his dis-

missal overturned on appeal, ballots for action may be in the offing to win justice for Bakerloo line driver Jayesh Patel (downgraded to a Customer Service Assistant after he was charged with gross misconduct following an incident that would normally never be charged as such) and Victoria line driver James Masango, whose Employment Tribunal on 17 August found that he was unfairly dismissed after bosses forced him to work when he was not fit to do so. Both cases date back several

months.

Jayesh's branch has submitted a request to the national union for a strike ballot, and the union's General Grades Committee (the body of the Executive which has sovereign power over industrial action) has already endorsed the view of James's branch (Finsbury Park) that the campaign to win his reinstatement should move to industrial action.

**It has instructed the General Secretary to make necessary preparations for a ballot.**

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## New pensions strike set for November

**By Patrick Murphy,  
National Union of  
Teachers (NUT) exec  
(pc)**

**In the first few days of autumn it was just possible to hear the creak of arthritic joints as one public sector trade union leader after another slowly got up of their knees, cleared their collective throats and finally announced that they would ask their members to take strike action to defend their pensions.**

Four unions (NUT, ATL, PCS and UCU) took national strike action on 30 June against government proposals to make public service workers pay more, work for longer and then get a worse pension in retirement. The rest of the union movement stood aloof from 30 June and TUC leaders did what they could to prevent that action from taking place. Worse, Labour leader Ed Miliband denounced the strikes as premature and unnecessary.

In the build up to TUC Conference (12-14 September), however, public sector union leaders declared intentions to ballot for strike action over pension proposals, starting with the civil service unions,

Prospect and the FDA. Unison and GMB announced that they will ballot their local government members for action in November. The FBU will ballot. The POA are not allowed to ballot but have said they will organise sympathetic action. The largest Scottish teachers' union, EIS, confirmed it would be balloting for action and named 22 November as the likely date for their action. The largest union in the UK, Unite, will ballot members in particular bits of the civil service where they have members affected. The Executive of NASUWT, second biggest teachers union, decided they would ballot too though it wasn't clear the focus of their action was on pensions.

If all of these unions carry out and win these prospective ballots and there is no movement from the government we will see the biggest national walk-out by workers since 1926. Sometime in November the government will face something close to a one-day general strike in the public sector. Only the health sector has so far not declared an intention to join in, and even here there are plans for a combination of strike and non-strike action from an alliance of unions and professional organisations. Of course there are bal-

lots to win and hurdles to cross from now on but the change in mood at the top of the trade union movement transforms dramatically the prospects for a serious fight against the government's austerity agenda.

All of these unions will ballot for "discontinuous" action giving them a mandate for more than just one-day token action. The 30 June unions also have mandates for further action without the need for new ballots.

### LOCAL

**Any action will take place against the background of other local and national protests against cuts and in defence of services.**

A revived student campaign of action against fees and cuts is likely. It will be the job of socialists and militants to build the whole movement and ensure that the possibilities are not wasted.

This move to joint action is not simply due to a revival of militancy. For sure the success of the "30 June unions" in winning ballot results and delivering members in support of strike action has boosted those in other unions who have been working for a collective industrial re-

sponse to the attacks and put pressure on leaders who argued that we should wait until the talks were exhausted.

It is also the case that union-government discussions, continued over the summer, are getting nowhere. Despite the hopes of moderate union leaders, this government will offer not even marginal concessions. The local government unions tried to persuade ministers that the high level of job losses in that sector had already delivered the necessary savings in their pension scheme as employers would no longer have to pay contributions for thousands of sacked workers! The minister responsible for local government, Eric Pickles, gave short shrift to this supine argument and continued to insist that increased contributions were necessary.

But the talks have never been genuine negotiations from the start. It was this that convinced the usually ever-so-moderate ATL to join the NUT and take their first ever national strike action. However we should be aware that they are doing so mainly because they have been given no choice. It may take little movement from

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## Stop jailing children!

**By James Bloodworth**

**During the riots many who would normally describe themselves as liberals or moderate socialists repeatedly Tweeted and updated Facebook with their own calls for the use of "any means necessary" to restore social order.**

If taken at their word, this would have meant the use of the full force of the state — police, police armoury, to disperse what people who were in many instances little more than children.

Now things have now calmed down and the arm-chair generals have stopped panicking, the post-riot response of the establishment meets all their expectations — vindictive, hating out disproportionate punishments and resting on an increasingly opaque "independent judiciary".

While the riots undoubtedly had a negative impact on the lives of those living in the affected areas, the draconian response of the authorities thus far has been based on a desire to send out a clear message to anyone thinking of coming out onto the streets — including those planning to do so in opposition to the ConDem government — to stay at home.

According to the *Guardian*, the typical sentence for theft or handling stolen goods in the riots is 13.6 months, compared with 11.6 months for the same offences last year. That is an 18% longer sentence for rioters than typical crown court convictions. Most worrying is the huge numbers of children that are being criminalised in the process. August's looting and rioting contributed to an 8% increase in the juvenile prison population in England and Wales.

As the *Guardian* points out: "The statistics on minors, who comprise 20% of all those convicted of riot offences, undermine claims from justice minister Kenneth Clarke that the riots were caused by a hard-core criminal underclass".

### FOUR YEARS

**In an example of the increasing disproportionality in sentencing, two men were jailed for four years simply for posting Facebook messages inciting rioting.**

Twenty year-old Jordan Blackshaw set up a Facebook group called "Smash Down Northwich Town", while 22-year-old Perry Sutcliffe-Keenan created a page titled "Let's have a riot in Latchford\$".

Both men named a time and place to meet, but police closed the Facebook pages before any riots were formed. Despite the fact that no disorder occurred, the two have been found guilty of inciting people to create disorder and handed four-year prison sentences.

Compared to, for example, the leniency with which courts treated MPs caught fiddling their expenses, the draconian sentences handed down on the back of the riots brings into focus something socialists have always argued — that the judicial system is an institution designed to maintain the status quo.

The labour movement urgently needs a campaign to against the new reaction to stop and reverse the powers the police and other branches of the criminal justice system are now building up.

**In particular we need to call for an end to the jailing of children.**

## Defend Dale Farm!

**By Joe Flynn**

**Hundreds of people marched on 10 September to show their support for the travellers of Dale Farm, who are facing the prospect of imminent, violent eviction by Basildon Council.**

The atmosphere on the march — a mix of young and old, including travellers, locals and others from further afield — was vibrant and the speakers were positive about the chances of the campaign preventing the eviction.

Camp Constant, the base set up by supporters of the travellers, is an inspiring place. The eviction is set for 19 September. We would appeal to anyone able to go there to do so as a matter of urgency.

This is a brutal and pointless attack on people who are hurting no one. That Basildon's Tory councillors are prepared to spend the equivalent of a third of their budget on this act of ethnic cleansing is foul enough, but that Ed Miliband is supporting it is a disgrace. The labour movement should be kicking up a storm of protest.

Being a socialist means standing up for the rights of the oppressed and fighting alongside them. Solidarity with Dale Farm! Stop this racist eviction!

• See <http://dalefarm.wordpress.com> for directions.

**Police outside magistrates' court after the recent riots**