

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.



Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — and join us!

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 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road,
 London, SE1 3DG.

Solidarity with Spanish miners!

By John Cunningham,
 Treasurer Spanish
 Miners' Solidarity
 Committee (pc)

Up to 100 billion euros for bankers and nothing for the workers!

Sounds familiar? Yes it's the turn of Spanish bankers to receive a massive hand-out from the Eurocrats in Brussels. It should come as a surprise to no-one that not a single euro will go towards helping the Spanish workers who now face the highest unemployment rates in Europe and vicious cuts in welfare and social spending.

Spanish miners, as of 9 July in their sixth week of indefinite strike against the withdrawal of substantial subsidies to their industry, will certainly not expect even a tiny percentage of these staggering sums.

On Wednesday 11 July the Marcha Negra (the Black March) will arrive in Madrid. Some 160 miners from the main mining areas of Asturias and León and Castile (joined by comrades from the tiny Aragon coal-field) are marching on Madrid where they plan to camp out in front of the government offices till the end of dispute.

They have received overwhelming support along the way of their march. Many Spaniards now see them as fighting for everyone and this could, possibly, be a factor in tipping the balance of forces in their favour and against the conservative government of Mariano Rajoy, dancing to the tune of the IMF and the World Bank.

Meanwhile strikers in the mining regions continue

their war of attrition against the forces of the state, using hit and run tactics such as barricading motorways. No coal is moving at all and it remains to be seen what the government will do as stocks are depleted.

In Pola Lena on 7 July miners supported by many local people fought running battles with the hated Civil Guard. On 8 July in the isolated mining town of Ceñera, in the mountainous border region between Asturias and León and Castile, the Civil Guard ran riot, breaking into people's homes, trying to terrorise the population.

Talks between the government and the miners appear to have ended before they even began. Government representatives have put nothing on the table and appear to want only to talk about the future of the mining industry in a year's time (by which time, if the government gets its way, the withdrawal of subsidies will probably mean there is no industry to talk about).

The miners and their

families have received their last wages and are hunkering down for the long haul. Support from many quarters is now coming in, German miners have donated a large sum and money from the UK is starting to flow into the strike fund.

At the request of the Durham Miners' Association, representatives from Spain will speak at this

year's Durham Miners' Gala and it is hoped that an NUM contingent will visit Spain shortly. It is vital that the Spanish miners win.

A victory for them will be a victory for us all and will mark the beginning of the fight back against the austerity measures which are afflicting so many ordinary people throughout Europe.

How to help

Consider organising some kind of fund-raising activity. Set up local support groups and publicise their struggle as widely as possible.

The Spanish Miners' Solidarity Committee has been specifically set-up in the UK to facilitate these ends. It is sponsored by the Durham Miners' Association and is officially

recognised by both the two main trade union federations in Spain, the Union of General Workers (UGT) and the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO).

Send donations, large or small, to: John Cunningham (SMSC), 136 Regent Court, Bradfield Road, Sheffield S6 2BW, South Yorkshire. Make cheques payable to: "Spanish Miners' Solidarity Committee". Also have a look at: smscuk.blogspot.co.uk.

Our e-mail is smsc@talktalk.net and we now have a Facebook site under the name of the Committee.

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Students will march in November

By the National
 Campaign Against
 Fees and Cuts

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts welcomes NUS's announcement of a national demo in autumn, called for 21 November.

NCAFC will be lending its full support to this demonstration, and activists all over the country will be building for maximum possible mobilisation in London on the day. However, we know that this will not be enough to stop the government's onslaught against students, education workers and young people.

It is important that the student movement moves off the defensive and sets out its vision of an alterna-

tive to Tory class war — free education, funded by taxing the rich. We want to see a democratic education system — this means an end to privatisation, to attacks on free speech on campus and to the harassment, monitoring and deportation of international students.

We expect to see a reinvigoration of localised anti-cuts groups on campuses. Students will campaign nationally, but will also hold their Vice Chancellors and local MPs to account — with direct action and campus occupations.

NCAFC will be pushing for a radical and democratic message for the autumn, in line with the motions passed at NUS's national conference in April.

Michael Chessum,

NCAFC co-founder and a member of the NUS's national executive, commented: "It's vital that the student movement mobilises in a way that can capture the public imagination. 'Tax the rich to fund education' will be a core slogan, and we will be organising walkouts and localised direct action across the autumn and into the new year, aimed at triggering a broader fight to save the welfare state from the Tories."

The NCAFC will also be using the Wednesday date as an opportunity to organise walkouts among students, especially in schools and further education, in support of a living grant for every student in education and against fees in the FE sector. As well as this, postgraduate students will

be mobilising for increased funding, better working conditions and against xenophobic and draconian visa regulations.

NCAFC will organise and support direct action, and will put serious energy into backing strike action by workers. Alex Peters-Day, General Secretary at the London School of Economic Students' Union said, "In 2010 and 2011, we learned that if we are willing to disrupt the ordinary running of education, and unite with workers and academics, we are impossible to ignore."

"When democracy fails ordinary people, we will have no qualms about using other non-violent means."

● Abridged from anti-cuts.com

Privatising homes will endanger children

By a childcare worker

We need to be very clear. The Tories don't care that the most vulnerable children in society have been exploited and abused. They are not even that interested in saving money.

BBC *Newsnight's* coverage on 3 July was part of the propaganda to justify the continued attack on

working class people.

We should remember the way that the media respond when children from wealthier backgrounds go missing. If looked-after children received comparable column inches, papers would be full of pictures of missing children on a daily basis.

The tragic fact is that 2036 separate "missing from care" episodes were reported in 2010. Those are

only the episodes that were reported. Up to two-thirds of local authorities failed to meet their legal requirements in proper recording. That is a huge number of children. The number will only increase as children coming into care increases.

If we look at how sex workers are treated, many of whom experienced the care system as children, it confirms that the Tories

are happy to criminalise those already living in dire situations with few or no choices. Many of the services accessed by these men and women and children have been decimated by recent cuts.

So, with limited specific services to help support adults and children who experience exploitation and abuse, children's care workers find themselves trying to implement difficult decisions without guidance from experts.

This raises a complex problem. On one hand, Ofsted and the government have a huge issue with restriction of liberty and freedom of our children. There are clear guidelines about when restriction of liberty and freedom can be applied.

I'm sure nobody is naive enough to think that our homes are all Tracy Beakerish. Our kids are angry, sad and often very challenging. But most staff will tolerate a huge amount of violence towards themselves before stepping in to physically restrain a child; more often than not they will only do that because the child is putting herself or himself in immediate danger.

On the other hand we are told it is the fault of

children's home I find it difficult not to take the accusation of neglect very personally. I have lost count of my sleepless nights worrying about kids that have not come home. Staff go above and beyond their job descriptions on a daily basis trying to safeguard children, following abusers, trying to see car registration plates or knocking on doors with the intention of trying to convince the children to come back with you.

Staff who have had their pay slashed and conditions changed will still go out and try to protect children, of course they will. But the slashing of services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services pushes our role well outside the job description already. Training is never a priority when budgets are cut and is always bottom of the priority list when any service is sold off.

Collective responsibility for all children in society would be the first step. Stopping the process of criminalising children will help.

Privatising homes is not going to stop child exploitation. Neither will attacking working-class people and our children.

care staff that our kids are not only going missing but many are being groomed. We are blamed for even letting these kids out of the front door.

Are we to lock these victims up, and in effect criminalise them?

On the premise that these two massive contractions are at the centre of this debate, it is logical to surmise that what the government wants to do is use child exploitation to whack well-organised workers who care deeply about the children they look after. This epic tragedy is going to be used as the Tories' Trojan horse, driven into local authority care homes with the intention to sell them off to the cheapest bidder.

As a worker in a chil-

Get the market out of children's care

By Rosie Huzzard

On the *Newsnight* programme (3 July) about scandals of sexual exploitation of children who wander from care homes, Children's Minister, Tim Loughton claimed that there is no way to manage children's homes other than through privately managed services.

Nevertheless, he said, the local authority is to blame for poor quality service for not managing the private providers properly!

Whilst local authorities remain responsible for dishing out the cash to fund outsourced services,

they are also asked to do so on as cheap a budget as possible.

Companies tender for contracts from the council and the one who can do it on the tightest budget usually wins, which inevitably means worse service.

You can't pay people minimum wage, train them insufficiently, make them work ridiculous hours with shoddy facilities, and expect an excellent service. Recognising and acting on safeguarding concerns takes training and time.

Loughton's argument was that local authorities should be improving quality of care for children by

moving them to safe neighbourhoods. But safe usually means wealthier, and the care providers will not provide services in these areas because the properties are too expensive.

Market competition shouldn't be a factor in care of vulnerable people, and this show had damning proof that one in five children who are sexually exploited are in care.

Loughton is right about one thing — in order for child exploitation to decrease, we must improve the quality of service.

But that cannot be done while services are being cut, squeezed and privatised..

Save the Women's Library campaign discusses strategy

By Jade Baker

Campaigners hoping to save The Women's Library at London Metropolitan University held their first public meeting on 6 July.

This follows the campaign's success in garnering support with an online petition that has attracted 12,000 signatories.

The Women's Library, currently housed in Lottery-funded, purpose-built premises, is under threat from management cuts. This is not only about a detrimental cut to a vital women's service but about the future of Higher Education. It will contribute to the government's vision of a two-tier Higher Education system, in which wealthy "Russell Group" universities will have the best resources by purchasing the assets of poorer universities, such as The Women's Library.

Some speakers from the floor said they didn't care much about where the library ended up, as long as the collection stayed intact and was built upon to become a "national treasure".

I argued that throughout history the women's move-

ment has done so much to liberate and increase the living standards of the poorest women, giving the example of the Women Against Pit Closures movement during the miners' strike of 1984/5.

There is a clear link between this history and the working class women studying at London Met.

Plenty of trade unionists, particularly Unison library workers and students, took the class issue seriously and argued for the Women's Library to stay at London Met. There was a general consensus that the library should remain in the current building, which currently functions as an activist hub, and that staff should be kept on.

One of the key areas of concern at the launch of the campaign was to keep the integrity of the collection. Due to pressure from the campaign so far, London Met management has handed over the Selection Criteria, which has been presented to all interested parties, to the campaign. This has allayed some fears, as it states that the collection must be kept together, but it contains no guarantees on the building,

staff or on public access after the first five years.

Although the overall tone of the meeting was "defensive" rather than "offensive", it was suggested that pressure should be applied to London Met management to hold a public consultation process and the campaign is planning to present its own public consultation to management whether they like it or not.

A speaker from the Feminist Library also suggested more radical ideas, such as direct action.

There will be an organising meeting soon to discuss going forward.

• For more information please visit: savethewomenslibrary.blogspot.co.uk

Women's Fightback blog

More information on the campaigns mentioned on this page can be found on the new Women's Fightback blog —

womensfightback.wordpress.com

Wikileaks yes, Assange no

By Kate Harris

Several months ago, there was an image going around social networking sites of Julian Assange and Mark Zuckerberg, the billionaire owner of Facebook.

The caption next to the image of Assange was: "I give private information on corporations to you for free, and I'm the villain". The caption next to Zuckerberg was: "I give your private information to corporations for money, and I'm man of the year."

While Zuckerberg is obviously a class enemy, Assange is a suspected rapist.

Yet many comrades — some who describe themselves as feminists — were still posting this image.

In recent weeks many leading figures on the left, including Tony Benn, have lent their support to Assange, asking Ecuador to uphold his plea of political asylum. Benn even provided his own disturbing definition of rape which included the phrase "a man's need".

It is possible to argue both against extradition to the US and at the same time for a fair trial in Sweden on the rape charges.

trying to make people into heroes who really aren't worthy of it. The glorification of misogynistic men does working-class women a huge disservice. Let's not forget that some leftists in France sided with Dominique Strauss-Kahn over a poor black hotel maid. Or that child rapist Roman Polanski is held in such high regard. "Offering" something — such as being an artist, anti-establishment or to the left of the status quo — seems to absolve men of crimes.

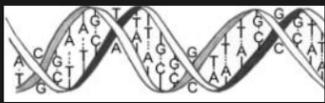
Those of us who were living in Scotland cannot forget the gang rape of a homeless pregnant woman at Occupy Glasgow, the way that spokespeople called it an "alleged rape", or the subsequent failures of the group to deal with it. In the last eighteen months there have also been numerous cases in Britain of women activists being sexually harassed and assaulted by those who were previously considered trusted comrades.

The rest of the left needs to do everything it can to distance itself from rape apologism and misogyny. Working-class women are the victims of a violent rape culture, and we deserve better.

Higgs is here!

Science

By Les Hearn



In January, we reported that CERN was tentatively claiming that Higgs bosons had been created in high energy collisions of hadrons in the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) ("Higgs ahoy!", *Solidarity* 229, 11 January 2012).

They were not certain enough that the signals detected were those of Higgs bosons and said they would be searching further this year, after the LHC's scheduled shut-down and re-opening.

Now, after analysing trillions and trillions more proton-proton collisions, they have come up with enough evidence to have "5 sigma" certainty (99.99997%) that they have discovered the Higgs boson* (or a Higgs boson, since there is a variant on the theory that predicts a family of different sized particles).

The mass of the Higgs is about 126 gigaelectronvolts (GeV), about what was predicted, and about 134 times the mass of a proton.

Wait a second, I hear you say; GeVs are units of energy, not mass. Ah, don't forget that mass is equivalent to energy, according to Einstein's equation, $E = mc^2$, and it's easier to write and say 126GeV than 2.24×10^{-25} kg.

Wait another second, you say; can you just remind me how two protons smacking into each other can make another particle 67 times heavier than both of them put together?

Certainly: the faster things go, the heavier they become — it's called mass dilation. Usually, the effect is negligible but near the speed of light it becomes appreciable and the protons in the LHC are travelling fast enough

that their mass is much higher than that of a Higgs.

What happens is that the protons collide, become converted into an intense burst of energy and then reconvert into all sorts of particles with mass, including some Higgs bosons. Most of these are unstable and break up into other particles which will be detectable. From the latter particles, their masses, charges, speeds and trajectories, scientists infer the existence of the particles formed in the collision. It's rather like deducing the size of a bullet fired at a vase from the size of the glass fragments, how far they travel and how much damage they cause.

So, if it is the Higgs, why is this important? Well, it provides support for the Standard Model, which describes the fundamental particles from which all visible matter is made. In particular, the Higgs field explains how particles get their mass. Unfortunately, visible matter totals only 4% of all matter, the rest being called, obviously, "dark matter".

So there's a lot more to work out. And it may not benefit us directly to know the nature of the universe in more detail but it's quite exciting and it's a lot cheaper than bailing out a bank or renewing Trident.

And we've already had the internet as a spin-off from CERN's previous work!

* CERN are being a little cautious about their discovery. It's definitely a boson and it's the heaviest one so far found but they won't finally confirm that it's the Higgs until they've studied it some more.

A graphic representation of the Higgs boson

Make Labour fight for NHS

By Gerry Bates

Labour movement activists are organising a lobby of Labour Party conference at the end of September, to demand Labour commits to reversing the Tories' NHS "reforms" and rebuilding our health services.

As the Tories' NHS Health and Social Care Act and their cuts are implemented, there will be numerous local struggles — to stop closures, defend services and resist the expansion of privatisation.

Such struggles are vital; they are the essential material from which a more powerful movement to defend the NHS will be built. At the same time, we cannot defend the health service piecemeal. We need to fight politically too.

Almost by definition, that means placing demands on the Labour Party. Recognising this does not mean putting off resistance to wait for a general election, or relying on the goodwill of the Labour leaders to defend and rebuild the NHS.

On the contrary: it means mobilising NHS campaigns

and the labour movement — including the Labour-affiliated unions — to bring to bear the maximum possible pressure, and seek to force a commitment from Labour.

That will be a battle. Andy Burnham has pledged to repeal the Health and Social Care Act if he becomes Health Secretary; very likely, all that means is that someone else will get the job.

Ed Miliband has explicitly said that he wants to repeal only limited sections of the Act.

So far Labour has faced almost no demands for accountability from our unions on this issue.

Labour Party conference is an opportunity to organise our movement around proposals for a clear alternative.

Labour movement organisations including Unite, the Labour Representation Committee, and a growing list of union branches, trades councils and Labour Parties in the North West, are mobilising to lobby Labour Party conference on 30 September, around the following demands initiated by the

NHS Liaison Committee:

Labour should return to the founding principles of the NHS: quality healthcare for all, on the basis of need, as a right, in a publicly-owned, publicly-provided, publicly-accountable system. That means:

- A clear pledge to repeal the Tories' NHS Act
- Business out of the NHS: reverse privatisation and outsourcing at every level
- End PFI and liberate the NHS from extortionate PFI charges
- Provision for need, not overgrown bureaucracy: abolish the internal market
- Decent wages, condi-

tions and pensions for NHS workers

• Tax the rich to rebuild the NHS and fund quality provision for all

This is an opportunity for a serious mobilisation, which can act as a major focus to boost all NHS campaigning. Please back the lobby and help mobilise for it.

• More info, model motions and regular updates: labournhslobby.wordpress.com

• For more information or to order publicity materials: nhsliasion@yahoo.co.uk or ring 07904 944 771

The NHS Liaison Network
A liaison network for campaigns and activists fighting to save the NHS

LOBBY OF LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE
Sunday 30 September
2.30pm. Meet at the central entrance to the convention complex, Peter Street, Manchester, M2 3GX

Tories' NHS bonfire continues

As NHS funding flatlines for the third year in a row, A&E departments and maternity services across the country are threatened with closure.

As well as looming battles in North West London over A&E services, St Helier in South East London, the Alex Hospital and Worcester Royal in the Midlands, and Prince Phillip Hospital in Llanelli, are all being considered for closure this month. If the government gets its way then we will have one third fewer A&E departments than we had at the last election.

The closure of A&E departments and maternity services is usually the first step in shutting down a hospital.

NHS bosses claim the closures are necessary as they try to create a multi-tiered A&E service with some hospitals offering urgent care centres for minor injuries. The idea is that patients should self-assess to decide whether they need a GP, an urgent care centre or the full-blown A&E service. In fact this is a scheme to allow relatively low risk emergency treatment to be hived off to the private sector. Care UK has already got the urgent care centre contracts for Ealing and Brent and will see these cuts as a business opportunity.

NHS bosses in North West London have launched a 14 week consultation over proposals to close four of the nine accident and emergency units in the region, serving 1.9 million people. The proposals are part of a reorganisation programme called "Shaping a Healthier Future" championed by Anne Rainsbury, chief exec of NHS NW London and Tory GP Mark Spencer, the NW London medical director.

NHS NW London is suffering financially because of extortionate PFI payments and a continued programme of cuts. It has been told to save £1 billion over the next three years. The units marked for closure are at Hammersmith, Charing Cross, Ealing and Central Middlesex hospitals, and a knock on effect would be to downgrade these hospitals, turning them into local hospitals with limited services.

Charing Cross and Hammersmith have a combined turn over of 100,000 patients a year with 20,000 emergency admissions. It is inconceivable that these numbers can be accommodated in alternative units, which are themselves already overstretched.

Campaigners and residents are being bombarded with threats that if the closures are not accepted then hospitals will

go bankrupt. We are told we have no choice but to accept cuts and closures that will cost lives. But the campaign against these proposals is continuing, involving local groups such as Ealing Hospital SOS and Brent NHS Patients Campaign. A public meeting in June brought campaigners together and more meetings are planned.

Spencer has already said that he will not be swayed by petitions or political objections. Workers and community campaigners should take this threat seriously and prepare for direct action.

Todd Hamer

Fight ward closures

St. Helier Hospital in Sutton is one of several hospitals in London being threatened by ward closures.

The "Better Services, Better Value" panel concluded that the hospital's A&E, Maternity and Pediatrics wards should be closed.

Bizarrely the proposed closures come whilst the hospital is part way through a major £219m renovation project.

Hundreds of local residents attended a meeting in defence of the hospital organised by Labour MP Siobhan McDonagh.

Labour movement activists, health workers and residents need to organise action to defend the hospital.

This includes voicing opposition at the 26 July NHS south West London board meeting, which will finalise the recommendation ahead of a consultation period.

Rosie Woods

Bankers out of NHS!

While Bob Diamond walks away from his job at Barclays with £22 million, his mate, Barclays vice-chair Naguib Kheraj, has secured himself a position on the NHS Commissioning Board, which now oversees the NHS!

Senior executives at Barclays have demonstrated they are incapable of running a bank, even on their own terms. But instead of nationalising the banks under social control, our government has put these same bankers in charge of the health system!

We need to get rid of Naguib Kheraj from the NHS Commissioning Board — and take the whole of the NHS and the banking sector out of the hands of the millionaire class, to run it democratically in working-class interests.

Dan Rawnsley

Take over the banks!

Five years ago the demand for the public ownership of the banks was the preserve of a small minority of socialists. Today it follows logically from the exposed venality of the banking system.

There have now been three waves of banking failure in the recent past. Socialists should use these events to argue relentlessly for state ownership and democratic control of the banking system.

First the advent of neoliberalism from the 1970s was premised on the renewed role of finance capital. Finance capital became in Lenin's words "the typical ruler of the world". It was "a power that is peculiarly mobile and flexible, peculiarly intertwined at home and internationally, peculiarly devoid of individuality and divorced from the immediate processes of production".

This was a period in which the banks, unshackled from tight government controls, built the global infrastructure of aggressive takeovers, instantaneous capital movements and gargantuan profits. But even as it boomed, financial hubris was punctuated with moments of meltdown: the stock market crash of 1987; the Asian crisis in 1997; the dot-com bubble. While the economy grew, finance took the credit and got away with abuses.

The second moment was the crash of 2008. The actual collapse of Lehmann and the near collapse of RBS and Lloyds, only averted by the hitherto unthinkable intervention of the state. New light shone on the culture of mismanagement, the arrogance of the gamblers and the impotence of the regulators.

The part-nationalisation of some banks offered a glimpse of another way, except it turned out to be "socialism for the bankers". Business as usual, the same obscene bonuses while so-called investment banking failed to bolster the recovery of the real economy. Even the chair of the Financial Services Authority described it as "socially useless banking".

Now we have reached a third stage where the venality of banks, their corruption, their tax evasion and their greed are epitomised by the discredited Barclays. Last year its erstwhile chief executive Bob Diamond collected £17 million in pay and bonuses (plus £5.7 million to cover his tax). In the same year Barclays was ordered to set aside £1 billion to pay customers mis-sold payment protection insurance, ordered to pay £500 million after a tax avoidance scheme was uncovered and now fined £290 million for fixing the Libor inter-bank interest rate.

Barclays is merely symptomatic of the whole banking system. Some 20 banks are reported to be under investigation about fixing Libor. Far from being cut-throat competitors, these bankers have run a rather old-fashioned cartel. They were all in it together over payment protection insurance, and no doubt united in their tax avoidance: after all, only the bankers know exactly how the tax havens, the offshore accounts and the semi-legal money laundering actually function.

From the 1980s the bankers saw themselves as the masters of the universe, and for a while that's what they appeared to be. They are still at the core of the global capitalist class and much of their power is intact. But the mask has slipped.

There is an opportunity to challenge their power. But what is required cannot be confined to a stage-managed inquisition, the punishment of a few scapegoats and a tad more regulation.

No one can trust the government or the courts to take on the banks. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism estimates that under Cameron, 51% of the Tory Party funding is derived from the City, with 27% of it from hedge funds and private equity. Cameron is so defensive of his friends that last Friday he had his bag carriers filibuster a motion promoted by John McDonnell, which would merely give parliament a say over the appointment of the next governor of the Bank of England.

The legal blows and fines may be large compared with the wages of workers on a pay freeze, but the £290 million fine equates to just 4% of Barclays pre-tax profits and far less than the impact of its rate fixing on living standards and economic activity. The interpenetration of finance capital with the British state is summed up by the characters tipped to take over the reins: former top civil servant Gus O'Donnell is apparently in the frame to take over as chair of Barclays.

LABOUR

The Labour leadership are right to call for a wider public inquiry beyond the Libor-fixing, to take in the entire banking system.

Dragging the shady world of banking into the light will diminish the power of the bankers and provide more ammunition for socialists. But Miliband, Balls and their coterie are culpable. Not, as Osborne tried to allege, with a direct link to Libor-fixing. But they did support the neoliberal model, and they were in government while the financial sector proliferated. They endorsed "light touch" financial regulation. They will not seize this opportunity to put the case for public ownership on the political agenda.

What do socialists say is the answer? We cannot confine our case to trite calls for investigation, prosecution and punishment of individual bankers, though we want all these things. The structures of ownership and control have to be challenged.

It is not enough to talk about the separation of retail from investment banking, or of "breaking up" the big banks. The problem with the banks is not their size; it is the absence of conscious planning for social needs and lack of democratic control. Parcelling up the banking system into smaller fragments will simply result in a melee of competition between the smaller units and the eventual amalgamation of what is left, reproducing the same structures that exist today.

What's needed was well summed up in Workers' Liberty's "workers' plan" four years ago:

"We need a single, unified banking, pensions and mortgage service organised to protect the jobs, savings, pensions and homes of working-class people, and whose resources can be used for a rational programme of investment to meet social needs. We demand the sacking of the bank bosses and the amalgamation of the various financial institutions under the control of their workers and representatives of savers, pensioners, mortgage-holders and so on."

A century ago the Marxist Rudolf Hilferding wrote in his book *Finance Capital* that "Even today, taking possession of six large Berlin banks would mean taking possession of the most important spheres of large-scale industry". He pointed to the intimate links between the banking system and the branches of production such as energy, manufacturing, construction and transport. Hilferding was guilty of an exaggerated rhetorical flourish.

But his insight was sound: socialising finance capital and bringing it under democratic control greatly facilitates the task of overthrowing capitalism. The labour movement should make public ownership and control of the banks central to its agitation.

● Summer schedule: *Solidarity* 253 will go to press on 31 July.

Help the AWL raise £20,000

At Ideas for Freedom we raised over £2,200 for our fundraising drive. If we raise the same again between now and September we will be on track to meet our target.

The summer time offers many opportunities for raising funds. Why not organise a Workers' Liberty BBQ in your area? £85 of the money we raised at IFF came from selling our specially produced "Liberty Ale"; now is the time to be as creative while raising the funds we need to keep the organisation fighting the battle for socialism.

In the long summer evenings, as the weather improves (we hope), people may be more likely to stop and chat at a public paper sale or stall. Make sure you have got your *Solidarity* subscription forms at hand so that more people can receive our news reports, working-class history and dispatches from the front lines of the class struggle.

You can also help our fundraising drive by:

- Taking out a monthly standing order. There is a form at www.workersliberty.org/resources and below. Please post to us at the AWL address below.
 - Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to "AWL") or do it online at www.workersliberty.org/donate
 - Organising a fundraising event
 - Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.
 - Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL.
- More information: 07796 690 874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Rd, SE1 3DG.



Total raised so far:
£17,600

We raised £2,493 this fortnight. Thanks to everyone who contributed at Ideas for Freedom, to Esme and Alex for money raised on AWL ale, and to Will and EBS.

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)
..... (its address)

Account name:

Account no.:

Sort code:

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

Amount: £ to be paid on the
..... day of

..... (month) 20
..... (year) and thereafter monthly until
this order is cancelled by me in writing. This
order cancels any previous orders to the
same payee.

Date

Signature

The crisis in numbers

£1.2tn: the amount British taxpayers have laid out to bail out the banks

£414bn: wealth of the richest 1,000 people in Britain

\$447bn: total Greek debt (2012)

\$12456bn: total Eurozone GDP (2009)

The Labour Left at its worst

By Jon Lansman

About a hundred people gathered in London on Saturday [7 July] to determine the future of *Labour Briefing*, whether it should remain an independent magazine or become the house journal of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) of which John McDonnell is the chair.

It decided, by 44 to 37 votes with a few abstentions, to go with the LRC. Although the debate was surprisingly cordial and everyone behaved well on the day, it was an old-fashioned faction-fight with people on both sides seething with anger and bitterness.

London Labour Briefing, as it was called at its inception, arose as the mouth piece of the alliance which made Ken Livingstone leader of the Greater London Council in 1981, and saw the left sweep to power in town halls across London the following year. Cuts in council income and spending saw its base narrow amidst recriminations after the collapse of the campaign against rate-capping and bitter divisions between Ken and his then deputy, John McDonnell...

There are different views on why it has disappeared under the wing of the LRC. Some argue that the real cause was a falling out between personalities [in *Briefing*] which escalated and led to the withdrawal from its editorial board

of Graham Bash, who had been a mainstay since its inception...

Some other longstanding supporters believed *Briefing* could not (or perhaps should not) survive his departure, and argued that it needed to link with the LRC and precipitated the "merger" or "takeover" (depending on your perspective)...

The matter was inevitably contentious within the LRC too... Of the advocates of merger, some wanted to see the LRC hosting a journal which would be genuinely independent, while others wanted the LRC to have a magazine which would promote the LRC as an organisation...

Others... thought that even if the LRC could use a journal rather than just a much better website, the journal it needed wouldn't look much like *Briefing*. What was the point of taking over a magazine that needed a hefty subsidy, and which they couldn't afford to send to all their members, most of whom don't currently subscribe.

When it came to the vote, there was an unholy alliance between ultra-Lefts like Ted Knight who are, in practice, actively hostile to Labour (even if they are still members of it) and those who believe that Labour Party activity must take absolute priority.

Graham Bash sees it differently. He points to political differences between those within *Briefing* who look towards

CLPD [Campaign for Labour Party Democracy] as the more effective and worthwhile organisation, and those who choose to prioritise the LRC even if they are members of CLPD. The proposed merger reflects the latter perspective. This certainly contains some truth, but may amount to rationalisation after the event rather than an explanation of the mo-

tivation of either side.

The structure of a *Labour Briefing* AGM is open to some abuse. There are no members and any reader is welcome to attend, even if they are a member of some other faction. Those who favour independence point out that members of the Communist Party of Great Britain, which produces the *Weekly Worker*, attended to support the LRC takeover... The CPGB members didn't help their case by trying to overturn the agenda. They said they had only come for the vote on the future of *Briefing* and didn't want to have to sit through the invited speakers first!

After the vote, everyone listened politely to a flawless and impassioned speech from Owen Jones, who'd abstained in the vote. There was applause but not much unity and we must wait to see how much comradeship remains.

*** This is an abridged reprint of a report on the Left Futures website, bit.ly/lb-lrc. There has indeed been fallout: Christine Shawcroft, a Labour Party National Executive member and former vice-chair of the LRC and chair of *Briefing*, has resigned from the LRC.**

Briefing was originally a split from *Socialist Organiser*, a forerunner of *Solidarity*, on the issue of whether Labour councils in the early 1980s should confront the Tories or sidestep by raising rates (property taxes). Despite that, over the years supporters of *Solidarity* have often sought, and sometimes achieved, collaboration with *Briefing* on issues where that's possible.

We opposed the merger because we saw it as a "double coup". On the magazine, it would copper-fasten the hegemony of those who were Labour-loyal but committed to a rather downbeat, "propagandist" course in the Labour Party, rather than the more interventionist, organising course associated with CLPD. In LRC it would — by default of the magazine's editors deciding the chief public profile of LRC month by month, and even if we assume no illwill or bad faith — establish the hegemony of the same strand, against both the CLPD-minded and those around Ted Knight (whom we do not think "ultra-left"!).

After such a close and acrimonious vote, and one where the majority may have depended on people who have had little to do with LRC or *Briefing*, there is a clear case for LRC reconsidering the whole thing.

It could consider an alternative proposal put by LRC committee member Vicki Morris: that LRC should ask all papers circulating in the Labour left — *Solidarity*, *Socialist Appeal*, *Tribune*, as well as *Briefing* — to give it a page each month.

The Left

By Daniel Randall



PCS pick and mix

In the *Guardian* of 26 June, Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS civil service union, declared that "Labour should be leading the defence of our welfare state... and arguing for... a real living wage, rent controls, a massive programme of housebuilding, and jobs. The unions have been doing this, but we shouldn't have to do it alone".

The thought is reasonable, but out of kilter with what Serwotka, in unison with the Socialist Party which politically dominates his union's leadership, has argued for some time.

The SP reckons that Labour became a through-and-through bourgeois party at about the time that the SP's forerunners ("Militant") chose to quit it in the early 1990s. Calling on Labour to pursue pro-working-class policies, in tune with the unions, is in their view as nonsensical as calling on the Lib-Dems or Tories to do the job.

Serwotka's new tack is welcome. Will he act on it? Logically, he should get together with Unite union general secretary Len McCluskey, explore how PCS can chime in with Unite's new Labour Party strategy (reported elsewhere in this paper), and add stimulus for that strategy to be taken from nice promise to real action.

PCS could, for example, organise those of its own members who are also Labour Party members to act as a coherent force in the Labour Party.

Elsewhere recently, Serwotka faces in a different direction. In a *New Statesman* blog, 2 July, commenting on the

PCS ballot result which authorises the union, in principle, to support occasional election candidates, he writes: "Our judgement will be based on the individual candidates, their records and what they stand for. We already work very closely with MPs from Labour, Plaid Cymru and the Green party..."

That "pick-and-mix" approach - essentially identical to the policy of US unions to back "friends of labour" from whatever party - cuts across a drive for a coherent and distinct working-class presence in politics.

Anti-banker populism

The response to the latest banking scandal from Britain's biggest "revolutionary" group has been as uninspiring as it has been predictable.

Rather than making any clear political demands around the crisis, or taking the opportunity to argue for social control, the Socialist Workers' Party has opted for catch-cry populism and has made "jail the bankers" its sloganistic response.

While the demand to bring people who are essentially corrupt thieves to some kind of justice (even bourgeois justice) has its place, to make this the encapsulation of one's response is dismal. In fact, "sub-populist" might be a better term; most people understand that the problem is not one of a few "rotten apple" bankers but a systemic issue, so for the SWP to respond merely by demanding that a few people are thrown in jail lags somewhat behind popular consciousness on the issue. Nowhere does the SWP pose any demands for expropriating the banks. It says: "We've had it with these crooked bankers and their rich chums. The whole lot of them should be behind bars."

Understandable sentiments, but from a revolutionary organisation — whose job it is to try and raise the political consciousness of the rest of the working class — one expects better.

the Proudhonists for instance — led to genuine political clarification, which was recognised as such *at the time*.

Also the long-term impact of the First International is underestimated. Veterans of that organisation in Britain were living links from the past, from early attempts to organise workers, to the early modern socialist movement of the 1880s and 1890s.

Attempts by veterans to form dockers' unions, for instance, laid the basis for future organisation and ultimately the magnificent dockers' strike of 1889.

The First International ultimately failed but, unlike the union project Eric writes about (IndustriALL Global Union), is still something to be inspired by.

Cathy Nugent, south London

Blame the teachers?

The figures for 16-18 year old who are not in education, employment or training — NEETs, as they are termed — have risen over the previous year (8.1% now compared to 7.5% in 2010).

This must be good news for the coalition. NEETs are a fantastic opportunity for apportioning blame; if crime levels in

particular area rise, find a correlation with NEET levels. If it is felt necessary to stir up the electorate by attacking the teaching profession (with its strong level of union activism) then suggest that this is all the fault of education and demand support for imminent reforms.

The fact that one of these reforms started out as a return to a two-tier system of examinations (as examined in the last issue of *Solidarity*) only proves that the government has no real interest in supporting or encouraging young people, merely in statistically reclassifying them out of existence. Inevitably it will lead to the creation of an educationally disempowered section of the working class.

Furthermore, these figures beg an urgent question; if it's so crucial to ensure that young people remain in education, why remove EMA and therefore condemn the poorest and most vulnerable?

Young people need education and support; they have a right to both. School workers have a right to educate as they see fit, not according to cynically derived agenda.

We must support them both by showing our solidarity, by proving that not everyone has written education off as nothing more important than a collection of bad statistics.

Dave Harris, Sheffield

Letters



Unfair to First International

Eric Lee was unfair to the First International in his column, "Back to that first International", (*Solidarity* 251). He says, "The First International was Eurocentric, male-dominated and paralysed by in-fighting". Yes, but so much more.

The First International was founded in a genuine spirit of internationalism by working-class militants attempting to overcome national boundaries, to make solidarity and stop employers smashing up fragile organisation, by scab labour. A little bit more "First Internationalism" would have been useful a few years ago when union bureaucrats and Labour leaders championed "British jobs for British workers".

As to the "in-fighting", some of that — the debate with

Ideas to change the world

AWL news

By Sacha Ismail

Around 200 people came to the AWL's annual Ideas for Freedom event (29 June-1 July) — a “showcase” for our politics, but also a chance to genuinely debate and think through ideas.

A number of themes featured consistently: understanding capitalism; the European crisis and the need for a Europe-wide response; the need to renovate the labour movement, in Britain and internationally, from bottom to top; and the need to renovate, clarify and regenerate Marxist ideas. In every discussion the themes of class politics and consistent democracy were centre stage.

Since 2007 we have run an opening event on Friday night. This year's opener celebrated the class struggles of 1972 and their relevance to recent winning workers' disputes. On the Saturday night was there a discussion on Greece with a viewing of two Reel News documentaries about Greek workers' and community struggles. We were also treated to beer and lager brewed and donated to the event by two atten-

Author Owen Jones spoke in a panel discussion on “how do we make socialism a force again?”



dees, including a specially created “Liberty” ale with an IFF label.

Another highlight was John Cunningham, former miner and secretary of the new Spanish Miners' Solidarity Committee, speaking about the inspiring battle of miners in northern Spain.

Activists from different trade unions held caucuses throughout the event. Our fundraising appeal raised over £2,200 in much needed funds for the AWL's campaigning.

All in all it was a great weekend. Many thanks to everyone who helped out.

All in all it was a great weekend. Many thanks to everyone who helped out.

• The Reel News documentary, Our Present Is Your Future can be found at reelnews.co.uk

John Cunningham reports from the Spanish miners' strike

“The questions and comments from the audience at Ideas for Freedom were the best and most insightful I've ever had.” — Dorian

Lynskey, author of *33 Revolutions Per Minute*

Seeing the bigger picture at IFF 2012

“I've been in the RMT for several years, and an activist for around nine months, but I'd never been to an event like Ideas for Freedom before. I wasn't entirely sure what to expect but I was blown away. It can be so easy to get caught up in local disagreements and negotiation, and forget that there is a worldwide labour movement happening all around you.

“I was slightly apprehensive about the event, as ‘politics’ has never held any real interest for me, but this seemed to be more like ‘applied politics. It helped me to see how the trade union movement is part of something much bigger, and that dealing with problems on a local level can only get you so far. For real change to happen, a much bigger movement is necessary.

“I would encourage any aspiring activist to attend next year, I walked away with more knowledge, and more insight than I had when I arrived, and that can only be a good thing. Solidarity wins!”

Sam Goldsmith, Tube worker and RMT activist

Rendezvous in Northern Ireland?

Press Watch

By Pat Murphy

In a hugely symbolic moment on 27 June, during a royal visit to Northern Ireland to mark her jubilee, the former commander of the IRA shook hands with the Queen.

The man who commanded the force responsible for, amongst other things, the death of the Queen's cousin Lord Mountbatten, exchanged a handshake with the woman whose armed forces murdered 14 innocent civil rights marchers in his hometown of Derry. This was, all proportions guarded, a real life instance of David Low's famous cartoon “Rendezvous” in which Hitler (“the bloody assassin of the workers”) greets Stalin as “the scum of the earth”.

The response of the press, in Britain, Ireland and internationally, was very positive.

The *Guardian* thought “it underlined how far we have come since the Troubles”. The *Mirror* contained an unusually calm and rational article from Tony Parsons who described it as “the end of something — the decades of hatred, loathing and bloodshed” as well as “the beginning of something, too — when the raw wounds of the past can perhaps begin to heal”.

The *Belfast Telegraph*, traditionally a Unionist paper, hailed the handshake as “bridging a gulf that spanned centuries”. The southern Irish press was unreservedly impressed. The *New York Times* called it “a remarkable sign of reconciliation for both figures”.

The working-class socialist response to this would seem to be fairly straightforward. McGuinness claims still to be a republican in both important senses of the word. As a “capital R” Republican he appeared to make peace with the highest symbol of British rule while her state and government continue to “occupy” the northern part of Ireland and deny his people self-determination.

Even more objectionable is his apparent suspension of “lower case” republicanism — the rejection of rule by hereditary, unelected privilege. Contempt for such an institution should be taken for granted by even the mildest democrat.

Didn't McGuinness, by shaking the Queen's hand, acknowledge both her right to rule and her government's sway in Ireland?

A glance at the fiercest critics of this historic handshake is a reminder that things are more complicated.

Before the meeting the *Daily Mail* advised the Queen to burn her gloves after carrying out her “distasteful duty”. The *Sun's* front page headline declared “We don't blame you for wearing gloves M'am”. The *Times* cartoonist providing an image of the Queen putting on four pairs of gloves before shaking the bloodstained hand of McGuinness.

The idea that there might be plenty of blood on the monarch's hands too didn't occur to any of them.

The *Daily Mail* was the one paper that didn't deem the occasion to be worth a front page story. Inside, though, they brought us arch-militarist Max Hastings under the headline “I'm sorry, even in the name of peace, it was wrong to shake his blood-soaked hand”.

FANATIC

Hunting for evidence that McGuinness, the deputy prime minister and latter-day conciliator, remained “a fanatic”, Hastings alighted on his principled decision not to take his full ministerial salary (£71,000).

For me, that is evidence that Sinn Fein retains some connection with its mainly working-class base. For Hastings, it shows “certitude about his own moral compass” and this, he claims, is “the foremost requirement of a fanatic”.

On what appears to be the opposite side of the spectrum, McGuinness and Sinn Fein have been attacked by harder line Irish Republicans for yet another betrayal. Protests were held by dissident republicans, and senior SF councillor Alison Morris resigned in opposition to the event.

It's important to register clearly what the critics are opposed to. On the republican side it isn't seriously claimed that McGuinness or his party have become soft on the monarchy. For certain McGuinness and Sinn Fein have rapidly acclimatised to being part of the establishment and clearly enjoy being normal bourgeois politicians. What took place on 27 June was, however, more than just a further shift down that road.

The justification given by Sinn Fein had nothing to do with either the Queen or British rule. McGuinness described his move as “in a very pointed, deliberate and symbolic way offering the hand of friendship to unionists through the person of Queen Elizabeth for which many unionists have a deep affinity”. There is no reason not to take that rationale at face value. He went on to claim that this sort of symbolism had the potential to define “a new relationship between Britain and Ireland and between the Irish people themselves”.

That view can be criticised as naive. It can be attacked as a top-down way of managing the communal differences without challenging the fundamental causes. In common with most elements of the “peace process” it seems to reinforce rather than undercut cultural division. It's a different matter, however, to criticise it for “going too far” towards the unionists. The least bad fault with modern-day SF is that they are insufficiently intransigent nationalists. Yet that is the criticism most commonly levelled at them from the left.

And it's hard not to take some pleasure from the visible discomfort this event has caused to the British right. The fact that their Queen has felt it necessary to shake the hand of the former IRA commander has opened a very old sore for reactionaries.

The most reliable of these, Peter Hitchens, summed up the problem in the *Mail on Sunday*. After a few predictable and gratuitous personal swipes at McGuinness he compressed all his familiar anxieties into this short sentence: “If anyone doubted that the Good Friday Agreement was a humiliating surrender by a once-great country to a criminal gang, they can't doubt it now.”

The sort of Tories whom Hitchens and Hastings write for spent their formative years insisting that those who took up arms to fight British rule anywhere in the world were no more than criminals. They said it too of Mandela and the ANC. Time and again they have seen these claims crumble to dust as the era of direct imperialist rule has given way to triumphant independence movements. And it hurts deeply.

Hitchens' adult life has been blighted by one episode after another of “humiliating surrender” by his “once-great country” to movements fighting to free their countries from colonial or racist rule (or “criminal gangs” as he prefers to put it).

But the Irish people have not yet won a united independent state. The British have not surrendered and nor would it matter much if they did. The key to Irish territorial unity is, and has for decades been, democratic unity between its people. What Martin McGuinness did on 27 June offended the sensibilities of democrats and socialists because of our contempt for the institution of monarchy. However, his motive at least was progressive.

It was also republican in the sense defined by the founder of modern Irish republicanism Wolfe Tone — “to replace the name Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter with the common name Irishman”. We should be bold enough to point that out.

Greece: the simmer

Ed Maltby and Martin Thomas visited Thessaloniki and Athens between 4 and 9 July to find out more about what the Greek left is doing. This is their report.

To build too much on quick impressions is foolish. Not to formulate impressions is worse than foolish. It leaves us guided only by generalisations and summaries which reach us only after being filtered by others' preconceptions.

Foolishness can lead to learning, by way of us formulating impressions and having them shown to be wrong (and why). Flat reliance on general formulas given in advance cannot.

That said, here are our impressions of a week in Thessaloniki and Athens talking and listening to people from many different strands of the Greek left and labour movement.

Greece is simmering. It is not boiling. It is not simmering down, either. New open eruptions are likely, but in the autumn rather than now.

Syriza, the left coalition which soared from 4.5% in the 2009 election to 27% in the June 2012 poll, on a programme of reversing the Memorandum agreed by Greek governments with the EU, ECB, and IMF, and nationalising the banks under social and workers' control, plans to convert from a coalition into a party, and has set itself the aim of building a mass membership linked to Popular Assemblies in neighbourhoods.

Syriza economist John Milios talked of a target of 200,000 members. Miltos Ikononou, Syriza leader in Thessaloniki, cited a more cautious target of increasing Syriza membership in the city to 5000 from about 2000 today and 1200 a year ago.

Miltos told us that the planned Popular Assemblies have already started, with 100 at a first local open-air meeting in Thessaloniki. Other activists were more sceptical about how fast Syriza can or will go with the Assemblies, especially over the summer, when activity usually dips if only because of the heat.

One activist particularly sceptical of Syriza, Mihalis Skourtis of OKDE-Spartakos, opened his conversation with us by stating that the main thing is that, after the relative lull of the two election periods, all the organisations of the Greek left and radical left must get back on the streets. Now! Then he explained that, realistically, by "now", he meant after the end of August.

TRADE UNIONS

We learned a bit about trade-union structure in Greece. In Greece, a "union", or a "first-level union" anyway, is made up of workers in a particular firm or workplace or trade.

The Thessaloniki Trade Union Centre, for example, covers 250 "first level" unions, with a total of 100,000 members. The smallest of those unions has 22 members; the biggest, the local bus workers', almost 3000.

The "first level" unions have sizeable autonomy. They can and do call strikes by assembling their members and having an on-the-spot vote. Workplace activists in Greece, unlike in Britain, do not have to go through a complex process of getting a remote national union leadership to run a postal ballot for a strike.

However, wider action depends on the higher "levels" of the union structure. There, things are not so good. The higher-level union offices and officials are (or have been) paid for by the government. They can and often do preside over dormant and neglected "first-level" unions. They can call one-day or two-day general strikes — sixteen of them so far — without serious follow-up and without serious organising in the workplaces.

Things are changing. Union posts come up for election every two or three years. Spiros, an activist with the Trotskyist group OKDE in Thessaloniki, told us: "Within the next six months or a year, the old Pasok officials will be voted out of the union leaderships. The biggest gainers can be the far left — more a broad spectrum of unaffiliated far left activists than the organised far-left groups.

"In the unions you can't really separate Syriza and the far left. They work together. Sometimes rank and file Syriza ac-

tivists are more left-wing than rank-and-file activists of Antarsya" [a coalition of ten revolutionary groups, which criticises Syriza harshly as rightward-moving reformist].

Other activists put it more cautiously, but agreed that big changes in the union leaderships are probable.

The other twist here, which must tend to shake things up even apart from the union elections, is that for some months now the Greek government has stopped paying the trade-union centres' bills and the union officials' wages. The government says it will sort out some new arrangement sometime, but has not said when.

LEFT POLITICS

Some activists suggested to us that Greek society is still in a process of emerging from decades of depoliticisation.

Giannis Vogiatzis, a long-standing activist of Xekinima in Thessaloniki, was very pleased with the large number of copies of its paper which his group had sold when Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras came to speak during the election campaign in Thessaloniki's huge Aristotelous Square.

But, he noted ruefully, even then the square was not quite full; and Pasok and New Democracy had attempted no open election rallies at all in Thessaloniki. In the 1980s, he recalled, both Pasok and New Democracy election rallies would fill Aristotelous Square right from the sea front to the Venizelos statue.

Greece has probably as many different Trotskyist groups as Britain, and a swathe of other revolutionary groups more coloured by the tradition of the now diehard-Stalinist KKE (Communist Party of Greece).

Spiros from OKDE told us that all the currents of the revolutionary left have grown markedly in the crisis. "Nobody has doubled", he cautioned. Some groups told us they had indeed doubled, or more.

In any case, the Greek revolutionary left is visibly more youthful and zestful than the British. The groups are smaller than they are in Britain, but they have a population one-fifth the size to draw from, and in proportion to population they are surely bigger.

We talked with many different groups. With OKDE, we ran up against stubborn political differences on attitudes to the European Union, on its call for a "Constituent Assembly", and on attitudes to Syriza; but found their assessments of political life careful and thought-provoking, and their se-

rious approach to work in trade unions and neighbourhood organisations undeniable. We found a group we knew very little about before we came to Greece, Kokkino, instructive and lucid.

Time is needed for the revolutionary left as well as for the general processes of politicisation. More or less the whole revolutionary left has the broad idea that they can win large numbers of workers to revolutionary socialist organisation as the reformist leadership of Syriza is put to the test and found wanting. Some also point to a risk that if the revolutionary left cannot achieve that, then demoralisation which will follow the Syriza leadership being put to the test and doing badly will throw the political initiative into the hands of the far right.

Yet the revolutionary socialist left is divided by large differences: over attitudes to Syriza, over attitudes to the euro and the EU, etc. For it to surge forward, it will need to unify — or at least, some sizeable chunk of it will need to unify — around a political synthesis achieved through thrashing out those differences.

All discussions on political evolution in the Greek working class are in the shadow of the bulk of the KKE, which is Greece's oldest political party and arguably also its most deeply-rooted. The KKE was down to 4.5% of the vote in June 2012 (from 7.5% in 2009, 8.2% in 2007). Stefanos from OKDE told us that despite the KKE's revolutionary-ish dialect, its life is in fact heavily focused on electoral success, and the electoral setback is grave.

KKE systematically organises its own demonstrations and rallies away from the main activities of the trade unions and the left, even on general strike days. When many thousands of young people come to events like the annual Anti-Racist Festivals in Thessaloniki (29 June/ 1 July) and Athens (6/8 July), all the rest of the left are there, but absolutely not the KKE.

Andreas Kloke from OKDE-Spartakos told us that the KKE is "the most right-wing part of the movement, and also always trying to split the movement" — and this despite the fact that Spartakos is a member in good standing of the Antarsya alliance, which in its official comment on the June election result deplored the fall in the KKE vote as "not a positive thing", as indicative of the movement becoming less radical.

KKE stands like a large stone in the way of a flow by the Greek working class towards revolutionary socialist politics. Time will be needed, again, to wear that stone down suffi-

queuing for food handouts

ering revolt

The Trotskyists inside Syriza

The leaders of Syriza are long-established reformists, long committed to a strategy of achieving socialism “step by step” by successively better “renegotiations” with capitalist power.

Some of the groups in the Syriza coalition, and indeed also some of the members of Synaspismos, the leading group within Syriza, are more left-wing.

Members of DEA (Internationalist Workers’ Left) and Kokkino (Red), two Trotskyist groups within Syriza, spoke to us about the issue.

Nikos Anastasiadis, a DEA member in Thessaloniki, said that the leadership faction around Tsipras does not fully appreciate the seriousness of a confrontation between a left government and the state.

How would Syriza government would cope with non-co-operation from the state apparatus? “Tsipras thinks he can control the state apparatus with the help of the movement and of collaborators inside the civil service. In fact Syriza would have to rely on the labour movement and workers’ control of services to implement its programme. For example, they would have to rely on the workers of the tax collection service rather than the heads of the service.”

Nikos sees DEA’s task not as convincing the Syriza leadership of the real stakes and the real nature of a confrontation with the state, but rather of “building up the social forces that would organise a response”.

This will take time, he thinks. The Greek labour movement was, in his view, at a much lower stage of development than the Chilean labour movement of 1970-3.

Xaris, a Kokkino member in Thessaloniki, drew another analogy — that of the “Committees for the Defence of the Revolution” which appeared in Venezuela during the right-wing coup against Chavez, and which operated public services and mobilised against the coup.

Nikos was scathing about the revolutionary groups who form an alternative electoral alliance, Antarsya, rather than participating in Syriza as revolutionaries: “Antarsya was set up to ‘protect’ the members of the revolutionary left from the influence of Syriza.”

Xaris from Kokkino put it differently: “Antarsya and EEK [another Trotskyist group outside Syriza] are probably right about the intentions of [Syriza leader Alexis] Tsipras. You can see this not only in terms of his decision to talk about ‘renegotiating’ rather than scrapping the Memorandum; but also in the way that the leadership ‘forgot’ about migrants and the demand for open borders in their slogans.

“But Syriza is not just about what Tsipras says. It is also about the expectations of most workers. Syriza is the only hope for most workers. If you want to win people to socialism, you have to start from where they are. We need to organise workers to support Syriza in a move to the left. The position of Antarsya is defeatist”.

DEA and Kokkino agree on the need for the unity of revolutionaries inside Syriza to fight for a socialist programme.

But they also agree that if the large numbers of workers who supported Syriza as the electoral expression of their struggle against austerity are able to intervene within Syriza, that will have a more significant leftward effect than all the members of the existing left-wing currents within Syriza put together.



Protest against austerity

ciently, or push it aside.

In May 1917, in the maelstrom of the Russian Revolution, Lenin struck his keynote as follows: “We Bolsheviks must patiently and perseveringly explain our views to the workers and peasants. Each of us must forget our old view of our work, each, without waiting for the arrival of an agitator, a propagandist, a more knowledgeable comrade who will explain everything — each of us must become all in one: agitator, propagandist and Party organiser. That is the only way we can get the people to... think over their experience and really take power into their own hands”.

That politics in Greece may need a good run of “patiently explaining” does not mean that times are dim. However, the rise of the Golden Dawn neo-Nazis may limit the time for “patiently explaining”. They got 7% of the vote in both the May and June elections.

Assessments on the Greek left vary. Some say that the bulk of the Golden Dawn vote is atomised and incoherent protest, and social agitation and action will undercut it. The SEK (Greek group linked to the SWP in Britain) calls for the Greek state to ban Golden Dawn, though the Syriza reformists we discussed with did not. Some anarchists resort to single combat with Golden Dawn over the heads of local communities. In any case, no coherent and united response by the left to Golden Dawn has emerged yet.

APPEARANCES

When we went to the Trade Union Centre in Thessaloniki, a water worker, Costas, not only answered our questions about water privatisation in Greece, but also asked us a question. Is Thessaloniki as we expected? One of us replies that what we have been told by many people indicates that there is great trouble and suffering behind closed doors, from unemployment and poverty.

Yes, replies Costas. Things look “normal” in and near the city centre. But it is different further out. “People are sleeping in doorways, and sorting through garbage heaps to find something to eat. That didn’t happen before”.

Costas believes that the trade unions in other countries “must inform people that the problem with have in Greece is a problem will will have in every country. It is a system problem. When they are done with us, and with Spain and Italy,

they will go on to others, maybe France.

“We have to change the rules where everything is privatised and everything goes to a few people”.

Both Thessaloniki and Athens look at first sight as if they were built in a hurry, by erecting long rows of middle-rise concrete-box-buildings, from about the 1960s, and at the edges sometimes slapdash, though in the centres round patches of Roman, Byzantine, or classical ruins. In and near the city centres, there are some shuttered shops and cafes, and some beggars. But nothing dramatic. The remaining cafes have plenty of people sipping iced coffee through straws, playing backgammon, and chatting. Public transport works, rather better than in England. In the evenings, when cooler temperatures arrive, hundreds of young people sit and stroll round the White Tower in Thessaloniki, chatting and socialising rather than raging or rioting. Superficially, Greece today looks less like a country in the grip of crisis and acute decay than Thatcher’s Britain or Volcker’s and Reagan’s USA did in the early 1980s.

There are political posters on the walls, but not a huge number. As in France, for example, graffiti on walls are more common than in England, but mostly not political. In a week we saw only one public street paper-sale or stall by the left, an ineffectual group of KKE youth trying to sell *Rizopastis*. The main papers of the left — Syriza’s *Avgi* and *Epohi*, the KKE’s *Rizopastis*, and *Prin* (from the New Left Current, the biggest group in Antarsya) sell mainly through newspaper kiosks and newsagents. (Unlike in Britain, a law obliges the wholesalers to supply all papers above a certain print-run, without discrimination against the left). The cities do not look like Lisbon or Oporto in 1974-6.

But to be suffering, outraged, thoughtful, rebel-minded, does not necessarily mean to parade the streets looking “abnormal”, with a rictus of rage always on your face, or ostentatiously in rags.

Yanis Varoufakis, Greece’s best-known economist, says that now: “Greeks are in a catatonic state one moment, in a state of rage another”. What looks “catatonic” to professor Varoufakis may be, in real life, people thinking things through.

• Many other reports from Greece will be posted as we type them up, at www.workersliberty.org/greecejuly2012

Steel and call-centre workers fight back

By **Theodora Polenta**

On 3 July IMF chief Christine Lagarde said she was in “no mood for negotiations” over Greece’s enforced cuts programme.

The ongoing strikes by Greek Steel and Phone Marketing workers show that Greek workers are in no mood for negotiations with national and international capitalism.

A general meeting of the Greek Steel workers, on 29 June, decided to invite the Federation of Metal Workers and all the Trade Union Centres of Attica [the region around Athens] to open out the struggle to the whole metal industry, with a 24-hour solidarity strike as the first step.

Dozens of workers’ associations and workers’ committees are present at the gates of Greek Steel these days, as a token of class solidarity.

Among them is the Workers Committee of the striking women of Phone Marketing. “Having as a beacon the heroic struggle of the steel workers, we continue. We won’t surrender, we won’t retreat”.

On Thursday 21 June, a few days after the formation of the new coalition government of New Democracy, Pasok, and the Democratic Left, scabs organised by Greek Steel owner John Manassis and escorted by the police broke into the Greek Steel occupation, citing as a pretext their “right to return to work”.

At the beginning of June, an Athens court had ruled that the Greek Steel workers’ strike in Aspropyrgos, which had been going on for eight months, was illegal.

The court claimed that no proper vote for strike action had taken place because the strike decision had been by open vote, not through ballot boxes. While the court hearing was still going on, the steel workers held a General Assembly and refuted the argument by a ballot-box vote to continue the strike, 204 to 42.

A few days later, an Athens court ruled that a strike by tour bus drivers, due to take place the following day, was illegal. The drivers were set to strike in opposition to brutal cuts in their pay and benefits demanded by their employers in negotiations over a new collective agreement.

The Greek Steel scabs were discreetly assisted by the police that were there to “protect social peace”. They broke the steel workers’ picket line, taking advantage of a sloppy moment.

They entered the factory and attacked and injured three strikers, who were hospitalised. The employers and the scabs opened all the factory doors, hoping that would be the end of the strike.

Hundreds of people rushed into the Greek Steel factory to support the strike and remained until late at night. The 40 scabs were isolated and had to leave the building, booed and heckled.

By the afternoon the Greek Steel trade unionists had re-occupied their factory. Although all the wings of capitalist power were used — court ruling, police, scabs, security guards, media outcry — it is not so easy to break a strike that has already established itself as a symbol for the working class.

Greek Steel is owned by John Manassis, and is one of three firms that control steel production in Greece. The strike began on 31 October, when workers at the Aspropyrgos plant, employing 400 people, rejected plans to sack 180, cut the work day from eight to five hours, and slash wages

Phone Marketing strike banner

by 40 percent.

Greek Steel was the first major employer to utilize new employment legislation imposed as part of the EU/IMF austerity programme implemented by the 2009-2011 social-democratic Pasok government.

The legislation allows companies to dismiss five percent of their staff every month, instead of the previous limit of two percent. Since the strike began, the company has sacked 120 workers. The workers also rejected the employer’s proposal of reduction of their working hours to five hours a day alongside with 40% reductions to their wages: “we are not returning to a dangerous job that places at risk our lives for the pittance of 500 euros per month and without our 120 sacked work colleagues being reinstated”.

A meeting between the Greek Steel workers, Manassis, and the government ministers on 3 July was inconclusive. Following the tripartite meeting, representatives of the Steel workers met with Fotis Kouvelis, who had the audacity to make promises and pledged that he would call a government meeting in order to discuss the “social problem” in the steel industry.

SOCIAL

The “democratic” and “left-wing” Kouvelis forgot to tell us that the biggest “social problem” at the moment is the capitalists themselves, whom he serves faithfully through his party participation in the coalition government.

On Thursday 5 July the steel workers voted unanimously to continue their strike. Their determination to carry on their struggle is the best answer to the newly-formed coalition government’s plans aiming to reshape Greek society so that the minimum wage (previously 751 euros) will be something more like the Czech Republic (301 euros a month), Estonia (290 euros), Romania (155 euros), or Bulgaria (148 euros). The government will also further decrease welfare-state provisions, cut dry pension funds and social benefits, further dismantle workers’ rights, and create special zones where capitalists can operate with lower or no taxes or legal restrictions.

Also in June, Manassis sacked a left-wing trade unionist at Greek Steel who is a member of the left-wing coalition

Antarsya and union Health and Safety representative at the works.

The Phone Marketing workers have been on strike for 100 days so far (early July) against demands by their employers to reduced them to working one day a week and being paid less than €200 monthly!

A one-day week has been implemented in the ship industry.

At Phone Marketing the employers have “offered” a new package of four days’ work a week employment, 10% reductions in wages, a month’s delay in paying the wages, and replacement of collective agreements and by individual contracts. The employers promised that these would be temporary measures, and they would re-examine the workers’ terms and conditions in September.

The Phone Marketing workers responded by calling a general meeting in the middle of June and deciding on a continuation of their strike. The workers declared boldly that they would not return back to work unless their wages are reinstated to their previous level, all their jobs are guaranteed, and their collective agreements and unions are secure.

The trade unions of other telecommunication companies such as Wind and Vodafone, as well as the councils of Nea Ionia, Hrakleio and Kallithea and a number of neighbourhood community movements, have issued statements of solidarity for the Phone Marketing workers and have contributed to their strike fund.

It is the duty of the revolutionary left to speed up the processes by not only participating in and observing the struggles but organising and being in the vanguard of them. It is our duty to organize every small and big battle, and to win in our ranks the most militant sections of workers and youth.

Every workers’ victory is a step closer to the emergence of the working class as the decision-makers of history.

It’s time for politics. Time for anti-capitalist revolutionary working-class politics; from a revolutionary left which will not confine itself to being the left wing version of the existing political establishment and discredited and decaying parliament, but will instead reinvent politics, not as a technique to manipulate the masses but as a medium for self-liberation of the masses.

Syriza and “Plan B”

Miltos Ikonou, a leader of Syriza in Thessaloniki, spoke to us in the Syriza office in the city, a set of rooms above a cafe, while other, mostly young, Syriza members hurried about and phones rang repeatedly.

How, we asked, does Syriza explain that Greece will be better with a left government?

“With our social programme. We want the people to support us and get involved. We want something like the Popular Unity in Chile”.

A reforming left government, with wide popular mobilisation behind it, held office in Chile in 1970-3. It was overthrown by a bloody military coup in September 1973. So we asked: But with a different ending?

“Yes... Like Chavez in Venezuela. We want a popular government”.

Greece under a Syriza left government: would it be socialist or capitalist?

“We believe we can bring a socialist society, our dream, step by step. Of course the first left government of Syriza will have a socialist programme”.

What about the possibility of a violent retaliation by the state? [From 1967 to 1974 Greece had a military dictatorship, and its 20th century history included many other military coups].

“In the army and the police there are people who support us. The situation in Greece now is different from 20 years ago.

“The people in the army and the police don’t want to be involved in politics”.

But 50% of the police voted for Golden Dawn?

“Not of the whole police. 50% of the special [riot] police, MAT. The problem is the education those people have received. When we get government, we will abolish the MAT. We want a different kind of police”.

Miltos seemed genuinely perplexed, and asked another older Syriza comrade to talk with us. We re-posed the question, mentioning obstruction of reforming left governments by the top civil service as well as the possibility of reaction from the army and police.

“I don’t know... If there is a violent reaction from them, there will be a violent reaction from the people.

“Most likely is a refusal to cooperate. We had a case here in Thessaloniki recently when there was a problem among the anarchists. Some are more violent, some are more social, but the police arrested them all.

“We could have problems. I don’t know how to deal with it. It would be very difficult to change all the chiefs of the police and so on, but maybe that is the answer...”

Plainly the comrades went away to think about it more: since then we’ve had an email from the Syriza office detailing Syriza’s proposals on the police, which do indeed include the disbandment of MAT, demilitarisation of anti-insurrectional special troops, a ban on police wearing masks or using firearms during demonstrations, union rights for police, etc.

We also talked with revolutionaries within Syriza about this issue: we report their responses on page 9.

“A change in Greece will favour the fighting position of the working classes all over Europe”

John Milios, a leading economist in Syriza and a Syriza member of the Greek parliament, spoke to Martin Thomas from *Solidarity* in Athens on 7 July 2012.

Q. We have approached a left Labour MP, John McDonnell. He has agreed to contact Jean-Luc Mélenchon to discuss them initiating a European conference of the left and labour movement in solidarity with the Greek left. Our comrades in France have also asked Mélenchon directly. We think that the new government in Greece is unstable...

A. Yes. They are planning to follow the same policy as before...

Q... and a left government in Greece could become a real possibility again quite soon...

A. Yes. We hope so!

Q. There is a serious risk that the European Central Bank could retaliate against a left government in Greece, for example by cutting the Greek banking system out of the Target2 system for payments within the eurozone [so that euros in Greek bank accounts would no longer be valid buying-power elsewhere in the eurozone]. There is also a possibility of building effective solidarity of the labour movement and left across Europe to stop the European Central Bank doing that...

A. We think that scenario has practically zero probability. It's not easy to exclude one country from the eurozone or from financing by the European Central Bank without it forcing a very rapid revaluation of financial risk all over the eurozone and double-digit interest rates not only for countries like Italy and Spain which already have problems but also for nearly every country. So the scenario is a threat and not really a practical possibility.

Josef Ackermann, the former head of Deutsche Bank, wrote recently that there has to be another big haircut of the Greek public debt, because the debt problem of the Greek economy is an insoluble equation. The crisis started when the debt was less than 120% of Greek GDP. They followed the austerity policies, they lowered the denominator of the debt:GDP ratio, and now we have public debt at 160% of GDP despite the haircut for private bondholders, the so-called PSI.

This is not a situation where they can do anything they want. The European ruling classes have as a main target to restructure the economy and the society away from the so-called European model, the European social state, towards the Asian or Chinese type, with very low wages and with no rights and guarantees for the working classes. Whether they can achieve is a matter of class and political forces.

BASIS

It is not part of their plans to destroy the eurozone. That fact creates a basis on which we can negotiate.

We will say that the internal situation should be a matter for the Greek people — that is, the Greek government — and if it is a government of the left, then it should decide on the level of the minimum wage and on the collective-bargaining laws and on reforms of the tax system.

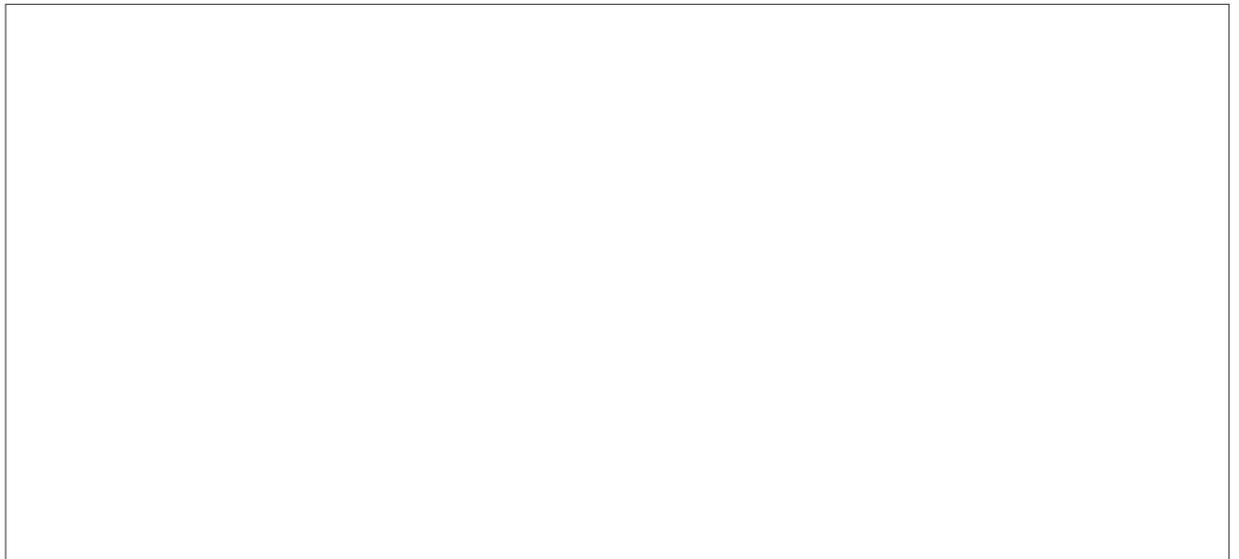
According to all accurate economic data, the actual direct tax coefficients in Greece are five to seven per cent of GDP lower than the European average. We have to change that. The rich must at last start paying taxes. We should not tax mass consumption, or the middle or the lower classes of society.

We should put this insoluble equation of the debt to other European countries, the members of the eurozone and the ECB, and say that it is impossible, given the current situation, where we have the deepest recession since the Second World War, to achieve at the same time three goals: to pay 110 billion euros in interest by the year 2020; to have a balanced budget and create a primary surplus [a surplus of government income over spending excluding debt service]; and to have funds to create growth. It is impossible!

It is to the benefit of the European taxpayers to renegotiate the Greek debt. Our direction would be the way that the Federal Republic of Germany renegotiated its debt after the Second World War, in 1953. The deal contained haircuts, renegotiation of the interest rates, and a moratorium period that made repayments conditional on growth - interest would be paid when the economy started growing again.

This year it is estimated that in Greece we will have a recession of 6.8%. This is an enormous recession. Greece was growing faster than any other country in the eurozone with the exceptions of Ireland and Finland. The average growth rate for the ten years before the crisis was around 4.5%. In eleven to twelve years we had an increase in per capita GDP of 61%.

The debt, as a ratio to GDP, remained constant around 100%. That was due to tax evasion, in part, and mainly to the reduction of tax coefficients for big capital and the rich.



Greek general strike, February 2012

The state revenues were reduced deliberately as GDP grew. That has to stop. It has to be reversed. We have to have a more just system and a redistribution of wealth in favour of the working classes.

Q. I agree that a Greek left government could be in a strong position to negotiate with the European Union. However, the leaders of the European Union are as dedicated to the idea of transforming society, social overhead costs, labour markets, in a neo-liberal direction as the Greek left is to transforming them in the opposite direction. The European ruling classes' calculations will not just be financial. Even if the retaliation is counter-productive financially, I can't see that we can say that there is zero probability that they will retaliate.

A. I believe the retaliation would be not only counterproductive but also disastrous. Also, this is a fight taking place all over Europe - in all countries, even Britain, which is not a member of the eurozone. A change in Greece will favour the fighting position of the working classes all over Europe. We will have a changed situation.

Some governments which were elected on the basis of "a different agenda", even in quotation marks - that is, a promise of a different agenda, despite what they actually do, like the French government - would be under strong pressure to decide on one side or the other.

We have discussed with different European governments, with the IMF, and the leadership of the European Union. Those have not been official meetings, but meetings through institutions which represented, in one way or another, those authorities. We are confident that we can negotiate.

PLAN B

On the other hand, as we have seen from history, there are always mistakes or unexpected situations. We have to have a plan B.

And we have a plan B. But this plan B cannot be made public at this point, because it has to do with the whole architecture of the negotiation. I understand your question. The situation is severe, but it is not catastrophic, that is, there are alternatives.

We believe we have to go on to take part in that battle and to collaborate with left parties and trade unions all over Europe in order to change the situation. If things can be changed in Greece, that means they can change everywhere. If things have changed in Venezuela, that means things can also change in other countries.

Of course, it is a very strong confrontation. There are extremists on the side of the ruling elites. We have to be prepared for every possible outcome. But our main course is to continue on an internationalist agenda and fight with other left forces and movements all over Europe for a change over all the continent.

We don't believe it would be a solution to have a situation like the interwar years where the working class of every country was making its alliance with its ruling class to fight other countries, and other countries were portrayed as the enemy. We do not believe that the enemy of the Greek people is Germany. We believe that the ruling classes of Germany follow a policy similar if not identical to that of the ruling classes of Greece. The ruling classes of Greece could not put forward their plans without the alliance of the German and other European ruling classes along with institutions like the IMF. They hope to make reactionary changes in economy and society irreversible, which of course they are not.

Q. If a left government in Greece wins office and suc-

ceeds, what would Greece look like after that? Would it still be capitalist? What are you aiming for?

A. If we sit here in Syntagma Square and look at the people passing by, we cannot understand the situation. The working classes of the country are on the brink of a great disaster. For the first time in post-war history, we have over 20,000 homeless. This is new for the country.

We have an official unemployment rate of over 20%, and 50% among the youth. This means an actual unemployment rate of around 30%, which is disastrous. This cannot go on.

Though the situation is very bad, a left government would first of all stop the declining course - stop this catastrophe - and would care for the poor.

The first measures would be to bring back the minimum wage of 751 euros, because it is impossible to live with less. We will take measures, based on state initiatives and other measures, and start decreasing unemployment and creating positive growth rates.

CLOSE

It is possible, within a very short period of time, to fight corruption. We know that there is a close connection between the big enterprises, both international and Greek-based, with the state, which is expressed in certain laws but also in central contracts.

We are going to fight this corruption immediately, to create a registry on an electronic basis in order to have a just tax system and deal with things like evasion of indirect taxes concerning petroleum products.

Greece produces and exports refinery products like gasoline and benzene and so on. It is estimated that we have something between one and a half and three billion euros in tax evasion from that business. It is easy to monitor imports and tax petroleum as it comes into the country.

The whole system is corrupt. We know about the Siemens case [about corrupt deals between Siemens AG and Greek government officials during the 2004 Athens Olympics]. We have evidence that similar things happen with many enterprises, especially those which control the mass media. It is possible to change the situation.

Crucial for us is the participation of the people, both the civil servants who work for the state who are also very anxious about corruption, and also the people who are going to support a left government.

We cannot make any positive step if we do not rely on the people and if we don't get ideas from the people. We are going to be part of the movements as we have been and as we are now. We are going to be the major opposition in the country.

Q. Syriza is launching Popular Assemblies?

A. Yes.

Q. How will they develop? And don't they need to discuss the Plan B?

A. We need to gather the ideas of the people. Plan B has a side which can not be public and which depends on very specific "technocratic" procedures. In order to fight with the people, we want to create a new mass party.

We have 1,650,000 votes. We believe that from those people who supported us we can create a party of 200,000 members, with the Popular Assemblies linked to it.

We are welcoming new members massively in the ranks of the party, and we want to decide, together with these people and the others who participate in the Popular Assemblies, to create a party capable of fighting this government and the ruling classes.

Anti-capitalist, pro-what?

By Martin Thomas

On 14 July activists meet for the first big public event of the “Anti-Capitalist Initiative” set up on 28 April and primarily initiated by a group of people who had just quit the Workers Power (WP) organisation.

Ambiguities in the initiative could be harmful. There is a risk of botching it so as to function well neither as united-front campaign, nor as broad forum, nor as party-type organisation

Every battle in the working-class struggle, or for liberation, requires broad unity.

If our aim is not just to fight immediate battles, but to replace capitalism altogether by a free cooperative commonwealth, then, as well as the broadly-uniting campaigns, we also need a political organisation developing and advocating that wider aim.

Marxists argue that the social revolution finds its agency in the working class, and its force in the organisation and self-education that the working class develops through daily struggles. If that is so, then, to be effective, the organisation advocating the social revolution must develop and organise for coherent views not just on the future and general revolutionary aim, but on the strategy and tactics of working-class and other liberation struggles now. It must be an active party and not just a group making propaganda for a future ideal.

In other words, we need two different types of organisation simultaneously. On the one hand, unions and other united-front organisations, which have to be broad if they are to be effective, and which have more limited remits, shorter-term outlooks, and are looser. And, on the other, political party or proto-party organisations, which are smaller, but which, if lucid, may do valuable educational and catalytic work even when small.

SPLINTER

Revolutionary-socialist parties or proto-parties, because of their more complex and long-term tasks, are inherently more likely to splinter than united-front campaigns.

And those united-front campaigns need to draw in people with different, or no definite, views on longer-term perspectives.

The different revolutionary-socialist parties or proto-parties need to be able to cooperate with each other, and with reformist or agnostic-minded people, in unions and campaigns.

In the new network, we will be proposing that it cooperate with others to:

- Set up a united coordination for campaigns for the NHS;
- Build the new rank-and-file initiative among school workers (the initial conference took place on 16 June) and, where possible, similar initiatives in other trade-union sectors;
- Revive and continue united anti-cuts committees based on local labour movements;
- Develop the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts among students.

The network would do best to work with others in broad united fronts on immediate active campaigns, rather than constituting itself as yet another “rival” campaign group on cuts, the NHS, or whatever.

We will also be proposing that the network set aside time for self-education and structured debate on longer-term strategic questions, some of which we will indicate below in discussing the ex-WP grouping’s statement.

Some participants in the new network think it is a broad coalition, operating largely by consensus, maybe providing a forum for different left currents and unaffiliated activists to liaise and debate in a way they now usually fail to. That could be useful. The ex-WP group’s statement suggests they see the network more as a “stepping stone” to a party-type group which is (by their lights) “clear on strategic questions”.

The ex-WP statement is centred round the aim of establishing “a new plural and broader anti-capitalist organisation”, “a new group” (though “not overnight”).

One paragraph states the aim as “a united, plural organisation in which splits can be avoided and the inevitable differences are factored into the day to day practice... debate [but] practical unity where we agree”.

If the practical unity is only “where we agree”, then the model here is a loose coordination of different groupings, or a consensus-decision-making collective. It’s an organisation looser than, for example, a trade union, which often obliges all members to join a practical action even though not all agree. (Few strike votes have a 100% majority).

Another paragraph gives a different line: the new organisation would have “democratic centralism [but meaning] unity in action around democratically determined goals, and free and open discussion”.

This suggests something less loose than a union, and maybe more like a party, though maybe (it’s not clear) a deliberately loose party which would not strive for clarity on longer-term perspectives but instead agree to differ on such things and confine itself (as unions generally do) to taking decisions where a majority binds a minority only on selected immediate activities.

Another passage offers a third variant, when it calls for “uniting sections of the left around a strategic perspective... clear on the strategic questions”, which implies a less loose “party”, with a defined “line” on strategic as well as immediate issues.

Other paragraphs point a fourth way: the new initiative will bypass and eclipse the whole existing activist left, and catapult itself straight into the status of an electoral mass party, “into the mainstream” of politics, into becoming able to “present a credible alternative to the mainstream parties”.

“Galloway’s success shows what is possible, as does the support for Mélenchon in France”.

Recent polls show long-term mass disaffection with the long-established major parties.

But neither Galloway nor Mélenchon is anti-capitalist in the sense of fighting for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the replacement of market-based economy by a free cooperative commonwealth.

Galloway has said: “my main political mistake, in retrospect, was that state ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, in which I believed, and for which I campaigned, was a false God... I’m not saying, at all, that everything in the private garden is rosy. There’s just more flowers than there were in the state garden”.

PROGRAMME

Mélenchon’s Front de Gauche programme proposes “a public pole” in finance, “public poles” in industry, and, in the longer term, “new powers for workers in the running of their workplaces”.

Galloway cannot be equated with Mélenchon, who is an honest left social-democrat. Bradford West shows, sadly, that it possible for the current disaffection to be channelled by a demagogue with a horrible record. It is possible for the disaffection to be channelled by the far right, too.

A revolutionary socialist party which had built a sufficient activist base and profile might well be able to use the mass disaffection reflected in the polls to make rapid advances through electoral activity. But not even Mélenchon shows us an example of how to leapfrog the difficulties of getting that activist base and profile in the first place.

We could pretend to leapfrog by attaching ourselves to the coat-tails of Mélenchon, or Galloway, claiming their electoral scores as somehow ours, and imagining that we are catapulted by proxy “into the mainstream”. But it would be self-deception. The SWP found that with Galloway in Respect.

In any case, what has the Galloway-Mélenchon tack got to do with the project of an “anti-capitalist initiative”? Nothing much, unless the term “anti-capitalist” be used so broadly as to cover all dissatisfaction with the obviously “capitalist” features of present-day society and desire to alleviate them in some way or another.

The negative term “anti-capitalist” (pro-what?) has drawbacks anyway. In the broadest usage it would notionally embrace a coalition stretching through the soft left to populist right-wingers.

The ex-WP grouping writes that for them the “anti-capitalist initiative” is “not an end in itself” but a “stepping stone for something greater”. Other activists in the initiative should ask the ex-WP grouping to think through, and spell out, more about whose boots will be “stepping” on them, and in which direction.

In our view, elements of the ex-WP group’s statement of political position derive from insufficiently-rethought recy-

cling of what they were taught as “Marxist ideas” in WP.

And yet the statement contains a passage which points to some of what is wrong with WP’s version of “Marxism”. “The way that Marxism came to be conceived as a result led to a narrowness; thinkers outside of the Marx-Engels-Lenin-Trotsky (and partially Luxemburg) axis tended to be subjected to a form of black and white critique that undermined the kind of engagement necessary for a living and evolving body of thought to develop. This naturally places constraints on critical thinking as the concern to ‘get it right’ tends to undermine the development of an attitude that recognises that a degree of plurality in the evolution of ideas is necessary to try and uncover objective truth...”

Over the years since its formation in the 1970s, WP became among the worst of Trotskyist groups in this respect. For it, a narrowly-defined doctrinal tradition became a source of quotabilities to rationalise positions. All theorising outside that canon became items to be ticked or crossed — “black and white” — in somewhat the same style as the name index in old Moscow editions of Marx and Engels would list thinkers, each checked as “idealist” or “materialist”.

Workers’ Liberty works to be more “doctrinaire” than the other tendencies, in that we work to educate our members in the Marxist classics and constantly to check our ideas against the classics. We also work to be — and are — the least doctrinaire, in that we are frequently willing to say that a classic “text” is inapplicable to a current problem, or another classic “text” is wrong.

WRONG

For instance: on the 1930s Trotsky analysed the Soviet Union as a “degenerated workers’ state”. By the end of World War Two, with the USSR overrunning Eastern Europe and the emergence of new Stalinist states, it was clear that the argument had to be reassessed, and in fact Trotsky had been wrong.

“Orthodox” Trotskyists ossified Trotsky’s position into a rigid and nonsensical dogma, in which the Stalinist states remained workers’ states, whatever the position of the workers, as long as the means of production were nationalised.

The original Workers Power group of the 1970s had drifted away from Tony Cliff’s version of state capitalism without settling on an alternative. Separating off fundamentally on a clique self-protection basis, and suffering vigorous pressure from the then-bustling Spartacist group, it needed an orthodoxy to cling to.

It eventually announced that events had convinced it the USSR was a workers’ state — and when? Of all times, in 1979/80, after Russian invaded Afghanistan! On that basis it refused to call for Russian troops to withdraw.

Ancient history? No. Today, WP and all its splits continue to maintain that North Korea is a “bureaucratically deformed workers’ state”, the only place outside Cuba where the working class still somehow rules!

That view skews the WP/ex-WP overview of the whole history of the last century. It skews their picture of where we, they, and the working class are in history. It must help nourish the thought (in the ex-WP statement) that socialist ideas can be “fused” with diverse non-worker struggles just as well as with working-class battle.

And it also sets a template for the WP/ex-WP view on forces like Saddam Hussein, the Taliban, the Sunni-supremacist Iraqi “resistance” of 2004-8, etc.: by virtue of the negative fact of coming into conflict with the dominant advanced-capitalist power, the USA, they fill the role (left vacant by the collapse of most of the Stalinist states) of big forces, “objectively” on our side.

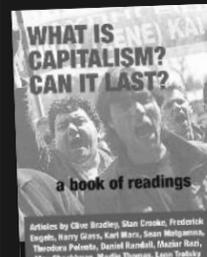
In 2004, at the European Social Forum in London, WP took part in an attempt to “no platform” an Iraqi trade unionist because of the Stalinist/reformist Iraqi Communist Party’s collaboration with the American occupation authorities.

They insisted that this representative of Iraq’s really existing workers’ movement, re-emerging after more than thirty years of repression, be not allowed to speak. At the same time they supported the “resistance” militias which, as well as fighting the Americans (for a while), were also (and more durably) conducting sectarian terror and harassing and murdering union activists.

The ex-WP group is right to call for “critical re-evaluation” and “open, ‘blue-skies’ discussion”. But they may be rethinking the wrong things.

If their project amounts to pulling together a loose regroupment, politically broadly WP but tacitly less “Leninist-Trotskyist”, tacitly less insistent on the centrality of working-class struggles, that will be wrong. As it develops, the ACI needs to debate these issues.

- Unabridged version: bit.ly/KhXESU • WP split statement: bit.ly/anticap2 • WP response: bit.ly/anticap3 • 28 April decisions: anticapitalists.org/about-us



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John Carlos: a life of protest

Harry Glass reviews *The John Carlos Story* (Haymarket 2012)

The black-gloved salute from the podium at the Mexico City 1968 Olympics is one of the most riveting images in the history of protest, surpassing its sporting moment. This autobiography of one of the central protagonists illuminates why John Carlos deserves to be regarded as a hero and a true champion.

John Carlos came third in the 1968 Olympic 200 metre final. His US compatriot Tommie Smith came first and broke the world record. Carlos was just pipped by the Australian Peter Norman. For the medal ceremony, the two Americans wore long black socks and no shoes to protest black poverty. They wore beads around their necks to protest lynchings. Their gloves signified black power, strength and unity.

For their courage, Smith and Carlos were booed out of the stadium and expelled from the Olympic village. Contrary to the myth, they were not stripped of their medals; but they returned to the US reviled and denounced, dubbed “black-skinned storm-troopers” who’d given a “Nazi salute”.

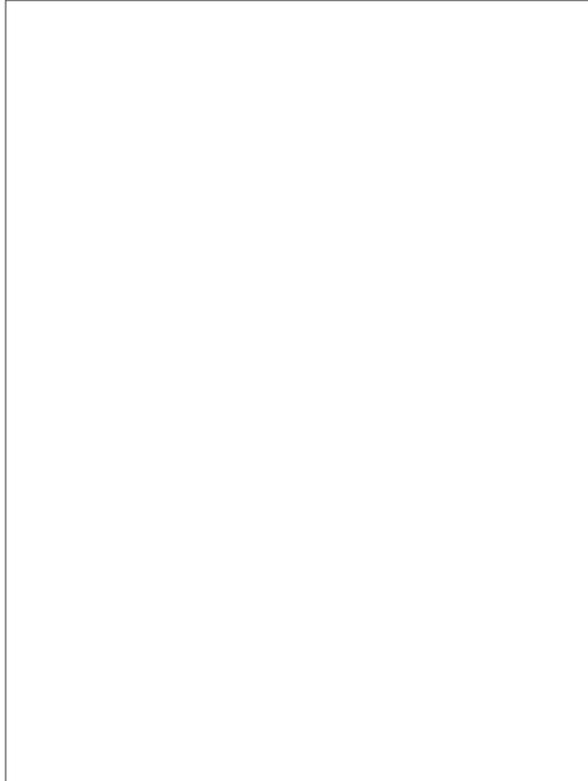
POLITICS

Carlos grew up in Harlem, New York, and learned his politics from Malcolm X. Malcolm “articulated ideas we were thinking but didn’t have the vocabulary to express. He turned frustrations into logic”, Carlos recalls.

A year before the games, he joined Smith and other world-class black athletes such as Lee Evans in forming the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR). They originally planned to boycott the 1968 Olympics to expose how the US used black athletes to cover for dire race relations at home.

The OPHR originally had four demands: 1. hire more black coaches; 2. restore Muhammad Ali’s world boxing title; 3. remove Avery Brundage as head of the International Olympic Committee; and 4. disinvite South Africa and Rhodesia from the Olympics. Ali had been stripped of his title for refusing the draft for Vietnam. Brundage was an anti-semitic and white supremacist, the man who sealed the deal for Hitler to host the 1936 Olympics. South Africa and Rhodesia were apartheid states in which a small white privileged caste ruled over the black majority population.

The OPHR was an incredible campaign. Carlos recalls a meeting in early 1968, where the athletes received support from civil rights leaders and sporting greats such as Jackie Robinson, Bill Russell, and Jim Brown. Martin Luther King offered them not only moral support for the boycott, but public backing and a tactical plan. King understood the global significance of the planned boycott. Carlos recalls asking him about why he was going back to Memphis to support the garbage workers’ strike. King replied: “John, I



have to go back and stand for those that won’t stand for themselves; and I have to go back for those that can’t stand for themselves.” King would be assassinated days later during that campaign.

The boycott idea lost momentum after King’s death and crucially when South Africa was banned from the Olympics. The OPHR athletes decided to go to Mexico and make their protest individually at the games instead. The story of some of those around the protest is worth telling. Peter Norman, the white athlete with them on the podium, wore an OPHR badge on his track suit in solidarity.

The US Olympic rowing crew, all white men and entirely from Harvard University, put out a statement of support and distributed OPHR badges. Carlos laments in retrospect the failure to involve women athletes in the protest. Yet Wyomia Tyus, who anchored the 4x100m women’s gold medal-winning quartet, still dedicated her quartet’s win to the two men in solidarity.

Bob Beamon, whose massive long jump stayed in the record books for two decades, told Carlos after the protest

that he had just screwed up his own life. Yet Beamon still wore long black socks when he collected his medal. George Foreman, winner of boxing gold, waved the stars and stripes after his victory, which was interpreted as a riposte to their protest. Yet years later, Foreman gave Carlos money when he was broke.

Saddest of all was Jesse Owens, whose four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics had answered racism in the heart of Hitler’s behemoth. Owens was sent by Brundage to persuade Carlos and Smith not to protest. He told them that there was no place in the athletic world for politics, as if to deny the very significance of his own past. Owens told them the black fist was “a meaningless symbol; when you open it, you have nothing but fingers”. This was a parody of the old socialist adage attributed to Daniel DeLeon, who roused workers by telling them that alone they were weak fingers but as a collective they were powerful like a clenched fist. Smith and Carlos understood the significance of this gesture.

After the expulsion from the games, Carlos returned to the US and his life unravelled. He had to work as a security guard at a nightclub to earn a living.

One winter he chopped up his own furniture for firewood. He played American football in the NFL and Canada until his legs were smashed so badly he walked with a permanent limp. It wrecked his relationship — his wife Kim committed suicide in 1977. He worked as a park keeper by the docks. It took more than a decade after his protest before he could actually work doing things he really wanted to do.

Some antecedents of the protest emerge from John Carlos’ early life. He was born in 1945 and grew up in Harlem, New York. His father was a veteran of the segregated US army from WWI, who worked as a shoemaker, while his mother was a nurse on the night shift. He had to struggle first and foremost against the grinding poverty and vicious racism that imposed itself on every life-situation. He had to overcome dyslexia. His first love was swimming, but racism and poverty barred him from the pools to train. His early running victories were in heavy trainers and later in old, second-hand running spikes. Yet he protested at school about the food, and in his neighbourhood at the living conditions. Excluded from the 100m sprint in 1968, he still made the Olympic team for the 200m.

Ultimately, John Carlos’ life has been a triumph. He will be remembered long after other Olympic athletes are reduced to simply names in the record books.

The causes for which he fought seem commonplace today. They were not in 1968. They had to be fought for. John Carlos struggled. He overcame. He showed it is possible to change the world. John Carlos is an inspiration.

The Second International’s lost revolutionary



Our Movement

In an ongoing series, Liam McNulty looks at the lives of some of the revolutionary socialist tradition’s heroes. This week, he explores the ideas and activism of Franz Mehring.

Franz Mehring (1846-1919) was a German Marxist journalist, theorist and historian. After almost thirty years in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) he opposed the leadership’s support for the First World War and founded the Spartacus League along with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht,

Mehring was born in Pomerania to well-off parents and studied at the universities of Berlin and Leipzig. As a young man, Mehring was not a socialist. But his instincts were liberal and democratic, which led him to protest openly against the Prussian annexation of Alsace-Lorraine after the Franco-Prussian War of 1871.

During the next two decades, Mehring worked at a number of liberal newspapers, becoming a well-known parliamentary reporter for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. By the age of 30 he considered himself a follower of the socialist Ferdinand Lassalle, but it took until 1890 for Mehring’s final breach with his own class. This came when, as editor of the democratic *Berliner Volkszeitung*, he made strident attacks on Otto von Bismarck’s Anti-Socialist Laws and the German Chan-

cellor demanded Mehring be silenced.

As Edward Fitzgerald, the English translator of Mehring’s biography of Karl Marx wrote: “True to those traditions of pusillanimity which caused both Marx and Engels to despair of the German bourgeoisie, the shareholders swallowed their democratic principles to defend their economic interests, and Franz Mehring was sacrificed. At the age of 44 he took the final and logical step and joined the Social Democratic Party.”

Mehring then entered his most creative phase, writing brilliant articles for Karl Kautsky’s *Neue Zeit* on philosophical, historical, cultural, military and literary subjects. His particular contribution was to deepen the historical materialist method, writing a classic history of Prussia and dealing at length with cultural and literary concerns.

HISTORICAL

For this he earned the praise of Frederick Engels, who appreciated his historical work, and Rosa Luxemburg who wrote to him on his 70th birthday that: “For decades now you have occupied a special post in our movement, and no one else could have filled it.

“You are the representative of real culture in all its brilliance. If the German proletariat is the historic heir of classic German philosophy, as Marx and Engels declared, then you are the executor of that testament. You have saved everything of value which still remained of the once splendid culture of the bourgeoisie and brought it to us, into the camp of the socially disinherited.”

From the turn of the century, Mehring took up the ideological battle against SPD “revisionists” such as Eduard Bernstein, who wished to abandon revolutionary Marxism

and settle for the piecemeal, evolutionary reform of capitalism. He did this as chief editor of the Social Democratic *Leipziger Volkszeitung* newspaper and became close to revolutionaries in the party, Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg.

When the war broke out, Mehring took a revolutionary internationalist stand against the slaughter of the European working class and helped form the precursor of the German Communist Party, the Spartacus League. After 1917 he became an enthusiastic supporter of the Bolsheviks and the cause of the Russian Revolution.

In 1918, the Bolshevik newspaper *Pravda* wrote: “Franz Mehring, associated with Karl Liebknecht. Rosa Luxemburg and Otto Rühle, is a great Marxian scholar, who uses Marxism as an instrument of revolutionary action, and not as a subterfuge to avoid action. Socialism is to him a theory of action, a means of making history and not simply a means of interpreting history. As the Revolution develops definitely in Germany, Franz Mehring will appear as a dynamic factor in the great drama.”

Sadly, Mehring died before the new German Communist Party could find its feet and gather weight. Already an ill man, he was deeply affected by the murder of his comrades Luxemburg and Liebknecht during the Spartacist uprising in January 1919. Just under two weeks later, on 28 January 1919, Mehring passed away.

Although it is impossible to say for certain, it is not unreasonable to suggest that had more comrades like Mehring and Luxemburg, representing the best of the revolutionary Second International traditions, survived into the next decade, the work of the Stalinist counter-revolution would have been made immeasurably more difficult on account of their steadfast principles and devotion to the working-class movement.

How Unite plans to change the Labour Party

At its 2012 policy conference, the Unite union ratified a strategy from its Executive for changing the basis on which the union relates to the Labour Party. Dave Quayle, Chair of Unite's National Political Committee, spoke to *Solidarity* about what that strategy means for working-class political representation.

The consensus in the union was very much that if we were going to remain part of the Labour Party, the relationship had to change.

We give millions of pounds to a party we have little control over, and we get nothing back. The Labour Party in government did absolutely nothing for the collective rights of workers, and very little for our individual rights.

So we had two options — disaffiliate, or campaign to change the way the relationship between the union and the party worked. Len McCluskey made that a key part of his

election campaign, so the strategy is something that's been in development since he got elected.

Many people across the union had an input into it, and it was passed by our Executive last December. It's all been entirely public; the strategy document is in the public domain and we've conducted the arguments for it out in the open. This isn't a secret coup — we're not Progress.

SHIFT

We want to shift the relationship between the unions and the party away from being money based.

We want to see trade unionists involved at every level of the party. We want a network of Unite councillors and MPs, as well as councillors and MPs from other unions. Only 9% of sitting Labour MPs have a working-class background; that has to change.

None of this will be easy because of the way New

Labour changed the party's structures, but we want to fight on that front too. A key part of our strategy is to democratise Labour Party conference and make it resolution-based, or at least to allow minority positions from the National Policy Forum.

The key policies we want to see trade union activists within the Labour Party fight for at every level are quite simple. It's about giving workers the right to collectively struggle to change their conditions. We want to shift the balance in the party away from middle-class academics and professionals towards people who've actually represented work-

ers and fought the boss. At the parliamentary level the key fight is against the anti-union laws. We have to restore the right to take solidarity action and strike effectively.

There's a lot of support for our strategies within constituencies. It's not about the unions versus party members, as some on the right are trying to suggest.

Within Unite, even the right wing is dissatisfied with the status quo. We cannot continue to throw money at a party led by people who don't represent our class. But we also don't believe we can fix the problem simply by arguing on the financial ter-

rain — by giving 10% less in affiliation fees, for example. If we give 10% less, but the relationship is still fundamentally the same, we might as well not give anything at all. If we want working-class political representation we need to change the way the relationship works. It's about class politics.

There's deep and understandable scepticism from some activists within the union about putting this policy into action.

The leadership needs to take the membership with us and show people it can work. We have a job of work to do in that respect.

CONFERENCE

Fighting for a democratic party conference will be a key initial focus.

We'll also be fighting the right wing in the constituencies to get trade union candidates selected as PPCs and as candidates on the lists for the European elections. It's not just about getting Unite members selected, either. It's

about getting working-class, trade-union candidates who have experience of representing and organising in workplaces selected.

Obviously there'll be a need to work to make sure any candidates who are selected remain politically accountable, but that's an ongoing process.

We want a firmly class-based and left-wing general election campaign in 2015. We've got to say that Labour is the party of and for workers, not for neoliberals, bankers, and the free market. That might alienate some people, but that's tough.

Labour has to be a working-class party — a party for workers, pensioners, unemployed workers, single parents, the whole class.

It has to fight for positive rights for working-class people, and we want trade union activists out on the doorsteps of working-class households as Labour Party candidates making that case.

Train workers ballot against victimisation

By Chimène O'Phair

More 500 members of the Transport Salaried Staffs Association (TSSA) on Virgin Trains' West Coast line are balloting for strikes to win the reinstatement of sacked colleague Martin Hodges.

Martin was summarily

dismissed by management, who allege a "poor timekeeping record" dating back to 2010. But TSSA officer Tom Condon said the sacking "was the first we had heard about [the timekeeping problem] — he has been our rep for five years."

Activists believe Martin was sacked because of his union work. TSSA leader

Manuel Cortes said: "Our rep, Martin Hodges, was fired for simply carrying out his trade union duties. He is now suspended on full pay because Virgin are refusing to allow him back into the office to resume his normal job."

"No trade union can stand aside and allow Virgin to run a hire and fire at will policy."

Remploy workers vote to strike

By a GMB member

Workers in Remploy factories across the UK have voted to strike, and to take action short of a strike, as they attempt to beat back government plans to close 54 factories.

The planned closure will see the loss of nearly 3,000 jobs in the manufacturing plants, which were set up after the Second World War to provide protected employment for disabled

workers.

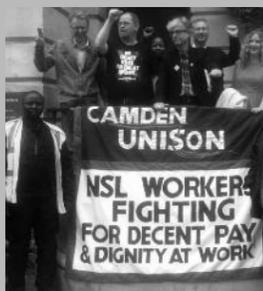
Members of the GMB union voted by 79.5% in favour of striking, and by 87.3% for action short of a strike. Unite members voted for strikes by a 59.7% majority, and for action short by 76.1%.

Phil Davies, the national secretary of the GMB, said: "The government's intention to destroy thousands of disabled workers jobs in Remploy has given rise to an overwhelming vote for strike action against the

proposed closures of their 54 factories. These closures are going ahead without any consideration of the feelings and needs of these workers and their families or their future job prospects. To close a factory that employs disabled people in the present economic climate is a sentence to life of unemployment and poverty."

Unions are now set to announce a programme of strikes and other industrial action.

Parking workers fight low pay



Parking enforcement workers in Camden, London, will strike on 11 and 12 July in a battle against low pay.

The workers voted by over 97% in favour of strikes, and will mount pickets on all six of the parking enforcement centres across Camden. The

service is run by the contractor NSL.

The workers are currently paid £8.09 an hour, less than the London Living Wage of £8.30 which even the Tory Mayor Boris Johnson acknowledges as a benchmark for wages in the capital.

Sparks' wildcat wins

By Stewart Ward

Balfour Beatty electricians won a swift victory against bosses after they took wildcat strike action on a site in Scotland.

The workers, who are installing an overhead electricity transmission line between Beaulay and Denny, come from all over the UK and therefore had

to use Friday and Sunday to travel to and from the site, meaning they effectively only had a one-day weekend. Many had worked 17 consecutive 12-hour days and, despite assurances from management that they would be given Mondays off as a travelling day, their weekend arrangements had still not been clarified or sorted out.

Workers walked off the job on 26 and 27 June, and after a series of negotiations with management, bosses agreed that weekends would be four days in length, with at least one day paid and including two travel days.

90% of the workers involved in the strike were not unionised, although several have since joined Unite.

Drivers consider Olympic strikes

By a train driver

After some insignificant concessions the RMT and Unite unions have given up the fight over changes to the East Midland Trains (EMT) pension scheme.

The RMT were hampered by a non-existent campaign to win the ballot and the unwillingness to strike of some members not in the scheme. Unite accepted a minutely larger pay rise to drop its objections whilst TSSA didn't even ballot.

Drivers' union ASLEF on the other hand is still in dispute. They face the difficulty of being against the changes while the other three unions, representing a majority of staff

employed by EMT, accepted them. That partly explains the strategy adopted, which is to seek a larger pay award, comprising the normal pay increase plus a further percentage increase paid for out of the money the company will be saving by making the changes to the scheme. For this to be meaningful drivers would need to be asking for at least a 6% pay rise, but officials would not commit to a figure.

Whilst ASLEF members

are justifiably disappointed with the inaction of the other unions there is still a very strong mood to fight this. One branch has already called unanimously for a series of strike dates to be named during the Olympics.

Having failed to move the company with six days of strike action already, drivers felt that the threat of strike action during the Olympic period was their best chance at getting a result.

Sheffield strikers discuss workers' control

By Rosie Huzzard and Dan Higginbotham

Recycling workers and their supporters met in Sheffield on Thursday 5 July to discuss the status of their dispute, after workers suspended their indefinite strike action on Wednesday 4 July.

Scab labour and strike-breakers were employed during the strike. Whilst no-one was willing to speak on-record, there is an allegation that SOVA, the private company which runs the recycling centres for the council, made use of its charity division which works with ex-prisoners.

Some of these may have been used as used as scabs, with the suggestion that their normal positions were under threat if they didn't comply, a move grimly reminiscent of the infamous Workfare scheme. If this is true, it represents a horrific act of exploitation on behalf of a so-called charity.

The workers' demands were for the reinstatement of dismissed staff, an end to reduced opening hours

of recycling depots (and consequent reduction in salary), improved bonus payments, and pay increases.

A rep from the GMB union reported that staff have now been reinstated, opening hours have been set at 22.5 hours a week for each worker, and bonus system has been agreed with workers. However, this centres on productivity bonuses, which only equal an extra £2 per hour on top of minimum wage.

Despite these impressive victories, GMB members still felt that the changes represented a betrayal of public services.

They will now face an increased workload to meet targets which they feel will reduce the standard of service they offer the site users.

The other offer from management under the talks was rather different and politically very interesting. The workers were offered management of the green waste recycling scheme under their own control, in what union reps described as a "workers' co-op". It seems the "green waste" (garden waste) has

proved to be a bit of a problem for SOVA, who charge the householder per bag of collected waste. Unsurprisingly, people prefer to dump their waste in the regular household bins, but this, problematically, tended to bring them over the weight limit for workers and into health and safety problems.

MANAGEMENT

The green waste collections currently cost £900,000, and the workers estimate that £300,000 of that is spent on management costs.

If the offer comes to fruition (though the workers seem very cautious of it, and with good reason) their initial thoughts seem to be to run it not as a coop in the traditional sense, but as a democratically-run service under workers' control, doing away with all management and instead simply employing a financial advisor to manage the accounts.

This is a potentially huge opportunity for the workers, who made clear that they plan to plough all £300,000 back into wages

or the service. If the service is taken back in house, workers will insist that the scheme's profits should be ringfenced for investment in care, housing, and other social services.

This is an inspirational example of class solidarity, and clearly shows a group of workers thinking about how workers' control — rather than volunteer-based cooperative models or outsourcing — can be used to beat cuts and defend services.

It is important to remember that this is a suspension, and not a settlement. The SOVA strikers will now be taking stock and considering their next steps.

Union reps said that we should throw all thoughts of odd one or two-day strikes out of the window as they are useless. They also said that having a strike fund, especially for those workers without support from family or partners, was essential.

They said finally that if they could launch indefinite strike action to take on bosses' cuts, anyone can.

Tube cleaners frozen out of Olympic bonuses

By Ollie Moore

While many transport workers will now be receiving payments for the extra workload they will face during the Olympics, some are being frozen out — and, not surprisingly, many are those who are already overlooked and super-exploited.

Cleaners on three contracts — ISS and Initial on London Underground, and Carlisle on the Docklands Light Railway — are voting in an RMT ballot for industrial action. ISS and Initial are refusing any Olympics payment, while Carlisle is refusing to pay even the barely-adequate London Living Wage. The ballots close on Thursday 19 July, the same day that the union will also declare ballot results on the London Cycle Hire Scheme, South West Trains, First Great Western and Greater Anglia.

Some Transport for London staff struck for one day starting on the evening of Sunday 1 July. TfL has offered no Olympic payment to many of its staff, expecting them to carry the extra workload with no reward. Despite all TfL's unions stating that they

strongly oppose this, only RMT is taking industrial action. The strike disrupted Travel Information Centres, the Call Centre and other departments, and saw a lively picket at TfL's headquarters, Windsor House. The strike was followed by a week-long overtime ban.

London Underground continues to insist that it will keep stations open if they fall below minimum staffing levels, by counting minimally-trained "Incident Customer Service Assistants". RMT is balloting members for "action short of strikes", planning to boycott this policy and keep stations open.

Janine Booth, London Transport workers' representative on RMT's national executive, told *Solidarity*, "Everyone is entitled to some extra cash for the extra workload during the Olympics. But there is a bigger issue — employers using the Olympics as a pretext to try out casualised forms of working, so they can then impose them after the Games when they set about cutting jobs."

"It is essential that the unions take a stand against this."

Bus bosses' bid for peace

By Darren Bedford

London bus workers' union Unite suspended a planned strike on Thursday 5 July after an offer from management that appeared to meet the pre-strike demand for a £500-across-the-board bonus for Olympics working.

Transport for London officials trailed the offer in the press as being the equivalent of £583 per worker, or £700 for workers at garages more heavily impacted by the Games. They also talked up a unique profit sharing scheme, where they promised to split any increased revenue with the bus operating companies, if they guaranteed to pass it onto staff.

That bosses have made this offer at all — after almost a year of negotiations in which they hardly budged — is huge progress, and a testament to both the power of workers' action and the desperation of London's transport bosses and politicians to avoid any disruption to the Olympic Games.

There must now be as full and democratic a de-

bate as possible amongst bus workers about the deal. It has some hidden (or at least harder-to-spot) strings — for example the fact that TfL's figures (the £583 figure, for instance) are before-tax figures, meaning the actual amount workers receive could be a lot less. Some bus worker activists believe calling off the 5 July strike was a mistake, while others feel that it would have been poorly supported once the details of the offer became clear.

As *Solidarity* goes to press, the next strike — scheduled for 24 July — is still live, although as Unite representatives discuss the full details of the offer (currently still "confidential") that strike may also be suspended or cancelled.

Settling for the bosses' current offer — forced from them when previously they had been unwilling to make one at all — would be a victory.

Bus worker activists must assess their strength and democratically decide whether it is the best victory they can hope for, or whether they are capable of fighting on for an even bigger one.

John Lewis cleaners strike

By Stewart Ward

Cleaning workers at John Lewis's flagship store on Oxford Street, London, will strike on Friday 13 July.

The workers are demanding the London Living Wage (currently £8.30 an hour), and want their employers — the contractor Integrated Cleaning Management (ICM) — to back off from recently announced cuts which will see many workers have

their hours — and pay — slashed.

The workers' union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), is not officially recognised by John Lewis or ICM, but says it will take action anyway after its members voted by 90% for strikes in an indicative ballot. Turnout was 80%.

The IWW is organising pickets of the store. For more information, see facebook.com/cleaners.branch

Essex firefighters strike

By Bill Holmes

Firefighters in Essex have been on strike in a long-running dispute over cuts and crewing arrangements.

Members of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) staged an eight-hour strike on 28 June, and followed it up with a one-hour stoppage on Saturday 30th.

Workers have been campaigning against the Essex Fire Authority changes since August 2009.

The fire authority has stockpiled equipment, and locked union members out of fire stations on the first day of industrial action.

Keith Hanscombe, East Anglian spokesman for the FBU, said the walk-out had been solid.

He said: "We are very pleased the fire chiefs decided to abandon plans to stop pay for the whole 15-hour night shift and lock us out as that would have affected the Olympic torch

relay.

"There are 160 fewer frontline firefighters in Essex and it's getting worse. They are getting away with the same number of fire engines but with fewer firefighters so they have had to change the way they do things - our dispute over cuts and working conditions are directly linked."

Talks between the union and fire chiefs are continuing through the government conciliation service ACAS prior to the next planned action, a 24-hour stoppage on July 18.

Initial strike dates have already been set for August and October.

Mr Hanscombe added: "Essex Fire Authority has more than £12 million in reserves, 15% of its annual budget and way over the recommended amount."

"Eric Pickles has told councils to temper front-line cuts with reserves, but in his own Brentwood constituency the second full-time fire crew is being cut."

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Whose Olympics?

By Dan Rawnsley

The London Olympics will begin in just under three weeks, but the accompanying security measures and marks of privilege in the city have been visible for some time.

Be it the 17.5km electric fence around the Stratford site, the warnings about travel delays, or markings appearing to identify specific roads for Olympic traffic only during the event, one thing is clear — the Games have come to town.

Activist groups covering a range of issues have come together to form the Counter Olympics Network (CON), stating in a press release that “CON helps to provide a co-ordinated voice for a wide range of groups which share the desire to provide a counterbalance to the overblown mainstream pro Olympics propaganda. CON is also concerned that the Orwellian security apparatus and regressive legislation put in place to protect brands, privilege, and privatised public space won't

Stop the Arrests

A campaign to stop the arrests of sex workers in London from now until the end of the Olympics. A coalition of sex workers and supporters of sex workers' rights. www.moratorium2012.org/

all disappear after the Games.”

Issues of concern for CON signatories include evictions of local people from their homes, the introduction of repressive policing and surveillance tactics, the encouragement of nationalism, high levels of public expenditure on temporary structures, the sanctioning of “gender apartheid” (for example, the Saudi Arabian government's ban on female athletes forming part of the Saudi team), and the hypocrisy of sponsorship for the Paralympics by ATOS, the company responsible for the disgusting disability assessment programme, which aims to force disabled people off benefits.

PROTESTS

The CON website is acting as a hub for a range of events and protests around the Olympics this summer.

This includes cultural events such as The Clays Lane Archive exhibition at Bethnal Green Library, looking at the work and testimonies of residents of the Clays Lane estate, once Europe's second largest co-operative housing estate before it was demolished to make way for the Olympic site, and Playfair's Alternative Opening Ceremony at Rich Mix on Bethnal Green road.

Protests and campaigns are also reported on on the

website, including the planned demonstration on 28 July and information on Simon Moore, who has been placed under an ASBO with the purpose of preventing “conduct leading to the disruption of the Olympic Games”. Simon, who was involved in a peaceful protest in the Lea Valley Regional Park, argued that “the effect of this ASBO is to criminalise peaceful protest.

CORPORATE

“There are legitimate issues for concern around the Olympics such as the destruction of Leyton Marsh in East London for a temporary basketball training facility and the ethics and human rights records of corporate sponsors for the games.”

Hopefully, during the event, CON will continue to document useful information on similar acts by the state which suppress the

right to protest. A lot of the security measures being put in place are extreme, bizarre and in some cases dangerous, for example the case of anti-aircraft missiles being put in housing estates. Exactly what would happen if a plane were shot down over East London doesn't take a lot of imagination.

Other measures include an integrated CCTV system capable of tracking an individual across the city and the use of security-camera equipped drone aircraft.

It is not merely a matter for “activists”. The heavy handed security measures will impact on individuals going about their every-day lives, whether it's young people being stopped and searched, or workers having to calculate in a few extra hours to their journey time to and from work.

The Counter Olympics Network will act as a valuable hub of information for a variety of similar issues around the Games.



Whose Games? Whose City?

No limos, no logos, no launchers!

Demonstrate on Saturday 28 July. Assemble 12 noon, Mile End Park. March to Victoria Park for “People's Games” event.

More info: counterolympicsnetwork.wordpress.com

Demonstrate against austerity

Demonstrations in Oxford and Sheffield on Saturday 14 July, called by local branches of the NUT, NASUWT, and other labour movement bodies. Oxford: Assemble 11am, Manzil Way. Sheffield: Assemble 11:30am, Devonshire Green.

TUC demo, London: Saturday 20 October. Assemble 11am, Victoria Embankment, march to Hyde Park. More info: afuturethatworks.org

Setbacks for Islamists in Libya's elections

By Martyn Hudson

The results of Libya's first parliamentary elections since the fall of the regime indicate a victory for the National Forces Alliance (NFA) led by former interim prime minister Mahmoud Jibril.

The NFA is a loose conglomeration of parties (58 of them) centred around a liberal programme of economic transformation and political moderation, and is largely a product of the old National Transitional Council (NTC).

The heartland of the NTC was the original liberated zones of Benghazi and Cyrenaica, which makes it all the more surprising that hostility to the elections was most apparent in those areas rather than the militia ridden west and south where there have been ongoing tensions.

The electoral disruptions, far from being orchestrated by remnants of the old regime, have been a product of rising federalist interventions specifically in the east of the country where there have long been apprehensions about Tripolitanian rule and where monarchist and secessionist groups have some currency.

QADDAFI

The very places where disruptions or active boycotts have been expected (the loyalist Bani Walid and Sirte) have been totally quiescent. Some commentators have noted that this is a consequence of two things.

Firstly, that Qaddafi had very little basis of popularity anyway. Once he was gone there was little appeal in restorationist tendencies.

Secondly, that the central elements of the old pro-Qaddafi population know that the future has turned against them and want some sort of political and economic stakehold in the new society. Largely distrusted by the general population, the revolutionary militias have now largely abandoned their policy of persecuting remnants of the old regime, and whatever support there was for Islamist politics there has not turned into a critical victory for the main Islamist party — Justice and Construction.

This is not to say that the NFA itself is a bastion of secularism and freedom of expression. It still stands for the maintenance of Shari'a law in the country and perceives itself as a force for traditionalist Islam in

Libya. However its central struggle has been against the federalists and secessionists rather than for political Islam for which there is very little appetite in either Benghazi or Tripoli.

In parallel to this, there is no violent, terrorist response to the elections on behalf of remnants of the old regime, reminiscent of the Ba'athist resistance in Iraq. If the NFA can position itself as the vehicle of inclusion, justice and reconciliation then the power of both the revolutionary militia's and the federalists will be reduced. It is very clear that the economic strategy of the NFA in terms of building links with international partners is popular in Libya, but this is really a maintenance of old economic relationships rather than Libya being brought for the first time into the global economy and the “hands of imperialism” — which is an old chestnut bandied around by those who would still maintain a commitment to the “anti-imperialist” Qaddafi.

There has been a large presence of women in the voting lines in the cities, and certainly the emergence of parliamentary multi-party democracy in Libya is to be supported. However, the fragile coalition of the NFA is assailed by a number of problems including the structural assimilation of the mass of migrant workers in Libya and labour struggles over the minimum wage, by geographical differences around decentralisation and federalism, and perhaps crucially by electoral struggles and the emergence of a “military solution” to democracy in other North African states.

Interestingly, NATO intervention in Libya seems to have captured the hearts and minds of much of the Libyan population and many others elsewhere and depressed their capacity to think about radical Islamist political directions. As an unintended consequence of intervention Libya looks, to the international community, like the opposite of a failed state and a success story for “humanitarianism”.

Let's hope the indigenous and migrant working classes and women of Libya make the smug smiles slightly less comfortable as the months go on, and we see real class fractures and independent class politics developing against the Shari'a Liberals of the National Forces Alliance.