

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty

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an injury to one is an injury to all

**THE LEFT AND
THAILAND**
PAGE 18

**FIGHT THE
ANTI-UNION
LAWS**
PAGE 9

GREEK CRISIS
PAGE 14-17

**ORGANISE TO RESIST
LIB-CON COALITION**

**See
page 3**

**Fight cuts,
reshape the
labour movement**

Unite for:

- **Public services; against cuts and privatisations**
- **Real rights to strike**
- **Unions' right to fund political parties**
- **Democratic control of Labour Party by unions and local Labour parties.**

Nominate John McDonnell for Labour leader: see centre pages

BRITISH TELECOM

Our first strike ballot for 23 years!

BY A DELEGATE

At this year's Communication Workers Union (CWU) Conference BT workers announced a ballot on strike action over pay... for the first time in 23 years!

This is as a consequence of a collapse in negotiations on the issue (due for resolution on 1 April). BT had offered a below inflation pay increase of 2%, a breaking of the link with pensionable pay, and a performance related element.

All these issues are "show stoppers" for the union.

BT management appear emboldened by the recent General Election result. When their annual profits were announced (£5.78 billion, up by 6%) there was no move in their negotiating position as had been expected. BT also reported annual cost savings of up to £1.7 billion (mainly through voluntary redundancies) and dividend payments to shareholders of 6%.

This standoff between the BT Board and CWU now threatens to escalate. And BT is one of the few national companies in the private sector that is well unionised.

In the past couple of years the current "Effective Left" (sic) leadership of the Telecoms Executive of the CWU has not inspired confidence in the members. We have seen a series of shoddy deals including massive reductions in the worth of pensions in 2008 and a truly dreadful agreement on attendance patterns in BT OpenReach in 2009. However industrial logic means that a fight on pay may be unavoidable.

The deadline for the final management response is 4 June. Watch this space.

- CWU conference also discussed moving to biennial elections for the National Executive (this policy was passed) and a biennial conference (a policy defeated).

A Workers' Plan for the Crisis

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Solidarity with Greek workers!

From back page

The package is by no means certain to "work" even in its own terms, because the huge cuts in Greece will trash industry there and reduce Greek capital's ability to earn euros.

The Greek left and labour movement is shaped by a history different from most European countries. Greece had 54% of its workforce in agriculture as late as 1961.

It was ruled by the Ottoman (Turkish) empire until 1829, when it gained independence, but only under a monarchy staffed by German and Danish princes nominated by the big powers. Large parts of its territory did not come under independent Greek rule until 1912-3.

From 1936 Greece was under a military dictatorship. During World War Two it was invaded twice, first by Italy, which failed to conquer Greece, and then by Germany, which imposed a brutal occupation.

From 1967 to 1974 Greece was again under military dictatorship, after a coup in which the CIA had a part.

One million Greeks were forced out of Turkey in the early 1920s, and over a quarter of a million out of Egypt in the 1950s and 60s.

In short, history teaches Greeks to think of their country as more akin to those of Latin America than to most European states' a victim rather than a profiteer of world capitalism. Yet Greek nationalism is by no means all a democratic resistance to outside domination: the rancid Greek hostility to the independence of the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia proves otherwise.

Greece has by far the highest rate of military spending, relative to national income, in Europe, and has long had a wealthy class with international ambitions. Along with the growth of Greek capitalism within the EU has come a rapid increase in inequality between rich and poor Greeks.

Where all the other old Stalinist "Communist" parties in Europe have declined drastically or disappeared, the Greek Communist Party, KKE — legal only since 1974 — remains a strong force (8% of the vote in October 2009's election, for example, as high a level as in the 1970s). It is still strongly Stalinist. Some of its tactics are like those of the Stalinist "Third Period" of 1928-34. It denounces Greece's trade union confederations as "yellow unions", and insists on calling its own actions and demonstrations. These tactics are tied to a revolutionary-sounding but very "patriotic" and unsocialist political programme.

Greece's analogue of the Labour Party, Pasok, was founded only in 1974. The first words of its founding motto were "National Independence". In recent decades it has, however, adopted the standard neo-liberal, world-market-oriented politics of other European social-democratic parties. It is the governing party pushing through the current cuts.

There are two union confederations, ADEDY for government employees, and GSEE for other workers. Both are linked politically to Pasok: it took rank-and-file pressure to get them to start calling general strikes against the cuts.

The union confederation leaderships, financed mainly by allocations from government welfare spending rather than by union dues (which are scarcely collected), stand above a very large number (about 4000) of individual unions, mostly quite small, often limited to sin-

gle workplaces or cities.

Synapsismos, a "Eurocommunist" split from the Communist Party, dating back to 1968, is also relatively strong. Syriza, the coalition led by it in the 2009 election, got 5% of the vote. Greece has several revolutionary left groups, some of them in Syriza, many outside.

The strike calls by GSEE and ADEDY limit themselves to opposing cuts, without stating any alternative. Often they hint that "more balanced" cuts would be acceptable.

Synapsismos calls for cuts in military spending, and for "renegotiation of the debt, and borrowing directly from the European Central Bank [not the IMF]... a redistribution of wealth in favor of the forces working against the forces of capital... taxing big business instead of cutting wages and pensions".

Revolutionary left groups add calls for the nationalisation of the banks, nationalisation of enterprises under workers' control, migrant workers' rights, and the creation of rank-and-file committees of struggle.

The call from Synapsismos is implicitly one for pressure on the existing Pasok government, or perhaps for a new coalition government of sections of Pasok plus Synapsismos. The revolutionary left's demands implicitly require a call for a workers' government, based on a transformed labour movement, to be the agency of such measures.

How such a call for a workers' government could be expressed in practical terms, I don't know from this distance. Three Pasok MPs have been expelled for opposing the cuts, but whether and how sectors of the Pasok base can be broken from the leadership I don't know.

Most of the revolutionary groups (the main exception, unexpectedly, seems to be SEK, Greek sister group of the SWP-UK) also echo the KKE's call for Greece to quit the EU. (No other big political force in Greece, not even the right-wing Greek party roughly equivalent to UKIP, makes that call).

Any socialist government in Greece, or even any government heavily responsive to and moving under working-class pressure, would have no choice but to insist on a cancellation or renegotiation

The struggle against dictatorship in 1974

of Greece's debt. Quite likely it would have to refuse payments on the debt, and see itself excluded from the eurozone and probably the EU. To shy away from declaring the debt unpayable for fear of EU retaliation would be false.

But it does not follow that socialists should cheer Greece's exclusion from the eurozone or the EU as a victory. It does not follow that Greece leaving the EU would push Greek politics to the left. On the contrary. If Greek workers are encouraged to see "out of the EU" as the answer, then they are likely to find themselves victims of a nationalist government which will enforce even bigger cuts in the name of a supposed "national independence".

Greece is not an isolated case. Portugal, Spain, and even Italy are on the same road, only a short distance behind. It is not impossible that more "central" EU countries could run into similar problems a bit later. The socialist answer cannot be that each country, as and when it finds itself in trouble, should cut loose and seek the best deal it can get "from outside".

A cross-European programme of cancelling unpayable debts and installing cross-Europe social guarantees (minimum wages, pensions, and social services) would provide the basis for a united workers' response.

The idea that each country should save itself by quitting the EU, and then trying to do the best deal it can from outside, can only divide the European working class into competing national segments, each lined up behind its "own" government as it seeks competitive advantage in the deal-making.

The rules of the eurozone are heavily neo-liberal, even after being so dramatically "bent" in recent weeks, and their making and "bending" is heavily dominated by the bigger and richer states. But does it follow that workers would do better in a Europe of walled-off, fiercely-competing nation states? Would workers in smaller and poorer countries, in particular, do better under a regime of more unrestrained competition between capitalist states? No.

• More on pages 14-17

LIB-CON COALITION

Fight cuts, reshape the labour movement

For the fight now coming against the Tory-Lib coalition government's cuts, we need to get the labour movement into different shape.

Individual local cuts can and will be defeated by one-off campaigns. A local campaign has recently defeated plans to close the Accident and Emergency unit at Whittington Hospital in north London.

That is good and important. But by itself it will only nibble at the edges of the £6 billion cuts announced on 24 May, and the much bigger cuts to be announced on 22 June. Maybe it will only shift cuts from one area to another.

The British ruling class knows it is on new terrain, as the global capitalist dislocation which opened in 2007-8 shifts into a crisis focused on government debt. The labour movement needs to adjust to new terrain, too.

We need to adjust industrially. In the long years of muted capitalist boom and expanding public expenditure up to 2007, unions slid back into seeing "industrial action" as normally a matter of one-day strikes switched on and off by top union leaders.

Unions need to start thinking about industrial action aimed to win, not just to protest, and controlled by democratic strike committees.

Politically, most of the unions submitted passively to New Labour, with occasional motions and speeches of protest never followed through.

The unions which were expelled by the Labour Party or disaffiliated — RMT and FBU — adopted no coherent and active political strategy.

The affiliated unions made small moves to regain some democracy in the Labour Party at the 2009 Labour Party conference, but only small ones.

Despite everything, the trade-union movement in Britain remains stronger than in Greece. The movement can step up to the challenges, if activists can overcome the many ties of inertia.

A call from the unions to set up across-the-board anti-cuts committees in all cities — and to rejuvenate Trades Councils — would be the first step. Beyond that, we need to prepare a movement of industrial and political resistance.

It will start with demonstrations and protests. But we should learn the lessons from Canada's battle against drastic cuts in the 1990s, discussed in *Solidarity* last issue.

There, the demonstrations and protests rose to the level of a one-day general strike that shut down the major city, Toronto. They stopped there because there was not the political momentum to go forward to more decisive action; and so the labour movement was defeated.

Politically, the labour movement needs to defend its very means of fighting. The BA and Network Rail cases have established a legal precedent that employers can stop or delay almost any big strike by going to court over inevitable small discrepancies in ballot procedures.

The Lib-Dems have established policy — promoted by Vince Cable during the election campaign — for new legislation to enable the government to ban any strike in public services and impose binding arbitration. The government may also legislate to require 40% of all workers eligible to vote, as well as a majority of voters, for a strike.

The cuts cannot be fought effectively without a parallel battle for a real right to strike.

The Lib-Dems and Tories also have established policy to outlaw union financing of political parties (beyond very small donations).

New Labour has paved the way for them to legislate on that, by commissioning the Hayden Phillips report. If the new government goes ahead, it will destroy trade-union leverage in the Labour Party, and reduce Labour to a rump dependent on state funding or on wealthy donors.

Some socialists may say that doesn't matter, because Labour is already so right-wing. That stance misses two points.

A legal ban on union finance for political parties will

cut against any sort of workers' party based on the trade unions, not just against the current Labour Party.

And recent developments show that, like it or not, Labour still remains what Marxists call a "bourgeois workers' party", a party bourgeois in its politics and leadership but containing contradictions because it is also tied to an organised working-class base.

The rallying of working-class anti-cuts votes to Labour in the election campaign; the influx of 13,000 people into the Labour Party since 6 May (unprecedented: nothing like that happened after previous Labour defeats in 1979, 1970, 1951, or 1931); and the anxious disavowal of "New Labour" by even the most Blairite candidates in the current Labour leadership contest, all point that way.

The Labour Party still has a working-class base —

misused, rightly resentful, reluctant, often disengaged, heavily gagged, but there.

Socialists who stand aside from ferment in the Labour Party are wrong.

They may say: "only industrial action matters". But politics matters too.

They may say: "the ferment will probably subside or come to nothing. Best to stand aside and appeal to workers to gather round us instead".

Indeed, there are no guarantees about how far the ferment will go. But passively to wait for it to disperse, rather than to intervene actively, is no way to build a better left wing.

Since about 2003-4 outside-Labour left electoral efforts have steadily been less successful. Their scores have dropped despite New Labour being in office and becoming more and more unpopular; and despite (or maybe partly because of) many left groups reducing their electoral platforms to the most minimal politics in a desperate attempt to "broaden out".

That decline continued on 6 May. The conditions of Labour being in opposition and able easily and cheaply to denounce the Tory cuts make it harder for that decline to be reversed in the near future.

At the Labour Party conference in September/October 2009, under pressure from the unions, Labour leaders promised a review of all the undemocratic structures imposed on the Labour Party by Tony Blair in 1997. That review is due to start in October 2010.

If the left does not mobilise on the issue, any one of the main current contenders for Labour Party leadership may well be able to get away with restricting or postponing the review. But if the left does mobilise, especially in the unions, we can win some effective power for a Labour Party conference, where unions and local Labour Parties are democratically represented, to control the party.

The best thing now would be a coalition of union and Labour Party groups to come together to fight on the four fronts listed above. Discussions are under way.

In the meantime, however, every activist can and should seek maximum unity in their trade-union organisations and committees, and in their local Labour Party if they are a member, on those four points.

Two other things need to be done by the Marxist left, in parallel to fighting for that broader unity.

We must fight for trade-union democracy. The unions face bigger challenges than for many years, but the TUC is moving to hold a full congress only every other year, not yearly.

Continued on page 4

The first six billion

On 24 May the Tory-Liberal government announced its first instalment of cuts. It will announce its largest plans on 22 June.

The cuts include:

- More than £1 billion from central government allocations to local government, i.e. cuts in local services.
- More than £700 million from central government allocations to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.
- £320 million by scrapping the "child trust fund" set up by the Labour government (which would pay small amounts to each baby, designed to accumulate into a still small but useful stash by age 18).
- £290 million by scrapping another Labour government fund designed to provide temporary placements for young people out of work. £311 million in central government grants for local children's and young people's services.
- Much more in a freeze on civil service recruitment and largely unspecified "efficiencies". The civil service union PCS comments: "With some departments being told to axe hundreds of millions of pounds from their budgets for this year, the union does not believe this can be done without hitting vital public services".
- The package is sugar-coated with cuts to payments to "consultants", on ministers' cars, and on top civil servants' first-class rail travel.

Don't underestimate our enemies!

BY COLIN FOSTER

A common story on the left now is that "the Tories didn't win the election".

Many people claim that the new coalition government is already shaky and could fall apart easily.

False reassurance, I think. The government can be made weak, and splits between the two coalition parties (or within the Tories or Lib Dems) can be forced, by determined working-class struggle.

But, without strong working-class resistance, this could be as strong a government as a straight Tory administration, or stronger.

We have to assume that the Tories and the Lib-Dems agreed a big cuts programme in their coalition talks. Nothing improbable about that: on economic and social issues the Lib-Dems are as right-wing as the Tories.

Announcing that programme will make the government unpopular. They already know that. The Tories and Lib Dems must hope that by the

end of the government's five year term they will have "lived down" that unpopularity and gained new credence as people who know how to govern and take "tough" decisions. It is not impossible they can do that.

In the meantime, the Lib Dems can expect nothing good if they break the coalition over some secondary issue after being "bloodied" by joining in the most unpopular measures.

Both parties have ditched some policies to make the coalition agreement. But it is plausible that both Cameron and Clegg are more pleased than displeased at being able to use coalition constraints to drop policies imposed on them by their party ranks.

Of course the Tories and Lib Dems may miscalculate. For example, they may find that they want to push through big supplementary cuts in a year's time, and fall out over that.

But working-class strategy should rely on our own bullets, not on hopes that our enemies will shoot themselves in the feet.

Fight the cuts, reshape the labour movement

from page 3

The Communication Workers' Union faces government plans to part-privatise Royal Mail. But it is discussing a similar shift to the TUC — to conferences only every other year, and Executive elections only every other year too.

Deputy general secretary Dave Ward blurted out the thinking behind this to the *Guardian* (29/10/09): it will insulate union leaders more from the rank and file.

"One example [Ward] cited was that, because officials have to be elected every year, they are in 'perpetual election mode' and therefore constantly feel the need to talk tough to appeal to the CWU's rank and file. He said the union was prepared to hold elections less frequently to improve relations with management."

The public services union Unison is

attacking democracy by witch-hunts against left activists in the union.

We need a fight to move the unions in the opposite direction - towards greater democracy.

And, along with broad campaign work, we must work - with other Marxists where we can - to reinstate basic socialist education in the movement.

We are in the midst of the greatest global capitalist crisis for over 70 years. Capitalism is discrediting itself. Yet the basic Marxist critique of capitalism, and outline of an alternative, still goes almost unvoiced. All our campaign work will lack direction unless we can also instill in the labour movement an understanding that capitalism is only a passing historical phase, a particular economic system which can and must be replaced by a different one.

Patience on pay doesn't pay

BY CHRIS REYNOLDS

The latest official figures for inflation are 3.7% (consumer price index) and 5.3% (retail price index), both for April 2010.

Both figures have been rising steadily since about June 2009.

The vast sums of credit pumped into the system in late 2008 by governments in order to bail out the banks and stop "deflation" (falling prices) always had an inbuilt risk of generating inflation; and it was always likely that the inflation would arrive after some delay.

We don't know what will happen to inflation now. A renewed banking crisis might bring it down again, though maybe at the cost of further bail-outs which could feed through to even more inflation later.

But inflation is already relatively high, and could rise higher.

That means that pay freezes, and multi-year pay deals, could well lead to severe cuts in workers' real income.

Many trade unionists, especially in the private sector, have "hunkered down" since 2007, keeping pay claims low or accepting cuts in the hope that temporary sacrifice will see them through the crisis.

Patience looks even less like a virtue now.

Stop the Tories' free market in state schools!

(From the back page...)

- Introducing a Pupil Premium, extra money, separate to the overall school budget, for schools in deprived areas. This was the policy of all the parties before the election. The money, £2.5 billion, may sound like a lot, but spread across thousands of schools, it will not go far.

No school will be obliged to become an academy, but schools will gain extra money from opting out of local authority control and that is an incentive some head teachers will jump at.

What will happen to the schools that are not now being fast-tracked to academy status? Will their business plans be good enough to get them academy status? Possibly.

Michael Gove says he wants all schools to be academies. But he envisages Academies being grouped in "chains" (a New Labour idea) — with lower achieving Academies being "helped out" by the higher achievers. In other words a two tier education system, grouped together by the businesses and charities that run the Academy chains.

What will happen to those schools that positively want to remain in local authority control? They will suffer from local authorities losing cash. If the government can't "incentivise" schools into becoming Academies, it will starve them into submission.

According to the Tories' free market dogma, bad Academies will be "encouraged" to improve by the shining example of the "very best". Really?

The school report on New Labour's Academy programme, presented originally as a programme to drive up standards in "failing" schools is not that great. The ten years since New Labour introduced Academies have yielded no scientific evidence to show that they

automatically drive up standards. Yet, an aura now surrounds these schools. Our rulers assumed that they do drive up standards. Such is the power of the myths that surround capitalist market principles.

The same set of assumptions underlies the so-called "free schools" policy. This is just another means to create more pseudo-options in a "free market" in state-funded education.

While local councils are by no means models of democratic functioning, the principle of having locally elected representatives who oversee education for the needs of a whole community, and who are accountable to it is extremely important. We need to sharpen up our arguments in defence of that principle.

- Under a hotch-potch system of schools competing against each other the needs of, for instance, children with special educational needs, cannot be planned for.

- The idea of allowing parents to set up schools wherever they want only superficially gives "power to the people".

The school-starters will always be a self-selected group (rather than a democratically representative body). They cannot possibly represent the needs of the *whole* community, and they are certainly not accountable to it.

The real point of these reforms is that through "parental enterprise" and the spreading of Academy status, a whole raft of services will be handed over to private companies. Headteachers and governors will spend their time meeting with reps from businesses with competing expertise.

If they are confused by it all they always can consult The New Schools Network, a consultancy set up by a former aide to Michael Gove, which will help put them in touch with the right businesses for them.

This is big business. And while free schools aren't allowed make a profit from their daily operations, by charging fees, for ancillary activities they can still cream off a big profit.

Take Kunskapsskolan a company which runs 30 free schools in Sweden. Last year the firm had an operating profit of SKr65 million. They have recently taken over their first Academy in Richmond.

There are many reasons for teachers to oppose these changes — it could smash up national collective agreements on pay and conditions (academies can determine their own pay structure). But this is not just an issue for teachers and not just about industrial concerns.

We need the broadest possible campaign to save and extend state-funded comprehensive education. We need to base our campaign on socialist principles.

It is not just that we oppose these reforms from an anti-capitalist point of view — because they are about the marketisation and privatisation of education. We also have a bigger vision — we believe that every child has the right to a decent education.

While every parent wants to do their best for their child, a competitive scramble by every parent to push their children forward is not a principle upon which we should organise society. Socialists live by the principle "from each according to her or his ability, to each according to her or his need". It serves us very well here.

This programme of individual schools competing for scarce resources has to be completely reversed. We need to get more resources, to take all competition out of the system and to design schools and education more broadly around the needs of all children and the communities in which they live.

After the election: what the left is saying

Comments from Workers' Liberty, the SCSTF, the LRC, Ken Livingstone's "Progressive London", the Socialist Party and the SWP

www.workersliberty.org/leftafterelection

STUDENT FEES

Take the fight to the government!

BY DANIEL RANDALL

The election of the Lib-Con government has given bosses in the education sector a renewed enthusiasm for further marketisation and profiteering of universities.

Universities UK, the university bosses' organisation has published a statement in which it said that, while it favours tuition fees remaining "regulated", it "envisages a... future in which [the] upper limit is appreciably higher than its current level". The current cap on fees is set at just over £3,000, and students can expect to graduate with over £15,000 of debt when accommodation and living costs are taken into account.

UUK's statement represents a rare moment of unity between university bosses. Usually the competing agendas of their separate institutions prevents them from mounting united action. But forming a single front was necessary for them to lobby an upcoming review into higher education funding (Browne Review).

The new government has delayed decisions on tuition fees pending that review. If the bosses manage to push the raising of the cap on fees, this is more

likely to shape government policy (the Lib-Dems election policy was to scrap tuition fees, not that this necessarily means anything now).

The "revolutionary vanguard" of UUK is the Russell Group, a coalition of the country's top-20 universities. The Russell Group published its own statement on fees, which goes even further than the UUK.

Russell Group universities favour the complete removal of the cap and a system within which universities can charge students whatever they like.

This would inevitably lead to a two-tier (or three, or four, or five-tier) education system in Britain where elite institutions like Oxford and Cambridge become completely inaccessible to students from working-class backgrounds. They can look forward to being herded into lower-quality institutions which charge lower fees and where they can look forward to being taught how to be effective and obedient workers. The ideological spirit behind the Russell Group's demand is positively Victorian.

Part of the context is the ongoing funding crisis in higher education which is being used to justify job cuts and departmental closures. These cuts have been

met with significant resistance from both students and workers. Student activists at universities like Sussex, Middlesex and Westminster have used radical direct action tactics such as occupations in their fight.

At both Sussex and Middlesex, management has responded harshly — mobilising campus security and/or the police against students and in both cases taking disciplinary sanctions against those involved.

At Middlesex, students involved in an occupation to save the philosophy department now face suspension, as do two members of staff who supported them (see below).

At Sussex, six "ringleaders", including one member of the AWL, were handed fines and were only saved from suspension or expulsion following a massive

solidarity campaign.

AWL students and others in the Education Not for Sale network have been central to establishing and building the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, a national network intended to provide organisational and political coordination to ongoing anti-cuts struggles and to help student activists launch such struggles on their campuses.

But with the Browne Review around the corner and with university bosses increasing the volume of their clamour for higher, or indeed unlimited, fees, fighting defensive battles against cuts will not be enough. We need to find ways of turning our struggle into an offensive one, which can take the fight to the bosses and government and not just resist the latest attack but give an alternative vision for how the education sector might be funded and organised.

Such a campaign will take commitment, determination and a willingness to use radical tactics. But more fundamentally, it will take an anti-capitalist political perspective which puts working-class interests first. Fighting to win support for that perspective is a key task for revolutionary socialists in the student movement now.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST FEES AND CUTS

Next national meeting: Saturday 5 June, 1pm, at University College London. More info: 07775763750
www.anticuts.com
againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com

MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

Defend the student and worker occupiers!

Four students and three lecturers have been suspended by Middlesex University management, in retaliation for the 12-day occupation of the philosophy faculty by students and staff in early May.

On 4 May, students and staff took over the philosophy faculty at Middlesex to protest against its closure, and after management had failed to show up to a meeting with students at which they had promised to "explain" the cuts.

Over the next 12 days, the campaign against the closure grew, drawing in messages of support from academics and trade unionists all over the world. The occupied building was used as a centre of operations for the campaign and also as a venue for alternative lectures and seminars. Dozens of supporters from the student movement and the labour movement across the UK visited.

The victimisation of activists involved in the occupation is totally unacceptable. Like the earlier victimisation of the "Sussex Six" following an occupation against cuts at Sussex University, it is an attempt to intimidate the anti-cuts campaign, and lay down a marker for future confrontations of this kind.

Middlesex management, like Sussex management, want to set a precedent — that it is normal to discipline, victimise and suspend anyone who protests against cuts and the marketisation of education. As with Sussex, these victimisations can be defeated by a nationwide show of solidarity and practical support.

STUDENT UNIONS

"Remould a rank-and-file student movement"

This year a number of socialists, including supporters of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, have been elected as full-time student union sabbatical officers. Below is an interview with one of them, Michael Chessum, who is a non-aligned socialist, an NCAFC supporter and Vice-President Education-elect at University College London Union.

What's your political background?

I've been politically conscious since forever — my parents were Marxists in the 70s, my dad later a left Labour parliamentary candidate — but only got active from university onwards.

I've always been consciously independent of the (capital letters) Left Factions — although I was briefly a very inactive member of the Scottish Socialist Party — but found myself involved in Education Not For Sale, which I met at NUS conference last year, as well as being on the Another Education is Possible Steering Committee.

My main project now is the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, which I hope will be able to bridge the gaps and remould a rank-and-file student movement. I've also been involved with Palestine solidarity activism.

What's the political culture like at UCL?

UCL Union has been characterised as a "Tory-Liberal marginal", but there's been a strong undercurrent of non-aligned left-wingers, some Revo members, Palestine solidarity work, and a Labour Society which self-defined as

"Bennite" when I arrived. We had a big Stop the War Society for years, and managed at one point to get the Officer Training Corps banned from campus.

The union varies from year to year, but in general the left can get stuff through General Meetings (which, thankfully, we still have). We have Free Education policy, and take a good line on cuts and strikes. The union elections have changed the landscape a bit, and we may be stronger than before.

Tell us about your campaign.

UCLU's regulations prohibit joint campaigning, so I couldn't run on a slate (though needless to say we co-ordinated). Cuts were the main issue — we had demos of hundreds during vote week — but I also ran on Free Education, the London Living Wage, doing more Liberation Campaigning, Human Rights, Global Justice and the Environment, and "Effective National Co-Ordination".

It helped that my main opponent was the president of the Tories. Slightly bizarrely, I had informal backing from Labour and the Lib Dems, who to be fair are not careerists. But in the end it was a surge in grassroots anti-cuts, living wage and Palestine campaigns that won.

What do you hope to achieve next year?

At a national level, I'd like to see NCAFC and the student movement in general take on the government over and fees, win, and then generalise that struggle into something recognisable to the student movements of yore — bring-

ing together vast swathes of students on everything from international solidarity to environmental activism. On a local level, I think we can achieve the London Living Wage. I want to promote liberation and internationalists campaigns. I want a great wave of interest, anger and activism.

Why do you think most student unions are quite conservative?

Governance reviews, careerists, slick meaningless fluff... I think the widespread death of General Meetings is very dangerous for the left: our arguments need time to be articulated and discussed; the right is much better at vacuous one-liners, and more likely to win in small meetings and referendums.

More broadly, the recent history of student politics has been a history of tipping-points: every material defeat (e.g. on fees) means a shift in consciousness: students-as-consumers, unions-as-businesses, democracy-as-expendable. And a highly bureaucratised NUS has managed to systematically institutionalise the spirit of New Labour.

What are the prospects for building a united, effective student left?

Good, if people are willing to put aside the acrimony of years of splits and defeats. We need a broad re-alignment of the left. This will almost certainly come from a general non-sectarian surge in support rather than a strengthening of one or another Trotskyist faction.

• More interviews:
www.workersliberty.org/suinterviews

JERSEY

Fighting for workers' rights and democracy

By BEA MILLS

On the back of the hugely successful result on the ballot for industrial action by teachers on Jersey against pay freezes and cuts, the workers' committee in Jersey last week began to move towards realisation of its own independence and the importance of now linking the industrial with the political.

Heavily dominated by Unite and its affiliates, the committee remained resolute in its determination to grow as a body that would welcome all unions on the island to its ranks. Rather than being subsumed by the defunct Trades Council, it decided to co-opt the Trades Council and the benefits that might bring in terms of TUC affiliation. To ensure the distinction and the independence is clear, the committee will not be calling itself a Trades Council.

Unite had also declared it would be backing Deputy Geoff Southern of the Jersey Democratic Alliance in the upcoming Senatorial by-election on the island. This prompted the committee to respond by agreeing to organise the first trade union hustings seen on Jersey in order for the committee itself to decide on a candidate rather than blindly follow Unite's decision.

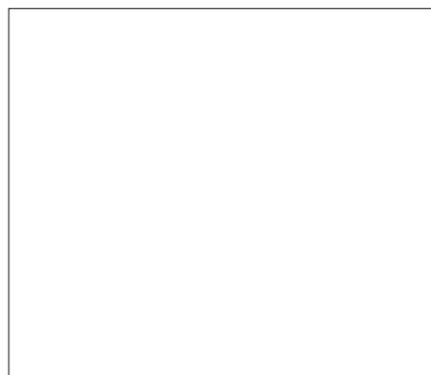
Their hustings will also provide the ideal opportunity for the workers' committee to launch itself as a body and invite other unions to join it, whilst at the same time sending a clear message to the States of Jersey that the unions are organised and growing in strength.

This was an important point for this group of public sector unions who are feeling ever more confident due to the success of the teachers' ballot. The fire service, prison officers and nurses have not yet settled. Having seen the teachers turning out to vote for action, the nurses are hoping to follow suit.

The idea of the necessity and logic of forming a workers' party is beginning to become apparent. This first step of engaging in the island's politics by making demands in the political arena as well as the industrial is being clearly seen by some on the committee as the first step on the path to that end.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty is now organising public meetings on the island. The second such meeting, in St Helier, attracted a range of trade union activists, students and campaigners to discuss why the working class on Jersey needs its own political party. We discussed how it might come into being and what demands it should raise. For all present, the question of independent working-class politics on Jersey was not abstract - it is the most urgent political question on the island at the moment.

Politics on Jersey is currently the preserve of super-rich individuals, and cliques of corrupt, right-wing businessmen. The total control that business has over the running of the island means that everything, from the tax system to unfair employment laws, is run in the interests of big business, and at the expense of working-class people and public services. The decision by the States to make £50million public spending cuts rather than tax the rich and big



Monty Tadier

business is a clear example of how the rich wield the state in Jersey against workers.

One public sector trade unionist told *Solidarity*: "One very important issue is that there is no gender discrimination law in Jersey. It's been debated on and off in the States since the year 2000 and we've just been told it's been deferred again because it'd be too expensive for the States to implement!"

"You can lose your job if you have a baby in the first year of service, and if you're off sick in the first three months after having a baby, you can lose six weeks of maternity pay. That's the case for all state employees."

There has been a small number of left-leaning deputies over recent years, and currently there is only one — Monty Tadier, who is part of the "Time For Change" group. Nick Le Cornu, a Time For Change supporter, who is standing in the forthcoming senatorial by-election

on a pro-union, working-class platform, told *Solidarity*, "It's important to fight the austerity programme which is going to affect working people. That's the big issue at the moment: the cuts caused by the failure of the 0:10 tax policy. They're trying to put the burden on ordinary wage earners and not privileged corporations who pay zero tax. It's about defending living standards against the assault that's going to come, against the cutbacks."

But Time For Change is a loose grouping of activists, without a firm basis in working-class politics. It is not directly linked to the workers' movement, nor is it accountable to working-class organisations.

The AWL believes that the rank-and-file co-ordinating group of trade union activists that has sprung up over recent months, and which represents workers from across the public sector, should form a political party of its own, which could regroup workers in the private sector, service-users and campaign groups like Time For Change.

A working-class political party, with a joined-up programme of demands would be able to command mass support and grow much faster than small leftwing associations like Time For Change. The workers' movement on Jersey is already taking steps in this direction, by preparing to hold trade union hustings for candidates in the forthcoming senatorial election.

As Nick put it, "The unions need to make political demands to achieve their economic demands. Otherwise they won't get very much at all".

Trades councils national conference

By ELAINE JONES, WIRRAL TUC

At this year's Trades Councils conference there were around 70 councils represented. There are now 157 Trades councils and 23 County associations which is an increase of 31 from the previous year...

It was quite a left-wing conference but also quite old. There were three people under 40, a dozen 40-50, and all the rest...

We opposed the idea of "promoting the *Morning Star* as our daily paper" and tackled those who thought that Europe was to blame for attacks on the working class. One delegates made a speech

about how "all this [cuts, etc] is coming from Europe", and reiterated it in a later speech. We explained how the British ruling class are happy to attack the working class in Europe or out.

The conference is allowed to pick one motion for TUC Congress, and our choice of the strongest motion against the anti-union laws was picked. This tells the TUC to campaign against the anti-union laws, but also to support all workers in struggle, including those taking "unofficial" action when they fall foul of the anti-union laws...

• Full report at www.workersliberty/tradescouncils

Journalists versus the anti-union laws

By WILL LODGE

On 19 May, journalists at Johnston Press became the latest workers to fall victim of a High Court injunction against planned strike action, on the basis of ballot discrepancies.

Bizarrely Johnston Press, which owns many titles across the UK including the *Sheffield Star*, managed to convince the court that it employs no journalists, and that to be lawful industrial action needs to be balloted for against each individual subsidiary company. This despite company literature proclaiming that it employs 1,900.

Jeremy Dear, general secretary of the NUJ, said: "Johnston Press management's claim that it employs no journalists would be laughable did it not have such serious implications for industrial relations in the UK. It's clearly part of an emerging trend amongst employers to derail democratically-agreed industrial action by skilfully exploiting the anti-trade union laws."

NUJ members voted overwhelmingly to take strike action; on a 65.2% turnout, 70% voted in favour of a strike, with 88.1% supporting action short of a strike. The union is now in the process of re-balloting all of its members on a company-by-company basis, and plans to co-ordinate action across the whole group.

Johnston Press journalists have struck before in individual workplaces, such as Scarborough.

There is some hope following the recent decision of the High Court to overturn an injunction granted to British Airways to prevent the latest round of cabin crew strikes.

Michelle Stanistreet, deputy general secretary of the NUJ, said: "The court decision earlier this week to frustrate by injunction the democratic strike vote of BA cabin crew - like the court action to stop journalists at Johnston Press from going on strike after they'd voted legally to do so - was a severe attack on the fundamental right to strike."

"Today's decision in favour of Unite goes some way to restore legal respect for that fundamental right. The TUC and the whole trade union movement must now press to ensure that perverse judgements like those in the BA and Johnston Press cases earlier this week are not repeated."

The 550 NUJ members in Johnston Press are fighting an industrial dispute over their company's plans to introduce a new computer system, ATEX, which would make individual journalists responsible for editing content, putting more pressure on them and creating redundancies among sub-editors. The dispute is also challenging a company-wide pay freeze, 12% staff cuts, and changes to the pension plan and employment terms.

Executives at the company refused to link their pay to the pay of their employees, and the chief executive received £1m in 2009.

Adult Education under threat

By A UCU ACTIVIST

Community Education Lewisham has been the target of annual cuts under a restructure which has been affecting learners and staff for at least five or six years. Now there has been an announcement of cuts to the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses of around 30% for the 2010/11 academic year.

CEL have recently announced a "proposal" to close all crèches run by CEL and set their own limit on the "consultation" period of three weeks. But it is obvious that management have long had this plan in the pipeline and are now repeating the mantra of enforced cuts due to forces outside their control, i.e., the Skills Council. The proposal will lead to the loss of 26 creche workers' jobs, and will seriously compromise CEL's claim

to call itself a community service.

What is more, the plans lack clarity and vision. They have not included any details of alternatives that may have been considered. There is absolutely no mention made of the impact on equal opportunities — most of our crèche users are ESOL learners with language and social needs. The only offer of help is childcare specialists who will help learners find alternative childcare. The longer term impact is also likely to be further cuts in ESOL provision due to falling numbers of students.

Management are picking off the most vulnerable and weakest members of the community first. It'll be us next. We need to remind CEL that they are there to serve the community and that Unison and UCU will fight these proposals with all the strength we can muster.

UNISON

Building a real rank-and-file movement in Unison

Members of the public sector union Unison should be at the forefront of a fightback against the cuts. That's the message being put forward by Paul Holmes who is standing for the general secretary election (running until 11 June) against Dave Prentis. But Unison under Prentis is not "fit for purpose" — undemocratic, passive in the face of massive attacks. Todd Hamer describes the state of the union and the kind of campaign the activist left needs to change the union's culture.

With 1.3 million members Unison will be the lynchpin of any defence of public services. But it is a union that is organisationally, politically and ideologically based on unelected fulltime staff ("the bureaucracy") and a few hundred sycophantic, right-wing lay activists.

Their glorious leader is Dave Prentis whose achievements as leader have consisted of defeats, privatisation and pay cuts. The "machine" is currently using the union's resources to ensure Dave Prentis is re-elected as general secretary.

The bureaucracy's approach to trade unionism is best explained by examining one of the recent "victories" gained by Karen Jennings, Unison's "head on health".

In hospitals up and down the country, Unison posters proudly declare that the union put the brakes on privatisation. Through hard negotiations Jennings and her team squeezed a promise from Andy Burnham, ex-Health Secretary, that the NHS would be "preferred provider" of health services. This means that when the Primary Care Trusts commission a service (e.g. a year's worth of hip replacements) they should "prefer" that an NHS hospital gets the contract rather than a private provider.

But this policy will achieve virtually nothing in the battle against privatisation. At best, "preferred provider" will slightly slow down only the latest phase. It leaves in place the entire infrastructure of two years of NHS privatisation — the costly internal markets, precarious employment practices of running services on short-term contracts and the reduction of human health to cash sum calculations.

And the new government could reverse "preferred provider" in an instant and move swiftly to an open health care market.

However, we did not need to wait for the Tories. According to the bosses' *Health Service Journal*, Gordon Brown intervened in March 2010 with a letter to the voluntary sector lobby. He explained: "The words 'preferred provider' will probably remain, but the guts of the policy are being ripped out." So, this is a meaningless concession, far from the "victory of the year". But empty phrases allow the Unison bureaucracy to fake a victory and disarm their members in the face of any future cuts and privatisation.

Unison negotiators probably genuinely believed that they had done their best and got a great deal. But it is precisely because they have given up on trade unionism, the strength of organised workers, that they see no alternative

than begging for crumbs in negotiations.

New Labour has done more to dismantle the NHS in the past 13 years than at any time since 1948. We are now a few simple steps away from the end of universal free healthcare — something that the Lib-Con government are sure to capitalise on. Jennings and the Unison elite have facilitated this process, whilst deluding themselves that they were winning.

SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

Venal and self-serving they may be, but union bureaucrats are first and foremost pragmatists. Right now they are dealing with the fallout of a shrinking trade union movement. Their pragmatism breeds its own ideology.

The received wisdom for trade union leaders throughout the 1990s and 2000s was that the unions had entered a new era of "social partnership". The idea here is that the bosses' interests are the same as the workers. Tony Blair summed up this belief when he announced in 1998 that we now live in a "classless society".

In signing up to this dogma, the union leaders rejected some basic ABCs of trade unionism. "Social partnership" means that workers don't need to stand together and take action to defend their interests.

If the bosses' ultimate goal is the same as the workers, then everything can be resolved by talking it through. Any conflict is trivial, or temporary, to be overcome by "adult dialogue". A skilled band of union negotiators can help to bring enlightenment to "the world of work" and transcend the apparent boss-worker antagonism.

This is clearly nonsense. Any worker who has been bullied by management, had their terms and conditions attacked, or taken a pay cut, knows that their interests do not coincide with their boss. Workers understand that their interests lie in standing together, organising and defending their collective interests. This is why trade unions exist.

The idea that we are "all in it together"

is a myth that only serves the interests of the rich; it stops us defending ourselves.

But the strategy of "social partnership" has had a devastating effect on trade union organisation. Members are encouraged to see their union as a service, a great protector that struts around the corridors of power defending their interests. Any halfway competent boss views these people as a joke, or worse, as an opportunity. Without strong workplace organisation the negotiators are toothless. The great promises of the union never materialise, and workers leave the union thinking it's not worth paying for such a shoddy service.

Meanwhile in the corridors of power, the negotiators get drawn into the bosses' world, deluding themselves that they are winning for "their" members by sycophantic politicking. When they are forced to justify their actions, they wash their hands and say they are trying their best — "what can you do with a weak membership?"

In Unison the collective delusion of "social partnership" has evolved into paranoid psychosis. Attempts to organise industrial action are regularly obstructed by the union officials. These attempts are seen as the domain of the fringe left-wing. Trade unionism based on workers' solidarity is now seen as an extremist activity. People who advocate it are run out of office. The union actually runs courses on how to "deal" with "Trotskyists" in the union.

BREAK THE CYCLE OF DECLINE

The Unison leadership has vested interests in keeping the members inactive and in the dark. When this fails and someone kicks up a fuss, they rely on threats and intimidation to silence critics.

If even a fraction of the 1.3 million members got involved in union activism, these "leaders" could be held to account. Their actions could be scrutinised, they could be forced to represent our collectively worked-out policies, they could be prevented from witch-hunting hard-

working lay activists and could be forced to serve the interests of ordinary members.

Getting involved as an activist in Unison is a fairly demoralising experience. However, we can imagine that in the times to come, people may get involved despite the best efforts of the Unison machine, get involved in their hundreds, even in their thousands, as part of a movement that is necessary if we are going to defend our public services. The depth of the cuts may spark off spontaneous strikes in local government or the NHS. Could we see Visteon-style occupations on a massive scale in PFI hospitals?

Another possibility is that the Unison bureaucracy is forced to act in response to the Lib-Con government. There are two major threats on the horizon. Firstly, Vince Cable has said he wants to ban public sector strikes. Secondly, there is a chance the Lib-Con will try to ban unions from funding political parties. We may see right-wing Unison bureaucrats or New Labour politicians, trying to rouse a mass movement against these proposals. Such a mass movement will develop a life of its own and may refuse to be led by these middle-class incompetents.

However, none of this can be taken for granted. The leaders have no experience of organising a mass movement. They do not know how to communicate with the majority of their members and they are scared of the forces they may unleash. At every opportunity to organise and turn to the strength of their membership, they have retreated.

Most hopefully, the general secretary election provides a small window of opportunity to elect a new leader. Paul Holmes, branch secretary of Kirklees Unison, has helped to create the best organised branch in the union, with over 80% density.

Holmes is arguing that we need to build a rank-and-file movement in the union. He argues that it is only by mass participation of the membership that we can hope to defend our jobs, terms and conditions. With strength in the workplace and mass participation, we can smash through all the bureaucratic blocks to effective trade unionism.

By running in the general secretary election, Holmes wants to inspire such a movement from below. He believes in root and branch change within the union, to rally a mass movement that can revitalise branches, reinvigorate the union's democracy and see off the Tory-Lib Dem government attacks. At the moment he has everything to fight for in this election. But if he is unsuccessful, then the message that he is putting out to the members remains the same.

In every branch there will be many bread and butter trade union issues to campaign around on which to build up the union's organisational strength.

Paul Holmes' message is to organise. He not only wants your vote but also wants you to get active in the union, inspire the workers around you that we can organise and fightback against the Tory-Lib Dem public sector cuts.

CIVIL SERVANTS' UNION CONFERENCE

Dodging issues on cuts and equality

BY A DELEGATE

PCS, by far the largest civil service trade union, met in conference in mid May, as the Lib-Con coalition was drawing up its year-on-year slash-and-burn plans for the public sector: huge reductions in jobs and services; privatisation; cuts in real wages; further attacks on pensions and severance terms.

Conference got through a record number of motions and was a credit to delegates. Yet only a delegate with rose-tinted glasses would have returned home with the belief that the current PCS leadership is geared up to meet the enormous challenges facing PCS members.

The Left Unity/PCS Democrats Coalition has effectively abandoned the fight for common, national, pay rates for all civil servants and the national defence of members' living standards. The National Executive Committee [NEC] is plainly unconfident about a pay fight with the Government, so has instead passed that task back to the members trapped in individual "delegated" bargaining units (BUs). The 200 divide-and-rule BUs are designed to quarantine pay fights. Common national pay rates for the same jobs in different parts of the civil service cannot be won by dealing with pay unit by unit.

The truth is that the NEC gave up the ghost on national pay when it called off the ill prepared 2008 national pay dispute, claiming a "national agreement" when there was no offer on the table (spin of Blairite proportions is a vice of the PCS leadership). The NEC's main hope is that a public sector trade union alliance will come to its rescue.

At conference it became clear that a public sector alliance is the key strategic aim for the NEC to meet the promised Tory-Liberal attacks. Conference agreed an NEC proposal that it should issue "a major call for joint action amongst public sector unions against the threat of spending cuts."

On one level this is absolutely correct. A generalised attack on working people should be resisted by a generalised defence.

Last year's PCS conference passed an Independent Left [IL] motion calling for the NEC to approach other unions for a joint campaign against the Tories' aim of

reopening the attack on public sector pension deals, making the retention of defined benefit pension schemes a key political and electoral issue. The NEC did nothing of the sort.

Some of the detailed proposals put forward by the NEC, local cross union committees for instance, have long been advocated by Independent Left (a grouping of left wing PCS activists, including AWL members, who have been highly critical of the NEC).

The PCS Independent Left (IL) has also consistently urged the NEC:

- Not to rely solely on intra-union diplomacy to build a public sector campaign but to use PCS Regional and town committees to reach out and forge links with the activists of other unions, building a pressure from below, even if the leaders of other unions do not want to unite in a common cause.

- Not to rely on a public sector alliance to defend members — not to rely on Unison general secretary Dave Prentis! — but to develop the strategy to fight alone if need be. PCS needs to go on a war footing. It should collect a levy to build its fighting fund. (It should have started doing that years ago. It should draw up detailed plans to combine selective action with national action, to keep the pressure on the employer and keep the action moving. It should develop the necessary propaganda amongst the members.

In the context of these looming attacks on the public sector, when the New Labour opposition is mired in its own calls to slash services, PCS conference voted to "work up detailed proposals about how supporting or standing trade union candidates would work in practice" with a view to ultimately balloting members on final proposals sometime in 2011.

But the NEC leadership gives no thought as to how it might support John McDonnell MP in his campaign for leader of the Labour Party or in his work in the Labour Representation Committee. The slow job of throwing PCS' weight directly into the electoral scales should not be counterposed to the task of fighting for political regeneration within the existing labour movement alongside John McDonnell, who has consistently supported PCS policies and fought the Blair/Brown cuckoos in the Labour Party.

John McDonnell campaigns tirelessly for a more equal Britain — an issue on which the IL has been at the forefront in PCS. IL has sought to compel the NEC to tie all membership equality issues into a cohesive, national, campaign that has the need for social equality at its core, that draws out for members the connection between workplace and wider society inequalities, and places such a comprehensive equality at the heart of all PCS's campaigns.

In a grotesquely unequal Britain, the fight for equality, including the fight to place the burden of the fiscal crisis on the rich, is a critical element in renovating the British labour movement. Unfortunately the NEC did nothing on the key IL equality motion passed last year. It defeated a censure motion on that issue this year.

IL supporters successfully moved further campaigning equality motions at this year's conference, and played a critical role in that part of conference. It held a large fringe meeting addressed by Richard Wilkinson, one of the authors of an important study of inequality and its consequences, *The Spirit Level*.

The NEC set its face like flint against a mildly worded, very flexible, IL motion calling on the NEC to act on the Union's policy to move full time officer (FTO) pay much closer to that of the members. The motion did not set any target salary, any timetable, did not specify which

grades of FTO should be affected, and did not rule out reserve rights for existing FTOs, but was opposed by the NEC.

Some of the NEC members are Stalinists (no surprise about the support of those "Marxists" for luxury for bureaucrats), but many others are members of the Socialist Party, Socialist Workers' Party, and Scottish Socialist Party — all of whom have a formal policy identical to that of the IL!

The union's staff of full-time officers is rapidly filling up with members of those organisations. So the NEC and its supporters denounced the union's own existing policy, called it brutal, and aligned themselves with the PCS right wing. The motion was lost and PCS will remain a trade union where:

- The gap between the lowest and highest pay points in its own employment is £69,438!

- The highest paid official earns £87,656 with effect from 1st August 2009 (and donated back to the union just £2,000 last year and £4000 in 2008) but the average full time annual salary in the Civil Service was just £22,850 as at 31 March 2009.

The position of the would-be Marxists on the PCS NEC seems to be one demand in trade unions by the right wing, and another in PCS where their mates and allies fill many of the full-time officer posts. We will return to this issue!

National Gallery workers take action for living wage

BY A PCS ACTIVIST AND GALLERY WORKER

A joint two-hour walkout was staged by PCS members working in the National Gallery and the National Gallery Company (a "front" retail company at the Gallery) in a protest over poverty pay on Thursday 13 May.

Gallery warders had previously voted overwhelmingly to reject a 2009 pay offer which does not even guarantee the London Living Wage (currently £7.60). Most workers are earning just below £15k, and this current action marks the continuation of an effective series of short walkouts which have temporarily closed most of the galleries in recent months.

PCS members in the fledgling NG Company section had also unanimously rejected their 2010 pay offer which, whilst conceding the London Living wage level, meant no rise for supervisors and only an uplift of £156.38 a year for the retail workforce.

The picket line and rally were notable for the presence of a smattering of PCS Executive members and full-time officers, but more remarkable still for the lively, carnival-like atmosphere generated by the 50 or so striking rank and file members. A combined force of the two sections (gallery warders and retail workers) waved flags and placards, sang songs and chanted their disapproval of the insulting pay offers and bullying antics of their shop management, even

going so far as to name and shame them, as the mobile picket line marched from the main steps to the Sainsbury Wing entrance, and back again.

Gallery workers swapped stories, informed curious bystanders as to the reasons for their protest and compared notes with reps from Tate Britain, who were in attendance to show solidarity with fellow "culture" workers. The overwhelming feeling from the assembled strikers was that there were more disputes and actions to come, not just over local pay and conditions, but over the £6 billion worth of public sector cuts due to start in the coming weeks.

The most surreal point of the afternoon arrived toward the close of the action when a red, Chanel-suited Tory

Baroness type, replete with brushed-back, blonde barnet, mounted the steps of the main entrance; hushed the strikers' songs and chants; and then — just as everyone expected a vicious tirade against the unions holding the country to ransom and restricting her access to her favourite Titian — proceeded to praise the walk-out and wish the workers "every success in your fight for fair pay. You must carry on until you win. Good luck to you all!"

When asked who this blue-blooded sympathiser was, a striking Gallery warder responded: "She's one of the guides, and she definitely doesn't have to worry about the London Living Wage!"

OPINION

“Workers must defy injunctions”

BY GREGOR GALL, PROFESSOR OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

What's happening is three things. The first is that in disputes which involve large numbers of workers, the possibility of being able to apply for an injunction based on a failure in the balloting process is that much greater.

More workers involved means more complexity in meeting the legal requirements, especially where there are many different grades of worker and they work at many different workplaces.

The second is that in the last couple of years case law has set new precedents which widen the terrain for employers to apply for injunctions. One employment law firm has been key to pushing this project.

Also, the use of the principle of “proportionality” has arisen, whereby if the strike is likely to affect people and business in a very deleterious way, it can be struck down.

The legal noose around the unions' necks is tightening with each new injunction, and the granting of the appeal for Unite in the BA dispute does not change that.

The pace of injunctions is also increasing, with seven in the first five months of 2010 in addition to the 11 last year. This

may just be a coincidence of certain disputes happening together, or it may reflect employers moving to respond to the recession and public spending cuts, whereupon they are met with resistance by those unionised workers that are the most capable of mounting effective resistance.

The third is that employers are not interested in challenging the right to strike, given that the number of strikes that exist. Rather, what they are interested in doing is challenging the right to have an *effective* strike.

Between 2006 and 2008, 144 strikes took place but there were only 15 injunctions applied for. The strike figures for 2009 are not out yet but there were 11 injunctions for that year.

When you examine which strikes the employers are trying to target via injunctions, it is the ones in transport (bus, rail, underground, air), prisons and the Royal Mail, where the strikes have an immediate and considerable impact upon the employers' operations — to the extent that they pretty much halt them.

They can because of high levels of unionisation and the nature of the employer's operations where the service is “perishable”. That minority of employers feels much more threatened by the strikes.

Even though there have been between 100-200 strikes per year for the last few years, the vast, indeed the overwhelming, majority are not subject to applica-

tions by employers for injunctions to stop them. Neither are the many other cases of industrial action short of a strike.

In fact, there are around a thousand ballots for strike and industrial action short of a strike every year. Of those that are likely to have their mandates for action implemented, again, the overwhelming majority are not challenged by employers in this way.

These figures cover the big, medium and small industrial disputes, and all are likely to be able to be shown to have fallen foul of some aspect of the unions' obligations under law. Yet there are no applications for injunctions forthcoming.

There's been talk — but only talk — about outlawing (official) strikes in what are deemed essential services, i.e. transport, hospitals, fire and rescue and so on.

What is more likely is that the law on strike mandates will be changed first. What the Tories propose to do is say that a lawful mandate is one in which the simple majority for a strike must also equate to 40% of all those entitled to vote.

This means those who do not vote are counted as “no” votes and this is based on the balloting regulations for statutory union recognition (which was introduced on 6 June 2000). This would be a far cleverer move than risking the law becoming an ass through employers trying to find ever more marginal technicalities to prevent strikes. The government

could present it as a democratic tidying up of the law, while at the same time as giving employers an incentive to influence the ballot result. In other words, it would avoid a potentially big confrontation in society over the right to strike at a time when the government will have so many other battles to fight with unions over cuts in public expenditure.

In terms of resisting and defying the law, there's always a role in being as competent and diligent as possible so that no hostages to fortune are given to employers, but that is clearly to remain corralled within the parameters of the existing anti-union law.

Campaigns like the United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Trade Union Laws are needed. But it is, unfortunately, woefully inadequate because it does not tap into or create a rising mobilisation against the law within workplaces. The last time something like that happened was around Gate Gourmet in 2005.

What is needed is defiance of injunctions by union members through taking unofficial action. This offers the best prospect of either making the law a dead letter and/or building up a head of steam around the issue so that it becomes a live, tangible one which other workers can relate to.

Last time round, it took the jailing of the dockers in Pentonville prison to make this happen.

BRIEFING

What does the law say?

BY DAVE KIRK

When activists refer to the “anti-union laws”, we are talking about a whole series of acts brought in by the Thatcher and Major governments between 1980 and 1996, which the Labour government of 1997-2010 did nothing to challenge.

Each new act built its predecessors in often quite elaborate ways to restrict the ability of workers to strike and organise effectively. But what do they actually say?

BALLOTING

A minor part of the 1980 Employment Act provided funds to unions for voluntary postal ballots of union members. However, the Tory government soon began to see ballots as a potentially very effective way of delaying and subverting union democracy, whilst claiming to be upholding the rights of union members.

Secret ballots were made compulsory in 1984. Before that strikes could be authorised by ad hoc votes in workplaces.

This move supplanted branch and workplace democracy and slowed down the whole process of taking strike action. All sorts of subsequent rules were brought in to complicate this process, including strict rules on the publishing of results and who should be balloted.

The 1993 Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act introduced a

requirement that unions provide employers with up-to-date information of every worker to be balloted, meaning that if the union's records include any inaccuracies about a worker's current grade or particular workplace, then the ballot is in danger of being declared illegal.

It is these technicalities that were recently used to overrule the democratic will of the workers in the Network Rail and British Airways disputes.

The same act illegalised workplace ballots entirely.

STRIKES

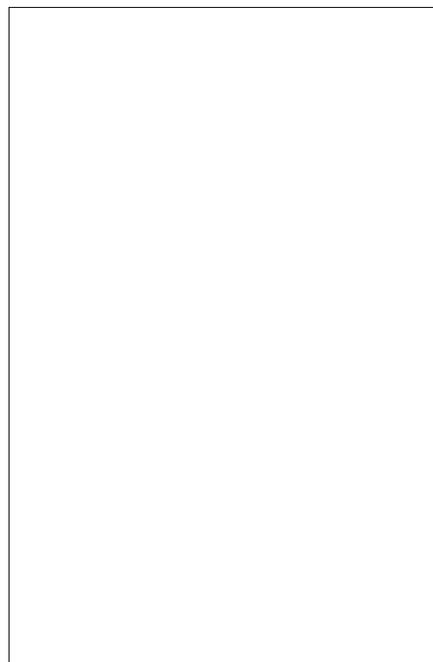
Solidarity strikes (whereby one group of workers takes action in support of the demands of another group of workers, such as car workers striking to win higher pay for nurses) were made illegal in 1980.

Two years later the grounds for industrial action were limited to pay, jobs and conditions. “Political” strike action had been made illegal.

A requirement for a 7-day notice period before any industrial action was introduced in 1993, in order to give employers time to prepare. Unions became legally liable for the costs resulting from unofficial industrial action unless an official written repudiation is sent to all members.

PICKETING

The 1980 Employment Act included a “code of practice” for picketing,



Pentonville dockers?

which restricts picket lines to six workers. This was intentionally designed to outlaw effective picketing; unless your workplace is extremely small, it is unlikely that a picket line of just 6 people will be able to exert any moral pressure (or physical pressure, in the form of actually blocking the entrance to the workplace) on scabs.

The 1990 Employment Act made all secondary picketing (that is, of anywhere other than your own workplace)

illegal. In short, effective picketing has been made illegal.

The 1986 Public Order Act introduced new criminal offences related to illegal picketing, meaning that anyone attempting to organise a real and effective picket line could theoretically face arrest or jail.

UNION RECOGNITION

New Labour introduced a series of stipulations and restrictions relating to union recognition.

The 1999 Employment Relations Act established the concept of the “bargaining unit”, referring to the given group of workers affected by potential union recognition. This is supposed to be decided jointly by the union and employers through the notionally “independent” Central Arbitration Committee, but can be used to make recognition difficult. For example, even if 100% of the workers in a particular store are union members and want union recognition, the employer could claim that because the store is part of a national chain, the “bargaining unit” is in fact all workers employed nationally by the chain.

Small employers — those employing less than 21 workers — are also completely excluded from recognition law.

For more, see this briefing from the RMT London Transport Regional Council: <http://www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk/node/1150>

ORGANISING SOLIDARITY

The Flying Bike Picket

BY A WCA ACTIVIST

Workers' Climate Action hosted a "critical mass" cycle ride around Heathrow on 22 May. The event was planned to coincide with the British Airways cabin crew strikes.

After a petty legal skirmish earlier in the week, it was not certain whether a Flying Bike Picket would actually be picketing anyone. In the event though, the mass was a colourful and musical display of creative solidarity and highlighted the current threat to our collective right to strike.

The bike were covered in slogans such as "Not the Courts, Not the State, Workers should decide their fate!", "Abolish the Anti-Trade Union Laws" and "Environmentalists want to defend the right to strike!".

The mass's first stop was British Airways HQ, where a local resident, who used to work for BA and lost his three-year-old child to aviation pollution, called on the workers inside to support the cabin crew and fight their bullying boss Willie Walsh.

At Terminal 5, BA workers on smoking breaks seemed pleased to accept our playful display of solidarity. Then the critical mass left the road and entered the terminal building, swerving past dismayed security staff. We cycled past the check-in desks, demanding protection of the right to strike.

The mass visited other parts of the airport and the surrounding villages to spread its message of solidarity and dissent, while simultaneously slowing traffic at every turn.

The critical mass is currently an effective and creative way to show your solidarity in a workplace such as Heathrow airport; it allows you to be mobile, avoid security and express dissent in a fun and inclusive way.

It is likely that WCA will host another cycling picket, and you're all welcome to come too! Join us!

<http://bit.ly/c-mass>
www.workersclimateaction.com

SOCIALIST POLICY

Fight for working-class democracy!

BY IRA BERKOVIC

U nite's victory in appealing against the second injunction given against strikes by British Airways workers was extremely significant.

If the injunction had been allowed to stand, it would have served as an invitation to bosses across both the public and private sector to seek court bans against any big strike in their workplace and a message that, no matter how spurious the grounds on which they sought that injunction were, they were likely to have it granted.

The successful appeal does not change the overall balance of forces but it may arrest the bosses' momentum; they were on a spectacular roll after winning high-profile injunctions against strikes at Network Rail, Johnston Press and British Airways (twice).

FRONTLINE COMMENT

"Walsh wants to break the union"

BY A BASSA ACTIVIST

W orkers definitely got a big morale boost from winning the appeal against the injunction. When that second injunction was granted, people were very down about that.

If it had stood then the dispute would've been finished, so it was extremely significant and galvanising when we won the appeal.

Despite the lies from BA and the media, the strike is definitely having an impact. If you know where to look at a big airport like Heathrow, you'll see dozens and dozens of aircraft grounded and parked-up. BA are literally hiding away the grounded planes.

Their initial statement said they'd had to cancel 117 flights; later that had risen to 133, so the strike is obviously having more of an impact than they want to let on. The workers have been solid; meetings and rallies at the strike headquarters in Bedfont near Heathrow have been extremely well-attended.

People's morale and resolve to dig in for a long fight varies. Some people are intimidated and battered down, but others are up for a long battle. The low lev-

els of morale that do exist are the result of BA doing everything it can to frighten, intimidate and harass. What Willie Walsh and BA have done would be illegal in a lot of countries.

Their plan is to grind people down over a period of time. People are being suspended all over the place on ridiculous grounds; one worker faces suspension on a bullying and harassment charge for refusing to shake hands with a flight deck worker who worked as "volunteer" cabin crew during the strike!

You can't allow a company to punish people for taking part in a lawful strike. The way he's behaved shows that Walsh's agenda is much wider than BA. He wants to be the big hero who broke the back of the strongest centre of union organisation in the aviation industry and changed the industry forever.

He has an absolutely focused anti-union agenda. He has a passionate hatred for BASSA, and may well go on the offensive against union recognition if he does well out of this dispute. We've already got a situation where reps aren't being allowed to accompany members into disciplinary hearings.

The dispute has definitely done lasting

damage, which makes it clear that Walsh doesn't really care about the future of British Airways. The damage that's been done in terms of relations between different grades of workers might be irreparable.

People claim that we're being unrealistic to fight to hold onto the terms, conditions and levels of union organisation that we've got, but the fact is that BA has been a world-class service-provider for decades; if Walsh gets away with his attempts to deregulate and de-skill cabin crew workers, then who knows what kind of service the passengers will be getting? I doubt they'll want to continue paying £3,000-£5,000 for a first-class seat to New York.

Some people are beginning to see aspects of Walsh's projects as inevitable. There are people who want to fight the introduction of "new fleet", but other people are arguing that we need to move on to fighting to protect the terms and conditions of existing staff.

We welcome solidarity from the wider labour movement and the left but we want effective, constructive support. People are extremely angry about the SWP's stunt at ACAS. I'm sure it was done with the right intentions, but it has only served to exacerbate the situation. We've had a lot of messages of apology from other left groups and even some individual members of the SWP who were unhappy with the action.

Workers and activists who support us can help even by doing simple things like writing to British Airways and let them know you're disgusted at the way BA bosses are treating their workers. People can also try and take arguments supporting our strike into the media; we need to build a climate where supporting workers and this strike is seen as mainstream rather than marginal.

We're living in a crazy society where Walsh is allowed to get away with what he's done. In other countries he might be facing prison for the way he's behaved! With the Tories back in power the situation looks set to get worse in terms of attacks on workers and anti-union legislation. The truth is that there won't be peace at a company like BA while someone like Walsh is in charge.



BA workers demonstrate outside the High Court

CHILD RAPE CASE

The British legal system does not serve children's interests

BY JEAN LANE

On Monday 24 May the jury at the Old Bailey found two boys aged 10 and 11 years guilty of the attempted rape of an eight year old girl.

According to the prosecution lawyer the boys had assaulted her in a block of flats, in the lift and in the bin shed before taking her to a field and raping her. The boys' defence called it in all likelihood a "game of I'll show you mine if you show me yours" that may have gone too far. Much of the media coverage has backed up this latter view, criticising the use of the criminal justice system on children.

We should abhor the use of an adult legal system to prosecute children, but we should not do so with such a cavalier attitude to the victim. The media have no way of knowing if this was just a game of "doctors and nurses".

The defence argument, which was taken up by the media to support their view, was that the girl changed her story under video-linked cross-examination. She said she had lied to her mother about what had happened because she had "been naughty" and was afraid she wouldn't get any sweets.

Despite this the judge continued with the proceedings on the grounds that witness statements and medical evidence

were consistent with the account the little girl gave to the police.

It is easy to imagine many reasons why a girl of eight might change her story: confusion, tiredness, anticipating adults' reactions, wanting to please, feeling guilty; none of which inform us as to the reality of the situation for her.

It might also be possible to imagine a child found by an angry and misunderstanding parent engaged in an innocent game of discovery saying, "he made me do it" — just as a child in school might tell the teacher that another kid broke the toy.

The problem with both these scenarios is that they are driven by adults; the response elicited by adults and the outcome controlled by them, over which the child has no influence or control and little understanding. Drop either of these two scenarios, then, into a confrontational and adversarial setting to see why this case should never have gone to the CPS and the Old Bailey. It gets us no nearer the truth and does not ensure justice for the child.

Much of the controversy following the court case has based criticism of the use of the adult legal system on the probability that the attack on the girl was not as bad as all that. But even if the worse possible scenario were the case; that this was a predatory sexual assault on a com-

pletely unwilling and helpless victim i.e. it was as bad as it could be, this would still not be the place to deal with it.

The Chief Crown Prosecutor, Alison Saunders, stated that, "The CPS had a duty to prosecute where there is sufficient evidence to do so and a prosecution is in the public interest". She added, "The allegations made by the young girl were very serious" and "she has the same right to the protection of the law as an adult".

If Ms. Saunders were talking about adult rape victims this would be quite a refreshing statement possibly eliciting more trust in the system than currently exists. But the little girl deserves not the same right to protection as an adult. She deserves much, much more, precisely because she is a child.

Does her "day in court" resolve the situation in which she finds herself? She has to live with the aftermath for the rest of her life. She would be much better served by good, prolonged, social intervention rather than the "satisfaction" of a prosecution; the satisfaction being geared toward, not her needs, but those of the angry adults around her.

Surely what she needs to know is: you are safe; this is not your fault; we will make sure it does not happen again; we will support you; this is what is going to happen now. A comforting, listening, kind and supportive approach which, even if there were the best will in the world, which there isn't, especially when it comes to children, the CPS could not provide because it is a cross-examining, adversarial system built for adults — and the most robust adults as well.

And what of the boys? Suppose the worst scenario again. Suppose this was a copy cat for Edlington (the case of the torture and sexual assault of two boys by two others all of primary school age) or Thompson and Venables, the 10 year olds who tortured and murdered Jamie Bulger. Is the Old Bailey the place to ensure that they don't do it again, that they understand exactly what they have done and why it is wrong? Is a 10 year old put on the Sex Offenders Register for the benefit of children, or for the benefit of the feelings of the angry adults? Is this "in the public interest"?

Britain is one of the very few countries in the world that thinks so. In Europe only Scotland and Switzerland have a lower age of criminal responsibility than England — 8 and 7 respectively. In England and Wales it is 10. In Scandinavia it is 15 and Belgium and Luxemburg 18. At the time that English society was pouring its collective venom on the "evil" Thompson and Venables, the perpetrator of a similar case in Sweden was being taken through a system of care and psychological support involving all the social, welfare and education agencies.

What was the difference between the two responses? It was not that one punished wrongdoing while the other let the offender off; but that the purpose of one response was to put the blame for the failings of society and its ability to raise children in a decent way firmly on the shoulders of the individual child. And the other was to put it on society itself.

SWP stunt at ACAS hurt our cause

BY TOM UNTERRAINER

The decision by 200 members of the Socialist Workers Party and a handful of others to enter the ACAS building on 22 May and disrupt talks between BA and Unite was nothing more than an ill-thought-out stunt.

It should be obvious to SWP members, as it is to the majority of the organised left, that such "militant looking" action had no positive impact on the cause of striking cabin crew and does not constitute valid solidarity. It may even have set back our ability to make solidarity with BA workers, at least solidarity which has their trust and support.

SWP comrades should not confuse media attention for their own actions with furthering the interests of our class as a whole.

Sadly this sort of stunt and the politics that determine such stunts permeates the whole of the SWP's approach to workers' struggles, trade union work and labour movement politics more generally. This is not the first and it will not be the last such example of them elevating sectarian interests above the logic of struggle.

If we look carefully at what happened, then it is clear that the SWP could not have planned to enter the building in advance. They could not have reasonably expected to gain access or to find Willy Walsh inside. What they seem to have planned is a vocal protest outside the ACAS building in support of the cabin crew — nothing wrong with that. The SWP members and the members of the Central Committee marshaling their activity then "got lucky" and invaded the building.

Rather than helping the workers, the stunt enabled BA boss Walsh to walk away claiming that union supporters were making progress impossible.

In other circumstances and with the active co-operation of striking workers, direct action solidarity has a place. Our movement has a long history of such actions. Of course..

Here, in the cold light of day, it is clear that the SWP has just damaged its own reputation. In doing so, as the most visible organisation on the left, it has damaged us all.

The left should ask the serious trade unionists and activists within the SWP to hold their leadership to account and demand a public repudiation of this stunt.

Debates on the French left

BY MARTIN THOMAS

AWL ran a stall at the annual fete of the French revolutionary socialist group Lutte Ouvriere on 22-24 May.

This event, drawing about 20,000 people each year to an open-air site near Paris, is one of the biggest events of the French left. This year it also benefited from unbroken sunshine.

It is a gathering of the international left: LO provides a stall free to any revolutionary socialist group willing to run one, though the number of such groups with sufficient energy to turn up has dwindled sadly in recent years.

This year, for example, AWL people were able to meet and discuss with activists from the Greek group OKDE at the fete.

A regular feature of the fete is a debate on perspectives between Lutte Ouvriere and another main organisation of the French revolutionary left, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste [New Anti-Capitalist Party] or, previously, with the LCR, now dissolved into the NPA.

This year the NPA was on the defensive. After its formation last year, it rapidly recruited new members, and its main spokesperson, Olivier Besancenot, scored very highly in opinion polls.

A poor showing in France's regional elections in April deflated it. "We fooled ourselves by saying that we were the only ones fighting Sarkozy, and forgot how to act politically", said NPA leader Pierre-François Grond.

A few members have quit, and the organisation is heavily divided in the run-up to a congress in November.

The speakers from Lutte Ouvriere

stuck to a simple line — the need for revolutionaries to be bold about their adherence to communist ideals, and not to play hide-and-seek — but scored some telling points.

Yvan Lemaitre, speaking for the NPA, and possibly chosen by the NPA for the job because he represents the wing of the NPA least vulnerable to LO's criticisms, could reply that "communism" means many different things to different people, and that revolutionaries need to consider bolder tactics than just one-by-one recruitment.

However, the LO speakers insisted:

- Revolutionary politics must be based on a positive programme, not just on an aggregation of people fighting against the status quo.

- In particular, to support Hezbollah and Hamas, as NPA has done in some articles, is shameful.

- "Anti-capitalist" means almost nothing as a positive political description.

- Too often, moreover, the NPA aims its complaints at the IMF or the European Union, rather than at the root, at capitalism.

- NPA focuses too much on pressing the rump French Communist Party and the Left Party (a splinter from the Socialist Party now allied with the CP) not to collaborate with the Socialist Party. But those groups are just as reformist as the SP.

Despite difficulties — and who ever thought that revolutionary organisations could be built without difficulties? — the NPA is still lively, with an open democracy. Let us hope its discussions can take on board the points made by LO.

Back John McDonnell!

A candidate of class struggle

The Labour Party's National Executive Committee has moved the deadline for MPs to nominate candidates for party leader from 27 May to 9 June. Candidates need the support of 33 MPs, 12.5 percent of the Parliamentary Labour Party, to get in the election; in 2007, left-winger John McDonnell got 29.

The delay means McDonnell has at least a chance of getting on the ballot paper; we have two weeks left to fight.

The reason socialists and working-class

activists should enthusiastically back John McDonnell is not just a question of his paper policies — though on cuts, the anti-union laws, privatisation, immigration, foreign policy, these are light years away from the neo-Blairite agenda offered by all the other candidates with the partial exception of Diane Abbott. It is a question of what he has used his position to do, and of the movement or movements he represents.

McDonnell has spent thirteen years in Parliament championing strikes and

workers' struggles, cuts battles and anti-deportation campaigns, using his position and voice to help workers and the oppressed organise. He does not just run union parliamentary groups, but is an ubiquitous presence on picket lines, at meetings and at demonstrations. Through the Labour Representation Committee which he chairs, he has made a contribution to uniting the left and helped build a movement for working-class representation, however weak and whatever its political limitations.

At times McDonnell has seemed like a one-man parliamentary opposition to New Labour. Without him on the ballot, there will be essentially no choice in the Labour leadership election — or very little choice, if Diane Abbott makes it through.

John McDonnell's candidacy represents the possibility of building up a fighting left in the Labour Party and the unions. Everyone who believes in the need for class politics should use the next fortnight to work for McDonnell's nomination.

“We aim for the socialist transformation of society.”

By JOHN McDONNELL MP (TAKEN FROM HIS SPEECH AT PCS CONFERENCE ON 19 MAY)

In 2007 I came to this conference and I received a very warm and kind reception. It was the day that I had to concede that I couldn't get onto the ballot paper and what then happened was the coronation of Gordon Brown, the bizarre spectacle of one name on the ballot paper.

But it has moved on. There has been a democratic revolution within the Labour Party and it now looks like we may have one family on the ballot paper.

Ed Balls is going to announce his candidacy. What that means is the son of Blair versus the sons of Brown — and if that carries on and we don't re-establish democracy in the Labour Party, then five years down the line we might have the son of the 2010 general election defeat.

I make my position clear, I have always supported the older Miliband. This is a statement he made a number of years ago: “The idea that trade unions have too much power is part of a distortion of reality; one whose purpose is to obscure the power of capital. A socialist government would acknowledge that trade unions are an essential means of redress for wage earners... a socialist government would seek to strengthen trade unions.” You can see why I supported Ralph Miliband...

If I couldn't get on the ballot paper in 2007, it's going to be extremely difficult this time around. Members were encouraged to come forward by the Labour Party hierarchy, asking for a lot of candidates representing a spectrum of views. We expected six to eight weeks of campaigning and then nominations would close; then a democratic election where members and others could have their say.

Oh, what hopes! The bureaucracy has re-established itself; the command-and-

control Stalinists of New Labour have moved in and made this almost impossible to happen. Instead of an exciting, detailed debate where we could contest ideas within the whole community, not just the Labour Party, the hierarchy has effectively tainted the whole process from the beginning.

There will be no time for MPs to go back to their constituencies to consult the rank and file; or for CLPs to give advice on nominations. The process was stitched up from the start, and it is almost impossible for me to get on the ballot paper.

I am using this platform to call upon Labour Party members, trade unions and others and the wider community, including non-affiliated unions, to call out for democracy.

The New Labour bureaucrats might well be able to block my candidacy again. They may be able to keep me off the ballot paper. But what they can't do is silence the views and the opinions and policies

that we pursue. What they can't silence is the ideas that PCS and others have campaigned with, and what they can't block is the movement of resistance that is building up against the policies of all the leaders of all the political parties.

And you know what it is: the policy backed by Cameron and Clegg, Miliband and Balls is that this economic crisis that was caused by rapacious financiers with the collusion of government ministers over thirty years will be paid for, not by those who caused this crisis, but by me and you. And you know that you're in the front line of that attack when they call for public sector workers to be sacked. It will be paid for in cuts in public services, in jobs in pensions in benefits and yes conditions of employment.

So if I'm blocked from the leadership campaign, from the debate about the future of the Labour Party, which will then be stifled, where do we go from here? What we do is we launch what

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2010:

TROTSKYISM AND THE CAPITALIST CRISIS

A weekend of socialist discussion and debate hosted by Workers' Liberty

10-11 July 2010 (film showing on the evening of Friday 9 July)
Highgate Newtown Community Centre, North London

After the 1929 crash, it was several years before working-class movements regrouped and started a militant fight back. How should the labour movement fight now?

Many of the ideas and arguments of Leon Trotsky, killed by a Stalinist agent 70 years ago, are acquiring fresh relevance:

- How do we fight fascism? “Maximum unity” or working-class united front?
- How do we develop independent working-class politics as a “Third Camp”, opposed to both capitalism and the dead end “anti-capitalism” represented in the world of 1940 by Stalinism and today by Islamist clerical fascism?
- How do small Marxist groups relate to mass workers' movements which are politically tied to capitalism
- How do we build links between the workers' movement and other struggles against exploitation and oppression?
- Do we need a revolutionary party, or are loose coalitions a better answer?

Invited speakers include

- “Red Tory” Philip Blond on community and capitalism

- The Socialist Party, on whether Labour is dead for working-class politics
- Neal Lawson of Compass on the rise of the Lib Dems
- Bob Crow and John McDonnell on the way forward for the left of the labour movement

Other sessions will include

- 2009: the year of workers' occupations
- Why should revolutionaries bother with elections?
- Being a revolutionary at work
- Forum on the state of the unions with BA, rail, Unison and other activists
- Socialist feminism today
- Women and women's liberation in the Bolshevik party
- * The politics of inequality

We will also be running an “Introduction to Marxism” series with a focus on Trotsky's contributions to Marxism:

- Trotsky on the Russian revolution and the defeat of revolutions in Europe
- Trotsky on what fascism is and how to fight it
- Trotsky's theory of “permanent revolution”
- “One, two, many Trotskyisms”? How is the AWL different?
- The workers or “the people”?

Creche, accommodation and cheap food provided.

Weekend tickets bought before the end of May are £18 waged, £10 low-waged/student and £6 unwaged/school students. Day tickets also available: £10, £6, £4.

Book online at www.workersliberty.org/ideas

For more information email awl@workersliberty.org or ring 020 7207 0706.

you've launched at this conference this week — a campaign to explain the truth about who caused this crisis and how it will be resolved. I invite you to join in that campaign to explain that we have an alternative. That it doesn't have to be like this. That there doesn't have to be an assault on services. That we can build a resistance to this coalition of cuts that's been built by this nation's leaders.

That's a message that's been debated this week: this crisis isn't our fault and we're not paying for it. If you want to cut the deficit, you do what the PCS advocated over the last year: bring in a fair tax system, tackling the tax evasion of anything between £90 and £150bn a year according to the Tax Justice Campaign; tackling the corporate sector and the wealthiest to pay their fair share and. You get back into planning our economy in the long term by public ownership of the finance sector and regulation.

We've got to control these banks and the market rather than being servants of the market.

We're advocating investment in our public services and an end to the scandal of the privatisations — all of it designed to cut the wages of our members, and to undercut the provision of our services, and to launder public money into private profits.

I'm the only one of the candidates so far advocating Labour Party policy to restore public ownership of the railways, and bring back the public utilities into public ownership.

I support civil liberties, the scrapping of ID cards, the right to protest — I might need that right in the next few weeks. But I support another liberty — I support trade union rights.

Where is the mention of trade union rights in this agenda? I support that basic right of a person to be able to withdraw their labour and in solidarity with others as well. I support the right of trade unions to consult their own members in ballots that aren't interfered with by employers, whether it's the cabin crew in Unite or our own members down at the Royal Naval Museum, where ballots are overturned by court actions on the most technical of details.

But I also support social rights. I sup-

port the right to have a decent home over one's head. That means we start building council housing and social housing once again. It's a scandal that homelessness doubled under a Labour government.

I support the right to free education, and that means scrapping tuition fees and top up fees and all the other charges that have crept in.

And I support the right of people to live free from poverty, and that means decent pensions: restore the link to earning.

It means a living wage, not a minimum wage. It means child benefits that reflect the cost of bringing up the child.

I support the right of people to live in peace and that means no more Iraqs and Afghanistans. It means scrapping Trident and all the other nuclear weapons.

I want a criminal justice system, where many of you work, which is aimed at preventing crime and rehabilitating rather than just locking people up.

I went to the Parliamentary Labour Party meeting last week, and it was rather like a car crash. People climb out of the wreckage and realise they're still alive. There was a euphoria that we were still alive.

Then there was a discussion about why we lost. We talked about the drop in votes because of the issue of immigration.

Let me say this clearly: I welcome people coming into this country. I stand proud of the United Kingdom and its role in offering asylum to those needing asylum and refugee status.

I am the grandson of an Irish migrant, and we contributed to the economy. We have built it, we have constructed it, we have populated its public services, we have made a contribution.

Where there are divisions, it is not because of migrants but because of a shortage of houses and of jobs, which is the result of a mismanaged economy.

We need to be explaining to people that within 50 years we will have open borders across the world. You cannot have a fortress Britain, you cannot have a fortress Europe and we should start preparing for that.

We must assist the developing world

McDonnell has been a consistent fighter for working-class interests in parliament and beyond. Pictured here with Paul Holmes, standing for General Secretary in Unison (see page 7)

so that people aren't forced out of their homes due to poverty. We must end the arms trade that drives people out of their houses in the developing world and forces people to come here for refugee status.

When Labour lost in 1931, R H Tawney published a paper trying to explain why they were defeated and why the coalition government went into power. He said that it wasn't just about policies — a party needs a creed.

I suppose that's what Gordon Brown was talking about when he talked about his "moral compass." But I had difficulty finding that moral compass at times.

And what made it difficult to find was the voices of the children locked up in Yarls' Wood.

What made it difficult was meeting the families of some of those half million Iraqis who died in the war. What made it difficult is the homeless families that come to my surgeries on a weekly basis

and can't be housed because we haven't built the homes that they need. That's the real reason New Labour lost — because I believe they lost the moral basis of the Labour Party, as it was founded and as it was campaigned for over generations by people who gave their lives to a cause they believed in.

That cause is the creation of a fair and just and peaceful and equal society. We used to sum it up in one word that is never used any more by New Labour — one word: socialism.

Whether I get on the ballot paper or not, the campaign will go on for those principles that we established the Labour and trade union movement on.

That's what we aim for: the socialist transformation of society so that we can meet the needs of people, so that we can tackle issues like climate change, so that we can overcome poverty, so that we can create prosperity for all, not just for a few.

Diane Abbott is not a working-class alternative

Diane Abbott, Labour MP for Hackney North & Stoke Newington, has also announced her candidacy for Labour leader. Abbott's stated rationale for standing is that the contest needs to be more "diverse":

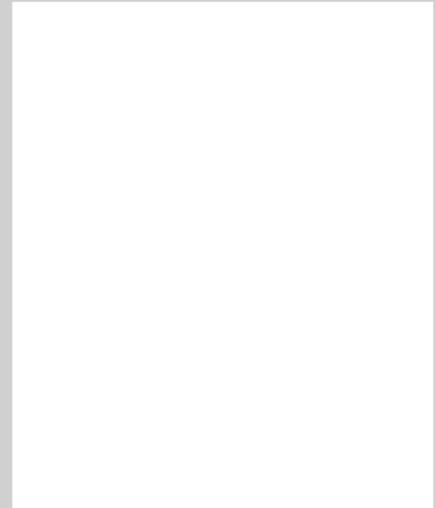
"The other candidates are all nice and would make good leaders of the Labour Party [!] but they all look the same... We cannot be offering a slate of candidates who all look the same. The Labour Party's much more diverse than that." (*Daily Mail*, 25 May)

Abbott has also commented, astonishingly, that "the existing candidates, Ed and David Miliband, Ed Balls, Andy Burnham and John McDonnell 'are all saying the same thing'" (*The Voice*, 24-30 May). Only the seriously disoriented, or dishonest, could claim that Burnham, who argues that Labour lost because it was too soft on immigration, and McDonnell, who spoke at last week's PCS union conference in favour of open borders, are saying the same thing. That goes more generally, of course.

If the left were bigger and had more possible candidates, it would be incredibly positive to put up a black, female candidate. The problem is that Abbott is just not very left-wing.

Where McDonnell has spent his time in Parliament championing workers' struggles, Abbott has spent 23 years promoting herself. Hence her decision to stand without any discussion in the organisations of the Labour left or

attempts to at least coordinate with



McDonnell.

For all her talk about diversity, Abbott is a well-integrated part of the Westminster establishment. She is notorious for sending her child to the £10,000 a year City of London public school — not exactly representative of the majority of black women she demagogically claims to represent, and hardly what is needed to reconnect with Labour's working-class base.

Occasional rebellions against New Labour are balanced by reactionary comments such as her 1996 rant against "blonde, blue-eyed Finnish" nurses who were allegedly incapable of looking after black patients.

BA workers: John McDonnell has been a consistent advocate of trade union rights

GREEK SOCIALISTS INTERVIEWED

On the brink of a social explosion

Paulin, Giannis, and Mika, activists from the Greek revolutionary socialist group OKDE, spoke to *Solidarity* on 22 May.

We asked first whether any new committees or coordinations have emerged which allow rank-and-file workers to discuss and develop perspectives independent of the bureaucratic leadership of the unions.

There are no real rank-and-file coordinations at present. But at the base of the workers' movement, a lot of new unions have emerged.

["First-level" or "base" unions in Greece are typically fairly small, often limited to single workplaces or cities. There are about 4000 of them under the umbrellas of the two big confederations, ADEDY (government employees) and GSEE (other workers).]

But in the general strike of 5 May, hundreds of unions emerged which have not been seen in activity before. No-one knows who controls them.

There are a lot of problems in developing an alternative leadership, to do with the politics of the far left. Many of the far left groups have lost the revolutionary traditions they should have from the past. But the situation is explosive.

The history of social struggle in Greece shows us periods of explosive revolt. We think we are very close to that now. We are close to a level of revolt which cannot be controlled.

There is a coordinating committee of "base" unions. But in that committee there is no real participation of the workers, and no serious discussion of creating a workers' front and developing the struggle.

The coordination is mostly controlled by Synapsismos [the former "Eurocommunist" wing of the Greek Communist Party], but with some representation of far-left tendencies too. It does not have a single policy. Every group in it has its own policy.

We [OKDE] take part in that coordination as observers. For the moment the coordination does not have a revolutionary direction. But organisations of that sort can play a very important role in developing the movement.

Only about ten "first-level" unions really participate in the coordination, and maybe 50 just sign up to support it. Some "first-level" unions are just signboards. You don't see them organising contingents on the big demonstrations.

The coordination does a lot of its communication by internet. After the huge mobilisation on 5 May it called no quick meeting. The bureaucratic tendency in the coordination wrote a statement about the deaths of the three bank-workers killed in a fire on 5 May, and called a demonstration the next day, without consulting anyone else. The coordination didn't meet until two weeks after 5 May.

At the meetings there are maybe fifty people.

The currents represented there played a role in struggles a couple of years ago. The coordination was set up then. Now it has been reconstructed with a different composition. But the leaders of the coordination don't see it as a tool for the struggle, just as an instrument to win electoral support.

We don't believe it is possible to fight for change within the coordination. There are more important things to do. There will be a coordination of some sort, but this coordination is at a lower level than the "base" organisations. It is "top-down".

Our policy is that we must build new "base" unions to fight for workers' rights, especially the rights of "precarious" [casual] workers, who are a very big part of the working class, many of them immigrants. Neither Synapsismos nor most of the far-left groups fight for those immigrant workers' rights.

We must fight for coordination at the base, with workers' participation, with unifying demands to address specific needs. We need a transitional programme, with demands including cancellation of the debt, expulsion of the IMF, a ban on sackings, and nationalisation of enterprises under workers' control.

We fight inside the unions for real coordination and for this programme.

The union bureaucracy [GSEE and ADEDY] does not prepare the general strikes. It does not inform the workers. It does not call meetings. It just announces that there will be a general strike on a particular day.

In the workplaces where we have activists we try to

get assemblies to inform the workers and find out what the workers want to fight for. We want a struggle defined by the workers, not by the bureaucratic leaderships.

We argue for creating strike committees and picket lines. In general there are workplace assemblies and picket lines on the one-day general strikes only at those places where the far left has activists.

Many "first-level" unions do have their own contingents on the big demonstrations. But Greek industry is mostly small-scale. There are not many big enterprises.

There aren't many meetings, demonstrations, or strikes between the different one-day general strikers.

Power will be wrested from the bureaucracy in the course of a big rank and file revolt, not through a normal procedure of elections and so on. In the history of Greece, mass movements are not usually led by the trade-union structures.

The crisis has led to a high level of confusion on the far left. Many far left groups do not have a policy of intervening and struggling within the working class.

Instead they seek to win support for a general "anti-capitalism". We think Antarsya [an alliance of far-left groups] is like that.

Rank and file working-class activists have a tradition of struggle, but do not have the analysis and political programme necessary to take the struggle forward.

There is a huge destruction of the middle classes in Greece. The social basis of bourgeois power in Greece for the last 20 years has been the middle class and the workers' aristocracy, and those layers are being massively destroyed. They feel humiliated by IMF intervention, and very angry.

The situation is already very difficult, and will become more so. When the revolt expands out of control, the imperialist organisations will intervene to try to suppress it. We need the help of the European workers' movement.

We can't know what the trigger will be for a larger revolt. Maybe a killing on the streets by the police, maybe something else. But we have to prepare. The Greek working class, especially the young workers in casual jobs, have nothing to lose.

European governments are afraid of a big revolt in Greece. The collapse of Greek capitalism could have a domino effect. And the revolt of the Greek working class could have a domino effect too, especially in Portugal, Spain, and Italy.

Pasok [the governing party in Greece, social-democratic] has expelled three MPs for opposing the cuts. That shows the crisis of the political system in Greece. Pasok and New Democracy [the main right-wing party] have lost their base of support. There is nothing to connect them with the masses.

We think Pasok is finished as a party. Maybe some elements of it will re-emerge under a different name, but it is finished. There is no point talking about Pasok and its base. Over the last twenty years they have sold out everything they once had. They are completely corrupt. They have lost the base they had, maybe, in the 1980s. They no longer have the organisation in neighbourhoods that they had in the past.

We thought that this dismissal of Pasok seemed unlikely to be true — if social-democratic parties lost all their support to the left whenever they took drastic measures against the working class, then those parties would have ceased to exist decades ago — but we wanted to press on to discuss other issues.

The Greek Communist Party was the biggest party of the working class for a whole period, although it was always against working-class struggles that it didn't control.

Its orientation now is totally sectarian. It always calls its own separate demonstrations on the general strike days. Its tactics are all designed to win electoral support.

It is losing more and more activists from the base, but it wins people from the middle class which is being destroyed and from parts of the working class with low class-consciousness. Workers and youth do not trust the KKE.

It uses very revolutionary rhetoric, but the union fronts which the KKE controls have no power to call strikes. And their message comes down to saying that it would be all right if only the KKE were in the government.

The KKE demonstration on 5 May was very big — maybe 100,000 — but most of that was people joining the first demonstration they met, rather than deciding to support the KKE. The KKE's demonstrations are usually more like 5,000 or 10,000, and mostly students. The KKE has a big student organisation. Its base is mainly students and much older people.

Syriza, the coalition led by Synapsismos, is quite big, though smaller than the KKE. It is a loose organisation. Unlike the KKE, it participates in struggles. Workers don't dislike Synapsismos, and it has some influence among youth.

But they don't do anything to organise the working class in struggle. Instead they take part in struggles with a view to winning votes.

The KKE wants Greece to leave the European Union. Syriza does not oppose the EU, and says that the EU could be friendly to the working class, though it isn't now.

For OKDE, the EU is an imperialist organisation. We support every movement that wants Greece to get out of the EU. Greece cannot develop in a socialist way within the EU. We are for a Socialist United States of Europe.

We ended the discussion by arguing over this question of the EU. From Solidarity and AWL, we said that a socialist revolution in Greece would surely disrupt Greece's EU membership, but the converse doesn't hold. Greece leaving the EU would not take it any closer to socialism.

On the contrary: we are for the reduction of barriers between nations even under capitalism. Greek "capitalism in one country" would probably face even more severe constraints from the world market than it does within the EU. Our response to the EU over the Greek crisis should be a programme for action by workers across Europe, not a demand for Greece to leave the EU.

The OKDE comrades were not convinced, and the debate will continue.

GREEK CRISIS

Why the EU/IMF package won't help the people of Greece

By **COSTAS LAPAVITSAS**

Costas Lapavitsas is a Marxist economist specialising in the study of financial systems. His writings include the chapter on money in Anti-Capitalism: A Marxist Guide (edited by Alfredo Saad Filho), and he is a professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. He spoke to Martin Thomas about the Greek crisis.

Q. A bit under two years ago, the governments of the leading capitalist countries introduced huge bail-out packages for the banks, which did succeed in stopping the banks going bust. Will the European Union/ IMF package of 10 May do the same for Greece?

A. The best way of answering this question would be to point out the differences between the two situations. In 2007-9, US, UK and German banks were running out of liquidity [ready cash] because of the bubble and the speculative games they had played. The banks were also close to insolvency because of losses.

Intervention by the state was quite successful in stabilizing the condition of the banks. But it did not resolve the underlying bank weakness, which has carried over to the present upheaval. This is a link between what happened two years ago and what is happening now.

The sovereign debt crisis of 2009-10, pivoting on Greece, is not a matter of a set of financial institutions running into trouble. It is a problem of state debt — inability of a state to borrow, and possibly inability of a state to pay its debts in the short and medium term.

This is the context of the huge EU/IMF package for all peripheral countries, as well as of the earlier one for Greece. The liquidity problem of Greece — its ability to finance its debts on a year-to-year basis — will indeed be tackled by the measures. The Greeks now do not have to go to the international financial markets to borrow, and there is no immediate problem of liquidity.

But the question of whether the Greeks will later be able to return to the financial markets without support is a very different matter. The package does not tackle that problem, which arises from the way in which the Greek economy has been integrated into the broader eurozone. This is a problem that cannot be resolved by throwing money at it. And it cannot be resolved by the IMF policies accompanying the package. On the contrary, it will probably become worse as a result of those policies.

What the package does, then, is to offer further protection to the banks of large European countries. It is money ostensibly given to Greece and other peripheral countries, but in reality to the banks. The EU and the IMF have made this money available because the underlying weakness of the banks has been revealed again.

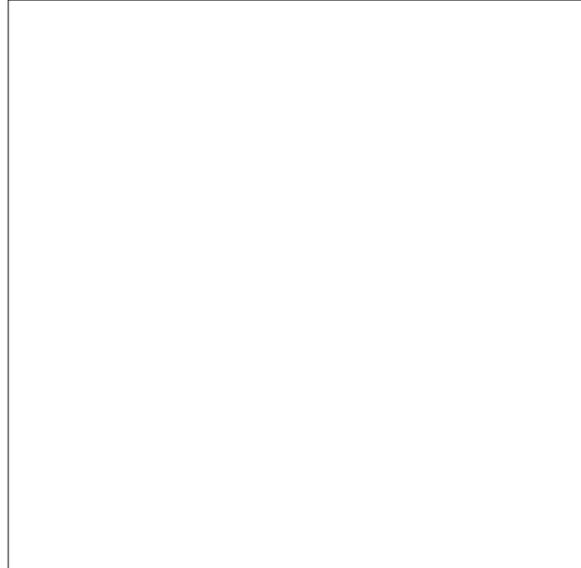
In this way the package buys time for the Greek ruling class to allow for a desperate last attempt to find some unlikely way out. It also buys time for the various European ruling classes to prepare for the situation in which the Greek ruling class might not be able to repay its debt.

Q. The measures of autumn 2008 shifted the focus of the crisis, as regards breakdowns in the circuits of capital, from the banks to the states. So is what we're seeing now — in Greece and in other countries — really a shifted version of the crisis of 2008?

A. We are dealing, really, with one crisis, which started in 2007 and keeps unfolding and acquiring different characteristics. We might think of current events as the second stage of the great crisis. The two stages are connected, first, through the actions of states and, second, through the underlying weakness of the banks and the financial system.

The first stage pivoted on the banks and the financial system reflecting the financialisation of capitalism in the preceding period. The banks had undertaken extreme speculation during the bubble, which weakened them and made them come close to bankruptcy.

State intervention then averted the worst by making lots of money available to banks. Nonetheless, the crisis moved to the productive sector and became a deep recession with rising unemployment. Consequently,



Spending money on the banks, plus the collapse of state revenues as a result of the recession, has led to the crisis of state finances. Now the workers are being forced to bear the brunt of the crisis.

there has been a collapse of state revenues. Together with the large amounts of money made available to banks, this has led to a crisis of state finances.

The second stage emerged as states faced increasing pressure to enter international financial markets, attempting to borrow at the worst possible moment. This led to a sovereign debt crisis [of debts owed by governments]. The most dangerous aspect of this phase of the crisis is that banks themselves have started to become weak again as a result of states running into difficulties. This is because banks hold a lot of state debts, and the fear among banks of possible state bankruptcies has led to increasing mistrust among the banks.

We might see a re-emergence of a banking crisis, possibly even worse than the one in 2008-9. It would be worse because banks have remained in a weak position and their recovery since 2008 has been entirely state-manufactured. That is why the leadership of the eurozone has intervened with such alacrity in the last few weeks. They have belatedly realised that banks might be in a very precarious position.

Q. And how great is the danger now of a euro-crisis — of a catastrophic collapse in the exchange-rate of the euro?

A. The crisis has revealed the fundamental weaknesses as well as the exploitative, hierarchical — in a sense, imperialist — character of the eurozone.

The main problem is not the one that a lot of people keep talking about — that in the eurozone there is one monetary policy [i.e. one policy, set by the European Central Bank, for regulating the supply of money and official interest rates] but many fiscal policies [i.e. many policies for government taxation and spending, set by the different eurozone governments].

It is true that this is a problem, particularly from the perspective of capitalist integration. But it is not really the fundamental problem.

The real problem is the nature of the integration which the eurozone has effected in Europe. In short, the eurozone has recreated a structure of core-periphery in Europe.

One periphery, clearly very poor and exploited, is in Eastern Europe. These are countries with weak welfare systems, weak trade unions, and so on, which are suppliers of cheap labour power to the countries of the centre. Yet, there is another periphery, within the eurozone, mostly in the south but also including Ireland.

This pattern confirms that the creation of centre-periphery relations is fundamental to capitalism. It tends to happen time and time again.

The way it has emerged in the eurozone, however, is through the exploitation of workers across both centre and periphery. Workers in the centre have suffered enormously in terms of wages and conditions, and in fact more heavily than workers in the periphery. On that basis the capitalists of the centre have been able to

get competitive advantage over the capitalists of the periphery. And so there have been growing divergences between centre and periphery, expressed in escalating trade deficits for the countries of the periphery.

This is the underlying and fundamental reason for the weakness of the euro, and as far as I can see, the ruling classes of both centre and periphery have no ideas about how to deal with it.

Q. Why should that make the euro necessarily more unstable than the currencies of states with enormous regional differences? Than the currencies of Brazil and India, for example, which have regional differences within their countries bigger than the differences between countries in the eurozone?

A. This is where the basic political weaknesses of the eurozone come into play. The eurozone is an alliance of states, and its ability to make fiscal transfers that can alleviate the tensions between its various components is very limited.

This fact too is connected to the centre-periphery or imperialist aspect of the eurozone. Those who rule the countries of the centre do not want a mechanism that would bring about the fiscal transfers which could perhaps provide more stability.

Some people on the left fantasise about creating a federal state across Europe that would alleviate the problems. But we should realise that a socialist United States of Europe is not on the cards at the moment. A federal European state, in the very unlikely event that it emerged, would be fundamentally undemocratic, anyway.

Q. Why?

A. Because such a state would not arise from below. There is no mechanism that would provide it with democratic legitimacy among broad masses of workers and others.

Q. But pretty much every democratic state — in the sense of the inadequate sort of democracy that exists anywhere now — has been imposed from above. For example, the French state was welded into one unit pretty much from above, from Paris.

A. Since we are talking about fiscal transfers, a fundamental principle is “no taxation without representation”. This is, of course, a bourgeois principle, not a socialist principle. But it is fundamental to the legitimacy of bourgeois states — that is the ability of a central power to impose fiscal charges, and make fiscal transfers. This principle is also connected to electoral rights. Therefore it provides some legitimacy for the state among broader layers of people, even though it is a very limited democracy, to be sure. A federal European state would have none of that, and it is unlikely that it could acquire it.

Q. When we talked in 2008, I asked whether you thought that the bail-out programmes, partly designed to combat deflation [falling prices], might lead to sizeable inflation. Your answer, partly based on the experience of Japan, was no. Does that issue look the same to you now?

A. There has not been a problem with inflation at all similar to what occurred in the 1970s, that is, rates in the region of 15%, 20% and more. Inflation has picked up, but is still at a very low level.

There are a lot of forces stacked up against the possibility of escalating inflation. Banks are hoarding the money that has been pumped into the system. Unemployment and job uncertainty are keeping nominal wages down. There is a lot of fear and insecurity across society. It looks unlikely that inflation will return to the levels of the 1970s.

Q. I'm puzzled by the balanced-budget amendments to the constitution which have been introduced in Germany, and in a softer form in France. These governments have just been through an experience when they ran very unbalanced budgets as the only way to limit an economic crisis, and now they're intro-

Continued on page 16

ducing constitutional amendments to rule that out in future.

A. At the level of economic theory, this move represents an incredible re-emergence of ancient orthodoxies which had been thought to have been dead for many, many years. These are the orthodoxies of the 1920s and of the early 1930s, before Keynes.

It is a re-emergence of the idea that in a crisis a capitalist government needs to allow the system to cleanse itself, while tightening up its finances. After that, capitalist accumulation will be re-born. But we know this view is plain nonsense in mature, decrepit capitalism.

That we see this idea re-emerging at the top of the European Union shows intellectual bankruptcy at the very top. The ruling classes of Europe seem to be completely bereft of ideas, indeed to have regressed to ancient fallacies.

Why are they doing it? This is a very difficult question to answer, but remember that the eurozone is a very peculiar structure. It brings pressure on workers across both centre and periphery, as I have already mentioned. Who has benefited from this structure? It is not workers at the centre, or even capitalist accumulation as a whole at the centre, which has been weak in the last decade. It is not capitalist accumulation in the periphery, since these countries are now close to bankruptcy.

The sector that has clearly benefited from the euro is the banks. The euro has allowed the European banks to operate globally with a "hard" currency and to acquire dollar assets cheaply.

In a similar way, the absurd policies of imposing austerity in the midst of a recession smack of narrow banking logic. They might damage many other areas of accumulation but they help the banks, at least in the short term, by protecting the relative value of the euro.

Q. The banks are the ones who benefit from the euro? But German banks could operate internationally with the deutschmark. British banks are quite happy to operate with the pound, and are not clamouring for Britain to adopt the euro. There is also a way in which the banks lost out with the introduction of the euro, and some financiers complained about it at the time: they lost the fees from a vast range of foreign-exchange transactions.

A. It is true that over the last couple of decades banks have increasingly made profits out of fees and commissions. But those fees and commissions are not necessarily associated with foreign exchange and arise from general trading of banks in financial markets.

The euro, over the last ten years, has had what is called an appreciation bias, that is, it has tended to rise relative to the dollar. That has been fundamental for the banks.

It has allowed banks to acquire dollar assets more cheaply. And so the expansion of assets held by eurozone banks — German, French, and Dutch, primarily — has been much faster than the average of banks worldwide. An added advantage for the banks is that the euro has found its way into the portfolios of the rich and of states across the world. The euro has become the number two currency for reserve hoards, after the dollar.

While the euro was getting stronger, European industrial capital adapted by putting extra pressure on workers. It used that tendency of the euro to rise as an excuse and as a lever for applying pressure to keep down wage costs at the centre of the eurozone.

Q. In the report on the eurozone crisis which you have recently written with other economists, you talk about two forms of exit from the eurozone for Greece, "bad" and "good". But under any government such as Greece has, or is likely to have short of a huge transformation of the political forces in the country, the exit will be a "bad" exit.

Of course, if you had a socialist revolution in Greece, that Greece would find itself outside the eurozone. But the converse doesn't hold — that quitting the eurozone would push Greece to the left.

Sure, being in the eurozone has exploitative effects. But being outside it would probably have even greater ones. Greece would then operate with a drachma which would have collapsed in international markets, and it would still have all its debts in euros.

A. I do not agree. It isn't necessary to have a socialist revolution for exit to be positive. What is necessary is a decisive shift in the balance of forces in favour of labour. That is not the same thing as socialist revolution.

The balance of forces has been moving in favour of capital for many years now. What is required in the first instance is a decisive shift politically, economically, and socially in favour of labour. That is necessary for exit to be positive, and it could then open up the way for

socialist transformation sooner rather than later.

Exit from the euro is necessarily connected to default [i.e. Greece announcing that it cannot pay its international debts]. As you pointed out, Greece's external debts would remain in euro, which would be impossible to service while operating with the drachma.

Default, or cessation of payments, is absolutely necessary for Greece and the other south European economies. The weight of debt crushing the Greek economy is unbearable, and there is no prospect of sustained growth to deal with it in the near future.

It is true that the shock of exit and default, for Greece, or any other small economy, would be great. The devaluation of the country's currency would make it possible to restart production and to protect employment, but it would also hit workers through higher prices for imported goods.

To confront these problems it would be important that profound political change should also take place. It would then be possible to introduce measure to protect people's living standards through tax policy and through social provision and transfers.

It would also be possible to take public control over other areas of the economy, including the banks. Once that had happened, the country could put industrial policy in place that would seek to change the direction of the economy to ensure growth and employment.

It is incredibly pessimistic to think that such a path is not feasible. The crisis is an opportunity. The ruling class sees it as an opportunity to squeeze workers hard. But it is equally an opportunity for the working class and the forces of the left to change things against capital.

Q. But look at Mexico and Brazil in the 1980s. Default shifted the balance of class forces in those countries in the other direction, and working classes which had a formidable history of struggle were absolutely pounded.

There was an era of capitalism when governments defaulted quite frequently and without drama. But today capitalist governments are much more involved in the international financial markets. The pressures on a government which defaults then to seek deals to get back into the international financial markets are much greater.

A. Default is not the ogre that it is made out to be. There have been many defaults in recent decades, none of them catastrophic. In fact, evidence from the IMF, no less, indicates that the costs of default are not that great in terms of loss of output, employment, and so on. After default and devaluation, economies tend to enter recovery within the space of about six to eight months.

In Argentina, the economy began to grow rapidly a few months after default in 2001. In fact, the heaviest damage in Argentina happened on the way to default, when the ruling class was trying to hold on to the non-sensical system of tying its currency to the dollar.

Much of the damage occurred because the country did not decide coherently to go for default, but was dragged into it slowly. It defaulted on some debt first, then on other debt later. When it finally decided on complete cessation of payments, chaos ensued for several months, it is true. But even in the case of Argentina, after those months of chaos, the economy recovered very quickly.

Default has costs for working people, to be sure. But they are costs that can be handled, and they are nothing like the severe costs imposed on working people by trying to remain within a monetary system that is clearly unsustainable and imposing recession. Look at what is happening at the moment in the Baltic states, which are trying to hold on to exchange rates that are unsustainable. The costs have been catastrophic.

Default is the least costly option for working people and for the economy as a whole. The option currently followed by the Greek ruling class at the moment leads to disaster.

As for the politics — it is very difficult to generalise as to how countries and working-class movements would behave in response to such shocks. What I can tell you is that at the moment the Greek working class and the Greek people are looking for answers to the left and not to the right.

People have been shocked by the government's measures, and they are waiting for the Left to come up with answers that will credibly resolve the social crisis. If the left proposes a series of steps that shifts the balance of forces against capital, and gets society out of the impasse, I think people will support it.

Q. What political forces, existing or coming-into-existence in Greece, do you think might be the agency for this "good exit"?

A. There is a need for a social alliance, and a political front. There must be an alliance of classes and social

layers that are being severely hit by this crisis. At the heart of that must lie the working class.

This is the most organised, compact, coherent social class, with its own traditions of struggle and its own institutional memory.

But there are also large layers of the lower middle class or petty bourgeoisie in Greece — small business people, professional middle classes, and so on — which are buffeted by the crisis. They would look to the working class for social leadership, if the working class came up with a programme that would credibly take the country out of the crisis.

There are also farmers, who demonstrated their ability to organise and to take to the streets just before the crisis became severe. They would also support a programme that dealt with the crisis.

The components of the social alliance are clear — the working class at the centre, drawing to itself middle-class layers in city and country as well as poor farmers in the countryside.

Then there is the question of the political front to give leadership to the social alliance. There is no single political force in Greece that can credibly say it will lead the country and the economy out of this mess.

On the left, toward which the country is looking at the moment, there are many problems arising from the last twenty years of decline and sectarianism, which we know in this country too. Left organisations may have common aspirations and visions, but we fall out among ourselves, we magnify differences, even personal differences become enormous... it is a cancer within the left.

Still, the pressures of the crisis are so great that there is every opportunity to create a front-type organisation in Greece that could begin to give political leadership. Actually, there are signs that such an organisation might be emerging.

Q. The Greek left has a problem unique in Europe, in the survival or even strengthening of the Greek Communist Party as a more or less thoroughly Stalinist party. It is the major force of the left on the Greek political scene at the moment. But it conducts all its activities during the crisis just as devices to scoop up more members and electoral support. It condemns the trade-union demonstrations as a matter of "yellow unions" and organises its own separate demonstrations. The differences between the rest of the left and the Greek Communist Party are not invented or exaggerated.

A. The Greek Communist Party is a product of Greek society and of the Greek left just as much as every other organisation of the Greek left.

Q. It wasn't called the "Greek Communist Party (Exterior)" for no reason...

A. It is easy to criticise the Communist Party, both for its history and for what it is doing at the moment. But in many ways the people on the non-Communist-Party Left originate from the same tradition and have several traits that are due to that tradition. It would be unfair to focus on the Greek Communist Party and say that is the main problem faced by the Greek left.

The Communist Party is clearly going through an extremely sectarian phase at the moment. It refuses to say a good word about anyone else. It refuses to march with others. It refuses to undertake much common action with others. This attitude clearly undermines the necessary joint action.

But the pressure from below for common action is very great and it is probably affecting Communist Party members too. If the rest of the left came up with credible ideas and proposals to take society out of the crisis, that would also have an impact on the Communist Party.

Q. In your report on the crisis, you also discuss a hypothesis which you call the "good euro". The basic reason you give for that hypothesis not being viable is that it would catastrophically damage the exchange-rate of the euro.

But some of the measures associated with the "good euro" perspective can be campaigned for by the left across Europe without subscribing to the perspective as "our advice to Merkel and Sarkozy" — measures like the cancellation of the Greek debt and the extension of social guarantees across the European Union.

Doing that would mean we could work to bring labour movements across Europe into activity on this crisis, rather than seeing as something to be resolved by this or that country withdrawing.

To win such measures requires a change in the balance of forces. But why are you so much more pessimistic about a change in the balance of forces on a European scale than within Greece?

A. No socialist in their right mind would say that a

minimum wage policy, or social protection, across Europe would be a bad thing. Some of the ideas for a “social Europe” come from people who are genuine socialists. The idea of the socialist United States of Europe is an old socialist idea, after all.

It would be wrong to dismiss the intentions, or some of the particular ideas, put forward for the “good euro”. Struggles for such measures should be supported. But the strategic sense of the proposal is very inadequate. Parts of it might be okay, but as a strategy for the left it does not hold together.

The difficulties are of a different order compared to those of exit. It is surely very difficult for the Greek capitalist entity to pull out of the euro, and even more difficult to bring about a shift in the balance of forces against capital and in favour of labour. But it is even more difficult, indeed I would argue impossible, to bring about a cross-European alliance that would achieve the social shift required for a “good euro” across the countries of the eurozone.

A point that also needs stressing is that the euro is not a kind of money that arose spontaneously allowing workers to buy what they need on a daily basis. Rather, it is money that was created from the top and was imposed on particular countries. It is money that aimed to act as world money from the start, serving the interests of particular sectors of capital in Europe.

Any attempt to turn the euro into money that would be friendly to workers would contradict its fundamental aim, and would thus create difficulties for European capital in international markets. It is already apparent how destabilising this can be as the recent fall of the euro has created enormous tensions. Any suggestion that the fiscal discipline in the eurozone would be relaxed would be enough to create a far more serious crisis for the euro in the international markets.

The last point to make here, though, has to do with the traditions of the left. From its inception the left has

been an international force. It has always looked across borders, and if it lost that, it would lose the very sense of what it is about. But what is the true nature of internationalism, and how do we go about creating genuine international solidarity?

The existing structures of European integration have created no genuine solidarity among European people. This can be seen very clearly in the war of words in the last few months, in the racism and xenophobia in the popular press of both Greece and Germany.

I would argue that the progressive exit is actually the true internationalist option. Using the traditional criteria of the Bolshevik and the revolutionary left, progressive exit is the coherent and credible internationalist option. It would set an example for the rest of the working class of Europe, and it would seek actively to mobilize support from workers across Europe.

Q. There is a more fundamental question here. The reduction of barriers between nations — barriers to the movement of people, but also even barriers to trade — is generally a step forward, even under capitalism. The return of Europe to a system of trade-warring or military-warring states, which you had for centuries before the European Union, would not be a step forward.

Ever since the early 1960s, it has been a common view on the British left, first to oppose entry into the European Union, then to demand withdrawal, then to drop the demand for withdrawal because it seems embarrassing but to keep the same basic attitude... We have always thought that common view was wrong.

We don't support the institutions of the European Union. The bringing-down of the barriers does not remove the contradictions of capitalism. We argue for a response to the international coordination of capital through the international coordination of working

classes and of labour movements, rather than by the working class of each country seeking to remove its own country from that international coordination.

A. The progressive exit argument has got nothing to do with autarky. It is not about raising tariff barriers or shutting countries out of the international flows of commodities, capital and labour. That would not be a sensible thing to do for small countries with middling technology. And it would certainly not be a basis on which to build socialism.

Socialism is about large-scale integration, a global economy, a global society. This outcome would not come about by erecting barriers. The strongest revolutionary tradition on the left has always been against “socialism in one country”.

Progressive exit is, in immediate terms, about regulating, controlling, managing the interactions of countries with the international flows. It is about not allowing the financial markets and unregulated commodity flows to dictate what happens at the level of economy and society.

After all, trade and capital flows are in practice already regulated by a number of countries. This includes the most successful countries in terms of growth, such as China, India. It is only in Europe and in some older capitalist countries that the ideology of completely free markets has prevailed so completely.

But the most important aspect of progressive exit is that it could change the balance of class force against capital. It could begin to pull economies and societies out of the current impasse, while also opening up the possibility of socialist transformation for the first time in decades. This is a great opportunity for the left and it remains to be seen if there are sufficient social forces to realise it.

• The report on the eurozone crisis written by Costas Lapavistas and other economists is available at <http://bit.ly/geuro>.

SRI LANKA

Exposing the “Sri Lankan option”

By ROSALIND ROBSON

A recent report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) documents the appalling brutality of the Sinhala-nationalist Sri Lankan government when, in 2009, it carried out a “military solution” to a 26-year conflict with the Tamil population.

As it attempted to wipe out the Tamil nationalist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) it killed tens of thousands of Tamil people caught up in the conflict. Internationally, governments either supported this regional “war on terror”, or stood by while the Sri Lankan army shelled the general population.

While the offensive was going on Liam Fox (then Shadow Defence Secretary) visited Sri Lanka as a host of the government. But the ICG’s report also condemns the intentional shooting and use of force by the LTTE against their own people.

The ICG report follows the August 2009 screening by Channel 4 of a video of Sri Lankan forces executing Tamils; this month the channel’s news programme aired testimony from two former members of Sri Lanka’s military. Among other claims the officers said that LTTE members and their families were summarily executed after surrendering. It is to be hoped that all these new public revelations will trigger further accounting of what happened last year.

According to the ICG report the Sri Lankan government deliberately ignored the difference between LTTE-aligned combatants and civilians. All Tamils were regarded as terrorists. In other words there was a genocidal intent in military actions and the orders for that must have come from the top.

Now this “Sri Lankan option” is being discussed by other governments. In November 2009 Burma’s military dictator, Than Shwe, visited the island on a “fact-finding mission”. Could the Sri Lankans tell him anything about how to deal with ethnic groups in Burma? The Thai, Philippine, Indian and Bangladeshi governments are also getting interested.

Since 2005 Sri Lanka’s President has been Mahinda Rajapaksa. He was re-elected at the end of 2009. He has concentrated great chunks of state power in his own and his family’s hands. While paying cynical lipservice to the idea of a multi-ethnic Sri Lanka, Rajapaksa

courts and fosters Sinhala nationalism. The concentration of power goes hand in hand with greater centralisation.

It is worth remembering what happened a year ago. By January 2009 the LTTE were cornered in Vanni, a small portion of the Northern Province, surrounded by the far stronger Sri Lankan army. Also in the area were 300,000 civilians, most of whom had been displaced from areas previously held by the LTTE. The Tamil population were increasingly unhappy with the forced recruitment policies of the LTTE and near total ban on leaving Vanni. At that point the Sri Lankan government could have taken advantage of the weakness of the LTTE and negotiated a settlement. But they were never going to do that.

The government had decided to raze to the ground any possibility of the LTTE reasserting itself and of a future generation of Tamils being able to reorganise a

fighting force. What did they do?

In September 2008 UN and international aid organisations were ordered to leave Vanni. Thereafter food, medical supplies and care were completely inadequate. But until 2009 the UN continued to run convoys of World Food Programme food into the area.

On 24 January 2009 a group of UN staff were shelled by government forces, where they had set up a distribution centre in a recently declared government “No Fire Zone”. This, despite civilians being told to evacuate to the area, and despite the UN staff having told the security forces where they were located. As the concentration of civilians had increased in the area, the shelling caused more deaths. The government denied targeting the “safe” zone, of course.

According to the ICG during the five months of the advance, the military intentionally and repeatedly shelled civilians, hospitals and humanitarian operations. UN agencies documented 7,000 deaths from January to April 2009. But many deaths were not documented. And the final three weeks of fighting saw thousands more killed.

In the same period over 280,000 Tamil people crossed over to government-held areas and were interned in emergency camps. Conditions in the camps were dire. Young men were interrogated, beaten and abused by the security forces. By April 2010 80,000 people were still in the camps.

The actions of the LTTE were also brutal. They refused to allow civilians to leave, shooting dead some who tried. But while the government condemned “human shielding” it also pressed ahead into the territory with no inhibitions. They knew, even as they corralled civilians into the NFZs, that the LTTE would not allow them to leave. The government must have been, at some level, forcing civilians to further risk their own lives crossing LTTE fronts, in order to escape shelling and starvation.

Only when they could announce the LTTE’s leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran was dead did the Sri Lankan military stop their advance — on 18 May 2009.

The state has backed up its military campaign with censorship of critics. Journalists have been beaten and even killed. Solidarity with the Tamil and Sri Lankan opposition and working-class forces remains an urgent necessity.

THAILAND

Assessing the “red shirts”

By PAUL HAMPTON

Ten weeks after they occupied the central district of Bangkok, the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD), known as the red shirt movement was repressed and driven out by the Thai army last week. Overall the *Guardian* (22 May) estimates that 83 people have been killed and 1,800 injured over the last few months.

At the beginning of May, it seemed as though a peaceful resolution to the conflict might be possible. Thai prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva appeared to offer to dissolve parliament in September and hold elections in November this year. However he swiftly reverted to repression, unleashing the military on the protesters.

The military action began with the assassination of an army general (known as Seh Daeng — red commander), who had defected to the red shirts. This was followed by the military intervention to clear the encampment the red shirts had built. Although some red shirts fought back and others attacked government buildings and the hostile press, their movement is now in full retreat.

BACKGROUND

The immediate political background to the protests and the crackdown is the military coup of September 2006, which overthrew a democratically elected prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

It was the latest in a long succession of coups, counter-coups and military interventions that have characterised Thai politics for 80 years. Shinawatra, a multi-billionaire telecommunications mogul, in known in Britain for his brief ownership of Manchester City football club. His bourgeois populist Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party won a landslide election victory in 2001 and was re-elected again in 2005.

Whilst in power the TRT imposed neoliberal measures, such as energy privatisation and free trade agreements. It conducted a “war on drugs”, which included widespread repression. The army carried out assaults in the south, including the murder of 90 men who had taken part in a peaceful demonstration in October 2004. However it also introduced a universal health care scheme and loans to small village businesses, aimed at buying social peace after decades of instability, but which gave the regime a popular base.

Shinawatra was the first Thai prime minister to complete a full term in office, though his second term was abruptly ended allegations of corruption, counter protests by the bourgeois-rightwing force, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD — known as the yellow shirts), and by the September 2006 coup.

ASSESSMENT

There is no question that the red shirts are more politically progressive than the existing Thai government and its yellow shirt backers. Their democratic demands for the resignation of the prime minister and for elections, backed by direct action, are entirely just. There is no doubt the repression by the bourgeois, unelected, royalist government should be condemned and that political prisoners should be released from jail.

Socially the red shirts are composed mainly of workers, peasants and the poor of Thailand.

However politically the red shirts are not a working class or peasant force. They are tarred by their relationship to Thaksin Shinawatra, who has provided financial backing for them and retains a level of support within the organisation. The red shirts are at best a petty bourgeois movement — the presence of some ex-Communists and Maoists in the leadership does not decisively change that.

The remarkable fact about recent events is the absence of the working class as an organised force. Rapid capitalist development over the last two decades spawned a larger, more urban working class in Thailand — though half the 37 million labour force are still in agriculture. Although overall union density is below 4% — with anti-union laws preventing civil servants, teachers, migrant workers and others from joining — density is over 10% in industry and higher

among state enterprise workers.

In 2004, some 200,000 workers took action in opposition to Shinawatra's electricity privatisation plans. Similarly, at the time of the 2006 coup, the 19th September Network organised demonstrations with independent politics, such as the slogan “No to Thaksin, No to the Coup”. However workers' organisations do not appear to have played a significant role in the latest events.

Beyond the widespread and understandable sympathy for the plight of the red shirts on the left, there has also been a temptation to exaggerate the radical nature of the movement, to downplay the role of Shinawatra and in some cases to fantasise about a process that will somehow grow over from democracy to socialism.

The most prominent and well-informed spokesperson for this tendency is Giles Ji Ungpakorn, leader of the Workers' Democracy group in Thailand, which is allied to the British SWP. Ungpakorn has written many important accounts of Thai politics in English and has combined academic research with socialist activism. He is currently in exile because of the crackdown. However much we should respect his work and sympathise with his personal situation, it is our duty to discuss socialist ideas politically.

Ungpakorn wrote in *Socialist Worker* (17 April): “Many commentators try to explain the conflict as an elite dispute between Thaksin and the conservatives. But the missing element in most analysis is the actions of millions of ordinary people. Thaksin's pro-poor policies, such as the first ever universal healthcare scheme in the country, helped him build an alliance with workers and peasants.”

As the crackdown began, he was quoted in the paper: “This is a class war. The red shirts represent workers and small farmers. They are facing the armed might of the ruling class and are standing firm.” (SW 22 May).

The quote came from a longer piece on his blog, which stated: “This is a class war. But only the naive believe that class war is a simple matter of rich against the poor. The red shirts represent workers and small farmers. They are the people who have created the wealth in Thailand, but they have not been able to enjoy the benefits. Thailand is a very unequal society. Their hopes were raised when millionaire Taksin Shinawat's Thai Rak Thai Government offered a universal health care scheme and pro-poor policies. They were inflamed when the elites stage a coup against this elected Government in 2006. Now they are standing firm and facing the armed might of the ruling class.” (17 May, <http://wdpress.blog.co.uk>)

This approach dissolves important class distinctions, or rather it transforms the legitimate point that class struggles can take different forms into the erroneous view that just because there is a struggle going on, it must express the basic distinction between workers and capitalists, rather than between or within other class forces. This perspective makes far too many concessions to Shinawatra's politics, ignoring the “bonapartist” elements within them [straddling more than one class base] because of the greater bonapartism of the existing government.

Red shirt movement

The argument was taken to its logical conclusion by the [Trotskyist] Fourth Internationalist Danielle Sabei, writing in the *Asia Left Observer* (17 May): “The problem is that decades of repression mean that today there are no political parties based in the workers' movement capable of being candidates to power and to offer a progressive political solution to the crisis. A number of leaders of the old workers' parties, whether social democratic or Maoist-inclined Communist, trade unions or peasant associations have been assassinated by the different dictatorial regimes. The workers' movement has still not recovered. That is why political opposition takes the unexpected form of the red shirts: a political movement which is neither a party nor an association, heterogeneous and marked by contradictions but whose essence is its organic link with the people.”

LOCUM

In other words, the weakness of the left means that another force play the role of “revolutionary” agency usually preserved for the working class, or at least its organised component. This kind of double substitutionism, of finding a locum for the working class, of other parties for working class representation, is at the root of the left's failure for decades.

The locum has successively been Stalin's Russia, Mao's army, Castro or Ho Chi Minh's guerrillas, or the Sandinistas — latterly Hugo Chavez's “Bolivarian revolution”. Stalinist armies, military despots, “popular” forces — that turn out to be actively hostile to independent working class politics.

Unfortunately, Ungpakorn — no doubt encouraged by the SWP's revolution cheerleaderdom — and others such as the Fourth International have fallen into this trap over Thailand.

The approach has also led to wishful thinking on political strategy. Ungpakorn wrote earlier this month: “To push forward with these necessary changes, the red shirts need to expand their organisation into the trade unions and the lower ranks of the army.” (SW 4 May) Last week he argued, “Strikes to back the protests would put the movement in a much stronger position to win—and to push for more radical changes in society.” (SW 22 May)

This is upside down and the wrong way around. Socialists in Thailand need to help build up the labour movement as an independent force in its own right. Such a movement would of course take up democratic demands and fight the military government. It would find allies in other social strata. The third camp view does not automatically seeing two bourgeois forces as “all the same”. It does not rule out a tactical orientation towards a heterogeneous movement like the UDD.

But it is not the job of socialists to advocate that a bourgeois or petty bourgeois movement extend its influence into the labour movement. It is not the job of the working class to act as a stage army for one or the other bourgeois factions. It may be starting from a far difficult situation, but the Thai working class needs independent working class politics if it is to solve the political crisis and fight for its own liberation.

THE LEFT AND EUROPE

What has Europe done for us?

The revolutionary socialist left is avowedly internationalist. We base our actions on ideas such as these in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* by Karl Marx:

"The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality.

"The workers have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.

"National differences and antagonism between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.

"The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United action of the leading civilized countries at least is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.

"In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another will also be put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end."

In this three-part series Vicki Morris asks how well the far-left is living up to its self-definition, through an overview of how it relates to the bourgeois project of European integration, in particular, the European Union (EU). The first article is an overview of the "European question".

In 2005, a tidying up measure called the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (European Constitution Treaty/Treaty) was proposed. It would consolidate existing agreements between the participating member states of the EU into one document.

It was presented as an attempt to confer some more democratic legitimacy to the EU project. The new Treaty was drafted after proposals from a Convention on the Future of Europe. What was their intention?

This body had a little representation on it beyond the usual governmental representatives, but was nonetheless far from being a widely inclusive body enabling a large-scale debate on Europe's future. In spite of its grandiose title, its remit, really, was to tidy up what had already been agreed and to increase the capacity of the EU to take decisions by majority rather than unanimously. Decision-making was becoming difficult in the enlarged EU — 10 new countries, including many of the eastern European countries formerly in the Soviet bloc, joined the EU15 in May 2004.

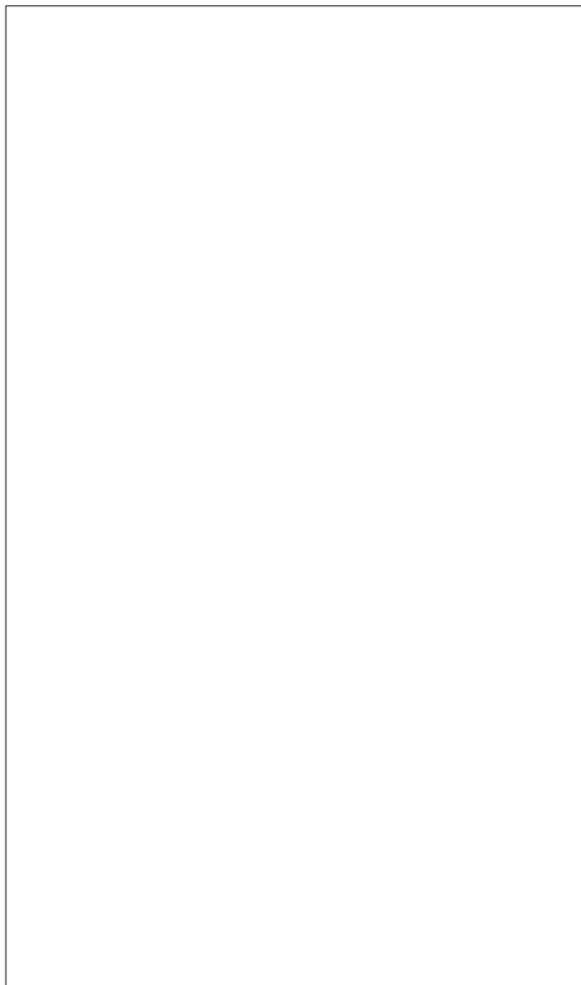
The Treaty would also add some citizen-friendly bells and whistles by giving legal force to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which enshrines certain political, social, and economic rights for EU citizens and residents, and increasing the powers of the directly elected European Parliament.

In 2005, the right-wing French and Netherlands governments opted to put the proposed Treaty to a referendum vote. They campaigned for a "yes" to the Treaty, but were defeated, on 29 May in France by 55% to 45% against (69% participation); on 1 June in the Netherlands by 62% to 38% against (63% participation).

The vote against the Treaty in France — with Germany, one of the supposed "engine" states of the European integration project — had a massive impact, and probably boosted the Netherlands "no" vote.

Very important to the result in France was the vigorous campaigning of the forces that made up the so-called "non' de gauche" ("left-wing 'no'") — this included most of the far-left:

- Trotskyist groups Lutte ouvrière (LO) and the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR)
- social justice movement Attac France
- French Communist Party
- significant personalities in the Socialist Party (PS): deputy leader Laurent Fabius (by no means on the left of the party), Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Henri Emmanuelli, although the Socialist Party's official position was to vote "yes".



The left does not take the issue of European integration seriously

With the exception of LO, which stood somewhat aloof, these forces collaborated in a more or less united campaign for a "no" vote.

French president Chirac had called the referendum partly as a vote of confidence in his presidency, expecting to win. Defeat was a blow to his prestige.

Why did the votes go against the Treaty? The reasons were legion, and included a mixture of right-wing and left-wing reasons. The BBC reported on the scenes in the Netherlands when the result was announced:

The No Constitution Rap, theme tune of the "No" campaign, blasted out and the Socialists danced. The gist of the song is this: "If you want a social Europe, and a Europe for the people, not for business and money, then say 'No' to the constitution."

Some voters evidently did want a social Europe, and voted "No" for that reason, but many others said "No" for quite different reasons. The television screens looming above the party-goers were showing a live programme from Hilversum. Right-wing "No" campaigners periodically appeared — the maverick MP Geert Wilders, for example, whose main theme during the campaign was opposition to immigration and Turkish membership of the EU.

On the streets of Amsterdam, people were giving varied arguments both for and against the constitution. One person talks about the euro, the next about domination by bigger EU states. Another will talk about Brussels bureaucracy, or the threat to Dutch liberal values, or loss of sovereignty and national identity, or the motor of European integration speeding out of control. ...A common complaint is that Brussels does not listen....

From France, three days earlier, the BBC's Caroline Wyatt had reported:

[One woman said]: "I hope this will be the start of a new project for a more social Europe."

Others here insisted this was not a vote against Europe.

"It was a pro-European no," said one young man. "We are not against Europe — we just want a different kind of Europe..."

Yet this result was as much a rejection of President Chirac and the French political elite as a rejection of the treaty itself.

There is anger in France over 10% unemployment and a stagnant economy, while many worry that Europe is simply too big and no longer built in France's image.

The "No" campaigners' message convinced many that the treaty would enshrine an "ultra-liberal" economic approach which would bring about far harsher competition between EU nations, with French jobs migrating to cheaper eastern European workers.

Likewise, fears over Turkish entry to the EU... became enmeshed in the passionate debate about the treaty.

On the surface, more than in the Netherlands, French rejection of the Treaty did seem to have a left-wing impulse. However, there can be a significant cross-over between rejecting the supposed "neoliberal" direction of the EU project and simply wishing to keep one's own job, even at the expense of, for example, the "Polish plumber", a character popularised in the campaign, supposedly arriving in hordes to put French plumbers out of work. Concerns about "offshoring" — companies exporting jobs to eastern European member states where labour was cheaper — could also be "left", "right", or a mixture. There is nothing automatically internationalist about rejecting "neoliberal" Europe.

As they trumpeted their victory, the left ought to have acknowledged the confusion of people's motivations, but they didn't. Pro-Treaty press and politicians sought to portray the "no" vote as inward-looking, nationalist and chauvinist. But, actually, it is only good sense for socialists to want to be sure about what is actually going on.

Opinions on actual nitty-gritty EU questions tend to play a small part in people's political choices in such things as European Parliamentary election campaigns. These tend to play out as referenda on national political issues.

It is reasonable to see Chirac's referendum defeat in the context not just of people's views on the Treaty in question (scarcely anyone who voted on it knew what it said) but also against the backdrop of recent social battles.

For much of the far-left, the referendum offered an apparently irresistible opportunity to defeat Chirac. The left worked hard for its victory, and enjoyed its moment of giving Chirac a bloody nose. But had it done the right thing? Was this campaign a distraction from more important political questions?

There were people on the left who voted "yes", with whom unity had to be rebuilt when the referendum was over: were false battle lines drawn in the working class movement?

And what were the lasting gains of the "no" votes?

The pro-EU ruling classes of Europe scratched their collective heads for several years over what to do next, and the votes around the Lisbon Treaty, the successor to the failed Treaty for a European Constitution, gave the left more chances to organise "no" campaigns, in Ireland in two referenda, one in 2008 (which the "no" campaign won) and one in 2009 (which the "no" campaign lost). But was this a good use of the left's time? Could it have been doing something else to bring its goal of "Another Europe" closer?

In the run-up to these Treaty referenda, the AWL advocated an "active abstention". If there had been a referendum in the UK — and those who wanted one had a right to it — we would have advocated an abstention campaign that involved a public debate on the issues raised, and that argued positively for the workers' movement to use the contradictions within the EU project in order to promote our own alternative to "bosses' Europe" — "workers' Europe".

In 2005, the AWL argued the "No Campaign will not lead to a better Europe". Martin Thomas wrote in *Solidarity* 3/74 (2 June 2005):

Let us stand back and take a longer view. Since the 1960s the AWL and our forerunners have had to respond to several rows in mainstream politics over Europe...

In every case, governments have asked us: either

Continued on page 20

From page 19

these (their) terms for European integration, or block integration? Which do you want?

The proper working-class response, we believe, is to counterpose European-wide workers' solidarity and democracy to both bourgeois alternatives. ...

The EU is European unity "in an incomplete and deformed way"! We want European unity "through the fight for socialism and democracy" — but if we are not strong enough to win it that way, and we are not, then history does not stop. Capitalism makes its own sort of progress, in its own class-divided, destructive way. The job of Marxists is not to try to halt capitalist development — but to fight capitalism within its development, to push through that development towards socialism.

Different sectors of the bourgeoisie support more or less European integration. They take different views, for reasons that might relate to their immediate economic interests, strategic calculations, or sometimes just plain sentiment. When the far-left says that the EU is just a bosses' Europe, they downplay the fact that Euroscepticism can equally be bosses' Euroscepticism.

How much more powerful a rejection of the bourgeois political class as a whole it would be if the labour movement and socialists were to refuse to choose between the choices they present us with: neither big transnational bourgeoisie nor insular, nationally minded capitalists, but workers' Europe!

We should pose a positive alternative, such as the programme for European workers (see box), which the AWL advocated around the time of the debate on the European Constitution Treaty.

Can there be such a thing as a "left-wing 'no'" to EU integration? In principle, it might be possible, but it is a question to answer concretely.

If it is possible to build and shape a left-wing "no" in France, that is clearly distinguishable from the right-wing "no" campaign — is it possible? and is that what happened? — it does not necessarily follow that it is possible to build a left-wing "no" campaign in the UK. If the socialists and far-left cannot acknowledge that the question might be answered differently in different countries, that this is a question worth asking, it perhaps shows the limits of their internationalism.

Is a vicarious left-wing "no" possible? On the day after the French referendum vote in 2005, on the European Social Forum email lists, socialists and "alternative globalisation" activists lined up to congratulate the French comrades on their victory.

This experience was repeated when the first Irish referendum rejected the Lisbon Treaty. We were all "French", then we were all "Irish". None of us ever wanted, apparently, to be Luxembourgish or Spanish — both countries that approved the European Constitutional Treaty in referenda.

Whatever else we think about the result of the referenda in France or the Netherlands in 2005, or in Ireland in 2008, it is hard on a very simple level to understand how a vote that rejects deeper EU integration cannot be understood as, in the first place, a rejection of European integration as such.

But undeniably that is how some people conceive it. We have to take people's motivations and beliefs to an extent at face value. How do they understand their actions; what do their actions mean to them? We can question whether objectively they are bringing about the thing they want, whether their means actually

serve their ends. That is another question.

But why then, if it is possible to choose between the ruling class options offered to us, at the same time as posing the alternative of a workers' Europe, does the far-left never accept the European integration project of the bourgeoisie? Better the devil you know?

While there is much to criticise in each new step on the road of EU integration, there is an awful lot to be said against the alternative: a Europe of national states and rivalries, with closed borders; in the worst times, tariff wars and real wars. A Europe of passports and visas. Of redundant national notes and coinages that must be changed every time someone wants to buy something from a foreign country or go on a trip...

In March 2007, to mark the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome which founded the Common Market, the *Independent* newspaper compiled a list of benefits of European integration.

Not all are "good" from the point of view of socialists, and all are open to qualifications, but you will search in vain to find many people on the far-left, in Europe generally but particularly in the UK, who will even acknowledge that the EU project entails any positive benefits from the point of view of the working class. All of the following deserve to be factored into the left's discussions about its attitude to the EU:

- So, what has Europe ever done for us? Apart from...**
- The end of war between European nations
 - Democracy is flourishing in 27 countries
 - The creation of the world's largest internal trading market
 - Laws which make it easier for British people to buy property in Europe
 - Four weeks statutory paid holiday a year for workers in Europe
 - Europe is helping to save the planet with regulatory cuts in CO2
 - One currency from Bantry to Berlin (but not Britain)
 - Free medical help for tourists
 - Study programmes and cheap travel means greater mobility for Europe's youth
 - End of the road for border crossings (apart from in the UK)
 - Compensation for air delays
 - European driving licences recognised
 - Britons now feel a lot less insular
 - Strong economic growth...

Of course, for all of the above arguments, counter arguments can be made highlighting a negative side — against the idea that it has helped to prevent war, critics will charge that the EU is just a project to make the European countries stronger against the emerging powers of China and India, and, long term, makes bigger wars more likely; that at the beginning it was a Cold War project pursued by the USA against the Soviet bloc. There is some truth in all of these arguments, but there is also some truth in the case made by the *Independent*.

On the far-left, however, it is extremely rare to find anyone who will talk about the EU as what it is, not a monolith — even in its institutions, there are different views on the direction it should take — but a contradictory creation.

Yes, the EU is overwhelmingly a neo-liberal, free market trading bloc, but its member states are overwhelmingly capitalist states representing the interests of national bourgeoisies. Why should we prefer the one to the other? The fact that the EU has become more of a neo-liberal, free market trading bloc over time reflects the trend in the politics at the national level of

the Member States.

We should engage with this contradictory creation, and we can and should use those aspects of it that we can use in pursuit of our goals, e.g. use the European parliament which provides democratic checks on EU legislation and a forum for debate about the future of European integration.

A programme for European workers

- For a Republican United States of Europe! Scrap the existing bureaucratic structures and replace them with a sovereign elected European Parliament with full control over all EU affairs.
- Fight to level up working class living standards and conditions. For a common campaign for a legal 35 hour week.
- Fight for a guaranteed decent European minimum wage.
- For a Europe-wide emergency programme of public works to tackle unemployment and social exclusion. Workers' control of the big multinationals, to steer production toward need and to guarantee every worker the right to a decent job.
- For Europe-wide public ownership of all the big banks, and democratic control of credit and monetary policy.
- For the replacement of the Common Agricultural Policy with a plan worked out by workers' and small farmers' organisations, based on the public ownership of land. Food production should be geared to the needs of the world's hungry people.
- For the abolition of VAT and the financing of public services by direct taxation.
- Stop all the state hand-outs to big business — subsidies, tax concessions, reductions in employers' contributions for social security — and use the money to create jobs in public services.
- Prioritise rebuilding good public services, halt all privatisation plans.
- For free abortion facilities, freely available, everywhere.
- For a Europe which respects the environment, putting controls on industries which pollute, phasing out nuclear power.
- For a Europe open to the world! Free movement of people into the EU; free access for Third World exports to EU markets; a big EU aid programme without strings to the Third World.
- For the right to vote of all residents of EU countries.
- Scrap the proposed Europe defence force. For the replacement of all the EU states' existing military hierarchies by people's militia. For a Europe free of nuclear weapons!
- For a united working class. For Europe-wide shop stewards' committee in all the big multinationals and all the major industries!
- Fight to rebuild a European international socialist movement.
- For a Workers' United States of Europe.
<http://www.workersliberty.org/node/3199>

WORKERS OF THE WORLD

By IRA BERKOVIC

ROMANIA

40,000 Romanian workers took to the streets to protest against proposed wage cut, with union leaders threatening a general strike for May 31 unless the government backs down. Emile Boc, the country's Prime Minister, has called the cuts (which aim to cut public sector pensions by 15% and public sector wages by 25%) "the only viable solution for the country's future." The IMF predicts that Romania's current number of unemployed workers (750,000) could rise to 1,000,000 by the end of the year.

TURKEY

In the first May Day demonstration for over 30 years not to face attacks from the police, Turkish tobacco

workers stormed the rally's stage to disrupt the speech of a union bureaucrat they accuse of undermining and selling out their dispute. Workers employed by Tekel, formerly a state enterprise, have been fighting a months-long struggle against job cuts and casualisation (direct products of privatisation) that has seen them take on both their bosses and the conservatism of their union leaders. In January, workers established a permanent protest camp near their union headquarters that lasted for nearly two months, and have used tactics such as hunger striking during the course of their struggle.

ZIMBABWE

25,000 Zimbabwean miners took one day of strike action to demand higher pay, after negotiations with their employer broke down. The lowest-paid mineworkers are currently paid just \$140 per month,

and the Associated Miners' Union of Zimbabwe is demanding a levelling up to \$290. According to miners' leader Tinago Ruzive, mine magnates are refusing to comply with the stipulations of a recent industrial tribunal which requires them to increase all workers' wages. The 25,000 striking miners represent over 60% of all miners employed in Zimbabwe.

ALGERIA

Railway workers have secured a pay increase of at least 20% following a week-long strike. Consumer price inflation in the country has recently risen to 5.7%, and workers in several industries have begun demanding pay increases to keep up with the cost of living. The strike was extremely effective, "paralysing" the capital's rail network according to one news source.

- More: www.labourstart.org

MUSIC

The remembering tradition

Tom Unterrainer went to listen to David Rovics singing his songs.

*I remember Warsaw
We stood side by side
The Star of David flew above the ghetto
There we lived and there we died
"I remember Warsaw", David Rovics*

American radical culture has suffered a number of notable losses of late. Most recently Howard Zinn, and before him Utah Phillips, Kurt Vonnegut and Studs Terkel have passed from the scene of the living, to be remembered by their words and music alone.

These were great losses indeed, all the more so for us British-based America-philes who have admired the distinct, "dissident" political and artistic voices that found space in the mass of cosmopolitan America but failed to experience them first hand.

One thing that linked Zinn, Phillips and the others — but by no means the only common association — was their act of remembering. Not reminiscing for purely romantic reasons, though a helping of romanticism does no harm, but remembering for a reason.

The reason? To educate and arm their brothers and sisters with the knowledge of things past in preparation for the struggles to come.

David Rovics, a singer-songwriter "folk" musician, stands in that remembering tradition.

*From Dublin City to San Diego
We witnessed freedom denied
So we formed the Saint Patrick Battalion
And we fought on the Mexican side
"The Saint Patrick Battalion"*

Ranging through history, taking in everything from the 1846 Mexican-American war in "The Saint Patrick Battalion", the life of Boxcar Betty all the way to the recent invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, Rovics sings and talks us through the events that shaped and continue to shape individual lives and the life of our movement.

But Rovics is not only concerned with the "big events" and "big personalities" of the near and distant past. Remembering his friends and comrades in struggle in the here-and-now is just as important. The song written for Brad Will, the activist-photographer murdered by police during the Oaxaca uprising, stands out.

Away from personal stories and historical events, Rovics turns his eye to the contemporary political scene: here he is uncompromising but often funny.

Rovics is a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) and has little time for either the "poseurs" that litter the anarchist scene ("I'm a better anarchist than you") or for the myriad socialist organisations he encounters ("Vanguard": "Worker's World says that they have all the answers, And Milosevic is a guy that they admire"). I suspect he'd have little time for my own politics, though who knows?

If Rovics is often hilariously acerbic when dealing with the idiocies he sees close at hand, his critical gaze is less than comprehensive. This should neither surprise us nor lead us to ignore what he has to say and the way he goes about saying it.

After all, he's not in the business of writing big fat books or orientating an entire movement. He's a political singer in the populist tradition, and as such he's a few paces removed from those often whimsical singers and groups that have recently emerged in the mini-folk renaissance of late.

Another difference between Rovics and the new wave of folk groups is that his main audiences are distinctly "activist" and political. So when I managed to see Rovics live, he was a support act for Attila the Stockbroker in a tiny pub room in Leicester. I don't suppose Rovics minds such small audiences and such small venues — in times like these, it is to be expected.

Through Rovics' music, we know that much more is possible: that we have resisted in the past and that we will resist again.

*With every bomb that they drop, every home they destroy
Every land they invade
Comes a new generation from under the rubble
Saying "we are not afraid"
They will pretend we are few
But with each child that a billion mothers bear
Comes the next demonstration
That we are everywhere
'We are everywhere'*

FILM

What is the ghost in the machine?

Mick Ackersley reviews *The Ghost Writer*

During the Moscow Trials in the 1930s, a story circulated that Stalin had never been a Bolshevik, but was an old Tsarist spy who had escaped detection after the revolution and remained in the party.

Discussing the story, Trotsky rejected it, and said: even were it shown to be true, it would add nothing to our political and social understanding.

It would only confuse the issues posed by Stalinism, seen in Marxist terms as a social and political phenomenon that had arisen as a counter-revolution against a working-class regime in an isolated and backward country whose development towards socialism was impossible.

Suppose it turned out that Tony Blair, or some of those who were very close to him, had been agents of the American CIA at the time of the invasion of Iraq in 2003? Would that clarify or confuse the picture of the British/US relation then?

Would it add to our understanding of the how and why of it?

Surely it wouldn't. It would lead us to view as a spy story what is perfectly understandable as a story of political delusion, of political corruption, of political and military subordination of one country to another, and of the hollowness of our pluto-democratic system which allowed Blair to do what he did.

Blair went with Bush because he saw advantage in playing Robin to the neo-conservative Batman in Washington, and big disadvantages in refusing to do so.

He thought that the USA's military world supremacy would be both irresistible and sufficient in reshaping the Middle East. He thought it would be easy for the USA to use its military might as a tool of social engineering and to remodel Iraq.

He saw the issues through the eyes of Bush and the naively arrogant and bungling neo-conservatives in Washington.

In Britain, Blair had largely destroyed the old democratic structures of the Labour Party and substituted his own secretive, manipulative, and autocratic "presidential" rule for collective rule by the Cabinet. Parliament had long previously lost the power to control the Government, short of overthrowing it.

Robert Harris is a former friend of Tony Blair who fell out with him over the invasion of Iraq.

Harris's 2007 thriller *The Ghost*, and now Roman Polanski's film based on it, link the "Blair" character to the CIA, and so inevitably reduce the politics of the invasion of Iraq to a story of subterranean "secret agent" manipulations.

That is perfectly legitimate. That is the sort of thing a thriller, book or film, is supposed to do; and certainly aspects of the now public story — the deception of Parliament about the "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq, for example — lend themselves to such treatment.

Is it well done? In the story, a ghost writer (Ewan McGregor) is hired to help write the memoirs of a former British prime minister (played by a convincingly powerful Pierce Brosnan), now holed up on a bleak island somewhere off the US coast.

A previous "ghost" has been found dead on the beach, seemingly victim of an accident. The new "ghost" treads in the footsteps of his predecessor, picking his way towards the ex-PM's secret.

The secret, once it is uncovered, adds nothing to our understanding of Blair's role in the war. Politically, the story is anti-climactic.

Even so, as a thriller I found it gripping and, on its chosen level, almost convincing.

Bungling for jihad

Ed Maltby reviews *Four Lions*

This film about a small cell of Sheffield-based terrorists who conspire to wage Jihad against the West by slaughtering innocent civilians is, believe it or not, extremely funny.

The film follows the group of suicide bombers as they attempt to hatch their plan, undergo training in Afghanistan, dodge the police and execute their attack. The process is chaotic, marred by constant bungling, stupid arguments and slapstick farce. But writer and director Chris Morris underlines that what interests him is the human reality of terrorist groups: "Terrorist cells have the same group dynamics as stag parties and five-a-side football teams. There is conflict, friendship, misunderstanding and rivalry. Terrorism is about ideology, but it's also about berks."

Morris is doing what he is best at — producing a shocking film about modern life that invites the viewer to think critically about taboo subjects. There are two traps that the film avoids — it doesn't shock for the sake of shocking; and, in inviting the viewer to think about a group of Islamist terrorists as people, it doesn't attempt to explain away the utterly reactionary nature of their project.

The points where people, innocents or terrorists, are killed, are shocking. The deaths serve to puncture the farce and remind us of the horror of the subject matter.

When Muslim convert Barry argues to fellow bomber Faisal that it's OK to blow up the mosque that his father visits, because "has your dad ever bought a Jaffa orange? Well, then! He's buying nukes for Israel - he's a Jew!" (a line of argument which is unfortunately sometimes used on the left...), it's almost touching to see the stupidity of the terms in which he understands the world, but it's also chilling — he is definitely a murderous anti-semitic (and sexist and homophobic).

The police and the state come in for a pasting, too — racist, violent, hypocritical and incompetent. It's an accurate portrayal — but as with the bombers, the humanity of the agents of the state, their bungling and the pressures acting on them are hinted at as well.

Not many political conclusions can be drawn, but the film performs the most important role of comedy — it breaks down the taboo about its subject matter, and emphasises that we have to understand terrorism as a human activity, as human as any other.

BNP

When fascists fall out

BY CHARLIE SALMON

Kate's not a very nice woman and neither is her boss. She spends her working hours raising money for an organisation that is ruled by fear. Kate knows that her boss is not to be messed with — his friends, associates and colleagues are "serious" people. So when she opens the mail one morning to find a picture of her boss holding a shotgun, Kate knows it will not be a good day.

Kate is not cooking the books for a bunch of gangsters. This is not the opening of a pulp fiction novel. Kate is a fascist and the story of her difficult morning is just one scene from the unfolding saga of the British National Party.

"Kate" is Kate Hunt and her boss is Jim Dowson. The pair ran the BNP's Belfast-based call centre where, for a commission, they handled membership and fundraising. That is until Dowson's calling card arrived one morning. Hunt and Dowson's falling out is one part of a now far-reaching story unfolding on the yourbnp.com website. It includes the resignation of BNP website editor Simon Bennett who subsequently disabled the party's internet operations on election eve; the pre-election fiasco over Mark Collett's alleged threats to kill Griffin and Dowson; Collett's subsequent arrest.

These sharp internal tensions together with the BNP's unmitigated drubbing at the general election are all very entertaining. Power struggles are not a new experience for the BNP — Griffin has weathered similar crises before. His recent announcement that he will step down from his position in 2013 may or may not appease his opponents. Either way we should look at the likely organisational ramifications of the BNP defeat.

GRIFFIN: "KEEP STEADY"

Almost immediately after the election Nick Griffin issued an internal party memo which noted the electoral defeats and promised great things in the near future. Does Griffin have a point?

Claim 1 from Griffin: "the fact remains that this was the best general election result in the history of British nationalism".

Fact: The total number of votes cast for the BNP in general elections since 1983 have shown an on-average increase. In 1983 they polled 14,261 votes; 563 in 1987; 7,631 in 1992; 35,832 in 1997; 47,129 in 2001; 192,746 in 2005 and 563,743 this time around. Clear evidence for a growth in support? Empirically yes, however...

In 1983 the BNP stood just 54 candidates which equates to about 270 votes per candidate. In 1997 they stood 54 candidates again and won 35,832 votes — about 660 votes per candidate. So, an improvement. But Nick Griffin only joined the BNP in 1995 after a long period in the National Front and a similar time on the margins of pseudo-intellectual fascism. He became the leader in 1998 after deposing long-time leader John Tyndall. So the only votes that have a bearing on Griffin's record as leader fall between 2001 and 2010.

Here we see steady increases again: between 2001 and 2005 a four-fold increase and between 2005 and 2010 a three-fold increase. Impressive? A closer look, however, shows a stagnation of sorts. In 2001 the BNP stood 33 candidates who took on average about 1400 votes each. In 2005 they stood 117 candidates who took on average 1647 votes each. In 2010 the figures were 339 candidates with on average 1663 votes. So despite an impressive increase in the number of candidates, the average number of votes won by each of them is about the same.

If we extrapolate these figures and assume that the BNP can stand a candidate in each constituency next time round with each candidate getting about 1600 votes, they can expect to win one million votes close to the figure won at the Euro elections in 2009 where the BNP contested every seat. This is just about 3% of the total vote.

So the picture is a contradictory one: massive increases in overall votes on the one hand but no major victo-

ry. Massive increases but stagnation in average votes per candidate.

The most significant fact about the results this time around and the electoral trend is the number of candidates. The fact that fascists were able to field 339 candidates as compared to around 100 all-told from the far left (who polled considerably fewer votes per candidate) is a sign of comparative strength. That the BNP has the organisational strength to stand and fund campaigns in 339 constituencies is worrying. But again, the reality is more complex.

Looked at one way, the 339 figure is worrying if for nothing else than the sheer numbers. Looked at another way — and with the benefit of local information — it's clear that the BNP did not run real campaigns in all but a handful of constituencies. According to anti-fascists in Stoke — number two on the BNP's target list — the BNP gave up campaigning well in advance of polling day, pouring all their resources into Griffin's Barking campaign. So they're big enough to find the candidates and the deposit money but they are not big enough to organise around these efforts.

The "best general election result" for the BNP so far but there are no signs of a huge increase in support. What I think the statistics show is that whilst the growth of the BNP is an incontestable fact in general, the numbers of people who "support" the party has been the same for some period of time. Of those who support the BNP, the "active" element has increased by a numerically tiny but in political terms significant proportion, thus allowing for the constrained organisational growth.

Griffin claim 2: "our frankly shocking wipe-out from Barking and Dagenham council is, when we look at the facts, not some terrible indictment of our councillors or leadership, but simply the result of a paradigm shift in the quality of Labour's election-winning machine."

Fact: Griffin's claim about the quality of his leadership or the work of his councillors is neither here-nor-there: I think we can assume that they are, indeed, morons. That all those BNP councillors up for election lost their seats is probably not connected to the amateur hour idiocy of those people in Barking and elsewhere: if only voters reacted to political idiots of all stripes in such a decisive way. But Griffin does have a point about the Labour campaign.

Very few people predicted the relatively high turnout at the last election. Fewer still could have predicted the outcome. A substantially smaller number — perhaps just a handful — can have anticipated Margaret Hodge's increased majority in Barking. Hodge, the epitome of New Labour, actually managed to increase her overall majority in a constituency where the street politics has been overwhelmingly dominated by the BNP.

In 2005 Hodge won Barking with 13,826 votes amounting to 47.8% of the vote on a 50.1% turnout. In 2010 she won with 24,628 votes, 54.3% on a 61.4% turnout. Only one factor can explain this increased voter turnout and the increased proportion of the vote: the Labour vote was mobilised in Barking to a far greater degree than the overall increased turnout nation wide.

This was done by running high profile anti-BNP initiatives, leafleting sessions, meetings and the like. The work was conducted by both the Socialist Workers Party dominated "Unite Against Fascism" and by *Searchlight* magazine's "Hope Not Hate" campaign. Good work was done, right? Yes and no.

The good: if there was ever a case for positively campaigning for a Blairite scum-bag, Hodge versus Griffin in Barking is it. In and of itself, distributing material aimed at boosting the Labour vote — whether or not it specifically targeted the BNP — was a positive thing to do. By what system of logic could you argue otherwise?

The bad. First, the actual politics promoted by both UAF and HnH in Barking as elsewhere is a crass amalgam of the "don't vote Nazi" and "everything would be lovely if only the fascists didn't exist" approach to anti-fascism. To invest the energies and finances of working class organisations — socialist activists who provide the bulk of the foot-soldiers for these campaigns and the trade unions who provide most of the money — in such efforts is to abandon any faith whatsoever in

working class politics. It is to assume that we cannot explain our own politics to working class voters — who, after all, comprise the overwhelming majority in Barking. It is also to ignore the realities of working class life that are only too clear to the vast majority in Barking. It makes no political sense unless the people you're worried about offending are the new Tory prime minister (a listed supporter of UAF) or unrepresentative layers in the trade union and Labour bureaucracies.

Unfortunately the overwhelming defeat of Griffin at the polls will reinforce the idea that the UAF mode of anti-fascism works. We should all note that the extra hundreds of activists mobilised against Griffin had a positive impact. But we should also note that the impact was to increase the Labour vote, not to substantially reduce BNP support.

In 1997 the BNP won 2.7% of the vote in Barking on a 48.2% turnout; in 2001 they won 6.4% on a 45.5% turnout; in 2005 they won 16.9% on a 50.1% turnout and this time they won 14.8% of the vote on a 61.4% turnout. A dip in support in terms of the percentage of the overall vote. But between 2005 and 2010 the BNP managed to persuade around 1700 more people to vote for them. The extra hundreds of activists and thousands upon thousands of pounds of trade union money did *not* reduce the fascists' numerical support.

If those standing as candidates to the left of Labour had managed to increase their support by 1700 votes, wouldn't we all take note. Let's not kid ourselves here.

We cannot pretend that the pleasantly disastrous results in Barking and Stoke spell the end for BNP representation on local councils. They were beaten by overall higher turnouts, probably resulting from the council elections being held on the same day as the general election. The BNP never won council seats on a high turnout but on low turnouts, especially during by-elections. There will be many more such elections and many more low turnouts in the time to come. To stop the BNP winning seats, we need locally based structures that can run working-class campaigns against the BNP and undercut their support — with or without an influx of campaigners from elsewhere.

Griffin claim 3: "we have just seen the last first-past-the-post major election contest in British history" and on a PR system "last week's showing would give us twelve MPs".

Fact: 29,653,638 votes were cast in the 2010 general election. Of those more than half a million (563,743) were cast for the British National Party. The BNP share of the national vote was 1.9%. If we translate that into a proportion of the 650 Members of Parliament elected this time around, in theory the BNP would have 12.35 seats. Griffin's Oxbridge education clearly wasn't a complete waste of time because he managed to round that down to 12 whole seats.

Whilst Griffin can use a calculator and round numbers as well as I can, he's playing fast-and-loose with reality. If the Conservative-Liberal government introduced a pure proportional representation system then the BNP would indeed have secured twelve seats. But neither the Con-Libs nor anyone else is considering such a system.

Under any PR system that is introduced only some seats would be allocated on a proportional basis and those that are will be allocated on a complex system of ranking and percentages. The figure of twelve seats is a lie.

However, any new PR system would give increased representation to smaller parties. Under any such system, the BNP with its current levels of support could win seats. If they manage to increase the number of constituencies contested in time for the next election, they will win even more seats. So Griffin's overall message to the party — "keep steady" — has some logical merit. The BNP did not do as well as Griffin promised but it is far from crushed.

PARTY QUESTION

The BNP's aim then, as far as Griffin is concerned, is to keep on keeping on. If the BNP was a "normal" political organisation, one capable of reading

the political weather vane and unhindered by competing agendas, it would continue to grow, put down roots, build the organisation and wait things out.

But the BNP is clearly not a “normal” bourgeois democratic party. Kate Hunt’s story proves as much. On the other hand the BNP leadership is not just a thuggish, dictatorial, gangsterised clique: they are ideological fascists. A great many of the foot-soldiers of the organisation have a long and well-documented history in the British fascist movement. To become a “voting member” of the BNP — one of those trusted to take part in what passes for democratic functioning within the party — you must complete a training course administered by Arthur Kemp, a former member of the rabidly pro-apartheid South African Conservative Party and writer for openly fascist groups in the USA. Jim Dowson, who now appears to control the party financial wing, is not just a nasty man with a shotgun but has a long history with Loyalist paramilitary organisations and rabid anti-abortion outfits. The record of Griffin himself is well documented.

The problem for Griffin and the BNP is that there are obvious tensions between the electoralist course that has brought the party so far and the natural political impulses of most fascists, many of whom have less at stake personally than the leadership.

BNP candidates are able to win on average around 1600 people over per constituency not on the basis of their maximum programme of “patriotic counter-revolution” but with a more minimum base-line nationalist programme. Their electoral campaigns and party building propaganda no longer includes flagrant racism or attempts to mobilise thuggish gangs. Rather, support is won on the basis of petty and simplistic “explanations” of the woes of society that echo and reinforce the racism, nationalism and xenophobia of mainstream right wing politics.

They do this not with high-profile stunts and provocations, they do this without the support of a single national news outlet and in spite of the well-deserved opprobrium rained upon them from left and right. The BNP builds by going to the door-step, entering communities and building from the grass roots.

Such work involves a huge amount of drudgery, especially for an organisation as small as the BNP. When the labour movement was able to do such work in the past, we had the allegiance and membership of hundreds of thousands of individuals. At best, the BNP has probably half a percent of this number.

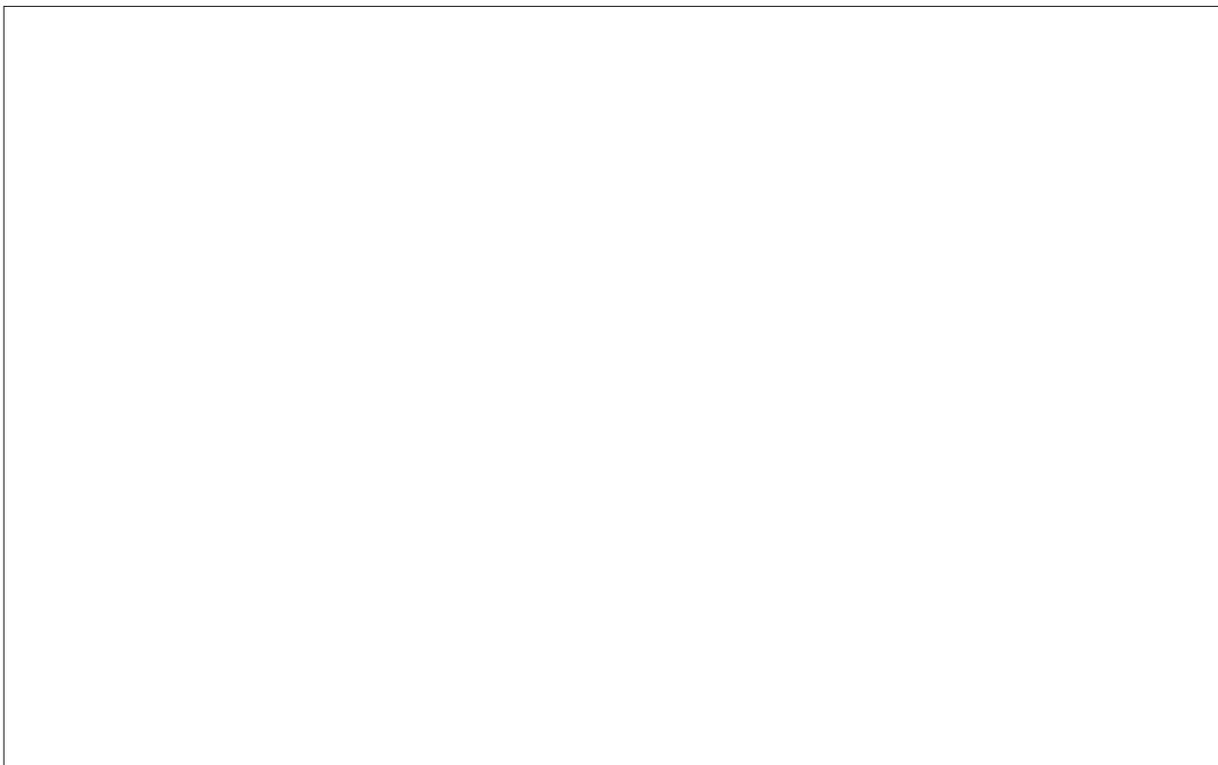
When the political core of a group like the BNP is faced on the one hand with what objectively looks like a defeat and on the other the resurgence of right-wing, racist street politics in the form of the English Defence League, then questions will be asked.

Add to this the thuggish antics of Jim Dowson and Mark Collett, the rule change forcing the BNP to admit all-comers, the repeated fundraising drives and financial crises, legal challenges, membership leaks, expulsions, arrests and general organisational incompetence and Griffin has a problem.

Griffin desperately needs to solve his “party question” and he will not be able to wait for the next round of elections to sort things out.

THE POLITICAL TEST

The test for the BNP and those of us who oppose them will come in the short-term. The test will not be an election, general or otherwise. It will not



involve increasing voter turnouts or going on the skill for a post-Blair Blairite. The test will be a fight defined by working class politics pure and simple.

Margaret Thatcher’s right-wing policies meant that a great deal of the NF’s support — electoral and otherwise — was absorbed within the ranks of the

BNP: down but not out

Conservative party, leaving a violent hard-core behind.

With the apparent defeat and fragmentation of fascist organisation came a political downgrading of anti-fascist work in the list of socialists’ priorities: the SWP all but closed down the Anti Nazi League for example. Such a response to any fragmentation of the BNP would be an equally grave mistake.

The fascists of the 1980s, though smaller in number and organisationally incapable of running election campaigns, posed a real physical threat to minority groups and the organised left. We cannot tolerate a repeat performance.

Whether or not the BNP falls apart, whatever Griffin’s personal fortunes, regardless of whether fascists can start to openly organise around the EDL or whether they re-group in smaller independent units the fundamental necessity for a labour movement orientated, working class campaign against racism and fascism remains.

One million votes at the Euro elections and half a million at the general election indicate that with or without Nick Griffin and the British National Party there are substantial numbers of people, including a large layer of working class voters, who have been won to nationalist and racist politics. Such a layer of people are the soil from which reaction — in a fascist guise or not — can and will grow without active intervention from our movement.

The degree to which Nick Griffin and the BNP can build themselves on the back of the coming cuts in government spending and any governmental instability it produces will determine the future shape of fascist political organisation in this country.

The degree to which we can organise and mobilise the labour movement to a. do the basic job of defending itself, b. organise politically around our fight back without slumping into crass anti-Toryism or drawing syndicalist conclusions and c. direct well aimed and politically astute blows against the BNP in the process, will determine more than just Nick Griffin’s political fortunes.

The shape of things to come, however, is not just a two-way fight: BNP versus the anti-fascists. That the EDL is an attractive prospect for a layer of organised fascists is intimately connected to the very real threat posed by these street-racists. So far our side has done very little — criminally so — to either disrupt or terminate the EDL’s activities.

In some ways, the worst-case-scenario would be the mass defection and acceptance within the EDL of layers of ex-BNP. Such a scenario could see the EDL combining the racist demonstrations and mobilisations with grass-roots activity: the proliferation of local and openly active EDL organisation, more determined organisation building work, an even more aggressive turn towards ‘dealing with the enemy’. Such a scenario seems a remote possibility given what we know of the periphery of the EDL and their repeated denials of racism and fascism.

Just as problematic would be a repeat of what happened in the wake of the National Front’s electoral defeat and eventual fragmentation from 1979 onward.

STOP RACISM AND FASCISM NETWORK

Doing things differently

By JACK YATES

Representatives from anti-fascist and anti-racist campaigns in London, Stoke, Derby, Manchester, Liverpool and Nottingham met in early May for the first committee meeting of a new network of organisations determined to forge a “different” approach to combating the BNP and EDL.

Those organising in the new network have drawn the conclusion that the lack of democracy and the political choke-hold exercised upon existing anti-fascist networks is no longer tolerable and hinders effective action against fascists and racists.

Both the Socialist Workers Party dominated

Unite Against Fascism and *Searchlight* magazine’s Hope not Hate campaign seem unable or unwilling to mount sharp political campaigns against the BNP or to mobilise effectively against the EDL.

The groups organised in the network want the trade unions, labour movement and socialist organisations to use their resources — organisational and financial — to fight on their own terms: to use working class politics to decisively cut the ground from under the BNP’s feet and use our strength of numbers to overwhelm attempts by racists to demonstrate and march. In short — but in terms not shared by all participants in the network — a genuine united front against racism and fascism: not apolitical, ineffective and essentially damaging

popular fronts with Tories and religious right-wingers.

Apart from choosing a name (the Stop Racism and Fascism network, SRF) the group is prioritising interventions against the English Defence League, sharing campaign materials and resources and building for forthcoming action against the BNP’s “Red, White and Blue” festival in August.

We encourage all those alarmed at the BNP’s half-a-million votes at the election, those disgusted at the opposition so far to the EDL’s racist provocations and all those determined to campaign more effectively to contact the new network (visit srfnetwork.org) and work towards forming a local group.

Solidarity with Greek workers!

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Greek workers staged another general strike on 20 May, following general strikes or days of action on 5 May, 22 April, 15 April, 11 March, 10 February, or 17 December. The tempo of struggle is increasing, and now Spanish unions plan a public service workers' strike on 2 June.

The 10 May bail-out package organised by the European Union and the IMF has not halted the struggle. Why should it? The Greek government's plans for huge cuts continue, and have become even harsher. And the Greek government may well end up with no choice but to default on its international debt even despite all the cuts designed to stop that default.

Why has the crisis erupted? How is the Greek left and labour movement responding? What answers should socialists propose?

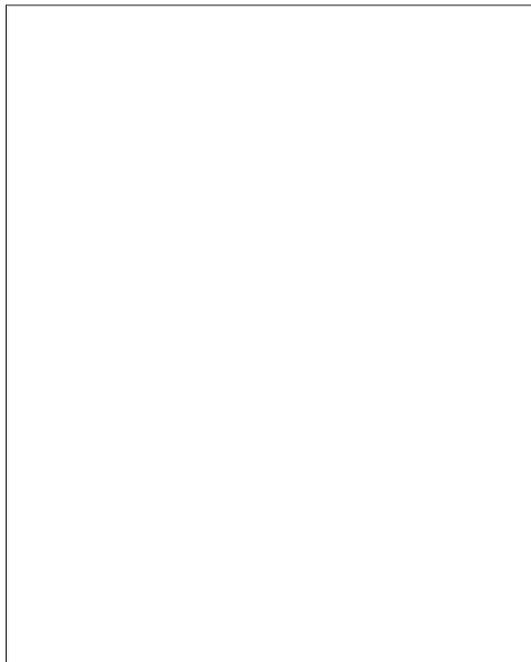
In 2007-8 a vast boom in the international financial markets tipped over into crisis. Governments responded by bailing out banks. That shifted the focus of the crisis, as regards points of breakdown in the circuits of capital, to the governments.

Since Greece joined the European Union in 1981 and the eurozone in 2001, Greek capitalism has grown fairly fast though not as spectacularly as Irish.

Generally, the faltering and bureaucratic processes of EU integration have led to some "levelling up" in Europe. In 2008, Greece's national income per head was 66% of Germany's and 68% of France's; Spain's was 75% of Germany's and 76% of France's. In 1980 those two south European countries had national incomes per head of only 32% of Germany's or 37% of France's (Greece) and 40% of Germany's or 46% of France's (Spain).

But the holding-down of German wages has led to a rise of German exports to southern Europe, and an increase in the trade deficits of the south European countries. The outflow of euros from those countries through trade was offset by an inflow of loans, easier to get at cheap rates now that they had a "hard" currency, the euro.

With the credit crisis, loans became harder to get, and banks became more nervous about lending. Greece faced being unable to get new loans



except at prohibitive rates, and thus being unable to repay old loans.

The fast-moving international financial markets, which are the lifeblood of today's capitalism in expansion, become a death-fluid in crisis.

Fearful for the health of the German and other banks who hold the Greek government's debt, the European Union governments finally decided on 10 May to throw out many of their own rules. The European Central Bank was supposed never to take instructions from governments, and never to buy up the bonds (IOUs) of eurozone governments. Now the EU governments have instructed it to buy those bonds in large amounts. They put together a package of 750 billion euros, including money from the IMF, to enable Greece to continue to make payments in the coming months, in "return" for a commitment by the Greek government to wring the cost out of Greek workers' wages and services over the coming years.

Continued on page 2

QUEEN'S SPEECH

Stop this free market in state schools!

BY ROSALIND ROBSON

The government's first Queen's speech was a mixture of cuts (but just the first round), policy built on New Labour's "legacy" and various concessions to the Lib-Dems — most of which had already formed the basis of the pre-nuptial agreement between the two coalition partners.

But the headline policy on schools reform, while being a logical step on from New Labour rule, was a giant step... towards a completely free market in state-funded education. And any imprint of historical opposition from the Lib Dems to such things as Academies was nowhere in evidence.

What do the government propose?

- Offering primary and secondary schools in England and Wales judged to be "outstanding" by Ofsted instant Academy status without any conditions. (That is 500 secondary schools and 1700 primary schools.)

- Allowing parents and other groups to set up Academies without any need to consult a local authority — a so-called "free school". All they have to do is turn up to the Department for Education with a Business Plan.

- Allowing every other state-funded school in the country to become an Academy, as long as they too have a Business Plan.

- Keeping League Tables in an unspecified modified form (although they will probably scrap SATs).

Continued on page 4

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