

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

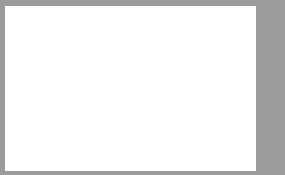


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For a workers' government

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# STOP THIS WAR ON THE POOR!

As George Osborne prepares his latest austerity budget...

Theresa May sets out her stall to be next Tory Party leader with an appeal to the right of the party...

and the disgraced MP Liam Fox urges more spending cuts

## 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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# Chávez: no hero of ours

By Pablo Velasco

**Hugo Chávez, the president of Venezuela, died on 5 March. Much of the left has lauded Chávez because he won 15 elections, used some of Venezuela's immense oil wealth to pay for social programmes, and stood up to American imperialism in Latin America.**

Neoliberals have chastised him as a dictator standing in the way of free markets.

Whilst we have no truck with the neoliberals, our assessment of Chávez is highly critical for our own reasons.

Chávez's "socialism" was from above — a mix of pan-Latin American nationalism and social welfare spending. He was not a revolutionary socialist or a Marxist. He was not committed to the self-emancipation of the working class.

Chávez formed a bourgeois government that administered the Venezuelan capitalist state and oversaw Venezuelan capitalism — at no point did he break from the national bourgeoisie. He continued to interact with the international bourgeoisie, particularly through oil (including the US). He created a layer of "Boligarchs", who grew wealthy off the back of his "Bolivarian Revolution".

The trade union movement, which broke out of the old CTV unions and formed the UNT in 2003, had great potential to organise millions of workers. Within it was a class struggle current, C-CURA, which predated Chávez and had fought the old regime and its allies in the union bureaucracy. But Chávez-supporting Bolivarian trade unionists stifled this movement when militants re-

fused to subordinate themselves to the government.

Although there was much rhetoric about workers' control, and a number of nationalisations, Venezuelan workers did not and could not, except for very fleeting moments such as during the resistance to the employers' lock-out in 2002-03, exercise genuine democratic control at the point of production. In all the firms where "workers' control" was proclaimed, the committees involved were very quickly incorporated or neutered. Even those under government control were run like capitalist businesses.

The PSUV, the party that Chávez built, is a top-down, electoral organisation which binds supporters close to the government. Although some socialists tried to work within it, it stifled the space for independent working class organisation. The PSUV was more like the Cuban Communist Party, or perhaps the early PRI in Mexico. Such a party cannot be a vehicle for working class self-liberation.

### FOREIGN POLICY

**Chávez may have been rude to George Bush and refused to follow the dominant neoliberal Washington consensus, but he also gave sustenance to some of the worst, anti-working class regimes across the globe.**

No one should forget how he told Iranian workers at the militant Khodro car plant that Ahmadinejad was their friend.

Chávez made friendships and alliances with Russia, China, Cuba and despots such as Mugabe, Qaddafi and Assad. He did not stand up for the workers in prison in those states; instead he acted as the PR

man for their rulers.

The best characterisation of Chávez and his movement in the Marxist lexicon, which the AWL has held from the start, is that he was a Bonapartist.

This designation foregrounds his defence of the Venezuelan bourgeois state and the bourgeois government that he headed. It emphasises the heterogeneous composition of his movement, drawing from all classes including sections of the ruling class, but also the central involvement of the military, as the force for stability at the core of the state. Chávez's origins were in the military, and there was a "civic-military" alliance at the centre of his rule.

The measures Chávez took to rule were state-capitalist, including the form of nationalisation he used, the welfare programmes he promoted, and the peculiar lurches of apparent radicalism together with bureaucracy. He could establish a stable Bonapartism because Venezuela has long had a peculiar rentier state resting on oil revenue.

Chávez was also a Bonapartist in the sense of a populist politician, very much in a Latin American tradition.

It is true that Chávez won successive, largely free and fair, elections. But to be a democrat, more is required. His was a shallow bourgeois democracy with authoritarian features, with a hypertrophic executive and truncated parliament. Venezuela under Chávez was a long way from the consistent, many-sided, widely accountable and recallable, political and economic democracy that socialists want to create.

Chávez's radicalism lurched after April 2002, when the US-backed coup failed to topple him.

On his first visit to Britain in 1999 he expressed an interest in Blair's "third way". When he returned in 2006 at the height of his popularity, he was lauded by leftists in London, with fawning from Ken Livingstone, Tariq Ali, and Alan Woods of Socialist Appeal. The Hands of Venezuela campaign invited supporters to wave flags outside Chávez's hotel, while the public meeting consisted of a four-hour long ramble to a sycophantic audience.

On "Newsnight", Alan Woods, presenting himself as a "confidant of Chávez", grotesquely claimed Chávez had made "half a revolution".

Worse, Woods claimed Chávez had given a voice to those who had no voice.

### SPEAK

**Chávez articulated his own interests and spoke on behalf of the poor, but did not permit the Venezuelan workers to speak for themselves.**

Similar softness was found in Mike Gonzales' piece for *Socialist Worker* and from the ex-SWP oppositionist Richard Seymour. They seem to view Chávez as some kind of social democrat. Yet his politics did not originate with the labour movement, nor were they based on the unions. They were not of the working class, even in a reformist sense.

The forces of the "third camp", working-class self-organisation independent of other classes, are small in Venezuela. But they do exist. They will need to wipe the slate clean of chavismo if they are to advance.

**The international left should not fall into sentimental veneration – ruthless criticism should be the watchword.**

## International Women's Day

IWD is celebrated on and around 8 March. This year...

● **The Women's Library (facing closure) was occupied by an independent feminist coalition:**  
[workersliberty.org/node/20579](http://workersliberty.org/node/20579)

● **1,000 women marched against violence against women:**  
[workersliberty.org/node/20586](http://workersliberty.org/node/20586)

● **Women's Fightback held a meeting a week earlier on 1 March on the theme "bring back International Working Women's Day".**

● **Our socialist feminism blog:**  
<http://womensfightback.wordpress.com>

# Stop this war on the poor!

By Ira Berkovic

**When averaged out across the whole population, the government's benefit cuts amount to a £760 loss by 2014-2015 for every single one of us.**

Imagine what a monthly reduction of £63 would mean for you. What basic necessities would you have to go without? And what would you have to cut back on that are things that make life more enjoyable? What effect would it have on your social life? Holidays?

The benefit cuts show the coalition's project in the clearest light. They want to use the opportunity of ongoing financial crisis to reduce social costs, so that when capitalism recovers, the social bill for the bosses and the state will be much smaller. They want to make the rich richer, and the poor poorer.

Benefit cuts like the "bedroom tax", penalises "under-occupation" by cutting housing benefit for people living in a home with more bedrooms than people and are designed to hit the poor.

Single parents who keep spare rooms for visiting children, or carer families who need spare rooms to

help family members with disabilities or health problems, will have to find extra money for rent or give up their homes.

Council tenants forced to give up their homes may have to move into privately-rented accommodation, where rents are higher. They may need to claim increased housing benefit as a result. The "bedroom tax" will not even achieve the government's aim of reducing the housing benefit bill!

The people affected are likely to cuts in other benefits, such as the reduction in funding for council tax benefits or the abolition of the Disability Living Allowance and its replacement with the "Personal Independence Payment".

The tabloid media' says

cuts will clean up the benefits system and penalise only "scroungers" who exploit. This is anti-working-class propaganda. Less than 1% of benefit spending is overpaid due to fraud, and the current cuts could hit nearly 10 million households (out of 22 million UK-wide).

**EMERGENCY PLAN**  
**Unions should be organising active, visible campaigns demanding the reversal of the cuts and a working-class emergency plan to increase social revenue by taking the vast wealth of the banks into public ownership, taxing the rich and business, closing tax loopholes, and cutting military spending.**

Any single one of these measures would free up the money to fund not only the reversal of the cuts but an expansion of the welfare system.

Unions must also go on the ideological offensive against government and media attempts to divide benefit claimants from working-class people not claiming benefits.

Unions like PCS, which organise workers who administer the benefits sys-

tem, must arm their members with arguments based on social solidarity.

And the unions must demand that the Labour Party, to which the biggest of them remain affiliated, commits to total opposition to the cuts and to their reversal if elected in 2015.

Local Labour Parties have been involved in campaigning against the bedroom tax, including supporting demonstrations which will take place in many cities on Saturday 16 March. But senior party figures are already beginning to dilute Labour's opposition. Shadow Cabinet Member Helen Goodman said that Labour would back the measure for people who had been offered a smaller home and chosen to remain in their current home.

The absence of a clear, comprehensive political alternative to the Con-Dem project means that even the most radical and courageous opposition to a given cut is often incidental and isolated.

**Our class needs a joined-up project to counter the joined-up project of our bosses and the government which serves them.**

## Osborne digs deeper

By Martin Thomas

**The curve of Britain's economic output shows a sharp decline from mid-2008 to mid-2009. Then from mid-2009 to late 2010 there was a slight recovery.**

Since the coalition government's social cuts have started kicking in, from late 2010, output has mostly stagnated or declined further.

The government's own Office of Budgetary Responsibility felt obliged on 8 March to write to David Cameron saying that, contrary to Cameron's claims, the OBR was sure that public spending cuts had reduced overall output, and might have reduced it more than the OBR thought.

Yet a large wing of the Tories, people like Liam Fox, are baying for more cuts. It is near-certain that in his Budget on 20 March chancellor George Osborne will dig deeper into the cuts

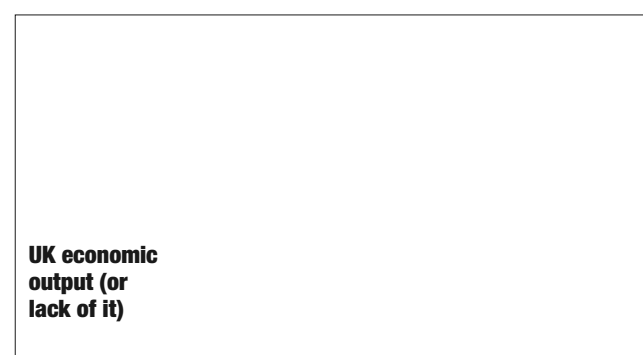
hole.

The government said back in 2010 that it was making cuts in order to end the government's deficit (its excess of spending over income) and to stabilise the government's debt (the running total of what it owes to financiers).

In fact the deficit for 2012-3 will probably be higher than in 2011-2. In 2014-5 the deficit will probably be £64 billion bigger than George Osborne projected in 2010. That £64 billion is a larger sum (in one year) than the projected total over five years of the cruel social cuts we all know about.

Osborne digs deeper because cutting the deficit (though he'd have been glad to do it) was in fact never the fundamental reason for his measures.

The fundamental motive was always as stated by Barack Obama's former chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel: "You never want a serious crisis to go to



waste".

Hurtful though capitalist slumps always are, usually inequality is somewhat reduced during slumps, if only because the rich can fall further, and still stay rich, than the poor can fall and still subsist.

In this slump, both in the USA and Britain, inequality has increased. While Osborne is making huge cuts in benefits for the worse-off, he has also cut corporation tax and the top rate of income tax. Liam Fox wants him to cut more from benefits — and health — so he

can cut capital gains tax!

The Labour leadership could demolish Osborne just by pointing to the graph of (slight) recovery when Labour was still in office and (if only because an election was due) making few cuts, and recalling Ed Balls's speeches from 2010 about "growth, not cuts" being the answer to slump.

**It doesn't do that because it is scared of the financiers who might call that "irresponsible". But haven't the financiers had their own way long enough?**

## More than a one-off campaign

**Edd Bauer from Birmingham Communities Against the Cuts spoke to *Solidarity* about the campaign.**

**We are a grass-roots community movement based in South Birmingham. Protesting against council cuts**

It's different from other campaigns because it organises direct action and calls for protests, not just lobbies. It's also willing to run candidates in elections.

In September last year it was involved in a successful anti-academies campaign in the west of the city. Last month it was involved in protests against the City Council cuts budget — occupying the Council chambers and then later blockading the Council Chambers to stop councillors passing cuts.

There isn't an active Labour Representation Committee or Labour left in Birmingham. In fact, the group was originally set up by a group of leftwing Labour Party activists who split from the party when they were carved out of council selections for being leftwing. The local Trades Council is very supportive of us.

The question of standing anti-cuts candidates has to be approached carefully. The last election campaign allowed the group to build itself. We were able to build relationships with a lot of people who felt familiar with that form of campaigning.

It shows that there is a great desire for a party of the left, but it's hard to see how that might emerge in the future. I think it'll come about by splitting from the Labour Party and merging with other left-of-Labour groups; organisations like ours can be a part of that mix.

Previous attempts at this parties — like the SLP, Socialist Alliance, and Respect — fell apart for different reasons. But I think it is possible to create one which is fit for purpose. How to do it differently? In a word, democracy. You can't build a party on the basis of undemocratic lash-ups or cultish hero-worship of figures like Galloway.

At our conference (on 16 March) we want to involve people from across the city on the basis of more militant tactics and politics. Building an organisation that can take on Labour from the left, fighting in local areas, takes citywide organisation.

We need two sticks: one stick, a strong left in Labour and the other stick a strong left outside of Labour. Both are needed. But people like me would be kicked out of Labour in a flash. Many people are alienated from the party. While Labour has historic links to the class, those links are under pressure, so there are just as many working-class people who feel no connection to Labour.

The budget has predictably gone through. The point now is to build up the grassroots to the point where you can defeat the cuts in future years. By taking action, by making clear arguments, we are growing and getting people involved.

Next on the agenda is the bedroom tax. We need to get people organised around something that's going to hit them hard.

Activists are also talking about forming a more revolutionary left group in the city to undertake political education. We want to take the most enthusiastic anti-cuts campaigners and get them involved in these broader political discussions.

**If you want people to be involved in the long term, not just around a one-off campaign, you need to offer them something else, a discussion about ideology and broader strategy.**

• [communitiesagainstthecuts.com](http://communitiesagainstthecuts.com)

# Socialists must fight for secularism

## Letters



**On Saturday March 9 an extraordinary incident threatened to mar UCL's reputation as a university with a proud tradition of secularism and free-thinking.**

At a debate between renowned physicist and atheist Professor Lawrence Krauss and Islamic lecturer Hamza Andreas Tzortzis, hosted by the "Islamic Education and Research Academy", women and men were made to sit apart in the audience. Before the debate began, women were asked to sit at the back of the audience, while men and "couples" sat in their own sections. An eyewitness account can be found here <http://on.fb.me/ZBLsV5>.

Despite being told that no gender segregation was to take place, as the debate began women were told that they had to sit away from any men unless they were in a "couple". Krauss threatened to leave the debate if the room was to continue to be segregated but the organisers managed to pacify him by relaxing the restrictions.

This incident was immediately responded to by many groups including the UCL Islamic Society, who professed not to have been involved in the debate, as well as prominent atheist Professor Richard Dawkins (see <http://bit.ly/13PwfFN>).

Dawkins' article was criticised by some as having an air of smugness and western superiority about it. Commentators discussed the fact that gender segregation was not necessarily an Islamic tradition but in fact a "cultural tradition" that was perhaps overzealously used for this debate.

Richard Dawkins is perhaps not the best spokesperson against sexism, as in 2011 he wrote a heavily criticised response (<http://bit.ly/12LY3eS>) to a woman who discussed the sexism that was apparent in some atheist activist organisations. His response was seen as highly patronising and an attempt to imply that because women in "Islamic countries" were treated very harshly, that anyone who thought that mi-

sogyny was an important problem in the West simply needed to grow some "thicker skin". In light of Dawkins' past comments, and of his overlooking of sexism within his own atheist ranks, one can't help but see this current response as a tad hypocritical.

However, outrage at Dawkins and mild annoyance at the idea of the first university in the UK to admit female students on the same basis as their male counterparts playing host to a quasi-segregated event is simply not a good enough reaction. Any attempt to forcibly divide an audience at a secular institution such as a university, or anywhere else for that matter, must be thoroughly denounced.

Though most Muslims see gender segregation as archaic

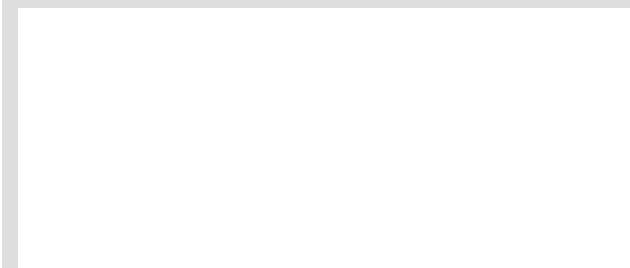
and pointless (including many of those living in "Muslim" countries), the phenomenon still persists in many mosques and events even in Britain. This thoroughly backward practice cannot be accepted for fear of being thought intolerant and offensive to Muslims and socialists and secularists must condemn it, whether or not Richard Dawkins happens to agree with us.

UCL has now banned the Islamic Education and Research Academy from holding any more events at the university.

**The tradition of marginalising religion from the public sphere is a proud one that socialists used to uphold. Let us continue to uphold it.**

Omar Raii, UCL student

## Dynamics beyond the limits of Grillo



**I think Toby Abse's comment ("No excuses for Grillo", *Solidarity* 277, 6 March) on my article of the 27 February ("Italian polls: politics adrift", *Solidarity* 276) is guilty of a certain selective attention to detail.**

Yes, the article didn't mention Grillo's racist utterances nor his invitation to a Casa Pound zealot to join his 5 Star Movement, or any other of his reactionary nonsense. Why? Because it explicitly referred the reader to Toby's then-current article in *Solidarity* recounting these and other details, summarised by me as proof of the "profound crisis of the working-class movement".

The thrust of both my recent pieces have been to empha-

size the basic reasons behind the movement's success, especially among sections of the working class, which, in spite of all the limits of Grillo and his cronies, objectively, potentially, is opening up conditions where the dynamic of events may suddenly shift on an even greater scale from the electoral arena to society as a whole.

Martin Thomas ("Another 'new mood'?", *Solidarity* 277) draws attention to the significance of the novel features of contemporary "civil society", and the social media as a pre-eminent factor, the necessity to relate to that terrain and its manifestations, not as substitute but as vital to engage in the battle for ideas, programme and strategy for the workers movement as a whole.

The 5 Star Movement, warts and all so to speak, offers us precisely such a challenge. Saluting it uncritically or simply branding it as reactionary do neither.

**As Trotsky pointed out, "he who believes that the process of social revolution is constituted by a schema where the mass of the workers are to be found on one side and reaction unequivocally on the other will never live to see it".**

Hugh Edwards

# Not what socialism should look like

## The Left

By Cathy Nugent



**Writing in *Socialist Worker* (5 March), timed for the SWP special conference, Judith Orr, with not-so-beautiful simplicity, explains how women's oppression is rooted in class society.**

We agree with that, and with Orr's subsequent argument that gender should not get in the way of a united fight against capitalism.

But Orr's basic picture leaves unexplained many complexities about capitalist exploitation and oppression worldwide: how the exact form of female oppression varies across geography and history; how human beings are "socialised" and gender and sexuality are constructed primarily, but not exclusively, through "the family"; about the role of women's labour — once the source of cheap labour, but, with mass migration, now not the only source. And last, but not least, how gender oppression intersects with other forms of oppression. Orr does not even mention these complexities.

In the Second Wave women's movement of the 70s and 80s, feminists influenced by Marxist ideas — socialist feminists — spent years debating and discussing complexities, with varying degrees of productiveness. These debates have never piqued the genuine interest of the Socialist Workers Party. For the SWP, "feminism" is of interest only in relation to itself.

In March 2013 Orr lectures us about feminism because she wants to bash "creeping feminism" in the SWP, those pissed off by the blatant abuse of power displayed by party committees over the handling of a rape allegation.

Would Orr be so crudely describing how feminism "does not see the fundamental divide in society as between

classes", etc., if she was sharing platforms with feminists who want to ban lap dancing clubs (thus making more vulnerable and precarious the lives of some working-class women), as she and other SWPers have in the past? Probably not.

To borrow a phrase from a participant in the recent anti-capitalist and consciously feminist occupation of the Women's Library, there are today "many feminisms". The sometime friends of Orr — the anti-porn and anti-sex work radical feminists — and also liberal feminists, anarcho-feminists, anti-capitalist feminists, others influenced by varieties of post-modernism, others still by Marxist ideas.

If Orr was seriously interested in analysing this "movement" of blogs, academia, activism and networks, that would be legitimate. Orr mentions the discourse around "hierarchies of oppression", something that does need criticism. But that is the extent of her "critique" because this is not the game here.

Finally, Orr gets down to the oldest SWP anti-feminist line in their book: "So, some feminists .... say that men benefit from women's oppression.... they argue that men have a short term interest in women's oppression with benefits such as women's work in the home."

I first heard this argument in the middle of the miners' strike when the SWP decided to be "difficult" about many aspects of that strike. They called the solidarity committees "left-wing Oxfam". In York they took the piss out of feminists for visiting pit communities to make lentil soup (it was cheap and nutritious!). The deliberate sectarianism divided people. Some joined the SWP, others it infuriated. The intention is the same here, but to divide people *inside* the SWP.

In 1984-5 the line was a disgrace. This was a time when hundreds of working-class women were both building the fight to save communities built around the mines and uniting with men to do that and *simultaneously* challenging the way

the men in those communities took for granted the tangible "benefits" they gained from the hundred and one domestic tasks women did. In the short-term such challenges disunited men and women. But this was an intrinsic, necessary part of the bigger battle; women needed to break through the barriers of sexism and reorganise their lives, structured as they were around their oppression, in order to find a political voice. It was a "disunity" worth going through.

The AWL is socialist feminist. We draw on Marxist socialism to understand oppressions and how they are interwoven with capitalist exploitation and continually reconfigured by historical development. We take inspiration from much of the work of the Second Wave socialist feminists. Unfortunately, for many reasons, socialist feminism was only able to take theoretical understanding so far.

The AWL will not have a monopoly on reviving socialist feminism. All we can do is be open minded about the "many feminisms" of today, and critical where necessary. We work with other feminists in concrete campaigns and try to learn from experience. We think we have a lot of work to do to "update" our socialist feminism.

**The SWP on the other hand does not even recognise what is at stake here, they think only about self-preservation. That is why they will play no part in reviving interest in or developing socialist understandings of oppression.**

**Marxism and Feminism: capitalism, class, and the politics of women's liberation**  
A series of meetings in March and April organised by Women's Fightback and Workers' Liberty students.  
[bit.ly/WFMlj7](http://bit.ly/WFMlj7)

# After the SWP: renewal or dispersal?

The SWP is imploding due to a crisis brought on by the leadership's handling of allegation of rape against a senior party member.

**The Central Committee (CC) of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the biggest would-be revolutionary socialist group in Britain, won a Pyrrhic victory at the SWP's special conference on 10 March.**

The CC scored, apparently, a four-to-one victory against those who have expressed doubts or criticisms, mild or radical, of the SWP's commandist regime. Although the critics were roughly as numerous as the loyalists in the signatures won by rival statements, the CC and its network of compulsorily-loyal full-time organisers were better at rounding up inactive or semi-active members to vote through the delegates they wanted.

As a blogger aptly put it, "Order Prevails in Vauxhall" (the SWP HQ is in Vauxhall). According to the CC, this ends the row that broke out when many SWPers became dissatisfied about the CC's handling of charges by a young woman SWPer of sexual harassment and rape against SWP organiser Martin Smith. But it doesn't end it.

70-odd SWPers have publicly resigned, and formed a new International Socialist Network. The SWP's entire student group at Sussex University has broken from the party. Dozens of individual SWPers posted resignation notes on social networking sites in the hours and days following the conference. More will follow.

## OVEREXTENDED

**The CC is now like a bank in the run-up to the 2007-8 crisis. It has overextended its credit. It has drawn deeply, too deeply, on the reserves of loyalty among SWPers, already depleted after the Respect fiasco of 2004-7.**

It now runs an organisation where half, or nearly half, the active membership are deeply disillusioned with the leadership, even if they will submit for now.

It could get past that only by new political directions which convince and enthuse the members. But there is no sign of such: only of the same old lacklustre gimcrackery.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci wrote about how political problems become "insoluble" in one-party states. He had in mind fascist Italy and, probably, the USSR as the Stalinists consolidated. The same thought applies to one-faction parties.

The SWP CC denounces "permanent" factions (i.e. factions operating for more than a few weeks prior to each annual conference). But in fact the SWP has one "eternal" faction. The CC (which, by SWP rule, confronts the rest of the SWP with pretended permanent unanimity) and its corps of full-time organisers (also obliged, as a condition of employment, always to push CC policy) are an eternal faction.

"The functions of such a party [or faction] are no longer directly political, but merely technical ones of propaganda and

public order, and moral and cultural influence... Even if no other legal parties [factions] exist, other parties [factions, trends of opinion] in fact always do exist...

"Against these, polemics are unleashed and battles are fought as in a game of blind man's buff... Political language becomes jargon... political questions are disguised as cultural ones, and such become insoluble".

That is the SWP's future. It will continue to crumble.

Many SWP and ex-SWP dissidents say they don't want "another left group". But a network is a group. Organising it very loosely may diminish its ability to formulate sharp ideas, to learn from criticism of the past, to mobilise compactly and with energy, or to have political control over its members who get trade-union or student-union positions. It won't stop it being a group.

## FIX

**And what would we say to a doctor who, when many medical treatments have failed to fix a disease, and some have made it worse, responded: we don't want yet another medicine?**

The International Socialist Organization of the USA (former co-thinkers of the SWP, but expelled from the SWP's international network in 2001 in obscure circumstances) has backed the SWP opposition and described leading oppositionist Richard Seymour as "an SWP comrade we know and respect".

We don't know whether the International Socialist Network will evolve into a "British ISO". Socialist Alternative in Australia, which is linked to the ISO-USA and is the other sizeable group in the English-speaking world adhering to the SWP/IS "tradition" but at odds with the SWP, says it's "not taking sides" for now.

In any case, for the ISN, and for all the activists now being shaken loose from the SWP, there should be two main priorities now.

First, join in united action with other socialists. You are no longer bound by the comminations of the SWP. Student ex-SWPers, for example, are now free to unite in action with the major force of the radical left in the student world, the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

Second, discuss. Where you have differences with other socialists, like Workers' Liberty, deal with them by dialogue and debate, rather than in SWP fashion by prefabricated curses.

**If you do that, this crisis can be a step to a healthier left. If you keep to old factional prejudices and anathemas from your SWP days, it will bring only fragmentation and weakening.**

## Help us raise £15,000

This week's edition of *Solidarity* contains articles by Max Shachtman and Hal Draper, two of the foremost writers of "third camp" Trotskyism, the anti-Stalinist Marxists who refused to acknowledge the Stalinist states as somehow progressive against capitalism.

**The AWL wants to make the "unorthodox" Trotskyism of Max Shachtman (above), Hal Draper, and others, better known.**

Their work, and the tradition they tried to build, is far less well known than it deserves to be. At a time when many on the left still place their faith in perceived lesser-evils and substitutes for independent working-

class self-organisation (Latin American statist-reformism, political Islam, or some other form of vague "anti-imperialism"), the ideas of a tradition which sought to reassert democratic working-class self-emancipation as the defining core of the socialist project remain hugely important.

Workers' Liberty wants your financial support so we can continue to popularise that tradition. Our plans for book releases in 2013 include a book of Shachtman's writings on Trotsky, but publication will be impossible without donations.

**Help us raise £15,000 by May Day 2013. You can contribute in the following ways:**

- Taking out a monthly standing order using the form below or at [www.workersliberty.org/resources](http://www.workersliberty.org/resources). Please post completed forms to us at the AWL address below.

- Making a donation by cheque, payable to "AWL", or donating online at [www.workersliberty.org/donate](http://www.workersliberty.org/donate).

- Organising a fundraising event.

- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell.

- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL. More information: 07796 690874 / [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.

**Total raised so far: £8,101**

We raised £84 this week in increased standing orders. Increased standing orders, regular monthly payments, are extremely helpful — even more so than one-off donations.



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# A short history of Maoism

The following article by Mike Kyriazopoulos was originally written for an internal discussion in the Workers' Party of New Zealand (now Fightback Aotearoa/NZ). Fightback has its origins, in part, in a Maoist-influenced tendency.

**The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) grew out of the anti-imperialist May 4th movement against the ruinous Versailles Treaty, which was founded by Chen Tu-hsiu in 1919.**

One of the most pressing questions for the CCP, founded in 1921, was how to relate to the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT), who ran the government of the fledgling republic.

Lenin had insisted that: "The Communist International [CI] must enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and backward countries, but should not merge with it, and should under all circumstances uphold the independence of the proletarian movement even if it is in its most embryonic form."

Initially, this was the policy that guided the CCP, establishing trade unions and organising strikes in alliance with other organisations, all the while maintaining their political independence. But once Stalin was in control of the CI, its only concern became defending "socialism in one country" — Russia.

Stalin identified a bloc of four classes oppressed by imperialism in China: the proletariat, the peasantry, the urban petty-bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie. The last class, he said, was counterposed to the comprador bourgeoisie, the economic and political agency of foreign capital.

Trotsky countered that the comprador and national bourgeoisies were far closer to each other than the bourgeoisie was to the masses of workers and peasants. While the national bourgeoisie became the dominant class for the Stalinists, Trotsky insisted that the proletariat should be in the driving seat.

## CLASS STRUGGLE

**Hence, when there was an upsurge in class struggle in 1925-26, with the emergence of the Hong Kong-Canton Strike Committee and Hunan peasant association, it was the Trotskyists, but not the Stalinists, who raised the call for soviets.**

In September 1926, Trotsky urged: "The CCP must now... fight for direct independent leadership of the awakened working class."

By March 1927, a workers' government had been established in Shanghai. The workers, confused by the CCP's line, initially welcomed the KMT forces into the city. On 12 April, the KMT began massacring Communists and workers and set about crushing the unions. Stalin belatedly called for armed uprisings long after revolution had been engulfed by counter-revolution — which meant only further massacres of revolutionaries.

The failure of the Stalinists' policy meant that Trotsky's ideas were popular with Chinese militants wherever they were exposed to them. During the anti-Trotskyist purges, the Sun Yat-sen University in Moscow was shut down because "An informer testified in court that all the students of the university were Trotskyists."

Of the "bloc of four classes", the Stalinists claimed that only the peasantry now remained. As Xiang Chung-fa, General Secretary of the CCP elected July 1928, put it: "We lost tens of thousands of workers; never mind, as a compensation we got millions, even tens of millions of peasants."

Mao was not drawn to Communism out of any kind of identification of the underdog. He set out his ideas on morality in an essay in the winter of 1917-18:

"I do not agree that to be moral, the motive of one's action has to be benefiting others... Of course there are people and

## Image of idealised commune during the Great Leap Forward

objects in the world, but they are all there only for me... People like me only have a duty to ourselves; we have no duty to other people... People like me are not building achievements to leave for future generations."

In the same essay, Mao went on to praise the virtues of war and death.

Mao attended the founding congress of the Chinese Communist Party in July 1921, and was soon tasked with organising miners on the Hunan-Jiangxi border. A few months previously in a letter to a friend, Mao had expressed the opinion that "I think labourers in China do not really suffer poor physical conditions. Only scholars suffer." He quit after a few days, telling the Party leadership that he had come "to his wits' end" with "organising workers." As a result, Mao was dropped from the Second Party congress in July 1922.

In January 1923, Stalin signed a CI order to give full backing to the Nationalist KMT. The CCP leadership opposed joining the KMT, describing its leader Sun Yat-sen as "lying" and "unscrupulous". At the Third Congress in June 1923, CI envoy Maring found that the only supporter of the policy was Mao. He "was so pessimistic", Maring reported, "that he saw the only salvation of China in the intervention by Russia", telling the congress "that the revolution had to be brought into China from the north by the Russian army."

However, Mao's enthusiasm for the KMT did not go down well with the CCP who expelled him from the Central Committee for being "opportunistic" and "right wing", and excluded him from the next party congress. Meanwhile, Mao progressed through the ranks of the KMT.

## STALIN

**By the time KMT leader Chiang Kai-Shek had broken with the Communists in April 1927, Stalin had control of the Kremlin and was personally dictating policy on China.**

Stalin had Chen Duxiu dismissed as Party chief, and Mao was promoted to the Politburo. Mao then proceeded to build up his own force, starting with 600 men retreating to the Jinggang mountains, from where they conducted looting raids on local villages. A party inspector reported that 15 months after the arrival of Mao's army, the countryside was devastated: "Because even petty bourgeois, rich peasants and small pedlars were all treated as enemies, and ...no attention was paid to construction or to the economic crisis, the countryside is totally bankrupt, and is collapsing by the day."

Mao's dictatorial methods were causing increasing concern within the CCP, whose army representatives voted to depose him from its leadership in June 1929. Mao was only able to reverse his fortunes once the opportunity to do Moscow's bidding arose again, during the "Manchurian Railway Crisis" a few months later.

The original Bolshevik policy was that Russia would give

up its substantial extraterritorial concessions in China, but Stalin reneged on this. When the Russians seized 1,500km of railways cutting through northeast China, they wanted the CCP to create some diversionary military pressure. Chen opposed this, declaring that such a stance "only makes people assume that we dance to the tune of roubles." Mao, on the other hand, enthusiastically followed Moscow's line, earning him praise in the Soviet press, and saving his political career.

Mao's next move was to take over the Red Army in Jiangxi. He had thousands of peasants and Communists denounced as nationalist spies in order to justify a brutal purge to consolidate his power. His atrocities provoked a mutiny. The rebels appealed to the party HQ in Shanghai, saying Mao was not a Bolshevik, and his ambition was to "become Party Emperor." But Chou En-lai in Shanghai backed Mao, giving him the signal to torture and execute the mutineers.

Following the terror, Mao proclaimed his first "Red" state with its capital in Ruijin in November 1931. He proceeded to build a totalitarian bureaucracy by squeezing the peasants and purging "class enemies", who provided an army of slave labourers. Around 700,000 people died as a result of terror and suicide.

After years of fighting the KMT, the CCP entered a period of rapprochement with the nationalists in 1937. Chiang legalised the CCP and appointed a Communist mole as head of the nationalists' propaganda department, who set to work sanitising Mao's image. Chiang assigned territory around Yen-an to Mao with a population of about two million.

When war broke out between China and Japan, the flow of Russian arms tilted the balance in favour of Mao and against Chiang, and there was a proliferation of "Red Bases".

The Stalin-Hitler pact of August 1939 opened up the prospect that Russia might do a similar deal with Japan, agreeing to carve up China in the same way as Poland. When the journalist Edgar Snow put this scenario to Mao, he replied: "It is quite within the possibilities of Leninism." Similarly, when Russia seized eastern Finland in early 1940, Mao issued a secret directive claiming that Moscow's annexation "guarantees the victory of the world and the Chinese revolution."

The war with Japan led to a massive increase in CCP membership, especially among educated youth disenchanted with the KMT. Many of them came to Yen-an, where Mao set about conditioning them into mass uniformity. Individuals were told to supply a list of all their family and social connections, and Mao's cult of personality was ratcheted up.

A critic, Wang Shi-wei, emerged as the champion of the young volunteers, denouncing the institutionalised privilege at the top of the Yen-an regime and proclaiming: "Justice must be established in the Party." Mao had him condemned as a "Trotskyite", imprisoned and later executed.

**An episode in 1966 during the Cultural Revolution: Mao praised the Red Guards and called on them to "bombard the headquarters" of "bourgeois elements" in government**

etc., will be protected.' .... To the workers the proclamation gives the following instructions: 'It is hoped that workers and employees in all trades will continue work and that businesses will operate as usual.'"

On 1 October 1949, the People's Republic of China was proclaimed. Law was replaced by party committees, media subject to total state censorship, and from July 1951 a registration system meant that most people were indefinitely tied to their job and place of residence. In October 1950 Mao launched a nationwide "campaign to suppress counter-revolutionaries". As regards KMT supporters, Mao said: "We don't kill a single one of those big Chiang Kai-sheks. What we kill are small Chiang Kai-sheks."

Russian experts were brought in to advise Mao on setting up his own gulag archipelago. Mao's "anti-corruption campaign" designed to consolidate his state power set quotas for executions. While the regime promoted the slogan "Serve the People", Mao himself lived extravagantly, having more than 50 estates built for him over his reign, dining on gourmet food and maintaining a coterie of women for entertainment and sex.

Mao intended to convert China into a nuclear armed superpower, although this plan was concealed to all but Mao's inner circle. Mao's overriding ambition was to obtain nuclear technology and know-how from the USSR. To this end, he went to extraordinary lengths, including prolonging the Korean War and provoking crises in the Taiwan Strait. He wanted to convince Russia that it needed a nuclear armed ally against the West.

Mao faced resistance to both requisitioning and forced collectivisation, which amounted to slave driving. Mao set a quota of 1.5 million "counter-revolutionaries" to be arrested over the next five years. As starvation ravaged the countryside, Mao instructed: "Educate peasants to eat less, and have more thin gruel." As the size of rations was reduced in the cities, Mao told the Politburo: "This is a war on food producers — as well as on food consumers." At the same time Mao bolstered the dictatorship in East Germany that had just crushed a workers' uprising in 1953 by offering 50 million roubles' worth of food aid.

In November 1957, Mao addressed a world communist summit in Moscow. His speech shocked even some of the hardened Stalinist participants:

"Let's contemplate this, how many people would die if war breaks out. There are 2.7 billion people in the world. One third could be lost; or, a little more, it could be half... I say that, taking the extreme situation, half dies, half lives, but imperialism would be razed to the ground and the whole world would become socialist.... People say that poverty is bad, but in fact poverty is good. The poorer people are, the more revolutionary they are. It is dreadful to imagine a time when everyone will be rich."

## DISSENT

**Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, and the subsequent Hungarian uprising, gave Mao cause to think about how to deal with potential dissent within his regime.**

His solution was the "Hundred Flowers" campaign, a deliberate trap for liberalising intellectuals. The permitted dissent was kept rigidly fragmented, to prevent any generalised revolt. The repression that followed was swift and brutal. One *People's Daily* headline stated: "Rebuke the rubbish that 'peasants' lives are hard!'"

Mao made it clear that there would be no let-up in the totalitarian regime, boasting that he had urged Khrushchev to send the tanks into Budapest. He denied any link between Marxism and humanism: "In the early stage of development of their thought Marx and Engels were indeed somewhat influenced by humanist ideas. ...But when they formulated the materialist conception of history and discovered the class struggle as the motive force of social development, they immediately got rid of this influence."

The Superpower Programme was vastly accelerated with the launch of the "Great Leap Forward" in May 1958.

Between 1958 and 1961, 37.7 million people died from famine and overwork in the greatest famine in recorded human history. In 1958-9, the regime exported seven million tons of grain. 10 million kg of grain was converted into ethyl

alcohol for missile tests. The cost of China's nuclear bomb, eventually detonated in 1964, has been estimated at \$4.1 billion (in 1957 prices), enough to have bought wheat to provide an extra 300 calories a day for the entire population during the famine, which would have saved every life that was lost.

The original CCP manifesto included self-determination for national minorities such as the Tibetans. But in 1950 Stalin had advised Mao: "The Tibetans need to be subdued... all the border territories should be populated by Chinese." In 1959, faced with a rebellion by Tibet, Mao responded with massive food requisitioning, atrocities and cultural annihilation.

The situation in China was getting so desperate that Mao faced the prospect of rebellion in his own ranks. Liu Shao-chi, his number two, criticised the "Great Leap" in front of a conference of 7,000 top officials in January 1962. When it became clear that Liu had the support of the delegates, Mao agreed to a reduction in requisitioning, costly arms programmes were cancelled and overseas aid slashed. Mao scapegoated the massive failures on lowly officials.

Internationally, Mao sought to build a Beijing-Jakarta axis to rival the Moscow-Warsaw axis. But in September 1965, an attempted coup against military leaders in Indonesia failed disastrously. Hundreds of thousands of Communists and sympathisers were slaughtered by General Suharto. The Indonesian Communist Party had followed the same class collaborationist line as the CCP had done with the KMT — and paid far more dearly for it.

## CULTURAL REVOLUTION

**As soon as the famine was over, Mao started plotting a Great Purge. He told his inner circle: "We need a policy of 'keep people stupid'."**

In April 1966, the Cultural Revolution was launched, under the direction of Jiang Qing (Mao's wife) and Kang Sheng. Mao's personality cult reached fever pitch — the *Little Red Book* was recited daily and 4.8 billion Mao badges and 1.2 billion Mao portraits were produced. China was turned into a cultural desert — schools were closed for a year and Red Guard groups (led by the children of high officials) assailed teachers, writers and artists, and participated in state plunder.

Red Guards were given licence to attack virtually anything from "Hong Kong haircuts" to the "bourgeois-feudal reactionary music of Bach, Beethoven and Shostakovich." The regime issued spine-chilling edicts, condemning: "workers concerned only with love and romance, pandering to low tastes, claiming that 'love' and 'death' are eternal themes. All such bourgeois revisionist trash must be resolutely opposed."

But the Cultural Revolution threatened to escape Mao's control. Proletarian and peasant masses went out on unprecedented strikes and fought pitched battles against Red Guards. A notice in Fuzhou warned that: "A handful of freaks and monsters have cheated the misled members of the worker Red Guard units and some worker masses to put forward many wage, welfare and other economic demands to the leadership and administrative departments of the units."

There was a significant rebellion in Wuhan, followed by bloody faction fighting. Mao solved the crisis by rustivating the youth and instituting state terror. He purged the top leadership of his regime — Liu Shao-chi and Deng Xiaoping were denounced as "capitalist roaders", and the purged positions were replaced by appointees drawn from the army.

As Raya Dunayevskaya noted, Maoism was the application of the theory of "socialism in one country" to a technologically backward country in a world divided between two industrialised superpowers. Because of this situation, and because the regime had "no perspective of world revolution 'in our time', [it felt] compelled to drive the masses all the harder. Under private capitalism this was known as primitive accumulation; under state capitalism, calling itself Communism, it is called, internally, 'fighting self-interest', and, externally, 'Mao Tse-tung's Thought Lights Up the Whole World.'"

**As such, Maoism belongs to humanity's reactionary past, not its socialist future.**

## "Let's march forward under the banner of Mao Zedong!" (1950s)

This initiated a reign of terror devised by Mao's deputy, Kang Sheng, who had learned the dark arts of Stalinist purging at the Moscow show trials. Mao decreed that 1% (later inflated to 10%) of the young volunteers were KMT spies. Thousands were publicly denounced, tortured, imprisoned, executed and driven to suicide.

Yenan's peasants were taxed extortionately, whilst they were suffering from hyperinflation. Grain tax sustained the burgeoning bureaucracy, as did the profits from the 30,000 acres of opium fields planted by the regime.

## THE THIRD REVOLUTION

**On 9 August 1945, Russia invaded China in accordance with the inter-imperialist carve up agreed at Yalta. Mao was ecstatic proclaiming "Who is our leader? It is Stalin... Every member of our Chinese Communist Party is Stalin's pupil."**

In Manchuria, the greatest and most modern industrial development in Asia, Russia went on a looting spree, behaving like conquerors. In the south of China, the KMT regime was mired in corruption, dependent on military and police power, the landlord class and US support. Its bureaucratic state capitalism had ended up becoming a brake on capitalist development. As the regime disintegrated, the CCP, alienated from the cities for 20 years, instructed workers to remain passive and "prepare themselves for the arrival of the liberation armies" from the countryside.

By the beginning of 1949, the cities were about to fall to the CCP. In the countryside, they had introduced land reform on a conservative bureaucratic basis, with Mao advocating that in old areas under CCP control: "Neither the liberal bourgeoisie nor the industry and commerce operated by landlords and rich peasants can be infringed upon: special attention must be given to non-encroachment on middle peasants, independent labourers, professional people and new-type rich peasants."

Atrocities were also committed under the banner of "land reform". Kang Sheng encouraged violence against "landlords" and "kulaks", but the criteria for determining who fitted the categories was "how they are liked by the masses".

A contemporary account stated:

"Nowhere in the countryside have CP armies been met by self-liberated peasants who have risen against their oppressors and taken the power. ...the peasants continue their daily round of toil while the armies manoeuvre and battle around them...The CP seeks an alliance with the compradores in order to ease its takeover. 'All privately operated factories, stores, banks, warehouses, vessels, wharves, farms; pastures,

# Putting working-class voices centre-stage

By Edd Mustill

On 14 March, a short play I wrote about the 1974 Clay Cross rents dispute (where the Labour council, backed by a strong labour-movement campaign, refused to implement a Tory act increasing council rents) will have a reading (i.e. a rehearsed, but not full, performance) as part of a new writing festival at the Pomegranate Theatre in Chesterfield. The play is called *The Rest of the Cod* (trust me, the title makes sense in context...)

The script is based around interviews, Hansard proceedings, film footage and other sources. I've been grappling with whether or not to describe it as verbatim theatre, but I don't think it is.

Verbatim theatre takes word-for-word testimony from participants in a particular series of events. At its fullest, it takes the form of some of the "tribunal plays" done at the Tricycle Theatre in recent years. These took the words of public inquiries into the theatre. The most high profile — *The Colour of Justice* — was based on the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, and productions were also done based on the Hutton Inquiry into the Iraq War and the Saville Inquiry into Bloody Sunday.

Other plays mix verbatim material with scenes created from the imagination of the writer. This was the approach taken by Tanika Gupta in *Gladiator Games*, her play about the racist murder of Zahid Mubarek in Feltham Young Offenders Institution in 2000. This is the approach I decided to take to Clay Cross. It allows some creative freedom, whereas just rearranging source material into some theatrical scenes can feel a lot like writing an essay.

But it has its own pitfalls too. Once a writer mixes their own words with the actual words of others — what if people confuse the voices? What if the writer puts a line in a charac-

ter's mouth that the audience assumes comes from the verbatim material?

To get around this, I've cheekily fictionalised the Clay Cross councillors themselves, and kept most of the strictly verbatim material in the mouths of MPs and judges. This is also a way of counterposing the pronouncements of "high politics" to what was actually going on in people's lives on the ground. I hope it works.

Of course the play is political and has a political resonance. I wanted to get away from the attitude towards history so prevalent on the left which is a sort of crude examining of X event in order to draw some "lessons for today." Hopefully anyone seeing the play will be able to draw any contrasts between the Clay Cross councillors and current local governments' rolling over when faced with Tory cuts, without having it shoved down their throats. I wanted to take that episode of working class history on its own terms. Again, I hope it works.

Political theatre can be tricky like that. It lays itself open to

criticism as "preachy" or "dogmatic," especially if it is left-wing. The thing is, I've seen plenty of liberal theatre that's preachy and dogmatic. Its message is usually along the lines of "All this technology we're using in our lives, eh? Are we really any more connected to each other? What's that about?" Or, even worse, "Look at these lives we're leading, aren't we all really decadent while so much horrible stuff is going on elsewhere in the world?"

There are human stories at the heart of big political events, just as much as there are at the kitchen sink or between an arguing couple placed in a black box theatre. Even if political plays like mine are not character-driven, hopefully the characters will not be two-dimensional.

Recently we have seen the incredibly popular two-handed version of the Ragged Trousers Philanthropists, which has been playing to packed audiences around the country. The same company is working on a play about the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

There are loads of directions left-wing theatre can go in to re-examine episodes of working-class history and culture, as well as to interpret things that are happening now. I was very much making a process up as I went along with this play, because it's one of the first I've written. I've learned that an important attitude in making theatre is: do-it-yourself. In future I'd like union branches and community groups to be able to use the script to have a reading, performance, or political discussion as they see fit.

**That's if the rights to it aren't bought up to turn it into a Hollywood blockbuster, with Anthony Hopkins as Ted Heath. I'm not holding my breath.**

• Follow Edd on Twitter at @ejmustill

## Ideas for Freedom 2013

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## Workers on the wireless

By Max Munday

**So often in the broadcast media, the lives of working class people come packaged in the form of grotesque exaggeration for the pleasure of the voyeur, or through the cold and de-humanising lens of statisticians.**

*Mouthpiece* on Sheffield Live! 93.2fm is a weekly politics and arts radio programme that features music, community news, and covers everything from local industrial disputes to discussing disability and sex; the interviewees are chosen for their ideas and experiences, rather than their title or privileged position.

Three elderly Jamaican migrant women who had been cleaners and factory workers spoke to me on the 50th anniversary of independence about their feelings towards the failings of their new black leaders to empower the poor, the racism they faced upon coming to Britain, their working lives and their admiration for the Queen.

Followed by a discordant rendition of "How Great Thou Art", these were not narratives that neatly encapsulated radical anti-imperialism, but were a genuine reflection of the lives of these working class women. *Mouthpiece* is not a platform for sloganeering platitudes.

### NEWS

**News and commentary so often narrow down discussion of complex issues by brushing over the human experiences and using lazy assumptions and simple dualities of the good and the bad, the familiar and the alien, plan A and plan B, strivers and scroungers.**

Last year's *Mouthpiece* special on prostitution featured a sex worker activist discussing criminalisation, ethics and organising in the context of an area in which journalism so often reverts to a binary classification of disgraceful harlots and pitiful victims.

A natural reaction to the neat blocks of transitory and seemingly distinct news items is to consume them and make only a cursory link with your own existence — perhaps for as long as it takes to splutter down the line to a radio phone-in. There is rarely encouragement to think critically about your

place in the world, or how you can change it.

It is sad to think that mine might be the only radio show that would cover Sheffield Council's implementation of Government cuts through interviews with its leaders, alongside Graham Skinner's explanation of how Clay Cross councillors took their radical stance 40 years before.

***Mouthpiece* allows local listeners to start from the position of connecting their lives to ideas of theory or public policy, and through sharing their views — and their art — avoid simply being used to colour a story packaged for consumption by a distant, cosseted and comfortable audience.**

• *Mouthpiece* is broadcast every Wednesday from 9-11am on Sheffield Live. Tune into 93.2fm or visit [sheffieldlive.org](http://sheffieldlive.org)

**Broadcasters like the late Studs Terkel used radio to give working-class people a platform to tell their stories**



# Why the working class?

This article was published in *Labor Action*, the newspaper of the Workers Party (later the Independent Socialist League) in the USA, in the early 1950s. It was written by Hal Draper, and attempts to answer the question of why the working class is fundamental to the socialist project.

**Why do socialists believe there is a special connection between their own great goal of a new society and the interests of labour, this one segment of society?**

Is it because we “idealise” workers as being better, or more clever, or more honest, or more courageous, or more humanitarian, than non-workers? Isn’t it rather true that the workers have time and again followed reactionary courses and leaders and have by no means shown any invariable affinity for progressive causes? ... Aren’t they filled with race prejudice ... sometimes even more so than the upper classes? If it is true that workers are “naturally” pro-socialist, why is it they have made such a mess of things, voting for reactionaries and fakers and supporting the status quo? ... And so on.

Most of this type of questioning is based on simple misunderstanding of the socialist viewpoint about the working class. Socialists do not “idealise” workers in any sense whatever.

As individuals, there is no reason to argue whether workers are “better” human beings than others because they are workers. This whole approach, whether pro or con, has nothing to do with the socialist conception.

To underline this in a different way: if we try to view social issues as merely conflicts between Good People and Bad People, then surely we must say that men who insist on starving others are Bad. The present minimum wage is surely a pittance; yet opposition even to this pittance was strong among employers, especially small employers, while virtually absent among workers. Is this a tendency of employers because they are Bad Men? On the contrary, these employers are just as likely to be kind fathers, generous friends, indulgent husbands, charity-givers — not the type to deliberately run over children in the street. They act one way as individual atoms in the social fabric; they act in quite another way as part of their class collectivity.

They explain this, when they do, by saying “Business is business”. This is their way of distinguishing their individual and human thoughts and role from their role as a member of the business community — that is, of their class. In the latter case, the conditions of existence and interests of “business” make out of them a social force that has little resemblance to their individual psychologies.

## SUM

**Like every other class or group, the working class is more than the sum of its individual atoms.**

Workers are not “naturally” more pro-socialist than anyone else. It is a question of what direction they are pushed in by the conditions of their existence as a class and by their interests as workers, just as with any other group.

This indeed is one reason why so often socialist ideas tend to be initiated in a systematic way not by ideologists from the working class but by men from the “educated classes,” the bourgeoisie and intellectuals, men like Marx and Engels, for example, who were not proletarians themselves — although it should be noted that the impulsions to the systematisation of such ideas were coming from the working masses’ struggles and conditions, not from other sections of society. Individuals were led to align themselves with the working class. If they were drawn in this direction, it was because here was the dynamic social force which they recognised as the decisive one for putting flesh and blood on ideas.

When a working class is politically and socially undeveloped it is well-nigh inevitable that its members will be filled with all sorts of backward and even reactionary notions.

For example, it has often been found in the US that racial intolerance decreases with amount of education: college graduates are less prejudiced, etc. Now, in general, working-class children get less schooling than upper-class offspring. So according to this pattern, workers should be far more filled with racism than the middle class. It is instructive to see where this neat pattern does and does not hold.

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class, and most recently organised, and where it is organised in the least class-conscious fashion. The South is not only a cauldron of racism but a sinkhole of union-busting and open-shopism. Toward the other end of the scale, racism is combated — as nowhere in middle-class groups — in the more militant mass-production unions that sprang from the CIO upheaval, like the Auto Workers, not to speak of the socialist movement.

Here anti-racism is not a function of school education; it is a function of class education. In many a mass-production integrated [union], the organisation is often more anti-racist than the sum of its members. That is, the dynamics of class needs push it more strongly against racism, which is divisive of the class, than do the individual opinions of its members.

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All over the world organised working-class struggle is inextricably bound up with every effort toward freedom and human emancipation.

Where the working class has been defeated, democracy and progress and humanity have been defeated too. Where the forces of freedom have fought, in Hungary 1956 as in capitalist Europe, it is the working-class forces that have been in the van.

There is no other sector of society of which this or anything like it can be said — not the middle class, not the intellectuals, not the “educated classes,” not the students, not the “managers,” not anyone else except the organised working class, for good or ill.

## ADVANTAGES

**What is the “advantage” which the working class possesses, willy-nilly, by virtue of the terms of its own existence under capitalism? Here in outline form are the special characteristics inherent in a social class whose individual components are (remember) no better or worse than the rest.**

The conditions of life of the working class lead it to organise in the first place — and most solidly as a homogeneous movement.

There is, of course, one other class which rivals the working class in this respect: the capitalists themselves, whose own class-consciousness and sense of class solidarity are ever-present models for the workers.

Never has a predominantly agrarian population (farmers or peasants) been able to duplicate the organisational achievements of the working class. The difference is no reflection on the individual farmer. By terms of their life, they live in atomised groups which stress self-sufficiency, separateness, reliance on individual effort; they are not thrown together in crowds and subjected to simultaneous stresses in the heat of social struggles as are workers.

Workers are taught organisation not by superior intelligence or outside agitators, but by the capitalists themselves. They are organised on the assembly lines, in the factory gangs, in shifts, in work teams, in the division of labour of capitalism itself. Capitalism cannot live without “organising” its workers, teaching them the virtues of working together, therefore of solidarity.

It teaches discipline. It enforces centralisation of effort. It hammers home every day the advantages of pooled work, and the subordination of individual self-interest to the needs of a group.

It does not teach this lesson equally to all workers: it is plainer for assembly-line workers in the mass-production industries than (say) for an office secretary who takes dictation from a personal boss, who works with a boss rather than with fellow workers. This is intended only as a simple example of the different degrees of “education” which capitalism’s conditions grant to different kinds of workers. This fact links up also with the social views which arise among these different strata of workers — simply on the basis of this first point:

## Shanghai electronics workers strike. Conditions of work can create a sense of class solidarity

class organisation.

The interests of workers as a solidarised group, organised by capitalism, lead them to struggle. It must be emphasised that this often takes place quite apart from the conscious desires and wishes of the labour leaders themselves.

Labour leaders, risen from the ranks of lowly workers and aspiring to be accepted as respectable and responsible members of bourgeois society, often want to substitute pleasant and friendly conferences with management for any kind of conflict. Having freed themselves from the condition of existence to which the mass of workers are condemned, they tend to become “bourgeoisified”; they want to integrate into the ruling class, or at least find as respectable a niche there as a corporation lawyer.

And indeed they could do so (so many do!) if not for the fact that it is the working class that they are standing on in order to reach so high. For the working class needs representatives in order to oppose the bosses’ interests; but the bosses accept the friendship of these labour leaders only insofar as they “behave.”

From below these bourgeoisified bureaucrats, there always arises the pressure of mass demands, the unslakable needs of the workers which cannot be wished away with fine talk about class collaboration, the aspirations steaming up from the depths of the class, demanding “delivery of the goods.”

Some bureaucrats can continue their precarious balancing-act for substantial periods, in “normal” times of class quiet particularly, as everybody knows; but even the most conservative and most bourgeoisified union leader must to some extent satisfy the class needs of his constituent base. This is in the worst case, of course, and there are not a few such “worst” cases in the society-corrupted labour bureaucracy... But whether timidly or militantly, consistently or hesitantly, competently or crudely, even the conservative union leader who does not “believe” in class struggle must be its instrument, to the extent that he functions as a labour leader at all.

The direction of the workers’ organised struggle inevitably tends to be counter to capitalism — or, more finely, this struggle always tends to go outside the framework of capitalist institutions and ideas. Steadily the labour movement’s insistence on social responsibility for all aspects of life comes in conflict with the capitalist insistence on the rights of private property. For the essence of capitalist private-property relations is that this whole area of man’s life — the economic sphere — is to be withdrawn from the rule of social responsibility, and is to be ruled by the unilateral power of capital as its birthright.

Capitalism has been forced into many compromises in this respect, as is well known — mainly this one, that a. the state

*Continued from page 9*

This article was published in *Labor Action*, the newspaper of the Workers Party (later the Independent Socialist League) in the USA, in the early 1950s. It was written by Hal Draper, and attempts to answer the question of why the working class is fundamental to the socialist project.

**Why do socialists believe there is a special connection between their own great goal of a new society and the interests of labour, this one segment of society?**

Is it because we “idealise” workers as being better, or more clever, or more honest, or more courageous, or more humanitarian, than non-workers? Isn’t it rather true that the workers have time and again followed reactionary courses and leaders and have by no means shown any invariable affinity for progressive causes? ... Aren’t they filled with race prejudice ... sometimes even more so than the upper classes? If it is true that workers are “naturally” pro-socialist, why is it they have made such a mess of things, voting for reactionaries and fakers and supporting the status quo? ... And so on.

Most of this type of questioning is based on simple misunderstanding of the socialist viewpoint about the working class. Socialists do not “idealise” workers in any sense whatever.

As individuals, there is no reason to argue whether workers are “better” human beings than others because they are workers. This whole approach, whether pro or con, has nothing to do with the socialist conception.

To underline this in a different way: if we try to view social issues as merely conflicts between Good People and Bad People, then surely we must say that men who insist on starving others are Bad. The present minimum wage is surely a pittance; yet opposition even to this pittance was strong among employers, especially small employers, while virtually absent among workers. Is this a tendency of employers because they are Bad Men? On the contrary, these employers are just as likely to be kind fathers, generous friends, indulgent husbands, charity-givers — not the type to deliberately run over children in the street. They act one way as individual atoms in the social fabric; they act in quite another way as part of their class collectivity.

They explain this, when they do, by saying “Business is business”. This is their way of distinguishing their individual and human thoughts and role from their role as a member of the business community — that is, of their class. In the latter case, the conditions of existence and interests of “business” make out of them a social force that has little resemblance to their individual psychologies.

### SUM

**Like every other class or group, the working class is more than the sum of its individual atoms.**

Workers are not “naturally” more pro-socialist than anyone else. It is a question of what direction they are pushed in by the conditions of their existence as a class and by their interests as workers, just as with any other group.

This indeed is one reason why so often socialist ideas tend to be initiated in a systematic way not by ideologists from the working class but by men from the “educated classes,” the bourgeoisie and intellectuals, men like Marx and Engels, for example, who were not proletarians themselves — although it should be noted that the impulsions to the systematisation of such ideas were coming from the working masses’ struggles and conditions, not from other sections of society. Individuals were led to align themselves with the working class. If they were drawn in this direction, it was because here was the dynamic social force which they recognised as the decisive one for putting flesh and blood on ideas.

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**Above: Chicago teachers on strike. Workers’ struggles are not simply one set of struggles amongst many for socialists. They have a unique potential to win social change, and only working-class self-organisation can defeat capitalism.**

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Capitalism has been forced into many compromises in this respect, as is well known — mainly this one, that a. the state is accorded power to intervene as representative of “society,” provided b. that the associated capitalist class retain full control of this intervening state. (This is the process of “statification” under capitalism in a nutshell.) But whatever the compromises, the working-class movement can never be satisfied — not even the undeveloped union-conscious labour movement of this country.

More militant unions have raised demands like trade-union intervention in the setting of prices or in peering over

# Civil servants' budget day strike

By Ollie Moore

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) will begin a three-month programme of industrial action, including strikes, on 20 March, when George Osborne announces his budget.

The strikes are against a variety of measures, including attacks on pay, job losses, and pension reforms.

The programme will include both national and sector-specific action, and will combine strikes with other industrial action. In between days of industrial action, the union will or-

ganise local protests and campaigning activity around specific themes.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "This is not a one-day protest, this is the start of a rolling

programme of walkouts and disruptive action to put pressure on a government that is refusing to talk to us."

The strikes were planned after a ballot returned a 61% majority in favour of taking action.

The announcement of an ongoing programme of action is a big step forward from the approach which has become the default for PCS and other unions – a single day of token protest action immediately before, or even after, the management policy against which one is protesting is implemented.

Rank-and-file activists in the union, including the PCS Independent Left

grouping in which Workers' Liberty members are involved, have been advocating for the PCS to adopt such strategies for some time. PCS leaders say the strategy will be reviewed after the first strike. Pressure must be applied to make sure the programme of action is maintained, and escalated if the government offers no concessions.

The strike campaign must also be organised around clear demands. In the past, PCS has not articulated clear industrial demands in disputes, and folded previous disputes into new ones without any satisfactory conclusion to any given dispute on its own terms. Mark Serwotka has talked about the strikes being "against austerity"; certainly, tying the action into wider political opposition to the government's project is positive. But strikes by civil servants are not, by themselves, going to beat "austerity".

**The campaign must also involve clear, winnable demands over specific industrial issues if members are to remain mobilised.**

# Union officials block Lewisham hospital fight

By Darren Bedford

Activists in Lewisham Hospital in south London are discussing their next steps after the leadership of the Unison branch blocked attempts to mobilise workers to fight against cuts and closure.

Unison, which is the majority union at the hospital with 500 members, refused to take motions proposing a fight against closure at its 6 March AGM, and refused to give members a copy of the branch rules under which the motions were ruled out of order.

One worker told *Solidarity*: "The agenda had been decided in advance, and both of the motions submitted were ruled out of order, one because of the fear of 'legal jeopardy' - without explanation, and the other because the current events don't constitute an emergency. There's no need, they say, to act on this with any urgency.

"There were no other

motions tabled and no formal policy decided.

"They were three short of their quorum, but that didn't matter because the branch committee is able to deal with any matters arising themselves, they don't need a general members meeting to do this! The branch committee concludes there is little need to mount a campaign as a union around the threats to our hospital as they don't feel this is serious, and they reiterated their commitment to ensuring that not a penny of union funds is given to Save Lewisham Hospital campaign."

Workers involved in the local campaign will now discuss whether they feel able to mount a fight to turn the Unison branch around in the next period, or whether other strategies, such as building the currently very small Unite branch in the hospital, are more viable.

**Unite has indicated a greater willingness to fight and may be more open and democratic.**

## PCS branches defend reps

PCS branches are mobilising to defend workplace reps victimised for union activity.

Lee Rock in Sheffield, Jon Bigger in Merseyside, and Kevin Smith in Bootle all face the sack for trade union activity. For more on these cases, and how labour movement activists can support Lee, Jon, and Kevin,

see [bit.ly/16ojfXb](http://bit.ly/16ojfXb).

The Civil Service Rank-and-File Network (CSRF), a newly-formed grouping of PCS activists, is planning local actions to coincide with the European TUC's Day of Action on 13 March.

For more, see [csrfnetwork.wordpress.com](http://csrfnetwork.wordpress.com)

## LANAC's next steps

By a LANAC delegate

The Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC, the rank-and-file network for teachers) held its second steering committee on 9 March in Coventry. There were just over 20 delegates from 18 branches.

The meeting planned LANAC's intervention at the upcoming National Union of Teachers conference (29 March-2 April).

In a discussion on the NUT's response to Michael Gove's proposed reforms to teachers' pay, delegates agreed that LANAC should present an alternative to the strategy of the union leadership which would call for a programme of action to start early in the summer term, involving a number of national strikes before the new pay arrangements are introduced. The NUT's official position is very unclear at the moment but at best it promises little or no action before late June.

LANAC, the only grouping within the NUT offering an alternative strategy, will write to all branches before conference to explain and promote their alternative strategy, and invite them to affiliate and publicise LANAC's two fringe meetings at NUT conference (Saturday 30 March and Monday 1 April).

Plans were made to deepen the reach of LANAC into the grassroots of the union. At conference there will be an affiliation drive which will include a drive to get school groups – as well as geographical branches – affiliated to the network.

**The next LANAC event after conference will take place on 18 May, either as another Steering Committee meeting or a larger conference.**

- A longer report is available here: [bit.ly/Y6G6D0](http://bit.ly/Y6G6D0)
- LANAC website: [nutlan.org.uk](http://nutlan.org.uk)

## Drug workers face cuts

By a Sheffield drug worker

Services supporting people to recover from problematic drug use are facing cuts to their budgets from Council-based commissioners that will likely lead to job losses.

The Arundel Street Project and Turning Point's services will both lose 10% of their funding from April, whilst providers of Methadone and prescribed treatment will be left short staffed.

Workers in the different voluntary sector services

came together in February to plan how to put pressure on the Labour-run council to stop the planned cuts that many believe could lead to an increase in crime, the transmission of viruses like Hepatitis and HIV, and child abuse, as workers struggle with fewer resources to deliver high-quality preventative interventions.

The cuts come after years of stagnation in the funding of drug treatment in Sheffield, resistance to which is hampered by a competitive system of contracts and groups of workers played off against each other.

**Maintaining solidarity in these conditions is tough, especially without industrial muscle, whilst the actions of "right-on" funding and service managers only serve to highlight the exploitative nature of a sector, so often lauded by left liberals.**

## Jawad Botmeh reinstated



Campaigners have succeeded in securing reinstatement for Jawad Botmeh, one of three trade union activists sacked at London Metropolitan University.

The university claimed that Jawad had failed to reveal a conviction for his role in a car bombing in 1994. But not only had Jawad informed London Met of this, a high-profile campaign was conducted which branded his conviction a "gross miscarriage of justice".

Steve Jefferys, the head of London Met's Working

Lives Research Institute where Jawad works, and Max Watson, the chair of the London Met Unison branch, remain suspended.

**The campaign continues.**

- [stophthewitchhunt.wordpress.com](http://stophthewitchhunt.wordpress.com)

**Defend Jayesh Patel!**

Tube worker victimised for following safety procedure. See [bit.ly/XFn6fn](http://bit.ly/XFn6fn)

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## Sussex occupation grows

By Dan Rawnsley

**On 28 February, students at Sussex University occupied two further buildings on their campus.**

Michael, a student occupier, said: "We wanted to prove that we could occupy across campus; we will continue to do so as long as this process continues."

University management have announced the outsourcing of 235 jobs. An occupation against the privatisation — which is uniting staff and students — is now entering its fifth week, with the university still refusing to negotiate.

Students have chosen a yellow square as their symbol, in homage to the red square used by Quebec students in 2012.

Michael said: "Management have tried to explain to the media that we're just a small radical group of students, but more and more that myth is being dispelled."

Students are building for a demonstration on 25 March and are calling for national support.

**They hope to build links with students and workers facing privatisation across the country.**

• More: anticuts.com

### NCAFC sweeps student elections

**After recent elections the newly created executive of the University of London Union (the three existing sabbaticals, a new sabbatical Women's Officer and a number of part-time officers, replacing the old Trustee Board) is heavily dominated by the left, mostly supporters of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC).**

**Michael Chessum, elected President in a by-election last November, was easily re-elected. Daniel**

**Cooper was narrowly re-elected Vice President, despite a major campaign against him following his refusal to take part in official, pro-war "remembrance" ceremonies.**

**NCAFC have won student union elections elsewhere — at Royal Holloway, at Birmingham University at a University College London, where seven NCAFC supporters made a "clean sweep" of elections to the executive.**

## March to save the Whittington Hospital!

By Gerry Bates

**On 16 March, thousands will demonstrate in North London in defence of Whittington Hospital.**

Following a successful public meeting attended by 500 people, campaigners from the Defend Whittington Hospital Coalition have been building for the march, which will begin at Highbury Corner and end at the hospital.

On 28 February, 150 campaigners demonstrated at a hospital board meeting, demanding the planned cuts and sell-off be scrapped. They

marched through the hospital canteen and were cheered by health workers.

The Whittington Hospital board are seeking Foundation Trust status. In the past, Dr Koh, a board member, has suggested that the hospital could be taken over by another trust if it didn't take on FT status. However, the application is the motor behind the proposed cuts. It requires "savings" of £4.8 million. This will mean the loss of 580 jobs, including 220 nurses, the sale of a third of the hospital site and a reduction in beds. Hospital manage-

ment have already sacked 22 medical secretaries who were given a week to apply for other jobs in the hospital.

Action in the workplace will be vital to defend the hospital.

So far the Unison branch have been supportive, donating £5,000 to the campaign. Reps have attended campaign meetings and spoken, but at present trade unionists are not articulating a strategy to oppose the sell-off.

Trade unionists at the hospital have spoken about bullying by managers, telling them not to

get involved in the campaign.

A successful march followed by protests at board meetings will help to build the confidence of workers. The march assembles at Highbury Corner (Holloway Road side) at 11:30am.

**Also on Saturday, the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign is organising a "hands around the hospital" event from 2pm.**

• Whittington campaign: [dwhc.org.uk](http://dwhc.org.uk)  
• Lewisham campaign: [savelewishamhospital.com](http://savelewishamhospital.com)

## Taking on the loan sharks

*Solidarity* spoke to Carl Packman, the author of *Loan Sharks: The Rise and Rise of Payday Lending*, about the growth of payday loan companies and how working-class people can fight them.

**The value of the payday loan market has increased massively over the past decade. In 2004, it was worth around £100 million. Now it's worth between £2-4 billion.**

That increase has taken place at the same time as we've seen wages stagnate to 2003 levels, and massive unemployment and underemployment.

High-street banks are increasingly risk-averse, meaning they're less likely to give credit or overdraft accounts. That allows payday loan companies to swoop in. According to the *Financial Times*, 1.2 million people took out a payday loan in Britain in 2012.

Payday loan companies' transparency are not upfront about their means of debt collection and many hidden costs and charges.

A type of automatic payment setup called the Continuous Payment Authority is used by payday lenders to take money directly out of your account. You sign over that right when you take out a payday loan, but that's rarely made clear. Lenders have to be upfront about their APRs, which are usually around 4,000%, but are often far less clear about other charges, such as late payment fees.

The Office of Fair Trading has guidelines that should prevent this, but they aren't enforced. The OFT's 2010 document "Irresponsible Lending Guidance" sets down guidelines about making rigorous affordability assessments, which means lenders should check what payments someone can actually afford before they let them take out credit. But this sort of thing isn't done.

Lenders want you to come back, and greater transparency would be a disincentive.

Payday lenders don't compete on price, they compete on speed — i.e., how quickly you as a borrower can access the cash you're borrowing. So if

they can cut corners, such as only performing perfunctory affordability assessments, they can get the edge on their competitors.

The OFT has the power to withdraw a lender's credit license if guidelines aren't met, but it's very reluctant to enforce its own guidelines. That's partially a capacity issue; the consumer credit department within the OFT is very small, and the process of withdrawing a license can be very expensive, so they're unwilling to do it. Greater investment in the area is needed to allow more rigorous enforcement of OFT guidelines.

### CAMPAINING

**There are some people active in campaigning around this.**

They've done some work in local communities raising awareness about other credit options apart from payday lenders, including local shops prepared to extend low-cost credit to consumers. Activists have also campaigned for local authority credit unions to be given high-street shopfront.

Visibility is a big issue. Pawnbrokers and payday lenders, have very eye-catching, visible presences on high street, whereas local authority or community credit unions are much harder to access.

Campaigners have leafleted outside shops to raise awareness of payday lenders' lack of transparency and to promote alternative sources of credit. In one instance, persistent actions outside a shop pressured the franchise manager into advertising a local credit union in the shop itself.

Campaigning against payday lenders must go hand-in-hand with campaigning for increased benefits and living wage. There are some Tories who are onside against particular payday lenders, but they don't want to tackle the issues at the root of the problem.

**We have to take on payday lenders as an immediate issue, but we can't forget about the big banks or the global financial institutions of capitalism.**