

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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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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Cynical stitch-up in Italy

By Hugh Edwards

The swearing-in ceremony on Sunday 28 April of the Enrico Letta government was momentarily interrupted by the attempt of an armed individual to "make the politicians pay". But nothing can overshadow the depth of defeat the coming to power of this government signals for Italy's working people.

Key ministries are taken by figures from Silvio Berlusconi's PDL, or technocrats from the banking/financial world. The Democratic Party shares minor roles with

people from Mario Monti's tiny outfit, while humiliatingly accepting only token "progressives" thrown in as proof of the "modernism" of the government.

This outcome was never in doubt from the moment the results of the elections returned no outright winner.

For 20 years or so, as the relentless decline of the Italian economy has continued, the centre right and centre left have enjoyed a cynical Punch and Judy exercise with each other.

Each plays up the ideological difference of the "enemy". The right attacks the "communists" of the Democratic Party (in reality

stuffed with former Christian Democrats like Letta, whose uncle has been the grey eminence behind Berlusconi). The left slams the bogeyman Berlusconi and how he trampled on the norms, principles, and honoured democratic traditions of political and civil life.

Yet across the board corruption, depravity, cruelty, and cynical indifference among the ruling classes has been for centuries as common as pasta.

It needed the restoration of the just-retired President of the country, Napolitano, to save the day. At the same time, we saw the imminent implosion of the party of Letta, as the stalemate over the attempts to form a government developed. The party's fragmentation turned into an explosion when it emerged that a secret deal had been done to elect a new president agreeable to Berlusconi.

Napolitano read the riot act to assembled parliamentarians at his inauguration, spelling out the consequences for them and the country if they didn't agree to the stitch-up between the PDL and the centre left, a stitch-up which had already been itemised in detail by a cabal of "wise men" he had personally selected.

The bubble of rebellion from inside the Democratic Party proved nothing but wind and piss. And why should anyone be surprised? This outfit and these people had, with hardly a squeak of protest, sustained for more than a year the most systematic and concerted assault on

the lives and living standards of ordinary Italian workers, while simultaneously condemning any who organised resistance.

This latest "historic compromise" serves to finally pull the mask from the party whose origins lie in the Stalinist CPI. The latter's ignominious role as first midwife to the resurrection of bourgeois Italy in the 1940s was followed by its loyal adherence to the democratic and ideological shibboleths of that order, and reached its apogee with collaboration with the ruling Christian Democrats in the 1970s, while crisis after crisis threatened the stability of the social order.

For the workers it was a catastrophe; mass defeats in the struggles led to the casino capitalism of the Craxi-led coalition years, culminating in the economic and financial collapse of 1992-3 and the "Bribesville" scandals of 1994 — the legacy of which is incarnated in the presence of Berlusconi.

But there is one spark of hope, of possible resistance. The millions of workers and ordinary people who voted for the centre left had their last illusions shattered. They must be at the centre of the urgent battle to build a common front of resistance across every point of conflict and struggle, an economic and political war whose rallying cry must be a government of the working masses of Italy.

By that yardstick those on the left now clamouring for the need for a new united force of the left should be judged.

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Workers' Liberty activist Ed Maltby visited the socialist Turkish workers' association UID-DER to participate in their activities in the run-up to May Day.

UID-DER runs clubs across Turkey where working-class activists organise cultural and educational activities, and also support strikes at home and abroad. The UID-DER branch in Gebze sent this message of solidarity to the "3 Cosas" campaign for sick pay, holidays and pensions for University of London ancillary staff.

A fuller report on Ed's trip and the activities of UID-DER will appear in the next issue of *Solidarity*. For May Day greetings from UID-DER, see page 4.

Fast food and retail workers in Chicago struck on Wednesday 24 April as part of a growing US-wide campaign for a \$15 minimum wage in fast food and retail outlets. The action, organised by a coalition of labour movement and community groups including the Workers' Organising Committee of Chicago, followed a similar strike in New York the previous week.

Lords rubber stamp NHS privatisation

By Todd Hamer

In a late-night session on 24 April, Lords voted through secondary legislation that will drive forward NHS privatisation.

The “section 75 regulations” provide the detail on how the new Clinical Commissioning Groups will sell the NHS to the private sector. Health academic Lucy Reynolds explains: “The Health and Social Care Bill was passed in a form as if it were an aeroplane without any jet engines. The structure was there but [...] they couldn’t find the thing in it to accomplish the privatisation. The regulations provide the jet engines and will make that privatisation go ahead.”

Prior to this legislation, GPs thought they would be able to choose which parts of the NHS to put out to the competitive tendering. But the Lords vote will mean that all NHS services will have to go head to head with the private sector.

This runs contrary to Andrew Lansley’s promises when he was moving the Health and Social Care Bill through Parliament. Then he gave assurances: “I know many of you have read that you will be forced to fragment services, or put them to tender. This is absolutely not the case. It is a fundamental principle of the Bill that you as commissioners, not the Secretary of State and not regulators — should decide when and how competition should be used to serve your patients’ interests.”

Health economist Allyson Pollock estimates that 20-30% of the NHS budget could be wasted administering this system.

Competitively tendering all health services will put the NHS under significant financial strain. At the moment, NHS providers are paid for every procedure they perform. Some of these procedures are very costly and some are relatively cheap. Generally, low-risk routine procedures, like

cataract operations, are cheap and hospitals can make some money on them. High-risk procedures, like emergency surgery, often involve spiralling costs and hospitals may perform them at a loss.

With a single NHS the costs balance out. The extra money from the low-risk procedures subsidises the more costly treatments. But if all services are being put out to tender, then the NHS could lose the low-risk work. Health sector capitalists will be looking to win as many contracts as possible in the low-risk category as this is where the profit is

found. So long as the service is funded by the taxpayer, these providers will be allowed to use the NHS logo. Patients will not even know that someone is making a profit from their care. NHS hospitals will be left doing all the expensive treatments but without the subsidies they used to get from low-risk treatments.

Instead of risk and costs being shared throughout a single organisation, the health service will be split between a profit-making private sector and a loss-making public sector. Over time the public NHS will wither away and its reputa-

tion will deteriorate as it fails to meet public expectations. At this point, the private sector firms, which have built up their capacity using the NHS brand, can take off the NHS logo and start offering services directly to the public through private insurance schemes.

GAIN

Many of the individuals who pushed through this legislation will personally gain from this vote.

According to the Social Investigations website, 142 peers have present or recent financial connections with the private health firms. Labour peer Lord Warner even broke the whip to vote in line with his private sector interests.

Only a tiny minority of people support NHS privatisation.

Most of them will personally profit from a booming private health sector. Unfortunately for us, a high concentration of such people work in Westminster. The

representatives of private health companies, sitting in Parliament, have ignored the evidence, and scorned professional opinion. They have told the public outright lies, hiding their true intentions with obscure legislative processes.

There is a widening chasm opening up between these people and the majority who believe in a publicly owned and controlled NHS. Unlike the sale of British Telecom in the 1980s, NHS privatisation will not happen overnight. The private sector will slowly strangle the life out of the NHS until there is nothing left.

Standing in the way of this future is a growing movement of people who understand the importance of a publicly owned, publicly accountable health service and are willing to fight on the streets, in our workplaces and at the ballot box for the working-class alternative.

Defend children’s right to holidays!

By Dan Rawnsley

In 1870, when the Elementary Education Act paved the way for universal state education in Britain, the population was 27.5 million.

Over half of these people lived in industrial towns or cities. Over a quarter of them lived in London. Acts of Parliament had restricted work for children and new technology like the threshing machine had industrialised farming.

Yet Michael Gove claims that the school day is based on a Britain of agricultural production, with holidays to allow children to help on the farm. Perhaps Gove thinks that working-class children in London used to rush home from school to help their parents in Bow and Poplar farm the family smallholding, raise a pig or grow some potatoes in the shade of factories, using polluted water. They would be joined later by their parents returning from their 11 hour day at work. The “strength” of the new history curriculum finds its mirror in the Education Secretary’s knowledge of history!

However, Gove is not just wrong about history.

On 18 April, Gove said that comparing British education with “the length of the summer holiday and the extra tuition and support children are receiving elsewhere” shows that “we already start with a significant handicap”. By “elsewhere”, he meant “Hong Kong, Singapore and other East Asian nations”.

In England the school year is 190 days long for students and 195 for teachers. There are 13 weeks of holiday and the day is 6-6.5 hours long. In Singapore, the day is 5 hours in primary and 6 in secondary, with 12 weeks’ holiday. In Hong Kong the day is 7 hours long, with 190 school days. In Shanghai, the school day is 8 hours long, but with a 1.5 hour break for lunch and 14 weeks’ holiday, including a two-month-long summer holiday. So — much the same as England when added up!

Michael Gove’s latest idea has little to do with providing a good education. Teaching union leaderships have abdicated from the

pensions fight and proposed little concrete action over performance related pay. Gove feels confident that he can keep pushing to get more work out of teachers.

He says he wants the school day to match up with the needs of working parents. Or rather: the school day should suit employers who don’t want flexible working hours for parents.

CHILDCARE

This comes close to seeing education primarily as childcare, something which the state should, but doesn’t, provide.

Our programme is flexible working hours for everyone (including but not just parents) and free childcare.

There is a discussion to be had about the long summer holiday. Children can return to school after six weeks less confident and having forgotten things. This can be especially problematic for working class children who have less access to intellectual stimulation and activities during the holiday. The answer is not more time in school,

shorter holidays or reducing the number of school holidays. Rather, working class families should have access to good quality, wide ranging out of school activities — groups, experiences, sport, travel and learning opportunities.

At root the discussion raises political issues about the purpose of school-age education, the treatment of children and their right to a childhood; issues about conditions for teachers and social and industrial issues around flexible working for parents and childcare provision. Teaching unions must address this newest step by Gove as part of a campaign of industrial action against the immediate attacks on pay, pensions and workload whilst developing a political campaign that puts forward a positive plan for education in the interests of students and school workers.

The Local Associations Network Action Campaign (LANAC) Committee will meet to discuss how to respond to these attacks in Birmingham on 18 May.

• www.nutlan.org.uk

Killed by anti-choice bigotry

By Mícheál MacEoin

According to an inquest on Friday 26 April, “medical misadventure” caused the death of Indian dentist Savita Halappanavar. She died on 28 October 2012 after she was denied an emergency abortion in a Galway hospital.

Savita Halappanavar was 17 weeks pregnant when she died. The inquest found that the specific cause of death was severe septic shock, e-coli in the bloodstream and a miscarriage.

Her death caused an international outcry and shone the spotlight on Ireland’s notoriously strict abortion laws, when it emerged that she was told she could not have a termination “because Ireland is a Catholic country”.

The jury had heard evidence from leading obstetrician Dr Peter Boylan, that it was highly likely Savita Halappanavar would still be alive had she been given a termination when it was requested by her and her husband, Praveen Halappanavar.

Speaking after the inquest, her husband said: “It’s horrendous, barbaric and inhumane the way Savita was treated.”

The key recommendation by the coroner Dr Ciaran MacLoughlin is that the Irish Medical Council should state exactly when doctors should intervene to save the life of a mother, “to remove doubt and fear from the doctor and reassure the public”.

This has put pressure on the government to clear up ambiguities in the law. Intensive discussions took place over the weekend between the governing parties, Fine Gael and Labour, over the text of new legislation.

Fine Gael is publicly split on the matter of terminations in the case of suicidal intent, despite this being a constitutional right following the “X case” judgement in 1992.

The Cabinet is expected to agree the Heads of the Protection of Maternal Life Bill 2013, and it is hoped that the legislation will be tabled before the Dáil summer recess.

“Zap” the SWP?

Letters



The people who are effectively “no-platformed” now are people who cannot be around the SWP [This letter is a polemic against our article “SWP: criticise, don’t ‘no platform’”, *Solidarity* 281, 10 April].

The no-platform policy is not a magic wand we can wave, even at fascists. Organisations and individuals must be held accountable, by everyone, everywhere, for everything. There is no difference between “politically confronting” someone and what people are doing when they shout them down (as on the Glasgow bedroom tax demonstration).

This is different from wanting to no-platform the SWP for chanting “we are all Hezbollah” (even though such chants already make people like me feel essentially excluded from demonstrations in solidarity with people in Palestinian territories).

There is a mass movement within the SWP and the wider left contesting them around the issue of women’s rights, but not around the Hezbollah chants. All companies exploit their workers, but we only target specific ones when there is a live struggle against them.

Also, you can ignore the Palestinian issue when marching alongside the SWP about something else, but when you’re a woman you can’t ignore the issue of women when you see them around — be it on a bedroom tax demo or on a May Day march. It’s just another slap in the face from the patriarchy,

1970: Gay activists successfully “zapped” Barney’s Beanery, Los Angeles, forcing the owner to take down homophobic signs with demonstrations and direct action

and either you fight back, end up beaten up (I’ve never won a fight in my entire life) or in jail, or you submit, go away, and drown your humiliation in alcohol and other distractions.

It is obvious that the acts of protest taken up by many different individuals and semi-formal groups — be it the attempts by part of the SWP to challenge its constitution, or people challenging them when they see them in public spaces — must be supported, but also open to criticism, like any other acts, on the basis of whether they are politically sound and as efficient as they can be.

The anger at the current SWP’s policy of ignoring that there is an issue at all is not going to go away. Making the organi-

sation acknowledge there is something wrong with its behaviour is a clear first step, and a difficult one at that. We do not have to use the term “no platform” (which it is not, by the way: the tactic used by Glasgow comrades takes root in the gay liberation direct-action practice known as “zap”, and makes much more sense in its proper context), as it has strong connotations, but if we are to have any effect at all on an organisation that has managed to be so dismissive and rigid up to now, shock-and-awe tactics making it impossible for them to function are in order, as long as they refuse to acknowledge any problem.

We might have different views on the issue of organisation, different ends and methods as well: some might be against all hierarchies and centralism, some might think this case is just the matter of a bad apple. But none of us, anywhere in the movement, wants a structure which allows and condones the structural oppression of anyone.

Despite all the horror, disgust and self-doubt this case caused, it is a chance to build real unity, between people as disparate as the original SWP dissenters, queer and feminist activists, Marxists who are boycotting the Sydney Historical Materialism which allows *Solidarity*, a local group who supports wholeheartedly their sister organisation, the SWP, to give talks, and, of course, the ever-ready anarchists.

These events were hard on us all, they made us question what we stand for and what we might be allowing to happen around us.

We now need to think about healing, and take collective responsibility in a feminist and revolutionary way.

Mr Scruffles, via email

Vacuum on the left?

The Left

By Martin Thomas



The idea of a vacuum or gap on the left, much mentioned in discussions about the “Left Unity” project recently launched by Andrew Burgin and Kate Hudson, has been current, on and off, since 1968.

Then, it was used by IS, forerunner of the SWP, as rationale for the unity appeal which IS made that year. “The old Left has been scattered, and a minority sucked up into the new corporate state. A new Left has to be created out of the existing fragmentary and divided opposition... If our differences inhibit what we can do, the Left is likely to be permanently condemned to irrelevance”.

IS proposed unity around four sketchy points (no positive reference to socialism other than implied in the two words “workers’ control”). It was a bit of demagogic political “marketing”. Only Workers’ Fight (forerunner of AWL) took up the unity appeal — we didn’t like the demagogic “marketing”, but we did want unity. The brief pretence at being undefined broad-leftists probably helped IS win some individual recruits.

The idea of identifying a “gap” in politics and constructing a political profile to fit it had been pushed earlier in the 1960s by the “Mandelite” group which would become known as the IMG (International Marxist Group).

The Mandelites ran a journal called *The Week* which was deliberately pitched to be less revolutionary, more broad-leftist than the Mandelites themselves (“orthodox” Trotskyists) really were. Their phrase for it was “the replacement leadership”.

Its line was: the right-wing leadership of the Labour Party would discredit itself. The revolutionary left was too small to pose as a replacement for it. The revolutionaries should therefore fill the “gap” by building a left-reformist or ambiguous force which would be moderate enough to pose as a direct replacement, but left-wing and broad enough to give space to the revolutionaries.

The common idea was that the revolutionary socialists could not make headway by proposing their own politics. But

maybe they could make up for the failure of the actual left reformists to build a sizeable movement, and themselves engineer some more-or-less left-reformist, or ambiguous, political operation within which to flourish.

It was as if cuckoos devised a scheme of pretending to be another species of bird, building nests for that other species, and then putting their eggs in those nests.

The idea was always manipulative, and produced no sure result other than a muffling of the voice of revolutionary socialism. But real facts underpinned the thought.

Before the late 1960s, and since 1945 at least, space on the political left was “full”. There was no vacuum. There was a Labour Left, “Bevanite” or “Tribunite”, very strong in the early 1950s but sizeable at other times too; and there was the Communist Party, 45,000 strong in 1945 and still about 30,000 in 1968.

ROOM

The revolutionary socialists (Trotskyists) did not languish in the emptiness of a “vacuum” or “gap”.

On the contrary, they battled to find elbow-room and to convince young activists, almost all of whom would take their first political steps in the orbits of the Labour Left or the CP.

In the late 1960s the Labour Left, long in slow decline, slumped suddenly. Many of its activists quit the Labour Party in disgust at the Labour Government’s record. The CP continued but became more and more discredited. The revolutionary socialist left grew fast, but was still much smaller than the Labour Left and the CP had been.

There were lots of people generally left-wing and socialist in their political ideas, but now without a political “home”. There had always been many left-wingers who weren’t politically active, or were active only in occasional demonstrations or campaigns or trade-union work; but the ratio of inactive to active had shifted.

The Labour Left had revivals in the 1970s and early 1980s, but on the whole the shift has endured. The broad left has not become a vacuum, “empty”. It has a bigger ratio of inactive to active.

In the nature of politics, the ratio of inactive to active in a political camp can vary widely. It is subject to “vicious” and “virtuous” circles. A decline in the zeal of the most active sets

the slightly-less active drifting to semi-activity, the previously semi-active losing confidence and becoming inactive, and so on in a snowball; conversely, when some who have been just plodding along galvanise themselves into outgoing energy, they draw in new keen young activists, revive the semi-active, and so on upwards.

That fact is one of the basic reasons behind the Marxist theory of building a highly-educated, disciplined revolutionary party: activists who have gained a solid theoretical overview can survive disappointments better, stop the “vicious circles” spiralling down, and give continuity to the movement. As Antonio Gramsci put it: “The emancipation of the proletariat is not a labour of small account and of little people: only they who can keep their heart strong and their will as sharp as a sword when the general disillusionment is at its worst can be regarded as fighters for the working class or called revolutionaries”.

Why left-reformist politics has suffered “vicious” circles in the last decades, why the best there seem to lack conviction and none are filled with passionate intensity, is a question too broad to cover here. But the fact is unmistakable.

Should the revolutionary socialists compensate by substituting our own conviction and intensity for the reformists’ default, thus (so we would hope) building a “replacement” movement, or something that “fills the gap”? That “solution” is no better now than it was in the 1960s.

Revolutionary socialists should certainly build up trade-union organisation on a broad basis, animate broad campaigns, develop rank-and-file caucuses in trade unions, and run ancillary groups and activities (film clubs, youth groups, reading circles...) which provide an easy way for young people to get into and “check out” politics without having to commit themselves all at once to full revolutionary-socialist militancy.

None of that involves sidelining or cold-storing our own politics. Any tactic which does sideline or cold-store basic ideas worsens the “vicious circles” rather than replacing them by “virtuous circles”.

It slows down a driving-wheel of the whole mechanism — the ardour, energy, and outgoing spirit of people who have learned the truth about the inhumanities of capitalism, and want to spread the word.

How to make left unity

The political situation makes a strong case for left unity. Since 2008 global capitalism has been lurching through a long depression, with some countries in outright slump, and no end in sight. Millions of workers have lost their jobs or their homes.

In 2008 even governments like George W Bush's in the USA felt obliged to impose large measures of "socialism" to avert chaos. It was socialism for the rich. Banks and insurance companies were nationalised, but left to bankers to run, on the same old criteria of private profit.

Vast sums of public money and credit were poured into the financial system to "socialise losses", and governments have organised things since then to "privatise gains" yielded by the patches and flurries of economic recovery.

The economic tumult makes visible to all the need for social regulation of economic life; and also visible to all, the fact that the present system is regulated only in the interests of the wealthy.

The workings of capitalism itself are providing ample evidence why we need a different social regulation of economic life — a democratic social regulation exercised through public ownership of the main concentrations of productive wealth, workers' control, and a thoroughgoing, flexible, responsive democracy in government.

But to go from evidence to conclusions requires argument. Argument in the teeth of the consensus which has dominated political life for the last two decades or more. Argument in defiance of the daily barrage from the mass media. And the argument requires people to argue it: socialists.

There are several thousand socialists and class-struggle anarchists active in Britain, quite a few in influential positions in trade unions. And yet advocacy for socialism is only a thin bleat in political life, often drowned out by the noise surrounding it.

Too much of our energy is absorbed in duplicated efforts, in unnecessary conflict, and in tawdry schemes and fronts which are supposed to provide short-cuts to socialism but in fact mostly serve competition between groups.

This problem cannot be resolved by a flabby search for consensus — that is, by the left trying to find a few points we agree on and leaving all else aside. The whittled-down consensus policy will probably not be socialist in any coherent way. The Left Unity project launched by Andrew Burgin and Kate Hudson, and backed by Ken Loach, so far sets its basis only as being "against austerity and war", and the TUSC electoral front run by the Socialist Party and the SWP says little more to explain the "socialist" label in its name than that it is against cuts, against British troops being in Afghanistan, and for trade unions.

There are real differences between the different groupings on the left, about real and important issues. For the labour movement to be able to win socialism, we will need to thrash out those issues and develop a coherent strategy.

We need a framework which allows unity in action where we agree, and honest and serious debate where we disagree. The best way would be to establish a transitional organisation.

This would be a coalition of organisations and individuals, organised both nationally and in each locality, which worked together on advocating the main ideas of socialism, working-class struggle, democracy, and welfare provision; in support of working-class struggles; and in such campaigns as it could agree on (against bedroom tax? against cuts?), while also giving space to debate differences.

It would have a newspaper, a website, and leaflets, based on the ideas its components agreed on, but would allow for debates in the newspaper and website, and for groupings within it to publish their own journals and websites.

It would deliberately allow its components to continue their own special activities — some in the Labour Party, and some not; some in this campaign, some in that — but also provide for debate on those choices.

It would seek links and practical political collaboration with anarchist and left libertarian groupings and individuals.

It would be "transitional"; it would recognise the aim of deepening the cooperation, and discussing through the differences, sufficiently to cohere into a fully-united, fully-coordi-

A Communist Unity Convention led to the founding of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920

nated party. In a fully-united party there would still be space for minorities to express themselves, including publicly; but there would be enough coherence for the party to have a defined, majority-agreed, adequately-discussed policy on every major question.

That coherence would be impossible in the initial coalition. But many differences on the left today appear fixed and rigid in large part because there is no dialogue about them, only an occasional exchange of curses between hostile groups when we meet. Real discussion between activists engaged in joint work, and seeing the benefits of cooperation, could budge many of those differences.

Not all groupings would agree to join the initial coalition or "transitional" organisation. Not all who engaged in the "transitional" organisation would stay with it. But the cooperation and debate would be valuable even if they failed entirely in creating a fully-united party.

COMMUNIST PARTY

The British left has one great example of unity in its history, the bringing-together of at least five major groupings previously at odds with each other, and many individuals and smaller groups, to form the then-revolutionary Communist Party in the early 1920s.

Not all the would-be revolutionary socialists joined the CP. It was at first a ramshackle organisation, quite different in tone and trend from one area to another. Significant numbers dropped away as it became fully unified. But then, for a while, until Stalinism killed it, it united almost all revolutionary socialists in coherent action, achieving much more with only a few thousand members than much bigger groups have at other times.

Other attempts in history "failed", but after having made contributions. The First International in which Karl Marx was active in 1864-72 had its central organisation in Britain, and here it was a composite of socialistic or anarchistic exiles from other European countries; British socialist trends like the Owenites and O'Brienites; and cautious trade unionists, some of whom later became outright Liberals.

Between 1893 and 1897 William Morris and others made a drive to unite all socialists in Britain — the SDF, the ILP, the Fabians, and smaller groups. There were joint manifestos and meetings, and much local cooperation, for a while.

Between about 2000 and 2003 the Socialist Alliance brought together almost all the revolutionary socialist groups, and a fair number of unaligned people. The effort was too narrowly focused on electoral activity, and prevented from getting very far on cooperation in other activity by the SWP, which dominated it excessively and eventually broke it up. But for a while, in many areas at least, there was real cooperation and real dialogue.

Just in the last 10 years, there have been eight or nine left unity projects which have got as far as organising meetings, conferences, websites, and yielded almost no result. All of them, however, were based on unviable schemes of one sort or another — to unite just by finding some points of agreement and sidelining all other issues, or to unite by rallying to a predefined project, usually electoral, of one group or another.

No miracle will result just from proposing a good formula for unity. But it is the first step. We invite all other groupings and individuals on the left to discuss our proposal.

Further reading

- Left unity in the 1890s: bit.ly/1u1890s
- Socialist Alliance: bit.ly/end-sa

Help us raise £15,000

Workers' Liberty HQ has rarely known as much excitement as it did on Tuesday 30 April, when our new duplicating machine was delivered.

Veteran members said it felt nearly as eventful as the day in 1973 when the office of our predecessor organisation, Workers' Fight, was raided by Special Branch on suspicion of connections to Irish republican groups.



The new machine will be "christened" in a special champagne ceremony

Our purchase of the new, top-of-the-range machine was only made possible because of a series of extremely generous donations from *Solidarity* readers. We can now print and duplicate the materials integral to our day-to-day work — workplace bulletins, leaflets, newsletters, and more — at unprecedented speeds.

But the need to fundraise specifically for the new machine did stall our overall fundraising drive somewhat. We're still short of the £15,000 target we set ourselves. We're extending the appeal until 21 June, when our Ideas for Freedom event begins.

Support our appeal! You can contribute in the following ways:

- Take out a monthly standing order using the form below or at workersliberty.org/resources. Please post completed forms to us at the AWL address below.
- Make a donation by cheque, payable to "AWL", or donate online at workersliberty.org/donate.
- Organise a fundraising event.
- Take copies of *Solidarity* to sell.
- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL. More information: 07796 690874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.



Total raised so far: £10,360

We raised £284 this week from sales of literature and donations. Thanks to Martin, Rosie, Mick and Chris.

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

..... (its address)

Account name:

Account no:

Sort code:

Please make payments to the debit of my account: Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)

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

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

Date

Signature

MAY DAY GREETINGS

For more, see page 8



Our dear class brothers/sisters,

We celebrate your May Day which is a day of unity, struggle and solidarity for the working class. The working class can only resist the attacks of the bourgeoisie through an organised and determined stance.

As UID-DER we also believe that this organised struggle has to be waged on an international level and we act in this understanding. Having in mind the idea that workers will not be defeated once they are organised, we send you our best wishes for success in your struggle.

Long live the international unity of struggle of the working class!

**Association of International Workers' Unity (UID-DER), Turkey —
www.uidder.org**



Dear comrades,

The working class is raising its voice against exploitation, repression, unemployment, misery, and imperialist war at a time when the bourgeoisie is stepping up its offensive.

Right in this period, it is crucially important to achieve the international unity of struggle of the working class against capitalism.

As internationalist communists our efforts are aimed at creating the internationalist revolutionary organisation needed by the proletariat in this struggle and preparing the way for its victory.

In these revolutionary feelings, we send you our May Day greetings and also greet the May Day of all the workers of the world.

**Marksist Tutum, Turkey —
www.marksist.com**

Dhaka factory tragedy: capitalism is guilty

By Ellie Clarke

On the afternoon of 24 April, Rana Plaza, an eight-storey building housing textile factories in Savar, a suburb of the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, collapsed. When rescuers gave up searching for survivors on 29 April, the official death toll was 380.

Local police ordered an evacuation of the building on Tuesday 23 April after workers reported cracks in the building's structure. The factory owners ignored these concerns and forced more than 2,000 workers to remain in the building. Workers reported the use of intimidation tactics, including threats of docking pay, to silence those who spoke out.

The police have arrested Mahbubur Rahman Tapas and Balzul Samad Adnan, the bosses of New Wave Style (the company which operated in the factory), and two engineers involved in the planning of the complex, on charges of criminal negligence. It is believed the foundations were laid inadequately. Mohammed Sohel Rana, the building owner, has been taken into custody after attempting to evade arrest.

The aid effort has been slow, with few resources pumped into it. The owner of the factory is influential and politically connected to the government. The building was never properly planned or regulated; the Mayor of Savar gave permission to build the complex on marshland without proper authority.

Textiles is one of the biggest industries in Bangladesh, employing around three million workers in 4,500 factories.

PRODUCE

The minimum wage is around £25 per month. Bangladeshi factories produce garments for many major UK high-street retailers, including Primark and H&M. The Rana Plaza factory supplied Primark and Matalan.

While this tragedy has one of the highest death tolls, it is by no means unique. Official figures show that more than 700 people have died since 2005 due to poor working conditions, and countless more have been injured.

Only five months ago a factory fire in the same region claimed the lives of 117 workers. The factory failed to meet basic health and safety standards and had no fire safety certificate.

Three supervisors were arrested on charges of criminal negligence, which included padlocking the exits to stop workers leaving the building. Despite this, the owner denies his factories are unsafe, and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina went as far as blaming the workers for the fire calling it an "act of sabotage" and citing other cases where workers were caught starting fires.

The 24 April collapse sparked a wave of protest across Bangladesh's industrial regions. Thousands of workers walked out of their workplaces, occupied major roads, and clashed with police, who reacted with rubber bullets and tear gas to control the crowds.

The strikes and protests have had an effect. The government's original reaction was to downplay the incident and defend the bosses, with Hasina claiming that the building was in the process of being evacuated and that workers became trapped because they went back to collect their belongings.

Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir, the head of the Ministry of Home Affairs, blamed the collapse on members of the opposition Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP) physically shaking the building in a strike they called two days previously.

This stance changed due to public pressure. Hasina later

Join the protests!

The National Garment Workers' Federation (NGWF) in Bangladesh has launched a petition. It asks UK high street chains Primark, Mango and Matalan to commit to forcing their Bangladeshi suppliers to comply with the Bangladesh Fire and Building Safety Agreement.

We also demand that the big chains should force suppliers to allow trade unions to organise in their factories and to negotiate with workers' own representatives.

AWL calls on other socialists and trade unionists to join us in protests outside Primark, Mango, and Matalan shops to raise these demands. Contact us on 07796 690 874.

• NGWF petition online: bit.ly/savar

promised justice for the workers and called for the arrest of the factory owners. The Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu told reporters: "I wouldn't call it an accident... I would say it's a murder."

As the anger of the workers in Bangladesh grows, the tragedy is being used as a point scoring device between the political parties. The BNP, along with 17 other opposition parties, has called another general strike for 2 May under the banner of solidarity with the affected workers.

Recent upsurges in garment worker militancy have not been controlled by the bourgeois political opposition, however.

Formal union organisation is difficult due to legal restrictions on unions' right to access workplaces. Independent unions such as the National Garment Workers' Federation (NGWF) have organised some campaigns and direct action, but are forced to function more as external workers' advice centres, with only a clandestine presence in workplaces themselves.

Many strikes and protests have been semi-spontaneous. In June 2012, there were mass strikes, protests, and a four-day lockout of more than 500,000 workers. Workers were demanding increases in the minimum wage.

Between right-wing bourgeois opposition parties, Stalinist parties, and Islamists, Bangladeshi workers risk becoming a political football whose struggles are manipulated. They need to form independent unions and political organisations to assert their own interests.

The deaths at Rana Plaza are modern global capitalism stripped bare. Every corner is cut, every possible saving made, to allow bosses to squeeze out more profits, even if it means risking the lives of hundreds of workers.

That exploitation can only be defeated at the point at which it takes place — in the workplace itself.

Strong unions are the key to preventing another Rana Plaza

By Eric Lee



The collapse of the Rana Plaza in Bangladesh has horrified people all over the world. Everyone wants to see something done about it, to ensure that it never happens again.

But not everyone agrees on what needs to be done. Last week, at the request of the IndustriALL global union federation which represents textile and garment workers around the world, LabourStart launched an online campaign. IndustriALL's text, which came in part from their affiliate unions in Bangladesh, demanded that the Bangladeshi government "take urgent action to guarantee freedom of association and improve building and fire safety and the minimum wage for the more than three million garment workers in Bangladesh."

The campaign pointed out that "Working for a minimum wage of US\$38 per month, less than one percent of garment workers in Bangladesh are represented by a union. The Labour Law leaves workers unable to join a union and fight for safe workplaces, improved working conditions and better wages."

It put the right to join a union at the centre of the campaign. Tens of thousands of people learned about our campaign due to a promotion on Facebook and thousands of them signed up. But many of them posted comments which typically

asked what we, as consumers, could do.

Many people wanted an online campaign to put pressure on those huge Western clothing chains like Primark and Walmart. Others talked about boycotting those shops. Many argued that the problem was cheap clothing — only if we paid more for clothing could people in Bangladesh have a decent life. Some proposed that we only buy fair-traded clothing.

The focus of many of these comments seemed to be entirely on how through our shopping we could make the world a better place. This strikes me as well-intentioned but also patronising — and ultimately ineffective.

A decade ago I worked for an NGO in London that had been asked to do a campaign to promote mine safety around the world. They did a beautiful poster with a slogan that I've never forgotten: "The stronger the union, the safer the mine."

It's a simple idea, but an enormously powerful one. The workers in Bangladesh need better laws to protect their health and safety at work, they need labour inspectors to enforce those laws, and we in the West can of course help pressure their government and employers.

But, above all, they need the only tool that workers have ever discovered that really does protect them at work: trade unions. Strong trade unions will ensure that health and safety laws are passed and are enforced. Strong unions can compel an employer to reduce risks in the workplace.

I'm very skeptical about the idea that we can shop our way to a better world by "buying ethically". It certainly feels better to buy a fair-traded product, but in the end, is that all we can do? Just make ourselves into nicer, more caring consumers?

The terrible tragedy at the Rana Plaza should remind us that we are far more than consumers — we are workers, members of a huge and powerful global movement that when united and focussed on a goal can change the world.

Solidarity — not ethical shopping — is what the garment workers of Bangladesh are demanding.

Bangladeshi socialist indicts the system

tion for the families of the people who were killed and help for those who are in hospital.

They are demanding a specific building safety code. There are many other potentially dangerous garment factories which need investigating.

The owner of the Rana Plaza has been arrested, the government is committed to get him tried in court, but according to the current building code he will only get a three year imprisonment. This not the proper punishment for him. After three years he will be free to do more harm to the workers.

The protests are demanding a new law so that in future no owners of buildings and factories cannot get away with this kind of thing.

Similar things have happened in Dhaka in the past. Last year in November, 112 people were burned to death at a fire in a garment factory (Tazreen Fashion). The owner of that factory (Delwar Hossain) was never punished.

Is your party raising any special demands or ideas?

We talk about the question of safety at work. We also raise the question of the system, and the workers' place in the system. We want to create workers' counter-hegemony. We talk about the need for revolution. Workers need rights but this society cannot provide those rights. Only workers can solve these problems.

What about the ability of the workers to organise in trade unions and those unions to exercise control over

health and safety?

Garment workers have a legal right to trade unions but organisers are not allowed into the factories to build trade unions. The law is on the workers' side but the owners defy it. This is especially true in the Special Economic Zones.

The lack of trade unions means many bad things happen to the workers. The organisation among the garment workers has also, to some extent, been also corrupted by government institutions.

Some garment workers are being used by the government. Some garment workers have collaborated with the owners. And this is doing harm to a united movement. But, on the whole, garment workers are very militant and the protests have been strong.

The main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, and is trying to take control of the protests.

Yes, the opposition is using the protests and all kinds of struggles, even those built by the garment workers. And they have strong links with religious extremist groups. But when the opposition were in power they did the same things to the garment workers.

That garment workers are part of the "formal sector" — what about workers in the informal sector?

Workers in the informal sector are even more vulnerable. At least there are laws in favour of formal workers. Most workers are in the informal sector, and outside the law. Again, organisation is key.

Badrul Alam (third from left)

Badrul Alam from the Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist) spoke to *Solidarity*

What demands have the workers been making in the strikes and protests over this disaster?

They are demanding the trial of the owner of the collapsed building and the arrest of the owners of the five factories in the building. They also want safety in all workplaces, proper treatment from the owners, compensa-



East Midlands Central

Happy International Workers' Day to readers of *Solidarity* from the East Midlands Central branch of the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT)



May Day greetings from Camden No. 3 branch of RMT

www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/camden3branch

Central Line East
 RMT unity is strength →

Greetings and solidarity from the RMT members on the east end of the Central Line

RMT Stratford No. 1 — www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/stratford1branch

An injury to one



Is an injury to all

May Day greetings from the Nottinghamshire, Mansfield & Nottingham Trades Union Council.

Solidarity can win.

www.nottstuc.org

**BOB
 CARNEGIE
 DEFENCE
 COMMITTEE**

Dear Comrades,

Please accept the warmest May Day greetings from the Bob Carnegie Defence Committee. May Day is the workers' day and a time to celebrate and reflect on the life of our movement and our own individual involvement in it.

The struggle in Great Britain is also our struggle in Australia. The work comrades in Great Britain have done in supporting our defence committee has inspired us particularly when things have been going poorly.

Once again, from the bottom of our hearts, thanks for your help and support.

In Solidarity,
 Bob Carnegie
bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com

- **Sick pay**
- **Holidays**
- **Pensions**

Hello comrades.

We are fighting for "3 cosas" (3 things) which are very important to us as cleaners. We want to have the privileges that direct employees of the University have — sick pay, holidays, and a pension.

So we'll fight for those things that we deserve, as we're not different from the direct employees and furthermore we do the important work of cleaning the University.

(Olga Nelly Alvarez on behalf of the 3 Cosas Campaign of outsourced University of London workers)

facebook.com/3coca • twitter.com/3cosascampaign

The Warsaw ghetto and the meaning of resistance

By Al Findley

Warsaw wrote two brilliant chapters in its history during the war, and also entered a dark blot on its pages.

The first was the uprising, against the Nazi occupation, of the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto, starting on 19 April 1943 and lasting about six weeks. This struggle of the Jews, and especially of the Jewish workers, against overwhelming odds is one of the most glorious episodes in the book of struggles of oppressed peoples and labour for freedom.

The second event took place a year and a half later in October 1944. This, often referred to as the Warsaw Insurrection, was the work of the Polish underground against the Nazi overlords. Despite heroic efforts, both attempts at freedom failed but they remain a source of inspiration and encouragement in demonstrating to mankind the extent to which men are capable of heroic sacrifice in the fight for liberty.

The blot that hangs over Warsaw is the fact that there was little or no support from the Polish underground to the Jews of the ghetto.

When the Nazis occupied Poland, they, pushed the Jews into ghettos and isolated them from the rest of the population. Beginning in the spring of 1942 there were deportation to concentration camps, where the Jews — men, women and children — were exterminated in gas chambers and crematoriums. The Nazis told the deportees that they were being shipped to work in war factories. It took some time before any inkling of the truth — which was so horrible and inhuman that even the victims found it hard to believe — was discovered.

In the fall of 1942 there was talk of resistance against the Nazis. The conservative elements among the Jews opposed "rash" action, fearing that it would provoke complete extermination. They still hoped that there was a little truth in the Nazis' pretext about war work. The Polish government-in-exile and the Allied powers refused to give arms to the Jews on the grounds that resistance was futile. By now, only 40,000 Jews remained out of a previous population of 400,000.

In the winter of 1942 there was some sporadic underground resistance. The Nazis held off complete liquidation of the ghetto for a few months. In April they resumed the campaign to exterminate the Jews. The time was effectively used by the Jews to collect and manufacture arms and to form a fighting organisation. On the Passover of 1943 — 19 April — they launched their revolt against the Nazis and drove them from the ghetto.

The underground forces of the Polish government-in-exile gave them no aid whatsoever. Despite the pleas and demands of the Jewish representatives in the government, they did not even issue a proclamation in support of the uprising until late in May, fearing to antagonise anti-semitic elements among the Poles.

The Polish labour movement, the PPS (there was no Stalinist underground to speak of), was generous with its moral support and resolutions, but extremely niggardly with material aid. There is dispute over whether the Jews received any aid from them. The evidence, I believe, shows that a few crumbs of aid were received but these amounted to almost nothing.

The leaders of the Bund (Jewish socialist group) made a direct appeal for help to the underground organisations of the Polish workers, if not help with arms then at least through a strike. The latter refused; they were divided by anti-semitism. Many sympathised with the Jews but the general attitude among the non-Jewish population was one of unconcern for the fate of the Jews.

The record and action of the great powers of the Allied bloc — both the "humanitarian" democrats of the West and Stalin's totalitarian state — belong to the most infamous chapters in the history of mankind. None of them lifted a finger to prevent the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis. During the uprising there was no attempt to divert the Nazis, no arms were given, no bombings were ordered. Not even their voices were lifted in support.

While Russia was nearer and therefore perhaps bears a greater share of the responsibility, since it was physically possible for it to have helped more, all the partners must take the guilt. There was not even a demand that the Nazis treat the fighters of the ghetto as prisoners of war.

(Later on in 1944 in the second revolt, the Warsaw insurrection of the Polish underground, in which the few surviving Jews participated, the valiant fighters met apathy from the West and betrayal from the East. The Moscow regime, after having called for a revolt, deliberately halted its army before Warsaw and allowed Hitler to destroy the Polish labour movement. The Stalinists thus spared themselves the need of doing the dirty job themselves, since no more than Hitler could they tolerate an independent workers' movement not under their control.)

ORGANISATION

The ghetto battle of 1943 was far from being a blind fight by hunted unorganised individuals who were interested solely in saving their lives.

The uprising was well organised and was the accomplishment primarily of Jewish workers. While the Bund was the prime force in its organization, the Hashomer Hatzair, a left-wing socialist-Zionist movement, also played an important role. A central fighting organisation was formed. The Germans were forced to retreat and, in the first weeks, lost about 2,000 men. They had to set up a virtual general staff to fight the intrepid, untrained Jewish fighters, who had only the most elementary weapons.

The Warsaw Ghetto uprising belongs not only to the Jewish people but is also part of the heritage of the working class. The bourgeois elements hesitated. The Agudas Israel, an orthodox-Jewish force, did not participate, while the Revisionists (rightist Zionist group) had a small independent vengeance organisation which fought a few days.

The Ghetto Uprising would not have taken place without the background of years of socialist agitation and organisation which lay behind the Jewish workers.

It is not true that every desperate man chooses to die fighting. Once the chance of personal survival is gone, the average person caves in, in despair, and awaits the end. Only those with an understanding of the political meaning of resistance, those with a sense of history, those with a larger view than the immediate threat, choose to die not in blind desperation but with a purpose.

They knew the political meaning of resistance

Their whole socialist past had prepared the fighters not merely for a last act of vengeance against the hated enemy but for a blow for freedom and against anti-semitism. The documents of these martyrs are filled with the one hope, that their act would arouse the world.

The Nazis had left to the last on their list those who were working in factories. The ghetto in its last days was therefore preponderantly proletarian.

Until they had met the ghetto resistance, the strength of the SS troops lay in their myth of invincibility. The ghetto fighters exploded this legend. The despised Jewish workers, armed with pistols and crude home-made grenades, proved more than a match for the SS.

The Nazis were able to win only by using planes, flame-throwers, tanks and higher concentration of artillery than was used in the siege of Warsaw in 1939. The Germans were forced to burn the entire ghetto to end the resistance.

The battle of the ghetto was a catastrophic moral defeat for the Nazis, a defeat from which they never really recovered in Poland. The Polish underground learned a great deal from the ghetto fighting, which blazed the path to the 1944 insurrection which was so cynically betrayed by the Kremlin.

Warsaw stands as a profound symbol of our times. Crushed on the one hand by the forces of fascist capitalism and on the other side by counter-revolutionary Stalinism, with the quiet acquiescence of the capitalist democracies, this betrayed city mirrors the forces of modern civilisation and its fight for survival.

The indifference of the world to the fate of the Jews during the war and the utter breakdown of all human decency in the battle of the ghetto is no mere passing phenomenon. It was an indication of how fast decay can spread, and at what an awful speed barbarism can replace the habits of "Western civilisation." At the same time Warsaw is added proof that Stalinism, far from being a barrier to social decay, is itself the epitome of barbarism. Warsaw stands as a star lesson of the inhumanity that grows out of the seeds of anti-semitism and racial doctrines. This lesson must sink deeply into the consciousness of everyone.

Warsaw stands as an object lesson to those of the oppressed peoples, and also those in the labour and socialist movements, who look to one or another of the great powers of the world for salvation and aid. Their indifference to, and betrayal of, the Warsaw struggle should be enough to warn that this is reliance on a broken reed.

The memory of the ghetto fighters is enrolled in the great book of revolutionary heroes along with the martyrs of the Paris Commune of 1871, of the Spartacus League of 1918 in Germany, of the Austrian Schutzbund of the 1934 civil war, and of the Spanish militiamen of the fight against Franco. They are part of the great tradition of the fight for socialist freedom.

• From *Labor Action*, 20 April 1953

Ideas for Freedom 2013: Marxist ideas to turn the tide

A weekend of socialist debate and discussion

Friday 21-Sunday 23 June, University of London Union

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For more info, and to book tickets, see workersliberty.org/ideas

The anti-imperialist united front

The final part of Paul Hampton's review article looking at the themes of John Riddell's book of documents* from the early communist movement.

The Fourth Congress adopted a call for an anti-imperialist united front in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, aimed at "the mobilisation of all revolutionary forces" in "an extended, lengthy struggle against world imperialism".

The expression was new, but the concept of an anti-imperialist united front had been effectively endorsed at the Second Comintern Congress and by the Congress of the Peoples of the East in Baku in 1920.

At the Fourth Congress, the need for an anti-imperialist united front was first voiced by the Indian delegate M N Roy, who had been a key participant at the Second Congress, submitting his own theses, with an amended version added to Lenin's draft after the discussion in the commission. But Roy's speech, like the congress resolution, was a combination of insight and confusion.

Roy identified some important trends. He observed that "imperialism is right now making the attempt to save itself through the development of industry in colonial countries". India was permitted during the war "adequate industrial development". Roy denounced as "mechanical" the idea that capitalist development in the colonies was impossible or would always be constrained by imperialism.

The resolution registered the emergence of a "new workers' movement in the East" that was "the result of the recent development of indigenous capitalism" and suggested the Communist parties in the colonies and semi-colonies had a dual task of organising "the working and peasant masses for the struggle for their special class interests" as well fighting to lead the "bourgeois democratic revolution, aimed at winning political independence".

Roy argued that the national-revolutionary struggle in these countries "can achieve ultimate victory only under the leadership of the workers and peasants, that is, of a political party that represents them". He also recognised that the bourgeoisie in the colonial and semi-colonial countries was not a revolutionary force: "unfortunately arrived too late on the scene, 150 years too late, and is in no way ready to play the role of liberator".

However Roy also used some loose formulations, which opened a path to the slippage that followed the Fourth Congress, when the increasingly Stalinised Comintern adopted formulas such as the "bloc of four classes" and "workers' and peasants' parties" with disastrous results. For example Roy argued that "fundamentally, the national movement in the colonial and semi-colonial countries is objectively revolutionary" and that the goal of the anti-imperialist united front was "to organise all available revolutionary forces into a great united front against imperialism".

Communists should support the liberation battles against colonialism of the plebeians of the colonies, among whom modern working classes were only incipient forces; and (this was the implicit assumption) the political weight of the workers' state in the USSR and the strong worker-based CPs of Europe could draw these plebeian movements into alliance.

The prototype for Comintern work had been the efforts of Sneevliet in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), where socialists had entered the Sarekat Islam organisation and recruited cadres who formed the Indonesian Communist Party in 1920.

The organisation's delegate Tan Malaka spoke with great passion at the Fourth Congress about this experience, managing to extend his speaking time when told to wind up by replying: "I come from the Indies; I travelled for forty days". He strongly advocated support for pan-Islamic movements. He said: "We have been asked in public meetings: 'Are you a Muslim, yes or no? Do you believe in God, yes or no?' And how did we answer? 'Yes, I said, 'when I stand before God, I am a Muslim, but when I stand before man, I am not a Muslim'... With the Quran in hand, we inflicted a defeat on their leaders". He argued that pan-Islamism had once had "a historical meaning, signifying that Islam must conquer the entire world, sword in hand". But now, "the Holy war lost its significance" and pan-Islamism now meant "the nationalist

Events demonstrated the limitations of Comintern policy. In April 1927, Kuomintang forces massacred their former allies, the leftist students, worker-activists and Communists.

freedom struggle... the liberation struggle against the different imperialist powers of the world".

Malaka was supported by other delegates, such as Tahar Boudengha from Tunisia, who also denounced the chauvinism of the French party's members in Algeria. The main reporter on the "Eastern Question" resolution, Willem van Ravesteyn, said that "in this world-historic struggle for the political liberation of Islam, the revolutionary proletariat has the duty to devote its full attention and provide all possible moral support". The Islamic peoples "have it in their power to destroy the bridge that sustains British imperialism" and that "the liberation of the Islamic world from every form of European political domination... would lead unavoidably to the fall of Western imperialism".

These discussions all took place before the emergence of political Islam in its modern form (the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928). Given the subsequent history, particularly of the involvement of Islamic parties in the massacre of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965 and of course Islamism in North Africa and elsewhere, it would be ridiculous to transpose these expressions of solidarity in 1922 onto today's conditions and forces. The Second Comintern Congress had taken a sharply critical line towards pan-Islam in Lenin's theses — accommodating to religious political forces was not part of the Comintern approach.

Interestingly, van Ravesteyn referred to the struggle under the British mandate in Palestine in terms that seem very reasonable, acknowledging both national movements despite the overwhelming predominance of Arabs compared to the Jewish population (about 10 to 1) at the time. He said: "The two dominant forces, Jewish and Arab, are both discontented... British rule has not been capable of achieving even a limited degree of peaceful collaboration between the nationalities in the new Palestine". In spite of the anti-imperialist rhetoric, the complexities of various national questions were not forgotten.

CHINA

Another significant test for the Comintern strategy was China.

Liu Renjing argued that "starting from the principle that that an anti-imperialist united front should be established to drive imperialism out of China, our party decided to achieve a united front with the national-revolutionary Kuomintang Party". He argued that "we can only combat imperialism if we unite our forces — those of the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat", yet went on to suggest "we can gather the masses around us and split the Kuomintang Party".

At the root of the anti-imperialist united front tactic was an assessment, well articulated by Radek. He said: "Comrades, you must understand that in China neither the victory of socialism nor the establishment of a soviet republic is on the agenda. Unfortunately, the question of national unity has not been historically placed on the agenda in China". The task of Communists consisted of "unifying the real forces taking shape in the working class with two goals: first, organising the young working class, and second, establishing a proper relationship between them and the objectively revolutionary bourgeois forces". He urged Chinese members to "Get out of the Confucian scholars' reading rooms and go to the masses!".

Few disputed the tactic of joining the Kuomintang at the time it was propagated in 1922, not even Trotsky. However, by 1925 it had become clear that Chinese workers were engaging in their own class struggles, for which an independent

Communist party was necessary. Also the bourgeois forces around the Kuomintang were becoming openly counter-revolutionary. In March 1927 the Kuomintang military forces massacred the Communists in Shanghai.

As Trotsky forewarned, events in China indicated two central limitations of the Fourth Congress conception of the anti-imperialist united front.

First, it was not grounded in the realities of the class structures of many of the most "backward" states — the combined and uneven development of the world economy meant sufficient class differentiation had already taken place in the colonies causing antagonism between workers and other classes.

Second, the perspective of permanent revolution — in which the organised working class was central to making the bourgeois revolution (including fighting for national independence, a democratic republic and land reform) and in the process preparing itself for making a socialist revolution — was desperately in need of generalisation beyond Russia. That is what Trotsky began to do in the aftermath of the Chinese debacle. In the process, he abandoned the term "anti-imperialist united front".

Today, after almost another century of capitalist development, it is difficult to see in what circumstances an alliance between working class forces and bourgeois or petty-bourgeois parties in an anti-imperialist united front would be anything other than a snare for workers. The last century is littered with examples where trade unions and socialist (and Communist) parties have subordinated themselves to other forces which have turned out to be Bonapartist or worse. The early Comintern never forgot the watchword of class independence, even as it sought to utilise anti-colonial struggles to the advantage of workers' movements and Soviet Russia. The anti-imperialist united front, underdeveloped and undertheorised by the early Comintern in very different conditions from today, is best confined to the history books.

RELEVANCE

What is the relevance of the Fourth Congress discussions today, when circumstances in the world and in labour movements are so different?

It would be wrong to take a scriptural approach and mechanically transpose assessments of realities then on to today. Hence the assessment of contemporary imperialism must be recast in the light of a more integrated, uneven and combined global capitalism in the early 21st century. Here the historical context behind slogans such as the anti-imperialist united front need to be understood, because these are the reasons why this particular approach should be rejected. Similarly, there are different political conclusions to draw for our assessment of the modern, more diffuse women's movement.

However it would also be a mistake to dismiss the early Comintern as merely the work of "dead Russians" or a matter of a bygone age. The early Comintern and particularly the Fourth Congress codified the lessons from the highest level of working class struggle seen so far in history.

Unfinished discussions around transitional demands, the united front and the workers' government provide fertile lines for struggles today. These lessons are not restricted to the assessment of capitalist decline, but turn on the importance of winning the majority of the working class. They are not restricted only to situations where Marxists have already organised mass parties — after all, how can such parties be built unless the revolutionaries struggle alongside reformist workers and convince them? Nor are they restricted only to pre-revolutionary situations when the fight for power may soon be on the agenda.

Riddell has done a herculean job editing this volume and his previous ones to bring the Comintern to life. But politically he wants to reclaim the workers' government (or workers' and farmers' government) slogan because he believes that Cuba and Nicaragua were originally, and Venezuela and Bolivia are today some species of workers' government — an idea Workers' Liberty utterly rejects. Our differences are at the level of analysis, from which different political conclusions follow.

The misuse of transitional demands, the united front and the workers' government by sections of the Marxist left does not destroy their importance.

• Riddell's website has a number of useful articles: johnriddell.wordpress.com

Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International (Haymarket, 2012)

Sussex Uni workers build for strikes

By Ira Berkovic

Sussex University branches of the University and College Union (UCU) and Unite have both returned large majorities for strikes against outsourcing in indicative ballots.

UCU members vote returned a 75% majority on a 60% turnout, and the Unite ballot returned a 93% majority on a 70% turnout. Unison, which conducted a "membership survey" on industrial action, has yet to release its results. They are due on Thursday 9 May, but many workers say they have yet to receive their papers so are fighting for an extension in order to allow them to vote.

Workers could strike against the outsourcing of 235 jobs at the university, mainly from the lowest-

paid sectors of the Sussex workforce including cleaners, catering staff, porters, and security workers. The Sussex Against Privatisation campaign, which involves workers and students, has staged occupations and other direct actions on campus, including a months-long occupation of Bramber House which lasted from 7 February to 2 April. There have also been demonstrations of several hundred on campus in support of the occupiers and against privatisation. A national demonstration on 25 March mobilised 2,000 people.

Central to the recent mobilisations has been the 'Pop-Up Union'.

The Pop-Up Union is a new body on campus open to all workers, of any grade, which has given rank-and-file workers a ve-

hicle through which to coordinate and organise when official trade unions, particularly Unison, have been sluggish. An activist involved told *Solidarity*:

"Whilst staff had previously been very active and militant in the initial stages of the campaign, their engagement had dissipated with the passing of time.

"What was once a militant membership pushing for strike action, became a disheartened membership that was rapidly decreasing

in numbers. Industrial action of any kind had been effectively wiped off the internal discussions of Unison, and the leadership was wholeheartedly committed to negotiating the 'best deal for their members' regardless of what may be lost in the process. The other two unions followed suit, and the focus of the established trade unions on campus was effectively diverted away from campaigning towards negotiations.

"We need to be critical of trade union bureaucracies when that is needed, and work with them when we can. At Sussex, we have done both. Even today, the Pop-Up Union is actively [...] encouraging members to join unions to fight from within. However, the struggle at Sussex has also highlighted the fact that sometimes, when the bu-

reaucracy refuses to move, the workers can move themselves.

"Temporary trade unions can never be long-term solutions to a bureaucratised trade union movement. They can, however, be the appropriate tools for pushing the movement forward and potentially securing victories at a time when the labour movement so desperately needs one."

A timetable for official strikes at Sussex has yet to be discussed. The Pop-Up Union has begun collecting money for a hardship fund for the 235, which so far has collected over £800.

For more information, see popupunion.org

• Adriano Merota from the University of Sussex was speaking to Daniel Lemberger Cooper from *Solidarity*.

**Reinstate Lee Rock!
Sheffield civil servants to strike on 7 May — see bit.ly/reinstalee**

More industrial news online

- **CWU conference report** — bit.ly/cwuconf2013
- **Local government pay offer is 1%** — bit.ly/locgovpay
- **TUC general council debates "general strike"** — bit.ly/tucgenstrike

Newsquest pay battle

By Bill Holmes

Journalists working for regional newspapers across the country are campaigning for better pay.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has launched a petition calling for an end to a pay freeze at Newsquest.

Editorial staff have endured a pay freeze — in real terms a pay cut — four years in the last five while workloads steadily rise as employees are not replaced and titles expanded.

Newsquest, which owns 17 daily and more than 200 weekly titles around the UK, is owned by American media giant Gannett, which is to pay out \$1.3bn to shareholders

over the next two years.

A senior journalist with two years' experience earns a typical £21,000 before tax, but company accounts show Newsquest chief executive Paul Davidson received £598,441 in salary in 2011.

An NUJ member who works for Newsquest said: "Year on year we are being flogged harder and harder just to satisfy shareholders with a payout.

"All we want is a fair wage which recognises our working conditions and allows us to live.

"Editorial comment pieces tell readers Newsquest is 'investing in quality journalism', but from behind the scenes the opposite is true."

To sign the petition visit bit.ly/newsquest

Leadership in charge at Unison Health

By a conference delegate

Unison Health conference (22-24 April) discussed attacks on the NHS, defending "Agenda for Change" (our national pay, terms and conditions), and union organising.

On every issue, the leadership showed their hold over the health sector of the union. The passing of the Section 75 Regulations during the week, which signalled the government's smashing up of the NHS, went almost unnoticed. There was no real sense amongst most delegates of the NHS crisis or of the battering workers are taking.

The debate on the lead-

ership's recent sell-out over Agenda for Change (where they accepted attacks to it without any fight at all) summed up the conference. Motions trying to hold the Service Group Executive to account for their actions lost heavily. The leadership's strategy to give away national T&Cs in the vague hope that this would stave off worse attacks later won the day, despite having already been proven to be unsuccessful (South West Ambulance Service is planning to employ all new starters on non-Agenda for Change contracts from May).

Motions calling for strike ballots on pay were defeated. The leadership's slight turn towards an "organising agenda" of sorts

over the last two years was also reversed, with a return to promoting the union as a service-based, personal insurance provider.

There were good signs of action developing locally with reports of the Mid Yorkshire strike and action within learning disability services in Oxfordshire and East Midlands. Mid Yorks have just announced a new ballot of all 3,000 members which could see more strikes from 10 June.

At a fringe meeting organised by the Health-worker bulletin, it was agreed to promote a 4:1 staffing ratio campaign, and to launch a blog linked to the Health Activist email list.

Teachers strike against Academy bid

By Jonny West

Teachers at Hamstead Hall School in Birmingham struck on Thursday 25 April, in protest at plans to turn their school into an Academy.

National Union of Teachers officials denounced the school management's "total lack of consultation" in the decision to bid for Academy

status. "The teachers don't know why the school wants to become an academy and are worried the school times and the terms of their employment will change", an NUT officer said.

Teachers are also worried by the school's plan to "sponsor" a local primary school if it achieves Academy status, possibly paving the way for the

primary school to become an Academy too.

The strike closed the school entirely for Years 8, 9, and 10, and restricted classes in other years. Over 40 teachers picketed the school.

Messages of support can be sent to joint NUT school rep Thomas Giles at ThomasG@hamsteadhall.com

Sheffield drugs workers' anti-cuts fight

By a Unite rep

In February a 10% cut was announced to two of Sheffield's drug service budgets, to run from this April.

Unite members have been fighting the cut by the funding body and the threat of redundancies from our employer.

Low pay, hard emotional work, and an endless carousel of TUPE transfers and redundancies make the voluntary care sector a tough place to work and to organise. Despite this, in one service (the Arundel Street Project), Unite members

have gone from a few members to 100% density in two years. Faced with this year's budget cut, a powerful media campaign, a lively demonstration involving workers and service users, and coordinated lobbying of MPs and councillors heaped pressure on the Drug and Alcohol Coordination Team commissioners.

Meanwhile, frequent members' meetings at the workplace kept the staff united and the decisions democratic. Workers refused to accept management's insistence on the need to make these supposedly "fair" cuts. Unfortunately, the commissioners have not backed down. Workers have been able to block compulsory redundancies and several have accepted tiny reductions in their weekly hours in order to protect those colleagues most at risk of being picked off by management.

The next step is to draw together drug workers from across the city, and across the unions, in order to prevent the next tranche of cuts, likely to come early in 2014.

Organising resistance in the voluntary sector is hard, but can and must be done.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Dockers demonstrate outside the Cheung Kong Centre, headquarters of Hutchinson Whampoa Ltd., one of port owner Li Ka-Shing's companies. One worker holds an image of Li with devil horns and the word "monster" on his forehead.

Dock workers and the Hong Kong government have entered renewed talks as the longest strike in the history of the Hong Kong container terminal continues. Although the waiting time for ships has reduced from 60 hours (at the beginning of the strike in March) to around 25, commentators say the strike is still having a huge impact on the port's functioning.

Port bosses have hired new workers to undermine the strike, but union representatives say that claims the strike is over are "nonsense". Lee Cheuk-yan, the general secretary of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, said the workers' pay demand was "open to discussion", but that an increase "in double-digits" was a bottom line.

Workers have been demanding an increase of 23%.

Ukip: party for retired dentists?

By Gerry Bates

Godfrey Bloom, MEP for the United Kingdom Independence Party (Ukip), which threatens to scoop many Tory votes in the May elections, has told Ukip leaders: "We do not have the resources to write serious papers on major subjects, why reinvent the wheel? Why not buy policy 'off the shelf'?"

He suggests that the party literally pay right-wing think-tanks to write policies for it, since otherwise the party will be dogged by "retired den-

tists, who understand the most intricate political solutions for the nation" and will argue at length about their own crank idea for suppressing migrants, trade unionists, and all other threats to their way of life (including lesbians and gays: Ukip recently sacked the leader of its youth section for supporting gay marriage).

Bloom's own previous outbursts explain why he does well not to trust himself to write policy.

He has declared that "no employer with a brain in the right place would employ a young, single, free woman".

"You don't stand as Labour to cut services"

Geoff Lumley is Labour Councillor for Newport East on the Isle of Wight. He is the only Labour councillor on the island. Geoff spoke to *Solidarity* about the council elections on 2 May, which take place mostly in county councils like IoW rather than city councils.

In 2009 I stood for re-election in Newport East, a traditional working-class constituency, on a clear non-New Labour platform.

We achieved an 11% swing in our favour, on an evening when Labour councillors across the country were losing their seats because of their association with Gordon Brown's New Labour government.

The 2 May council elections need to send a message to the Coalition and in particular to the Liberal Democrats that people are cheesed off with austerity. I expect to see Labour gains across the country and hope to see gains in the south. In particular I would like to see other Labour councillors elected on the Isle of Wight. The campaign is going well on the island, and we are hoping for a group of five or six Labour councillors that can have a greater influence over island politics. We have had eight years of a Tory council who have enjoyed themselves cutting services and jobs. I think they will lose their majority and we might hold the balance of power in a hung council.

I am not for entering coalitions. There are hardly any Liberal Democrat candidates on the island. The Labour Party is standing candidates in almost half the 40 wards. A lot of Lib Dems have gone into hiding as independents. The argument for tactical voting, which has

been used heavily in the past on the Isle of Wight, has disappeared from the Liberal Democrats' approach, but some of the independents still use it.

Ukip came second in the European elections in 2009. They will take votes off the Tories and they have 29 candidates. They are running a high profile campaign. The Tories are very scared about their potential impact.

Labour councillors wherever they may be have to argue very clearly for a different economic strategy. Austerity-lite will not work. We need a Keynesian strategy, with economic growth as our aim. Every year I propose alternative budgets to the Council, which are balanced budgets. They are usually supported by all the opposition councillors. I work to defend jobs and frontline services; I am less supportive of things such as the Council's media service, which is a propaganda machine — I think things like that can be cut.

You don't stand as a Labour politician to cut services. I'm not sure how comfortable I would be being a councillor in an area where Labour were in power and having to implement cuts.

This week, the right-wing media has been trying to whip up splits in the party. I respect Len McCluskey. I also supported Ed Miliband in the leadership election. I would rather have supported John McDonnell, but unfortunately he wasn't on the ballot paper.

I have been an active trade unionist all my life, and I understand where McCluskey is coming from, but Miliband has to have one eye on being in government and I think he is doing okay.

Geoff is a supporter of Councillors Against Cuts. Above, trade unionists rally to defend Warrington Labour councillor Kevin Bennett, suspended for voting against cuts.

Ukip MEP Godfrey Bloom, noted sexist.