

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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

For a workers' government

**Police aid  
bosses' blacklist**  
page 11



**Keep links  
with Histadrut!**  
pages 6-7

**José Carlos  
Mariátegui**  
pages 9-10



# CAPITALISM'S POLICY FOR THE CRISIS: see page 5

# A trillion for the banks, cuts for us

RBS boss Stephen Hester; demonstration against the Welfare Reform Bill; Barclays boss Bob Diamond; demonstration against the Health and Social Care Bill

## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

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

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## Ireland to vote on austerity "treaty"

By Liam McNulty

**Irish Taoiseach, Enda Kenny has bowed to pressure and announced a referendum on the European Union's fiscal treaty.**

The ensuing campaign is likely to turn into a battle over the wider issue of austerity and threatens to become a plebiscite on both the EU and the Fine Gael-Labour coalition.

The fiscal treaty will place severe restrictions on governments' abilities to run budget deficits. Not only does it entrench the Maastricht debt limit of 60% of GDP, but will also place tight limits on EU members' budget deficits. It is a neoliberal charter and must be opposed.

### SURPLUS

**Ireland's trade surplus reached €4.3 billion last November on the back of increased exports.**

But this disguises the profound weakness of the domestic economy. The European Commission forecasts GDP growth of 0.5% for 2012, a 0.4% fall on last year. Ireland's unemployment is running at just over 14%. A survey of 400 members of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) showed plans for further wage cuts and freezes despite predictions of higher productivity.

Given Ireland's previous

rejection of the European Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty, the referendum will be eyed nervously in Brussels and by the bond markets. However, unlike Lisbon, the "fiscal compact" does not require unanimity; ratification by 12 out of the 17 Eurozone governments will suffice. This removes a potential source of leverage from the government if it wants to use the referendum to barter concessions from Europe.

### EMBOLDEN

**Nevertheless, a "no" vote would embolden opponents of austerity Europe-wide, including in Greece, so Brussels would rather avoid the prospect of rejection.**

With even the International Monetary Fund (IMF) insisting that the repayment terms of Ireland's "promissory notes" (guarantees) to Anglo-Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide Building Society are unsustainable, it is possible that Brussels will agree to some restructuring.

On the fundamental issue of the treaty, the three establishment parties — Fine Gael, Labour and Fianna Fail — are united. All want the treaty ratified so that Ireland can access funds under the new European Stability Mechanism. They are likely to be joined in the "yes" campaign by IBEC which spent €150,000

on the second Lisbon referendum. The Irish trade unions will meet on Friday and divisions are expected to emerge on whether or not to campaign actively for or against.

Opinion polls show a majority in favour of passing the treaty. A *Sunday Independent* poll showed about 37% for and 26% against, with a further 36% of voters who "don't know" or whose votes are conditional on some other factor. But opinion polls were positive up until a week before the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in 2008.

### PAYMENTS

**The vote will not be until May or June and scheduled payments of €3.1 billion set to go to the AIB shareholders at the end of the month will provide a focus for popular anger.**

The worried Labour Party, now polling below both Sinn Féin and Fianna Fail (at 16%), is contradicting Kenny's insistence that the issue of possible concessions from Europe is separate from the referendum. Labour Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton has said that a restructuring of the promissory notes would be useful "not just in the context of the referendum but also in the context of our recovery".

Most prominent the "no" camp is Sinn Féin, which is currently second in the

opinion polls, ahead of Labour and Fianna Fail but behind Fine Gael. Although the party is implementing austerity north of the border, Sinn Féin are seeking to pick up support from opposing the treaty and are framing the debate in terms of "national independence and sovereignty." Sinn Féin's nationalism and opportunism offers no real answers to the problems facing Irish workers.

### ULA

**Also opposing the treaty is the United Left Alliance (ULA).**

Socialist Party/ULA MEP Paul Murphy said: "The government must not engage in scaremongering about this Treaty. The question is not whether Ireland will stay in the Euro or the EU. The question is whether we sign up to an Austerity Club. This is people's opportunity to reject austerity at the ballot box and strike a blow for those suffering under the reign of the Troika's austerity across Europe."

These criticisms are perfectly correct.

**But the ULA must now develop a positive programme for a workers' government which goes beyond vague nods towards "a Europe of social solidarity and fairness" or merely rejecting the treaty.**

### Boycott Workfare

**On 3 March nearly 40 demonstrations took place against mandatory work placements for jobless claimants (workfare). Pictured, Edinburgh protest. Following a campaign many companies have backed out of one of the work placement schemes. The government said they would abandon threats to remove benefits from those who refuse "workfare" — but have yet to clarify how and when they will do that. Watch this space for further action: [www.boycottworkfare.org](http://www.boycottworkfare.org)**

WORKERS' LIBERTY  
LONDON FORUM

**Socialism  
and religion**

**Thursday 22 March  
7.30pm**

**Lucas Arms, 245a Gray's  
Inn Road, near Kings  
Cross**

## ESOL campaigners launch Manifesto

By Rebecca Galbraith

**On 3 March Action for ESOL held a large, national meeting to launch *The ESOL Manifesto*.**

The first part of the day was a celebration of the campaign which led to a u-turn on plans to make students on benefits pay fees of up to £1,200 for a course. The proposed cut would have meant that up to 75% of current learners, mainly women from black and minority ethnic groups would not have been able to attend classes anymore.

The u-turn was an important victory for the campaign, a coalition of students, teachers, trade

unionists, researchers, migrants' rights activists and many others.

It is important to note however that it was not a full victory. The u-turn does not apply to students on working tax credit, low income workers not on benefits, or so-called "failed" asylum seekers. Furthermore it is only a temporary reprieve till 2013/14.

The feeling of the meeting was that while we have won this battle, we certainly have not won the war, and it is entirely unacceptable that year after year ESOL students and teachers face an uncertain future.

One of the exciting

things that has developed is that a group of practitioners (teachers and researchers) want to talk about what we think ESOL is and should be. A discussion seminar last July led to a draft document, which was brought back for discussion at another mass meeting. From these two meetings we collectively wrote a Manifesto for ESOL (see [www.actionforesol.org](http://www.actionforesol.org)).

The manifesto is the result of many hours of debate amongst a large group and is intended to raise crucial issues and debate among a much larger group of teachers and learners.

The campaign meeting

after the launch was lively, and despite the fact that we are not under immediate attack there was a decision to keep the campaign going and plans made to use the manifesto to spark further discussion. It was agreed to start to look at building a bigger campaign for the whole of Adult Education.

Teachers don't have much time or space to talk about pedagogy or lay out a different vision for the area in which you work.

**The Action for ESOL campaign, while fighting to defend ESOL, gave us the chance to discuss education and raise a collective voice.**

# Iran: dancing towards war

By Chris Reynolds

**On Tuesday 6 March, the European Union announced a move to restart talks with Iran over its nuclear program.**

"The time and venue of these talks will now be agreed", said EU foreign-affairs chief Catherine Ashton.

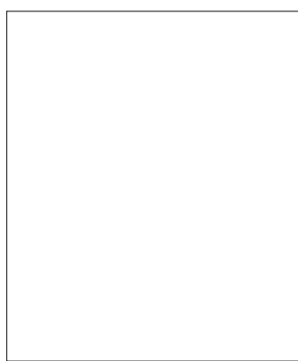
The same day the Iran government said it would allow UN investigators to visit the Parchin military complex, to which it had previously refused access.

The day before, 5 March, Yukiya Amano, director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, declared that his agency "continues to have serious concerns regarding possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear program"

and "is unable to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran, and therefore to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities".

On 4 March, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu aggressively asserted that Israel would "do what it takes to preserve Israel's qualitative military edge — because Israel must always have the ability to defend itself, by itself..."

US president Barack Obama warned against "loose talk of war", and the next day Netanyahu told Obama that Israel had made no decision yet to bomb Iran in an attempt pre-emptively to block Iranian development of nuclear weapons.



Netanyahu: talk of war

In Iran, results were announced from the parliamentary election on 2 March, boycotted as a farce even by the moderate opposition. Supporters of "supreme leader" Ayatollah Khamenei won out against supporters of president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has come into

increasing but obscure conflict with Khamenei.

Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak has said that only a small timeslot remains until so much of Iran's nuclear program is buried deep underground that it is invulnerable to bombing. That assessment also, of course, indicates that bombing would at best delay Iran if it wants to develop nuclear weapons, and possibly even speed up nuclear-weapon development by giving a political boost to its bellicose advocates. Khamenei has responded to Israeli threats bullishly, declaring that Iranian retaliation, aided by Iranian-allied groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, would hurt Israel more than the bombing hurt Iran.

US officials say that there

is no clear evidence of Iran going for nuclear weapons and that sanctions and diplomacy can work.

Nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran's clerical-fascist regime would be a real threat. The complex dance of threat, counter-threat, and diplomacy is only strengthening the Iranian right at present, and carries a large risk of tipping into war. That war is as likely to bring a nuclear-armed Iran closer as to block it, and certain to bring death and devastation to working people across a large stretch of the Middle East.

**No to war, no to the Islamic Republic! Our solidarity should be with the working-class, democratic, and secular opposition in Iran, and with the internationalist opposition within Israel.**

## Homophobic killings in Iraq

The Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq has issued this protest statement jointly with Iraqi LGBT following homophobic murders by clerical-fascist forces.

**"New barbaric attacks started against the Iraqi LGBT in many cities like Baghdad and Basra; using inhumane methods such as hitting the head and body parts of gay victims with concrete building blocks, repeatedly till death; or by pushing them off high buildings, which took place in Basra city.**

"These actions ... against those who were described as 'adulterous' by Islamic Shia militias, besides hanging lists on the walls of several sections in Al-Sadr city

and in Al-Habibea region, have terrorised the society at large and especially the Iraqi LGBT community..."

"The first killings took place on 6 February 2012 and continued or rather escalated now.

"One of the hanged lists in Al-Sadr city included the names and addresses of 33 persons, while other lists included tens of names in other areas. The news confirmed that 42 gay men have been tortured and killed so far, mostly by concrete blocks, while some by dismembering.

"The Islamic militias in Iraq believe that the religious family should consist of a male husband and a female wife, and is the cornerstone of building a pious Islamic society. Such an institution is handed to

the males to rule and control. Under such an institution, they deny the right-to-life, or rather they command a death sentence against all who do not fit under the religious description of a family.

"Those rules are the basis for the campaigns of honor killings against women and LGBT. Just as women face honour killing as a result of extra marital affairs, lesbians and the gays face the same destiny because of their sexual practices which do not relate to marriage.

"We call on all freedom-lovers of the world, the women's and human rights organisations and governments in the advanced world to put pressure on the Iraqi government to provide protection to LGBT people in Iraq, and establish legislation for defending their right to life, and criminalising all aggressions against them.

**"We demand also a full enquiry into the groups and criminal behind the killing campaign and that they get full punishment from the legal and correctional system."**

- [www.equalityiniraq.com](http://www.equalityiniraq.com)
- [iraqilgbtuk.blogspot.com](http://iraqilgbtuk.blogspot.com)

## Solidarity with Kamal Abbas!

**A "misdemeanour court" in Helwan, near Cairo, has sentenced Kamal Abbas, general coordinator of the Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services (CTUWS), to six months in prison for "insulting a public officer".**

Kamal Abbas is one of

the leaders of Egypt's pre-revolutionary, government-controlled "unions".

At a session of the International Labour Organisation last June, representatives of the CTUWS and the new independent unions clashed with representatives of the state-run "Egyptian Trade Union Federation". Abbas

is supposed to have "insulted" the ETUF's acting president Ismail Ibrahim Fahmy, because he criticised the role of the ETUF and rejected the idea it represents or can represent Egyptian workers.

Abbas, who visited the UK last year on a tour organised by the TUC, the FBU and Egypt Workers'

Solidarity, was sentenced in absentia; he is appealing and now waiting for a new court date.

This is an attack on freedom of expression but also on Egypt's independent workers' movement, which comes in the context of continued militant struggles by the Egyptian working class — despite

the military regime's attempts to ban strikes.

**It must be resisted.**

- Background article: [ahram.org.eg/2007/866/eg4.htm](http://ahram.org.eg/2007/866/eg4.htm)
- More: [ctuws.com](http://ctuws.com), [labourstart.org](http://labourstart.org)
- Early Day Motion: [www.parliament.uk/edm/2010-12/2818](http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2010-12/2818)

## Escalation in Syria

By Rhodri Evans

**According to the Washington Post (2 March), Saudi Arabia and Qatar have indicated they will send arms to the Syrian opposition. Kuwait's parliament passed a non-binding resolution on 1 March calling for its government to provide weapons.**

The Saudis and Qataris, so the *Washington Post's* sources said, are prepared to move "as soon as they physically can", within days or weeks at the most. "The delays are logistical, not political".

"The Saudis see Assad's early downfall as a major blow against Iran [Saudi Arabia's main rival in the region]. Qatar, which played a leading role in arming the Libyan opposition to Muammar Qaddafi, is seeking to further expand its role as a major foreign-policy player".

On 1 March the exile Syrian National Council announced that it was forming a "military bureau" to help funnel weapons.

### TURKEY

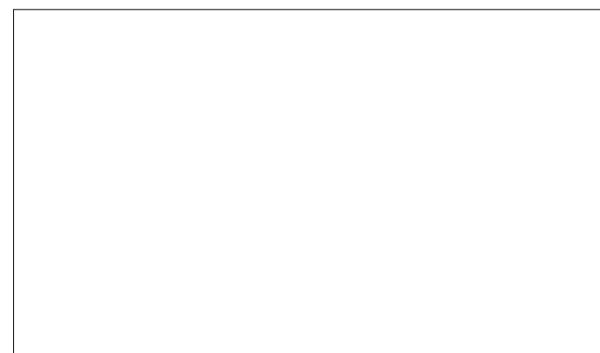
**The Turkish government has a 910-kilometre common border with Syria, and an estimated 11,000 Syrian refugees from the recent repression (including "Free Syrian Army" units) on its territory, and so is likely to be the most powerful external influence on the conflict within Syria.**

Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has declared: "Humanitarian aid corridors must immediately be opened", and demanded that Assad allow the delivery of relief supplies to civilians.

The future of Syria may depend heavily on whether the opposition can generate political organisation strong enough to maintain independence from the outside powers seeking advantage, and strong enough also to avoid the country being edged into civil war between factions linked to rival outside powers.

**But socialists must remain clear in our support for the popular rebellion, and not allow the meddling of outside powers to be used, as it is by some, as an excuse to side with Assad's tyranny.**

## Vote Livingstone... very critically



He's getting a good deal

By Andrew Smith

**Ken Livingstone has aligned himself with the Occupy movement and attacked the tax-avoiding rich. Now, however, it seems he is one of them himself.**

There has been a minor scandal in the media because Livingstone and his wife set up a company to channel money from his media appearances and speeches — allowing them to avoid the 50% income tax rate and pay 20% corporation tax instead.

It's right that there should be a scandal. It's a shame it's so far mostly limited to the press, and limited to the issue of tax-dodging. The real issue here is that Livingstone is a very rich man trying to get richer — not the kind of individual who can seriously represent working-class London.

Nor is it "just" a matter of personal wealth. It's his policies. In 2008, when Labour chancellor Alistair Darling proposed a trivial tax on foreign financiers, and was backed by the Tories, Livingstone opposed the move. While as London Mayor he never offended the City, or property-developers, he did go out of his way to attack the unions on London Underground.

Livingstone's record and his policies on a whole range of issues — not just basic "class struggle" ones, but his links to reactionary semi-Islamist forces — rule out the idea that he is a serious left-winger, let alone a socialist. This is abundantly obvious, if you don't close your eyes to it. Go on Livingstone's campaign website, for instance, and you immediately confronted with a special page featuring an image of policeman's helmet and a pledge to increase police numbers.

Unfortunately a huge swathe of the left is closing their eyes. Livingstone's union backing is — so far — completely uncritical, while the SWP seems to have only published one sentence on the election: "We will be backing Labour's Ken Livingstone for London mayor" (of course, the SWP sees Livingstone's Islamist links as a virtue).

### LABOUR

**We should still work for a Labour victory — despite Livingstone.**

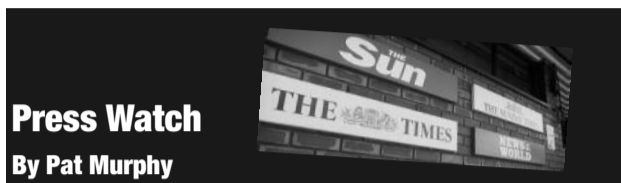
However inadequate from a working-class socialist point of view, Livingstone's policies are different from Johnson's. He says he will cut fares and reinstate EMAs for London college students. He has backed a campaign to defend and extend council housing. He opposes more cuts than Johnson does, anyway, and has even supported some strikes.

These differences reflect the underlying reality that Livingstone is the candidate of the labour movement. The fact that the labour movement does not have the political will to impose a better candidate — a candidate who is not a friend of the City and who has not openly encouraged RMT members to scab on their strikes — or even to put more pressure on Livingstone is a reflection of our weakness. We seek to address that.

Meanwhile, Boris Johnson is openly and unreservedly a servant of the ruling class, committed to class warfare against the working class and the labour movement. He opened his campaign with an *Evening Standard* interview pledging to bring in driverless trains and smash the Tube unions.

**A victory for Labour in the mayor and GLA elections will be a blow, however limited, against the Tory government. We should not trust Livingstone an inch, and organise to exert the maximum pressure on him. But we should do that while working for a Labour election victory.**

# The cancer "Rupert" meets his singing detectives



## Press Watch

By Pat Murphy

**A week is a long time in the newspaper industry. On 26 February Murdoch launched the Sunday edition of the Sun in a blaze of hype about a "fresh start" and new era for the News International stable.**

Sales figures of over three million suggested that the Dirty Digger could begin to put the scandals of the last 12 months behind him and regroup. Within days the scandal was resurfacing — thanks to years of research by serious journalists like the *Guardian's* Nick Davies into New International's corrupt practice, piecing together a complicated web linking the corporation to dodgy police, the political establishment and the intimidation and harassment of hostile witnesses and celebrities.

The playwright Dennis Potter named his terminal cancer "Rupert" — after Murdoch who he represented everything he thought despicable about the British media. This month the BBC has been re-showing Potter's greatest TV drama, *The Singing Detective*. It would have amused the sardonic old socialist that the person to spoil Murdoch's attempt to renew his British reputation was a very different kind of singing detective, Leveson inquiry witness and deputy assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Sue Akers.

### CORRUPT

**Akers has revealed to Leveson that the Sun was responsible for a widespread culture of corrupt payment to public officials, including police.**

The payments, she said, were "regular, frequent and sometimes involved significant sums of money". She made it clear that such payments had to have been authorised at a very high level and that everyone concerned from the reporters all the way up the most senior managers must have been aware that they were breaking the law. *News of the World* could no longer be represented as the "one bad apple" in the News International barrel.

Murdoch's papers are now accused of actions which are illegal and punishable in the home of his primary wealth and power; in the American courts. This takes Murdoch's problems into new and far more dangerous territory.

After Akers came Charlotte Church, movingly describing the harassment and bullying of her parents to the point where her mother was pressured to reveal details of her personal medical condition.

Later it was revealed that NotW editor Rebekah Brooks had been lent a former police horse by friends at the Met police. Soon after came news that Cameron had probably had a ride on the horse.

On 29 February Rupert's son and heir James Murdoch resigned as executive chairman of News International.

All of this, however, may be sideshows when compared

to some more telling aspects of this tale.

Two stories in particular will continue to dog those who want to kill this crisis.

First the story that John Prescott had his phone hacked while he was Deputy Prime Minister. When he asked the police whether this was happening they denied it. Forget the New Labour apologist's awful political record for a moment and pause for thought: the second most important elected politician in the land was having his phone calls intercepted and the people in charge of his and the government's security either didn't know or were complicit and covered it up. Prescott's dogged refusal to let this be forgotten is exposing the cosy, mutually-corrupting relationship between tabloid owners and editors and those charged with law enforcement.

Second is the case of murdered private detective Daniel Morgan. His story is worthy of the great US noir crime writer James Ellroy. Morgan was investigating police corruption and attempted to sell the information he uncovered to tabloid newspapers. Unfortunately somewhere between him making it known to newspapers that he had a story and any agreement to publish his material, he was the victim of a very brutal and professional murder.

### SERIOUS

**If the tabloids were serious about their claims to lift the lid on the secrets of the powerful and print the stories they don't want you to read, what happened next would be all over the Sunday front pages.**

The police officer charged with investigating Morgan's murder was, it is now widely believed, placed under surveillance and harassed by journalists from the *News of the World*. The dots are not that hard to join up but just in case, the detective's wife, TV presenter Jacqui Hames, spelled it out at the Leveson Inquiry on 28 February:

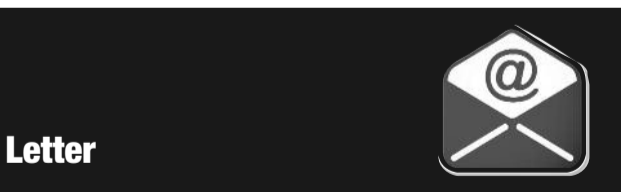
"Suspects in the Daniel Morgan murder inquiry were using their association with a powerful and well-resourced newspaper to try to intimidate us and so attempt to subvert the investigation".

Rupert Murdoch has not yet reached his "Robert Maxwell moment", and become a figure of derision and fun with whom no-one who wants to remain respectable or credible can have any connection. Such a situation is now, however, becoming entirely plausible.

The reputation of Murdoch's British tabloid enterprise may be irretrievably damaged and he may decide to shut up shop or sell up in an effort to save his much more important and profitable US operation. His loss of an heir in James Murdoch and the very real possibility of US legal enforcement holds out the tantalising possibility of a truly Shakespearean ending to this iconic modern life.

**His ruin would be an outcome to be celebrated from the rooftops by socialists and serious democrats everywhere. We should use it, however, to call to account all those in the Labour Party who fell shamefully at his knee and joined eagerly in his attack on trade unions, the poor and the vulnerable.**

## Islamist is new UAF vice-chair



### Letter

**The new vice chair of Unite Against Fascism is Azad Ali, leading activist in the Islamic Forum of Europe, an Islamist group based mainly in the Bengali community of East London. There are many things socialists should say about UAF, Ali and the IFE, but I want to concentrate on one.**

Our comrades, particularly in the student movement, are regularly called racist by the SWP and their friends for our position on Palestine. We oppose the Israeli occupation and support Palestinian struggle against it. Some of our members have travelled to Palestine, and been tear-gassed by the IDF while protesting with Palestinians against the theft of their land. We are for Palestinian self-determination, but what damns us is that we think this is only realisable, now,

through a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Of course, this is the same position as every British trade union and, according to most polls, a majority of Palestinians. But that is not what concerns me here.

The IFE was founded in 1989 by Bangladeshi members of the Islamist group Jamaat-e-Islami. In 1971, Jamaat supported Pakistan's murderous war to suppress the Bangladeshi independence struggle; its associated militia, Al-Badr, helped the Pakistani army in its murder of many hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi civilians. The IFE's founders included Chowdhury Mueen-Uddin, who has been widely accused of participation in the 1971 massacres, and others similarly accused. In any case, to this day the IFE echoes its parent organisation's hostility to the existence of Bangladesh, using the Bangladeshi government's attacks on democratic rights during war crimes investigations as its "headline" story.

**So supporting of the Palestinians who support Israel's right to exist are racist, but apologists (at best) for the massacre of Bangladeshis are fine anti-racists? It makes me want to scream.**

Sacha Ismail, Lewisham

## A trillion for the banks, more cuts for us

**Quietly, without any of the stomping that accompanied Greece's "bail-out", the European Central Bank has lent European banks more than a trillion euros at ultra-low interest rates, in two tranches, one in December and one in February.**

This is equivalent to an outright subsidy to the banks of maybe €120 billion over the coming three years.

Banks borrowing cash cheaply from the ECB, at one per cent interest a year, can then use the same cash to buy Italian or Spanish government bonds at about 5% interest a year.

So long as Italy and Spain don't go bust, the banks make a net gain of 4% a year. 4% of €1 trillion, multiplied by three years, equals €120 billion.

Part of the object of the operation is to make sure that Italy and Spain, though they will have to make destructive cuts — youth unemployment in Spain is now almost 50% — will not in fact go bust. If banks are buying up fresh-issued Italian and Spanish bonds, and with their easy cash they are doing that, then the Italian and Spanish governments can pay off their old debts by arranging new ones.

Alternatively, banks can use the cheap borrowing from the ECB as a substitute for raising cash the way they otherwise would have done, and gain that way.

### BONDS

**Banks, like governments, issue bonds (tradable IOUs). Over 2012-4, €1.1 trillion of those bonds "mature": that is, the IOUs fall due for repayment. In normal conditions, the banks would replace the old debt by new debt, selling new bonds for approximately the same amount.**

In late 2011, there was considerable doubt whether the banks would be able to sell that amount of new bonds, or at least whether they would be able to do it without offering a costly high "coupon" (interest) rate on them. Just before the first ECB handout, the market "yield" (interest rate) on old European bank bonds reached 5.5%, and it looked as if banks might have to offer something like that rate to make new bonds saleable.

If the banks can get €1tn from the ECB at 1 per cent interest, instead of having to pay 5 per cent interest to get the same amount by selling bonds, then, again, their gain is €120 billion.

It is pretty much the same sum as the amount lent (not given) to the Greek government by the EU/ ECB/ IMF "troika", and lent not for the Greek government to spend as it wishes but for the Greek government to pass on, straight away, to the banks holding its IOUs.

In return for its EU/ ECB/ IMF loans, the Greek government, and Greece's biggest political parties, have had to sign up to a raft of detailed and intrusive conditions, involving not just budget cuts but also changes in Greek law, guarantees that paying bondholders will come before any spending on Greece's own public purposes, and agreements to have Greek ministries supervised by outside officials.

In return for their trillion, the banks have had to do... nothing.

Their bosses can do with the trillion what they like. They can use it to make big profits and pay big bonuses to themselves. If they use it foolishly and end up making new losses, why then the governments and the ECB will bail them out again.

It is the same story with the British banks and the British government in 2008. The British government put a total of £1100 billion (about €1.32 trillion) into the banks, in cash (share purchases), loans, and guarantees. That is ten times as much as the supposed "bail-out" for the whole country of Greece!

### CONDITIONS

**Even those banks that had so many of their shares bought up that they became nationalised had no conditions demanded from them for this money.**

Even with the nationalised banks, the Government does no more than beg and cajole them to restrain their bonuses and to lend a bit more to small businesses, and the bankers largely ignore the pleas.

The reason for this is not that the Government favours bankers above industrial bosses. It is that it favours capital above workers.

The difference between banks and most industrial and commercial businesses is that the banks are larger and more central in the networks of capital. When Woolworths went bust, it was no great blow to the capitalist class in general, and it even brought advantages to some of Woolworth's competitors. There was no motive for the capitalist class as a whole to press the Government to intervene and "bail out" the company.

If a sizeable bank goes bust, that is different. Its collapse is likely to bring down other banks that have dealings with it, and maybe industrial and commercial businesses that have dealings with the banks.

On the other hand, if the banks are kept afloat, and keep supplying credit at least to the biggest industrial and commercial companies, then "bailing out" the banks is also "bailing out" big capital in general.

The government functions as the means to guarantee a smooth run for the banks and big business in the boom periods ("privatisation of gains"); to bail them out in crises ("socialisation of losses"); and to squeeze down workers' pay and conditions in the crisis periods, the better to enable high profits in the recovery when it comes.

On the scale of the sums being funnelled into banks and big business, the social cuts being imposed in Britain and even in Greece are tiny.

On the scale of human life, they are huge.

**The issue, which comes first, capital or human life? Subsidise the banks — or expropriate them, and use public control of their funds to redirect investment to social ends?**

## Help AWL raise £20,000

**Horse trading between the Liberals and Tories over what goes into the Budget (21 March) has begun.**

Rumour has it the Liberals will "relax" their commitment to the 50% top rate of income tax. Rumour has it Ed Balls is also getting supine on the issue.

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- Organising a fundraising event.
- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.

- Getting in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

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**Total raised so far: £9,787**

We raised £454 this week from donations and new standing orders. Thanks to Mark, Laura, Christine, Mick, Rosie, Miles and Tom.

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Account name: .....

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**Amount: £ ..... to be paid on the ..... day of ..... (month) 20**

**..... (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.**

Date .....

Signature .....

# Why unions should not break links with the Histadrut

By Harry Glass and Ira Berkovic

**In a number of British unions there have been proposals to sever links with the Histadrut, the mainstream trade union centre in Israel (roughly analogous to the British TUC or American AFL-CIO). Workers' Liberty opposes these moves.**

Workers' Liberty believes that Israeli and Palestinian workers need to find a democratic settlement to the national question between the two peoples if they are to successfully fight for socialism. Both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs are distinct national groups. Both have the right to self-determination.

We advocate two independent states as the most immediately democratic settlement to the national oppression of the Palestinians that is consistent with Israeli Jews' national rights. Only a framework based on mutual recognition of self-determination can provide the basis for working-class unity and any future single, merged state.

We support Israeli workers in their struggles against their bosses and their state, and we believe that British trade unions should develop and build links with them. This is why we oppose breaking links with the Histadrut. This briefing explains further.

## Isn't the Histadrut a pillar of the Israeli state?

In the decades after Israel was founded, the Histadrut was one of the central institutions of the society — arguably a state within a state. In the early decades after independence, while Labour was the main force in government, ex-Histadrut leaders were elected to some of the highest offices of state and others elected to the Knesset.

Histadrut was a major employer, controlling at one point around a third of the economy and employing over three-quarters of workers. It owned or part-owned the Sole Boneh construction firm, the dairy enterprise Tnuva, Koor manufacturing firm and Bank Hapoalim. Its holding company, Hevrat Ovdim, managed large swathes of industry. The Histadrut was also central to the provision of pensions and health services through the General Health Fund.

However the Histadrut lost this central role after Labour lost power in the late 1970s. Most of its industries were sold off and in the 1990s it lost its role in the health service. Its membership fell from around one and half million members to around half a million. It became for the most part simply a trade union centre.

It no longer plays the same central role it once did in state administration. However, even when it was much more enmeshed into the state apparatus, that did not devoid it of its fundamentally trade-union character. The involvement of

trade-union bodies in various aspects of state administration — including administering welfare services or even overseeing employment — is not uncommon in social-partnership models of capitalist administration. They are models that socialists oppose, but they do not mean that trade unions that engage in them cease to be trade unions.

The Histadrut, like all mainstream trade-union centres, has a bureaucratic and conservatising influence on the class struggle in Israel. Recently, national Histadrut officials have intervened in a railworkers' strike against privatisation to undermine the democratic control of the dispute by a shop stewards' committee. But it does mobilise workers against their bosses. Most recently it organised a four-day general strike to demand the levelling-up of pay and conditions for temporary workers employed in the public sector — a degree of industrial and indeed political radicalism practically inconceivable from any of the British unions who are reviewing their links with the Histadrut.

## Isn't the Histadrut a racist, apartheid union, exclusively for Jewish labour?

The Histadrut was founded in 1920 as the General Confederation of Hebrew Labour in the Land of Israel as an exclusivist Jewish labour organisation. It did play an important part in the creation of the state of Israel.

In 1959, the Histadrut decided to allow Palestinian Arabs in Israel to become members. They were at first restricted to an Arab department headed by a Jewish official. In 1966, the Histadrut changed its name to the General Confederation of Labour in the Land of Israel. However it did not campaign against the exclusion of Palestinians from some strategic industries, where military service was a condition of employment.

In 2008 the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) signed an agreement with the Histadrut. The Histadrut reimbursed some of the money deducted from Palestinian workers and agreed that at least 50% of the representation fees paid by Palestinians working for Israeli employers will be transferred to the PGFTU.

Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip cannot join the Histadrut. The Histadrut says that to allow Palestinians there to join would legitimise the occupation and that the Palestinians own unions organise them. In 2009 the Histadrut decided to allow migrant workers to join for the first time.

In its attitudes to Arab workers within Israel, the Histadrut has often been reactionary. Reactionary attitudes to migrant workers, workers from ethnic minorities and workers from dispossessed indigenous groups are sadly all too common in the history of the workers' movement across the world.

But it is simply a lie to say that the Histadrut remains the exclusivist Jewish organisation it was before 1959, and politically lazy to say that, because of its reactionary attitudes towards Arabs, it should be boycotted. Socialists fight within all working-class organisations for socialist politics; a knee-jerk policy of boycotts and severing links does nothing except to leave the control of the Israeli workers' movement by social-partnership bureaucrats with conservative attitudes on questions of ethnicity and immigration totally unchallenged.

## Isn't the Histadrut politically terrible against the Palestinians?

The Histadrut is on the record in favour of two states (i.e. an independent Palestine alongside Israel). It says it is "committed to the existence of two sovereign, independent and democratic states existing in peace and mutual respect". It has called for the illegal settlements (what it calls "outposts") to be dismantled. It has opposed security checkpoints and provided some assistance to Palestinian transport workers facing these restrictions by the Israeli state.

In 2009 the Israeli government tried to impose a tax on Palestinian employees employed by Israeli employers. The Palestinian unions asked the Histadrut to campaign against it, which they did — eventually succeeding in forcing the government to back down. In the transport sector, the Histadrut and PGFTU set up a telephone "hotline" project to facilitate communication between Israeli checkpoint guards and Palestinian truck drivers. It helped Palestinian drivers, who were not able to cross the checkpoints, to go to work.

Histadrut could do a lot more to support the Palestinians. Like virtually all unions today, it is bureaucratically run and politically reformist. But even if it was much worse in its attitudes towards the occupation of Palestinian territories (in fact it is one of the few mass organisations in Israeli society even notionally committed to Palestinian independence and opposition to illegal settlement building), that would not make a policy of boycotts and link-severing helpful or correct.

## But the Histadrut supported the assault on Gaza in 2008/9 and the attack on the flotilla in May 2010.

The AWL opposed the Israeli state's attacks on Gaza. Our members mobilised against the attacks and some were arrested on demonstrations in 2009. Our members in various universities were active in the wave of occupations and sit-ins in solidarity with Gaza, and at the University of Sheffield were integral to launching and building the UK's second-longest Gaza solidarity sit-in in March 2009.


The Histadrut press releases supporting the attacks were wrong and we said so. But severing all links with an organisation is not necessarily a good way to oppose a particular policy.

The British and American trade union movements have a far-from-perfect record when it comes to opposing "their" states' imperial adventures. The links between sections of the American labour movement and the US's inter-imperialist Cold War machinations are well-known, and a recent WikiLeaks bundle showed that the British TUC's International Department still regularly informs the US Embassy of all its activity!

Would any of the British trade unionists who call for unions to break links with the Histadrut call for international unions to boycott and break links with the TUC because of its pro-imperialist policies?

**The Palestinians call for a boycott. We have no right to question the means through which they choose to fight oppression; we should take our lead from them.**

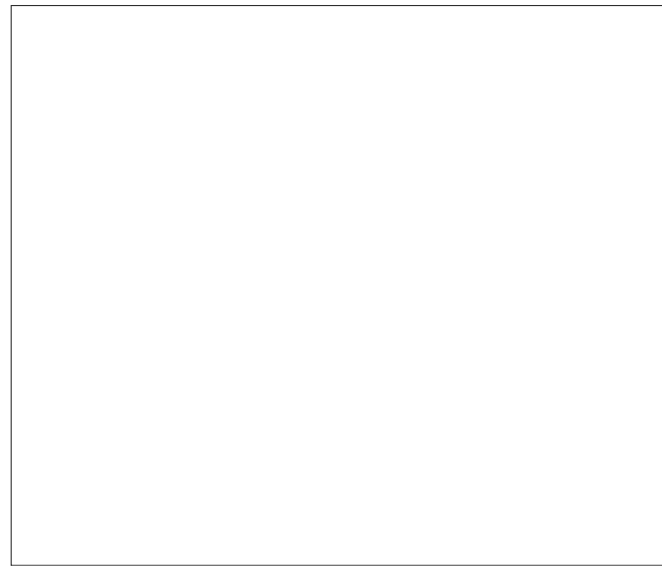
The official BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) campaign is backed by a significant layer of Palestinian civil society. Its trade-union arm (PTUC-BDS) has support from many organisations, including affiliates of the Palestinian



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**Above: scenes from the class struggle in Israel. The Israeli-Jewish working class is a real working class, with revolutionary potential. Unions internationally should not break links with its organisations, even a mainstream bureaucratic trade union centre like the Histadrut.**

General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU, the main Palestinian union centre).

But just because a particular demand has a lot of organisational backing does not make it right. Many of the Palestinian organisations signed up to the BDS campaign have little active support, political life or even a real organised presence in Palestinian society. Even if the BDS demand had much more, and much more verifiable, mass support, that still would not make it right. For socialists, demands, tactics and strategies are assessed by what impact they have on the class struggle overall, not just on how popular they are.

Workers' organisations such as the PGFTU (at its "national" level), Sawt el-Amel (the Labourer's Voice), Kav LaOved (the Worker's Voice), the Workers' Advice Centre (WAC/Ma'an), Koach LaOvdim (Power to the Workers), the Mossawa Centre, and One Voice do not support the boycott of the Histadrut (even though some of them support the general boycott of Israeli goods). A delegation from the British trade union Unison, dispatched to Israel/Palestine in 2010 specifically to "critically review" Unison's links with the Histadrut spoke to all these Palestinian and Israeli organisations. Its report concluded:

"All the organisations we met during the delegation including the PGFTU, the new Israeli trade unions and Israeli NGOs are or have been critical of the Histadrut in the past for various reasons. However, they all stressed that the Histadrut was a legitimate trade union and with over 700,000 members was clearly the dominant trade union in terms of members and collective bargaining coverage. Even the new Israeli unions accepted that the Histadrut had been responsible for Israel's strong labour and employment protection legislation. They also recognised that the Histadrut remained influential, although less so than in the past, with the Israeli government.

"Neither did any of them call on Unison to sever its relations with the Histadrut, in fact the opposite. The PGFTU in particular said that Unison should maintain links with the Histadrut so that we could specifically put pressure on them to take a more vocal public stance against the occupation and the settlements."

**But doesn't COSATU call for the boycott? They should know about fighting against racist states...**

COSATU, the South African trade union federation which played a central role in the working-class struggle against apartheid, has indeed been a vocal advocate of boycotting the Histadrut. They have drawn the analogy with apartheid. Given Israel's links with the South African apartheid regime (which they maintained until 1987, much later than most other nations), COSATU's view, and basic hostility, is understandable. But the analogy is false.

The class structure of Israel is different from apartheid South Africa. In Israel, the Israeli-Jewish ruling class exploits some Palestinian and Israeli-Arab labour, but its economic power rests fundamentally on exploiting Israeli-Jewish workers. In apartheid South Africa, a tiny white caste ruled and exploited the majority black working class. There was a tiny layer of poor whites, but it was negligible and both socially and economically insignificant compared with the Israeli-Jewish working class.

**Breaking links with the Histadrut is increasingly an accepted, mainstream position in the British labour movement, particularly on the left. Why swim against the stream?**

High-profile and vocal campaigns in a number of unions, including Unison and the University and College Union (UCU) for boycotts of Israel have given the impression that

there is a burgeoning rank-and-file groundswell within the British labour movement for breaking links with the Histadrut.

This is still a long way from being the case. Nearly all British unions in Britain have links of some kind with the Histadrut, including the more "left-wing" ones. Alex Gordon, president of the Rail, Maritime and Transport workers' union (RMT) said at the TUC Congress in 2011: "My union has welcomed the Workers' Advice Centre/Ma'an to our conference in previous years. We've supported class struggle that is going on now by workers in Israel, and we fully intend to continue to support struggles by Israeli workers, by Palestinian workers and by Arab-Israeli workers who are fighting for peace and workers' rights. We are concerned about the implication of a review of bilateral relations with all Israeli organisations. Our view is that we should be supporting the Israeli peace movement, and we should be supporting the Israeli trade union movement where it stands up for Palestinian national rights. That is the best route to peace in the Middle East."

**Breaking links with the Histadrut and other forms of boycott are the most immediate forms of action we can take. Anything that harms Israel is worth doing, whatever other consequences it may have.**

Many rank-and-file activists who support breaking links with the Histadrut, whether as part of a general boycott campaign or not, do so out of an entirely understandable and positive desire to "do something" — anything — to "help" the Palestinians, who they rightly see as oppressed and brutalised by the Israeli state. But breaking links with the Histadrut, or boycotts in general, are not a good "something" to do.

Even on their own terms, boycotts are a blunderbuss, indiscriminate tactic that stand to harm ordinary Israeli workers as much as — if not more than — they harm the Israeli state.

Breaking links with the main trade-union organisation in Israel, however bureaucratically-run and politically collaborationist it is, makes it much harder for British trade unionists to engage with Israeli workers' struggles.

If we want to play any role in helping socialists in the Israeli labour movement fight for a more progressive attitude towards the Palestinians, we need more links — not less. Breaking links with the Histadrut will fuel the Israeli right's attempt to whip up a "siege mentality" and clamp down on domestic dissent by claiming that the world is "out to get Israel".

The "break the links" position, and the boycott perspective in general, also has an anti-Semitic logic. Israel, home to nearly 50% of the world's Jews, is exceptionalised and treated as in a different category from all other imperialist or colonial powers. Russia's occupation of Chechnya, the Turkish-Iranian-Iraqi occupation of Kurdistan, the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara and indeed Britain's military presence in Afghanistan are all oppressive, but no-one on the left suggests boycotting goods produced in these countries or breaking links with their labour movements because of this.

The boycott can easily be turned into a tool to vilify Jewish communities, which are perceived (usually correctly, like it or not) as centres of support (however loose and notional) for the state of Israel.

Imagine if someone argued that Chinese student societies should be banned if they did or said anything that could be interpreted as support for the Chinese government (a far more powerful and oppressive imperialist centre than Israel). Such an argument would be rightly denounced as reactionary and racist. But some "socialists" have in the past ar-

gued for Jewish student societies to be banned from university campuses because of their support for Israel (or their failure to condemn it). Jews are required to take a loyalty test not required of any other ethnic, cultural or national group: distance yourself from, and condemn, "your" state... or face boycott and proscription. Thus the boycott becomes more about vilifying Jews than about doing anything concrete to help the Palestinians.

Against the counterproductive and anti-Semitic logic of the boycott, Workers' Liberty proposes a positive politics of international working-class solidarity. We believe British trade unions should make concrete links — through exchanges, branch twinning, awareness raising and financial support — with working-class organisations in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. They should support any attempts to unite Israeli and Palestinian workers in common struggles against exploitation and injustice, and for a just settlement based on mutual respect and acknowledgement of national rights.

Financial and material support should focus on the independent workers' movements, including those organising outside the Histadrut and amongst groups of workers (precarious workers, migrant workers, women workers) traditionally sidelined by mainstream labour movements. British unions should also support Israel's small but significant radical left, organising in solidarity with the Palestinians against the occupation and against racist discrimination towards Arabs within Israel.

Breaking links with the Histadrut does not make it any easier or more possible to support those radical elements; it does, however, make it much harder to support those within the mainstream of the Israeli labour movement attempting, in extremely unfavourable conditions, to win their movement to a more radical, internationalist position on the national question.

Ultimately, the boycott (both in general and in terms of its "break links with the Histadrut" manifestation) only makes consistent sense if one believes that the Israeli-Jews have no national rights and that the Israeli-Jewish working class either does not exist or has no progressive or revolutionary potential. Root-and-branch boycotts of Israeli society and Israeli workers' organisations go beyond the framework of attempting to defeat the Israeli state's colonial project and help the Palestinians win national independence and into a politics based on delegitimisation of the Israeli-Jewish national entity.

Workers' Liberty rejects those politics. The Israeli Jews are a national group with a century-long history in the region and no colonial centre to "go back" to. A progressive settlement cannot be based on exceptionalising Israel, demonising Israeli Jews or attempting to rewind history. It must be based on working-class unity between Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Arab workers.

**Breaking links with the Histadrut is part of a political logic that can only serve to hinder attempts to build that unity.**

## Further reading

• "Why left-wing students should not support boycotts of Israel" (2009) — [bit.ly/65NnQR](http://bit.ly/65NnQR)

• Interview with Israeli socialist Adam Keller — [bit.ly/yckwie](http://bit.ly/yckwie)

• "Two Nations, Two States: Socialists and Israel/Palestine" — [bit.ly/b1gZMw](http://bit.ly/b1gZMw)

• "Class struggle explodes in Israel" (February 2012) — [bit.ly/AmjtH](http://bit.ly/AmjtH)

# Openings for the far right

By Charlie Salmon

**The English Defence League (EDL) recently split, with the “Infidels”, a more explicitly racist and pro-fascist grouping, breaking off.**

The EDL leadership has also formed a relationship with the British Freedom Party (BFP), a splinter group from the British National Party (BNP). And BFP is attempting to position itself as the sister party to European right-wing populist groups such as the Dutch and Austrian Freedom Parties. How do these developments fit into the wider European picture?

Far-right populism and anti-immigration sentiment has a foot-hold right across mainland Europe. The recently published *Transatlantic Trends 2011* survey reveals that across five major European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK — the US is also included in the survey) more than 40% of respondents viewed immigration to be “more of a problem than an opportunity”.

In the UK 68% of respondents took this view, with 71% expressing greater fears about “illegal” than “legal” immigration. 57% of UK respondents feel that there are “too many” immigrants, compared with figures between 25%-50% for the rest of Europe. When it comes to “sharing the burden” of immigration across the EU, only 18% of UK respondents (compared to 52% in France and 60% in Italy) agreed that the “burden” should be shared. Of UK respondents 58% felt that immigrants “take jobs”, 52% that they bring down wages and 63% saw them as a burden on social services.

In the UK, 44% felt that stronger border controls should be used to halt illegal immigration (the highest figure of any country) as compared to 18% in favour of increased international aid. 70% of UK respondents are in favour of the immediate deportation of “illegal immigrants”.

On the theme that occupies the attention of groups such as the EDL, BFP and sister organisations in Europe: whilst 50% of US respondents took a positive view of the “integration” of Muslim immigrants, only 44% in the UK felt the same way. Figures for the rest of Europe are just as bleak, with only 41% of Italians, 29% of Spanish, 49% of French, and 37% of Germans taking a positive view.

In the “Integration and Belonging” section of their summary report, the authors of *Transatlantic Trends* note that “Europeans still considered Muslim immigrants to pose higher integration challenges than other immigrants, with only 40% of Europeans rating Muslim immigrants as integrating ‘well’ or ‘very well’”.

This compares to 50% of Americans who believed Muslim immigrants are integrating “well” or “very well”. In some countries, the UK and France, for example, there was little to no distinction between the perceived integration success of “immigrants” and “Muslim immigrants”.

## ECONOMIC

**These figures are important outside of other obvious factors affecting the European political scene — the general economic and more specific Eurozone crisis.**

As Matthew Goodwin argues in the April 2011 issue of *Political Insight* (the magazine of the Political Studies Association), the rise of the European populist far-right predated the emergence of the world wide economic crisis. He writes that:

“Radical right parties have become an established political force in several European states. Contrary to early predictions that they would quickly disappear in time, or that their fortunes were intimately tied to economic cycles, these parties have recruited loyal electorates and proven stubbornly persistent... they emerged well before the recent financial crisis and the events on 11 September 2001.

“Since at least the 1980s these parties have rallied support among some of the most affluent regions of Europe, and during periods of relative economic stability. Several have also outlived their charismatic leaders, who were often hailed in popular media as the main reason for their success.”

Goodwin also analyses the social base of far-right populist support. He notes that the most successful of the European far or radical-right parties succeed in winning votes from three key socio-economic groups. These were: the “economically insecure” middle classes, and the skilled, and unskilled working class. One characteristic of the rapidly dwindling BNP is that it failed to unite these groups, whilst the far-right populist Danish People’s Party polled 12% in national elections by winning working class support away from the Danish Social Democrats.

The *Transatlantic Trends* survey demonstrates that there is a significant layer of opinion within the UK that could be harnessed by an effective and organised far-right at the bal-

## EDL demonstrators welcome Geert Wilders’ visit in 2010

lot box. If the EDL can bury or at least side-line their violent, confrontational image then the developments in Europe could be replicated here.

Key to this will be something previously noted in *Solidarity*: the social base of the EDL — that is, those who are mobilised on the streets and those who identify with its message — is composed mainly of young, unskilled workers. If the EDL can combine successfully with an organisation such as the BFP, they may have a chance of developing the sort of support base enjoyed by the European populist far-right.

The way in which the EDL is structured and the BFP’s roots in the fascist BNP imply an inbuilt instability at the heart of any political union. Whether or not the people behind the EDL and BFP succeed in forming a new organisation, the social conditions for it exist. Any such formation — based on the EDL/BFP or not — would be a considerable setback for the working class movement and the left.

## POLITICAL CRISIS

**The major factor that could catalyse the reorientation or foundation of a new far-right populist initiative is the political climate determined by the general economic and Eurozone crisis.**

As Goodwin shows, the foundations of far-right populism across Europe pre-dated the events of 9/11 and the economic crash of 2008, but the interplay of broadly “cultural” and sharply changing economic conditions is obviously vital.

Apart from the failures of fascist organisations such as the BNP to successfully orientate themselves to win support across the middle and working classes — something that Marine Le Pen has started to achieve in France through a re-oriented Front National (FN) — the situation in Britain is complicated by the role of the Conservative Party in politics.

Since the late 1970s to early 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher brought issues of race, immigration and nationalism firmly into the political mainstream, the Conservative Party has been able to adapt itself to and absorb support that would otherwise go to far-right and fascist organisations.

In *Contemporary British Fascism* Nigel Copsey points out that “[u]nder the guise of the asylum-seeker issue, the ghost of Enoch Powell had returned to haunt mainstream political life. During the 1970s Powellism had opened up legitimate political space for the National Front, but when Margaret Thatcher had made a bid for the racist constituency in the late 1970s this space had been reoccupied by the Tories. Thereafter, the ‘race’ issue was removed from the arena... This was the case down to the spring of 2000 until the Conservative Party leader William Hague re-politicised the ‘race’ issue by turning asylum into a central plank of the Tories’ May local election platform.”

One example of where the Conservatives may be testing the political water was over the issue of the Falkland Islands. Earlier this year there was an edging escalation of rhetoric from both the British and Argentine governments, with reciprocal accusations of “colonialist” attitudes.

The fact that an American oil company has signed a billion dollar contract to explore oil fields in Falkland Island territorial waters no doubt escalated the mood, but the dispatching of both a British Royal and a large warship to the area fed the fires. It is generally accepted that the Falkland conflict of the early 1980s did the Thatcher government more good than harm — some would say it saved her from political ruin. Stirring the fires of nationalism now and testing the response would make some political sense for Cameron, especially as the storms gathering over the European economy edge closer towards the UK.

On the other hand the only “demonstrable” response came from the EDL, who burned an Argentine flag at their

rally in Leicester on 4 February.

So at the same time as making efforts to accommodate and absorb far-right opinion, a Conservative government can act to feed and bolster organisations seeking to make their own independent political gains.

If the Tories under Cameron replicate some sort of “triangulation” in the hope of mobilising nationalist, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim feeling for electoral gain, would this automatically quash prospects for independent or at least independent minded far-right political action? Possibly, but reality is more complicated than moves on a chess-board.

## TEA PARTY EXAMPLE?

**Take the American Tea Party as an example. The Tea Party has an independent political existence, calling demonstrations, rallies, conferences, etc., under its own banner.**

The Tea Party is not a homogeneous, uniform organisation: it is riddled with factions, competing personalities and priorities. There are far-right fringe elements within the organisation and many figures who are simply ultra-conservative Republicans.

When it comes to the electoral process, Tea Party activists focus on using the structures of the Republican Party rather than independent political action. As Mike Davis points out “[t]he far right takeover of the Republican Party in the United States provides... [the European far right] ... with an inspiring template” (*New Left Review*, November/December 2011).

It is therefore conceivable that something akin to the Tea Party could emerge as an adjunct to a traditional party political organisation such as the Conservatives.

The state of the European left — from social democratic parties to the revolutionary left — is almost uniformly abysmal. In such conditions, it is the far-right and specifically far-right populist parties that look set to gain the most from any fragmentation or disintegration of the Eurozone.

Groups such as the EDL/BFP in Britain, Marine Le Pen’s reformed FN in France, and Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party in the Netherlands promote a nationalist identity politics and have convenient scapegoats to hand (i.e., Muslims). They have structures, an existing base of support, and a massive reserve of potential support that could be tipped in their direction by tumultuous political events.

The blades of nationalism are already being sharpened across Europe, from Athens through Rome to Paris, as the fall-out from the economic crisis comes to a head.

In a historical context, fascism is the final barbaric option open to a ruling national, capitalist class left floundering by sharp economic, political and social crises and threatened by a combative, militant working class. Faced with the prospect of losing their hold on society, the vestiges and gains of liberal bourgeois democracy are closed off. To protect private capital, all freedoms are curtailed — even those freedoms enjoyed by sections of the capitalist class themselves — and, fundamentally, the labour movement is crushed.

It is this “version” of fascism that was carried through by Mussolini in Italy, Hitler in Germany, and Franco in Spain during the 1920s and 30s.

Had the Bolshevik revolution failed, then something akin to fascism would have emerged to decisively crush the Russian working class.

It is this form of “fascism” to which groups such as the National Front and, later, the leadership of the BNP looked for inspiration. Their aim was to create an organisation capable of combining political action with street activism — that is, thuggery — in order to create a fascist state. Nationalism, a specific concern with race and a vision of “race war”, were and are central planks of their propaganda, agitation and organisation.

The political outlook and intentions of fascist groups are “counter-revolutionary” in the sense that they understand their final victory to be based on the crushing of any and all prospects for working class rule.

The same is not true for the new far-right populists of Europe. Their current aim is to wield political influence within the mainstream to deal with specific cultural and national questions. They are reactionary to the core, often economically conservative and hostile to trade unionism, but not fascist in the way we have described... not yet, at least.

**The far-right populists and the movements they are building or attempting to build represent the base from which a new fascist movement could emerge. Developments in Hungary, Greece and elsewhere in Europe will be a test for how rapidly such a transformation can take place.**



# The Marxism of José Carlos Mariátegui

By Paul Hampton

**There is a rich and authentic tendency of Latin American Marxism, in which José Carlos Mariátegui is probably the brightest star. His contribution during the 1920s has rightly earned him the epitaph of Latin America's Gramsci.**

The publication of *José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology*, edited by Harry Vanden and Marc Becker (*Monthly Review*, 2011) is therefore welcome. This is the most comprehensive selection of his works so far to appear in English. The texts in the book are well worth reading, but the choice of selections and the editorial interpretation detract somewhat from its value. Ultimately, it is impossible to read the true Mariátegui without sloughing off the excrescences foisted onto him by Stalinists.

## JOSE CARLOS MARIÁTEGUI

**José Carlos Mariátegui was born in Peru on 14 June 1894. When he was eight, a serious injury to his left leg restricted his studies.**

From 1909 he began working for daily newspapers, rising from assistant to editor. He promoted the university reform movement and from 1918 turned towards socialism. In October 1919 Mariátegui was given a government allowance to leave Peru. He travelled through France and Italy, witnessing the Turin strikes and the factory council movement. In 1921 he attended the Livorno Congress of the Italian Socialist Party, where the left split to form the Italian Communist Party.

Mariátegui returned to Peru in 1923, where he wrote for newspapers and lectured at the Popular University. In 1924, he suffered a lifesaving amputation of his right leg, which confined him to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. In 1926 he founded *Amauta* ("Wise Teacher") magazine. In 1927, Mariátegui was interned during a government crackdown on a supposed "Communist plot".

In 1928, Mariátegui broke with the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA). He sent Julio Portocarrero and Armando Bazan to the USSR as delegates to the Fourth Congress of the Profintern (Red International of Trade Unions) and the Congress of the Peoples of the East. Mariátegui defined his socialist orientation in *Amauta* and became general secretary when the Socialist Party of Peru was formally constituted. He produced his second book, *Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality* and began publishing the biweekly newspaper *Labor*.

In 1929 Mariátegui helped found the trade union central, the Organising Committee for a General Confederation of Peruvian Workers (CGTP). He sent Portocarrero to Montevideo as a delegate to the Constituent Congress of the Latin American Trade Union Conference. The following month, Hugo Pesce and Portocarrero were delegated to the First Latin American Communist Conference in Buenos Aires. Mariátegui became a member of the General Council of the Communist-led Anti-Imperialist League. He faced further harassment in Peru and died on 16 April 1930.

## MARIÁTEGUI'S MARXISM

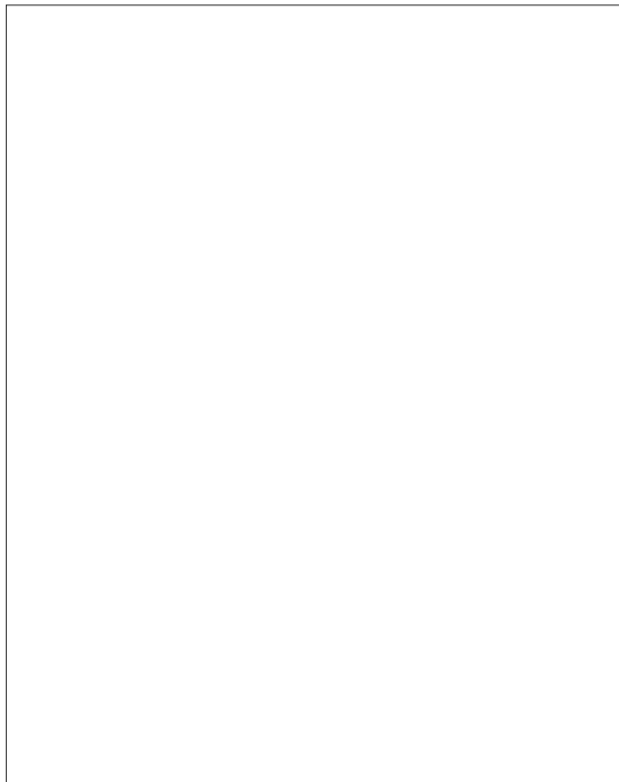
**Mariátegui developed a very fluid and open Marxism, uncluttered by much of the burgeoning Stalinist orthodoxy of his day.**

He applied this method to Peruvian reality with stimulating results. He was arguably the first Marxist to really engage with the indigenous question in Latin America and made a useful contribution on the strengths and limits of "anti-imperialism" in politics. He argued that Marxism "is a method that is completely based on reality, on the facts. It is not, as some erroneously suppose, a body of principles of rigid consequences, the same for all historical climates and all social latitudes". Every Marxist act he said, "resounds with faith, of voluntarism, of heroic and creative conviction; whose impulse it would be absurd to seek in a mediocre and passive determinist sentiment".

Mariátegui understood the basic Marxist conceptions that had been hammered out in the early Comintern: the need to form Marxist parties, the importance of the united front for Communists intervening in the workers' movement and the link between everyday struggles and the fight for working class power. However his originality lies principally in his efforts to apply these principles while firmly rooted in the reality of Peru and Latin America.

Marx discovered and taught that "one had to begin by understanding the necessity and, especially, the value of the capitalist stage. Socialism, beginning with Marx, appeared as the conception of a new class... The proletariat succeeded the bourgeoisie in the work of civilisation. And it assumed this mission, conscious of its responsibility and capacity..."

In the *Programmatic principles of the Socialist Party* (1928), he assumed the international character of the contemporary economy and the international character of the revolution-



José Carlos Mariátegui

ary proletarian movement, arguing that the party "adapts its practice to the country's specific circumstances, but it follows a broad class vision and its national context is subordinated to the rhythm of world history". The emancipation of the country's economy "is possible only by the action of the proletariat masses in solidarity with the global anti-imperialist struggle. Only proletarian action can stimulate and then perform the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution that the bourgeois regime is incapable of developing and delivering".

Mariátegui's *Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality* (1928) was his first truly original contribution. The text was first translated into English in 1971 and is now available online on the Marxist Internet Archive. Mariátegui summarised the recent history of Peru. The Spanish conquistadors had destroyed Inca society, "this impressive productive machine without being able to replace it. The indigenous society and the Inca economy were wholly disrupted and annihilated by the shock of the conquest". But Spain did not send to Peru, nor for that matter to any of its other possessions, throngs of colonisers. "The weakness of the Spanish Empire lay precisely in its character and structure as a military and ecclesiastic rather than a political and economic power. No large bands of pioneers, like those who disembarked on the shores of New England, arrived in the Spanish colonies. Viceroy, courtesans, adventurers, priests, lawyers, and soldiers were almost the only ones to come to Spanish America. Therefore, no real colonising force developed in Peru".

But if the historical origins of the modern Peruvian economy were colonial, Mariátegui discerned a second stage "in which a feudal economy gradually became a bourgeois economy, but without losing its colonial character within the world picture". Spain's policy "totally obstructed and thwarted the economic development of its colonies by not permitting them to trade with any other nation and by reserving to itself the privileges of the mother country to monopolise all commerce and business carried on in its dominions". However, with independence (1824) came a degree of capitalist development. In Peru, the profits earned from the export of guano and nitrates created the "first solid elements of commercial and banking capital. Those who profited directly and indirectly from the wealth on the coast began to constitute a capitalist class. The bourgeoisie that developed in Peru was related in its origin and structure to the aristocracy, which, though composed chiefly of the descendants of colonial landholders, had been obliged by its role to adopt the basic principles of liberal economics and politics". This was not completely negated after Peru lost the sources of guano and nitrates to Chile in the War of the Pacific (1879-84).

By the 1920s, Mariátegui characterised Peru's economy by a number of interlocking contradictions. First, the appearance of modern industry meant "the establishment of factories, plants, transport, et cetera, which has transformed life on the coast" as well as the formation of an industrial proletariat. Second, "the emergence of national banks which finance various industrial and commercial enterprises but which are very limited in scope because of their subservience to foreign capital and large agricultural proper-

ties". Third, as a result of the Panama Canal, Peru's trade with Europe and North America had grown. Fourth, the gradual substitution of North American for British ascendancy, evident from "the participation of North American capital in the exploitation of Peru's copper and petroleum". Fifth, the Peruvian capitalist class was "no longer dominated by the old aristocracy" and the bourgeoisie had grown stronger. The boom in Peruvian products caused a rapid increase in domestic private wealth and "the hegemony of the coast in the Peruvian economy was reinforced".

Mariátegui summed up the economic evolution of Peru during the post war period: "the elements of three different economies coexist in Peru today. Underneath the feudal economy inherited from the colonial period, vestiges of the indigenous communal economy can still be found in the sierra. On the coast, a bourgeois economy is growing in feudal soil; it gives every indication of being backward, at least in its mental outlook". He reminded his readers that "Peru, despite its expanded mining industry, remains an agricultural country. The great majority of the population is rural, with the Indian, who is usually and by tradition a farmer, making up four-fifths of the population". Nevertheless a force was growing which could challenge this. He pointed to the 28,000 miners, workers in manufacturing industry, as well as the 22,000 sugar workers, 40,000 cotton workers and 11,000 rice workers.

Vanden and Becker argue that Mariátegui anticipated much of what later became the dependency school, which is still very influential in left politics. It is possible to read some passages in the *Seven Essays* in this way — although of course Mariátegui was writing in the 1920s rather than the 1960s and 1970s when dependency theorists were most prominent.

The dominant mode of production in Peru was capitalism and the country subject to market imperatives. A "formal capitalism is already established... Peru is in a period of capitalist growth". Industry was still very small in Peru. "Its possibilities for development are limited by the condition, structure, and character of the national economy, but it is even more limited by the dependency of economic life on the interests of foreign capitalism". However, "to the extent that it is capitalist, the economy of the coast creates the conditions for socialist production". The urban, industrial proletariat was crucial, although it would have to "realise its obligations of solidarity with the peasantry of the haciendas".

In short, Mariátegui held to a supple conception of Peruvian reality, as the interpenetration of three modes of production, but nevertheless one in which capital was dominant and where the working class remained the essential agent of change.

## PERMANENT

**Within Mariátegui's writings it is possible to discern a sense of both the combined and uneven development of the world economy and permanent revolution.**

Mindful of theories of the West's decline, he nevertheless asserted that "No one dismisses, no one excludes the possibility that Europe will renew and transform itself again. In the historical panorama which our viewpoint commands, Europe presents itself as the continent of the greatest rebirths". Capitalism, "which in Europe displays a lack of faith in its own forces, remains endlessly optimistic about its fate in North America". North America had shown from its beginning that "it was predestined for the highest achievement of capitalism". In spite of its extraordinary power in England, "capitalist development has failed to remove all feudal remnants". He discerned the pattern of history emerging in the 1920s: "New York or Moscow". The two poles of contemporary history were Russia and North America: capitalism and communism, both universalist although very different and distinct".

Vanden and Becker also wrongly argue that Mariátegui believed peasants were the locomotive revolutionary class. However, even their selections in this book do not support this thesis. Mariátegui saw the working class as the principal revolutionary class. He wrote: "We Marxists do not believe that the job of creating a new social order, superior to the capitalist order, falls to an amorphous mass of oppressed pariahs guided by evangelical preachers of goodness... A new civilisation cannot arise from a sad and humiliated world of miserable helots with no greater merits than their servility and misery. The proletariat only enters history politically as a social class, at the moment it discovers its mission to build a superior social order with elements gathered by human effort, whether moral or amoral, just or unjust". He added: "The exceptional merit of Marx consists, in this sense, in having discovered the proletariat".

*Continued on page 10*

Continued from page 9

In one of his last writings he argued: "The vanguard of the proletariat and class-conscious workers, faithful to action on the terrain of the class struggle, repudiate any tendency that would mean a fusion with the forces or political bodies of other classes. We condemn as opportunist all politics that put forward even the momentary renunciation by the proletariat of its independence of programme and action, which must be fully maintained at all times."

## INDIGENOUS QUESTION

**Vanden and Becker also suggest that Mariátegui elevated Indian peasants to the level of a revolutionary class.**

Whilst they are wrong on this too, there is no doubt that he brought a fresh perspective to the indigenous question. Throughout the 1920s he grappled with the question from a Marxist perspective, shedding new insight on both the indigenous peoples and on Peruvian nationality itself.

In the *Seven Essays* (1928), Mariátegui argued that any treatment of the indigenous question that "fails or refuses to recognise it as a socio-economic problem is but a sterile, theoretical exercise destined to be completely discredited". Previous treatments had "served merely to mask or distort the reality of the problem. The socialist critic exposes and defines the problem because he looks for its causes in the country's economy and not in its administrative, legal, or ecclesiastic machinery, its racial dualism or pluralism, or its cultural or moral conditions. The problem of the Indian is rooted in the land tenure system of our economy". Any attempt "to solve it with administrative or police measures, through education or by a road building program, is superficial and secondary as long as the feudalism of the gamonales [landowners] continues to exist".

Mariátegui's other major analysis of the indigenous question was the essay, 'The Problem of Race in Latin America', written for the Comintern's Latin American conference (1929). He was scathing about the racism against indigenous peoples, arguing that "the colonisation of Latin America by the white race has only had a retarding and depressive effect on the lives of indigenous races" and that "Quechua or Aymara Indians view the mestizo, the white, as their oppressor".

Mariátegui afforded indigenous peoples some agency in the struggle for socialism. He concluded: "Perhaps an indigenous revolutionary consciousness will form slowly, but once the Indians have made the socialist ideal their own, they will serve it with a discipline, tenacity, and strength that few proletarians from other milieus will be able to surpass". But he was not a romantic, glorifying a mythical Inca past. He wrote "indigenismo does not indulge in fantasies of utopian restorations".

However, the principal area of debate at the conference concerned whether indigenous oppression should be formulated as a national question. Mariátegui's paper directly contradicted the Comintern's proposal to establish an Indian Republic in the South American Andes, where a concentration of Quechua and Aymara peoples formed a majority of the population. Although Mariátegui conceded that the establishment of such autonomous republics might work elsewhere, in Peru the proposal was the result of not understanding the socioeconomic situation of the Indigenous peoples. He wrote: "The construction of an autonomous state from the Indian race would not lead to the dictatorship of the Indian proletariat, nor much less the formation of an Indian state without classes." Instead, the result would be "an Indian bourgeois state with all of the internal and external contradictions of other bourgeois states".

Mariátegui believed that the existing nation-states were too deeply entrenched in South America to warrant rethinking their configuration. As Becker put it previously, "the Comintern's underestimation of the level of state formation, together with the misapplication of the 'National Question,' led to a policy which Mariátegui rejected as 'irrelevant and unworkable'".

There were undoubtedly problems with the Stalinised version of national question, which were criticised by Trotskyists at the time. However, the demand for "native republics", originating with South African Communists, was

**Mariátegui founded *Amauta* ("Wise Teacher") magazine in 1926**

also accepted by the left oppositionists in the US and by Trotsky himself as a legitimate self-determination slogan. Mariátegui was probably too hasty in dismissing its relevance to indigenous struggle.

Mariátegui did accept elements of the self-determination, repeatedly emphasising that the solution "must be worked out by the Indians themselves". He was clear that the indigenous peoples should form part of Peruvian national identity, but he does not appear to have considered the possibility they might want to retain or develop their own separate national identity. Self-determination on the national question in Peru might have included the right not to be incorporated into the Peruvian nation, as well as the right to secede and form a separate state.

Therefore, whilst his discussion of the indigenous question was a significant improvement on previous formulations, it did not develop fully the advances made by Lenin and the Bolsheviks on the national question.

## ANTI-IMPERIALISM

**Mariátegui also made a sharp intervention against the "anti-imperialist" common sense of his day. Initially he worked with the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), when it was a loose, nationalist, anti-imperialist alliance. However, when its leader Haya de la Torre transformed it into a political party, Mariátegui broke with it.**

Mariátegui criticised the APRA for seeking to become the Latin American Kuomintang, stating his "aversion to any form of demagogic and inconclusive populism, including personalistic caudillos". He was not taken in by demagogy about "revolution". He wrote: "In this America of small revolutions, the same word, revolution, frequently lends itself to misunderstanding. We have to reclaim it rigorously and intransigently. We have to restore its strict and exact meaning. The Latin American Revolution will be nothing more and nothing less than a stage, a stage of the world revolution. It will simply and clearly be the socialist revolution. Add all the adjectives you want to this word according to the particular case: 'anti-imperialist', 'agrarian', 'national-revolutionary'. Socialism supposes, precedes, and includes all of them".

Mariátegui criticism was crystallised in his document to the Comintern's Latin American conference, 'Anti-Imperialist Viewpoint' (1929). He summed up the differences sharply: "Anti-imperialism thereby is raised to the level of a programme, a political attitude, a movement that is valid in and of itself and that leads spontaneously to socialism, to the social revolution (how, we have no idea). This idea inordinately overestimates the anti-imperialist movement, exaggerates the myth of the struggle for a 'second independence,' and romanticises that we are already living in the era of a new emancipation. This leads to the idea of replacing the anti-imperialist leagues with political parties. From an APRA initially conceived as a united front, a popular alliance, a bloc of oppressed classes, we pass to an APRA defined as the Latin American Kuomintang". ('Second Independence' was still being touted by some in Latin America during the Falklands war in 1982.)

In a tone that should serve as a warning to today's left, he argued: "For us, anti-imperialism does not and cannot constitute, by itself a political programme for a mass movement capable of conquering state power. Anti-imperialism, even if it could mobilise the nationalist bourgeoisie and petty

bourgeoisie on the side of the worker and peasant masses (and we have already definitively denied this possibility), does not annul class antagonisms nor suppress different class interests... Neither the bourgeoisie nor the petty bourgeoisie in power can carry out anti-imperialist politics. To demonstrate this we have the experience of Mexico, where the petty bourgeoisie has just allied with Yankee imperialism".

He added: "The taking of power by anti-imperialism, if it were possible, would not represent the taking of power by the proletarian masses, by socialism. The socialist revolution will find its most bloody and dangerous enemy (dangerous because of their confusionism and demagogy) in those petty bourgeois placed in power by the voices of order... Without ruling out the use of any type of anti-imperialist agitation or any action to mobilise those social sectors that might eventually join the struggle, our mission is to explain to and show the masses that only the socialist revolution can stand as a definitive and real barrier to the advance of imperialism".

Mariátegui concluded: "We are anti-imperialists because we are Marxists, because we are revolutionaries, because we oppose capitalism with socialism, an antagonistic system called upon to transcend it, and because in our struggle against foreign imperialism we are fulfilling our duty of solidarity with the revolutionary masses of Europe".

## STALINISM AND TROTSKYISM

**The Mandeliste Michel Löwy has argued that Mariátegui "did not take sides in the conflict between Stalin and the Left Opposition, but his articles on the issue barely hide his regret over the defeat of Trotsky". It is clear that Mariátegui was familiar with a range of Trotsky's writings and utilised them for his own analyses.**

After Trotsky's initial defeat at the hands of Stalin (1924), Mariátegui described him as "not only a protagonist, but also a philosopher, historian, and critic of the revolution". Mariátegui rejected "the fiction of the martial Trotsky, the Napoleonic Trotsky" — i.e. the idea that he was the likely Bonaparte of the Russian revolution. Rather he praised Trotsky's organisation of the Red Army.

As late as February 1929, Mariátegui described Trotsky's exile as "an event to which international revolutionary opinion cannot become easily accustomed. Revolutionary optimism never admitted the possibility that this revolution would end, like the French, condemning its heroes". He stated that "Trotskyist opinion has a useful role in Soviet politics" because it represented "Marxist orthodoxy, confronting the overflowing and unruly current of Russian reality. It exemplifies the working-class, urban, industrial sense of the socialist revolution. The Russian revolution owes its international, ecumenical value, its character as a precursor of the rise of a new civilisation, to the ideas that Trotsky and his comrades insist upon in their full strength and import". Mariátegui warned that "without vigilant criticism, which is the best proof of the vitality of the Bolshevik Party, the Soviet government would probably run the risk of falling into a formalist, mechanical bureaucratism".

Although he opined that "events have not proven Trotskyism correct", he felt that "neither Stalin nor Bukharin is very far from subscribing to most of the fundamental concepts of Trotsky and his adepts". Mariátegui praised Trotsky's "notable writings on the transitory stabilisation of capitalism are among the most alert and sagacious criticisms of the era. But this very international sense of the revolution, which gives him such prestige on the world scene, momentarily robs him of his power in the practice of Russian politics". According to Pierre Naville, there was correspondence between Mariátegui and the European Left Opposition.

More importantly, there is much in common between Trotsky's conceptions of uneven and combined development and Mariátegui's assessment of Peru in terms of three modes of production, dominated by capitalism. There is more than just a hint of permanent revolution in Mariátegui, when he wrote that "this is a moment in our history when it is impossible to be really nationalist and revolutionary without being Socialist". He argued that "there does not exist and never has existed in Peru a progressive bourgeoisie, endowed with national feelings, that claims to be liberal and democratic" and that "only proletarian action can stimulate and then perform the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution that the bourgeois regime is incapable of developing and delivering".

Löwy's verdict on Mariátegui is generous, but I think accurate. He was "undoubtedly the most vigorous and original thinker that Latin America has yet known". His *Seven Essays* were "the first attempt at a Marxist analysis of a concrete Latin American social formation". Zinoviev summed it up pithily: "Mariátegui has a brilliant mind; he is a true creator. He does not seem like a Latin American; he does not plagiarise, he does not copy, he does not parrot what the Europeans say. What he creates is his own".

**Mariátegui deserves to be read, translated and discussed. His contribution to Marxism was wide ranging and unlike so many of his epigones, he deserves to be included in our great tradition of working-class socialism.**

• Longer version of this article: <http://alturl.com/mhec3>

**Mariátegui with Peruvian comrades**

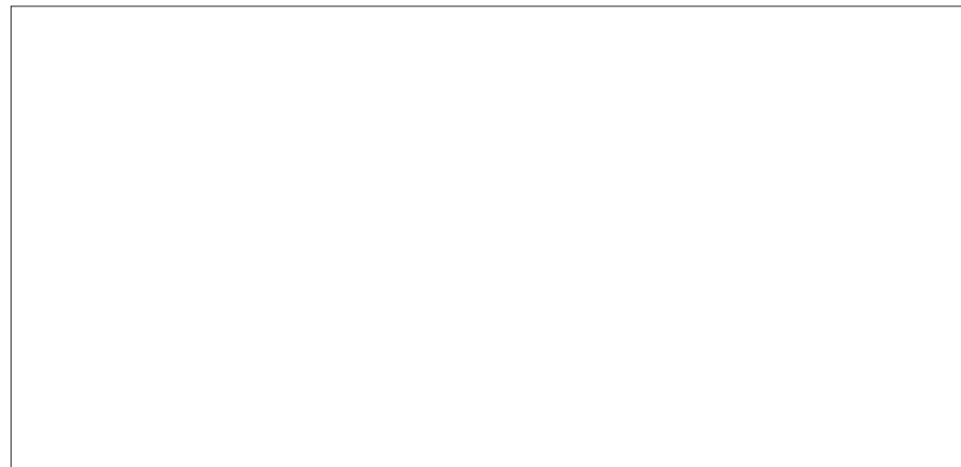
# State colludes with bosses to blacklist workers

By Darren Bedford

Information has emerged that implicates the police and intelligence services in a comprehensive operation to help construction industry employers monitor and ultimately blacklist radical workers.

The organisation behind the data collection is the "Consulting Association", a clandestine body funded by many of the construction industry's major employers. But the records it gathered were so detailed as to make it almost inconceivable that its data came from any other source except official police records.

Firms behind the "Consulting Association" include Balfour Beatty, whose Engineering Serv-



ices arm was recently forced into an embarrassing climb-down from its attempt to impose new contracts on mechanical and electrical construction workers after a sustained campaign of grassroots direct action. The informa-

tion, gathered over the past three decades, has helped firms like Balfour Beatty keep off their sites workers who might raise health and safety concerns or attempt to unionise fellow workers.

The revelation of state

collusion in surveillance and blacklisting by capitalist firms is confirmation of what many blacklisted construction workers have suspected for years. 100 of them will now pursue a class action legal case against at least 39 con-

struction industry employers.

Left-wing Labour MP John McDonnell has demanded a parliamentary debate and public enquiry into the scandal. He said: "I am outraged at the systematic abuse of people's rights. This has destroyed people's lives, broken up families, ensured that people have not been able to earn a living. It has devastated people year after year, and nobody has listened to us. No one has been willing to believe the extent to which there has been collusion between police, security services and companies.

**"It is all about the ability of companies to exploit workers and destroy anybody who stands up against them."**

## Meryside PCS strike

By Clarke Benitez

Members of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) in Merseyside struck for three hours on Monday 5 March.

The strike was part of an attempt to stop the transfer of 100 workers from local job centres to centralised call centres.

**29 job centres and two existing call centres were affected by the action.**

## Carillion workers launch more strikes

Carillion workers at Great Western Hospital in Swindon will take a further five days of strike action from 8 March, followed by another 7 days from 17 March.

The strikes involve porters and auxiliary workers working on a PFI contract.

**They are part of a long-running dispute against bullying and harassment by Carillion bosses.**

## Huge vote to reject council pay cuts

By a GMB member

Workers at Aberdeen Council have voted overwhelmingly, on an unprecedented turnout, to reject the council's latest pay offer, which would have amounted to a 30% cut in wages.

Members of the GMB union voted by 93% on an 80% turnout to reject the deal.

**The union will now discuss how to proceed following the ballot.**

## Pension strikes restart from 12 March

By Darren Bedford

NHS workers in Scotland will begin rolling strikes from 12 March as part of the ongoing battle over pensions.

Workers will strike on a local basis, with workers at the Ayrshire Central Hospital taking part in the first wave and further local action in Edinburgh, Lanarkshire and Glasgow expected later in the month.

The strikes will attempt to reverse a Scottish Government decision to impose a 2.4% increase in employee contributions from 1 April.

Writing on the *Union-News* website, Tom Watson, the chair of Unison Scotland's Health Committee, said "Our members have been demanding action on this increase.

"We had been hoping to persuade the government to talk to us before now about the proposed increase, because SNP ministers have said repeatedly they think the Coalition's pensions proposals are wrong.

"So it's ridiculous that they won't come to speak to us about this issue

now."

Scottish teachers' union EIS is urging its members to vote yes in a consultative ballot on whether to take further strike action on pensions on 28 March.

The ballot, which closes on 15 March, could see EIS join the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and University and College Union (UCU) members in further education and post-92 universities in the third day of national actions in the pensions battle. These unions are also conducting consultative ballots on whether to strike, closing on 16, 15 and 13 March respectively. Welsh teachers' union UCAC has also rejected the government's "final" pensions offer but has not yet declared an intention to strike.

**As well as campaigning for yes votes in consultative ballots for action on 28 March, activists must fight for that action to be made part of an ongoing, rolling and escalating programme of action.**

• Notts NUT resolution proposing plan for rolling action: [bit.ly/wfUMQI](http://bit.ly/wfUMQI)

## Tanker drivers' struggle spreads

By Stewart Ward

After drivers working for logistics firm Wincanton took two rounds of seven-day strike action in February, the Unite union will ballot 2,000 fuel tanker drivers for national strike action.

Drivers across the fuel haulage industry are facing attacks on jobs and conditions. Unite wants to end what it calls the "contract merry-go-round and beat-the-clock culture" now endemic in the industry. Companies where workers will be balloted are Wincanton, DHL, Hoyer, BP, J.W Suckling, Norbert Dentressangle and Turners, accounting for 90% of distribution to the UK's petrol station forecourts.

Unite official Matt Draper said: "For over a year we have strived to

talk some sense into this industry but they have shown no genuine interest in bringing stability to the supply of this vital national commodity.

"This is not about pay – this is about ensuring that high safety and training standards are maintained so that our communities are safe. It is about a simple measure, the creation of an industry-wide bargaining forum. It is about bringing fairness and stability back to an industry that is now controlled by faceless global giants.

"This is a clear case of a predatory industry putting its profits and greed before the wider well-being. This workforce is now saying enough is enough."

Employers are already fighting back. Just one day after the strike ballot was announced, six drivers working a Norbert Den-

tressangle contract out of the Grangemouth refinery in Scotland (delivering to Tesco forecourts) were sacked. The six also happened to be the only Unite members working the contract. The workers were told they were surplus to requirements but were told shortly afterwards to get on with their day's work anyway.

Draper said: "This is a disgraceful act by Norbert Dentressangle (ND). It is callous to tell workers their jobs have been axed and then in the same breath tell the workers to get on with the job.

**"Why on earth would an employer think this is a responsible act? These workers are driving tankers full of fuel on public highways. They need to be entirely clear in their mind when they hit the road."**

## Locked-out workers vote to fight on

By Jane Edwards

Workers at the Meyr-Meinhoff Packaging plant in Bootle, Liverpool have voted on 5 March to continue their pickets of the factory.

At a union meeting, workers voted 138 to 1 to reject the management's derisory offer and continue with the dispute. They have now been locked out since 18 February.

The company have been spreading lies to their other plants over the nature of the dispute and have been accusing the workers of "intimidating behaviour" — no doubt the children's football matches, barbecue and stuffed donkey are all very frightening. The workers have organised an ongoing blockade of the plant as there is £1.75 million worth of products still inside. They are now planning to increase their pickets through the night. The workers are visiting workers in other plants owned by the company in Deeside, Germany, France, Tunisia, Turkey and Austria, in order to stop the work being done elsewhere and to build solidarity.

The Deeside plant is now balloting for action on failure to agree on redundancies and hopefully the workers can win more international support.

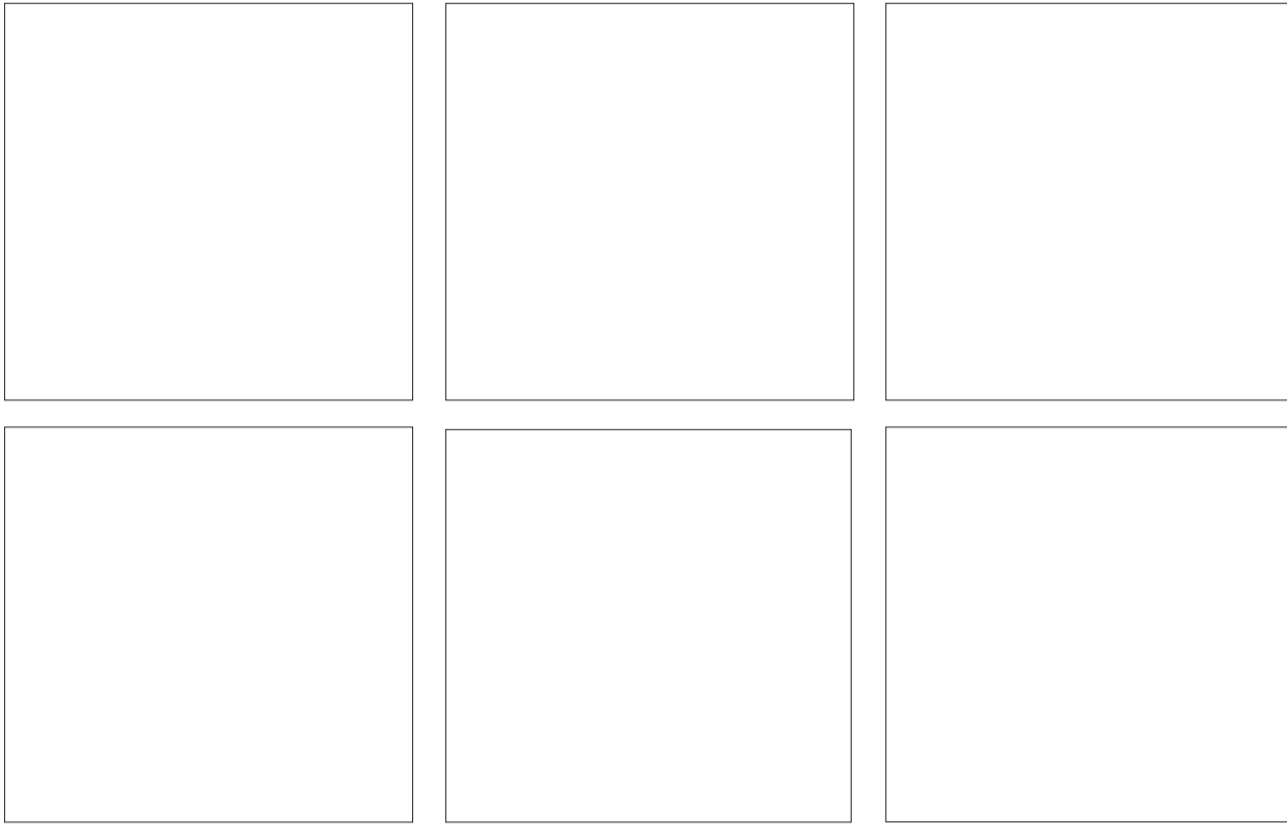
For the workers involved, the dispute has come to be about more than taking on their employer over employment rights and jobs; they have developed a sense of solidarity and comradeship which has changed them. They have seen work colleagues that they hardly know being prepared to stand up for others. Women workers and young workers who have not been involved in any action before are now speaking at meetings. There are still 60 people on the blockade of the plant from each shift. They have said whatever happens – if they do go back to work and the factory isn't closed – then management will be dealing with different people; people who know they can rely on each other for support and who know the importance of human solidarity.

**That solidarity will be the key to winning the dispute. Please send messages of support to [p-potter1@sky.com](mailto:p-potter1@sky.com).**

### More industrial news on the web

- London "Troublemakers Group" to meet: [on.fb.me/y01YZF](http://on.fb.me/y01YZF)
- GMB organises "Student Worker Solidarity" conference: [on.fb.me/Ahpzi2](http://on.fb.me/Ahpzi2)
- Report from Maritime Union of Australia conference: [bit.ly/z1tGBm](http://bit.ly/z1tGBm)

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



Bleed them dry! Top to bottom, left to right: the Duke of Westminster, Philip Green, Emma Harrison, Roman Abramovich, Fred Goodwin, Lakshmi Mittal

# Tax the rich at 75%? At least!

By Gerry Bates

**François Hollande, candidate of the Socialist Party in the French presidential election coming up on 22 April and 6 May, has called for 75% tax on incomes above a million euros.**

Supporters of incumbent president Nicolas Sarkozy have expressed outrage and muttered about “confiscation”, but polls show 61% of voters backing the policy and only 29% against.

At present the highest marginal income-tax rate in France is 41% (on pay above 70,830 euros: similar to the 40% highest rate in Britain, on pay above £34,371, before the 50% band for pay above £150,000 was introduced in April 2010). In fact, after they have manipulated their allowances and loopholes, the top 1% in France pay 18.3% of their total incomes in tax and the top 0.1% pay 17%.

Meanwhile in Britain, 500 bosses have signed a letter of protest demanding that the Government remove the 50% tax-band

and tighten the screws on the worse-off instead. The Government, worried about public opinion, seems likely to keep the 50% band for now.

Hollande is no left-winger, and his Socialist Party has loosened its never-strong links with the working class probably more even than the Labour Party in Britain. The Socialist Party held either the presidency or the prime ministership or both from 1981 right through to 2002, and from 1983 onwards pursued consistently neo-liberal policies.

**PRESSURE  
But Hollande feels under pressure.**

In late 2010 there was a huge strike movement in France against moves to worsen pension provision — far more militant than the sedate action we have had in Britain so far over the same issue — and, though the movement did not win, it left a sediment in public opinion.

Hollande has also had to promise to renegotiate the EU’s new budget-balancing treaty.

The 75% tax proposal is, as Hollande himself says, symbolic. But it is an important symbol in a political world where, since the early 1980s, the idea that the rich should be taxed less has been as axiomatic in the mainstream as that water is wet.

**TAX BAND  
In France itself, the top tax-band was 90% in the years after 1945, and still above 60% at the start of the 80s.**

In Britain, the top tax-band, in 1979, was 98% on investment income and 83% on other income: it had been high since 1945, and all through 13 years of Tory rule in 1951-64.

Today, the highest income-tax band for the rich is 59%, in Denmark. Taxes on wealth used to be widely discussed. Today, France is the only EU country with a wealth tax, and it is at a very low rate. Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, Spain, and Greece used to have small wealth taxes and have abolished them. Britain has never had one.

After-tax economic equality has increased hugely in the three decades of tax cuts for the well-off, partly because of the tax cuts, and partly because pre-tax loot for the rich has increased too.

Despite the claim that “incentives” for the ultra-rich are vital for economic growth, that growth has been slower in the neo-liberal decades than it was in the decades of relatively high top tax rates.

Total household income in Britain is not much short of £1 trillion a year. The top ten per cent get 31% of that, or about £300 billion a year. Take even ten per cent of those billions in tax, and it’s more than enough to offset all the cuts currently being pushed through by the coalition Government.

Socialists aim to establish democratic and social control over all social wealth, rather than leaving it in the hands of a minority of individuals and taxing them.

**But to tax seriously would be a first move towards control. Tax the rich!**

# Get Carter!

By Rosalind Robson

**The NHS Cooperation and Competition Panel (CCP) was set up by the last government as part of its drive to intensify the NHS market.**

Controversy over potential conflicts of interest for its chairman Lord Patrick Carter of Coles, have just surfaced (*Guardian* 5 March) — three years after he first took up the job.

Under the Health and Social Care Bill the CCP will be merged with another regulatory body, Monitor, and Monitor will oversee a gigantic expansion of private sector companies in the NHS.

Patrick Carter founded and built up Westminster Health Care (a private nursing home company) in the 1980s. He got rich on the back of Thatcherite reforms which saw “social” care redefined, privatised and subjected to means testing.

Selling his business in 1999, Carter decided to “give something back” to the country. He was knighted by New Labour and “employed” on various committees and quangos.

A tiring schedule for little financial reward. But it was all good for the dynamic 50-something peer because he still had his millions to invest in “health”-related private companies like Life Works Community Ltd

(rehab for the rich) and time to give to companies based in the offshore tax-haven Bermuda (Primary Group Ltd).

What’s got the Royal College of GPs particularly annoyed is Carter’s position as chair of McKesson Information Solutions Ltd, a US-owned healthcare giant. Operating as System C in the UK, the company has contracts with more than 90% of NHS organisations as well as private health companies.

It provides “healthcare solutions” (IT-based stuff). It’s a big business which could make a gigantic killing in the next few years.

Whether Carter ever does have a direct conflict of interest — the CCP say he pops out of the room when his interests are involved in any investigation — is secondary.

The real disgrace is that a wheeler-dealer life peer who got rich on NHS privatisation holds such a powerful position. No one elected him, and he can’t be held to account.

What the hell does he know about the real aspirations and needs of the people who rely on the NHS?

**He got where he is by crawling over “little people” — whether it was by paying pittance wages to migrant workers who worked in his homes or by exploiting other people’s infirmity.**

## NHS: not for sale!

**Forty activists demonstrated outside the “Winning Business in the New NHS” conference at the King’s Fund in central London on 29 February.**

They included health workers, student nurses, community campaigners, student activists and trade unionists from other sectors.

One demonstrator, a student at University College London, said:

“I came to the demo this morning because I am against the privatisation of the NHS. As the government is refusing to listen to the health-care workers and the public who are against the bill, I see direct action as the most effective way of getting our voices heard.”

Health Alarm, the

newly-formed activist collective that organised the protest, will be calling a mobilising meeting for activists wanting to organise more direct action to save the NHS.

For more information, see [healthalarm1159.wordpress.com](http://healthalarm1159.wordpress.com) or email [healthalarm@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:healthalarm@yahoo.co.uk)

**Next Health Alarm action**

**“Kick the market out of the NHS” — Saturday 17 March, 11am-2pm at the Virgin Health Club, Plaza Shopping Centre, 120 Oxford Street, London W1D 1LT.**

**Richard Branson’s company Assura Medical is one of the companies making private profits in the NHS.**