



Rap and revolution - Lowkey



The 1848 revolutions



Greece and the EU debt crisis

workers power 5

July/August 2011 ★ Price £1 / €1.50 Issue 356

Monthly paper of the British section of the League for the Fifth International

IT'S RIGHT TO STRIKE!

Next step - **general strike** to bring down the Tories

Richard Brenner

THE TORIES have tried to threaten the trade union movement not to strike against their vicious cuts.

So deep is the hatred that millions of working class people feel for the Tory cuts that one after another our unions have voted for action.

First half a million marched through London on 26 March. Then we saw ballots for strike action by the teachers' unions NUT and ATL, by the lecturers' union UCU and by the civil servants' PCS. And, one after another, the results came in: massive majorities for strikes against the Coalition's attack on pensions.

92 percent in the NUT, 83 percent

in the ATL, 65 percent in the UCU. And 61 percent in the PCS. A clear and overwhelming mandate for a massive one-day public sector strike on 30 June.

"Not so!" cried the Tories. "You may have got a majority of the votes, but when you take the turnout into account, you do not have a majority of your members voting for action."

They can talk! Together they got just 38.5% of the electorate to back one or another of their parties - and that was before people realised what their real policy of axing front line services really was.

So when the Tories say we should not strike, the answer is simple: on



your own argument your government is illegitimate. Stand down or we'll bring you down in a massive wave of strikes, and a general strike where we all strike together and stay out until we win.

Workers and Youth Unite against the Cuts

The day of action on 30 June brought together workers resisting pension cuts, trade unionists giving them solidarity, and young people resisting attacks on education.

Amy Price, a student at Lawnswood School in Leeds, told Workers Power: "I have been encouraging people in my year to boycott lessons on the day to support the strike, joining the picket line outside the entrance and attending the march and rally in town at midday. I think students are keen to support the strikes."

John, a classroom assistant in South London, said: "My union,

Unison, is not striking on 30 June. But our members in the school have decided not to cross teachers' picket lines - so the head has decided to shut the school for the day anyway."

And Rebecca Allen, a striking PCS rep and chair of the union's young members group for the north of England, said: "It's great that so many unions are striking on 30 June, but we should all come out together if we want to win. I think it's time the TUC called a general strike."

Now let's get organised for the next round of struggle!

The cost of bombing Libya - over £400 million

CHIEF SECRETARY to the Treasury Danny Alexander has admitted that the cost of Britain's war in Libya could run to "hundreds of millions of pounds". A Guardian report in May quoted defence experts who suggested the total bill by the autumn will be between £400 million and £1 billion.

£400 million represents the equivalent of a brand new fully equipped hospital, £1 billion would buy two of them. Or it could pay for between 10 and 20 new secondary schools with 1,500 pupils each. It is three times the

amount saved by scrapping the Disability Living Allowance, more than the proposed cuts to the Legal Aid budget, and roughly the same as the savings from ending the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

In June, Armed Forces Minister Nick Harvey replied to a parliamentary question that Britain was using £6 million worth of munitions a week. Just one Storm Shadow cruise missile, used to destroy buildings, costs £1.1 million. On 19 March, when operations began, US and

British forces fired over 110 Tomahawk cruise missiles costing £750,000 each.

The cost of the "humanitarian" Libyan intervention comes on top of the cost of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq - more than £25 billion over the last decade. Keeping 10,000 troops in Afghanistan costs almost £5 billion a year.

Our rulers, it seems, can easily afford these imperialist wars, while school and hospital building programmes are slashed, our social services downgraded and jobs and pen-

sions cut.

But the apologists for our latest war reply that it's a war in defence of the Libyan people, in support of the fighters for democracy. Is it?

BBC reporters with the rebel forces in Misrata and on the front line report that the rebels are extremely poorly armed, often with only small arms. They have no anti-tank guns or anti-aircraft missiles. In a war that is supposed to be about protecting those who rose up against Gaddafi, virtually none of the massive expenditure is to aid the rebels to defend

themselves.

Quite simply the US and British imperialists do not want the revolutionaries to defeat Gaddafi by themselves. By bombing Tripoli - killing innocent civilians in the process - Britain, France and the United States want to rub out Gaddafi before the Libyan people do, so that they can dictate what happens after his fall.

That is why Workers Power - which supports the Libyan revolutionaries - at the same time opposes the imposition of the no-fly zone and the bombing of Tripoli.

The editorial
SIMON HARDY



Stop the cuts - save the planet

IN PREVIOUS editorials we have argued for a strategy to beat the cuts, centring on the need to win the unions to an all out general strike to smash the austerity programme and kick out Cameron and Clegg. This month I want to use this editorial to discuss something not covered in the rest of the paper but which will affect us all if we do not take action.

Recent reports about the pace of climate change are cause for concern. Despite repeated promises that CO2 emissions will be cut 2010 actually saw an increase in emissions – with the greatest amount yet recorded. If this continues then major climate change and extreme weather events will cause devastation across large parts of the world.

The UN predicts millions of climate refugees by 2020, with many more by 2050. The maps that we are used to looking at from school will change permanently as sea levels will rise and shift coastlines inwards. Countries like Britain would be particularly badly hit.

Life in the oceans is also being destroyed by climate change, over fishing and pollution. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature's report in June stated that our oceans are degrading at a faster capacity than anyone predicted and some of the indicators have exceeded even the worst-case scenario put forward by climate scientists.

They predict extinction of many species of fish, both large and small, and a dramatic unbalancing of the eco-system as coral reefs perish and the entire ecosystems that rely on them to survive are wiped out. The waters are heating up, the acidity levels have increased and more of the oceans are becoming anoxia zones or dead zones where no fish can live.

Urgency of the situation

Many people will think 'yes clearly this is important – but isn't the fight against the cuts more urgent? Can't we turn to the environment later?' I think this is the wrong way of looking at it. The issue that faces us is that all the struggles, both to save the planet and to stop the Coalition's austerity programme and save our jobs and communities, are very immediate. The Tories are ramming through the cuts before many people even know what is happening, often before the powerful but painfully slow organisations of the labour movement can roll into action.

The danger is that the longer-term problems get lost as we deal with what is right in front of us. The annual protests against climate change in Britain remain stubbornly small – around 10,000 people or less. Opinion polls show millions are worried about the planet, but few people are mobilised to take action.

But it is the same government and the same companies that are causing both the social crisis and the environmental crisis. It is the same class of fat cats that are making money from privatisation and bank bailouts whilst also polluting our planet. In tackling them we are tackling the source of all our problems.

Each of our struggles can become something more – it can become part of a movement to build a new society where there are jobs for all (for life!), a reduced working week, production for human need and not greed and we can work together, collectively, to reduce fossil fuel emissions and rely more on renewable energies.

This is not just a social struggle – it is a political one – one aimed not just at changing the government, though that would be a start, but at changing the state and the class that rules through it. If we do not do this we will leave the levers of power in the hands of the exploiters and the polluters. We need to coordinate all our forces into a new anticapitalist political party; one that can bring about revolutionary change – abolishing poverty and pollution creating a decent life for all in a restored natural environment.

To expropriate the major corporations and banks and take them under the control of the workers means bringing down the Bullingdon Boys and replacing them with a government of working people. Such a revolutionary act will give us the best hope – indeed the only real hope – of organising society in such a way that we are not killing the planet through greedy, profit driven cost cutting, unsafe pollution and carbon emitting energy production.

But all this requires political action, political organisation, and a party that organises both nationally and internationally to fight for socialism.

Our battle plan to beat the Tories

Richard Brenner

THE TORIES are preparing for a wave of strike action – they are starting to reveal key elements of their plan to break our unions' resistance to the cuts.

First before Christmas the Tory press revealed that minister Francis Maude heads a secret cabinet committee to prevent a general strike and break it if it happens. Then Lib Dem traitor Vince Cable dared to threaten the GMB union, at its conference, with a new set of anti-union laws if workers use our right to strike. Then in the midst of negotiations over pensions, the government dropped a bombshell. In a calculated insult Lib Dem Danny Alexander announced the government will force men to work three more years and women eight more, and will reduce the value of pensions and hike employee contributions. Not to be outdone, Education Secretary Michael Gove appealed to parents to break the teachers' strike by crossing picket lines.

Key elements of the Tory plan become clear. Threaten legal restrictions and up the ante in negotiations to frighten union leaders into backing down. And, if we go ahead, then mount a scabbing operation, turning people against one another to try to weaken workers' resolve.

Miliband's cowardice

Labour leader Ed Miliband has now issued a disgraceful statement against the strike action on 30 June. Despite being elected Labour leader only thanks to trade union votes, Miliband says the 30 June strike shouldn't happen, because "I don't think the argument on public sector pensions has yet been got across".

What a nerve. He's done nothing to help the unions explain why the government's attack on pensions is unjust. And he's done nothing to back the most important argument – that all the cuts are unnecessary, that all of them are designed to make the working class pay the price for the crisis, and that the bankers and the rich could be forced to pay, not the workers and the poor. On the contrary he and his shadow chancellor Ed Balls say they won't oppose all the cuts and would make cuts themselves if in power, just more slowly, to clear the deficit within eight years, not four.

Waiting for Miliband and Balls to win an election would be a fatal strategy. Even if they won in three years' time, it will be over the ruins of our pensions, of affordable higher education, of the NHS and of another 1.3 million public and private sector jobs. And of course, if the Tories win and break our unions in the process like Thatcher did, there's no guarantee Labour would win the next election anyway. The labour movement would be demoralised and the Tories could get in for a further one or even two terms like in the 80s.

Fighting talk

No wonder anger is growing so much in the workplace and across the union

movement. We can see that in the huge majorities for strike action on 30 June. The PCS has adopted a motion calling for a one-day general strike. And the CWU adopted the call at their conference in May.

So union leaders are having to speak out and sound more militant. Admittedly TUC general secretary Brendan Barber still sounds for all the world as if he's dealing with a minor inconvenience rather than a historic assault on the living standards of his seven million members. But those union leaders who unlike Barber are actually elected by workers are feeling the pressure.

Dave Prentis, the leader of public sector giant Unison, was until recently the most reluctant of the union leaders to call for action. He said on 26 March we should just 'march in our thousands and vote in our millions', and that was his sole strategy. But now, just before his union's annual conference, he changed tack.

Prentis called for an 'unprecedented' wave of strikes, referring to the general strike of 1926 and the miners' strike, but added that unlike the miners "we are going to win". He criticised one-day strikes because they are 'not enough' to force governments to back down.

What should militants make of this? On the one hand Prentis is right – one-day strikes are not enough. Just look at France and Greece – they've held 10 general strikes in Greece over the last 12 months but without staying out indefinitely, the government has clung to power.

On the other hand, Prentis' rhetoric is hypocritical. He was criticising one-day strikes as if he wants to be more radical – but in fact it's probably an excuse given his union is not joining the tremendous day of action on 30 June.

So let's hold him to the statement – let's hold all the union leaders to any militant speeches they make. High on rhetoric and low on promises as they are, let's raise the call loud and clear: Union Leaders, TUC: Call a General Strike to Bring Down the Tories.

Pressure from below

Some will say, 'why call on those sell-outs to act?' To them we reply, millions of workers still trust their leaders and are mobilised by them, as we saw on 26 March. To fail to call on the leaders to act is to let them off the hook.

Others say we don't need a general strike because we can make do with coordinated actions. This means unions all ballot around their own legal disputes and strike at the same time, without taking solidarity action with other workers which is against the law.

Sounds good – until you look at it more closely. If our disputes are not united, if we don't say 'we'll all stay out until we all win', then the Tories and employers can settle with one section to take them off the battlefield. And in fact this is what has happened with the tubeworkers just before 30 June. In the face of

three days of threatened action including 30 June, Transport for London backed down in a dispute over victimisation of union members. A great example that the threat of strike action can win results. But also an example of how the bosses can concede to one section temporarily to weaken coordinated action.

Others say the slogan for a general strike should not be raised because workers 'are not ready'. First answer: 'how do you know?' Unless you campaign for it, you'll never find out.

But the second answer is the killer. 'Without a general strike we won't win.' So it's time for militants and socialists to stop debating whether we need a general strike, or is the working class ready for the slogan, or 'I'd love one, but...', or what if, what if and what if? There is only one question left about the general strike worth discussing and that is: how are we going to get one?

We need to raise the call for union leaders to put their money where their mouths are and call a general strike. But we'd be mad if we waited for them to do it. And even if they did, they could always sell it out after a few days – like the TUC did in 1926.

So we need to move fast to organise the strongest possible coordinations of workers across the unions and across the regions so that we can take control of the action, so we can push forward to a general strike and so we can control it until the Coalition and their cuts lie shattered at our feet.

One way is to convene mass meetings in every city and elect coordinating committees at them. Another could be to occupy the squares like in Spain and Greece and use mass assemblies to elect our own action councils. Still another way might be to federate all the local anticuts committees that have sprung up across the country into a great democratic All-Britain Anticuts Federation. There are many ways, but one way or another, this must be the perspective if we are to have a chance of winning.

Finally, we need an army of militant workers and youth committed to that perspective and out there agitating for it in every workplace, every school, every college, every estate, and every campaigning group. That means political agitation, and for that we need a political party. Every union branch, every campaign, every socialist organisation that wants this to happen needs to come together. We need a great political convention to draw up, debate out and adopt an action programme to beat the cuts and then form a New Anticapitalist Party to fight for it.

Forming a new party is crucial, not just to help us organise our resistance better, but to provide a political alternative to the mainstream pro-capitalist parties, who are busy arguing over how deep the cuts should be, not whether we should have them at all. If you agree with these perspectives and ideas then you should get organised and join Workers Power.

What would a rank and file movement look like today?

Union activists often come up against their own leaders even before they can take on the bosses. Marxists advocate a militant grassroots movement to solve this problem. But, asks *Jeremy Dewar*, what would one look like today?

TWICE THIS year we've caught a glimpse of the potential strength of the trade union movement in Britain. First, on 26 March when half a million marched through London, and the second snapshot: 30 June, when 750,000 are out on strike.

But we had to drag our union leaders into launching this level of action. They delayed and delayed, then some still proclaimed strikes "premature", and finally they failed to plan any follow up till... October.

All this shows that it is not the workers who lack fighting spirit; they have responded magnificently whenever called into battle. It is the generals who misdirect our campaign. We need to turn the unions on their head: put the rank and file in command and unite our forces into a class war.

We are entering a new, prolonged period of intense conflict. If we do not build new organisations capable of defending past gains, find ways to hold our leaders to account or replace them, and thoroughly transform our unions into democratic fighting bodies – then the working class will pay a heavy price for the bosses' crisis.

We urgently need a rank and file movement to emerge out of today's struggles. But how can we make it happen? What will it look like? And what are its tasks?

Principles first

It is vital that the rank and file militants retain their independence from all wings of the trade union bureaucracy, including the left leaders. Time and again, the TUC lefts, like Mark Serwotka (PCS), Bob Crow (RMT) and Matt Wrack (FBU), have allowed jobs to be destroyed or conditions eroded without a fight. Too often they have called off action merely for "talks" rather than pressing on for victory. Habitually, they prefer stop-start tactics of one-day strikes and cave in front of the judges and the anti-union laws.

So long as unions caucuses tie themselves to these "lefts", they will be unable to provide an alternative leadership at key moments. For example, the United Left in Unite recently threatened to expel the Socialist Workers Party for daring to criticise left wing officials for selling out the BA cabin crew dispute. For them, the reputation of "our left general secretary", as they called Len McCluskey, was more important than loyalty to a section of workers who had been fighting for over a year and had been shamefully let down by their union leaders.

Workers Power supports the Grass Roots Left in Unite, precisely because it is not afraid to criticise the left as well as the right. But this doesn't mean reconciling ourselves to being



in permanent opposition. Grass Roots Left came out of Jerry Hicks' campaign for the General Secretary post, gaining 50,000 votes for an independent fighting candidate.

For us, the election was a vital way of promoting a new kind of trade union activism as well as trying to win the leadership. If rank and file candidates won a majority they would begin a radical democratisation of the union ending the power of full time officials and replacing it with that of recallable lay delegates at all levels.

Workplace organisation

A rank and file movement must be rooted in the workplaces. In this sense it would be a world away from today's broad left groups, which exist primarily to get left wing officials elected or at best to win ballots for strike action. In truth, such organisations cannot transform the unions and inevitably start to decline when the left leaders, once elected, fail to stem job losses and pay cuts.

So how can we make a start in this direction? By recruiting new and young workers into the unions and launching unionisation drives to break into new areas: agency workers, temps, cleaners and so on. From these new layers of trade union members there will emerge new workplace reps and activists, who can start to take up workers' grievances and challenge management diktats.

This requires agitational material, which we can either produce through official channels if we have co-thinkers in union positions, such as membership secretary or publicity officer, or unofficially.

In Lambeth Unison, a group of us who wanted to change the way the branch operated started off publishing material under the name, Lambeth Activists. We won scores of new members in this way, doubling and trebling the number of shop stewards in some areas, as the keenest and most dedicated recruits stepped up to the plate and took on responsi-

bilities.

The key to making such gains permanent is to keep up the agitation. Older workers and seasoned shop stewards who are not so worn out or cynical that they cannot recognise a fresh wind blowing through the branch and perk up in response. Soon workers are discussing what the bosses and the union leaders are doing; they start to have views on these issues; they begin to ask for meetings and demand action.

Of course, none of this is rocket science. Neither is it fresh thinking: socialist groups pumped out hundreds of workplace bulletins in the 1970s. It was not the only reason union membership and the number of shop stewards rose so rapidly in that decade, but it both reflected a high level of industrial action and reinforced that high level. The point is that we are again entering such a period, when such workplace agitation is both possible and necessary.

Social media

The power of new media tools, like blogs, facebook and twitter, have escaped no one's notice since the Arab spring revolutions. They are supremely suitable to rank and file activism because, just like Mubarak's Egypt and Assad's Syria, the workplace in "modern" Britain is also a dictatorship. The worker who is found giving out unofficial literature or "abusing" the company's email system can be instantly dismissed for gross misconduct. But with a mobile phone in her pocket, today's activist can take the boss or the union bureaucrat by surprise.

Postal workers successfully used facebook and chatrooms in the 2007 dispute, spreading news of victimisations and walkouts, and agitating for escalating strike action. The Royal Mail Chat website provided a forum for posties to swap news and have ongoing dialogues on threads, using pseudonyms to keep prying management trolls guessing. The website

undoubtedly played a major role in spreading the wildcat strike down from Edinburgh to Oxford, which brought Royal Mail bosses to their knees.

Rank and file groups

But the postal wildcats did not win. Why? Because they had no alternative to the CWU leaders, who remained in control of calling off the strikes and entering secret negotiations with the bosses. Imagine if the strikers had their own command centre. At the time, Workers Power militants argued for a rank and file conference to unite all regions, branches and depots who are prepared to strike on for victory to hammer out a plan of action and elect a leadership to implement it. Our motto was 'with the union leaders where possible, without them if necessary.'

Today, we are faced with the same task. We can start by uniting all those workplaces that want to coordinate strike action against the cuts, rank and file groups and local anticuts committees. This is already happening around 30 June – the point is to continue to organise afterwards, demand more action from our leaders and prepare to call strikes ourselves if the officials refuse.

The current situation provides union activists and socialists with a great opportunity to forge a new, rank and file movement in Britain – just like militants used the trades coun-

cils in the 1920s and shop stewards committees in the 1970s.

These attempts floundered eventually for political reasons. The Communist Party tied the rank and file groups to the policy of the left leaders, leaving the rank and file disarmed when the lefts betrayed them. The Socialist Workers Party, on the other hand, tried to ignore political issues altogether, on the false assumption that "politics would come later". They had no answer to the Labour government of 1974-79, which cut thousands of jobs and closed mines and factories.

The rank and file movement today should see itself as an indispensable tool in the struggle for socialism. So long as the unions are affiliated to Labour, it should demand the party supports all strikes and opposes all cuts, committing itself in office to reversing the cuts, nationalising the banks and big business and placing them under workers' control.

But just like we recognise the need to break with the bureaucracy, so we will need to break with the party of the trade union bureaucracy. A rank and file movement should ally itself to a consistent working class policy, a revolutionary action programme to seize the power and open the road to socialism. This means building a revolutionary party, based on the militant unions and the fighting youth.

Reform the unions

Taken from From Protest To Power, manifesto of the League for the Fifth International

The upper ranks of the trade unions are not simply controlled by individual misleaders. The full-time officials constitute a conservative caste with its own interests separate and opposed to those of the majority of union members. Instead of being under the control of the members, the officials control the members.

To the workers they preach a reformist policy that leaves the levers of exploitation and control in the hands of the bourgeois. When workers' discontent breaks out the bureaucrats try to calm things down and avoid militant action. When the patience of the workers is exhausted, the union leaders may reluctantly allow action so as not to lose support. At the same time, they limit action to one-day strikes or series of stoppages. The effect is to exhaust and demoralise the activists, preparing the way for a settlement falling far short of the workers' demands.

Even where left wing officials promote unlimited strike action, they tend everywhere to leave the power of the bureaucracy itself intact. Even where they are forced to fight they refrain from appealing over the heads of the leaders of other unions for action.

Replacing right wing bureaucrats with left wing bureaucrats – while a step forward – is cruelly insufficient. Unless the roots of bureaucracy are ripped out, we cannot regain control of our unions and pursue struggles to victory.

We advocate rank and file movements within and across the unions committed to:

- The election and recallability of all officials
- The payment of officials at the average wage of their members
- All strikes and pickets under the control of rank and file action committees
- Militant action, not collaboration with the bourgeoisie.

Greece on the verge of revolution – but can the workers win?

Greece is in a prolonged pre-revolutionary crisis. *Dave Stockton* points to how it can be resolved

THE GREEK state is unable to pay the debts and interest demanded by the banks and international finance. So the government of George Papandreou is demanding that the working class, middle class and poor pay the price of the EU and IMF bailout.

And so all the billionaires who lent money to Greece – bondholders from the US, France, Germany and Britain – can continue to squeeze obscene profits from the Greek people. Last year alone they made profits of €50 billion.

The 2010 austerity package has already cost huge numbers of jobs – unemployment is above 15 per cent. Public sector wages have been cut by a quarter, and workers are being made to work an extra half an hour a day with no extra pay. Now the vampires are coming back for more. They want another 150,000 job losses in the public sector and another swinging round of cuts and privatisation.

The Greek people are giving their answer to the government's cuts: "What part of NO did you not understand?" Ten one-day general strikes. Demonstrations hundreds of thousands strong. Militant resistance to police repression. And since 25 May, a mass occupation of Syntagma Square, directly outside the parliament building in Athens.

Despite this the "socialist" PASOK government has once again won a confidence vote in parliament and hopes to ram through the austerity package, amounting to over €78 billion. Around €28 billion of the total is to be raised through spending cuts and increased taxes on the people.

The tenth one day general strike of 15 June was the biggest so far. Now an eleventh, this time for 48 hours, is due on 28-29 June.

For over a month, angry crowds shouting, "Thieves, thieves!" confront the Greek parliamentarians, and try to stop them approving the second austerity package in just over a year. They are enraged that the parliamentary system refuses to enact the will of the people. For an overwhelming majority of Greeks are against the cuts.

Athenian democracy

Nightly popular assemblies in Syntagma Square give voice to their anger and frustration. The occupation is in conscious imitation of the month-long demonstration in Madrid's Puerta del Sol in May and in Cairo's Tahrir Square during the Egyptian Revolution in February. In the square the call goes up for "real" or "direct" democracy. But in Syntagma Square, as in Madrid, the occupiers have so far been unable to come up with a way to give exec-



Protesters give riot police a taste of their own medicine

utive power to their aspirations – to make decisions and then carry them out.

One key reason for this is the principle on which the assemblies are based. As one of their declarations says: "We organise ourselves with direct democracy excluding all political parties. Our voice is our everyday people's assembly."

Speakers are allowed only two or three minutes each, decisions are few and only by consensus, proposals by the hundred are simply recorded. Participants, as in the Spanish square occupations seem intoxicated by the mere experience of self-expression and self-organisation – even if this limits itself to the square and the blogosphere. There is an explosion of ideas and discussion – but if all decisions must be by consensus, the will of the majority can be blocked. The explosion of popular democracy in the squares has not yet taken form as a working class democracy where delegates from the workplaces and the estates can debate, vote and implement decisions.

Pre-revolutionary situation

With the masses against the cuts, the government tottering, a string of general strikes, mass democracy in the squares... so why say Greece is in a pre- and not a revolutionary situation? For the same reason Leon Trotsky gave when describing France in the mid-1930s: "The situ-

ation is revolutionary, as revolutionary as it can be, granted the non-revolutionary policies of the working-class parties."

The leaders of the main Greek trade union federations have consistently blocked the road to a decisive struggle to bring down the government – which means an all-out indefinite general strike. The ADEDY public sector union and GSEE private sector unions are led by officials close to the ruling PASOK party. The smaller but more militant PAME union is close to the Greek Communist Party (KKE). They have refused to escalate their one day general strikes into an all out indefinite strike – and in fact both the KKE and the smaller radical left party SYRIZA have refused to call for an all out indefinite general strike too.

Otherwise the classic conditions for the eruption of a revolutionary situation as defined by the Russian revolutionary V.I. Lenin are fully present. The ruling class cannot go on ruling in the old way. The workers are not prepared to go on living in the old way. Nor are the middle classes who are being ruined by the cuts and the downturn.

The ruling class parties have accepted the demands of the EU and IMF, but they are deeply divided over how to enforce them. After the 15 June general strike led to violent clashes between demonstrators and

police. Prime Minister George Papandreou tottered. He offered to resign in favour of a national unity government. But conservative opposition leader Antonis Samaras refused to take the poisoned chalice.

A pre-revolutionary situation as ripe as this can quickly turn into a fully revolutionary situation: one where the question of an alternative power to the weak and divided government is posed. This can happen – if mass pressure forces the union leaders to go further than one-day protest strikes and call a general strike, and if the square assemblies go beyond consensus-limited talking shops and set up democratic councils of action with delegates from the workplaces, the unions and the neighbourhoods. These could not just discuss, but take control of the strikes out of the hands of the hesitating union bureaucrats of PASOK and the KKE.

Revolutionary socialists need to take the fight for this perspective into the heart of the battle – not just join the masses on the streets, wait and hope this happens, nor just congratulate and raise the "self-confidence" of the masses. The task is to fight for a general strike and workers' councils to control it, fight for this in the unions and in the squares against those who are blocking it, whether sincerely like the libertarians or cynically like the union bureaucrats.

And there is no time to lose. A pre-revolutionary situation as ripe as this can go rotten too. If the working class does not succeed in putting forward a fundamental social alternative and establish a workers' government to carry it out, if those in the squares and workplaces do not create organs of an alternative power to the capitalist state then there will be a further decomposition of Greek society. We could see a reactionary radicalisation, a proto-fascist and racist mass movement focused on "restoring order and national pride", inciting pogroms against migrants, building on the nationalism of some of the demonstrators (which has been stimulated by the Stalinist KKE's emphasis on "Greek independence").

With mass unemployment and social misery caused by the French, German and British bankers, and with the risk of default and exclusion from the Eurozone leading to isolation, the threat of a descent into nationalism and barbarism could emerge. Against this there is only one alternative: a socialist revolution that is not afraid to speak its name.

Instead the main trade union federations, ADEDY and GSEE, pin their hopes on restoring social partnership, based on a "compromise" with the government, accepting some "necessary" cuts and poverty.

The KKE and PAME see the solution in the fantasy of a return to an "independent" but still capitalist Greece, outside the EU, with a restored drachma in place of the euro. This is a reactionary utopia – Greece would be as much a victim of the bond markets and currency speculators as it is now. And a "patriotic" national government would demand even more savage cuts to shore up the country's supposed independence.

General strike

The way forward is an all out general strike. To organise it means building action councils composed of delegates elected in the workplaces, as well from mass assemblies in the city neighbourhoods, towns and the villages. The danger of police provocations means it would need to organise the protection of the strike against state repression and fascist gangs – by forming armed pickets as the embryonic form of a workers' and youth militia.

But as Trotsky said, the general strike inevitably poses the question of power because it paralyzes and suspends the normal functioning of both the economy and the state. This is why the trade union leaders and the reformists of the KKE and Syriza fear a general strike



Greek protesters rage against government cuts and police violence

Greek debt crisis leaves Europe on the brink of financial collapse

With Greece on the verge of default the crisis is set to deepen, writes *Simon Hardy* and *Richard Brenner*. The Eurozone is in serious trouble with Spain and Italy sinking deeper into debt

THE EUROPEAN financial system came within a whisker of collapse again in mid-June.

As police and workers clashed on the streets of Athens and the Greek government shattered, European leaders were forced into a desperate last minute compromise to avoid not only a Greek debt default but the potential collapse of the European banking system and the Euro itself.

In the face of a one-day general strike and massive street protests on 15 June, key members of the ruling PASOK party refused to back the regime's vicious programme of cuts and privatisation, demanded by the International Monetary Fund as a condition for bailing out Greece. Prime Minister George Papandreou was forced to dump allies and invite bitter rivals into a hoped-for coalition national government. They are now racing to get the cuts and sell-offs voted through parliament over the next week.

A huge amount is riding on this, not just in Greece but across the world. On Friday German Chancellor Angela Merkel finally backed down in a dispute with French President Nicholas Sarkozy and the European Central Bank (ECB) over how to broker another Greek bailout. Merkel had wanted private lenders to Greece – including banks and other institutional investors – to “take a haircut” and be forced to accept some losses.

She blinked first in this stand off because the entire banking bourgeoisie, backed by the ECB, other European governments and the IMF, threatened a full-on meltdown of the system if she didn't.

Greece's total state debt is €330 billion. Like all the large state debts incurred since the 2007-08 crisis, it arose not because of “overspending” on welfare as the Tories and the lying right wing papers suggest, but because of plummeting tax revenues following the recession and the soaring cost of unemployment benefits. The capitalist crisis caused the debt, not the other way round.

The Greek government cannot afford to meet repayments and interest on its existing bailout. The Greek economy is nowhere near where it needs to be to start repaying; it would take a budget surplus of at least 7 per cent just to keep debt at the same level as it was at the end of 2010. But the likelihood of such a surplus is nil – recession is ripping through the Greek economy. More unemployed and less tax revenue is creating a scissor crisis of state finance.

As Swiss bank UBS's George Magnus admitted last month, “I don't think there is a question over whether Greece is going to default; it is just a question of whether it is an orderly or disorderly one.” But when Merkel suggested that private lenders should be forced to write off some of the debt, the financiers went into over-

drive to block it. Their funds stopped buying Greek bonds (which is how governments borrow money), pushing the interest payable by Greece to investors on two-year bonds up to a staggering 30 per cent, while the bond price fell through the floor.

ECB president Jean-Claude Trichet then moved in, claiming that any compulsory write-offs of debt to private capitalists would be treated as a “credit event”, which is banker-speak for a default. And then, he implied, all hell would break loose. Simultaneously credit analysts at the big three rating agencies, Moody's, Standard & Poor's and Fitch, all warned that pressure on private investors would make them issue a default rating on Greek debt. Standard and Poor's cut its rating on Greek debt to CCC – the lowest it has ever given for any country in the world.

One of the biggest issues for the major European powers is the amount of Greek debt held by their banks (see table). French banks are the most exposed, holding nearly four times as much as the German banks, which explains why Sarkozy took a tougher line against forcible write-offs than Merkel. And the ECB itself may hold more than €40 billion of Greek debt, according to estimates from Barclays. So in a classic example of financial blackmail it warned that in a default it would have to cut off funding to Greece altogether.

A default would also trigger the insurance policies held by investors against the risk of a government refusing to repay its debt. These policies – called credit default swaps – are what brought down the biggest insurance company in the US – AIG – during the great banking crisis of 2008, triggered by Lehman Brothers going bust after the US government failed to bail it out.

A Greek default would be like another Lehman Brothers collapse – a seismic event for the world economy. As the IMF puts it, “In a serious market event, a shock could be transmitted beyond the Eurozone”.

So Merkel made a humiliating climbdown and did a deal with Sarkozy. But now they have to make it work.

The *Financial Times* revealed just how fragile this deal could be. The proposed scheme will invite banks to voluntarily write off some of Greece's debts. But it will affect only the €85 billion that Greece is supposed to pay back over the next three years and, as the European Commission has warned, “very much less than full renewal [i.e. repayment of the €85 billion] is to be expected from such a strictly voluntary operation”.

But while as the private bankers are allowed to decide voluntarily if they must pay for the crisis, the Greek people are given no choice at all. The new cuts package means €6.5 billion spending cuts and tax rises this

Greece's loan sharks - who loaned what

Country	Total lending exposure to Greece (millions)	Total government debt exposure to Greece (millions)
Total of 24 countries	145,783	54,196
European banks	138,317	52,258
Non-European banks	9,466	1,938
Germany	33,974	22,651
Italy	4,085	2,345
Japan	1,631	432
Spain	974	540
UK	14,080	3,408
US	7,318	1,505
France	56,740	14,960

year alone. This is twice what was previously agreed with the IMF and the bond markets, coming on top of an earlier cuts programme that has driven Greek unemployment up to a record 16.2 percent after three years of recession. And another 150,000 public sector workers will be sacked.

No one in Greece has voted for more austerity – but rather than elections or a referendum on the cuts and IMF privatisation package, the politicians just re-jigged and reshuffled the seats in the cabinet to fend off collapse.

The reshaped government in Athens will now take desperate measures to get the cuts through the parliament, warning that if they do not pass the package, the bondholders will refuse to do a deal. As *The Guardian's* Nils Pratley put it: “If Greece doesn't have an effective government capable of imposing the austerity measures demanded by its lenders, the game is close to up.” It is a clear and obvious example of the international financial institutions imposing cuts through the dictatorship of credit and debt.

And this crisis has the potential to sweep the world. Spain is next in line for a bailout – one which would exhaust the EU's entire existing bailout facility and would threaten holdings of banks all over Europe. Investors are aware of the risk, which is why in the midst of the Greek crisis they stopped buying Spanish bonds, forcing the Spanish state to pay far more interest on its debt and making a Spanish default more likely.

Further and almost unnoticed in the chaos last week, rating agency Moody's downgraded Italy, complaining that southern Europe's biggest economy is mired in debt and that austerity measures being pushed by Silvio Berlusconi's government may not be enough. As we have written before, the EU cannot afford to bail out Italy, raising the spectre of a collapse of the European financial system.

If Greece's creditors cannot agree to a sufficient waiver of its debt and

it defaults, if Spain or Italy need to be bailed out, then the only remaining possibility could be a break-up of the Eurozone. Either the poorer countries, busted out, will leave the Euro and devalue their currencies sharply, weathering years without support from international banks, or Germany will lose patience and walk away itself.

This crisis is not just about Europe even. In Japan debt has risen sharply following the tsunami and earthquake. In the US, Congress has a limit on state debt of a staggering \$14.3 trillion, but federal reserve chairman Ben Bernanke warns that refusal to raise that limit might “require the federal government to delay or renege on payments for obligations already entered into”, which means default.

As we wrote last month, the whole system in which states are funded under capitalism is deeply unstable because it relies on lending by private capitalists, and taxes from their profits. As capitalism goes through its cycles in which rates of profit tend to decline, crises break out which reduce tax income and force governments to borrow more. So while governments privatise services, they nationalise private debt and force the working class and the poor to pay it back.

“I am here by patriotic duty to carry out a real war” said the new Greek finance minister Venizelos. Indeed – a war on working class people, on the unemployed, the youth, all the users of welfare and public services.

Workers and youth need to respond in kind to Venizelos, Papandreou and the IMF by extending their action into an indefinite general strike, bringing down the new government, and putting in its place a government based on popular committees of working class delegates, a government that would renounce the debt, confiscate the assets of the banks and corporations, sending out the clearest possible call on the masses across Europe and the world to do the same.

like the plague. So revolutionaries should raise the call for a workers' government, based on the workers' parties and unions and on the councils of action – not on the discredited bourgeois parliament.

A programme

This is the only way an emergency programme to combat the crisis could be implemented in the interests of workers, youth, peasants and the impoverished middle class.

Such a programme would need to include immediate renunciation of the public debt, expropriation without compensation of the banks and big business, both domestic and foreign, the confiscation of big private capital and the reorganisation of the economy under workers' control.

It would mean fixing a minimum wage and social benefits, such as pensions and unemployment pay, at a level set by the labour movement and launching a programme of socially useful public works to employ those without jobs.

These are just the most urgent measures for an anticapitalist workers' government. This could set the pattern across Europe as Spain, Ireland, Portugal and Italy all face bailouts and massive cuts.

As the bosses' attempts to unite Europe fail, the workers could make it happen – in a Socialist United States of Europe.

For this something more is necessary. The many thousands of far left militants in Greece must set themselves the task of building a united revolutionary workers' party that can fight for such programme. Such a party need not be a vote-catching machine of deception like PASOK or a big bureaucratic sect like the KKE. Nor need it be a confused mixture of the two like SYRIZA. It must assemble in its ranks as many as possible of the youth and the trade union militants.

It should fight to break the hold of the union bureaucracy, and also the limits of the spontaneous assemblies which are paralysed from making anything but utopian consensus decisions and blocked from electing representatives. A new revolutionary party must fight for the formation of workers' and popular councils in all the cities and towns of Greece.

The one thing that will cry out for such bodies and convince workers and youth of their necessity is an all out general strike to bring down the government.

The present state of the workers, and youth, mobilised and militant, makes this fully possible.

THE

REVOLUTIONARY

PARTY

The resistance today, from Tunisia and Egypt to Wisconsin and London, has moved into focus. What forms of organisation and what type of politics can we orientate the new movements towards the socialist goal of the past? Jo Cassidy and Dave Stockton explain what we mean by

The urgent need for a new kind of party

AT A time of intense crisis in Europe - generated by the demands that ordinary people pay the full costs of the bank bailouts - the prestige of political parties stands at an all time low.

In Syntagma Square thousands of young Greeks chant, thieves, thieves at the MPs, voting for another devastating programme of cuts. So hostile are they to the betrayal of the politicians that even representatives of left wing parties are told they were not welcome to speak to the crowds.

In Britain the way that the Liberal-Democrats brazenly broke their election pledges on tuition fees outraged many students who voted for them and led to the storming of the Tories' Milbank HQ and tens of thousands demonstrating around parliament in November and December.

In 2011 new movements - now calling themselves the "outraged" - have taken to the squares and streets right across Europe.

From Athens to London and Madrid young people repeatedly told the cameras that parties offer them no real alternative. They feel the parliamentary system is unrepresentative of the majority who were opposed to the bank bailouts and the cuts in vital services.

The result is that many young people have drawn the conclusion that it is political parties as such that are a big part of the problem. Instead they counterpose the social movements, inspired by Cairo's Tahrir Square copied in Madrid's Puerta del Sol or Athens Syntagma squares. They argue that the answer is to create some sort of direct democracy.

Occupying the squares is a positive step - demonstrating on a mass scale that "we are the people" and that we reject paying the price of keeping billionaire bankers, corporate CEOs and overpaid politicians living the high life. It is excellent that by using of the social media the stifling private and state control of press and TV can be circumvented and millions made aware of the rip off that is being perpetrated on them.

But as the intransigence of the Greek government shows protests alone - even mass square occupations and one day general strikes will not stop the cuts and austerity. If no political alternative exists to the old parties, totally united in their determination to carry out cuts they will continue to win elections and carry out cuts. In Britain too there was no alternative to Gordon Brown's cuts and bailouts except the Tories and Lib-Dems, who just made them even faster. In Greece, Portugal and Spain the alternative to the "Socialist Party" cutters are... the right wing parties who will do the same.

What we must recognize is that we have not only to block the capitalist politicians from carrying out their plunder of our public services but to also take away their powers to carry out future attacks. To do this we need an organisation which can give a lead to the struggles. In short we need a political party, though one of a radically different sort to those of our rulers.

In fact the mass revolt against austerity has opened up a space for a new left - to build an anti-capitalist and revolutionary party which breaks with the reformism of the old Left. It must be democratically controlled by its own members. The role of the revolutionary party is not primarily to win elections - it is to lead the fight on the streets and in the workplace.

Unlike the capitalist parties it must not make big promises and then in power just do what the bosses and the bankers dictate. Its main task is to win the support of millions through leading them into action. Elections should be used to publicise its programme for mass action not to pander to the prejudices and propaganda of the millionaire owned media. When it wins MPs and councillors they must not control the party but be under the control of the party.

Such a revolutionary party today could have a huge impact within the movements of resistance, arguing for tactics to take the movement forward, providing a voice for all the oppressed, fighting racism, sex-

ism and imperialist wars as well as all exploitation and poverty.

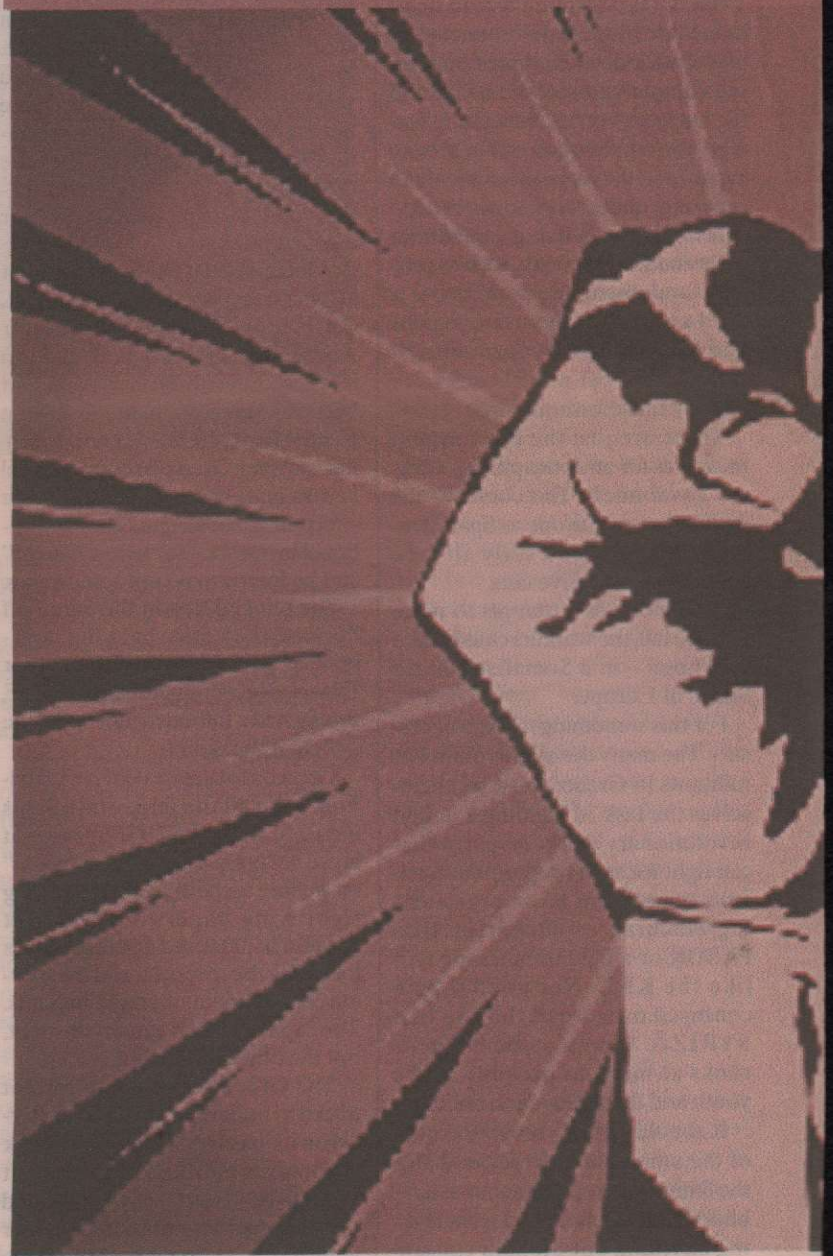
In last year's student movement for example, a revolutionary party could have kept the spontaneous fire of revolt burning long after the vote was passed in Parliament to raise tuition fees. It could have organised school and university students to stay in Parliament Square and in occupation in the universities across the country. It could also have organised workers to support the students by taking strike action in solidarity until the ConDem policy was reversed.

Such a revolutionary party could organise the rank and file in the unions to take unofficial action. While the trade union leaders are dragging their feet about whether to call effective action which can challenge the cuts, it could prepare workers to coordinate a general strike, with or without the trade union leaders.

It is the role of a revolutionary party to throw itself into every movement, whether for higher wages or more democracy - as we are seeing in the Middle East - and patiently explain its politics. Only a political party can put forward both a total solution to the crisis based on making the rich pay and the project of building a society based on meeting human need. It can work out a strategy and the key tactics necessary at any given moment which can achieve this goal. It is through this process that we can fuse communist ideas with the mass social movements and the class struggle.

The members of such a party must be the vanguard of the struggle who show the value of their ideas in practice.

Without it there is always the danger that - as with the education struggles last December - they eventually exhaust themselves and we have to start all over again with the next issue. A party can transmit the lessons we have learned and speed up the process. It can and take us from the present defensive battles to the struggle for power.



"The progress of a class toward class consciousness, that is, the complex and a contradictory process. The class itself is not homogeneous and follows different paths and at different times. The bourgeoisie participates in its own institutions, or utilizes those already existing, in order to oppose the class. Therefore, for the general historical interests of the proletariat find their expression in the Communist Party consists in winning over the majority of the proletariat. The Communist Party cannot fulfill its mission except by preserving its independence apart from all other parties and organizations within the class."

London, has brought a fundamental question back
should we adopt in the fight against capitalism? How
? How do we avoid repeating the mistakes of the
a revolutionary party

REVOLUTIONARY PARTY



building of a revolutionary party which leads the proletariat, is a
ogeneous. Its different sections arrive at class consciousness by
s actively in this process. Within the working class, it creates its
ose certain strata of workers to others. Within the proletariat
ater part of its historical journey, it remains split politically...The
ommunist Party - when its policies are correct. The task of the
etariat; and only thus is the socialist revolution made possible. The
ompletely and unconditionally, its political and organizational
n and without the working class." Leon Trotsky

Principles of the revolutionary party

MANY PEOPLE believe that the model of the revolutionary party was developed exclusively by V.I. Lenin. This overlooks the foundations laid by Karl Marx, who believed that the self-emancipation of the working class could not be achieved by "saviours from on high"; that a working class party must be independent of all capitalist parties or personalities.

Marx and Engels also believed it must embody a unity of theory and practice. The understanding of capitalism, the nature of exploitation, of crises, of social questions like women's liberation has to be developed and implemented in order to change the world. In turn its practice enriches and develops its theory.

But it was indeed the Russian revolutionary Lenin who distilled these lessons into a practical guide for building a revolutionary party: one whose task was to lead the working class in a revolutionary assault on the capitalist state, with all its other sophisticated instruments of repression and deception.

The model of the party that Lenin developed cannot be treated as a fixed formula that can be imposed on any situation; what a revolutionary party looks like will change and adapt according to historical circumstances and national conditions.

Such a party must be able to continue its work in conditions of illegality when the ruling class deprives us of our democratic rights. At the same time when we have democratic rights a revolutionary party must use them to the full.

Consciousness

Nevertheless, there are fundamental principles, which are vital and form the foundations of any effective revolutionary party through all the stages of its life. These were outlined first in Lenin's classic work, *What Is To Be Done?*

This included the following statement, still highly controversial to this day:

"Class political consciousness can only be brought to the working class from without, that is only from outside the economic struggle."

This has been subject to so much misinterpretation that we should clarify what it means. It does not mean that workers must be led by outsiders, by an elite of middle class intellectuals. Nor does it deny that class consciousness originates in day-to-day the struggles against the bosses and their state under capitalism.

It means quite simply that struggles over wages and conditions, over economic issues alone; waged by trade unions alone, will not develop spontaneously into a struggle for socialism; it will not automatically create a revolutionary socialist consciousness.

The reason for this is twofold. The unions' outlook starts from that of the separate trade or occupation of its members and at a certain point these divisions tend to obstruct a class wide outlook. Secondly, work-

ers are subjected to powerful influences "from the outside" quite apart from that of revolutionaries. Working class people are subjected to the ceaseless propaganda from the schools, the media, the churches; all stressing that capitalism is the best, in fact the only possible system.

This is all the more effective, not because workers are particularly unintelligent - on the contrary, capitalism has increasingly had to educate the working class - but because capitalism is the highest form of class society; it hides its exploitation under the ideology of democracy and the free contract between worker and employer.

This barrage of propaganda aimed at keeping the workers divided and dominated by ruling class ideas can only be combated by the ideas of socialism and revolution. This can only be done "from outside" of the sphere of pure and simple trade unionism by a political party whose goal is to transform fragmented and sectional struggles into a political struggle which identifies capitalism as the enemy.

Lead from the front

But this party cannot remain outside of the struggles of the working class. It has to be radically different to the purely parliamentary parties like the Labour Party which leaves the struggle in the workplace to the trade unions (except when it condemns strikes as "irresponsible").

For a Leninist party its members must be amongst the best activists and explain in every arena of struggle that capitalism is the root, not only of low pay, unemployment, cuts, but also of exploitation, racism, sexism and war. They must be fighters in the forefront, the most dangerous places of the class struggle. If they earn the respect of their fellow workers they will be able to play the role of a vanguard.

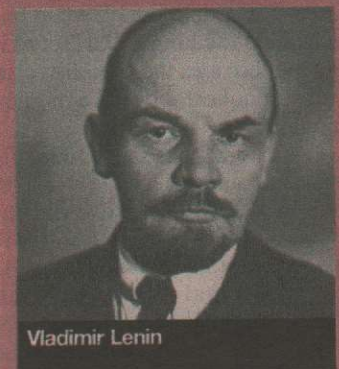
Lenin's idea is that party members must be cadres - professional revolutionaries - meaning not paid officials, but people who devote considerable time and energy to politics and make it the centre of their lives. Their work is in the old revolutionary slogan to "educate, agitate and organise."

The great majority of its cadres must be workers if they are to be real leaders in the class struggle, but the party must draw into its ranks the best fighters from all struggles and make these struggles an integral part of its own programme and activity.

That was what the Bolshevik Party was like and why it was able to turn the "spontaneous" revolution of February 1917 into the conscious seizure of power by the workers councils in October. These key principles of revolutionary politics, programme and internationalism are as relevant today as when Lenin developed them and it is the burning task of revolutionary socialists to put them into practice in the huge battles we face today.

Democratic centralism not bureaucracy

LENIN'S MODEL of the revolutionary party, when put into practice by the Bolsheviks, managed to achieve a real workers' revolution, based on the democracy of workers councils (soviets). The international workers' movement has been unable to repeat this victory since. Indeed, the experience of the 20th century has marred the image of the revolutionary party amongst activists today. This can be put down to the influence of Stalin over the world communist movement following the bureaucratisation of the Soviet Union and the Communist Parties internationally. It meant the total erosion of internal democracy and plurality within the communist parties. It signaled the turning point, from the healthy, living revolutionary parties of the early 1920s to the bureaucratic parties of the rest of the 20th century.



Vladimir Lenin

The parties became tools of the dictatorship in the USSR, their militants uncritical and passive. The genuine Communist tradition of critical thinking was crushed internally.

The fundamental principle of internationalism was replaced by following orders from Moscow. From the mid-1930s Communist Parties forged links not just with reformist workers parties but also with those of the liberal bourgeoisie. The aim was to win capitalist allies to support Soviet Union, which it was claimed was building socialism in one country. Revolutionary opportunities were squandered in China, Germany, France and Spain to preserve the Soviet bureaucracy which itself became a barrier to the creation of socialism and workers democracy. Genuine working class democracy - democratic centralism was replaced by bureaucratic centralism. It was the exact opposite of Lenin's model where there is freedom of debate and discussion before decisions are taken and everyone acts on them. Discipline in action does not preclude democracy; the two re-enforce one another.

Democratic centralism is the way that the workers movement organises, in a workplace we have a vote for a strike and we accept the majority decision. That is democracy - and it is the same principle in a revolutionary party. The lessons of the 20th century cannot be ignored, they must be taken into account to expand and renew our idea of the revolutionary party. We must emphasise the democracy at the heart of the party. It is a healthy culture of internal debate which allow a party to develop a correct programme and this can never be discarded, as it was by the Communist International after 1924.

When revolution

The year 2011 is a year of revolution. Uprisings sweep across the Middle East as rebellion against kings and dictators move from one country to another. And in Europe the crisis is spreading upheaval from Greece to Spain and beyond. *Simon Hardy* looks at another "mad year" and ask what lessons the Great Revolutions of 1848 have for workers and youth fighting today

THE YEAR 1848 was a turning point in European history. Fifty years after the French revolution Europe was still in a state of transition from one form of society to another. The old feudal system, which had dominated Europe, was passing away, being supplanted by capitalism – in very few places had it been accomplished thoroughly and completely.

Even in France, famous for the Great Revolution of 1789 that had beheaded the king and ushered in the modern age, the capitalist class had still not established a modern republic.

France was still a majority peasant country. Despite a revolution in 1830 which drove out the Bourbons who had been restored to the throne in 1815, France still had a constitutional monarch, Louis Phillipe. His ministers ruled for the highest echelons of the financial bourgeoisie, the bankers.

The 19th century historian de Tocqueville described Europe as being like a "volcano". Contradictions were growing between the still surviving remnants of the old society, – the absolutist monarchy and nobility – and the newer classes, which were destined to make up the capitalist society that we know today.

Classes

These were the middle classes, growing richer and demanding more power and say in how society was run, and the working class – which had expanded massively since the turn of the century.

The young working class was concentrated in a few key cities, like Paris, London, Vienna, Manchester and Milan. They lived in slum tenements as the infrastructure of the cities had not been able to catch up with the massive growth of the population.

In 1845-47 a severe economic crisis hit the continent. Like the great crisis of 2007-08 it began in the finance sector. A banking crisis in England, caused by the collapse of the railway boom, and a steep decline in the price of cereals in France, reverberated across the economy, causing growing unemployment.

In many countries working class resistance broke out; massive strikes and pickets were organised outside factories. All the while the monarchies backed the bankers and the landowners against the demands of the people.

On 12 January 1848 the volcano erupted – beginning on the island of Sicily. The population rose up against the Bourbon king. They successfully established an independent state for

16 months, adopting a constitution which called for the unification of Italy.

This was opposed by the many feudal monarchs who ruled over various parts of what would become Italy. Sicily was an important breakthrough for the struggle for democracy. But the next revolutions would strike at the heart of Europe itself – first Paris and then across the German states.

Third French revolution

The February revolution in France, a mass, popular movement composed of the various disenfranchised classes, rose up and overthrew Louis Phillipe and his band of corrupt financiers that had been bleeding France dry. The second republic was born.

The newly installed provisional government was dominated by bourgeois Republicans (capitalists and various middle class leaders), along with a minority of reformist socialists from the working class, led by Louis Blanc. It organised elections for a constituent assembly in April. However the provisional government was weak, divided between the different classes and unwilling to rule in the interests of the working class which had been such a crucial force in bringing it to power.

Karl Marx described it at the time: "The Provisional Government which emerged from the February barricades necessarily mirrored in its composition the different parties which shared in the victory. It could not be anything but a compromise between the different classes which together had overturned the July throne, but whose interests were mutually antagonistic. The great majority of its members consisted of representatives of the bourgeoisie."

The provisional government made the cardinal error of trying to appease the financier sections of the capitalist class by refusing to cancel the enormous and growing debt of the now departed king. To pay this debt they imposed a new tax on the peasants.

Fobbed off

Now the revolution changed phase. In the face of mass unemployment, caused by the crisis, the working class now demanded that the constituent assembly pass a law guaranteeing the right to work. Under their pressure it was included in the first draft of the constitution.

Louis Blanc, the most influential reformist socialist of the period, advocated the creation of nationally owned factories to absorb the unemployed and begin a gradual replace-



ment of private capital by social production. But all the provisional government would provide funds for was a network of "National Workshops". Meanwhile it fobbed off Louis Blanc and the workers by creating a commission which met in the Luxembourg Place to "consider solutions to the social question."

Marx called the right to work: "the first clumsy formula wherein the revolutionary demands of the proletariat are summarised. It was transformed into the *droit à l'assistance*, the right to public relief, and what modern state does not feed its paupers in some form or other? The right to work is, in the bourgeois sense, an absurdity, a miserable, pious wish."

"But behind the right to work stands the power over capital; behind the power over capital, the appropriation of the means of production, their subjection to the associated working class, and therefore the abolition of wage labour, of capital, and of their mutual relations. Behind the 'right to work' stood the June insurrection."

Here Marx describes what Leon Trotsky later called a transitional demand, one that connects the needs of the masses to the struggle to overthrow capitalist ownership of production.

By May the National Workshops were employing 100,000 workers. They were basically public work schemes – aimed at providing an income for the unemployed whilst

beginning the task of modernising the medieval cities. The conservatives, the Party of Order, attacked the workshops as places where idlers were paid for doing nothing of real value and where they listened to seditious speeches by revolutionaries and communists.

They rallied support amongst the newly enfranchised male peasants by claiming they were paying for these idlers in Paris and the other large cities. Not for the last time in history a revolution would generate a counter-revolutionary reaction which would soon make a bid for power.

The Party of Order expelled the socialist deputies from the government and within months moved to attack the working class in Paris by closing down the National Workshops. The working class, politicised and radicalised by its experiences in February, was not prepared to meekly accept these attacks.

To arms!

On 22 June they set up barricades in the working class districts – 50,000 workers, an army of rebellion, began to move on the centre of Paris. Never before had such a mass of workers taken up arms to defend themselves and their rights. This was truly a momentous event in the history of the struggle of the working class. The Assembly appointed General Louis-Eugène Cavaignac as dictator. Fresh from bloody victories in colonising

Algeria, he organised a mixed force of regular soldiers and press-ganged criminals into a 130,000 strong army.

The workers' uprising was drowned in blood, after three days of ferocious barricade fighting. Never had the working class organised such a sustained battle. They fought heroically under the red flag in defence of the "Social Republic". A historic chasm opened between the workers' movement and the bourgeois republicans. Around 1,500 workers were killed and 15,000 political prisoners deported to the colonies.

Marx called it "the tremendous insurrection in which the first great battle was fought between the two classes that split modern society". He contrasted the June rising with the February Revolution:

"The February revolution was the nice revolution, the revolution of universal sympathies, because the contradictions which erupted in it against the monarchy were still undeveloped and peacefully dormant, because the social struggle which formed their background had only achieved an ephemeral existence, an existence in phrases, in words. The June revolution is the ugly revolution, the nasty revolution, because the phrases have given place to the real thing."

He drew out the class politics implicit in the events:

"In place of the demands, exuberant in form but still limited and even bourgeois in content, whose concession the proletariat wanted to wring

swept Europe

from the February Republic, there appeared the bold slogan of revolutionary struggle: Overthrow of the bourgeoisie! Dictatorship of the working class!"

The June Days in Paris proved also to be a turning point in the 1848 revolutions right across Europe. After this the forces of reaction, previously on the defensive and making concessions in the form of constituent assemblies, began a steady counter-attack – just as the Arab rulers are doing in the Middle East today.

Counter-revolution

In France the Party of Order now gained total control of the constituent assembly and severely cut back on the right to vote. By December new elections were held and Louis Napoleon, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte was elected President of the Republic.

He posed as a friend of the workers against the bourgeois republicans, promising to restore universal suffrage, but he also pledged to the peasants that he would keep taxes low and the Parisian reds in order.

By 1851 Bonaparte consolidated his rule and pushed through a referendum to appoint him Emperor. Again the peasantry voted to support him, a vote against the hated tax collectors and rich capitalists that they despised. The Catholic church too supported him because he had sent French troops to restore the Pope to power in Rome against the Italian Republicans led by Giuseppe Garibaldi.

The peasantry had become a conservative force, with its small farms secured by the Great French Revolution, its outlook narrowed to the village, with the parish priest the main source of opinions about the outside world. Still a large majority of the population, using universal suffrage, the bourgeois class could use them as an electoral steamroller for reaction.

The army too was mostly made up of peasants and could be sent into the cities to shoot workers, especially when their heads had been filled with tales of the 'red workers betraying the nation'.

Bonapartism

It was this event from which Marx theorised the phenomenon of Bonapartism, when society is so divided and convulsed by open class warfare, with neither class able to completely take power securely and rule in its interest, that a "strong man" must appear. This Bonaparte balances between the classes and seeks to rise above them, adopting dictatorial forms of rule.

Louis Napoleon was able to do this by mobilising the peasantry against the capitalist republicans. The peasants marched to the polls under the slogans, said Marx, "No more taxes,

down with the rich, down with the republic, long live the emperor! Behind the emperor was hidden the peasant war. The republic that they voted down was the republic of the rich". But once in power the emperor defended the capitalists against the workers and indeed the bankers against the peasantry.

Bonapartism is a political phenomenon that capitalism would see again and again, as the working class strug-



Louis Napoleon between the classes

gle makes society unstable. But instead of overthrowing the capitalists, a lack of a revolutionary leadership leads to a dictatorship, usually by an officer in the army (Chiang Kai Shek in China, Franco in Spain, Suharto in Indonesia, Pinochet in Chile, etc).

Revolution spreads to Germany...

In 1848 Germany was much less industrially developed than France, with a large peasantry and small capitalist and working classes. When the popular struggle broke out, it was a result of two key issues.

The middle classes and sections of the capitalist class were propelled into action against the current political order – Germany was divided into 39 states, united in a loose confederation.

The 39 states each represented a German monarch – a King, a Prince, an Archduke, etc. The newly developed bourgeois class demanded universal suffrage (men only!) the right to bear arms and for a national parliament in which all Germans would be represented.

Just as events in Tunisia spurred on the Middle Eastern masses today, the French events inspired the people of Berlin and other large German cities to launch a wave of uprisings. The revolutionaries convened an emergency meeting – the Frankfurt National Assembly.

This revealed the key role that the radical intelligentsia had played in the revolution. When the Assembly met, it was packed with professors, teachers and well-educated men with

degrees (quite rare for 1848). Because it was dominated by men of position who had a lot to lose, it took no serious measures to seize power and was eventually dispersed in May 1849 by Prussian soldiers. The power of the Prussian aristocracy and the military was re-established.

In Austria, when news broke of the revolution in Paris, masses of people rose up in Vienna. University students mounted barricades, took over the inner city, and opened the gates to columns of workers from the suburbs.

The Emperor Ferdinand's chief minister, the arch reactionary Prince Metternich was forced to flee to England. All eyes turned to the Frankfurt National Assembly to give a lead – none came. Then, after a revolt by the Hungarians against the Habsburg regime, on 6 October a new uprising occurred in Vienna. It took three days for General Windischgrätz to repress it brutally. The conservative monarchy restored its power.

The revolutions of 1848 showed that capitalist crises led to revolution, and that revolution could spread across a continent. The events revealed the key role of the working class in the revolution.

And they showed another thing too. The working class was starting to find a political voice of its own. The year 1848 was a key date in the birth of communism.

Marx and the Communists

The struggles in the German speaking lands saw the introduction to the political scene of Karl Marx, editor of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* – a paper that he used to fight for the ideas of revolutionary communism.

Marx's comrade Frederick Engels described the scene:



Prince Metternich – driven from power

"On the outbreak of the February Revolution, the German 'Communist Party', as we called it, consisted only of a small core, the Communist League, which was organised as a secret propaganda society.

"The League was secret only because at that time no freedom of association or assembly existed in Germany. Besides the workers' associations abroad, from which it obtained recruits, it had about thirty communities, or sections, in the country itself and, in addition, individual members in many places.

"This inconsiderable fighting force, however, possessed a leader, Marx, to whom all willingly subordinated themselves, a leader of the first rank, and, thanks to him, a programme of principles and tactics that still has full validity today: the Communist Manifesto."

Engels himself spent much of 1848-49 taking part in the insurrection at Elberfeld and in the fighting in Baden. By the time that the counter-revolution had regained control, the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* was suppressed, but its final headlines carried a ringing call from Marx to carry on the struggle:

"In bidding you farewell, the editors of the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* thank you for the sympathy you have shown them. Their last word everywhere and always will be: emancipation of the working class!"

All across Europe the absolutist monarchies had been shaken to their core, either overthrown or kicked off their thrones for a brief period of democratic rule. Although many of the monarchs had returned, they knew that their power was no longer absolute.

The class forces welling up beneath them were set on their defeat and it was only a matter of time. The task now was for the revolutionaries to understand what had happened in the revolution and begin the political preparations for the revolutionary struggles they knew were coming.

Marx and Engels were exiled to Britain. In London Marx addressed the central committee of the Communist League with an analysis of the failures of the revolutions, caused by a mixture of the fear that the capitalists felt for their own workers and the brutal bloodshed by the generals and monarchs.

Marx outlined a strategy that would see the working class, instead of simply letting the capitalists take power, fight for power themselves. "While the democratic petty bourgeois want to bring the revolution to an end as quickly as possible, achieving at most the aims already mentioned, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent until all the more or less propertied classes have been driven from their ruling positions, until the proletariat has conquered state power and until the association of the proletarians has progressed sufficiently far – not only in one country but in all the leading countries of the world – that competition between the prole-

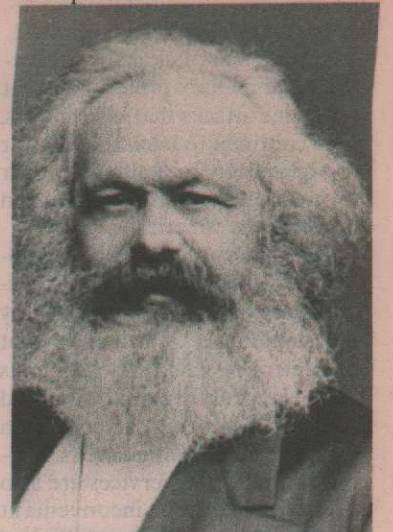
tarians of these countries ceases and at least the decisive forces of production are concentrated in the hands of the workers.

"Our concern cannot simply be to modify private property, but to abolish it, not to hush up class antagonisms but to abolish classes, not to improve the existing society but to found a new one."

Permanent revolution

It was this strategy which Trotsky later developed into the strategy of "permanent revolution", taking the phrase from the address to the Communist League. In underdeveloped countries like Germany in 1848 and Russia in 1917, the capitalist class was too weak to lead "its own" democratic revolution to victory against the monarchy. But there was already a small, but strong and concentrated working class; the capitalists were too afraid to mobilise its mortal enemy to assist it in its own revolution.

The working class would have to come to the head of the democratic masses and lead the democratic revolution to victory. But in taking the power, the workers would then need to establish their own system in place of capitalism.



Marx drew lessons from 1848

Just as Lenin and Trotsky learned from 1848 when they devised the strategy that led to victory in 1917, so Arab workers today can learn from 1848 in the struggle to make their revolutions permanent.

The experience of the revolutionary struggles across Europe was essential for the development of revolutionary socialist politics. The capitalist class was by 1848 a shadow of its previous revolutionary self, too afraid of the working class to fight for serious change, easily defeated by monarchies, their progressive role had been played out.

Now the working class would have to emerge onto the political scene, with its own banner, its own programme and its own parties to fight for power and an end to all forms of exploitation.

Sri Lanka massacre exposed

Sean Ambler

SRI LANKA'S war against the Tamil Tigers was brutal and amounted to a genocide against a whole population: that we already knew. But in June a TV programme showed the extent of the killing. This climaxed in a gruesome orgy of killing of 40,000 civilians by the Sri Lankan army in the last weeks of the war.

Channel 4's exposé, *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields*, shows mobile phone footage of extra-judicial killings, shelling of civilian refugee camps and the rape of Tamil women.

The evidence shows the "no fire zones" created by the Sri Lankan Army were far from that and used to justify killings of civilians who tried

to flee from them.

These kinds of war crimes are increasingly a part of ethnic conflicts, but as the reporter in the film Jon Snow points out these eclipse even "Central America in the 1980s" where the crimes of US backed regimes exceeded even the toleration of Hollywood, which produced films such as *Salvador* exposing their brutality.

Similarly, here the crimes cannot be seen as the work of a rogue state acting outside the influence and wishes of the international system.

There is increasing evidence that the desire to clear large areas of the East of Tamils was in part motivated by the Sri Lankan government's deals with China for ports in the Indian Ocean. Similarly Amer-

ican, European and other Western businesses are looking to Sri Lanka as a potential location for cheap production for which 'stability' is a business necessity. This led these countries to ignore the Sri Lankan government's war against the Tamils or, like David Miliband, issue weak, late, meaningless protests against it.

The Sri Lankan government responded to the film with complaints that Channel 4 lacks "standards and fairness" and is investigating ways to sue the broadcasters. This shows that the Sri Lankan government feels confident that the imperialist states will continue to ignore the massacre.

Workers Power's sister organisa-

tion in Sri Lanka, the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka, fights against the oppression of the Tamils and the Sinhala chauvinism which allowed it to take place. Rajapakse was a war criminal and we said it openly.

Sinhala chauvinism isn't a product of some primordial hatred between two peoples, but the result of conscious policies of the British empire to 'divide and rule'.

Overcoming this ethnic hatred will require the destruction of the imperialist system where the West still benefits from these ethnic tensions. A strong internationalist movement - rooted in the working class - will be key to freeing Sri Lanka from imperialist interference and manipulation.



Pakistan gripped by strike wave

Shehzad Arshad, from the Revolutionary Socialist Movement of Pakistan, reports on a rising tide of struggle across the country

RECENT WEEKS have seen a rapid acceleration of the political and social crisis in Pakistan. The assassination of Osama Bin Laden by US Navy Seals exposed the real character of the "partnership" between the United States and the government in Islamabad. Opinion polls show 63 per cent disapproved of the assassination: only 14 per cent approved.

Although the Pakistani government and military protest loudly at US drone attacks that kill civilians, they continue to back the US war in Afghanistan. They also wage their own war in the border regions on behalf of the Americans.

The military seems unable to protect ordinary people. The recent brutal killing of a youth in Karachi by Pakistan Rangers, which was caught on camera, revealed how such units treat the general population and their belief that they can do so with complete impunity. Pakistan's notorious intelligence services are also prepared to silence inconvenient reportage - as the recent killing of journalist Salim Shahzad reveals.

Legitimacy

The army command fears that it is rapidly losing popular legitimacy for its powerful and lucrative role in society and politics. Discredited by their evident subservience to the Americans, some generals are openly questioning the future of US-Pakistan relations.

Important sections of the ruling class - led by the main parliamentary opposition, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, are distancing themselves not just from President Asif Ali Zardari and the Pakistan People's Party-led coalition government, but from the military as well. Nawaz Sharif, the PML-N leader, is demanding the military be kicked out of politics and put under civilian control. He has even threatened to lead a "youth revolution" and "march on Islamabad".



Obviously, the workers and peasants should place no trust in the leader of a party which has historic ties to the military as well as to sections of capitalists and the large landlords. However, this call for "revolution" does reflect deepening divisions in the ruling class. After the fall of General Musharraf, the PPP used populism and its "democratic" credentials to derail mass anger. Now, the PML-N is trying to put itself at the head of discontent with the PPP government which has proved unable to resolve economic and social decline.

For the working class, the peasants and the youth, following the lead of the bourgeois opposition would be another dead-end. They need to build up their own organisations in the struggles against the crisis, against the bosses and the military.

In Pakistan, the post 2008 global recession has led to prolonged economic decline. Prices for foodstuffs, fuel and other essential goods are still rocketing. Whilst the military receives and spends billions of dollars for the war and for protecting the estates of the rich, millions displaced by the floods are still homeless and starving.

The government is incapable of ensuring the basic supply of electricity. Power cuts up to 16 hours a day hit the population hard, particularly in the countryside and the smaller towns. Even in the large cities, like Lahore and Karachi, power cuts of four to eight hours are a daily occurrence.

But there is one encouraging development; the crisis is leading to widespread workers' strikes and protests all over the country.

A mass movement against the power cuts has developed, especially in the major commercial and cultural city of Karachi. There, 11,000 workers of the KESC electricity company have been on strike for the last two months. Political parties issued a call for citywide strike in support of the KESC workers and the whole city shut down on that day.

In Balochistan, too, we have seen a massive movement of protests and strikes by doctors, mainly the badly paid young doctors in the hospitals. They are receiving support from the young doctors in Punjab who organised a one-day solidarity strike against the arrest and manhandling of young doctors in Balochistan. There was also a countrywide all-out strike in their support.

A protest movement of workers in government institutions is also developing. A large workers' demonstration, organised by 24 different unions, took place in Lahore. It was supported by the left - the Pakistan Labour Party (close to the Fourth International), the Revolutionary Socialist Movement (the section of League for the Fifth International) and left wing student organisations.

It is quite clear, in Pakistan, the ruling class is in deep crisis and on the other hand, the working class is increasing its resistance. The general population is becoming more active, open to being mobilised against the government, the bosses and the imperialists.

All these are clear symptoms that Pakistan is entering a pre-revolutionary situation, in which the working class needs to come to the head of all the economic and political struggles.

To achieve this means first of all, unifying the workers in struggle against the cuts, inflation and impoverishment. Despite a massive increase in action, the strikes and protests are often not co-ordinated beyond regional, sectoral or even company level.

The unions, too, are fragmented.

Many are tied to the bosses' political parties or NGOs. They need to be united and rebuilt on an industrial and class independent basis.

That is why the RSM is calling for a workers' united front of all the trade unions and workers' parties against the crisis. Its goal must be to work towards an indefinite general strike, against cuts, privatisations and inflation, for a minimum wage of 25,000 rupees. It must be run by strike committees elected in all the workplaces and local action committees, linking up on a regional and national level. To defend strikers from fascist and other right wing forces, and the police, self-defence organisations must be built.

A general strike would rapidly pose fundamental questions; who should pay for the crisis, the rich or the poor? Who can restructure the economy to meet social needs? In short, it would pose the question of political power and the need for a workers' and poor peasants' government.

This programme needs a revolutionary working class party to fight for it.

The Pakistan workers' movement does not have such a political force at the moment. It is dispersed in hundreds of unions and a few small "parties" that, together, number a few thousand at most.

Therefore, we call on the unions, the leaders and the members, to take the initiative to form a new, mass party of the working class. We also call on all the political organisations of the Pakistani left, such as the Labour Party, the Workers' Party and the Class Struggle tendency to join in this crucial struggle.

We, in the RSM, are committed to building such a party and we propose as its political basis our action programme for socialist revolution. History is presenting enormous challenges to us. The Pakistan workers' movement and the left should rise to them.

Lowkey – rap and revolution

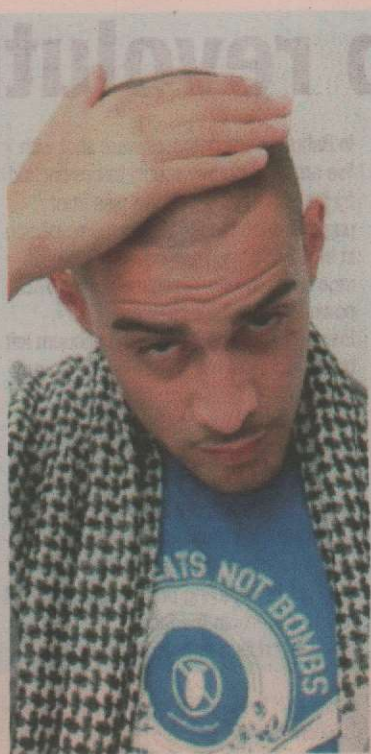
Matt Chew

“They don’t really know what revolution would mean, it would mean blood, it would mean pain, but it could be us that bring that change” - Lowkey

LOWKEY IS a revolutionary lyricist and political activist. As a prominent figure in the anti-war movement and recent anti-cuts movement, Lowkey makes no apologies for his far from low-key approach to music, politics and life. As well as speaking at numerous rallies and conferences, he makes frequent appearances on news channels speaking out against war, imperialism and social injustice. Lowkey is a prominent member of The People’s Army, a collective of musicians, poets and writers who have a common goal of combating the misogyny, violence and materialism that is often associated with hip hop.

Born in London with both English and Iraqi descent he began rapping at the age of 12. He first broke into the music scene with his *Key To The Game* mixtape trilogy which gained critical acclaim from the UK hip hop scene before he was 18. The third in the series, *Key To The Game 3* give his listeners an insight into the trials and tribulations of being Lowkey. The album is written with an autobiographical approach, from his emotional *Bars for my Brother*, written about his brother who committed suicide after doctors failed to diagnose his mental health problems, to the more comical sounding *Check-Up* a frank song about an embarrassing visit to the sexual health clinic.

After touring in support of Immortal Technique, Canibus, and Dead Prez, he set about recording his debut album *Dear Listener* which was released in January of 2009. Despite



gaining much critical acclaim over the past decade, and collaborating with well-known artists such as Wretch 32, Reverend and the Makers and Logic, Lowkey bypassed the potential wealth and fame to direct his creative energy into publicising and supporting the struggle of the Palestinian people. He raised money for victims of the Israeli assault on Gaza with his no-budget song ‘Free Palestine’ which reached 18 in the iTunes hip-hop chart.

In February of 2009 Lowkey was approached by the Sabreen Association, a Palestinian music organisation, to perform in the Hip Hop For Gaza tour of the West Bank and some parts of Israel. On the trip he experienced a small measure of what Palestinians are forced to endure every single day of their lives. He was detained and interrogated for nine

hours in Tel-Aviv airport, where many Arab and Muslim people are detained and questioned. His mobile was confiscated, and on return he realised that the only number that had been barred was that of the British embassy in Israel.

Lowkey uses his radical take on hip hop as a medium for change, understanding the need to reclaim hip hop as a liberating form of music from the capitalist record companies who exploit the genre to sell violence and misogyny. Lowkey said:

“The majority of rappers advertise a capitalist lifestyle which has been proven can’t support itself, one which is pretty much non-existent, a fantasy. So at some point someone’s going to turn round and say this whole thing we’ve been advertising is bullshit.”

His most exciting project alongside Logic and Jody McIntyre is The Equality Movement, a loose organisation which believes in equality regardless of wealth or background and the opposition to Capitalism and Imperialism. Recently they held meetings of hundreds of people on issues such as the role of the police, current affairs, the revolutions in the Middle East and more. This is a great opportunity for a growing movement of people against capitalism to discuss the way forward.

As the prospects and reality of millions of people becomes bleaker due to the capitalist crisis, there has never been a more important time for revolutionary artists such as Lowkey to make a conscious change in the way people see the world. Lowkey’s music is fuelled by his passion for every aspect of human interaction and his refusal to conform or compromise his work to sell records. It shows the importance of a radical culture of music and literature to accompany the growing social movements fighting back against the cap-

Loyalist pogroms return to Northern Ireland



Darren Cogavin

FIFTEEN YEARS after the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland has yet again witnessed a series of violent attacks on Catholic homes, notably in the isolated enclave of Short Strand in predominately Protestant East Belfast. Hundreds of masked Loyalists armed with petrol bombs, paint bombs and pipe bombs attacked several entrances to the district over a two-night period. The coordinated attacks, directed by the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), saw several local people badly injured, pensioners’ homes set on fire and shops fired into the area.

The Loyalist pogrom was eventually driven back by residents who courageously emerged from their houses to defend their community. Workers Power salutes their bravery in confronting the UVF and offers them our full support and solidarity.

The Short Strand has historically been the target for Loyalist terror over the years, from the ‘Battle of St. Matthews’ in 1970 which saw local IRA volunteers repel a mob trying to burn down the local Catholic Church, to the Short Strand siege in 2002 when petrol bombs rained down on a nightly basis while Police Service of Northern Ireland officers fired rubber bullets at nationalist youth defending their area.

Unionist politicians have tried to portray current events as a retaliatory ‘tit for tat’, placing responsibility for the riots equally on Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries. But Loyalists have perpetrated the overwhelming number of attacks in interface areas, particularly during the season of Orange marches, in an ongoing campaign to create a state of siege and intimidation.

Who is to blame?

Disgracefully the Socialist Party in Ireland – which has always refused to distinguish between reactionary Loyalism and the nationalism of the oppressed minority in the Six Counties, joined in this propaganda saying: “... it is vital that working class people take a united stand and not allow the minority of sectarian bigots

in both communities to get away with more attacks and shootings, creating misery for working class people.”

The ‘community conflict’ propaganda, currently peddled by Sinn Fein and DUP politicians alike, is designed to absolve them of any responsibility for what is going on. Both parties, governing the Orange statelet together, have delivered austerity cuts, job losses and worsening public services on the back of the Good Friday Agreement. These policies just lead to a carve up of existing meagre resources rather than demanding what is needed to abolish poverty for all. This is bound to ratchet up tensions between workers on both sides of the sectarian divide.

The Irish SWP has a better line on recent events. Its statement says: “We support the right of the people of the Short Strand to defend themselves, but believe that both Protestant and Catholic workers have a stake in seeing off the scourge of loyalist paramilitarism.” They correctly point to the need to “unite workers from across every religious and ethnic community in the north of Ireland to resist the cuts and to fight for a new society free from sectarianism” but then add “we believe Protestant workers have as much a stake in that fight as anyone”

But their statement fails to address the small but real privileges – greater access to jobs and housing – that form the material underpinning of the Protestants’ continued identification with the sectarian statelet. For unity against the cuts to become a barrier against Orange bigotry, Protestant workers will need to be won not only to action against the cuts, but also to a common struggle against the inequality and discrimination inevitable in a divided Ireland dominated by British imperialism.

It is not enough to hope that anti-cuts struggles will automatically overcome sectarianism. As the long-term capitalist crisis fuels sectarianism, the need for a new workers’ party fighting for a socialist solution becomes ever more necessary. In Ireland its must take the form set out by James Connolly: a United 32-County Irish Workers’ Republic.

Revolution summer camp will take place in Upminster, London from 8-12 August.

Workshops and debates on the Arab Revolutions, culture, Nuclear power and global warming, How South Africans beat apartheid, Trotsky versus Stalin, The politics of Che Guevara, Organising school walkouts, Public speaking and more!

For more details visit socialistrevolution.org



Resistance to regime grows in Syria



Marcus Halaby

THE UPRISING that began in Syria on 15 March has become one of the bloodiest of the Arab revolutions. So far around 2,000 have been killed and 10,000 arrested, despite the formal end of the 1963 state of emergency. The uprising has stood firm in the face of massive state violence and forced concessions from the regime, but it has not yet brought it down.

This is partly because the working class has not yet come to the head of the uprising. According to Hassan Khaled Chatila of the Syrian Communist Action Party, it has been “like a series of neighbourhood uprisings”, in which the mass of people in the streets have been the unemployed and those without regular jobs, as well as students and young graduates.

Beginning in Daraa, an extremely

deprived rural region by the Jordanian border, the uprising quickly spread through the countryside to all of Syria’s provincial towns and cities.

However, in the capital Damascus and in Aleppo – the centre of Syria’s industrial working class – the protests have largely been confined to the universities and the suburbs, although a national general strike called for 23 June affected some parts of Aleppo.

President Bashar al-Assad’s speech on 20 June gave the appearance of conciliation, acknowledging that “citizens” as well as soldiers and security forces had been “martyred” and offering a national dialogue that “could lead” to a new constitution. But the promises he made were nothing new, and – like Egypt’s Mubarak before him – he has insisted on managing the transition, stating that the regime would “make the future rather than

The Arab revolutions

The great revolutions of 2011 began in Tunisia and Egypt and quickly swept on across the Middle East and North Africa. The fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt showed that even vicious dictators backed by the army and gangs of thugs could be brought down. How? Not just by hundreds of thousands massing in the city squares, defying arrests, beatings and shootings, but by something still more powerful: indefinite general strikes of the workers.

It was these general strikes that paralysed Tunisia and Egypt and brought down the regimes.

Across the region millions were quick to follow suit. But the rulers had learned their lesson – and so had their foreign backers.

In Bahrain demonstrators were shot with live ammunition by security forces backed by the Saudi Army. In Libya (see front page) Gaddafi tried to drown the revolution in blood. In Yemen and now Syria battles rage on as dictatorial regimes cling to power in face of the masses.

Even in Egypt and Tunisia, the vacuum left by the dictators has been filled by corrupt politicians and the army clinging on.

The Arab Revolutions are driven by the desire for democracy, for freedom and for justice. Yet beneath the surface still deeper needs are driving the revolution on: the need for jobs in the face of mass unemployment and the need for food in the face of spiralling price rises, the need to end poverty in the face of the great financial crisis and its grim aftermath.

It is this force – resistance to the crisis – that links the great Arab Revolutions to events that are now unfolding in Europe. The economic crisis is threatening to bring down the finances of several European states. As bailout and bust loom, the squares of Madrid and Athens fill with people seeking to repeat the stunning events in Cairo.

Every generation of revolutionaries finds that its greatest teacher is revolution itself. Its lessons today are clear. General strikes are needed to bring down the regimes, the revolution will need to defend itself against attacks from the police, the army and the counter-revolution, and even bringing down a government will not end the crisis unless the workers themselves take the power.

have events make it”.

Distinguishing between “citizens”, who had “legitimate demands” on the state, and “terrorists”, he called on the “the people and the state” to come together, attributing the “violence” to saboteurs motivated by extremist Islamist ideology, as well as “radical and blasphemous intellectuals wreaking havoc in the name of freedom”.

From day one the Ba’ath regime has presented the revolution as a uprising of backward, conservative and religious elements, presenting itself as the only force able to defend “secularism” and prevent sectarian civil war. It has accused the protests of being manipulated by “armed sectarian gangs” that have killed ordinary conscripts. This is a slander against the revolution, which has drawn in masses of people from all of Syria’s sects and communities. It is the regime’s own actions that have

been the biggest instigator of sectarian tensions.

In particular, the regime has armed members of the once-marginalised Alawi minority – to which Assad and others in the ruling elite belong – into irregular militias known as the “Shabiha” (“ghosts”), sending them to attack protesters when the army and regular security forces might be unreliable. This has increased the risk that a majority of people will identify the Alawis as a whole with the regime.

In Jisr ash-Shugur, a rural town of 40,000, about 120 soldiers were killed by their officers when they refused to fire on civilians who had surrounded a group of Shabiha irregulars in the central post office. Fearing the regime’s revenge, about a quarter of people in the town and the surrounding villages fled across the border to Turkey, creating a refugee crisis that

has raised the prospect of a Turkish military intervention.

In turn, protesters have consciously decided in favour of non-violent demonstration to counter the regime’s attempts to divert the resistance in the direction of sectarianism, although at a huge cost to themselves.

The Syrian revolution urgently needs to throw the social and economic power of the working class into the balance and so win Aleppo and Damascus to its side. The call for a general strike is a promising start. But this will mean going beyond the present demands for democratic rights and addressing the most pressing social and economic needs of the masses: unemployment, inflation, job insecurity and social inequality. Only this can defeat the regime’s plans to manage a transition to a “reformed” dictatorship on its own terms.

Civil war in Yemen: towards reaction or revolution?

Chris Newcombe

YEMENI PRESIDENT Ali Abdullah Saleh’s sudden flight to Saudi Arabia on 4 June, supposedly to be treated for serious burn injuries, was a cause for jubilation in Yemen’s capital, Sana’a. But his regime remains intact, and he has stated his intention to return. The stage is now set for a revolutionary civil war.

Armed struggle in Yemen is not new. Shi’a Houthi rebels in the north of the country, on the border with Saudi Arabia, have been in conflict with the regime since 2004, prompt-

ing occasional Saudi military intervention against them. In Aden in the south of the country – previously a pro-Soviet state separate from the rest of Yemen – former supporters of the Yemen Socialist Party have waged a struggle to secede since 1994, while elsewhere in the south armed Sunni Islamists have fought for an Islamic state.

Five months of mass protests for democratic rights, however, have added students, mainstream Islamists, socialists and tribal leaders to this challenge to the state’s authority. President Saleh’s decision

to renege on a deal to step down from power provoked former parliamentarian Sheikh Sadiq al-Ahmar, the leader of Saleh’s own Hashid tribe, into joining the opposition on 18 March.

Conflict in Sana’a

In late May and early June, Ahmar’s tribesmen battled for control of Sana’a, seizing government ministries, the state news agency and the headquarters of the national airline, and preventing the Republican Guard from marching on Sana’a to support the President. Saleh’s threat to return, with the support of the regular armed forces, makes inevitable the breakdown of their ceasefire with the armed tribes, hastily arranged after Saleh’s departure.

Saleh’s stubbornness and resilience cannot be understood without reference to the support of the United States and Saudi Arabia. Long before the current struggle erupted the United States launched

what was effectively a secret war in Yemen, in the form of air strikes against alleged al-Qaeda strongholds in the south. US military aid – over \$150 million in 2010 – has been crucial in propping up Saleh’s regime.

President Obama has now escalated the bombing with the New York Times reporting that US aircraft are targeting anti-government forces. Given that Yemen, with a population of 24 million, has only around 250 al-Qaeda personnel even by US estimates, it should be obvious that Obama’s real aim is to crush the popular rebellion, not al-Qaeda. Saudi Arabia dominates the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council, which has “mediated” talks between the protesters and the regime, with the aim of excluding the revolutionary youth from any post-Saleh power structures.

Saleh, for his part, is actively promoting a civil war to split the country along tribal lines. In a bid to foment inter-tribal conflict, Saleh’s forces attacked a meeting of tribal leaders

at Sadiq al-Ahmar’s home on 23 May. While hundreds have died as a result of government violence in the last five months, the killings at the sheikh’s home were especially provocative.

Nevertheless, leaders of the Yemeni youth have called for protests to remain peaceful. Tawakkol Karman, chair of Women Journalists Without Chains, has even appealed to the United States and Saudi Arabia to engage with the opposition and facilitate a transition to democracy, promising in turn to recognise their right “to attack terrorist sanctuaries”.

In fact, the Yemeni democracy movement needs a political leadership that understands the need to prepare an armed struggle to overthrow the regime by linking the mass movement to the existing sources of armed opposition. This requires a program to tackle Yemen’s catastrophic economic problems that would win the support of workers, peasants, youth and tribes alike.