



For a  
workers'  
government

# Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 324 14 May 2014 30p/80p

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**Migrants and settled,  
black and white**

**UNITE TO**

**FIGHT**

**BOSSES**

**AND BANKERS**

**Resist UKIP  
surge**

**see pages 6-7**



## 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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● Printed by Trinity Mirror

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# Why I went to the food bank

By Leopold Loewer

Perhaps even two years ago I had never actually heard of such a thing as a "Food Bank", and even then, despite growing financial difficulties, I would not have expected to need it.

However, times change — albeit in a more or less predictable direction, in many cases — and I have since joined the percentage of the population that does need to use food banks.

Three times now I have visited the People Before Profit Food Bank on New Cross Road, south east London. I signed up as a member with a minimal donation (£1) which I pay again each time I visit, with an occasional added contribution of spare change. The food available is rationed, but not to the extent that I am unable to take away a substantial supply of canned soups and pulses, loaves of bread, loose veg-

etables and fruit. I can also obtain toothpaste from time to time!

This usually tides me over from the end of a two-week period, when money is short, until the next Monday/Tuesday when benefit payments arrive.

The question of being dependent on benefits is of central importance here: delays in receiving payments and gaps in claim periods frequently result in many people nearing the end of a two-week cycle without cash or credit to purchase essential items, such as groceries.

I recently visited the local food bank with a view towards obtaining groceries for a housemate who, though employed full-time, was told that he would have another 8/9 days to wait before he could expect to receive his regular wage. This can be critical when allowing for the fact that monthly rental and utility bill payments sometimes

coincide around the end of a month.

I suspect some people may be a little too proud to visit such places, when they are not officially welfare-dependent and, obviously, if they are working full time it may not be convenient or feasible to visit directly in person. I was happy enough to act as a proxy on this recent occasion, although I had to use the food bank in any case for my own reasons.

The staff are sympathetic and helpful but, reminding me that they rely on donations, they have to dedicate Fridays to restocking their shelves; this when many users would be most impulsively inclined to shop for the weekend ahead. [Also, a registered user/member is restricted to one visit per week, normally].



Food banks provide an important lifeline so long as you are au fait with their rules and routines.

But how did it get to the point where, in one of the richest economies in the world, thousands upon thousands (I don't know the exact figure) depend on this type of service, essentially provided by volunteers?



## LGBT protest demands release of prisoners

By Kieran Miles

On Wednesday 7 May, around 50 LGBT campaigners organised a protest at the President of Uganda's visit to the UK. President Yoweri Museveni was being welcomed by government officials as part of a Ugandan business forum, and was giving a speech near Westminster.

A number of groups, including Out and Proud Diamond, an African LGBTI group, Stop AIDS, and the Peter Tatchell Foundation were present for the protest.

Unions also sent delegations, most visibly the RMT.

The protestors made sure that the whole speech was interrupted with drums, vuvuzelas, and loud chanting. Protestors demanded the repeal of the infamous Anti-Homosexuality Act, signed by Museveni in February, which made any same-sex sexual activity, even just kissing, an imprisonable offence with a maximum life sentence.

The bill's sponsor, David Bahati, said the law was necessary to protect schoolchildren from being "recruited into homosexuality".

Only through the work of African LGBT groups and global protests was the bill amended to remove the use of the death penalty. It is now also illegal to fail to report LGBT people to the police, and Ugandan LGBT people can be extradited and prosecuted for engaging in same-sex sexual activity overseas. Museveni himself has said that gay people are "disgusting".

It is still illegal to be gay in 78 countries. We must continue protests like this one, until every single comrade is released from jail.

## CGIL opposition

There was some opposition in at the congress in Rimini (6-8 May) of the Italian union confederation CGIL.

It came from of the once-radical metalworkers' union, FIOM, led by Maurizio Landini.

He criticised the passivity and bureaucratic, undemocratic nature of the organisation.

Landini's 15 minute speech at least woke the conference from its torpor.

But under the rhetoric he offered absolutely no concrete proposals or attempt to set out a strategy of resistance to the ruling class offensive.

• More: [bit.ly/17-cgil](http://bit.ly/17-cgil)



# Turning the world inside-out!

Vicki Morris assesses “Fashion Revolution Day”, marking the anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster

**The disaster in Rana Plaza on 24 April 2013, where at least 1,138 Bangladeshi garment workers died, has spurred more people to fight for better conditions for the world’s 75 million garment workers.**

On the one-year anniversary, fashion industry figures organised the first annual and international “Fashion Revolution Day” (FRD). UK events included a debate in the House of Lords; “fash mob” in Carnaby Street by London College of Fashion students; and Twitter Q&A with experts, including the IndustriALL Global Union General Secretary talking about a new trade union organising drive in Bangladesh: “The stronger the union, the safer the factory!”

**On 23 April the news that Primark is entering the US market, opening a store in Boston, made a far bigger splash than news of Fashion Revolution Day the next day. The Guardian reported:**

**“The Primark label was among 28 western brands found in the rubble.... Primark has paid more than any other retailer into a UN-backed compensation scheme, but on the first anniversary of the disaster this week the fund has raised only \$15m (£9m), well short of its \$40m target.**

**“Anna McMullen of Labour Behind the Label campaign said Primark had been engaged in the compensation process, but needed to rethink its business model. ‘They are driving a fast fashion agenda that has a negative effect on workers’ rights around the world...’ “**

FRD encouraged people to tweet a photograph of themselves wearing their clothes inside-out to their garment’s manufacturer and ask them: “Who made my clothes?”

For the FRD organisers, wearing clothes inside-out — showing the stitching and the label — helped people to think about what goes on behind the scenes of the fashion industry:

“We need to... reconnect the broken links in the supply chain. At the moment of purchase, most of us are unaware of the processes and impacts involved in the creation of a garment. We need to reconnect through a positive narrative, to understand that we aren’t just purchasing a garment or accessory, but a whole chain of value and relationships.

“...It takes a lot to make a garment. Not just the bits we hear about — the designers, the brands, the shops, the catwalk shows and the parties — but also



London College of Fashion students organised a “fash mob” on 24 April.

the farmers who grow cotton, the ginners, spinners, weavers, dyers, sewers and other factory workers without whom the industry would not exist. These people, the people who make our clothes, are hidden from us, often at their own expense.

“The greatest cost these hidden people have to bear is to lose their life — as happened... in the Rana Plaza tragedy.... This terrible accident is a symptom of the broken links across the fashion industry.”

FRD was a valuable effort to foster consumers’ solidarity with garment workers, and prompt them to take further action, putting pressure on clothes manufacturers to treat workers better. After that, however, the plan became unrealistic.

With a focus in 2014 on

“transparency”, FRD set an ambitious aim:

“...building a future where an accident like [Rana Plaza] never happens again.

“... Transparency means companies know who makes their clothes — at least where they are stitched as a first port of call — and then communicate this to their customers, shareholders and staff.”

Perhaps because they are working in the industry — albeit in its “ethical fashion” niche — FRD give garment manufacturers far too much credit for being moral.

“...We recognize that being transparent is difficult. As a business, you might fear transparency because you don’t want it to jeopardize your competitiveness, or because you might not be able to an-

swer workers or suppliers if questions are asked, or because it might uncover issues you don’t know how to resolve.”

The fact is that companies know full well that their huge profits come from low wages, and turn a blind eye to practices in the factories they sub-contract to.

FRD are correct, however, that consumer pressure has been important in, for example, helping to achieve the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, which makes independent safety inspections of 2,000 factories compulsory. More than 150 UK and 14 US brands have signed the Accord, which — on paper, at least — covers two million of Bangladesh’s estimated four million garment workers.

But it takes an awful lot of consumer pressure to make the brands move. Crucially, most important in forcing change was the action taken by Bangladeshi garment workers themselves, when they mounted a wave of protests and strikes in the wake of Rana Plaza.

In the FRD set-up there is little recognition of the importance of workers organising. The IndustriALL Twitter Q&A seems to have been exceptional on the day.

There were other anniversary protests. The Clean Clothes Campaign

supports “the empowerment of workers in the global garment and sportswear industries”. Its UK affiliate, Labour Behind the Label, organised a “Pay Up” protest on Oxford Street, where Amirul Haque Amin, president of Bangladesh’s National Garment Workers’ Federation, spoke.

**If FRD brings more people into contact with organisations such as Labour Behind the Label, or helps them to understand the importance of workers organising, it will have been worthwhile.**

•<http://bit.ly/1kN3S0k>  
•<http://bit.ly/1laHpKe>

**Students from the University of the Arts London/London College of Fashion joined in the FRD protests, led by members of the “Evolving Fashion” society.**

“Evolving Fashion is a society that has been established for students across UAL to come together to discuss how we, as the next generation, can change the fashion industry. Our motto is Sustainability, Ethics, Innovation.

**As well as campaigning for Fashion Revolution Day, we’ve got some events coming up in May with some very exciting speakers — Watch this space!”**

•<http://bit.ly/1nKrbKj>

## India: “rather like Mussolini”

By Michéal MacEoin

**The results of India’s elections are due on 16 May, with many expecting the victory of Narendra Modi and his right-wing opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).**

Modi is the front-runner, and faces Rahul Gandhi, Vice-President of the ruling Indian National Congress party. Modi hopes to break the grip of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty and its Congress party which has dominated Indian political life since the country gained its independence in 1947.

Modi proclaims himself a “Hindu nationalist” and according to University of Cambridge academic Priyamvada Gopal “was a leading activist for [the] secretive and militaristic... Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) — whose founder expressed admiration for Hitler, ideologies of racial purity and the virtues of fascism.

“It is an organisation that, on a good day, looks like the British National party but can operate more like Nazi militias.”

As Chief Minister in Gujarat in 2002, he is accused of preventing authorities inter-

vening to stop anti-Muslim pogroms by Hindu extremists. Modi also stands accused of fanning the flames of sectarianism.

A report into the pogroms by the National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRC) says Modi has been “promoting the attitudes of racial supremacy, racial hatred and the legacy of Nazism through his governments support of school textbooks in which Nazism is glorified.”

Modi’s strategy is to present himself as an outsider, as a plain-speaking insurgent against the corruption of the dynastic Congress

party. He has taken aim at India’s faltering economy and runaway inflation, and promises further development.

William Dalrymple in the *New Statesman* writes that: “On the campaign trail, whether from pragmatism or otherwise, Modi has largely kept his Hindu nationalism hidden and presented himself throughout as an able, technocratic administrator who can turn the country’s economy around and stimulate much-needed development.”

Indian Marxist writer Jairus Banaji writes of this

pose that Modi’s “current mask is that of the great architect of a developmental state, rather like the way Mussolini projected himself in Italy, where... fascism broke the power of the feudal, mafia-dominated South and extended the sway of the industrial North in a modernising Italy.

So, all this bosh you hear about Gujarat’s ‘development’ is the same kind of authoritarian discourse about modernisation. All it boils down to in the end is a rampant, unfettered development of capitalism, one led by private capital and both encouraged and given

a completely free hand by the State.”

The Congress party’s hold on power is tenuous, relying on several smaller coalition partners who offer no guarantee that they will continue to support the government after the election.

Having been in power for ten years, it suffers the disadvantages of incumbency.

**Its base among Muslims and those at the bottom of the social hierarchy may not provide the necessary votes to secure a third term.**

# IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2014

SATURDAY 5-SUNDAY 6 JULY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON UNION

## Their Class War and Ours



Building international  
solidarity for LGBT  
rights

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- The politics of sex and "sexualisation"
- Is the far right winning over Europe's workers?
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The women's movement and the First World War

Other IFF events on Thursday/Friday 4/5 July.  
Book at [www.workersliberty.org/ideas](http://www.workersliberty.org/ideas)

# IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2014

SATURDAY 5-SUNDAY 6 JULY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON UNION

## Their Class War and Ours



### Learning from working-class history

#### The 1984-5 Miners' Strike

- Understanding the strike, and socialists' role
- Could the miners have won?
- The Miners' Strike and liberation

#### The First World War

- Workers' struggles during the war
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Other IFF events on Thursday/Friday 4/5 July.  
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Not for flyposting

# Left candidates in May elections

## Letters



Rhodri Evans (*Solidarity* 323) is wrong to simply say: “That socialists will have to vote Labour and step up the fight in the unions”. That might have been sufficient in 1991 but it hardly deals with the complexities of the situation we now face.

Workers’ Liberty has analysed the Blairite restructuring of the Labour Party and increasingly recognised the diminished scope for party members and union members to affect policy. Indeed from 1999-2010 we stood candidates against Labour, sometimes in alliance with other socialists, sometimes alone. In 2010 it was argued that we could reckon upon some sort of settling of accounts with Blairism within the Party and a realignment of the union leadership and the Labour Party. This has failed to materialise.

In fact the Collins report and the changes, which have been agreed, to the relationship between the Party and the unions have gone further than the Blairites dared. In the meantime Labour councils up and down the country have implemented the Tory cuts with barely a whimper of resistance from within the Party. In these conditions even the ultra-Labour loyal Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, have started to consider how to work around rather than through the existing Labour Party structures.

Rhodri is right however in his analysis of the left electoral alternatives. However the situation requires that where there are TUSC who are “good activists” and standing on a reasonable programme then we should support them.

In the election for Mayor of Lewisham we are presented with the choice of the Labour Party incumbent Sir Steve Bullock who on a salary of £77,000 has presided over nearly £100 million worth cuts and plans a great deal more and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) candidate, Socialist Party member Chris Flood.

Chris is standing under the banner of “A workers’ mayor on a worker’s wage.” His programme includes: no to all cuts, creating jobs for anyone under 25 who is unemployed, £10 per hour minimum wage, rent controls and a register of private landlords, building council houses and no selling off of existing stock, end PFI in the NHS, scrapping the bedroom tax and restoring full council tax benefit. All of which amounts to a little more than being “pretty much limited to opposing the cuts”. Chris himself is an ex-nurse who previously served as a Socialist Party councillor in Lewisham.

We have many disagreements with the Socialist Party and Chris but we cannot doubt that he is an honest individual who is on our side of the class struggle. Whilst TUSC itself is unlikely to be central to a re-founding of working-class political representation, we should surely support candidates such as Chris to send an immediate message about how Labour should be opposing the Coalition — rather than vot-



The Socialist Alliance broke up in 2003.

ing Labour and hoping that a fight will emerge within the unions that will eventually find its way through the tortuous structures, against the will of the current leaderships, and force the Labour Party into an adequate response to the cuts, rather than implementing them.

**As Workers’ Liberty we must begin a serious discussion on how we can move forward the struggle for a genuine workers’ party. The tactics for this will include independent working-class candidates as well as work within the unions and what is left of the Labour Party.**

Duncan Morrison, Deptford

**We use electoral tactics either to make propaganda for our socialist ideas, or to help intervention in a broad labour movement effort.**

Given the realities of the British labour movement, that generally means either (a) recommending our own candidates, or left initiatives in which we can intervene substantially and constructively; or (b) voting Labour and arguing for a fight in the affiliated unions and the Labour Party.

Since February 1974 we have been against giving a necessarily passive endorsement to propaganda candidates of hostile left groups. We want left unity, but we don’t want to build groups when they are making left unity unviable. We have voted for other left groups when that is linked to intervention (as our vote for SWPers in the SA was linked to intervention when we could unite with them).

From 1999, as Duncan points out, we electioneered, mostly through left-unity initiatives (Socialist Alliance, SGUC), occasionally on our own. However, from 2005 at latest, that left electioneering became more desultory. SA and SGUC broke up, against our wishes. We didn’t back their successors, No2EU in 2009 and TUSC (son-of-No2EU). We judged them

too poor politically, and too closed to intervention.

Duncan suggests that the AWL majority in 2010 “reckoned on” big improvements in the Labour Party. Not so. We rejected claims that CWU disaffiliation from the LP would likely lead to a big and good new working-class political “alignment”, “project”, “coalition”, etc. Facing an aggressive Tory government, some movement in the Labour Party was more likely.

The movement in the Labour Party came quicker than we thought (influx of members, etc.) We predicted immediately after the 2010 general election results that it would be limited, because Labour’s defeat had been narrow enough that the leadership retained authority; and we were right about that. Things have gone into reverse recently, which is unsurprising given the depression in working-class struggle since the pensions sell-out of late 2010.

The changes of detail in the last few years strengthen the case against recommending propaganda candidates of hostile left groups. (a) SP now stand not as (even generically) socialist candidates, but as TUSC, with a platform going little beyond anti-cuts. (b) For 22 May 2014 TUSC is closely linked with No2EU (both are essentially SP-plus-RMT).

Of course Chris Flood is personally preferable to Steve Bullock. Almost all TUSC candidates are “good activists” compared to their Labour rivals. It does not follow that we endorse SP/TUSC politically.

**We are sympathetic to people who want to vote Chris Flood, but say that Flood votes can do no more than boost the SP/TUSC, and that that doesn’t help.**

Rhodri Evans, London

## PCS-Unite merger is welcome development

**As a community member of Unite, I would like to comment on the proposed merger of the Public & Commercial Services Union with Unite.**

A merger of the PCS and Unite would probably lead to the merger of the broad left groupings — currently Left Unity in the PCS and the United Left in Unite. This would be a very good thing if it led to a more open broad left in the merged union.

A merger of the PCS and Unite would put community members of Unite, some of whom are claimants of job seeker’s allowance and employment and support allowance, in the same union as people who work in job centres.

This would be a good thing if it led to the merged union leading a campaign against the Department for Work and Pensions targets placed on job centres for sanctions against benefit claimants — one million of whom in the last year, according to Michael Meacher MP, have had their benefits stopped and then referred by job centres to food banks.

A merged union would be better able to publicise the petty nature of the sanctions regime in job centres. For example, some claimants have had their benefits stopped for being five minutes late for an appointment.

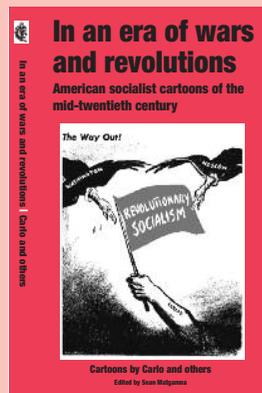
Another example, as reported in April’s edition of *Socialist Appeal*: ex-offender job seekers in the North-East are having their benefit stopped for not turning up for non-existent appointments which job centre staff have made up.

An article in the *Independent* (9 March) revealed that the PCS faces a pensions crisis, with an estimated £65.5 million combined deficit on two of its schemes. This is more than double the annual income of the PCS, which is £27.6 million. The pension deficit probably explains why the PCS bureaucracy is intent on such a rapid merger with Unite.

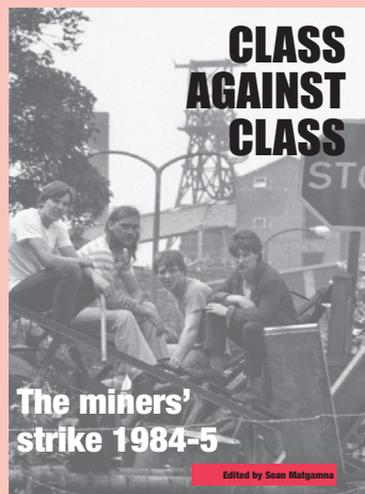
**On balance therefore, given the welcome development of the open Grass Roots Left in Unite, which has a vastly more democratic structure than the United Left, I would say that Marxists in both unions should not oppose the merger of the PCS with Unite.**

John Smithee, Cambridgeshire

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Old city of Homs today

## Syria: Assad gains ground

**After three years of intense fighting, famine-like conditions and immense bloodshed, the city of Homs has fallen to the Assad government in Syria.**

Assad's allies have hailed the negotiated retreat (completed 8 May) by the remaining rebels into rural areas north of the city as a decisive victory.

"The capital of the revolution", as it was called after the beginning of the anti-Assad revolt in March 2011, will now be "rebuilt" from a gutted shell.

Assad subjected Homs to wave after wave of brutal attacks, including chemical weapons and so called, "barrel bombs", barrels filled with explosives and nails dropped from helicopters which indiscriminately killed thousands of civilians. Alongside the bombings was a constant siege of the city, with only limited aid being allowed in following UN negotiation in February.

Malnutrition and near starvation forced the rebels to retreat. Last-ditch resistance has been through suicide bombings by the largest Islamist militia, the Al-Nusra front.

Assad is organising a presidential election for 3 June to reinstall him for a further seven years. It is effectively a plebiscite. To run in the election, candidates had to gain approval from at least one-third of Syria's parliament. Assad will probably have (as stage-props) just two largely unknown opponents, both of them part of a tolerated opposition that existed prior to the 2011 protests.

A Russian official (Russia is among Assad's main allies) quotes Assad as saying that "the active phase of military action" will finish this year.

The official Syrian opposition, the Syrian National Coalition (SNC), has been lobbying Washington in vain for access to anti-aircraft weaponry. The US has given limited recogni-

tion to the Syrian opposition, but remains unwilling to provide arms for fears that these will fall into the hands of anti-US forces in the ever-fractured, divided and sectarianised opposition.

The SNC is almost entirely based outside Syria and keeps a deliberate distance from the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Conversely, only some of the FSA would see the SNC as their political wing.

The SNC says, and maybe rightly, that Assad cannot be defeated unless Russia, Iran and Hezbollah withdraw their support.

The Assad-Iran-Hezbollah-Russia alliance remains unified and is far better resourced than any of the rebels.

A victory for Assad in Syria is not just the continuing of a brutal dictatorship but the furtherance of a Shiite sectarian agenda. The snowballing of these tensions across the region is an ever-increasing reality of the war in Syria.

Iran wishes to extend its influence across the Middle East, particularly in opposition to the Sunni absolute monarchies that support the rebels. They are aiding Assad not so much for his own sake as to ensure that they can continue to assert their influence across the Middle East.

Buoyed up by Putin's successes in Ukraine, Russia has little interest in compromise with the US over Syria.

Socialists should remain opposed to a victory for the Syrian government, and back popular protest against Assad. However, the opposition has fractured too much for a general position of support for it to be viable.

**A rebel victory is now unlikely. Even if it happened, in anything like the current balance of forces, it would signify triumph for factions of reactionary fundamentalists with a sectarian agenda.**

## Cameron's new anti-union threat

**David Cameron has threatened new anti-union laws to make it harder for unions to call lawful strikes.**

Cameron said: "When strikes are going to take place that are hugely disruptive to other people's lives they should at least have the support of a good share of the members of that trade union." On 11 May he said he would include in the 2015 Tory manifesto "thresholds in strike ballots in essential services." He implied backing for the plan by London mayor Boris Johnson that strike ballots must get a 50%+ turnout, as well as a majority of those voting, to provide a mandate for legal strike action.

Even on its own terms, Cameron and Johnson's case is hypocritical and disingenuous. Boris Johnson, having been elected on a turnout of 38%, would not hold office if his proposal was applied to his own election. And it does not at all follow that a union member who did not vote in a strike ballot can automatically be considered to oppose the strike, as Johnson suggests.

Low turnouts in union ballots are themselves products of the corrosive effects of decade of restrictive anti-union laws. Thatcherite legislation, unchallenged during 13 years of Labour government, compels unions to hold postal ballots for strikes, individualising and atomising what should be a collective decision-making process, shaped by face-to-face discussion, assembly, and voting in workplaces themselves.

It is now fairly routine for employers to seek, and win, injunctions against unions to rule strikes illegal, as at Lambeth College in south London recently. There is, technically, no positive right to strike enshrined in British law, so the law is already hugely weighted against unions.

The labour movement's current campaigning against the anti-union laws is largely tokenistic. The Campaign for Trade Union Freedom, formed in 2013 from a merger of two separate campaigns (the United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Trade Union Laws, and the Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions), organising briefings and speaker meetings, with top tables heavy with union general secretaries. But there is little rank-and-file involvement, and no direct action focus. Few unions have been prepared to confront the anti-union laws head on.

**A more confrontational attitude will be needed if this latest potential attack is to be seen off, and if organised labour in Britain is to win greater freedoms to fight.**



Tube strikes will be targeted



Songs of Liberty  
& Rebellion



## Machine Gun

By Victor Serge

At the gates of the homes, at the gates of the palaces  
that we have conquered  
everywhere in the city  
where the riot drags on cold, dull and strong,  
everywhere at the doors of our homes  
the machine-gun in the dark cowers.

Dull, to bring death;  
blind, low, at the base of the earth,  
blind, cold, of steel, of iron,  
with the metal of their hate  
elemental,

with their steel teeth ready to bite,  
their clockwork,  
wheels, nuts, springs,  
their short black mouths on the mounts  
squat ...

Oh, the tragic machine, the thing of steel, of iron, inert,  
which mutilates seconds,  
which digests seconds — tac-tac-tac — the  
seconds drop to the infinite — and lives  
tumble to the great cold of the tombs,  
The machine

which eats, tears, bursts, pierces, excavates  
the flesh, becomes twisted in blood and nerves,  
breaks the bones, makes the rails sing with the hollow  
of perforated chests,  
makes the brain ooze with the breaking of great faces:  
grey among blackened blood.

Low machine to kill, everywhere, in the town of dull  
riot,  
lurking at the doors of our homes, watching for what  
wants to be born,  
watching  
for what lifts from human hearts and from the depths of  
the live earth,  
for what rises from burning faith, from mad hope and  
from anger — from want and from light —

from enthusiasm and from prayer,  
which goes up to flower — acts, cries — flames: the  
revolt ...

Low to cut down flight, the machine-gun in ambush:  
victory to the man of iron laws,  
victory to metal on flesh — and in the dream — the law  
of death.

And this machine, our hands and our brains built.  
O Father! Did we know what we made?

Petrograd, 22 July 1919

# Zombie-Thatcherism

By Matt Cooper

**UKIP could top the poll in the European parliamentary election on 22 May, a vertiginous rise that has been analysed in the recently published *Revolt on the Right* by Nottingham University academics Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin. The book asks: can UKIP be considered fascist; and are UKIP attracting working class voters away from Labour?**

### FASCIST?

**Ford and Goodwin rightly conclude that UKIP is different from the overtly fascist BNP.**

UKIP leader Nigel Farage was recently mobbed by demonstrators in Scotland chanting “fascist scum off our streets”. Similarly, the SWP-dominated Unite Against Fascism has produced a leaflet for the European Elections telling voters “Don’t be used by UKIP” informing voters that UKIP has right wing policies, is against gay marriage, and that UKIP blames immigrants for economic problems created by “the bankers and their rich City friends”. The implication, as with UAF’s previous campaigns against the BNP, is that voters choose anyone else.

This recycling of the Communist Party’s popular front policies of the 1930s might make some sense against fascism in a vacuous liberal way. It makes none against UKIP. The defining feature of fascism as a political movement is that it seeks to create a mass base through which to take and consolidate power; to first control the street and then use the party as the basis of a new state that forcibly wins political control by smashing its opponents. It has been said that every fascist leader has both a suit and a paramilitary uniform in their wardrobe. Nigel Farage only has a suit.

UKIP’s racism and homophobia are worth demonstrating against, but are different in kind to fascism. Faced with a fascist threat the left have to oppose it ideologically *and* physically. “Fascist scum off our streets” is a call for community and working class self-defence. Our opposition to UKIP is ideological.

Ford and Goodwin’s book explains that unlike the BNP’s neo-Nazi racial nationalism, UKIP blend more common-or-garden anti-immigrant racism, civic nationalism with social conservatism, together with a fair dose of neo-liberal economic policy. In this they have much in common with the right wing of the Conservative Party.

Indeed the roots of UKIP are in the mainstream right of British politics — the Bruges Group which was formed in response to Thatcher’s anti-federalist speech of 1988. Although the Bruges Group always attempted to present itself as a broad church it was overwhelmingly Conservative. Out of it came those, including UKIP, who wished to stand candidates on an anti-European ticket against the Conservatives.

From its start, there had been a faction in UKIP (now dominant and grouped around Farage) who believed that the party could develop as a broad based electorally successful party, rather than just pushing the Conservatives to a more anti-European position.

The Farage party-in-its-own-right tendency has become dominant, forcing UKIP to broaden its appeal beyond the single issue of leaving the EU. UKIP has ceased to be a parochial oddity, a shadow of the anti-European British Conservative politics, and part of a broader rise in the radical populist right in Europe.

However there is little analysis in Ford and Goodwin’s book of the European radical right. Although there is no one size fits all analysis of these populist right parties, they all are developing in a globalised context where neo-liberal states are willing to let international market forces leave some people’s existence and identity in a precarious position.

Ford and Goodwin note in passing that compared to many other parts of Western Europe, the radical right was late to arrive in Britain, but they do not explain why. The answer lies in how right wing and somewhat populist Conservative

governments under Thatcher filled this space. After 1987 the defining policy of this current was Euroscepticism. Even as the space to the right of the Conservative Party opened up after John Major became prime minister in 1990, it was filled by the insurgency against him within the Conservative Party.

That insurgency won the Tory leadership with William Hague in 1997 and Ian Duncan Smith in 2001, but ended with the ghost of governments past in the form of Michael Howard to 2005. Only in David Cameron’s period in opposition from the end of 2005 to the 2010 election did the Conservative Party have a more centrist face.

Even as this centrism declined after the 2010 election, it has done so in a way that has allowed room for the radical right; the government has maintained support for at least some symbolic socially liberal policies, particularly gay marriage.

### UKIP SUPPORT

**Who are UKIP’s voters? Ford and Goodwin summarise this base thus:**

UKIP’s revolt is a working class phenomenon. Its support is concentrated among older, blue-collar workers, with little education and few skills: a group who have been “left behind” by the economic and social transformation of Britain in recent decades, and pushed to the margin as the main parties have converged on the centre ground.

UKIP is not a second home for disgruntled Tories in the shires. It is the first home for angry and disaffected working-class Britons of all political backgrounds who have lost faith in a political system that ceased to represent them long ago.

There are two problems with this “left behind” analysis. Ford and Goodwin over-estimate class as the defining characteristic of UKIP voters. And the above quote has a subtle but important shift in categories: Ford and Goodwin state UKIP’s voters are not Tories but working class.

There is a fundamental confusion with the distinction between working class and middle class on one hand, and Conservative and Labour voters on the other. Not all working-class people voted Labour even before UKIP. If they had, Labour would have won every election at least since 1918.

Ford and Goodwin recognise that UKIP’s initial breakthrough in the 2004 European election was not a working-class one. Class aside, every indication was that these were disaffected Conservative voters.

And there is little evidence that UKIP has appealed to any identifiable layer of working class Labour voters. The by-



### Farage in Scotland

**Over 300 activists turned up last Friday (9 May) to protest at a visit to Edinburgh by UKIP leader Nigel Farage.**

**Farage’s last visit to Scotland — in May of last year — saw him trapped in a pub on Edinburgh’s Royal Mile by protestors and police being called to rescue him.**

**This time Farage managed to avoid the same fate by bringing his own security team and creeping into the venue for his press conference and (very poorly attended) “rally” through a rear entrance.**

**UKIP is running at 10% in the polls in Scotland. Some on the left are using the rise of UKIP as an argument for Scottish independence.**

• Full article here: [//bit.ly/ukipscot](http://bit.ly/ukipscot)



elections since 2010 (largely in Labour held seats) have, in the vast majority of cases, seen large swings to Labour. Ignoring Scottish seats (where UKIP is not a factor) Labour has got a substantial swing in votes (averaging over ten percentage points).

UKIP has sometimes cut deep into the Conservatives' core votes and nearly annihilated the LibDems, but with an average swing of maybe 8 percentage points. Only in a few cases are there signs that they are blocking voters returning to Labour who abstained or voted Conservative or Lib Dem in 2010.

There are two by-elections that suggest that UKIP could impact on Labour.

In Rotherham (Denis MacShane's seat) Labour held the seat but with a swing of only 2% (although Respect picked up 6% of the vote). More ominously in South Shields (vacated by David Miliband), Labour's vote declined a little, although here Labour's vote was still above 50% of the total. In similar seats (Barnsley, Middlesbrough) Labour have held the seats with large swings.

There are areas — particularly northern towns with white and Asian populations living "parallel lives" and suburban east London — where the BNP had built itself a younger predominantly working-class base and it seems that since the BNP's implosion after the 2010 election UKIP has been able to pick up much of that vote. Whether it can make any further inroads in that direction remains to be seen.

To understand what is happening it is necessary to look at Ford and Goodwin's statistics critically. A group of UKIP voters, compared to a group of voters overall, will contain around twice as many voters over the age of 55, around 50% more who left school at the age of 16 or earlier, about 40% more men and 25% more manual workers. (The BNP's vote, in comparison, was younger and more working class). *This is not a picture of a predominantly manual working class vote, but of an older, uneducated and male vote.* Most UKIP voters are not manual workers and the massive majority did not previously vote Labour.

It is clear that UKIP exists in an age where strong class identity has ceased to be the underpinning of voting behaviour, so the "left behind" voter explanation fails to convince. It does not explain why UKIP's voters are older. I would suggest an untested hypothesis that, nonetheless, fits the available evidence.

The older group came of age in the period of British post-war decline. Furthermore, this group mainly lived outside of cosmopolitan metropolises, in northern towns, the provinces, or on the margins of big cities but not in them. They did not go to university or college. They started work in dull jobs in

traditional workplaces and did not progress beyond those (not necessarily manual work, but also retail, financial services, clerical and lower managerial).

Mass immigration and the permissive age of the 1960s and 1970s was something of a distant and unsettling spectacle that they saw as part of Britain's (perhaps England's) existential decline. The strikes, women's movement, demonstrations and racial diversity of the 1970s were something experienced at both a physical and cultural distance. It added to their sense that cultural change in Britain was deeply implicated in economic decline.

In the mid-1970s to the early 1980s this group became part of the bedrock support for a more radical, new right, agenda of Thatcher's Conservative Party. If the members of this group hadn't voted Conservative to this point, they did now. They were the readers of the *Sun*, *Daily Express*, and *Daily Mail* who believed in the myth of the return to Victorian values.

After Major's government, this group was increasingly cut adrift, and although some may well have voted for Blair's New Labour vision, the social liberalism of the Labour governments after 1997 alienated them. After 2005, Cameron's Conservative Party, striving to detoxify its brand, to be not the nasty party but a party of a cosmopolitan elite who are comfortable with gay marriage, mixing with black and Asian people and eating hummus, alienated these older people even more.

UKIP's voting base is clearly wider than this thumbnail sketch. Its anti-immigrant racism has the potential to widen its electoral base and for it to become (as Ford and Goodwin argue) a more genuinely right wing populist party. But there are tensions within UKIP and its electoral support. It is as if history has vomited up half digested chunks of late Thatcher period Conservatism replete with free market bile. It smells of decay, of the past.

Thus, the way to counter UKIP is not to denounce it as fascist. It is necessary to address the issues that UKIP address.

New immigrant workers should not undercut the existing workers. They should be unionised and the minimum wage should be raised to a real living wage and enforced.

The labour movement should demand integrated public housing, increased capacity in the NHS and education system.

Such demands will not immediately undercut much of UKIP's support. Some people gave up long ago on solidarity and fully accept individualistic competition.

**But these demands will create an environment where this brand of zombie-Thatcherism cannot reproduce.**

# What UKIP stands for

1. UKIP is a bosses' party in favour of tax cuts for the rich. They want to abolish inheritance tax and cut taxes for business. They would axe public services, reduce state pensions, and cut funding to schools and colleges.

2. Farage claimed £2 million expenses from Europe for the last four years. He registered an offshore Trust Fund in the Isle of Man to avoid paying taxes



3. UKIP wants the health service fully opened up to the market. They are against publicly funded and run health care, and support people opting out of NHS services and paying to skip A&E queues. They would see hospitals closed, jobs lost and care sold to the cheapest bidder.

4. UKIP wants to return to an elite education system. They want grammar schools for the rich and talented and would leave everyone else behind. College and Universities would become an elite privilege. UKIP are like the Tories of 50 or 60 years ago.

5. UKIP would end maternity leave. They want UK to join a club of just five countries in the world who do not support women who work to take time off for childbirth. Farage thinks business should be able to choose not to employ women. UKIP wants the church to have a greater say in family policy. UKIP opposes gay marriage and see LGBT equality as a problem. Their councillors have attacked disabled people and their rights. They want cuts to services to support disabled people and older people.

6. UKIP is happy to increase spending on some areas, but they want to double Britain's prison numbers. In 2010 they called for the establishment of "boot camps" for young people.

7. UKIP denies that climate change is caused by human behaviour. They don't want to save our planet and don't want curbs on pollution and waste. UKIP Education spokesman MEP Derek Clark pledges that "all teaching of global warming being caused in any way by carbon dioxide emissions must...be banned. It just is not happening."

8. UKIP sees Britain as a superpower that needs more missiles and war ships, rather than hospitals and schools. They will cut spending to public services to spend on war.

9. UKIP wants to scrap paid leave for workers, scrap sick pay, and scrap maternity pay. UKIP is a party for business people and the rich. They want a bonfire of employment rights and "would put an end to most legislation regarding matters such as weekly working hours, holidays ... overtime, redundancy or sick pay etc. and provide a statutory, standard, very short employment contract template."

10. UKIP scaremongers: two million UK citizens live or work (or retire) in Europe and two million Europeans live or work in the UK. The recent poster campaign: "26 million unemployed in Europe want to come here and steal our jobs" is just whipping up fear and prejudice. It is arrogance to say that workers want to leave their jobs and families to move to Britain. You could say millions of the unemployed in the north want to go to the south and steal jobs there!

# Impasse in Ukraine

The coup-makers in the Donets region of eastern Ukraine ran a referendum on 11 May and declared a huge majority in their favour.

The question was vague, asking people if they supported “the act of state self-rule”, and the figures given by the coup-makers are not to be trusted.

Within hours, however, the coup-makers took the referendum as authority to declare the region independent and ask Russia to annex it.

Russian president Vladimir Putin had said before the referendum that it would be best to postpone it, and may not move quickly to annex. This canny “moderation” gives him more options, especially to get a deal in which he unwinds the east-Ukrainian coups in return for guarantees of influence over all Ukraine.

Ukraine’s presidential election of 25 May looks unlikely to include polling in the east, and Putin can then credibly dismiss its results.

Ukraine — a historically-defined and long-oppressed nation — has the right to self-determination. The Russian minorities in east Ukraine should have the rights due to minorities, but not the power to override all-Ukrainian self-determination.

We must support the left in Ukraine as it strives for the best way out of the impasse — unity of Ukrainian workers, east and west, against the corrupt oligarchs, both pro-EU and pro-Russian.

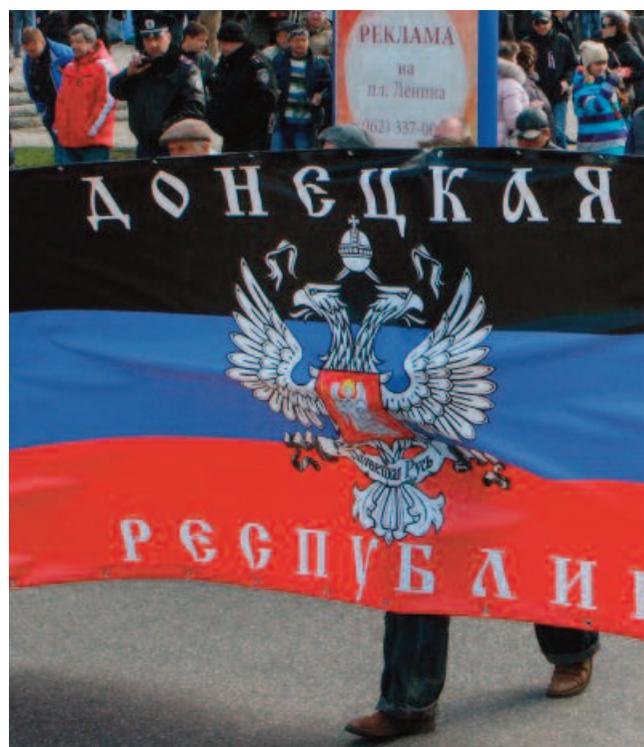
We demand that the US and the EU give the Ukrainian people real help by cancelling Ukraine’s foreign debt.

## Who made the coups in east Ukraine?

Bogdan Gritskiv (Kramatorsk, Donets Region) argues that the driving force behind the declaration of the “Donets People’s Republic” is Yanukovich’s Party of the Regions, with support from within Russia. Abridged from the website of the Ukrainian Left Opposition.

In our opinion, the beginning of the movement which, in the final analysis, resulted in the demand for the creation of the Donets People’s Republic was the meeting of local organisations of the Party of the Regions which took place on 1 February this year in the Palace of Sports in the city of Kharkov.

After two months (December 2013 to January 2014) of the confrontation on the Maidan, the ruling classes had come to the conclusion that the process was getting out of control, that participants in the protest were pushing the demand for membership of the European Union into the background, and that social questions were increasingly coming to the



Donets People’s Republic flag

fore.

At the above-mentioned meeting of 1 February in Kharkov the tone was set by Mikhail Dobkin, head of the Kharkov regional administration and now the official candidate of the Party of the Regions for President of Ukraine. Dobkin suggested creating a Popular Front of Ukraine, self-defence detachments, and people’s militia, which, together with Cossacks and sportsmen, would have the task of opposing the Maidanists and all that “filth”.

Dobkin’s speech was supported by: the President of the Kharkov regional council, representatives of the Ukrainian Communist Party, churches, Cossack groups, and representatives of various social organisations, especially ones involving youth and sporting activities.

Everywhere in the regions of the south-east of Ukraine all possible types of self-defence detachments began to be created, the role of which, it was said, was to defend the population from “Maidan fanatics” and “Banderists” who, supposedly, were advancing in entire battalions from the west of Ukraine towards the Donbas.

Using this pretext (defence of the Russian-speaking population of Crimea from the Banderists), Yeltsin-Putin Russia began to intervene in the internal affairs of Ukraine.

Then similar activities spread to the Donets, Lugansk and Kharkov regions, and to some other regions of Ukraine. At meetings everywhere regional “governors” and town “mayors” began to be elected.

For example, in one of the meetings in Donets a certain Pavel Gubarev was proclaimed governor (the population of the Donets region numbers five millions; at the meeting no more than five thousand were present, i.e. less than 0.1%).

All this could have been called magnificent, an exercise in direct democracy, the unfolding of self-government if it were not for the fact that ... behind all these events was the hand of big capital, the hand of Yanukovich and his family, the hand of the entire court camarilla which had been swept out of power.

Today we see how, on the basis of a preconceived plan, the special services of a neighbouring state penetrate into Ukraine, disseminate provocative rumours, attempt to destabilise the situation, intervene in the staging (or the non-staging) of elections and referendum, and support some (e.g. Gubarev) but discredit others.

By manipulating people’s consciousness, and exploiting the nostalgic sentiments of the older generation, bourgeois propaganda (above all through the medium of television) hammers into people’s heads the belief that the self-defence detachments are involved in no more than defending people against fascists.

In every meeting there appear in one form or another the attributes of the time of the Great Patriotic War (1941-45): St George’s Ribbons, Guards Ribbons [introduced in 1943 as an appendage to the Order of Glory], songs of the war years, posters such as “The Mother Country Calls You”, photos of commanders leading their battalions into an attack, and so on.

By such means and devices the class struggle of the working masses against their own oppressors was directed by a skilled hand into a struggle of one group of petty-bourgeois nationalists against another group of petty-bourgeois nationalists.

It has not occurred to many people that the self-defence detachments (separatists), willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, are paving the way for Yanukovich to return to Ukraine.

A very curious Appeal, published by the newspaper *Working Class* in April 2014, declares:

“The only way out of this lawlessness is to return to President V Yanukovich his constitutional rights and duties ... The population of south-east Ukraine is already demanding guarantees of his personal safety and his return to the country ... And instead of the electoral farce scheduled for 25 May [date of Ukrainian presidential elections] a legitimate authority will be re-established.”

What is piquant about this situation is the fact that in every issue *Working Class* appeals to the working masses to stage a socialist revolution. How can these appeals be reconciled with simultaneous demand for a return to power of the person against whom the socialist revolution must be directed?



Striking Ukrainian miners

## The miners and the separatists

Vitaliy Atanasov (Kiev) argues that a recent miners’ strike in south-east Ukraine demonstrates the gap between workers’ concerns and the demands of the pro-Russian separatists. Abridged from the Russian “Open Left” website.

When Ukrainians took to the streets at the close of 2013 in opposition to the Yanukovich regime, their dissatisfaction was akin to what moves many people to take part in the current protests in the south-eastern regions.

In analysing the largest mass component of the protests we are essentially dealing with the one and the same energy: anger which is directed at the policies of the regimes of the self-enriching “elites” which succeed each other.

Depending on the geographical location and the dominant identity, this energy is shaped differently in terms of its ideology. In the south-east much is determined by the influence of Russian state propaganda, but it would also be wrong to over-estimate its influence.

The leaders of the paramilitary structures of the south-east, the “people’s” mayors and governors, and the commanders of the militia are by and large supporters of extremely conservative ideas – Russian nationalists, imperialists, Stalinists and Cossacks. If the concept of “social justice” is in their political lexicon, then it has a very specific meaning.

Confirmation of the thesis that social slogans are merely a means but not an end for the organisers of the political meetings in the south-east was provided by the recent strike by miners in Krasnodon in the Lugansk region.

All in all, the miners’ strike lasted three days. After ending the talks with the strikers’ representatives, management agreed to implement the majority of their demands, apart from doubling their pay. The company was obliged to increase rates of pay by 20%.

It is a characteristic feature that the strike had been preceded by a meeting in favour of federalisation, for staging a referendum, and for the creation of a Donets Republic. About 200 people, including miners, took part in the meeting.

At first the action involved the shouting of mainly political slogans but as miners who were returning from their shift joined the action, slogans of an economic character came to be heard ever more loudly. The meeting gradually relocated to the “Krasnodonugol” offices in the neighbouring square.

According to the president of the local branch of the IMUU at the “Sukhodolskaya-Vostochnaya” pit (which is part of the “Krasnodonugol” combine), Anatoliy Bartoshek, the pro-Russian activists tried to direct the action in front of the office block into political channels:

“The guys, the miners, immediately took away the microphone and said that this was a place only for miners’ demands, about production, pay, and working conditions.”

• More on our website: why Boris Kagarlitsky is wrong on Ukraine, [www.workersliberty.org/kag](http://www.workersliberty.org/kag); full versions of these translations, [www.workersliberty.org/140512uk](http://www.workersliberty.org/140512uk)

# First days of Ulster's Protestant general strike

Part two of a three-part article by Michael Johnson on 1974 in Northern Ireland

**The Ulster Protestant General strike against power-sharing government had a poor start. On the morning of 15 May most people turned up for work. "It wasn't organised," admitted Harry Murray a union rep at the Belfast shipyard. "The people weren't educated." According to Don Anderson:**

"Murray thought his own wife was joking that morning when she asked him why he was not at work. Nor did [UWC member] Bob Pagels' wife take him seriously, at least not until she went into the kitchen of her Belfast home to make breakfast to find there was no electricity. She thought a fuse had blown. When the truth dawned she felt the same as most. 'What on earth are we striking for? Do we need all this?'"

The story was the same across Northern Ireland. In the shipyards, only the stagers — notorious hardliners, whose job is to erect the scaffolding around ships under construction — took part. The rest of the workers left only when rumours began to circulate that cars left in the carpark after a certain time would be burnt.

In the Sirocco engineering works, where Jim McIlwaine, secretary of the Belfast County Ulster Workers' Council worked, the engineers did not want to strike. Anderson recounts: "'I must have a wee talk with them,' (UWC) Bob Pagels said. 'They'll have to fall into line.' Pagels went onto the shop floor, wearing a coat and a pair of sunglasses. He walked through the lines of machines shaking his fist. The image was enough. Large numbers of workers left soon after. In microcosm, that was the story of the first few days, a story of massive intimidation."

"The UWC's only success was in the power stations where the levels of electrical supply were reduced to sixty per cent by lunchtime on the first day. However, workers sent home from the factories because there was no power of because they were frightened were involved in a lock-out, not a strike."

As well as power-induced lock-outs, the UWC had to rely on paramilitary intimidation.

By 16 May, the "strike" was biting. Engineering was hit hard. When a quarter of the workforce at the Mackies plant tried to work, they were chased out by paramilitaries. Petrol bombs were thrown into the Gallaher factory car park, and a spate of car hijackings formed the bulk of the intimidation campaign. Even though animal feedstuffs were on the UWC's list of "essential services", in reality this had little effect and did not stop hijacked feed trucks from appearing on the barricades. Hundreds of children missed school exams, with absenteeism highest in Protestant areas where road-blocks had been established. Buses were withdrawn in Belfast after a dozen vehicle had been hijacked.

That evening, the UWC closed pubs and hotels. "A group of women stormed into Shankill Road pubs declaring that if their husbands were losing money in a strike they should not be spending what little they had on drink. Pubs, they shouted, were emphatically not on the UWC list of essential services. The counter-argument that pints were 'a normal recreational activity' did not prevail."

In these early stages, however, the Executive thought the strike would not last. Anything built on such a high level of intimidation, they reasoned, must be essentially brittle. The loyalist politicians had not even come out in support, waiting until the fifth day of the strike to do so.

By Friday, petrol supplies were drying up as many of the big oil and petrol companies had withdrawn their tankers. Filling stations were running out as motorists began to hoard fuel. Farmers, too, were hit. Thousands of gallons of milk were poured down the drain, and eggs and bacon exports could not reach their markets. Supermarkets rushed to sell frozen food in case power ceased completely, and shopkeepers faced a run on food supplies. The UWC were sure that a panic about food supplies would rebound on the Northern Ireland Executive.

Over the weekend, public opinion remained against the strike. The churches, the Protestant middle-class and representatives of the farming community were against. Labour Secretary of State Merlyn Rees insisted: "There will be no agreement with people who strike for political ends."

However, the Executive was becoming increasingly wor-



Ulster Workers' Council barricade, East Belfast

ried. At a crisis meeting on Saturday 18 May they were told that the army would not be able to operate the power-stations without the aid of civilian engineers. Adding to this dismay was the fact that the Northern Ireland Office would not discuss security matters with the Executive because it was not a devolved matter. SDLP minister John Hume expected that at least one Executive member and elements of the civil service may have been leaking sensitive information to the UWC.

The following day, the British government announced a State of Emergency but the Northern Ireland Office already had all the powers it needed to deploy troops. The loyalist politicians now felt confident enough to come out in support of the strike, calling for fresh elections. In another blow to the Executive, one of their members — the Unionist Roy Bradford — publicly broke ranks, calling for negotiations with the UWC.

Meanwhile, the Executive was deadlocked over the final ratification of the Sunningdale Agreement, and in particular about the Council of Ireland. With the army unable, or unwilling to do anything about the blockades and hijackings, the Executive looked precarious and by Monday 20 May Gerry Fitt feared it was on the verge of collapse. Power was now at such a low level that the Post Office system could not function in Belfast, impacting on pensions and benefits.

## TIDE

**In an attempt to turn the tide, Rees and the Irish Congress of Trades Unions organised a "back to work" march to be led by the TUC general secretary, Len Murray. It was a disastrous failure.**

Few turned up and they were pelted by eggs, stones and other projectiles. Partly this was because the UDA blocked roads to ensure that the route to the march was as difficult as possible. More fundamentally, though, there was a wide gulf between the local trade union leaders who supported the marches, and rank-and-file loyalist workers, who sympathised with the UWC.

During the strike, the Stalinist and pro-loyalist British Irish Communist Organisation (BICO) published a bulletin. Despite its pro-UWC stance, its commentary on the weaknesses of the Northern Ireland unions was accurate: "[Trade union leaders] are heeded by the rank and file in trade union affairs proper, but when they led the back-to-work campaign, they were not acting as trade union members but as politicians. In political matters they are at loggerheads with their members, so the campaign failed... There is a tacit understanding in the trade union movement that political and economic matters will be kept separate."

A history of avoiding political issues in order to maintain basic unity on the economic front had left its mark on the trade union movement, and could not easily be overturned. Brian Garrett, chairman of the Northern Ireland Labour Party, agreed: "Any bloody fool could have told them [Stormont] that there were not going to be many men turning up, basically because the trade unions that were leading it had never held shop floor meetings on constitutional issues."

On Wednesday 22 May the UWC felt confident and the Executive looked like it would collapse. The Executive's sub-committee discussing the implementation of the Sunningdale Agreement had agreed that it was to be phased in over a number of years, and that the Council of Ireland should be delayed until after the next assembly election in 1977.

The SDLP ministers, however, had to take this to the party's executive to be ratified. Despite Fitt's warnings that rejection would mean the certain collapse of the Executive, the SDLP's ruling body was angry at what were seen as concessions in the face of loyalist intimidation. The vote was 11 to eight against. Fitt went to meet Faulkner to tell him that he couldn't carry his party with him.

When it was clear that this meant the fall of the Executive, Fitt returned to the SDLP executive but the results were the same. Fitt played one more card. He rushed to Stormont Castle, 400 metres from Parliament Buildings, to the office of Stanley Orme, Labour's Minister of State for Northern Ireland. Fitt persuaded Orme to talk to the SDLP executive. Meanwhile, Faulkner was composing a statement on the collapse of the Executive.

By sheer chance, Fitt intercepted Faulkner in the corridor on his way to make his statement and pleaded for an hour's adjournment. By this time, Orme had pressured the SDLP executive to reverse its decision, insisting that if the Executive fell then it would be blamed on their party; the vote was now 14 to 5 in favour of phasing in the Council of Ireland.

The Executive survived by a whisker, but it was damaged in the eyes of nationalists. The SDLP's Falls Road branch rejected the compromise and called for an emergency conference. In Dublin, the Taoiseach, Fine Gael's Liam Cosgrave, reluctantly accepted it but there was a strong feeling that the British government had gone back on its word after having failed to take effective action against the UWC strike.

With phasing-in agreed, the Executive was finally able to turn its attention towards the UWC strike. On Thursday 23 May, Hume unveiled a plan to use the army to take over oil. It was fraught with risk: the army could become a target for republican and loyalist retaliation, and there was a real danger of sabotage of the refinery and storage tanks if the paramilitaries got wind of the plan.

To counter the possibility that the UWC would close down the electricity system, Hume developed a plan for the grid. This involved splitting the grid in half, using Coolkeeragh power station's 40% Catholic workforce to provide power to the west of Northern Ireland, demonstrating that the stoppage was a lock-out and not a voluntary strike, affecting only the Protestant east of the six counties.

The Northern Ireland Electricity Service (NIES) resisted Hume's plan right up until the end. They feared, reasonably, that if the power system was being maintained only by Catholic workers, it would poison industrial relations for years. They also envisaged that power workers in Ballylumford station in Larne would walk out, plunging the system into a crisis without any guarantees that Coolkeeragh could function on its own.

The Executive's oil plan was of political importance. Members of the Executive felt that the British government had held back from giving them support on the basis that it needed to prove first that it was viable. It finally proved this by agreeing to phase in the Council of Ireland but by this stage, time was running out.

Finally, on Friday 24 May, representatives from the Executive met with the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson. The government made only vague promises about using troops to maintain essential services, and gave no clear answer on the oil plan. The Executive returned home disappointed, though the Cabinet was due to meet that evening and Rees promised to phone with a decision on oil. The call finally came in at 11pm that night, confirming that the government would move ahead with the plan to take back the power stations.

In the meantime, however, the UWC had been moving on oil itself. Working with oil shop stewards, the UWC sequestered up to 142 stations for paramilitary use and to provide petrol to those with UWC passes for essential services. A similar system worked for animal feedstuffs. By Sunday 26 May, "the UWC had finally established control over all forms of energy, over transport, farming and commerce."

**The second weekend also further exposed the dark underside of the strike. On Friday 24, four people were killed; two were Catholics bar owners murdered for opening their businesses in defiance of the strike and two motorists died when they crashed into a free felled as part of a barricade. That night a gang in Ballymena also wrecked pubs and a cafe, and minibuses of thugs in Ballymoney ordered customers out of pubs.**

• Part three next week



# PCS-Unite: no to merger!

By a PCS activist

**The annual conference of PCS, the largest civil service trade union, on 20-22 May will debate a motion submitted by the union's Executive (NEC) on PCS merging into the big general union Unite.**

The motion would instruct the NEC, on completion of talks with Unite, to convene a special delegate conference to debate the terms of "merger" and decide whether to proceed to a membership ballot to authorise the "merger".

Strictly speaking the "merger" would be a transfer of undertakings. PCS members, staff and assets would transfer into Unite, essentially on the basis of the Unite rulebook (although the PCS leadership is said to be looking for assurances on democracy and PCS membership of Unite decision making committees).

Some PCS members think the leadership is keen on merger because the union's future looks extremely difficult. With Tory-led Coalition's austerity drive, PCS has lost a significant number of members since May 2010. In 2013 alone it lost a net average (leavers minus joiners) of 1,600 members each month. Further civil service job cuts are looming.

Moreover the union is under explicit threat of Tory ministers quickly ending the "check-off" whereby civil service departments deduct PCS dues directly from members' wages and pass them to the union.

The PCS Independent Left, the left wing opposition to the ruling Left Unity/ Democracy Alliance, has said that if PCS is facing financial meltdown then "merger" with Unite has to be supported, irrespective of qualms, simply to keep trade union organisation alive in the civil service and other workplaces where PCS organises.

However the PCS leaders claim that the union is well able to continue as an independent organisation. The PCS Independent Left therefore argues that it should do so rather than transfer members to Unite.

The PCS leaders proclaim that moving PCS to Unite "would create a union able to bridge the traditional divide between unions operating in the public and private sectors so that we can boost our bargaining power." They do not explain how, for example, the bargaining power of Unite members in a car factory will be boosted by the adhesion of PCS to Unite, or how the bargaining power of civil servants in HMRC or DWP will be boosted by being in the same union as car workers and other trade unionists in the private sector.

The Left Unity/Democracy Alliance has run PCS for eleven years. Over that time it has totally failed to overcome successive governments' divide-and-rule policy of carving the civil service up into a huge number of "delegated bargaining units" and to regain civil service national bargaining. Yet that same leadership now asserts that merely by joining Unite it will overcome the bargaining divisions between public and private sector workers.

The PCS leadership effectively assumes that union "merger" is a shortcut to the development of wider working-

class political awareness and industrial militancy.

The PCS leaders state that "merger" (transfer!) would create "a new, powerful force in the public sector adapted to today's changing industrial circumstances that can deliver more for members" but has not explained precisely what it sees as the changing industrial circumstances and precisely how this new force within Unite would be better able to deliver for Unite and PCS public sector members. They do not say how the awful defeats PCS has suffered under their leadership would have been avoided if we had been Unite members.

The underlying and only very partially stated argument would seem to be that:

- PCS cannot "win" against the state on its own (winning is rarely defined by the PCS leadership),
- Public sector workers must therefore strike together on pensions, pay, jobs and services (and presumably keep striking until the demands of all the different occupational areas of the striking public sector workers have been satisfied – not a model the PCS leadership followed in the pensions dispute with the last Labour Government)
- Unison and other unions cannot be trusted to do so, as shown by the pensions debacle in November 2011
- If PCS "merges" with Unite and a large public sector group is created, then Unite will be able to call out its civil service, NHS and local authority workers at the same time, and thereby put pressure on Unison and other unions to join with it.

## NEW FORCE?

**There is plenty of talk about a "new powerful force", "making a difference", needing "a more effective trade union fightback in the public sector" and PCS and Unite sharing the same basic approach of being genuine fighters for members. However, nothing has prevented Unite and PCS from calling such joint action before now if they wanted to.**

In reality, Unite remains a relatively minor player in the NHS and local government. A fully united public sector fightback would require Unison to play an effective and committed role. That is extremely unlikely under the current Unison leadership.

PCS should certainly agitate for joint action, but has to develop its own independent strategy for winning on issues facing PCS members. There is no short-cut through merger with Unite.

The PCS leaders hint that they see themselves (in Unite) as competing with Unison for authority in the TUC and members in the NHS and local government. They say, "A merged union would become the second largest public sector union. It would be the first public sector union to hold substantial membership in...the NHS, local government and central government." PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka spoke at last year's PCS conference of creating a "left wing pole of attraction" in the union movement.

But competition with Unison is unlikely to attract its membership in mass numbers. If a few left-wingers are won over, that will be at the price of them abandoning the fight to replace the leadership in Unison of Dave Prentis or a successor in the same mould chosen in Unison's next General Secretary poll in 2015.

Mark Serwotka or the Socialist Party, the dominant group in the PCS leadership quite clearly see themselves running Unite's public sector group. They are certainly not going to give up the leadership of an independent trade union just to play second fiddle in one sector within Unison.

And Socialist Party must have high hopes of dominating Unite's "United Left" through the much bigger PCS Left Unity membership.

Merger is likely to mean losing PCS's democratic structures and its actual and potential industrial coherence.

PCS has annual elections at all levels; annual national and group conferences; delegates directly elected by branch members; and a widespread membership understanding of the key industrial issues.

Delegates to Unite's national conferences are indirectly elected by regional committees and regional industrial sector committees; national policy conference takes place every two years; national rules conference every four years; industrial sector conferences every two years. Elections for the Unite NEC, Regional and Branch Committees are held every three years.

PCS's very different circumstances enable direct relationships between members and the different levels of the union and within the single "industry" that is the civil service and the private sector support companies that provide services to the civil service. The end result is a membership with common workplace experiences and issues that gives national PCS an explicit and (potentially) unifying coherence of trade union purpose. That makes accountability (potentially) easier to judge and deliver.

There is simply no real industrial logic to merger with Unite.

There is some opposition on the left and right to merger with Unite because of its relationship to the Labour Party. It's an opposition which either sees PCS in apolitical terms (a union for state employees!) or sees politics purely in terms of standing would be left-wing independent candidates in opposition to the Labour Party. Both are wrong and fail to outline any way in which PCS can help remove the Tories from government, ease the considerable pressures on members, and replace them with a trade-union based party whose leaders need to be opposed and tested with positive working class policies.

**For certain an alternative to Labour will not be found through TUSC or similar candidates. Serious socialists opposed to the merger should not get caught up with opposition on sectarian grounds.**

## CWU edges towards “two funds”

By a CWU conference delegate

The CWU (Communication Workers' Union, covering post and telecom workers) met for its postal, telecom, and general conferences on 27 April to 1 May.

The biggest political debate was on Scottish independence. Several Scottish delegates spoke for a “no” to independence, saying that “as a union, we’re stronger together” and they won a large majority. Only one of the 13 Scottish branches is pro-independence.

Of the two motions on the Collins Review, the more combative was defeated, and the “steady as you go” one was carried.

A rule change was submitted by a regional committee and a branch

(probably encouraged by the central union leadership) proposing that CWU move to Unison’s model of having two political funds, one affiliated to Labour and one unaffiliated. That would deflect democratic control over the union’s political activity into small and inaccessible meetings.

The rule change wasn’t reached, but general secretary Billy Hayes, in a speech to conference, raised the “two funds” idea, and it is likely to come back in 2015.

The main motion at general conference about campaigning for renationalisation of Royal Mail was not reached.

Royal Mail boss Moya Greene was invited to speak at postal conference. The deal which the union struck around privatisation provides postal workers with substantial guarantees for a

couple of years. But what then? And the price was that the union had no proper protest campaign against privatisation.

At the telecom conference, a motion was passed criticising the telecom leadership — dominated now by the misnamed “Left Activists’ Network”, a splinter from the Broad Left, over performance management in BT. BT bosses are now pushing for a two-tier workforce, with new workers employed on worse pay and conditions.

**Many workers have little confidence that the LAN leadership will fight that push effectively. The Broad Left faction needs to be rebuilt in telecom, and to be made capable of combatting LAN in the next telecom Exec elections, in mid-2015.**

## NUT stepping up?

By an NUT member

According to the website of the NUT (National Union of Teachers), the union is “stepping up our campaign”.

Some on the left in the NUT praise the plans as “a turn to political trade unionism”. However, the political activity proposed is weak.

The union leadership is semi-committed to another one-day strike this term, and if Unison and other unions go for 10 July, the NUT may strike on the same day, and produce an important protest against the Tories.

Plans for further action, to move from protest to winning concessions, remain vague. The union leaders have set out proposals to fill

the gap in a mailing to all members announcing:

- a lobby of Parliament on 10 June (necessarily by few teachers, since it is on a school day)

- plans to get NUT members to lobby MPs locally

- a request to local NUT branches to organise stalls to leaflet the public.

None of the material sets out definite demands. The mailing cites, as its shining example that “pressure works”, a meeting by NUT members in Watford with their local Tory MP which got him to write to education minister Michael Gove to support the right of “free schools” to hire unqualified teachers... but worry that it may be “used as a tool to effectively ‘hire on the cheap’”.

The MP then declared:

“Across Watford, I have seen first-hand the massive improvements in education that have come about as a result of Michael’s efforts”.

The union needs a political strategy which could stir up real pressure on an incoming Labour government in 2015 to restore public services.

And that needs to be coupled with plans for continuing and escalating industrial action, rather than scattered one-day strikes without definite sequel.

**The coming elections for General Secretary (balloting from 5 to 14 June) and Deputy General Secretary (closing date for nominations 1 December) give members a chance to press for a real “stepping up”.**

## Labour: rebuild the NHS!

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) watchdog has warned that NHS understaffing is a threat to patients’ safety, and is calling for a 1:8 ratio of nurses to patients.

According to Nice’s “report found understaffing at Stafford hospital, caused by cost-cutting by the trust, had contributed directly to what a previous official in-

quiry called ‘appalling care’ which led to patients dying and suffering serious harm.”

The recommendation will increase pressure on hospitals to hire more nurses to tackle shortages, and cuts against the government’s reluctance to introduce mandatory minimum staffing levels.

The Royal College of Nurses (RCN) has said that

20,000 new nurses are needed urgently.

The 4:1 campaign, supported by Unite, is calling for a mandatory 1:4 ratio, a demand recently endorsed by Unison’s Health Conference.

**Unions and health campaigners should pressure Labour to commit to rebuild the health service, with funding for nurses based on patients’ needs.**



Workers at the Ritzy cinema in Brixton, London are balloting for more strikes. The campaign is gathering momentum but management are still refusing to negotiate on demands for the London Living Wage. Workers have struck three times in the last three weeks.

## Students support Lambeth strike

By Phil Grimm

The dispute at Lambeth College between workers and management continues. UCU members at the college are fighting against reduced terms and conditions for new workers, as well as threats to the conditions of current staff.

Staff went on what was planned to be an indefinite strike on 1 May, but a court injunction prevented them from extending the action beyond one day.

Another day of strike action by Unison members had been planned for 22 May, but it has now been postponed after the college made an offer.

Management have offered

more protection for existing staff, but have made no concessions for new workers. The union is recommending rejecting this new deal, since it would produce a two-tiered division in the workplace.

The deal would also be of little comfort to existing workers, since there is no guarantee of how long the protections would last.

Student activists have been involved in organising support for staff. On 13 May, members of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts talked to students at the Clapham site of the college, making the case for supporting the strikes.

Many students took an interest, prompting a flustered Paul Chambers, the

Director of Learner Services give activists a piece of his mind. Apparently attempting to win over students was “despicable” and “contemptible”, since the strike would disrupt students’ exams.

NCAFC activists replied that if management were so concerned about effects of the strike on students, then why wouldn’t they agree to the workers’ demands?

Chambers was unable to give a reply beyond repeating “despicable!” etc — presumably his “learner services” don’t include a thesaurus.

**Workers and students will be rallying at Clapham Common, 12 pm, 17 May.**

## Church of Scotland workers on strike

By Dale Street

Since 9 May employees of the Church of Scotland have been engaged in industrial action against management’s decision to impose an inadequate pay rise on the workforce.

An ongoing ban on overtime commenced 9 May. A one-hour strike is being staged on Wednesday 14 May to coincide with the royal opening of the Kirk’s General Assembly. A 48-hour strike will begin on Friday 16 May.

Negotiations about the 2014 pay rise began five months ago. Management’s line was that the Church of Scotland could afford only £80,000 for this year’s pay rise, but it was up to Unite, which has collective bar-

gaining rights for the Kirk’s entire office workforce, to decide how that amount should be “divvied up”.

After consultations Unite proposed the lowest-paid should receive a rise of £350, anyone on £60,000 a year or more should have a rise of £250, and the “middle-paid” a rise of £300.

This was aimed at reducing, to a limited degree, the vast inequalities in pay among the 227-strong workforce. The lowest-paid are on around £17,000 a year.

But in late March the Kirk’s Central Services Committee announced that a flat-rate increase of £300 was being imposed.

Faced with management’s abandonment of pay talks, its imposition of a pay rise, and its by-passing of collec-

tive bargaining machinery, over 70% of Unite members who participated in the ballot on industrial action backed taking action.

Last-minute ACAS talks collapsed last week when the Kirk’s representatives walked out of the talks.

“In all my years of representing workers’ interests I have rarely come across a management that is so contemptuous towards the welfare of its own employees, which is bitterly ironic given the context we are in here,” said Unite full-timer Gillian Mackay.

**“Our members view their job as a vocation and deserve better. The church needs to start practising what it preaches.”**



## Political change can drive out Boko Haram



By Rosalind Robson

**The impressive “Bring Our Girls Home” social media campaign has succeeded in drawing attention to the audacious and cruel abduction of 276 schoolgirls by the Nigerian Islamist sect Boko Haram.**

The actions of the nihilistic group, who view the girls’ lives as more-or-less expendable (no more than their value in ransom), have rightly been condemned. But we need to discuss the political conditions in which such an organisation takes root.

Some on the socialist left have been more concerned to expose the (undoubted) hypocrisy of the west’s offers of help to find the girls (e.g. *Green Left Weekly*, [bit.ly/glf-nigeria](http://bit.ly/glf-nigeria)).

But the less publicised protest of the “Women Arise Against Terror” coalition (which includes the Nigerian Labour Congress) in Lagos on Monday 13 May (pictured on this page) chose to focus on the responsibility of Nigeria’s government for the crisis.

Other critical voices inside Nigeria have pointed out how the government failed to act before international attention forced it and how they have failed to tackle the sect over the last five years of murderous activities.

Nigeria’s government has more than enough resources to crush Boko Haram. It does not need Western intervention! As one commentator caustically asked, why can’t the Nigerian army deal with a “ragtag fundamentalist Islamic group who trained neither at Sandhurst nor at any of the elite military schools around the world where Nigeria’s military men and women are regulars?”

The answer is the government does not care. As Nigerian socialist Kola Ibrahim points out, for the Nigerian government, when the kidnapping took place in April, the matter was “business as usual”:

“Even at the peak of the outcry by the parents to the government, the Jonathan government did not issue a single statement, at least to console the parents. On the contrary, it exploited the issue for its political interests. For instance, while the government did not sanction senior security chiefs who misled the nation by claiming that most of the schoolgirls have been rescued, many protesters, especially in the north were illegally arrested.

“Tragi-comically, the president’s wife, Patience Jonathan... was quick to issue an ‘order’ for the immediate release of the schoolgirls. She even arranged a tear-shedding session with journalists. Interestingly, the following day, two of the selfless and concerned parents leading the campaign for the release of the girls were clamped into detention, because they ‘embarrassed’ the government of the madam’s husband.

“The President, at a media chat, was busy asking journalists to help him find the missing girls, because they (the journal-

ists) know more about security and defence of the country than the Commander-in-Chief does! The same president that budgeted close to a trillion naira for defence last year was asking journalists to guide him on national security! Prior to this time, the President, in a show of pure callousness, attended a political rally in Kano, dancing, while in the nation’s capital city, Abuja, more than seventy lives were burning to ashes in a terrorist bomb blast.”

If there is hypocrisy in these terrible events, most of it is that of the Nigerian government of Goodluck Jonathan. They are responsible for so many human rights abuses — of women and, most recently LGBT people (same-sex marriage prohibition laws have just been passed).

Boko Haram has its origins in the revival of salafist (fundamentalist) Islam in northern Nigeria in the late 1990s. Properly established in 2002, it came out of an Islamist youth movement based in Maiduguri, the capital of the northern state of Borno. The youth group, Shababul Islam (Islamic Youth Vanguard), was originally led by Mohammed Yusuf. Yusuf’s goal was the introduction of sharia in northern Nigeria.

When mainstream Islamist politicians failed to implement sharia to their satisfaction, Boko Haram became more extreme. A split-off tried to set up an isolated community, but violent clashes with local people and police disrupted that project. Increasingly the group became an armed band of criminal outlaws.

Undoubtedly poverty fuels the growth of Boko Haram and other Islamist and jihadist fragments (Boko Haram itself has a number of factions). In this oil rich country 61% of Nigerians live in absolute poverty on less than \$1 a day. But the sect does not win recruits from the generality of the poor population in the north (one of the poorest areas in Nigeria). It recruits many of its members from the vast numbers of destitute children who are sent to Quranic schools. And Boko Haram’s ideology is not about protesting against poverty. They exist to campaign for release of prisoners (as it has done with this recent abduction), trying to get compensation, targeting police, Christians, critical Muslim clerics, traditional leaders, UN offices, bars, and secular schools.

For much of the last decade the movement has had connections and/or a client relationship with local politicians and that, as much as anything, encouraged its growth.

In 2009 Boko Haram violence escalated and the government set about suppressing it. 800 people, not all supporters, were killed. Mohammed Yusuf was killed in police custody. Since 2009, for the last five years, Boko Haram has been underground, its activities increasingly violent and more akin to criminal gang-type thuggery.

In the last year the Nigerian government has adopted a policy which has inconsistently swung between repression and negotiation. They have also financed civilian vigilantes, and these have been involved ex-judicial killing of suspects. Boko Haram attacks have increased during the first three months of 2014 and according to Amnesty at least 1,500 people have been killed.

The “Bring Our Girls Home” campaign is very limited politically, but it has drawn attention to how Nigerians (many of them Muslim) are suffering at the hands of this vicious group. The attention is a good thing. Our job is to make solidarity with the many Nigerians who are fighting for the fundamental social and political change that will be needed to drive out Boko Haram.

**We will try to give coverage in the forthcoming issues of Solidarity to the views and struggles of those activists.**

• Nigerian authors quoted all at <http://saharareporters.com>



## Make 10 July the start of a fight over pay

By a local government Unison member

**The *Sunday Times* “super rich list” shows the UK has more billionaires than any other country per head, and London the most of any city worldwide. Their collective wealth has risen by over 20% in one year.**

Meanwhile 650,000 local government workers in the UK have seen a real-terms pay cut of 20% over the last four years. They will now be balloting for action over pay (the ballot begins on 23 May)

If there is a yes vote for action, as is expected, there could be a strike on 10 July involving members of Unison, GMB and Unite in local government and schools.

It is also possible that they will be joined by teachers in the National Union of Teachers (who are still in dispute over pay, pensions and workload), and health workers, as last month Unison members in the NHS voted for action over the miserable 1% pay increase they have been offered.

The obscene disparity between the super-rich and the loan sharks and child poverty for the majority of low-paid council workers exposes the lie that “the country” cannot afford pay rises.

In run up to Unison local government and national delegate conferences in June, delegates will be discussing a strategy to win our pay dispute. Workers’ Liberty will be calling for escalating strike action, including dates set for more than one strike day in July and more dates set in advance for September. We also advocate a national strike fund to pay out strike pay for those who need it, and a discussion about selective action, action short of strike, and work to rule tactics.

Over the last period one-day strikes have been discredited. They win little and undermine the solidity of disputes.

May’s local elections are likely to deliver a change in leadership of the Local Government Association as Tories and Lib Dems lose councillors and Labour wins seats. The unions should use this opportunity to force a rethink on the Tory pay freeze.

**The first task is to give ourselves a massive mandate for action and get the largest vote for action. Then we need to build willingness to take serious ongoing action. This is what will make the new employers take public sector pay seriously.**