



# world revolution

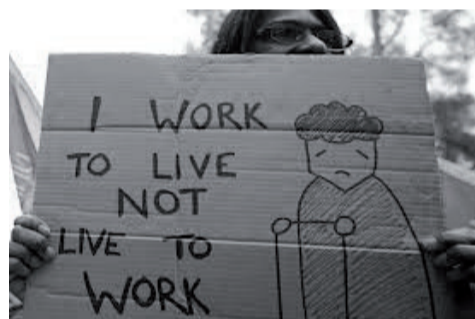
## Attacks on benefits Once again workers forced to pay for the crisis

At the start of 2013 the UK's Coalition government voted in the latest tranche of austerity measures aimed at reducing the budget deficit. The Spending Review put forward by George Osborne factored in the planned attacks on welfare benefits and pensions. These attacks have been phased in by the British bourgeoisie over a number of years and didn't start with the Lib-Cons coming to power. The attacks are plainly focussed on the working class.

To start, the government has placed a cap of 1% increase per annum for a period of three years on all welfare benefits. This has jettisoned the link of benefits to inflation that had previously been in place. When we consider that the present level for JSA is £71 (if you are 25 or over, £56.25 if under), an already impoverished situation is bound to get worse. The Department of Works and Pensions has insisted that this is not a cut, but is committed to establishing a further £10 billion 'saving' in the welfare bill in the coming period.

Iain Duncan Smith, the Secretary of State for Works and Pensions, has promised to introduce a 'Universal Benefit' which will impose a £500 ceiling on all benefits for every household. This is currently being trialled in different boroughs in the country because the DWP does not have in place the infra-structure to implement it immediately. However, the cuts will still take place. These cuts will affect JSA, working tax credits, and pension credits. The Disability Living Allowance will be replaced by a 'Personal Independence Payment'.

The cuts to child credit payment will affect 2.5 million single women workers and a further million whose partners are in work. This in effect will be throwing millions of children into poverty. The Child Poverty Action Group has said that these changes will cut 4% from benefits over the next three years. The overall plan is to subsume all payments into the one 'Universal Benefit' payment. The government will thus cut its welfare bill. All the guff about lazy 'shirkers' versus hard-working 'strivers' is just so much camouflage to hide the attacks. According to another report, this time by the Children's Society, "up to 40,000 soldiers, 300,000 nurses and 150,000 primary and nursery school teachers will lose cash, in some cases many hundreds of pounds" (Guardian 5/1/13) So much for targeting 'shirkers'!



Protesting benefit cuts

### Housing benefits: cut

The government has placed a cap of £500 per household per week on the rent of a family home. In places like London this is impossible for many to find. According to the government's own figures on risk assessment, this will affect some 2.8 million people. 400,000 of the poorest people will be included. 300,000 households stand to lose more than £300 per week.

The government in its 'war on welfare dependency' will hit the young hardest. The government intends to refuse housing benefit to the under 25's. This is to effectively throw thousands of young people onto the streets.

### Council tax benefits: cuts

The government is cutting its subsidies to local councils by 10% while leaving local authorities to implement the cuts in Council Tax payments. This will mean an average £10 per week that social tenants will have to find to supplement their rents. Those occupying dwellings which have a spare bedroom will have to find a minimum of £10 per week under the so-called 'Bedroom Tax' since they now fall into the "over occupancy" category. This will again hit young people the hardest. The homeless charity Shelter say that only 1 in 5 of rental homes are affordable to single people on benefits.

### The Labour Party's alternative workfare scheme

The Labour Party, far from being opposed to the cuts, have declared that they agree with the 'basic principle' that work for the jobless should be encouraged and should be part of a package for welfare benefits. In response to the government attacks Liam Byrne (shadow employment secretary) has come up with his own 'workfare' scheme. This scheme would see every claimant under the age of 25 who has been unemployed for more than two years forced into compulsory jobs. These workers would be paid the minimum wage only. Anyone who refused such Mickey Mouse 'jobs' would, under the Labour Party scheme,

lose 13 weeks of benefit for the first time and 26 weeks of benefits for the second time. This would not only be a way of reducing the welfare benefit costs but would also force unemployed workers into the hands of unscrupulous bosses. It is reminiscent of the 'Dole Schools' of the 1930s where, to claim the dole, you had to attend 'schools' to perform menial work or lose what little benefit you could receive.

This Labour party scheme will only mean jobs for six months, after which workers will be back on the dole - and unemployment will still remain at the same massive levels, since most workers won't qualify for the scheme anyway.

### General attack, general response

The attacks are only just beginning. The benefit cuts are part of a wider push to make the working class pick up the bill for their crisis. Governments all around the world, particularly in the centres of the 'Eurozone' like Greece and Spain, are doing the same.

If the working class is to mount any resistance to this offensive, it must reject out of hand all attempts to make it feel responsible for the crisis of capitalism, and all the nauseating campaigns about shirkers and strivers, which are aimed at dividing the working class. Unemployment and poverty are the product of capitalism in crisis and the working class can only defend itself by developing its unity in the struggle against this system.

Melmoth 12/1/13

## Inter-imperialist war ravages Syria

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## We are all scroungers now

Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne restarted an old ‘debate’ when he said that all those dependent on the welfare state for their existence were ‘scroungers’. The Labour party along with some of Osborne’s LibDem coalition partners, were astonished at the apparently provocative outburst, which relegated the greater part of the working population to the same status as the unemployed. For Osborne, the unemployed are ‘shirkers’ by definition of course, and most of his critics have difficulty distinguishing their position from his. It has become fashionable to be ‘tough’ on the unemployed, and the Labour party is making sure that it fits in with the fashion. This means that in contemporary public discourse everyone has to look as though they believe that unemployment is always a matter of choice.

Thus the Labour party has launched its latest idea of giving some of the longer-term unemployed 6 months of guaranteed work experience. This is not a fixed idea – they are just talking about it. And it only actually seems to apply to a little over 100,000 of the unemployed. But the basic idea is to show how ‘hard’ they are being on the unemployed, by insisting that anyone offered the opportunity will have to take the job. All media presentation concerning this ‘initiative’ made it very clear that the purpose was to present the Labour party as just as unyielding as the Tories in attacking the unemployed.

But the main thrust of Labour’s response to Osborne has been to say that the majority of recipients of benefit are not unemployed and not feckless shirkers. It might seem very reasonable and persuasive to argue that those who are working for a living are not shirking and so should not be denounced as scroungers. But we should note that this argument contains, albeit very quietly, the implication that there is indeed a fundamental difference between unemployed and employed workers, and carefully does not address the question of whether unemployment is voluntary. Otherwise they would have to address the issue of how unemployment actually does arise – which is a very awkward question, since it puts into question the very viability of capitalism.

We can note, in passing, that in the 1930s, when the crisis was much less developed than it is now, but when unemployment was at a much higher rate in terms of the working population, the bourgeoisie were braver than they are now. They actually did have a real, public discussion on this very question. Keynes took the view that massive, long term unemployment could not be put down to workers refusing to accept lower wages, pointing out that workers could not actually negotiate their wages individually with a prospective employer as was assumed in the economic models of the time. It was this insight that was the foundation of the Keynesian revolution in economics. In his general theory Keynes tried to show that a capitalist crisis such as the Great Depression of the 1930s was actually possible. This was ‘revolutionary’ from the bourgeoisie’s point of view, because the economic theory of the day said that such a crisis was impossible. Keynes thought the conventional view unsatisfactory given the empirical reality of the Great Depression.

The reason that the bourgeoisie have to avoid the question today, as far as possible, as to whether unemployment is voluntary or not, is that they no longer have a perspective of doing anything about the gradually unfolding drama of mass unemployment (as to whether the unfolding is indeed ‘gradual’, it rather depends on which country one is living in – Greek, Spanish or Irish workers, for example, might not see matters that way). Keynes proposed a series of remedies to try and avoid a repetition of the nightmare of the 1930s. For several decades it looked as if unemployment had been dealt with in the major countries. It was certainly reduced to lower levels after the Second World War, whether due to Keynesian policies of ‘full employment’ or to other factors.

The re-emergence of the open crisis in the late 60s and early 70s saw the re-emergence of long-term mass unemployment and an explicit abandonment by the bourgeoisie of the perspective of full employment. Once it arrived at that point it

paid the bourgeoisie, obviously, to be as evasive about the issue as possible. Since they cannot avoid referring to the problem of unemployment altogether, the only remaining option is to blame the phenomenon on its victims. Hence the pervasive implication in the pronouncements of the bourgeoisie, without being too explicit, that unemployment is indeed voluntary.

This takes us back to the situation before Keynes, except that there is no question now that the bourgeoisie knows that it is trapped by the crisis and it just has to make the best of it as far as ‘explaining’ what is going on. The British bourgeoisie can see that the early promises of the current government about a ‘recovery’, following stern measures to get the state’s deficit under control, have been swept away by the reality of the crisis, so that entire line of argument is dead in the water. The Labour party might like to say ‘we told you so’, but they dare not do this seriously because they may actually have to take over the responsibility of managing the crisis again quite soon. There is no point building up expectations that they could do better in terms of running the economy. There is so little room for manoeuvre, whoever is in charge. The bourgeoisie is already muttering about the possibility of a ‘triple dip recession’.

Having said all this about the bourgeoisie’s evasions, there is one true point in what Osborne said that we should note. All workers are indeed in the same boat. If the unemployed are scroungers then so are the working population. Destitution, in other words, is completely general. It affects all workers to more or less an extent, and it affects a great many employed workers profoundly as well as the unemployed. Many employed workers – especially in London where the price of accommodation is exceptionally high and getting higher – are completely dependent on state hand-outs to live at all. The rent for a modest flat for a family in London, even in the less expensive parts, is as much as two thirds or even the whole of the wages of many workers.

Even Labour leader Ed Miliband, despite his efforts to divide the working class into the deserving and undeserving poor, is right to point out that the majority of benefits go to those in work. We should follow Marx and always note when the bourgeoisie speaks the truth – they cannot always avoid it. The reason that workers are reduced to living on benefits is because their wages are below the level required to maintain the reproduction of labour power. In other words wages are not enough to live on. It is really as simple as that, and this is not an exaggeration. The London *Evening Standard* was shocked to discover that there are children in London who are actually starving. The dozens of soup kitchens set up across London don’t only feed those sleeping rough or in hostels for the homeless.

Marx, let us note, was well aware of these issues and how they affected the working class. In *Capital* Marx deals with employers who rely on the workers subsisting on ‘relief’ as it was then called, provided by the local councils, to be able to afford the required amount of bread for their families that was regarded as the subsistence level. Similarly Trotsky in the 1930s denounced the situation where workers in the US who were actually employed nonetheless had to live on charitable hand-outs because their wages were insufficient to maintain life. Neither Marx nor Trotsky deal with such employers kindly. But both these marxists were realistic – they knew that the first response of the bourgeoisie to a crisis is to try and reduce the wages of the workers below the level required to reproduce labour power – at least below the currently accepted level.

It is a pity that Marx did not live to pronounce on a state controlled system which, in a period of almost permanent crisis, has more and more been given the task of maintaining wages permanently below the basic requirement to maintain life for a great part of the working class. This is the system we now refer to as the ‘welfare state’. The product of the period of expansion after the Second World War, the welfare state was initially a vehicle for some significant improvements in working class living standards. But it was established at a con-

siderable price: not only the horrors of the war itself, but a considerable increase in social control, since the mechanisms of welfare aim to reduce the working class to a mass of individuals whose well-being is confided to the paternalism of the state.

It is reasonable to think that Marx’s polemics against such a system, whereby the bourgeoisie foist their welfare and dependency culture on the working class, would be something to read – and no doubt he would be particularly scathing about those ‘radicals’ and leftists who never tire of telling us that the welfare state is a gain won by the

workers in struggle and even a ‘socialist’ sector of the economy. The bourgeoisie’s supposed ‘denunciations’ of the welfare state – of their own monstrous system that reduces the workers to the status of permanent beggars – would pale beside the denunciations of the workers’ movement if the workers were better able to affirm themselves politically than they are at present. It is only the working class, after all, that contains within itself the historical perspective of ridding us of the capitalist state altogether. **Hardin 11/1/13**

## Winterbourne View, Mid Staffs Hospital All the ‘compassion’ capitalism affords

After the ill-treatment of people with learning disabilities was filmed by *Panorama*, Winterbourne View has been closed, more inspections have taken place, and 11 care workers have been convicted. Between 400 and 1200 ‘excess’ and ‘unnecessary’ deaths between 2005 and 2008 at Mid Staffordshire Hospital Trust have been investigated and reported on. Health minister Jeremy Hunt and the Chief Nursing Officer for England have emphasised the need for “care” and “compassion”.

The scandals have been exposed and investigated, scapegoats tried and convicted, platitudes uttered, and future inspections will be carried out by a new body with a new name, the Care Quality Commission. So we can all sleep confident in the safety and compassion of our health and care services... except for the small detail that the whole process takes us no closer to understanding why such things happen.

### ‘Nurses who don’t care “should resign”’

When things go wrong the ruling class are always quick to blame workers, whether they are nurses and care workers, as in these scandals, or train or coach drivers following an accident. This hypocrisy is truly nauseating.

When NHS services are shut down months before the end of the financial year (such as i-Health in East London) because there is no more money, leaving patients suffering from their illnesses for longer, where is the ‘compassion’ in that? When new treatments – that can protect sight in macular degeneration, or give a cancer sufferer a little longer – are judged on cost through the National Institute of Clinical Excellence, where is the ‘compassion’ in that?

Then there is the effect of all the targets that have to be achieved in the NHS: “For every condition there is a guideline to follow, a reward for doing so scrupulously, and a penalty for falling short. Patients matter less as individuals than they do as units in a scheme with a public health objective in mind.” (BMJ 18/12/12).

There was no golden age in the NHS. The British state only became interested in the health of the working class when it discovered they were unfit to fight in the Boer War. The NHS grew out of the Beveridge Report in World War II, and the need for labour in the years that followed. It was always limited by delays and underfunding. Now it is no longer in their interests to spend so much money on it.

Jeremy Hunt wants a special sort of compassion from nurses and doctors in order to be able to live within the limits on the NHS, and deny services that are not funded, in a kindly and considerate way. No wonder communication skills are now

1. Lorraine Morgan, president of the Welsh Nursing Academy, [http://www.publicservice.co.uk/news\\_story.asp?id=21708&utm\\_source=MailingList&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Health131212](http://www.publicservice.co.uk/news_story.asp?id=21708&utm_source=MailingList&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Health131212)

taught and examined – including, for GPs, the skill of saying “no”.

And no wonder burnout is such an important problem. This is not just a question of overwork but above all stress, which includes the stress of feeling unable to do the job as it should be done. Burnout makes it much more difficult to feel compassion, even if a professional is expected to behave in a proper professional manner regardless of how they feel at the time.

When doctors, nurses and care workers are unable to show appropriate compassion this is most often the result of the conditions they are working in, whether through lack of resources to make their compassion count, or the destruction of their normal compassion by years of working in a system characterised by daily banal and bureaucratic inhumanity.

As for resigning due to lack of compassion – just imagine trying to get Job Seekers Allowance after leaving, or refusing to take, a job on such grounds.

### Not just Winterbourne View, not just private hospitals

“*Mencap and the Challenging Behaviour Foundation have just published a report ‘Out of Sight’ which details a number of serious incidents of abuse at other private hospitals including physical assault, sexual abuse and over medication. The report calls for the government to close these large institutions which are mostly operated by the private and not for profit sector*”<sup>2</sup>. In other words the same lesson about care of people with learning disabilities and large impersonal institutions as was drawn from similar problems 30 years ago. The difference is that the institutions today tend to be privately run, with only 10% of those in residential care run by social services. Today it is all too easy to equate economy with private profit: “*The private sector in particular recognised there was money to be made if you set up nice looking purpose-built homes for some of the most dependant and challenging people. The care could be provided more efficiently (cheaper) in large institutions. A simple case of the economies of scale that could be achieved in catering, care and management costs by replacing a dozen small homes each providing care for four or five people with a ‘hospital’ providing beds for 60 or more residents.*” The use of such facilities, with their economies of scale, results from the need for social services departments to keep costs down in line with stretched budgets.

With the British economy, being much stronger than the Greek, we do not face the same level of cuts (see “‘Curing’ the economy kills the sick”, page 8). Nevertheless, if we look at the plans to

2. [http://www.publicservice.co.uk/feature\\_story.asp?id=20505](http://www.publicservice.co.uk/feature_story.asp?id=20505)

# Inter-imperialist war ravages Syria

It's always difficult - and unwise - to make precise predictions about the international situation, particularly as imperialist tensions and conflicts take on a more irrational and chaotic character. However, we can say with some certainty that, whatever the specifics of events in Syria, whether the regime falls or not, there will be more fighting, more bloodshed and the greater likelihood of the war worsening in Syria itself and extending beyond its borders. To a large extent 'outside forces' are already involved in the dynamic towards greater bloodshed and instability: Russia, Iran, China and Hezbollah on one hand backing the regime, and on the other a whole basket case of interests, rivalries and potential conflicts: Turkey, the Gulf states, France, Britain, the USA, Germany, Jordan, Egypt, to name the major players, alongside, and often manipulating, the various 'rebel' forces and factions, and then throw in al-Qaeda in Iraq, the Kurds and the Palestinian factions. The intervention of all these imperialist gangsters, big and small, augurs badly for the populations and stability of this region.

## The regime fights on

Various countries and bodies have been predicting the fall of the Assad regime for many months now. We are not military experts and we cannot draw on first-hand information from within the country, but the fall of Assad still doesn't look imminent. On 6 January, in a Damascus opera house, Assad put forward what was billed as a 'peace plan' that was really a call to his military, which his clique is totally identified with, to deepen the war. He looks set to stay on whatever, to the point of implementing a 'scorched-earth' policy, which would only be an extension of what's already really happening. While his regime has been increasingly threatened and undermined by the rebels' offensives against its positions, so far this has led to a contradictory situation. On the one hand Assad is more and more under pressure; at the same time, the more his falls seems likely those forces and groups (the Alawite, Christian, Druze and Shia elements) who fear that a take-over by the rebels - among whom the Sunni fundamentalist element has gained considerably in strength - will result in pogroms against them have been driven into a desperate attempt to cohere behind Assad.

What remained of the protests of 18 months ago has been broken. His military seems to be generally in control of the densely populated south-west, the main north/south highway and the Mediterranean coast. Although the opposition have taken some, the Syrian military hold bases throughout the country from which its helicopters and jets can

destabilise rebel-held areas at will, making territorial gains for the latter tenuous. Another aspect of Assad's speech that wasn't directed solely towards his army was the overtures made towards the Syrian Kurds in order to strengthen their position, if not their full allegiance, against his own enemies. But the major backer of the regime is Russia and despite some diplomatic noises against their man (played up by the west), the Russians remain fully behind the regime for the foreseeable future. They, like the Iranians, have to cling to him desperately, and do so with some very heavy ordnance. *The Guardian*, 24/12/12, reported that Russian military advisers and crews are manning a sophisticated missile defence system, making a western 'no-fly zone' and the general situation even more problematic. These defences have been strengthened since the Israeli strike on the nuclear site of al-Kibar in 2007 and again at the start of the genuinely popular Syrian uprising in March 2011: "...the air defence command comprises two divisions and an estimated 50,000 troops - twice the size of Gaddafi's force - with thousands of anti-aircraft guns and more than 130 anti-aircraft missile batteries". The placement of long-range S-300 Russian missiles is a possibility but not confirmed. For the Russians, Syria also holds their largest electronic eavesdropping base outside its territory in Latakia and it has a naval base on the Mediterranean at Tartus. The Russians will not give up easily on the present Syrian regime and the 'assets' it provides.

Unlike Libya, Germany was quick to become involved here, placing Patriot missiles and its troops on the Turkish border. These were followed by the USA, Dutch and Norwegians under the NATO umbrella. NATO is hiding behind the defence of its member Turkey which itself is becoming more aggressive. American and European forces are thus getting directly involved, with differences amongst themselves, in a confrontation with not just Syrian forces but Iranian and Russian interests which have formidable military force to back them up. Germany increasingly has its own imperialist ambitions to put forward, even though it may antagonise Russia, and Britain and France have been at the forefront of promoting the opposition forces, including, along with the CIA, the use of their special forces and intelligence services. Again there seem to be rivalries here, expressed in diplomatic circles, between France, Britain and the USA - with the latter getting a freer hand now that the 'fiscal cliff' problem has been temporarily shelved and new foreign and security bosses have been put in place by the Obama clique. The appointment of Chuck Hagel to head the Pentagon and 'terrorism adviser' John



Brennan to lead the CIA not only reinforces clandestine operations, special forces work, drone attacks against army 'boots on the ground'; it also seems to be more bad news for Israel. Hagel has been accused by Republicans of being soft on Iran and weak defending Israel. This comes on top of the destabilisation of Syria, which is the last thing that Israel wanted to see; and now the latter is planning a wall on its borders along the Golan Heights to keep out the jihadists who are swarming into Syria. The recent Egyptian/Iranian intelligence services rapprochement must also be a worry to Israel and the United States.

## Britain promotes its imperialist interests

Along with France, Britain has played a leading role in the anti-Assad front. In order to help reconstruct the discredited opposition forces of the Syrian National Council, and quickly following a conference in Doha, Qatar, meetings across several government departments were held in London in late November, including representatives from France, Turkey, Jordan, Qatar and US military personnel, with the aim of forming a general strategy and helping to reorganise the Syrian 'revolutionaries'. According to official accounts alone Britain has provided aid amounting to £57 million to the rebels up to October last year. This obviously doesn't include the vast amounts spent on undercover activity, logistics and sur-reptitious provisions. The British army, under its chief of defence, General David Richards, is or has drawn up contingency plans to provide Syrian rebels with maritime and air support (*Guardian*, 12/12/12), but given the obstacles outlined above this would be a major escalation of danger. One thing for sure though is that as British troops are being 'drawn-down' in Afghanistan, many are going to the Gulf, reinforcing British land and naval bases in Bahrain, strengthening forces in Qatar and the UAE and "forming close tactical-level relationships" in Jordan. And although there's a great deal of state secrecy around the issue, there's no doubting growing British support for the Muslim Brotherhood which is very active in the Syrian opposition and across the wider region (not least Egypt). Britain, along with the other western protagonists, has raised and kept the issue of Syrian chemical weapons alive in order to provide a possible motive for direct intervention. But even if the latter happens this can only lead to a further bloody fiasco.

## The Syrian opposition

The old Syrian opposition of the Syrian National Council, with its long-term exiles and links to the CIA and the US State Department, was totally discredited. The new opposition, to give it its full title, the Syrian National Coalition for Opposition and Revolutionary Forces, is now recognised as 'the legitimate representative of the Syrian people'. This new bunch of gangsters, formed in late November in a conference at Doha and consolidated at a meeting in Morocco on 12 December, from which the Free Syrian Army network was sidelined, and which was recognised by more than a hundred countries, reflects many of the problems of the current situation, including faction fights between the major powers of France, Britain, the USA and Germany, and the fact that Syria is a prized strategic crossroads. The most controversial aspect of the new opposition is its fundamentalist leanings, which shows the west, once again, playing with the fire of 'holy war'. The nature of the opposition more closely reflects its masters in Saudi, Qatar and the other Gulf

states where these Sunni leaders promote radical, religious-based ideologies that have fuelled anti-western sentiments for some time now. These regimes, as autocratic and vicious as Assad's, have no time for the 'democratisation' process that the USA is attempting to foist on them and this represents a further division among the so-called 'Friends of Syria'.

## Al-Qaeda's dead, long-live al-Qaeda

In Syria, jihadists are pouring in from everywhere, different poisonous fractions representing the interests of different countries; some brought in by the intelligence services of the US and Britain, some from the Gulf states, and a multitude of 'freelancers' from countries including Libya, Tunisia, the Balkans, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iraq. The most ruthless, organised and efficient of these groups has been Jabhat al-Nusra. These fighters were declared a 'foreign terrorist organisation' by the US State Department on 10 December. Despite promises made to the US by the opposition to break with them, "...coordination continued on the ground. This is why the US deputy secretary of state found himself isolated in Marrakech when he classified al-Nusra a terrorist organisation. *The British and French remained silent, as did the EU*" (*The Guardian*, 18/12/12). We've underlined this last bit because of the clear divisions it shows between these countries and the USA. The leader of the new Syrian opposition, Mouaz al-Khatib, has even lectured the US on the merits of al-Nusra and the virtues of martyrdom. The Muslim Brotherhood also condemned the US decision as "wrong and hasty". Al-Nusra, which has led the fighting in Aleppo and in the suburbs of Damascus, the overrunning of the Sheik Suleiman base in the north while spearheading gains elsewhere, is an al-Qaeda front. It has indiscriminately targeted all non-Sunnis, military or not, and in Syria we see a sort of Sunni accord with them, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists for the time being. The Gulf states are supporting all three with the British and French their silent partners. It's long been thought that al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the expanding Sunni terrorist organisation, would get involved in Syria and now they have and are in the forefront of it. The leader of al-Nusra is Abu Du'a who is also the emir of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

## The perspectives are grim

We haven't even begun to mention the Kurds who also play a major part on the imperialist chessboard in and around Syria. Just like al-Qaeda coming from Iraq to Syria, so too are Iraqi Kurds training Syrian Kurds to fight (*New York Times*, 7/12/12). This itself presents the prospects of a wider conflict with sectarian strife, pogroms and ethnic conflict among people who previously lived side by side. The working class exists in numbers in this region but it is weak and has been further weakened by this conflict which, far from being a 'revolution', is a bloody imperialist war. Tens of thousands dead, hundreds of thousands wounded and traumatised, possibly millions displaced and people in Syria starving to death or dying for lack of care. The more immediate successes that there are for the 'rebels', the more they are falling out amongst themselves: looting in Aleppo for example, assassinating and killing each other over the 'spoils'. While the regime deals out its own form of death and destruction, the opposition have been engaged in their own atrocities, beheading and massacres. To call this inter-imperialist nightmare a 'revolution', as groups like the Socialist Workers Party have done, is obscene but this is not the first time that such groups have supported Islamic fundamentalism for their own sordid ends - just like the British government. **Baboon. 9/1/13**

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save money in the NHS being rolled out at the moment, we can see that the difference is one of degree and not principle. The plan is to make £20 billion in savings in the 4 years to 2014/15, with an estimated £5.8 bn saved in 2011/12. However despite freezing pay, freezing what Primary Care Trusts pay for healthcare and cutting back office costs (ie administration jobs), the National Audit Office has estimated that the real saving is more like £3.4 bn. Because of this shortfall, the cuts to come, we can be certain, will hit both patient care and healthworkers' pay, conditions and jobs. It will also involve the regulation of health care assistants - people employed to take on aspects of the nursing role that used to be the province of more qualified staff. It used to be called 'dilution', now it's called 'skill mix'. All this will come in whatever compassion nurses and doctors have for their patients, or indeed the compassion the sick may feel for their carers.

## Preparing the ground for the next attacks

Nurses compassion will be measured, according to Jane Cummings, chief nurse for England! As if you could trust the capitalist state to measure such things in a meaningful way! The Prime Minister

wants patients in hospital to use the "friends and family test". *Mark Porter, chairman of council of the BMA, said, 'Doctors and the NHS, generally, welcome feedback from patients and their families. However, the friends and family test that has been piloted so far is based on a model developed to test satisfaction with consumer products. We would like to see a full evaluation of the pilot before it is rolled out more widely, as there may be better ways of getting useful information from patients in a form that allows the NHS to improve services.'* (BMJ 7/1/13).

These 'reforms' will do little if anything to improve care. They certainly won't overcome the effects of the planned 'efficiency savings'. But the media concentration on these scandals, and the campaign about 'care' and 'compassion', can undermine the confidence we feel in our doctors and nurses in the NHS, and create a climate in which they can be blamed for the inevitable failings that will happen as cuts in the health budget are rolled out. **Alex 12/1/13**

1. Foreign Secretary William Hague and the Socialist Workers Party are as one in supporting the imperialist butchery that they call the "Syrian Revolution". See *Socialist Worker* 20/9/12 and the UK Mission to the United Nations statement, 11/11/12.

# Capitalism produces the housing crisis

In September 2012 legislation came into force that made squatting in the UK a criminal offence. At the end of the month the first person was convicted under the new legislation and sentenced to 12 weeks in prison. He had come from Plymouth to London looking for work and had occupied a flat owned by a housing association.

Prior to this a number of Tory MPs and newspapers made much of cases where homes that were lived in had been squatted and used this to justify the new law, despite knowing that there were a number of laws already in place aimed at preventing squatting. This suggests that the new law is actually aimed at keeping squatters out of unoccupied houses, offices and other buildings, which are those usually squatted. It is also part of the wider campaign to divide and control the working class. This was given a new boost at the start of 2013 with the spat over 'scroungers' versus 'strivers' that preceded the vote to limit increases in most benefits to 1% a year.

No official figures on the number of people squatting have been collected since the mid 1980s, but a recent article in the *Guardian* reported that there are between twenty and fifty thousand people squatting, mostly living in long-term abandoned properties.<sup>1</sup> This is part of the larger picture of increasing numbers struggling to keep a roof over their heads. For example, the figures gathered about homelessness show increases in the last few years: in England 110,000 families applied to their local authority as homeless in 2011/12, an increase of 22% over the preceding year. 46% of these were accepted by the local authority as homeless, an increase of 26% over the preceding year. The figures for Wales and Scotland also show increases in both the numbers applying and being accepted.

The charity Crisis, from whose website the figures above are taken, underlines that these official figures are likely to be very inaccurate since the majority of those who are homeless are hidden because they do not show up in places, such as official homeless shelters, that the government uses to gather its data. Another indicator that housing is becoming an increasing problem is provided by the data about the numbers sleeping rough. In 2011 official figures show that over two thousand people slept rough in England on any one night in 2011, an increase of 23% over 2010. However, once again, the real figure is probably far higher as non-government agencies report that over five and a half thousand people slept rough in 2011/12 just in London, an increase of 43% over the previous year.

Globally, it is estimated that at least 10% of the world's population is squatting. Many of the slums that surround cities such as Mumbai, Nairobi, Istanbul and Rio de Janeiro are largely comprised of squatters.<sup>2</sup> The types of accommodation, the services, or lack of them, available to inhabitants, the type of work undertaken and the composition of the population all vary, but collectively they show that, for all the goods produced and all the money swirling around the world, capitalism remains unable to adequately meet one of the most basic of human needs. The purpose of this article is to try and examine the reasons for this.

The starting point is the recognition that the form the housing question takes under capitalism is determined by the economic, social and political parameters of bourgeois society. In this system, the interests of the working class, and of other exploited classes such as the peasantry, are always subordinated to those of bourgeoisie. At the economic level there are two main dynamics. On the one hand, housing for the working class is a cost of production and thus subject to the same drive to reduce the costs as all other elements linked to the reproduction of this class. On the other, housing can also be a source of profits for part of the bourgeoisie, whether provided for the working class or any other part of society. At the social and political level, housing raises issues about health and so-

cial stability that concern the ruling class, while it can also offer opportunities for both physical and ideological control of the working class and other exploited classes. This was true in the early days of capitalism and remains true today.

## Housing and early capitalism

The situation in Britain in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was a consequence of the full unfolding of the capitalist system that had been developing for several centuries previously. The industrial revolution that was a consequence of these early developments led to a transformation in all areas of life within the capitalist world, in the economy, in politics and in social life. The development of large factories led to the rapid growth of cities, such as London, Manchester and Liverpool, and drew in millions of dispossessed peasants, transforming them into proletarians. Advances in productivity and the cyclical crises that typified early capitalism periodically ejected hundreds of thousands of workers from employment while the expansion of production and its extension into new fields, driven on by the same crises, drew them back in. For the bourgeoisie this meant there was a readily available workforce: the reserve army of those ejected from work or newly driven from the land, that tended to help keep the cost of all labour down. For the working class the result was a life of exploitation, poverty and uncertainty.



Victorian slum housing

*The Condition of the Working Class in England* written by Engels after he moved to Manchester in 1842 and published in German in 1845, revealed the true face of the industrial revolution. A central theme of the work is an examination of the living conditions of the working class. Drawing on various official reports as well as his own observations he described the accommodation endured by workers in cities such as London, Liverpool, Birmingham, and Leeds: "These slums are pretty equally arranged in all the great towns of England, the worst houses in the worst quarters of the towns, usually one or two-storied cottages in long rows, perhaps with cellars used as dwellings, almost always irregularly built... The streets are generally unpaved, rough, dirty, filled with vegetable and animal refuse, without sewers or gutters, but supplied with foul, stagnant pools instead. Moreover, ventilation is impeded by the bad, confused method of building of the whole quarter, and since many human beings live here crowded into a small space, the atmosphere that prevails in these workmen's quarters may readily be imagined."<sup>3</sup>

He notes the gradations of misery within this overall picture. In St Giles in London, which was near Oxford Street, Regent Street and Trafalgar Square with their "broad, splendid avenues", he distinguishes between the dwellings located in the streets and those in the courts and alleys that ran between them. While the appearance of the former "is such that no human could possibly wish to live in them" the "filth and tottering ruin" of the latter "surpass all description": "Scarcely a whole window-pane can be found, the walls are crumbling, door-posts and window-frames loose and broken, doors of old boards nailed together, or altogether wanting in this thieves quarter... Heaps of garbage and ashes lie in all directions, and the foul liquids

emptied before the doors gather in stinking pools. Here live the poorest of the poor, the worst paid workers with thieves and the victims of prostitution, indiscriminately huddled together, the majority Irish, or of Irish extraction, and those who have not sunk into the whirlpool of moral ruin which surrounds them, sinking daily deeper, losing daily more and more of their power to resist the demoralising influence of want, filth, and evil surroundings."<sup>4</sup> In the new factory towns industrialists and speculators threw up houses that were poorly built, overcrowded and lacking in ventilation. Within a few years most had become slums, albeit profitable ones. From these and many other descriptions of the environment Engels goes on to consider the consequences on the physical and mental health of the inhabitants. He shows the link between mortality, ill health and poverty, examines the poor quality of the air breathed by the working class, the lack of education of their children, and the arbitrary brutality of the conditions and regulations of employment.

The pattern set by Britain was quickly followed by other countries such as France, Germany and America as they industrialised. Everywhere that capitalism developed the working class was housed in slums and in most of the great cities the working class areas were places of poverty, filth and disease from which the new bourgeoisie drew the wealth that allowed them to live comfortably and moralise according to their various tastes about the immorality and fecklessness of the working class.

## Bourgeois solutions to the housing crisis

In *The Housing Question*, published 27 years after the *Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels acknowledges that some of the worst slums he described had ceased to exist. The principal reason for this was the realisation by the bourgeoisie that the death and disease that reigned in these places not only weakened the working class, and thus the source of their profits, but also threatened their own health: "Cholera, typhus, typhoid fever, small-pox and other ravaging diseases spread their germs in the pestilential air and the poisoned water of these working class districts... Capitalist rule cannot allow itself the pleasure of generating epidemic diseases with impunity; the consequences fall back on it and the angel of death rages in the ranks of the capitalists as ruthlessly as in the ranks of the workers."<sup>5</sup> In Britain this resulted in official inquiries, which Engels notes were distinguished by their accuracy, completeness and impartiality compared to Germany, and which paved the way for legislation that began to address the worst excesses.

This was the era that saw the building of sewerage and water systems in towns and cities in Britain. If the impulse for these reforms came specifically from the self-interest of the bourgeoisie and more indirectly from the pressure of the working class and the need to manage the growing complexity of society, the possibility of realising them was due to the immense wealth being produced by capitalism. Engels notes that the interests of the bourgeoisie in this matter are not only linked to issues of public health but also to the need to build new business premises in central locations, to improve transport by bringing the railways into the centre of cities and building new roads, and also by the need to make it easier to control the working class. This last had been a particular concern in France after the Paris Commune and resulted in the building of the broad avenues that still characterise much of this city.

However, Engels goes on to argue that such reforms do not eliminate the housing question: "In reality the bourgeoisie has only one method of settling the housing questions after its fashion – that is to say, of settling it in such a way that the solution poses the question anew."<sup>6</sup> He gives the example of a part of Manchester called Little Ireland that he described in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. This area, which was

"the disgrace of Manchester", "long ago disappeared and on its site there now stands a railway station"; but subsequently it was revealed that Little Ireland "had simply been shifted from the South side of Oxford Road to the north side."<sup>7</sup> He concludes: "The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place produces them in the next place also. As long as the capitalist mode of production continues to exist it is folly to hope for an isolated settlement of the housing question or of any other social question affecting the lot of the workers."<sup>8</sup>

Subsequent developments in Britain seem, ultimately, to refute this since the slums of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century are gone. The First World War left a shortage of 610,000 houses with many pre-war slums untouched. In its aftermath local authorities were given powers to clear slums and to build housing for rent. Between 1931 and 1939 over 700,000 homes were built, re-housing four fifths of those living in slums.<sup>9</sup> Many of the new houses were built in large estates on the outskirts of major cities including Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and London. Some local authorities experimented by building blocks of flats. However, these efforts were dwarfed by the two and half million homes built privately and sold to the middle class and better off parts of the working class. Nonetheless, this did not mark the end of slums and severe overcrowding remained common in many working class areas. The Second World War saw a regression as house building all but stopped and inner city areas were exposed to bombing. The post war period witnessed the most concerted house building programme by the state in British history, which reached its peak under the Tory government of the late 1950s when over 300,000 council homes were built annually. The building of large tower blocks was a more prominent feature this time. Support was also given to private building and by 1975 52.8% of homes were privately owned, compared with 29.5% in 1951 (private rented properties fell from 44.6% to 16% during the same period).<sup>10</sup>

However, these developments were the product of their time and reflect the prevailing economic situation. In Britain and the other major capitalist powers, the post war period allowed some significant changes in housing. The post-war boom that was based on the very significant improvements in productivity that followed the destruction of the war gave the state the means to increase spending in a range of areas, including housing. As already noted, some important working class areas in cities that had been centres of production had been destroyed or damaged by bombing. The industries that developed after the war, such as car making, led to the building of new factories, often outside the old concentrations. This required the building of accommodation for workers. There was also a political motive in meeting social needs in order to reduce the risk of unrest following the war. In this the state drew on the failure of the policy of 'Homes fit for heroes' proclaimed after World War I, a failure that had helped to discredit the post-war government of Lloyd George.

However, the post war boom did not reach many parts of the world. These included some countries in the west, such as Ireland where severe poverty and slums remained until the economic boom that developed there in the 1980s. Above all, it encompassed what has been called the 'Third World', which essentially comprises those continents and countries that were subject to imperialist domination by the major capitalist countries. In short, most of the world. Looked at from this perspective it becomes evident that Engels' argument is not just confirmed but confirmed on a scale he could not have imagined.

## Housing in late capitalism

The present global situation is shaped by the structural crisis of capitalism that lies behind both the open recessions and the booms of the last

7. Ibid. p.366.

8. Ibid. p.368.

9. Stevenson *British Society 1914-45*, chapter 8 "Housing and town planning". Penguin Books, 1984.

10. See Morgan, *The People's Peace. British History 1945-1990*. Oxford University Press, 1992.

1. *Guardian* 03/12/12, "Squatters are not home stealers". Part of the ideological campaign whipped up to justify the anti-squatting law involved loudly publicising cases where individual homeowners returned from a period of absence to find their house being squatted

2. Ibid.

3. *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, "The Great Towns". Collected Works Volume 4, Lawrence and Wishart p.331.

4. Ibid., p.332-3

5. *The Housing Question*, Part ii "How the bourgeoisie solves the housing question". Collected Works, Volume 23, Lawrence and Wishart, p.337.

6. Ibid. p.365.



### A modern shanty town

30 to 40 years, including the astonishing levels of growth seen in China, India and a number of other countries. This period has seen a reshaping of the whole world and its full analysis is far beyond the scope of this article. For many on the left this reshaping is a consequence of the triumph of neo-liberalism with its doctrines of reducing the state and supporting private enterprise. This is frequently presented as an ideologically based strategy and the crisis of 2007 as being of its making. While the critique of neo-liberalism and globalisation may describe aspects of the changes that have taken place in the global economy, it tends to miss the essential point that this transformation is the result of the response of capitalism to the economic crisis. It is the result of the unfolding of the immanent laws of capitalism rather than the outcome of ideology. It is this that links the situation in the old heartlands and the periphery, in the Third World and the first, in the countries experiencing economic growth and those not. The housing question everywhere has been posed anew by these developments.

Today, one billion people live in slums and the majority of the world's population is now urban. Numbers continue to grow every day and the slums that surround cities of all sizes in these countries grow ever-larger. Most of these slums are in the third world and, to a lesser extent, parts of the old eastern bloc (what was once called the Second World). This is a new situation. In the book *Planet of Slums*, published in 2006, the author, Mike Davis, argues that "most of today's megacities of the South share a common trajectory: a regime of relatively slow, even retarded growth, then abrupt acceleration to fast growth in the 1950s and 1960s, with rural immigrants increasingly sheltered in peripheral slums."<sup>11</sup> The slow or retarded growth in many of these cities was a consequence of their status as colonies of the major powers. In India and Africa the British colonial rulers passed laws to prevent the native populations moving from the country to the city and to control the movements and living arrangements of those in the cities. French imperialism imposed similar restrictions in those parts of Africa under its control. It seems logical to see these restrictions as linked to the status of many of these countries as suppliers of raw materials to their colonial masters. However, even in Latin America, where the colonial hand was arguably less severe, the local bourgeoisie could be equally opposed to their rural countrymen and women intruding into the cities. Thus in the late 1940s there were crackdowns on the squatters drawn to urban centres such as Mexico City as a result of the policy of local industrialisation to replace imports.

This changed as colonialism ended and capitalism became ever more global. Cities began to grow in size and increase in number. In 1950 there were 86 cities in the world with populations of over one million. By 2006 this had reached 400 and by 2015 is projected to rise to 550. The urban centres have absorbed most of the global population growth of recent decades and the urban labour force stood at 3.2 billion in 2006.<sup>12</sup> This last point highlights the fact that in countries such as Japan, Taiwan and, more recently, India and China this growth is linked to the development of production. One consequence of global significance is that over 80% of the industrial proletariat is now outside Western Europe and the US. In China hundreds of millions of peasants have flooded from the countryside to the cities, principally those in coastal regions where most industrialisation has taken place; hundreds of millions more are likely to follow. By 2011 the majority of China's popula-

tion was urban.<sup>13</sup>

This can give the impression that the process seen in the 19th century is continuing; that the early chaotic development will be replaced by a more steady progression up the value chain of production with resulting increases in wages, prosperity and the domestic markets. This is used to support the argument that capitalism remains dynamic and progressive and that in time it will lift the poor out of poverty, feed the starving and house the slum dwellers.

However, this is not the full story of the current period. In many other countries there is no link between the development of cities and the slums that go with them and the development of production. This can be seen by comparing cities by size of population and GDP. Thus, while Tokyo was the largest by population and by GDP, Mexico City, which was the second largest by population, does not figure in the top ten by GDP. Similarly Seoul, which is fourth largest by population also does not appear amongst the top ten by GDP. In contrast, London, which was sixth by GDP, is 19th by population.<sup>14</sup> Population growth in these cities seems more a consequence of wider economic changes, such as the reorganisation of agriculture to meet the requirements of the international market and fluctuations of the price of raw materials on the one hand and the often linked impact of war, 'natural' disasters, famine and poverty on the other. In some cities, such as Mumbai, Johannesburg and Buenos Aires there has actually been de-industrialisation. Davis also highlights the neo-liberal policies of the IMF as having a particular role in this process and in the impoverishment of many of the recipients of its 'aid' and 'advice'.

The consequences can be seen in the shanty towns that encircle many cities in the south. While it is the megacities that hit the headlines, the majority of the urban poor live in second tier cities where there are often few, if any, amenities and which attract little attention. The accounts of the living conditions of the inhabitants of these slums that run through *Planet of Slums* echo parts of Engels' analysis. In the inner cities the poor not only crowd into old housing and into new properties put up for them by speculators but also into graveyards, over rivers and on the street itself. However, most slum-dwellers live on the periphery of the cities, often on land that is polluted or at risk from environmental disaster or otherwise uninhabitable. Their homes may be made of bits of wood and old plastic sheeting, often without services and subject to eviction by the bourgeoisie and exploitation and violence by the assorted speculators, absentee landlords and criminal gangs that control the area. In some areas squatters progress to legal ownership and succeed in getting the city authorities to provide basic services. Everywhere they are subject to exploitation.

As in England in the 19th century there is money to be made from misery. Speculators large and small build properties, sometimes legally, sometimes illegally, and receive rents, which for the space rented are comparable to the most expensive inner city apartments of the rich. The lack of services provides other opportunities, including the sale of water. The inhabitants within the slums are divided and sub-divided. Some who rent shacks may rent a room to someone even poorer. Some may have jobs that are more or less precarious, others scrape a living through petty trading or providing services to their fellow inhabitants. This mass of proletarians, semi-proletarians, ex-peasants and so on constitute a reserve army of labour that helps to lower the cost of labour regionally, nationally and, ultimately, globally. They also pose a threat to capitalist order and offend the sensibilities of the bourgeoisie just as the slum-dwellers of Britain did in the 19th century.

The bourgeoisie continues to try to 'solve' the housing crisis that its society creates. Today as in the past this is always circumscribed by what is compatible with the interests of the capitalist system and of the bourgeoisie within it. On the one hand, there have been attempts simply to bulldoze the problem away, evicting millions of the poor, whether workers, ex-peasants, petty-traders or the cast-offs of society, and dumping them in new slums, or in the open countryside, away from the

eyes, ears and noses of the rich. On the other hand, a whole bureaucracy has grown up aimed at solving the housing problem, including the IMF, the World Bank, the UN as well as both international and local NGOs; but they always do so within the framework of capitalism. Thus, new housing often benefits the petty-bourgeoisie and better off workers who have the contacts or can pay the bribes or afford the rent, rather than those it was nominally intended for. A priority is usually to keep costs low, resulting in either barrack-like housing schemes or reforming the slums without ending them. The latter has seen a particularly unusual alliance between would be radicals who want to 'empower' the poor and international capitalist bodies such as the World Bank who want to find a market solution that encourages enterprise and ownership.

Finally, there is the unspoken but ever-present objective of dividing the exploited through the usual mix of co-option and repression. Thus bodies that begin with radical demands, such as squatters' groups, often end up collaborating with the ruling class once they have been given a few concessions. Amongst some ideologues there are even echoes of the past, such as the idea that the solution lies in providing the poor with legal entitlement to the land on which they are living. This echoes the ideas that Engels combated in the first part of *The Housing Question* that deals with the claims by a follower of the anarchist Proudhon that providing workers with the legal title to the property they are living in will solve the housing question. Engels shows that this 'solution' will rapidly lead back to the original problem since it does not change the basic premise of capitalist society that "enables the capitalist to buy the labour power of the worker at its value but to extract from it much more than its value..."<sup>15</sup>

In the old capitalist heartlands of Western Europe and the US, the return of the open economic crisis at the end of the 1960s led to two major changes that impacted on the provision of housing for the working class. The first was the need to reduce the expenditure of the state, and especially the social wage paid to workers; the second was the shift of capital from productive investment to speculation where the returns seemed higher. We will focus on Britain in examining this, as we did at the start of this article, mindful of the fact that the particular form taken varies from country to country.

The tightening of state spending led first to a slow down in the number of council houses built and then, under Thatcher, to the selling of the council housing stock and the restriction of further building by local authorities. This is frequently portrayed as an example of Thatcherite dogma and it is indeed true that it was partly an ideological campaign to promote home ownership. But none of this began with Thatcher. We have already noted the efforts to promote home ownership by both Tory and Labour governments both before and after the Second World War, principally through tax relief on mortgages. The selling of council houses not only reduced the capital costs of building homes but also the revenue costs of maintaining them, since the new owner assumed individual responsibility for this. The idea that owning property would help to curtail the threat from the working class goes back further still. In *The Housing Question* Engels, quotes one Dr Emil Sax's paean to the virtues of land ownership: "There is something peculiar about the longing inherent in man to own land... With it the individual obtains a secure hold; he is rooted firmly in the earth... The worker today helplessly exposed to all the vicissitudes of economic life and in constant dependence on his employer, would thereby be saved from this precarious situation; he would become a capitalist... He would thus be raised from the ranks of the propertyless into the propertied class."<sup>16</sup>

Financial speculation became ever more feverish as the struggle to find a profitable return on capital became more intense over the last 40 years. The financial deregulation that was a feature in both Britain and the US in the 1980s allowed the bourgeoisie to develop ever more complex forms of speculation. In the 1990s money flowed into a range of new instruments based on the extension of credit to ever larger parts of the working class. The development of sub-prime mortgages in the US typified this approach. Speculators thought

they were safe because of the complex nature of the financial instruments they were investing in and the high rating given to them by rating agencies such as Standard and Poor. The collapse of the sub-prime market in 2007 exposed this as the illusion it always was and laid the foundations for the wider collapse that followed, whose effects are still with us. In Britain ever-larger mortgages were offered with ever-smaller deposits and relaxed financial checks. The result was that mortgages made up the majority of the growth in personal credit that helped to underpin the 'booms' of the 1990s and early 2000s (the longest period of post-war growth as Gordon Brown used to claim).

The first housing bubble burst in the 1990s and plunged many into negative-equity, resulting in a high level of repossessions. This time round the bourgeoisie has managed to limit the impact so there are less repossessions. However, housing has now become less affordable due to a combination of the lasting increases during the bubbles and the tightening of credit following 2007, with the result that many young people can no longer afford to buy. At the same time, the rented sector has reduced. Council provision is limited and tightly controlled, with eligibility criteria that condemn younger people to small and poor accommodation if not to B&B. The new limits on Housing Benefit will also force families to move away from their home area or face being thrown on the street where one of the few options is to squat one of the thousands of empty properties. Thus we return to where we began.

### The answer to the housing question

The housing question that confronts workers and other exploited classes around the world takes quite different forms in one country or another and often divides the victims of capitalism against each other. Between a young worker squatting on land prone to flooding or subject to industrial poisons on the margins of a city like Beijing or Mumbai and a young worker ineligible for a council flat in London or unable to get a mortgage on a house in Birmingham there can seem to be an unbridgeable gulf. Yet the question for all workers is how to live as a human being in a society subordinated to the extraction of profits from the many for the few. And for all the changes in the form and scale of the question the content remains the same. Engels' conclusion remains as valid today as it was over a century ago: "In such a society the housing shortage is no accident; it is a necessary institution and can be abolished together with all its effects on health etc., only if the whole social order from which it springs is fundamentally refashioned"<sup>17</sup>

North 11/01/13



### Gorbals tower block

11. Davis, *Planet of Slums*, chapter 3 "The treason of the state", Verso 2006. Much of the information that follows is taken from this work.

12. Ibid., chapter 1, "The urban climacteric", p.1-2.

13. UN Habitat, *The state of China's cities 2012/13*, Executive Summary, p.viii.

14. Davis op. cit. p.13.

15. Engels op cit., p.318

16. Engels, op.cit. p.343-4.

17. Ibid., p.341.

# The experience in the UK in the 1980s, part 1

The 1980s was a period of important working class struggles in Britain as well as in the rest of Europe and the world. The 'Thatcherite revolution', capitalism's response to the inability of Keynesian economics to deal with the economic crisis, was a means of ruthlessly culling unprofitable industrial sectors and involved a brutal assault on workers' jobs and living conditions. The classic expression of this policy was the decision to decimate the UK mining industry, which provoked the year-long miners' strike of 1984-5. This struggle was a focus for the whole working class in Britain, but although its defeat came as a bitter blow, the effects of which would make themselves felt even more strongly in the longer term, it did not bring an end to the wave of struggles in Britain. Between 1986 and 1988 there were widespread movements involving printers, BT workers, teachers, health workers, postal workers and others.

Given the historic strength of the trade unions in Britain, none of these struggles gave rise to independent forms of working class self-organisation on the scale of the movements of education workers in Italy or rail and health workers in France during the same period<sup>1</sup>. But even so, just as in other parts of Europe, these movements played a part in stimulating small groups of militant workers to get together outside of the union framework. As in Italy, France and elsewhere, communists often played a significant role in these groups, even if they were expressions of a wider process. But inevitably it is the communist minority – since it tends to have a more permanent existence than workers' groups produced by the immediate struggle – which has taken on the task of preserving the memory of these experiences and drawing out their principal lessons.

What follows does not in any way claim to be a complete reconstruction of the experience of workers' groups in the UK during the 80s. It is based mainly on articles published in *World Revolution* at the time, although the libcom library also contains articles written by other participants in the process and copies of bulletins and leaflets produced by these groups. Obviously we are writing it from our own political viewpoint, but we welcome further contributions, especially by others who can bring first hand knowledge from the time, in order to develop a broader discussion at a time when the formation of similar groupings is once again on the agenda.

## Picket and the print strike of 1986

Coming in the wake of the defeat of the miners, the 1986 Fleet Street printers' strike was another major test in the battle between the classes. It was provoked by the attempts of Murdoch's News International group to introduce new technology and working practices which meant job-losses and tighter work discipline. As in the miners' strike, when the NUM concentrated the workers' energies on achieving a total shut-down of the mining sector rather than going directly to other workers who were also on the verge of struggle (dockers, steel workers, car workers), the print unions kept the struggle locked up in one part of the newspaper industry by insisting on the tactic of closing down NI's Wapping plant. But whereas in the miners' strike there was little overt criticism of the NUM by the workers involved in the strike, the effective sabotage of the strike by the print unions was rather easier to see, especially their specious argument that the strike should not be spread to the rest of Fleet Street because by allowing the other newspapers to carry on and capture NI's sales, the blockade of Wapping would force Murdoch to his knees.

It was in this atmosphere that the unofficial strike bulletin *Picket* appeared. Compiled by both printers and others, it provided regular updates on the progress of the strike and ran to 43 issues, all of which can be found in the libcom library<sup>2</sup>. It

was very quickly condemned by the union officials, prompting the ICC (*WR* 95, June 1986) to publish an article expressing its solidarity with the bulletin:

## Picket: the need for a break with unionism

At a time when the police and the print unions are trying to ram home the isolation of militant printworkers and complete their defeat, it's no accident that they should create a minor witch-hunt against the comrades who produce *Picket*, a bulletin that's a direct product of the printers' strike. For months the TUC, the NGA and SOGAT<sup>3</sup> have tried to blame violence at the Wapping demonstrations on outside agitators (ie revolutionaries, workers, the unemployed expressing their solidarity). Now they have discovered an "enemy within".

Bill Freeman, the print unions' national picket co-ordinator has said he "deplored its contents" and that "steps were being taken to locate its authors and prevent its publication" (*Guardian* 12/5/86). With the print unions more and more in collaboration with the police, militant pickets had better watch out for repression from the unions who won't hesitate to finger them to the cops. We solidarise with *Picket* against any attempts by the unions or the police to silence it.

The hostility of the union leadership to *Picket* is a class hostility to any attempt by the workers to break from the hegemony of the left and the trade unions. That the leftist press has totally ignored *Picket* is characteristic, as it is not an 'official' trade union organ, nor the product of a leftist sect, nor a rank and file front group.

As they say themselves, *Picket* is produced by "printworkers", "SOGAT/NGA pickets" and is "not connected to any group or party". It is a workers' bulletin which expresses criticisms of the TUC and the print union leadership at a national and branch level. It contains descriptions of the activities of the pickets in the print strike, letters from supporters and critics, tenants in Wapping and other practical information. While this kind of information is a vital component of any strike bulletin, this emphasis is at the expense of any analysis or attempt to use the bulletin as a focus for the organisation of militant printworkers.

*Picket* is not a political group with political positions and an orientation for the struggle, but an expression of militants who are trying to fight back against the capitalist offensive. However, hostility to the TUC, the police, the print unions and the bosses is not enough, nor is combativity on its own. But *Picket* refuses to offer any slogans, "which have come to be the method of hypocrisy". This comes from a fear of being like the unions or the left whose slogans are not hypocrisy but lies to disorientate the working class. In fact *Picket* do have a perspective, that "the strike will be won by picketing". This fixation on one form of action ignores the need to extend the struggle to workers in other sectors.

They criticise the TUC for having "worked overtime to contain the strike, stop it and then sink it. They want to get control over the growing picketing movement in order to demobilise it". But there is no criticism that could not be found in the more extreme leftist press. In the end the touchstone of a working class orientation is the push for extension and self-organisation, which inevitably means outright opposition to the whole union apparatus. *Picket* says "the sacked printworkers need to build on their own organising abilities to picket. It remains for ordinary pickets to take complete control of the strike". We agree with this, but *Picket* undermines their position by putting self-organisation as only rank and file action against union "sell-outs". Today the production of *Picket* is a thorn in the side of the union leaders, but without an attempt to go beyond being just

anarchistscommunists-wapping-dispute-28042006

3. Society of Graphical and Allied Trades and the National Graphical Association – the two main print unions at the time

## Picket no. 43 5th January 1987

**Sunday Night/Monday Morning, 3.00am. Wapping:** Over 100 pickets walked from Wellesley to the gates of the scab fortress, to be met by 40 truncheon-wielding scabs in blue. Without warning, they started to lay into us. Fighting broke out and several pickets of both sexes were injured, to add to the casualty list from Saturday. Strategic retreat and off home for paper-round leaving barriers in Pennington.

**3.00am:** God knows what happened to the others coming from Wapping Lane! Anyway, there was one cop van at each end of Virginia, and they immediately piled out, truncheons drawn. About 15 of us got through; the rest retreated, so we couldn't do much. About 20 of us went to Wapping Lane, and crowd-control barriers became scab-van barriers suddenly across Pennington Street. We had to disappear sharpish when a load of filth came up. So we moved about the area a bit. Ranks swelled as we moved back to the Highway. Picked up police escort as white mice scabs came out. Returned to base, frustrated for the moment.

**Wednesday 28th January, 9.00am. TUC buildings:** Around 50 pickets gathered to tell the TUC what they think of their crying condemnation of pickets. Pickets stayed outside all morning. Only the NUM President distanced himself by refusing to agree with the forelock-tugging of the Executive. We are entitled to fight for our jobs. Meanwhile, Willis crawls around the back of the building for his job. Do we have to be bludgeoned to death before this lot even issues a toothless protest? (*Out of the Mouths of Babes...* One junior picket at the TUC, when asked who the lady with the fancy hair-do was, replied loudly "Maggie Thatcher"... Exit one embarrassed Sogat general secretary.)

**Wednesday Evening. Wapping:** A march of 800-1,000 pickets, all in good spirits, shows that they can throw all the power of the riot police, the horses and the rest, but they cannot beat our spirit to fight on. The Highway cleared at around 11.00pm, when we decided to give Old Bill further practice at pushing us around and wander off to continue picketing.

**Friday 30th January, 9.00am. Embankment Tube:** Thirty scabs were asked to change their pick-up point pending further negotiations.

**Friday Night. Wapping:** On a freezing night, some 30 or 40 pickets braved the cold to annoy Plod and the scabs. Pickets noticed telephone cables being installed at 2.00 in the morning. When challenged, they claimed to be "working" for Mercury and have nothing to do with the strike of Telecom engineers. Seems we've heard that one before. After the intervention of pickets, these shady individuals legged it. Pickets walked round to a nearby Telephone Exchange (all Telecom engineers were wearing Wannine badges) and informed them of developments in the Highway.



an information sheet with militant comments, tomorrow it could well end up as just another voice for rank and file unionism. *RJ* (address for contact with *Picket* supplied).

In *World Revolution* 103, April 1987, with the definitive defeat of the printer's strike we published a balance sheet of *Picket's* activities:

## Picket: balance sheet of a struggle group

**One of the most significant expressions of the maturation of the present international wave of workers' struggles is the appearance of small groups of militant workers organising outside the unions in order to push forward the extension and self-organisation of the struggle. With the official winding down of the printers' strike in Britain, it is an appropriate time to draw a balance sheet of the group *Picket* which emerged from this struggle.**

The appearance of struggle groups is intimately bound up with workers' growing distrust for the trade unions. After the railway strikes in France, for example, a group of workers from the electricity industry produced a leaflet 'To all electricians and gas workers, to all workers and unemployed' in which they showed how the railworkers' general assemblies had functioned, and how the unions kept the strike isolated in one sector.

The ICC's section in France pushed for the formation of such groups. In particular our militants in the post office participated in a group which put out a leaflet showing "it is necessary to prepare the struggle:

- by establishing contacts and information between different centres
- by preparing the largest possible unification at the base, between unionised and non-unionised
- by proposing the most unifying demands for all workers"

Membership of the group was open to all who agreed on the main lessons of the rail strike:

- that general assemblies take the decisions, elect the strike committees and the revocable delegates
- that it's the general assemblies which are charged with extension to other sectors

These struggle groups are not new unions. They aren't nor can they be the embryo of future general assemblies or strike committees.

However, such groups can play a very important role:

- making contact and forging links between different sectors during and even before struggles;
- drawing lessons from previous struggles;
- defending the need for all to struggle and not to stay isolated in one sector;



Release Shirfield and Hicks

- not leaving the unions the monopoly of information.

## Picket: a gain of the struggle

The group *Picket* formed by printworkers and others around the struggle at Wapping was an expression of the same process within the class. It was by no means as clear about the anti-working class role of the unions as the groups in France. But precisely because of the strength of trade unionism in Britain it was of considerable significance that such a group should appear outside the structure of the unions, and that so many of the printworkers involved in the struggle should look to it as a valuable source of information and encouragement to their fight.

*Picket* above all reflected the workers' distrust in the official structures of the unions. In contrast to the miners' strike, which was characterised by a loyalty to the NUM, the print strike ended with the workers expressing a strong feeling of having been 'sold out' by the print unions, even if this was largely put in terms of criticisms of the Dean-Dubbins leadership of SOGAT and the NGA. The pages of *Picket* were thus frequently given over to bitter criticisms of the print union hierarchy and the TUC and other unions for sabotaging any solidarity with the printers.

In the same way, just as the printers' strike in its most dynamic phase contained a real push towards solidarity and unity with other workers, so *Picket* expressed a certain understanding of the necessity for the extension of the struggle. In one issue, for example, they recognise that a weakness of the miners' strike was that "most activists were sucked into the fund-raising circuit"; in another they insist, in response to a letter advising the printers to rely on the leadership of the London branch representatives, that "the pickets are the leadership of the strike...Extending the strike will be done by picketing, not as you outline it. And it is necessary to link the strike to other workers. Ours in a common struggle".

## Picket's fatal flaw

It cannot be said, however, that this call for extension was central to *Picket's* activities. On the contrary, the fundamental weakness of *Picket* was that it never seriously challenged the printers' illusions that their demands could be won if only they could mount a really effective blockade of News International.

Unlike the leftists, *Picket* did not ask the workers to put their trust in union officials even at the most 'rank and file' level. But publishing page after page celebrating the initiative and self-activity of the pickets was completely inadequate when that activity was caught up in dead-end strategy. In fact, it could only mean tail-ending the most radical postures of the unions.

As one unattributed letter *Picket* received rightly

Continued on page 7

1. <http://en.internationalism.org/worldrevolution/201211/5287/workers-groups-experience-1980s>

2. <http://libcom.org/history/picket-bulletin-wapping-printers-strike-1986-1987>. For a discussion and recollections about some of the people involved in the group, see also: <http://libcom.org/forums/history/>

Continued from page 6

said: "the organisation and activity of the strikers has contained elements both of autonomy from the structures and processes of capital, and of dependence on them".

This equally applies to *Picket* itself, which on one page could attack 'the unions', on another criticise only 'the leadership' and very uncritically advertise the activities of rank and file union bodies; which could talk about extending the struggle while at the same time tirelessly propagating all the fixations on blockading Murdoch's publications, on the battles with the police at Wapping, on abusing scabs – all of which became part of the union trap to **prevent** the extension of the struggle.

### The need for a balance sheet

Such ambiguities are inevitable in a grouping thrown up by the immediate struggle. They can only be overcome through a continuous process of discussion and confrontation of ideas within the class. The last words of the last known issue of *Picket* (no 43) seem to indicate the beginning of an attempt to draw some lessons after the set-piece confrontations at the 'anniversary' celebrations: "But the real cause of it all, Murdoch's production and distribution, continued totally unhindered, certainly making more than a few pickets go away thinking that they should have a rethink of strategy".

Unfortunately, *Picket* itself does not seek to stimulate any such a rethink. In the previous number, months after the struggle has been effectively defeated, and two weeks before it was officially called off, *Picket* continues with its usual triumphalist proclamations: "we raised the stakes" and "if NI think they can beat us, they take on not just us, but our history". Workers can hardly draw lessons from their defeats if they can't recognise defeat when it's staring them in the face! In fact this blindness was conditioned by *Picket's* unwillingness to raise a discussion about the real needs of the struggle.

Symptomatic of this was that *Picket* never called for the holding of general assemblies to discuss the aims and methods of the strike. Equally significant was *Picket's* extreme reluctance to engage in discussion with proletarian political organisations – those who most unambiguously defended the necessity for the struggle to break out of the Wapping trap. It is positive that *Picket* reprinted articles on the print strike or on *Picket* itself from

*World Revolution*, *Workers Voice* and *Wildcat*. But these were printed without comment and without any attempt to distinguish them from similar reprints of articles from the leftist press.

In a previous article on *Picket* (WR 95) we said that if it did not seek to provide a focus for discussing and analysing the printers' struggle, it could end up as another voice for rank and file unionism. *Picket* was indeed drawn deeper and deeper into this trap. But, at the time of writing, the main danger of this inability to draw out the lessons of the struggle seems to be that *Picket* will simply vanish without trace – precisely at the time when the most militant workers need to reflect on the causes of the defeat at Wapping and the perspective for participating in future struggles. This need exists not only in the print, but at British Telecom, among the miners, the teachers and throughout the class. *Picket* itself may not be equal to the task. But its very appearance shows that the development of other workers' groups and struggle committees is now definitely on the horizon in Britain as elsewhere. L'A

In the second part of this article we will look at initiatives to form workers' groups in other sectors during this period: health, post, and education.

## ICC Online

Israel/Palestine: Populations held hostage by imperialist war

Israel-Gaza conflict - the rotten fruit of decadent capitalism

Spain: Debate on the general strike

The history of sport under capitalism (Part One): Sport in the ascendant phase of capitalism (1750-1914)

## Discuss with the ICC and others through our online discussion forum

### Capital, the best way to read it

This thread was begun by Derek Lorenz on 5 January 2013. So far it has had 9 replies and 1290 reads.

*I've finally went and bought a copy of capital (the penguin edition), and while I've read through the work somewhat previously (when I was a teenager) I'm pretty sure I really didn't quite comprehend what I was reading nor did I get very far.*

*So, basically, I'm just wondering if anyone who posts here could offer some advice on reading Capital, if there are any useful videos, books, anything, that would help me along in reading the book itself. I've attempted to get a group together to read it locally where I live, but that was ultimately unsuccessful (I only found one person who was interested and they were far too busy with school for it too really work out). Should I attempt one online, or find one already ongoing?*

*I've been recommended David Harvey's Reading Capital youtube series of videos and while the first couple of videos I found somewhat helpful, I've also read that further along in the series the videos get much worse and that they aren't particularly helpful (the same goes with his book of the same name).*

*I've also watched Brendan Cooneys videos on*

*youtube, and while they've been helpful in dealing with some of the same concepts from Capital I'm looking for something focused more on a reading of the book itself.*

*Anyway, sorry if something like this has been asked here before (I searched and didn't find anything). Thanks in advance.*

The most 'popular' thread is 'Why is it so difficult to struggle, and how can we overcome these difficulties?', with 120 replies and over 28,000 reads.

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\*Out of print pamphlets will be photocopied which may take a little longer to supply.

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## Contact the ICC

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# Greece

## 'Curing' the economy kills the sick

In December the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported on a visit to Greece.

"In October 2012 the trauma therapist Georg Pier made the following observations in Greece: 'Very pregnant women hurried desperately from one hospital to the next. But since they had neither any medical insurance nor sufficient money nobody wanted to help them give birth to their children. People, who until recently were part of the middle classes, were collecting residues of fruit and vegetables from the dustbins. (...) An old man told a journalist, that he could no longer afford the drugs for his heart problems. His pension was cut by 50% as was the case with many other pensioners. He had worked for more than 40 years, thinking that he had done everything right; now he no longer understands the world. If you are admitted to a hospital, you must bring your own bed-sheets as well as your own food. Since the cleaning staff were sacked, doctors and nurses, who have not received any wages for months, have started to clean the toilets. There is a lack of disposable gloves and catheters. In the face of disastrous hygienic conditions in some places the European Union warns of the danger of the spreading of infectious diseases.'" (FAZ, 15/12/12).

The same conclusions were drawn by Marc Sprenger, head of the European Centre for the Prevention and Control of Diseases (ECDC). On 6 December, he warned of the collapse of the health system and of the most basic hygiene measures in Greece, and said that this could lead to pandemics in the whole of Europe. There is a lack of disposable gloves, aprons and disinfectant sheets, cotton balls, catheters and paper sheets for covering hospital examination beds. Patients with highly infectious diseases such as tuberculosis are not receiving the necessary treatment, so the risk of spreading resistant viruses in Europe is increasing.

### A striking contrast between what is technically possible and capitalist reality.

In the 19th century many patients, sometimes up to a third, died due to lack of hygiene in hospitals, in particular women during childbirth. While in the 19th century these dangers could be explained to a large extent through ignorance, because many doctors did not clean their hands before a treatment or an operation and often went

with dirty aprons from one patient to the next, the discoveries in hygiene for example by Semmelweis or Lister allowed for a real improvement. New hygiene measures and discoveries in the field of germ transmission allowed for a strong reduction in the danger of infection in hospitals. Today disposable gloves and disposable surgical instruments are current practice in modern medicine. But while in the 19th century ignorance was a plausible explanation for the high mortality in hospitals, the dangers which are becoming transparent in the hospitals in Greece today are not a manifestation of ignorance but an expression of the threat against the survival of humanity coming from a totally obsolete, bankrupt system of production.

If today the health of people in the former centre of antiquity is threatened by the lack of funds or insolvency of hospitals, which can no longer afford to buy disposable gloves, if pregnant women searching for assistance in hospitals are sent away because they have no money or no medical insurance, if people with heart disease can no longer pay for their drugs... this becomes a life-threatening attack. If, in a hospital, the cleaning staff who are crucial in the chain of hygiene are sacked and if doctors and nurses, who have not been receiving any wages for a long time, have to take over cleaning tasks, this casts a shocking light on the 'regeneration' of the economy, the term which the ruling class uses to justify its brutal attacks against us. 'Regeneration' of the economy turns out to be a threat to our life!

After 1989 in Russia life expectancy fell by five years because of the collapse of the health system, but also due to the rising alcohol and drug consumption. Today it's not only in Greece that the health system is being dismantled step by step or collapsing. In another bankrupt country, Spain, the health system is also being demolished. In the old industrial centre, Barcelona, as well as in other big cities, emergency wards are in some cases only kept open for a few hours in order to save costs. In Spain, Portugal and Greece many pharmacies no longer receive any vital drugs. The German pharmaceutical company Merck no longer delivers the anti-cancer drug Erbitux to Greek hospitals. Biotest, a company selling blood plasma for the treatment of haemophilia and tetanus, had already stopped delivering its product due to unpaid bills last June.

Until now such disastrous medical conditions



were known mainly in African countries or in war-torn regions; but now the crisis in the old industrial countries has led to a situation where vital areas such as health care are more and more sacrificed on the altar of profit. Thus medical treatment is no longer based on what is technically possible: you only get treatment if you are solvent!

This development shows that the gap between what is technically possible and the reality of this system is getting bigger and bigger. The more hygiene is under threat the bigger the danger of uncontrollable epidemics. We have to recall the epidemic of the Spanish flu, which spread across Europe after the end of WWI, when more than 20 million died. The war, with its attendant hunger and deprivation, had prepared all the conditions for this outbreak. In today's Europe, the same role is being played by the economic crisis. In Greece, unemployment rose to 25% in the last quarter of 2012; youth unemployment of those aged under 25 reached 57%; 65% of young women are unemployed. The forecasts all point to a much bigger increase – up to 40% in 2015. The pauperisation which goes together with this has meant that "already entire residential areas and apartment blocs have been cut off from oil supplies because of lack of payment. To avoid people freezing in their homes during the winter, many have started to use small heaters, burning wood. People collect the wood illegally in nearby forests. In spring 2012 a 77 year old man shot himself in front of the parliament in Athens. Just before killing himself, he is reported to have shouted: 'I do not want

1. In 'emerging' countries like India more and more private hospitals are opening, which are only accessible to rich Indian patients and to more solvent patients from abroad. They offer treatment which are far too expensive for the majority of Indians. And many of the foreign patients who come as 'medical tourists' to the Indian private clinics cannot afford to pay for their treatment 'at home'.

to leave any debts for my children'. The suicide rate in Greece has doubled during the past three years" (op cit)

Next to Spain with the Strait of Gibraltar, Italy with Lampedusa and Sicily, Greece is the main point of entrance for refugees from the war-torn and impoverished areas of Africa and the Middle East. The Greek government has installed a gigantic fence along the Turkish border and set up big refugee camps, in which more than 55,000 'illegals' were interned in 2011. The right wing parties try to stir-up a pogrom atmosphere against these refugees, blaming them for importing 'foreign diseases' and for taking resources that rightfully belong to 'native Greeks'. But the misery that drives millions to escape from their countries of origin and which can now be seen stalking the hospitals and streets of Europe stems from the same source: a social system which has become a barrier to all human progress. **Dionis 4/1/13**

## Winterbourne View, Mid Staffs Hospital

### All the 'compassion' capitalism affords

see page 2

## Political positions of the ICC

**World Revolution** is the section in Britain of the **International Communist Current** which defends the following political positions:

\* Since the first world war, capitalism has been a decadent social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction and new crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decadence, the phase of decomposition. There is only one alternative offered by this irreversible historical decline: socialism or barbarism, world communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.

\* The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.

\* The statified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called 'socialist' or 'communist' were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.

\* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in

the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

\* All the nationalist ideologies - 'national independence', 'the right of nations to self-determination' etc - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.

\* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. 'Democracy', a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.

\* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called 'workers', 'Socialist' and 'Communist' parties (now ex-'Communists'), the leftist organisations (Trotskyists, Maoists and ex-Maoists, official anarchists) constitute the left of capitalism's political apparatus. All the tactics of 'popular fronts', 'anti-fascist fronts' and 'united fronts', which mix up the interests of the proletariat with those of a faction of the bourgeoisie, serve only to smother and derail the struggle of the proletariat.

\* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union

organisation, whether 'official' or 'rank and file', serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.

\* In order to advance its combat, the working class has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organisation through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.

\* Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it's not the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organised mass action by the proletariat.

\* The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class towards a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers' councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.

\* The communist transformation of society by the workers' councils does not mean 'self-management' or the nationalisation of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labour, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.

\* The revolutionary political organisation constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active

factor in the generalisation of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to 'organise the working class' nor to 'take power' in its name, but to participate actively in the movement towards the unification of struggles, towards workers taking control of them for themselves, and at the same time to draw out the revolutionary political goals of the proletariat's combat.

### OUR ACTIVITY

Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.

Organised intervention, united and centralised on an international scale, in order to contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society.

### OUR ORIGINS

The positions and activity of revolutionary organisations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organisations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the *Communist League* of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the *International Workingmen's Association*, 1864-72, the *Socialist International*, 1884-1914, the *Communist International*, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular the *German, Dutch and Italian Lefts*.