

workers power 5



Anti-capitalist Initiative



Greece swings to the left



1910-1914
The Great Unrest

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COALITION IN CRISIS

It's time to go on the attack!

Jeremy Dewar

THE COALITION took a drubbing in the local elections.

The Tories and Lib Dems lost 741 seats and 13 councils, including major cities like Southampton, where a year long strike campaign by local authority workers has finally seen their wage-cutting Tory bosses defeated at the polls.

Like in France, Britain has turned to the left under the hammer-blows of recession and austerity, unemployment and cuts.

The Labour Party – still associated with trade unions – was the main winner. Some left of Labour candidates – in Bradford, Walsall and Preston for example – also won, but Labour remains for millions of workers the only available political way to hit back against the Coalition.

Coalition crimes

And it's not hard to see why the Coalition is so hated. Their budget has been exposed as raising taxes on pensioners' incomes, hot snacks, caravans and hairdressers, while abolishing the top earners' 50p tax rate and slashing corporation tax by 2 per cent.

This is a government for the rich by the rich.

It is also increasingly seen as corrupt. David Cameron regularly wines and dines party donors at No. 10 at £250,000 a throw, and enjoys close personal ties with key players in Rupert Murdoch's News International media empire.

Any pretence that money and



informal gatherings do not buy favours is laughable. As Murdoch told the Leveson Inquiry into phone hacking, "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" is the expectation in these circles.

Underlying this suspicion and hatred for the Coalition is the never ending recession. The economy is shrinking again; in truth it never recovered.

Unemployment stands at 2.65 million with twice that number needing to work extra hours to survive. Claimants are made to work without pay on government workfare schemes. Sick and disabled workers are forced into menial jobs even if they are terminally ill, while specialised Remploy factories are closed.

For those in work, pay has been

pegged back for years, while inflation keeps pushing essential items like food, housing and fuel up and up.

The truth is austerity is choking the economy. The banks are sitting on their money, while a "lost generation" is deprived of jobs, priced out of education and hounded by an increasingly racist police.

Don't wait for Labour

After the local elections, Labour leader Ed Miliband said: "Labour is back, throughout the country, on your side."

But what has he actually done to stop the cuts? Labour councils have been implementing the cuts and the newly elected ones will doubtless do the same – if we let them. Labour refuses to back any strikes and is relying on voters returning them to office in 2015.

But we cannot afford to wait that long. The time to stop this destruction is now. Let's hit this vicious government while the Coalition is reeling.

On 10 May 400,000 health workers, lecturers and civil servants will strike in defence of pensions. Unison's Dave Prentis has called for a national demo against austerity in the autumn – "the biggest in our labour movement's history". UK Uncut is mobilising for direct action and street parties on 26 May to highlight inequality and expose the 1% who rule over us.

We need to unite these forces – young activists and mass unions – by organising from below, and demanding serious strike action: not one day, here and there, but all out and stay out to win.

We need to put the pressure on Labour too to oppose the cuts in deeds, not just in words, on the streets as well as in the council chambers and parliament.

But most of all we need a new, anticapitalist party that can help win today's struggles and link them to the fight for a better world, a socialist future.

Join the new Anticapitalist Initiative

www.anticapitalists.org

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Editorial

Europe turns left

AS WE GO to press, news is breaking of victories for the left in France and Greece. François Hollande, first Socialist Party president for a generation, told his cheering supporters, "Austerity is no longer an option," and pledged himself to seek policies from the European Union for "growth, jobs and prosperity... a new start for Europe".

In Greece well over half the electorate – 65 per cent of Greeks – voted for parties that rejected EU-IMF austerity. One of them, the left reformist Syriza, more than tripled its vote replacing PASOK as the second largest party in terms of the popular vote.

On a more modest scale, Labour performed better in local elections than commentators predicted, gaining 823 councillors, 38 per cent of the vote and taking control of 32 councils from Glasgow to Southampton.

Years of savage austerity have hit the workers of Greece, Spain, France, and Britain hard. Of course if, instead of awaiting elections, they had unleashed a wave of direct action which culminated in indefinite general strikes then they could have thrown out their tormentors before millions lost their jobs, houses and pensions.

But thanks to their own leaders bungling and cowardice resistance rarely exceeded one-day strikes and mass demonstrations. Despite heroic exceptions, like French oil refinery workers and Greek hospital staff, union movements did not act "all together" and go all out for victory.

This was not the fault of the workers themselves, but of their reformist leaders, who blocked the road to unity and limited the effectiveness of the actions.

Given workers do not have the option of accepting defeat – given there are further economic storms ahead for all the countries of Europe (see page 4) – they used the only political weapon they had at their disposal to give the slump politicians a battering and voted for those who at least promised some respite.

Breaking illusions in reformism

The great mass of working people view elections from a practical angle – not mainly from the point of view of the ideas a party represents but from what it can do, either in parliament or the local council. Thus even when mass reformist parties have a track record of betrayal and holding back the struggle, if they are the only weapons with which to drive out the right workers will use it.

Of course it is pure foolishness to sit back and say, "our people are now in charge. They will do the business for us; all we have to do is support them."

But the small numbers of revolutionaries who long ago shed illusions in these parties should not adopt smug but passive attitude of "they will soon learn their mistake". Sectarianism, especially today, is quite as useless as opportunism.

When millions of workers and young people have pushed the mass reformist parties into office – or at least given them a huge electoral boost – revolutionaries need to relate to these mass illusions in a positive way. They need to do so by urging action to force the leaders to fulfil their promises and indeed go on to adopt more far-reaching change.

While the union and party leaders, after an election, will try to demobilize the masses using the argument that "we should not embarrass a friendly government" (France) or "we must wait for Labour in 2015" (Britain), experience shows that only worthwhile reforms are a by-product of the most militant class struggle.

Through using these tactics of the united front – unity in action plus criticism of the delays and sell outs by the reformist leaders – forces like the NPA in France and the embryonic new Anticapitalist Initiative in Britain can grow and become alternative poles of attraction for workers and youth demanding an end to austerity.

Such parties and initiatives need to present their own action programme, a strategy outlining the road to a workers government that can put an end to capitalism altogether.

These are times full of revolutionary potential. The road to an effective revolutionary party is not a broad and direct highway. It will demand tactical turns, temporary compromises and alliances but always combined with timely and forthright criticism of reformist misleaders. There will be defeats and setbacks, that is the nature of the class struggle. But the past few weeks should fill us with confidence that we can make real advances in the coming period.

Bring racist police to justice

Joy Macready

THE RECENT POLICE killings of Mark Duggan and Anthony Grainger expose the racism rife in the police force. Conditioned to see young, black men as drug dealers and gangsters, in both cases the police shot dead an unarmed man.

These two murders are part of a bigger picture of institutional racism in the police force. Nothing has changed in the 13 years since the Macpherson Inquiry into Stephen Lawrence's murder investigation, which denounced the Met as "institutional racist" and rejected the idea that there were just a few "bad apples" in the force – the police remain racist to the core.

The ingrained racism stems from the role that the police have within capitalist society. They are paid defenders of private property and capitalist exploitation in a system that spreads racist ideology in order to divide and rule the working class. Do police arrest an employer that has sacked her/his workforce? No, but they will readily use their truncheons against workers on the picket line.

Reported racist abuse by police is on the rise, as shown by the Independent Police Complaints Commission's (IPCC) own statistics. There are currently 13 accusations of racism lodged against Met officers. Since 2005, there have been 2,720 complaints of racism against the Met; of those, 42 were substantiated and just two officers were sacked.

In addition, figures released from the Ministry of Justice show that for 2009-2010, 43,219 black people were searched by Met officers under Section 60, compared with 27,217 white people.

Black people have the right to fight every aspect of this daily harassment and to stop the state criminalising whole communities. They have the right to organise black self-defence against police and racist attacks.

Twenty years ago, Los Angeles was set alight a year after Rodney King was pulled from his car and savagely beaten by four Los Angeles police officers. At least 15 white officers watched or participated in the systematic clubbing – over 50 truncheon blows – and kicking of Rodney, a black man who had been stopped for speed-

ing after a chase.

The acquittal of those four police officers – by a near all-white jury – in April 1992 sparked a weeklong uprising in LA; demonstrations, protest and risings spread to other cities. There was outrage at the injustice of the verdict, but it was fuelled by the fact that state racism and police repression are part of normal life for that community.

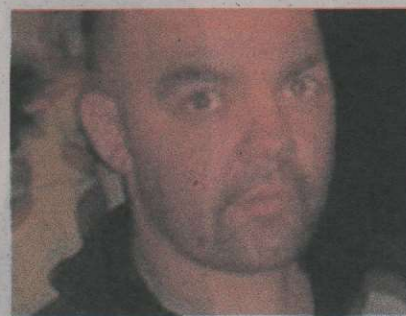
Britain saw a very similar reaction in the aftermath of Mark Duggan's murder. After years of stop and search and harassment by the police, young people took to the streets in cities across Britain and struck back against their oppressors. Yet it is these youth that have had draconian sentences meted out to them while not a single officer has ever lost their job in relation to a shooting or a death in custody.

In recent news, the 31 officers present at Mark's shooting have refused to be questioned by the IPCC, which says it does not have the power to "compel" their testimonies. This exposes the sham of this so-called "independent" inquiry. The IPCC and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) are not independent but an extension of the British state. The IPCC's role is to defuse the anger in the community under the pretence that something is being done.

Yet something has to be done. Mark, Anthony, Jacob Michael, Christopher Alder and the hundreds of others that have died at the hands of the police deserve justice. We have to fight to get truly independent inquiries – i.e. independent of the state – into racist beatings, murders and deaths in custody.

The inquiry should be made up of elected representatives from working class and anti-racist organisations of the black community, the labour movement and anti-racist legal experts, not ex-police, lawyers, bankers and their friends.

17 June – March for Anthony Grainger



Helen Hadfield

THE #JUSTICE4GRAINGER campaign is growing – and it will not stop until it gets justice. It now counts more than 6,000 members and is forging solidarity links with many other police justice campaigns.

The campaign was launched after Greater Manchester police shot dead Anthony Grainger on 3 March 2012. His death at the hands of the police has left hundreds heartbroken and thousands devastated. The police used a submachine gun to shoot Anthony as he sat in a stolen car. No weapons were found in the vehicle and no sign that he posed any threat to the police.

Even the IPCC had to admit this shooting was no accident and the officer responsible could face criminal charges for manslaughter or murder.

Anthony's partner, Gail Hadfield-Grainger, set up a Facebook group

where family and friends could post their memories and photos of him, but soon people from across the country began voicing their outrage. Many who also have had family members killed by the police are demanding answers and justice. It has become a catalyst for linking together campaigns and now the group is growing by 1,000 members per week.

#Justice4grainger is raising money for the campaign and for his children's future by selling wristbands, hoodies, t-shirts and leggings online. In addition, there will be a fundraiser social on 12 May at the Pint Pot in Salford.

The campaign is building for demonstrations on 17 June – Father's Day – in towns and cities across the country to raise awareness and show the nation's outrage at trigger-happy police. The main #justice4grainger protest will be in Manchester, while other demos have been confirmed in Leeds, London (Brixton), Slough, Sheffield, and Birmingham. We have to hold the police to account for their actions, particularly the officer that shot Anthony.

Please join the campaign. You can find us on twitter (#justice4grainger), and facebook (www.facebook.com/groups/anthony.grainger). Contact us with any questions you may have or to be added onto the update list. Phone 07803812955. If you have a Blackberry, you can also add our pin: 27534832.

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Labour wins local support – now make them fight the cuts

Joy Macready takes stock of the results of the local council elections and asks where now for Labour?

THURSDAY 3 MAY proved to be a red-letter day for Labour. The local elections saw a mass turn to Labour, despite its lack of strategy to oppose austerity. This was clearly a protest vote against the Tory and Liberal Democrat Coalition, aimed at punishing them for swingeing cuts and the bad handling of the economy, as Britain slides back into recession.

Labour wrested control of 32 councils, bringing its total up to 75 across the country. The party picked up 823 new council seats, for a total of 2,158. It gained 20 seats in Birmingham and took control of the council, which had been run by a Tory and Liberal Democrat coalition for eight years.

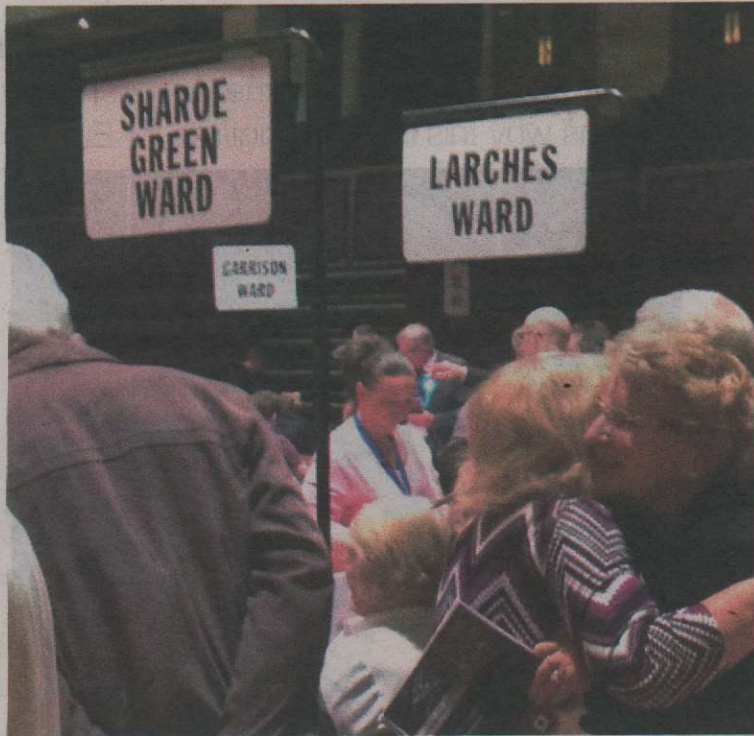
In Dudley Labour picked up 13 seats from the Tories to give it overall control of the council. Importantly for Labour, it also held Glasgow against the Scottish National Party (SNP). In Wales, Labour's results were the best since 1996, taking control of 10 out of 21 councils in the poll.

It proved to be a bruising day for the Tories and even more so for the Lib Dems. The Tories lost 405 seats and control of 12 councils. Only in London did the Tories buck the general trend, with the re-election of Boris Johnson as mayor.

The Lib Dems crashed out, losing one council and 336 councillors, leaving them with the lowest number of seats since their party was formed in 1988.

In the Pentland Hills ward in Edinburgh, the Lib Dem candidate won fewer votes than independent candidate Mike Ferrigan, who ran his campaign as "Professor Pongoo" in a full penguin suit.

As a result the Coalition is facing sharp criticism from inside its ranks, and the cracks are deepening. The Tory right has attacked David Cameron, calling for "more Conservatism and less Liberalism".



Preston council elections where Michael Lavalette, TUSC, won a seat

The Lib Dems have been told to "keep calm" by Nick Clegg, but are mindful of the collapse in its activist base. Last year the Lib Dems lost just over 44 per cent of the seats they contested, and 70 per cent of their seats in metropolitan councils.

The Coalition also suffered a setback, as nine out of 10 cities rejected a directly elected mayor, effectively voting against replacing the power of councils – already much reduced – with personal popularity contests. The largely right wing local and national press more easily manipulates these mayoral elections, as London shows. Despite a big push from Cameron, only Bristol voted in favour.

Another party that suffered a drubbing was the fascist British National Party (BNP). All the BNP candidates who stood in the elections lost, meaning that there is no BNP councillor in Burnley for the

first time in 10 years. These results leave the BNP with just three councillors, down from a high of 57.

The Left

George Galloway's Respect Party built on its success in the Bradford West by-election, gaining five seats on Bradford council. This included the Little Horton seat of Ian Greenwood, Bradford's Labour council leader since 2010, lost after three recounts to Respect's Alyas Karmani.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) did not fare as well, garnering only 1.2 per cent of the vote in the London Assembly. Although it picked up two councillors – Michael Lavalette in Preston and Peter Smith in Walsall – it lost its seat in Coventry, held by Dave Nellist since 1998.

The TUSC's poor results are the result of a number of factors, includ-

ing a campaign woefully short of activists except where the Socialist Party or the Socialist Workers Party had candidates.

Although it stood key union figures, the organisation is too amorphous – a political alliance without a clear programme or democratic structure. It is difficult to know how to join TUSC and become an active member. Critically, it has not developed as an organisation beyond the sum of its parts.

People are looking for a real alternative with defined policies – a political party – that has longevity and is vying for political power. Respect has a prominent leader, true, but more importantly it says it's a party.

These election results prove that people across the country still turn to the Labour Party to give the Coalition government a bloody nose. In this respect, the death of the Labour Party in the eyes of the working class is an exaggeration. But does that mean that Labour has won back support in working class communities?

The need for a new alternative to Labour

Well, Ed Miliband seems to think so, off the back of a few bad weeks for the Coalition. In his victory speech he told voters that Labour is "back throughout the country on your side".

What he doesn't admit is that most people can see that there is only a difference of timescale between the Coalition's answer to the crisis and his. The austerity cuts – over 80 per cent of which have not yet been implemented – are deeply unpopular with British workers, but Labour do not stand opposed to them.

That is why George Galloway thumped Labour with a 10,000 majority in the Bradford by-election: he spoke out against the

Tories' vicious cuts and the sell-off of the NHS.

During *Question Time* on the night of the election, one person argued that if Labour were arguing what the French presidential candidate François Hollande was arguing, its popularity would see a massive resurgence. Many people are looking across the Channel to the Socialist candidate and wondering why no one in the UK is brave enough to adopt policies disapproved of by the bankers and the rich.

Instead Labour is expelling its few members that voted against implementing council cuts, such as George Barratt in Barking and Dagenham and Kingsley Abrams in Lambeth.

To counter this, we need to do two things. First, we need to place demands on Labour councillors that have won seats from the Tories and Lib Dems and apply pressure on them. We should demand that they refuse to implement the cuts, defend the NHS and support workers on strike. We cannot let them off the hook – we must push them to breaking point.

At the same time, we need to develop an alternative to Labour. We need to forge a political party that will fight for working class policies. We should call on all trade unions, left electoral alliances like TUSC and the Scottish Socialist Party, political organisations, rank and file groups, and new initiatives such as UK Uncut, Occupy and the Anticapitalist Initiative, to come together and call a national convention to discuss founding a new mass party of the working class.

We need a party that does not limit its political activities to electioneering, but is on the streets and the picket lines, embedded in working class struggles and active in our communities, with the aim of transforming the whole of society.

UK economy: the Great Depression

Jeremy Dewar

BRITAIN IS experiencing "the deepest recession and weakest recovery for 100 years," according to Michael Saunders, an economist at Citigroup.

Output has not recovered even half of what it lost in the great crash of 2008-09 and the economy has flatlined over the past year, and has started to contract again with a 0.2 per cent drop in GDP in the first three months of this year. The UK has now joined seven other European Union countries, including large economies like Italy, Spain and the Netherlands, in a double-dip recession.

It must now be clear even to the many apologists for capitalism, who lamely complain that some of the Office for National Statistics figures are "rogue", that this is a historic crisis of the system itself.

The facts speak for themselves. The service sector, which accounts for three-quarters of the economy, is bumping along the bottom, with business and financial services actually dipping in and out of recession.

Manufacturing is no longer growing, as its export markets are likewise suffering from recession and the relatively strong pound is not making industry competitive.

Construction has suffered a sharp fall, down nearly 5 per cent. While

millions languish on council and housing association waiting lists and thousands of builders are on the dole or on short contracts, the fall in new builds is criminal. But the market dictates – and with house prices falling, sales are slow.

Banking crisis

Underlying all this is the continuing banking crisis. Financial institutions continue to hoard money – even that which was effectively given to them by the government in various rounds of "quantitative easing".

Business analysts Ernst & Young expect 1.9 per cent of corporate loans not to be paid back (because the companies will go bankrupt, for

example) and new loans will contract this year by 6.8 per cent (on top of a 6.1 per cent drop last year). Lending to businesses will not recover before 2016 while "insolvencies rocket to levels not seen since the 1990s," its widely read report says.

But it is the working class that continues to bear the brunt of a crisis they did not cause.

At 2.65 million, the jobless rate is historically high. On top of this many thousands of full-time jobs have been replaced by part-time posts and "self employment", neither of which offer the income or security workers need.

Wages have risen on average by 1.1 per cent in the past year, compared with inflation running at 3.5

per cent – a 2.4 per cent drop in real incomes.

Yet the cuts keep coming. Right wing Tories are asking for more and more austerity but as TUC leader Brendan Barber told the BBC, "94 per cent of the cuts announced so far have yet to be implemented".

We have to demand of Barber, the union leaders and the resurgent Labour Party that they take action to defend jobs, wages and services here in the now. And if they won't fight, we must launch the battle without them. We did not cause this crisis and it is not fair that we should pay for it. Enough is enough – time to unite and extend the resistance.

No sunshine for Eurozone as crisis returns

The Eurozone crisis is the main immediate threat to world economic stability and could spark another worldwide recession. Now the 6 May elections have added a new political dimension, with the victory of the Socialist Party's Francois Hollande in France and his calls for a new growth pact. *Andy Yorke* explains why this is no springtime for Europe and the euro

AT THE START of March, Eurozone bosses breathed a sigh of relief, as the crisis seemed to have been halted after a near-miss banking meltdown in late 2011. At the heart of the reprieve was the European Central Bank (ECB), pumping more than €1 trillion of cheap loans into the banking system and a second bailout agreed for Greece, after a deal cut with its private creditors – the biggest debt restructuring (or government default) in history with a €174 billion write-down. Then 25 EU countries signed an historic fiscal treaty on 2 March, legally binding them to budget limits to be policed by EU bureaucrats, with only Britain and the Czech Republic staying outside. All this good news saw stock markets in Europe and the US soar, with many stock indexes hitting their highest level since last July.

But this proved to be a false spring for the beleaguered Eurozone economies. March may have entered like a lamb but it exited like a lion – or in the language of the markets, entered like a sickly bull but exited like a bear.

Double-dip recession

Late March saw a steady stream of overwhelmingly negative economic indicators and bad news that worsened in April. Manufacturing data and jobs figures have nose-dived since the second half of 2011, leaving 10.9 per cent unemployment totalling 17.4 million across the Eurozone. Early May figures showed an even steeper fall in Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) measures for both manufacturing and service sector activity, suggesting accelerating contraction for a third successive quarter in the Eurozone, effectively a recession.

Sharply rising production costs due to rising fuel prices, and falling consumer purchases due to unemployment and austerity are also hitting production hard. A backdrop of slowing growth in Brazil, India and China, key to German exports, along with continued question marks over the US economy have not helped either. Ireland and Britain showed contracting growth again at the end of March, joining Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal and Greece in recession, and Spain followed suit at the end of April. The French economy has almost certainly joined them, with only Germany keeping its head barely above water so far.

All in all a series of mutually reinforcing trends are driving the Eurozone back towards recession. Austerity hits growth, growth drives governments to borrow more, rising



debt creates investor panic, hiking interest rates and slashing credit ratings. The result is accelerating debt and renewed demands for austerity to appease the bond markets.

The rain in Spain

Spain has rapidly become the weakest link in the Eurozone. Despite a lower debt-to-GDP ratio than many EU countries, recession and rising bond prices have seen its debt grow quickly, jumping nearly 25 per cent in one year to a predicted 79.8 per cent of GDP by the end of 2012. Spain was at the centre of a huge property bubble that burst with the global recession of 2008. Spanish banks, staggering under a mountain of toxic property loans, took the biggest slice of ECB loans, jumping in March to a record 227.6 billion euros or 63 per cent of the Eurozone total net borrowing from the bank. These loans have gone not only to the deficit-spending Spanish government but to help rollover their bad real estate loans.

When the ECB lending figures came out in mid-April, showing the Spanish banks and government leaning on Draghi's cheap credit, fears about deficits turned into panic. The Spanish banks are propping up the Spanish government and vice versa. What if one proves insolvent? It will bring down the other, leaving the ECB on the hook for hundreds of billions of euros. Coupled with the drip-feed of bad news, it sparked a stampede to the exits. Throughout April, Spanish

bond yields rose sharply back to the levels at the height of the late 2011 crisis, to over 6 per cent by the end of the month, while Italian bond yields followed close behind. Seven per cent is seen as the point of no return where debt and interest rates take off in a vicious spiral. Shares slid on international exchanges while the euro fell against the dollar. Lyn Graham-Taylor, a Rabobank strategist, said: "We're back in full crisis mode. It is looking more and more likely that Spain is going to have some form of a bailout." Italy is not doing much better, despite both governments implementing vicious austerity packages.

The net results of April's string of bad news were Eurozone debt rising to 87.2 per cent of GDP, the highest level since the euro's launch in 1999, and global stock markets (measured by the MSCI world equity index) falling 1.4 per cent, after rising the rest of the year.

Political shocks

The Russian revolutionary Lenin famously said, "Politics is concentrated economics". On 23 April proved this to be true as a new, political dimension to austerity came to the fore. The Dutch Prime Minister resigned after his coalition partners failed to agree a hard enough austerity package, and the narrow victory of Francois Hollande the Socialist Party candidate in the French presidential first round elections the day further spooked the markets.

In his victory speech, Hollande announced "Europe is watching us, austerity can no longer be the only option" and says France will not ratify the new EU fiscal treaty unless it is renegotiated to include a "growth pact". However, he has also signalled compromise with Merkel and Draghi's austerity supplemented by eurobonds that would not pool ("mutualise") Germany's debts and credit rating with the crisis-hit periphery – something German capitalists will not countenance since it would threaten to drag Germany down with the poorer countries – but ECB bonds developed specifically for infrastructure and industrial investment. Germany already compromised over the Draghi long-term refinancing operation (LTRO) stimulus in December. No doubt there is room for convergence between Hollande and Merkel.

This austerity-lite would mean continued cuts and neoliberal "reforms" to public services, pensions and workers' legal rights. This is effectively Keynesian spending that at best might act to stabilise unemployment at its current high levels.

Who will pay?

With the ECB's trillion euro stimulus wearing off so quickly and the re-emergence of the Eurozone recession, the question of bailouts returns. More and more analysts are predicting that Ireland, Spain and even Greece again will require fresh bailouts this year. The "realistic"

solution to such a crisis is to muddle through with compromises along two lines: the ECB monetising debt – something already begun with Draghi's boosted LTRO programme – and then controlled defaults into the new bailout fund operational in July, the €500 billion European Stability Mechanism (ESM). The problem is: if the government or banking system in Spain or Italy goes bust, the ECB is now on the hook for hundreds of billions in worthless loans and assets. And how many trillions of euros more can the ECB print without unleashing a disastrous inflation? Meanwhile Italy is the Eurozone's third largest economy, and Spain its fourth, twice the size of Portugal, Greece and Ireland combined. Bailing out those smaller countries caused tremendous strains and crises, a bailout of Spain would in current circumstances bankrupt and rip apart the Eurozone. This is where Francois Hollande comes in, to force more concessions out of the German government, both to stave off such an explosive crisis for as long as possible, to minimise its impact when it comes, and to produce big enough resources to contain it.

What is for certain is that the longer the crisis goes on, the more the global bankers and bond market funds like Pimco will line up behind the only workable strategy that means their loans get paid: super-austerity and extreme neoliberalism. This necessarily entails attacks on democracy and workers' rights, and support for the most reactionary governments able to repress resistance.

The "markets" (the term the big capitalist barons and finance houses hide behind) have applied unyielding pressure for this solution throughout the crisis, and while France and Germany, behind the ECB and EU, could wring write-downs out of Greece's creditors, they are not strong enough to do so repeatedly. Capital would haemorrhage out of Europe. In reality Hollande and his supporters in the Eurozone hierarchy will not stand against the markets in the final analysis.

A barbaric future of poverty for Europe's workers is the only "sustainable" way for capitalism to go forward. The alternative to this is not Hollande's austerity-lite but building massive resistance across borders to austerity and in defence of our welfare states, led by a new revolutionary international aiming to go beyond the best rotten "unity" Eurozone capitalists can achieve with a Socialist United States of Europe.

A fracking disaster in the making

James Copley

THE CAPITALISTS' LUST for oil and gas knows no boundaries. From wars to extortion, economic sanctions and environmental disasters, these are all just unfortunate blips in the profit figures for those who control the globe's ever-dwindling supplies of fossil fuels.

In recent years rising oil prices, in part due to the instability caused by imperialist war in the Middle East, has brought heightened interest in hydraulic fracturing (fracking), as a method of extracting more fossil fuels from oil and gas wells.

Fracking essentially involves pumping hundreds of thousands of

litres of water mixed with toxic chemicals into the ground at very high pressure, either into an old and partially spent oil or gas well, or into a hole drilled specifically for the purpose. This mixture opens up cracks in the rock deep underground, forcing out gas and oil. Approximately 50 to 70 per cent of the fluid pumped into the ground remains there.

The process came to public attention last year, when a site run by energy company Cuadrilla near Blackpool was linked to the first confirmed case of earthquakes directly caused by fracking in the UK. Scientists have known for a long time that fracking can cause earthquakes, but there have been mixed reports

about just how serious the effects could be.

Some researchers are convinced that the process can produce only very low magnitude earthquakes, barely big enough to notice.

Others have voiced concern over the large volume of toxic fluid that is left in the ground, arguing that earthquakes can cause this fluid to migrate through the natural underground fissures that hydraulic fracturing makes use of. They fear that earthquakes will allow fracking fluid to reach the aquifers from which water supplies are drawn.

One thing that is certain in the current economic downturn – as well as in the heightened tensions between

the old imperialist heartlands and the Middle East – is that any source of fossil fuel will be exploited, regardless of the environmental cost. It is after all profit and not the environment that motivates the companies that promote the fracking of these wells.

The UK government is serving their agenda by ignoring the advice of researchers and approving further oil well exploitation after the Blackpool earthquakes.

In addition, government policy allows fracking companies to regulate the pollutants they put into the ground themselves. With no official watchdogs to hold them to account, it is community and grassroots cam-

paigns that are on the frontline against fracking.

We are in favour of a suspension of fracking to prevent vast quantities of toxic chemicals being put into the ground without oversight or control.

And we believe that dependence on the exploitation of fossil fuels needs to be phased out, with investment in sustainable energy financed by the taxation of the biggest oil and gas producers and those who pollute the environment.

This investment should be directed both towards large infrastructure projects, such as wind farms, and towards smaller, more distributed methods such as solar panels.



Bernie McAdam

VETERAN IRISH Republican Marian Price has been imprisoned without trial since May 2011. This harks back to the British government's widespread use of internment in the 1970's as a way of silencing opposition to its rule in the north of Ireland. This repressive policy only succeeded in broadening the scale of the anti-Unionist and anti-British revolt.

The 57 year old activist had been

given a life sentence following the Old Bailey bombings in 1973, then released in 1980 following a prolonged hunger strike in which she had been force-fed over 400 times. She had been suffering from tuberculosis and weighed five stones. Her release had been based on a royal pardon.

Northern Ireland secretary Owen Patterson signed an order revoking her parole licence claiming that she had encouraged support for an illegal organisation. This amounted to

Free Marian Price

holding up the script of a message read out at an Easter commemoration from a masked man representing the Real IRA.

Marian's lawyers pointed out that she was not on licence and there was no legal right to detain her as her release was based on a royal pardon. Patterson's lawyers were unable to find the royal document – the only copy of which it would appear was conveniently destroyed in 2010 – hence their claim it was not a pardon but a conditional release! After her arrest, the judge granted her bail only for Marian to be immediately rearrested on Patterson's orders.

Last July Marian was further charged with "providing property for the purposes of terrorism", linked to the Massereene shootings of two soldiers. But as Eamonn McCann points out, she "had been questioned for two days about this allegation in

November 2009 and released without charge. There was no change in circumstances in the interim and no new evidence offered." Again the court offered her bail only for Patterson to overrule.

It is patently obvious that Marian's detention is not about her being guilty of a serious crime, but about the British government's desire to silence her. As Bernadette McAliskey commented at a recent protest in Belfast: "This is a clear message that no dissent will be tolerated. You challenge the status quo at your peril." In short, don't oppose the Good Friday Agreement!

The British government would love to fool us into believing that a just peace reigns in the north of Ireland – but the reality is different. It is British repression that reigns supreme. Maghaberry republican prisoners are still subject to beatings

and strip-searches. Loyalist parades continue to march through nationalist areas. Raids and beatings are regularly dished out in the pursuit of 'dissident' republicans. The northern state is still a sectarian prison house for all those that identify with a united Ireland.

Marian has been illegally incarcerated for a year now. She had been locked up in the all-male prison at Maghaberry and put in isolation. This long-term solitary confinement is a form of torture. Due to a serious deterioration in her health she has been transferred to the hospital wing of Hydebank prison where she still remains in isolation. The authorities are intent on breaking her body and spirit. Many protests have taken to the streets in Ireland.

We must call on Britain to drop the charges and release Marian Price now!

Say no to Olympic guns

Marcus Halaby

THE HEADY combination of big business, land development, local and national politics, and the struggle for international prestige has always ensured that major sporting events like the Olympics are fraught with issues for the communities that live and work near them.

Few people, however, could have expected the news that ground-based surface-to-air missiles would be deployed in residential areas in East London to "protect" the Olympic site in Stratford from unspecified threats from the air.

Residents of the 700-apartment Bow Quarter complex are understandably concerned that a battery of missiles could be based on their rooftop water tower, with one resident, journalist Brian Whelan, mounting a legal challenge against the owner of the complex, questioning their right to allow the Ministry of Defence to place the missiles there.

On top of the fear of accidents

or explosions, there is the news that armed police may be required to protect the team of around 10 soldiers who will operate the missile battery, bringing with it the prospect that the area might become a target for terrorist attack.

As a recent Stop the War Coalition newsletter put it, this news gives the lie to the idea that the war in Afghanistan is being fought "so that we don't have to fight on the streets of London", showing instead that the war "has made Britain a more dangerous place".



Disable the government, not Remploy

Sally Turner

REMPLOY, a government-owned company that provides disabled people with employment, is closing 36 of its 54 factories and sacking at least 1,700 workers. Everyone should oppose this act, which will destroy workers' dignity and independence, as well as halting socially useful production.

Workers Power and Revolution members went to meet the workers at a Remploy factory in Leeds under threat and talk to them about the closure. The atmosphere outside was welcoming, and the workers were happy for the support.

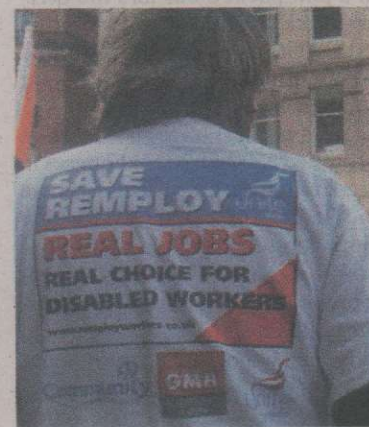
At first many workers thought the game was over, but many seemed buoyed up when we suggested they occupy the factory and hold the machinery to ransom.

The unions representing the workers – Unite and GMB – have so far

not come up with a fighting plan, with officials spreading further gloom when they told the BBC that there is "no way disabled people will be able to find work in the current climate." By refusing to call strike action, the officials are lying down in front of these closures. No wonder the workers we spoke to felt let down.

Hundreds of workers protested in London, Sheffield, Cardiff and Edinburgh at the end of April against the attempts to throw them onto the dole. We attended the demonstration in Sheffield, where there was an atmosphere of defiance. Four hundred marched, chanting to the sound of car horns from supporters.

One placard read, "Disable the government, not Remploy". We packed into Sheffield Town Hall for a rally with GMB officials, Labour politicians and a Unite



organiser.

Unfortunately none of the speakers were disabled or Remploy workers, although they did make fiery speeches about fighting back, resonating with a clear mood in favour of resistance.

We will continue to fight alongside the Remploy workers, and show that they don't have to be another unemployment statistic, in particular arguing for pressure on the unions to call strike action and occupations.

PCS: new strategy needed

Rebecca Anderson

THE ISSUE of overriding importance at this year's conference of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union will again be the battle to save our pensions. The government has now implemented the changes to our pensions – we will work longer, pay more and get less – but this does mean the fight is over.

Last year we voted to ballot for strike action on 30 June and this year there are again a number of motions tabled on this issue. All propose a way forward. The National Executive Committee's (NEC) proposal will commit us to continuing to campaign against the changes alongside a coalition of other unions but in terms of industrial action it only supports departmental or local action.

If the National Union of Teachers (NUT) agrees to strike at the end of June, then it is very likely that the NEC will bring PCS members out alongside them. But this motion leaves the question of whether or not we strike again entirely in the hands of

the NEC, which refused to call action on 28 March and has a track record of pulling back at the crucial moment. Surely conference and a directly elected strike leadership should control the action, not a standing committee.

Name the day

The only other mention of industrial action is in a motion from my branch in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). This calls on the NEC to "name the day for another strike within one month of this conference, coordinating with other unions if possible but alone if necessary" and "publicly call on all public sector unions to join the strike, and any private sector unions that also face attacks on their pensions".

Unison Health members have just rejected the government's offer but their leaders are refusing to call another strike. PCS should openly demand Unison leaders call another pensions strike – and appeal directly to their members if they refuse.

Conference motions paint a picture of a workforce facing cuts and sell-

offs. The Tories are threatening to privatise Criminal Enforcement in the MOJ, oblivious to the horror stories of G4S and Serco's abuse of powers over asylum seekers and prisoners. The Coalition also wants to abolish the Gangmasters Licensing Authority and the Employment Standards Inspectorate, which speaks volumes about their attitude to workers.

The other major issue facing PCS member is the prospect of a one per cent pay cap and the introduction of regional pay. Over four years the average civil servant has lost 15 per cent of their wages. Regional pay will add to this impoverishment through paying staff from poorer areas lower wages and further impede collective bargaining.

Serwotka losing his shine

Over the past few months and certainly since the aborted strike on 28 March, some of the shine has rubbed off the PCS leadership. Their strategy for defending our pensions, pay and jobs in the face of brutal Tory austerity has stalled in a cul-de-sac.

A number of attacks from the government have gone unanswered, like the tens of thousands of voluntary redundancies that have crippled services and put enormous pressure on remaining staff, or the huge reduction in our redundancy pay – you now get more money for voluntary redundancy than for compulsory.

Since last conference we have only taken two days of strike action in response to the biggest attacks ever faced by our union and by the whole public sector. The NEC was right to try and build a coalition of all unions facing these attacks, but must have known and should have prepared for the right wing betrayal.

Over 100 delegates to the recent NUT conference met to discuss the state of the pensions dispute and to organise from below. Delegates to the PCS conference need to do the same. Let's use the conference to pass the best motions and meet to discuss strategy for resisting the cuts. Let's follow the example of the sparks and NUT members and start to build a rank and file network.

Support tanker drivers

Sally Turner

AS SOLDIERS prepare to scab on tanker drivers, it is clear that the threat of a national strike remains very real. Despite ongoing negotiations and a final proposal from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) to prevent a strike, it seems unlikely that drivers will accept it.

Last month, workers at all but one of the seven companies involved voted for strike action, with unusually high turnouts for postal votes. Petrol would dry up quickly during a strike, as these drivers supply 90 per cent of station forecourts.

Tory Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude caused panic buying and queues at the pumps in March, when said that a "bit of fuel in a jerry can in the garage" would be "a sensible precaution". The following day a woman suffered serious burns in York, after trying to decant petrol in her kitchen.

This dispute is entirely winnable, but Unite officials appear to be caving in to political pressure from the government, which has tried to whip up a hate campaign against the drivers. Like the British Airways cabin crew two years ago, the tanker drivers are being set up as the new "enemy within". No one should fall for those lies.

The tanker drivers deserve our complete support. Their demands on conditions, which would prevent bosses from undercutting wages or sacrificing safety on the altar of profit, are entirely reasonable and affordable. Any attempt to use the army to break strikes must be met with mass pickets – they cannot be allowed to drive thousands of litres of petrol on our roads with little or no safety training.

Victory to the tanker drivers!

All aboard for a London bus strike

Jeremy Dewar

BUS DRIVERS in the capital are to ballot for strike action in pursuit of a £500 Olympic bonus to compensate for the 800,000 extra passengers expected during the summer Games.

The mental stress and physical strain (the extra work of the engine in a jam-packed bus jars the drivers' back) of working extra hours in this period needs to be rewarded financially. This is a totally just claim.

Tube workers have already been promised £500-£1,200 in bonuses in recognition of their efforts to make the Games run smoothly. Yet Mayor Boris Johnson has accused the drivers of "using their positions to lever more money out of London's transport budget".

What a hypocrite! Johnson spent £11.37 million on just eight Routemaster buses as a pre-election gimmick this year, yet he denies bonuses to 28,000 drivers, which would cost £14 million.

Behind the jokes and the sound-bites, Johnson is just another anti-working class Tory.

In truth, the drivers are the only group of transport workers not being offered any bonus for the Olympics.

The drivers' union, Unite, has already conducted an indicative bal-

lot, in which 90 per cent supported strike action on a 50 per cent turnout – a tremendous mandate for action.

Action and demands

But as yet, the union has failed to announce an official ballot. Why? Even if officials are using the threat of strike action to sharpen their negotiating tools, they need to take the next step and organise a real ballot – otherwise the bosses will simply drag their feet and continue to refuse to negotiate.

Since the last cross-London bus strike in 2008, pay and conditions have deteriorated badly. Pay has fallen behind inflation every year, while there is an alarming new trend to pay new drivers just £9.50 an hour – far below the going rate of £12 or more.

The danger is now that, after the Olympics, when there will be a "surplus" of drivers, the bosses will keep on the new and cheaper ones, and find excuses to sack the more experienced workers. Victimisation, like the sacking of Unite convenor Abdul Omer at Sovereign, is rife across the sector.

So bus drivers need to get organised and make sure that they take charge of their dispute and do not allow Unite officials to delay, limit or call off the action, like they did in 2008.

Strike committees should be elected in each garage and delegates from each come together in a single, all-London strike leadership. They alone should decide when to strike and for how long – all-out and stay out if necessary.

Equal pay for equal work

Bus drivers should also ask themselves why they are only demanding £500 when they could win so

much more.

Instead of the current "race to the bottom" they should reinstate their old claim from 2008: £30,000 for a 38-hour week across all companies.

The Olympics provides an excellent opportunity to fight back against some of the most vicious employers in London.

But the drivers themselves need to take it with both hands if they are to steer the dispute to victory.



London buses: an iconic symbol in the capital, but Boris Johnson wants to run them on the cheap

NHS: all out with Unite on 10 May

The fight to save the NHS starts with the pensions strike on 10 May, argues NHS worker *Dara O'Connell*

A HUNDRED thousand health workers in Unite will take strike action on Thursday 10 May over attacks to their pensions. Members of the PCS, UCU, Nipsa and the RMT will join them, as strikes hit colleges, Jobcentres and other key services.

Last November up to 2 million public sector workers went on strike against Tory plans to make them work longer, pay more towards their pensions and get less in return when they retire. Unite's health members further voted by a margin of over 94 per cent in January to reject the pension package, reinforcing their mandate for further strikes.

The Tories have already imposed increases on pension contributions, with NHS workers losing an average of £30 a month. This increase arrived during the extended lull since 30 November, as union bureaucrats either refused to call more action or simply dithered over the next steps.

The conservatism and passivity of the union leaders has emboldened the Tory-led coalition to ratchet up their attacks on the NHS. The Health and Social Care Act, effectively handing huge swathes of the NHS over to the private sector, was passed without even a national demonstration.

Now health secretary Andrew Lansley has threatened NHS workers that they will be paid less if they live in poorer areas. These pay cuts and the £20 billion of cuts over the next four years are meant to soften up workers and the pub-

lic for the privatisation the NHS.

United front – above and below

But the campaign against the government's plans has been strengthened over the last few days. A ballot of 300,000 NHS workers in Unison showed that just over half voted against the pension deal, albeit with a low turnout of 14.8 per cent. Christina McAnea, Unison's unelected head of health, claimed, "The low turnout coupled with the close vote shows there is no mandate to endorse the pensions proposals, but equally no mandate to take further action."

This is a blatant lie; the original ballot for strike action, representing a majority of 78 per cent, is still live and action can be restarted. The low turnout was undoubtedly due to the cynicism of members who expected more action after the incredible show of force in November. The British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nurses have also voted to reject the government's final offer.

The crisis facing us is not the demoralisation of union members, who clearly want to fight, but one of political direction. Union leaders, like Unison's Dave Prentis and the GMB's Paul Kenny, have won no concessions from negotiations. Meanwhile the "rejectionist" leaders have failed to give a clear lead against a sell-out.

The strike on 10 May can reignite the struggle and provide activists with the opportunity to agitate for

a return to a united campaign. This means building joint mobilising meetings in our workplaces, involving striking unions and non-striking unions, to mount pickets on the day and organise solidarity actions.

This could kickstart the process of building cross-union strike committees across the NHS so that the rank and file can prepare for more strikes, oppose the leaders selling out, and deliver action without them if necessary.

It is clear a series of one-day actions will not be enough to win. We need to escalate the actions, culminating in a general strike, to defeat the pension attacks, save the NHS from privatisation and bring down the millionaires' coalition.

Why we need a rank and file movement

Jeremy Dewar

WE ARE IN the midst of the biggest capitalist offensive for generations and yet the response from the trade union leaders has been miniscule. There is a yawning chasm between the scale of action needed to stop the cuts and bring down the government, and the timid industrial action strategies put forward by union leaders, left and right.

While the biggest traitors are to be found on the right wing of our movement – Brendan Barber, Dave Prentis, Paul Kenny – the left-wing leaders have not come up with any independent strategy to beat the cuts.

As this paper predicted, the right wing union leaders broke the united front and abandoned the strike movement in December 2011. But faced with this treachery, the left wing leaders of Unite, PCS, NUT and UCU failed to up the tempo of strikes, extend their duration or even coordinate them.

Yes we have had the 28 March and now 10 May strike days, but on each occasion – with the exception of the UCU lecturers – the left leaders have found excuses not to join in.

Worse, none of them have developed a policy to openly appeal to the hundreds of thousands stuck in the big-defeatist unions. Instead they still obey the unwritten rule that says no union leader should interfere with the business of another union or criticise its leadership – even when they stab workers in the back!

Where now?

The lesson of the pensions dispute is that rank and file union members cannot rely on their leaders to take the necessary action to beat the cuts or to unite the resistance, and that they therefore need to organise independently of all wings of the bureaucratic officials.

The aim of rank and file organisation is to:

- Maximise support for all actions.
- Pressure the leaders to carry out agreed actions and demand they extend the actions.
- Defy the anti-union laws wherever possible and whenever they threaten effective action.
- Call unofficial strike action whenever necessary.
- Demand rank and file control of all disputes and negotiations through mass meetings and elected strike committees.

• Transform the unions by replacing treacherous leaders with fighting leaders, elected and instantly recallable by the members and paid the wages of the average members they represent.

Such a movement is possible to build in the current period and can produce spectacular results for our side, as can be seen, for example, with the Construction National Rank and File Committee (the "Sparks"). There are other rank and file groups too, like Crew Defence in the Bassa section of Unite and Unite's Grass Roots Left, pulled together after Jerry Hicks' General Secretary election campaign.

We need to build rank and file groupings and networks on this basis across all sectors and in all unions, as the number one priority for all trade union activists. We appeal to all left trade union bodies – National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), Unite the Resistance (UtR), the various broad left groupings in the unions – to cooperate in building this conference, while making it clear that this is not a vehicle for promoting this or that left leader but an attempt to build a genuinely independent rank and file movement.



David Cameron is sitting on a timebomb with the NHS reforms – let's set it off! (Image: Bristol Anticuts Alliance)

NUT leaders dither as teachers lose out

Bernie McAdam, Sandwell NUT

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) Conference this Easter made abundantly clear to its leaders that more national strike action was needed to stop the Coalition's pensions attack. A successful motion called for regional strikes in the summer term, culminating in a national strike in June. Within weeks, however, the National Executive refused to name a date either for national or regional action.

Outrageously union lawyers ruled calls for action on 10 May "out of order" at conference. Then the executive refused to roll out regional strikes on that day based on negative reports from divisional secretaries.

This bureaucratic blocking leaves hundreds of thousands of health workers and civil servants taking strike action on pensions in May on their own.

Despite all the past rhetoric about getting cross-union action, the leadership has copped out of a brilliant opportunity to coordinate strikes. So much for the NUT boast that we are in the vanguard of the fight to save our pensions.

Lack of urgency

The lack of urgency is breathtaking given that all teachers as from April are now suffering a reduction in their take home pay as pension contributions rise whilst wages remain frozen. The creeping paralysis afflicting our leaders is all the more irksome considering the well-supported strike and 8,000 strong demonstration in London on 28 March.

The executive will reconsider the call for a national strike at their next meeting, ironically also on 10 May, but want to consult the Naswut (the other main teachers' union) first. Whether Naswut agrees to support

such action must not, however, become a precondition for the NUT to proceed. Indeed if the NUT had issued a clear call and set a firm date, that would have put tremendous pressure on Naswut to join in.

In an important move, an angry fringe meeting of 150 delegates at NUT conference called for a Local Associations for National Action conference in Liverpool on 16 June. All associations (branches) should send delegates and in the meantime bombard headquarters with resolutions calling for the resumption of national strike action.

Rank and file

It is vital that NUT rank and file activists debate and develop a strategy for victory. The leadership, despite its "left" credentials, has delayed, and then limited action. Its mentors in the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) talk of the need for "a clear overall war strategy" but then refuse to tell us how to win the war!

The NUT needs a grassroots movement that is not tied to the leadership and its policy of stringing out isolated days of action. Such a network needs to give a lead on how to fight back against the wide range of attacks on education and teachers. Strikes by teachers on terms and conditions, redundancies and academies, workloads and victimisation show that the new mood of militancy is not limited to pensions.

Our strategy will necessarily involve escalating action up to and including indefinite strikes. If the leadership is unwilling to lead, then we must develop the network at school and association level to build unofficial action – just like the electricians did in their successful fight against the construction giants. The forthcoming Liverpool conference could be a significant step in the direction of building such a network.

A NEW ANTICAPIT

A project is launched in Britain, bringing together activists from around the UK in a new network for united action and open debate.

Will it succeed where others have failed? Or will it fall apart like so many 'unity initiatives' in the past?

The answer depends on whether the participants can reach agreement on their strategy and their programme.

Founding meeting debates first steps

THE ANITCAPITALIST Initiative (ACI) was founded on 28 April 2012 at a meeting of around 75 activists from across England.

The Initiative is backed by local groups in South London, Leeds, Manchester and Sussex, and involves rank and file trade unionists, students, activists and young people resisting cuts, privatisation and capitalism.

New local groups are being set up in Bristol, Doncaster, East London and North London.

Trade unionists attended and reported on their struggles against the cuts, the pensions robbery and privatisation. Activists came from the post union CWU, the teachers' union NUT, healthworkers from Unite, civil servants from the PCS, and education workers from Unison and the UCU.

Students were there from Sussex, Leeds, Manchester and a number of London colleges.

Political organisations present at the launch included Workers Power, plus two breakaways from our group: Permanent Revolution, formed in 2006, and the trend led by Luke Cooper and Simon Hardy which left us this spring.

The meeting had two sessions. The first was a discussion of the fight-back against austerity and the prospects for building rank and file resistance today; the second discussed the nature of the new initiative and voted on three motions.

Rank and file

The first session showed that while the meeting was small, the people there were connected to and closely involved in the class struggle.

Nick Jones, an NUT member, reported on the pension dispute and the decision of the general secretary of the NUT to call off action, which had spurred a lively and angry meeting of local associations at the NUT conference, determined to stop the sell-out.

Jeremy Dewar, a teaching assistant, Unison and Workers Power member from south London, called for unity

of all trade unionists in the education sector and beyond, and argued for a rank and file movement across the unions, reporting on how activists in Lambeth had formed a rank and file network in the past and how it could be relaunched.

A speaker from the Alliance for Workers Liberty questioned whether people were being too optimistic about prospects for building a rank and file movement in the unions, pointing to the fact that his own organisation had taken 30 years to win even modest influence on the London Underground via its workplace bulletin.

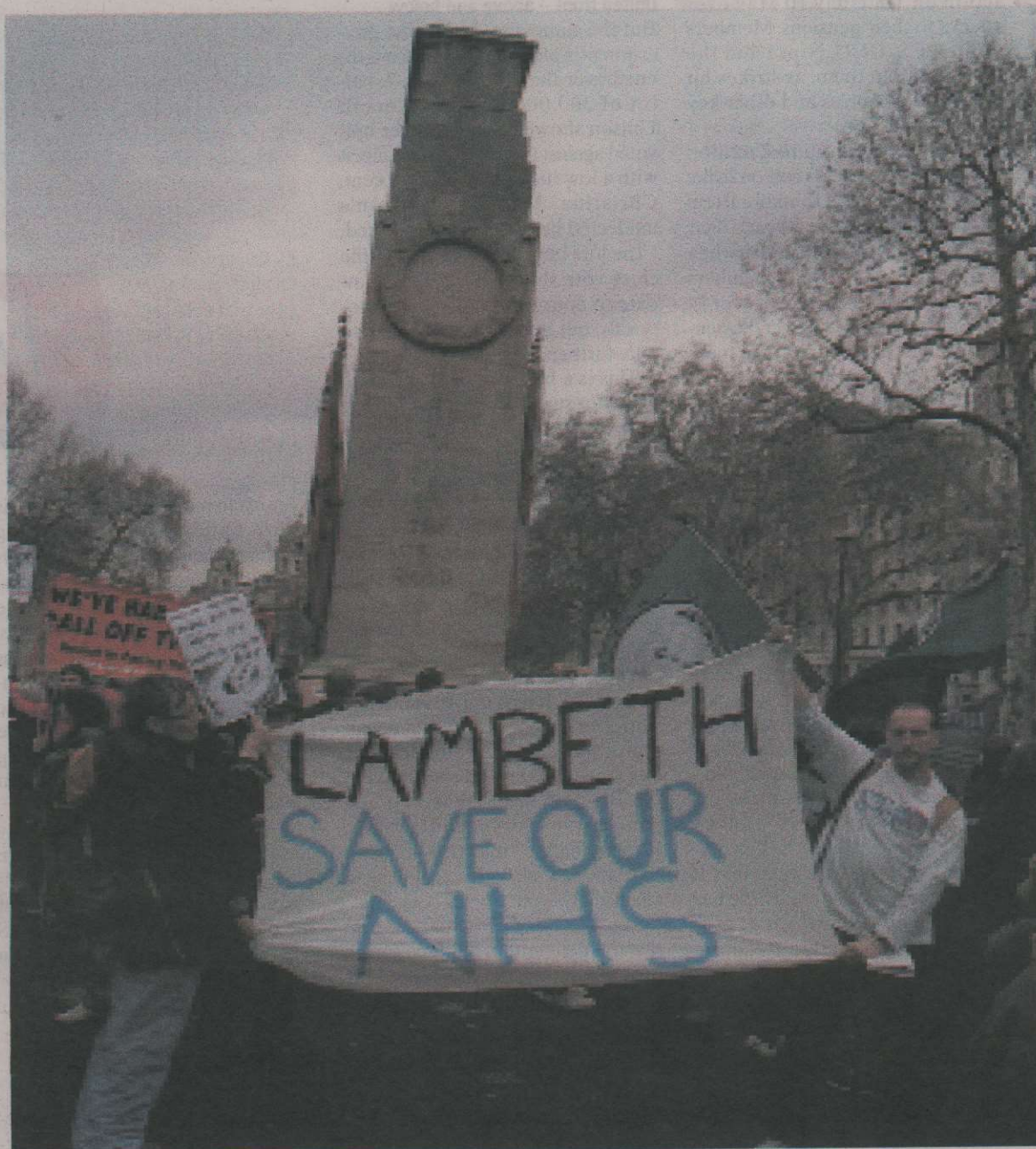
In one of the best speeches of the day, Kate Ford from Hackney NUT and Permanent Revolution recognised it takes time to build up a rank and file opposition, but said teachers who wouldn't normally be radical had been propelled into opposition to the union tops, giving an opportunity to the left now: "We haven't got 30 years."

It wasn't just trade unionists or education workers talking. Jack and Stuart from Leeds talked about how unemployed activists had rallied support for the disabled Remploy workers facing redundancy through Tory cuts. Louise from Doncaster said the NHS had been set up to meet the demands of the working class after the huge Labour victory in 1945, and calling the fight to defend it the "struggle of our whole generation for their future".

The first session also heard a number of contributions about the problems of the left today and the nature of the new initiative. Luke Cooper said there is a mood in favour of something that is about unity, creates a space in which politics can be discussed in a fraternal atmosphere, where there can be debate, and where actions can be coordinated.

The need for policies and programme

Richard Brenner, for Workers Power, said that given the scale of the economic crisis, there is a widespread



recognition in society that capitalism is unfair, but very little belief that there is an alternative to capitalism. Resistance is not being connected together in a way that can bring down the austerity governments, and not being linked to a fight to overthrow the system. An alternative to capitalism will mean a working class government, which means we will have to build a political alternative and a political party. The initiative should therefore open a process of discussing the policies and programme around which a new political organisation could be built.

This proved controversial, and debate continued on whether the initiative should be a network or a political organisation, as well as whether Workers Power's proposed motion should be adopted, which would have committed the initiative to "policies as a framework for common action, and as a starting point from which we will go on together to elaborate a common action programme for a new political organisation."

Our motion went on to set out some brief policies, including resisting the attacks on the welfare state, bringing down the government

through a mass strike wave, overcoming the division of the anticuts movement into rival campaigns through a national federation of anticuts groups, building a rank and file movement in the unions, supporting unemployed, migrant and precarious workers, opposing imperialist wars and occupations, supporting the Arab revolutions and the Palestinians, opposing racism, sexism, homophobia and Islamophobia, defending the environment, and – most controversial of all – fighting for the formation of a mass working class political alternative to the Labour Party.

Many speakers opposed this. Some seemed to be opposed to adopting policy as a matter of principle, with one student from UCL saying she thought this would put people off, and another saying we should avoid it at all costs as it would delineate who could be in the Initiative and who could not.

By contrast, some said they thought it was too soon to adopt policy; some said they were not opposed to policy in principle but the policies proposed were too long; others objected that the policies proposed did not go far enough.

Rebecca Anderson of Workers

Power argued that simple policies like the ones proposed would help the initiative to grow and that otherwise if people asked what it stood for we would have no reply of any substance.

Bill Jefferies of Permanent Revolution said Workers Power "should not have brought this resolution" because it showed a "top down" approach. Nick Jones welcomed the fact that Workers Power had brought the proposal, but said, on balance and given the feeling of the meeting, he would oppose it, but that the initiative could nevertheless consider developing some simple policies to build around.

The meeting adopted a very general motion from Luke Cooper and Stuart King which included no policy at all, with 35 votes in favour, 13 against and 11 abstentions. Workers Power's second part motion on policy gained 12 votes in favour but more than 20 abstained on the issue.

A proposal from Mark Renwick (Leeds) that "the Anticapitalist Initiative will actively initiate, lead and participate in local and national campaigns to oppose the privatisation of the NHS", was adopted almost unanimously.

CAPITALIST INITIATIVE

Workers Power and the Anticapitalist Initiative

THERE IS A clear need for a new political organisation in Britain.

The scale of the Tory attacks and the severity of the continuing capitalist crisis contrast miserably with the feeble response of the Labour and TUC leaders.

Ed Miliband has backed the Tory cuts, the pay freeze and the benefits cap. Unison is calling for a TUC demonstration – but not until October. The unions fighting the pensions robbery are limiting action to one day strikes and repeatedly obstructing coordination.

Yet Labour has surged in the polls, because millions of working class people want protection from the Tory attacks, and no mass alternative to Labour exists.

To paraphrase Leon Trotsky, the fate of British society, like that of the rest of humanity, is now focused on “the crisis of working class leadership”.

But in Britain today the socialist organisations are small, divided and unable to offer coherent opposition to the Labour and trade union bureaucrats.

The Socialist Party (SP) went along with the decision of the PCS leadership to back down from action in March over pensions; the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) did the same with regard to the NUT.

Neither is committed to building a national movement of rank and file trade unionists to deliver action without the officials where necessary, to dissolve the union bureaucracy and put control of the unions in the hands of their members.

Nor do these two organisations advance a coherent strategy to link working class resistance to austerity to a challenge to the capitalist system itself. The SP’s programme calls for a democratically elected socialist government to peacefully take over the economy from the capitalists – a parliamentarist illusion that no capitalist state would ever permit. The SWP has no written programme at all, no strategy for power, just a *carte blanche* for its leaders to perform one tactical volte face after another, without reference to principle.

And both groups repel generation after generation of activists through their bureaucratic regimes, in which members cannot organise within the party to change policy or hold their leaderships to account, and through their cynical manoeuvres to gain short-term organisational advantage within the movement. Most scandalously, this has resulted in the existence of three rival anticuts campaigns, each holding a succession

of dwindling national conferences, each addressed by the same figures from the left wing of the TUC which each of them shields from criticism.

We need a break from this.

Workers Power has always recognised that the path to a revolutionary party will not come simply through individual recruitment to a small, mainly propaganda focused group like our own. We are always seeking avenues to work with other forces and to debate and agree revolutionary policy with them. We believe a revolutionary party will come into being not through recruiting ones and twos, but through “the fusion of communism and the working class movement” (Lenin).

Today there are many activists in the unions, in the student movement and amongst the youth, who see the need for a movement that opposes the system but are crying out for something new that they can shape themselves, that they feel is really theirs.

That is why Workers Power, with others on the left, launched the call from our Anticapitalism 2011 event last autumn for steps towards a new political organisation.

Should this be just a network coordinating action and debate, as some libertarians and autonomous Marxists said at the founding national meeting of the ACI? We think that would run the risk of replicating the work of existing anticuts and campaigning organisations, without developing a coherent political alternative to the misleadership of the reformists and the opportunist socialist groups.

And while a forum for discussion is no bad thing in and of itself, a discussion that reaches no conclusion and adopts no policy or programme runs the risk of being a talking shop – at a time when clear answers are needed to the question: how can we defend the NHS and the welfare state before the Tories succeed in demolishing them?

Too soon, top down?

Our motion to the founding meeting of the ACI was voted down, with most delegates feeling it was too soon and too delimiting to adopt even the very basic initial principles we proposed. We think this was a mistake, because the ACI needs to make a clear decision that it can and will adopt policies: otherwise by definition it remains no more than a network – and one vulnerable to adopting unstated policy, *de facto*, driven by whoever controls the balance of opinion on its website.

What is more, the ACI will need

to be more than a coordination of local groups, because we are all fighting the same national enemy: the British capitalist state. Metaphors about local organisations being ‘from below’ and national ones being ‘top down’ are ideological and conceal key realities about class organisation. In this context the national organisation is the ‘totality’, something more than the sum of its parts, where decisions affecting every local group should be made.

Autonomous local groups should take local initiatives and make local policy; a national meeting should decide on national issues, based on the inputs and the arguments brought to it from the localities. Representation should reflect not only the organisation’s geography but industries, race and nationality, gender, sexuality, age and, above all, political opinion. This can only be done if a national structure can make policy decisions and elect a leadership to carry out its will until the next meeting.

Is there a risk that such a leadership could act unaccountably, against the will of the local groups? Yes. The answer is to guarantee the right of the members to convene a national meeting and recall the elected national leadership – not to pretend that we can dispense with leadership altogether. Such amorphous structures can be manipulated. Hence the title of one famous counter to libertarian prejudices in the 1960s: the Tyranny of Structurelessness.

Programme obstacle?

Of course in adopting policy there is a possibility that some people will not agree with it. To fear delineation and differentiation is to object to political organisation in and of itself.

But at the founding meeting of the ACI, many who objected to Workers Power’s proposal said they wanted policy to be developed first in the local groups so that people felt they owned the process.

Workers Power agrees that the ACI’s fuller programme should be developed in that way, and ours was the only motion that committed us to “go on together to elaborate a common action programme”.

At the same time we did not feel for a moment that the short list of general principles we proposed would have excluded forces vital to the development of a political alternative. We think opposition to the cuts, racism and war are basic and that no-one who does not share these views can go forwards with us in a common political organisation. We think the need for a unified anticuts

movement and a rank and file movement in the unions was affirmed and reaffirmed by countless speakers at the national meeting and are things that unify us, not divide us.

What then of the question of a new political party? That, we accept, is contentious. We brought it because we want to debate it, not whether we should be discussing it, but whether it is a good idea or not. Why? Because we are confident we can win that argument with many people who today have libertarian ideas, provided the argument is put, and provided a section of those who claim to support the need for a party do not continue to try to shield our libertarian comrades from that argument.

What is more, we are very clear that our proposals were just a few starting principles at the beginning of a discussion, not the revolutionary programme we will need for a durable organisation that will connect resistance to the fight for revolution.

It is therefore a distortion for Ben Lewis of the Weekly Worker to write that we promoted “an open, unashamed halfway house party” on some kind of incoherent programme intermediate between parliamentary reforms and revolution. We are simply practical enough to recognise that a programmatic discussion cannot be successfully concluded before it has begun. We want the movement to come together in the formation of a new mass working class party, and to win that party to a revolutionary policy in its formative discussions, not as an *a priori* demand from the armchair.

For this, the existence of a political organisation – Workers Power – that already develops revolutionary programme and which works to advance that programme in the movement in a disciplined way is not an obstacle to the formation of a new revolutionary party (as Cooper and Hardy suggest), but a precondition for it happening. Against their view, which we have described as liquidationist, we will not dissolve Workers Power unless and until we can reach real agreement with others on the tasks of the working class movement.

To describe adherence to a clear programme as the cause of nothing more than endless demoralising splits, as the Cooper-Hardy trend do (following Louis Proyect, Pham Binh and,

of course, Hal Draper) flies in the face of both logic and actual historical experience. Put bluntly, the left in Britain and internationally since the second world war has not distinguished itself by an excess of programmatic clarity. On the contrary, a series of ‘unity coalitions’ and ‘broad initiatives’, combining tragedy and farce in equal measure, have disorganised the left for six decades, from Pablo and Healy’s decisions not to push forward principled questions within the social democracy in the 1950s, through to more recent episodes such as Respect, the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) and the French New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) today.

To blame the left’s problems today on too strict a conception of revolutionary programme is to wish the mourners at a funeral “many happy returns of the day”.

Conversely, we have no wish to deliver our condolences at a wedding, and if the forces currently assembling in the ACI are not convinced of our views this is no cause for us to walk out, lose patience or attempt to kill it with condemnations. It is a characteristic of *intellectuals* to refuse to accept majority decisions when they go against them; we will continue to build the ACI energetically and to pursue the argument for a political organisation, a revolutionary programme, and communist forms of organisation in a loyal and frank way.

We believe we were right to take this initiative, though given the resignation of the Cooper-Hardy group from Workers Power it is not taking shape as we had first imagined or would have preferred.

There are clear risks that the ACI could remain a mere discussion group, or become an intermediate ‘centrist’ organisation, or of course a libertarian network actually controlled from above by an informal leadership group.

Recruiting to the organisation is the best way to develop a cross-section of those that are fighting against the cuts and against capitalism. The stronger the organisation, the more vibrant and democratic its internal life. We will work energetically to attract more forces to the ACI and believe that there is no reason that we can’t recruit hundreds over the next few months.

Join the Anticapitalist Initiative
<http://anticapitalists.org/>

Support the self-determination of the Balochi people

Arshad Shahzad

PAKISTAN'S MILITARY has intensified its fifth operation in Balochistan, battling a resistance movement against national oppression. Thousands of Balochi political activists are missing, and four hundred bodies of students, engineers, doctors and workers have been found, many showing evidence of severe torture.

Rebel leader Nawab Akbar Bugti's assassination in August 2006, and the more recent discovery of the mutilated body of Sangat Sana Baloch – a leader of the national movement – on 13 February, has caused widespread indignation at the murderous campaign of the Pakistan Army and security services.

Since Pakistan's foundation, the Balochi people have been an oppressed national minority. Despite British promises of self-determination or independence, they had to choose between joining India or Pakistan after Partition. Moreover, successive Pakistani governments have removed the initial concessions on autonomy granted to Balochi nationalists, leading to five full-scale uprisings and continuous armed resistance since the foundation of the country.

Balochistan, with 13 million inhabitants out of Pakistan's 177 million, is Pakistan's largest province, encompassing 44 per cent of its territory, and is one of the world's richest regions in terms of natural resources that include coal, gas, gold, copper and

other minerals.

These resources have not improved the lives of the Balochi people, but have become the principal cause of their suffering. Balochistan's strategic importance has also brought the interest of rival imperialisms, further complicating their struggle against national oppression. China and the United States, as well as the Pakistani and Balochi ruling classes, all want control of its mineral resources, as well as the deep warm water Gwadar Port situated close to the strategically vital Straits of Hormuz.

Should revolutionary socialists support Balochistan's struggle for national independence? There are major differences within the Pakistan left on this issue. Some oppose the Balochi liberation movement because it is supported by India and the United States, or because its leadership is in the hands of tribal chiefs.

They argue that these leaders are hostile to modernity and progressive values, and that we should support Balochistan's capitalist development. In circumstances where Balochi nationalists are killing Punjabi, Kashmiri and other Pakistani workers, others ask how the left could support them?

But why do these tribal chiefs still exist, and why has the Pakistani state not eradicated their social basis? The majority of them always were, and remain, its supporters, and it is Pakistan's continued rule that keeps the tribal chiefs in their positions of authority.

Similarly, Balochistan remains underdeveloped because Pakistan's ruling class did not carry out any social improvements such as the building of infrastructure, that might have helped ameliorate the national question.

Pakistan's ruling class draws enormous profits from Balochistan's natural resources, while leaving the Balochi people in acute poverty. Many on the Pakistani left might view the tribal chiefs as the main obstacle to progress, but for the Balochi people the frontline issue is their homeland's continued plunder.

Other Pakistani leftists claim that India and US imperialism are fomenting the Balochi liberation movement, making it a conspiracy against Pakistan rather than a genuine national movement. In doing so, they repeat the same argument that is used against every movement of liberation of an oppressed class or an oppressed people by its oppressors: that their struggles are not the product of justified resistance to exploitation and oppression, but merely the work of "outside agitators" – trade union militants, socialists or nationalists. Similarly, the Bolsheviks were accused during the Russian Revolution of being "German agents".

Of course, there is no doubt that imperialist powers are backing part of the movement, hoping to manipulate it in their own interest. That however is no reason to reject the aspirations of an entire people. Almost every national liberation struggle or

revolutionary uprising around the world has at some point been the subject of imperialist intervention and meddling.

Reactionary attacks on migrant workers

It is however true that some Balochi nationalists are attacking migrant workers, and we vigorously oppose such attacks. The vast majority of these workers are poor, and such indiscriminate acts weaken the Balochi struggle itself by antagonising potential allies within Pakistan. But the question remains: what approach should revolutionary socialists adopt towards the Balochi movement?

We support the right of national self-determination unconditionally, but critically. While it is a democratic demand that can be fulfilled within the limits of capitalism, support for the self-determination of oppressed peoples by the workers of the oppressor nation creates better conditions for working class struggle. Instead of the workers of the different nations fighting each other, they can unite to fight against capitalism.

We want a voluntary federation of nations, not a forced one. We would prefer to abolish borders and boundaries instead of creating new ones. But national self-determination (including the right of oppressed nations to form their own states, if they wish) has to be understood as a step towards this unity. Why?

Because, the workers and all progressive forces of the oppressor nation can only win the trust of the oppressed if they support their rights without hesitation.

In these circumstances, revolutionary socialists should support the Balochi national movement, while warning against the intervention of imperialism, both American and Chinese. Neither power will bring the Balochi people independence, instead giving rise to war, destruction and rivalries.

We must also point out the class differences within the national liberation movement, and the dangerous mis-leadership of bourgeois and tribal forces. We need to fight for the working class and socialist forces to become the leadership of the national liberation movement.

In place of the petty bourgeois methods of guerrilla struggle, the Balochi working class must build its own organs of struggle, linking its struggles with those of the whole Pakistani working class, using the methods of class struggle: strikes, occupations, and the general strike, culminating in mass political uprising. In this way the national liberation of Balochistan and the struggle for socialism can go forward together.

- Stop the military offensive! All military out of Balochistan!
- No to imperialist interference!
- Self-determination for the Balochi people!

Founding of new party overshadowed by abductions

Peter Main

THE FOUNDING convention of Sri Lanka's new Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) was held in Colombo on 9 April. The new party is based on the 5,000 members of the Movement for People's Struggle who split from the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, National Liberation Front), over the JVP's collaboration with the government of President Mahinda Rajapakse and its oppression of the Tamil community.

The convention was dominated by the abduction of two prominent party members, Kumar Gunaratnam and Dimuthu Attygala. Both expected to be in the leadership of the new party; their seizure, assumed to be by state forces, was a clear attempt to intimidate FSP members and supporters.

In fact, this latest unlawful detention only served to highlight the increasingly repressive character of Rajapakse's regime. In just the last six months, 56 opposition activists and investigative journalists have

"disappeared", often seized by teams travelling in the white vans associated with the security forces.

A wave of international protests demanding the detainees' immediate release once again drew world attention to the situation in Sri Lanka. Coming only weeks after a United Nations commission condemned the Colombo government for failing to act on its own investigation into the war crimes committed in the last phase of the war against the Tamils, these protests undoubtedly damaged Rajapakse's international image.

The subsequent release of both detainees on 10 April, after the Australian government's intervention on behalf of Kumar Gunaratnam, an Australian passport holder, made a mockery of earlier government claims that the detainees' whereabouts were unknown.

Meanwhile, at the new party's founding convention, its chairman Senadeera Gunatilake told members that this was "the beginning of a new era" to "unite the socialist movement

in the country for a struggle against the capitalist administration" and to bring about social reform.

He went on to describe the party as "the Sri Lankan segment of the global struggle against capitalism".

The fact that other socialist organisations, including the Socialist Party of Sri Lanka (SPSL), the Sri Lankan section of the League for the Fifth International, were invited to observe the convention is certainly a welcome change of attitude from leaders who were, until recently, part of the leadership of the JVP, which had a long record of violent hostility to other left organisations.

Whether the new party can, indeed, play a role in the struggle against capitalism will depend on more than just a change of attitudes. As SPSL general secretary Mahinda Devege made clear at a press conference following the convention: "What is needed in Sri Lanka today is not just a new party for the 5,000 who have left the JVP but a new party for the whole of the working class."

**Workers Power
discussion meeting
Sri Lankan left in flux
as JVP splits –
prospects for
a new party**

At 7.30pm on Wednesday 23 May 2012, at the
Indian YMCA, Fitzroy Square, London W1T
Near Warren Street tube

Student strikes rock Québec and Chile

Students in Québec, Canada have been on strike for three months against the government's attempts to raise university tuition fees, while Chilean students are protesting for reforms in the public education system, writes *KD Tait*

THE GENERAL unlimited strike, organised by a coalition of student federations, started on February 13 and has drawn in more than 190,000 students across the province. Tuition fees, currently C\$2168 per year, have increased by 300 per cent since 1989.

Over the 12-week campaign, Québec students have demonstrated what a national student leadership that is accountable to its members can achieve.

The Québec Liberal Party government, backed by bosses' organisations and the provincial riot police, have done its best to defeat the movement. The students and their federations have seen off government-sponsored scabbing, mass arrests and rubber bullets.

But while the violence and longevity of the protest has surprised many, Québec students have a record of resisting attacks on education. Big strike waves in 1996 and 2005 slowed the price hikes, but did not defeat the government.

However, the idea that 'resistance works' is borne out by the fact that tuition fees in the rest of Canada are more than double those in Québec. Opposition to tuition fees is not undermined by arguments that Québec should 'catch up' with the rest of Canada, but rather is strengthened by the knowledge that social conquests such as education, health and social services can only be maintained if they are fought for.

Austerity

Canada might seem a world away from the austerity regimes that are plunging Europe into deeper austerity in a vain – and unsuccessful – bid to stave off a double-dip recession. But like their UK counterparts who sparked a wave of resistance to Con-Dem cuts, Québec students recognise that attacks on education are merely the herald of further cuts in wider society.

There is no doubt that the most organised Canadian workers understand this too, reflected by the practical support of many trade unions which led to a 200,000-strong march through Québec City on 26 March. The strength of the movement has no doubt shaken the government, who view education reform as key to softening opposition to more fundamental reforms to workplace rights, jobs and welfare.

An 'agreement in principle', which is being brokered between the Education Minister Line Beauchamp and leaders of Québec's largest student federations, is the most serious threat to the movement yet seen. After an offer to spread price hikes over five years instead of seven was rejected, the government's latest concession is a six-month freeze on price rises.

This sham is nothing more than an attempt to demobilise resistance, removing students from the arena of struggle so that the government can concentrate on 'reforming' the rest of the welfare system.



The offer must be put to a vote of all the students involved in the struggle. The 'concession' is in reality nothing of the sort – it simply demonstrates that the government has no intention of backing down on higher education reform.

Therefore, we think students should reject the sell-out deal and press their leaders to escalate the struggle.

More than education

At this level of mobilisation, where government and its repressive apparatus in the police, media and courts faces the collective power of organised young people, the struggle becomes about much more than the accessibility of Québec's universities. While the social status of students enables them to play the role of 'detonator', the implications of this struggle go far beyond defending the material privileges of a section of society. A defeat for the movement in Québec will be the signal for a general offensive against what remains of the state's obligations to society.

With the intransigence of the government matched only by the determination of the students, the movement awaits the entry of a decisive force to swing the balance. The student strike is a source of politicisation and channels social anger against the government. But it does not have the economic muscle to hit the bosses where it hurts – in the pocket.

As the slow but inexorable rise in tuition fees shows, it will take the weight of the working class – millions strong – to achieve a sectional vic-

tory for students and a class victory against the government, in defence of wider social services.

CLASSE, the most radical student federation representing nearly 100,000 students in 57 different organisations, is appealing for a 'social' general strike. This is great, but the bitter experience of the UK student struggles in 2010/11 teaches us that trade union leaderships are deaf to appeals for solidarity action, i.e. a political struggle in defence of another section of society needs pressure from grassroots union members.

The potential power that Britain's students glimpsed in November 2010 was frittered away by disunity and the delayed action of the trade unions. As a result, young people have been largely absent from the great set-piece con-



Confronting the Québec provincial riot police

frontations in the past year.

Linking the struggles and turning to the unions

Québec's rulers don't fear the union leaders, as they've been doing business together for decades. What they fear is the anger of the youth who have no job, no prospect and therefore no stake in society.

If the working class is to be mobilised in this struggle then the students must organise beyond the official bureaucratic routes – they need to send delegates to union branch meetings and invite union branches to send their delegates to students' assemblies.

Building practical links is the first step, but on what basis can Québec's youth achieve joint action with the organisations of the working class? The message must be: first they come for the students, next they will turn on the workers. From Greece to Chile, education reforms have been the opening skirmish in the global assault on the social wage – schools, pensions, health and housing.

If the government says there is no money for education, what stops them from saying there's no money for healthcare or housing or jobs? Like healthcare, housing and a living wage, education is a right.

Fighting to keep and to extend rights across a whole society is impossible without mobilising the majority – the working class – behind that struggle.

Student organisations should appeal to unions to unite the resistance. A general strike to defend education is no instant fix, but it will take the struggle to a new level. If the working class sits on the sidelines, the government will be able to isolate the students.

But with a working class mobilised in conscious defence of its interests, alongside the students, the stage will be set for a decisive confrontation with the ranks of the privileged represented by the government on one side and the millions who continue to be ground down by their attacks in one of the world's richest countries on the other.

Chile

AT LEAST 50,000 students took part in May Day protests in Chile calling for serious reforms to the public education system. For more than a year Chilean students have waged an intensive campaign to win free education for all.

Only 45 per cent of high school students study in traditional public schools and the education system is largely in private hands, but heavily subsidised by the government.

Over the past 12 months, however, education is just one factor in the demonstrations which have mobilised millions across the country, giving voice to the rising tide of anger at failures to stem Chile's growing inequality.

"We will carry on making history... We students will not give up the fight to make education a public right," argues student leader Gabriel Boric.

Although to date their main goals have not been achieved, the students have contributed to falling support for millionaire media mogul and president, Sebastian Pinera, which was measured at 26 per cent in August and has not risen since.

In an attempt to counter this bad press, Pinera has introduced new tax reforms (around £443 million), some of which will be pumped into education.

But another tax-payer subsidy to the profiteering private education institutions won't satisfy students – especially not the huge numbers of school-age students who have occupied their schools and marched in the streets.

The drive to extend state-funded education to all, and to break the power of business over education reflects the social pressure sustaining the mobilisations. But the lesson of Britain in 2010 and today in Québec is that victory can only be achieved by fusing the struggle for education with a wider working class struggle that raises the question of who society benefits.

If the capitalist model cannot provide jobs, then it certainly can't provide free education. That's why we support an alternative that is based on organising all society's productive forces to meet the needs of the majority who create wealth, not the minority who accumulate it.

For the billions in the world for whom education and workplace rights remain a pipedream, the enthusiastic resistance sweeping the Americas is an inspiration.

In all the struggles lies the germ of social revolt which demands the social wealth we create is distributed evenly, that the services we have invested in are defended from privatisation, and that where no compromise is found, then a genuine alternative is put forward.

Arab Left: paying the price for Stalinism

The Arab Spring of 2011 inspired millions around the world through its acts of heroism. But now the revolutions have stalled. In the spirit of solidarity with these movements and communist internationalism, *Marcus Halaby* takes a critical look at the far left in these countries and Syria in particular

ONE OF the most noticeable features of the Arab revolutions has been the weakness of the organised left and its failure so far to come to the head of movements for democratic rights, provoked by the immiseration of the masses. In one country after another, the left has either been: weak and fragmented as in Egypt; largely absent as an organised force as in Libya; or hamstrung by a policy of adaptation to non-working class forces as in Tunisia and Bahrain.

And this has been despite the central role played in the Arab uprisings by the urban working class, the natural constituency for a politics emphasising economic class struggle, democracy, secularism, women's rights, and opposition to imperialism and its Israeli ally.

By and large, it has been the Islamists who have benefited politically from the overthrow of the old regimes, even where they played little or no role in leading the initial uprisings. This has simultaneously left the field clear for pro-Western liberals (some connected in various ways to the old order) to pose as the defenders of secularism and democratic freedoms, against the risk that democratisation might advance too far and too soon for the unenlightened masses to make use of it responsibly.

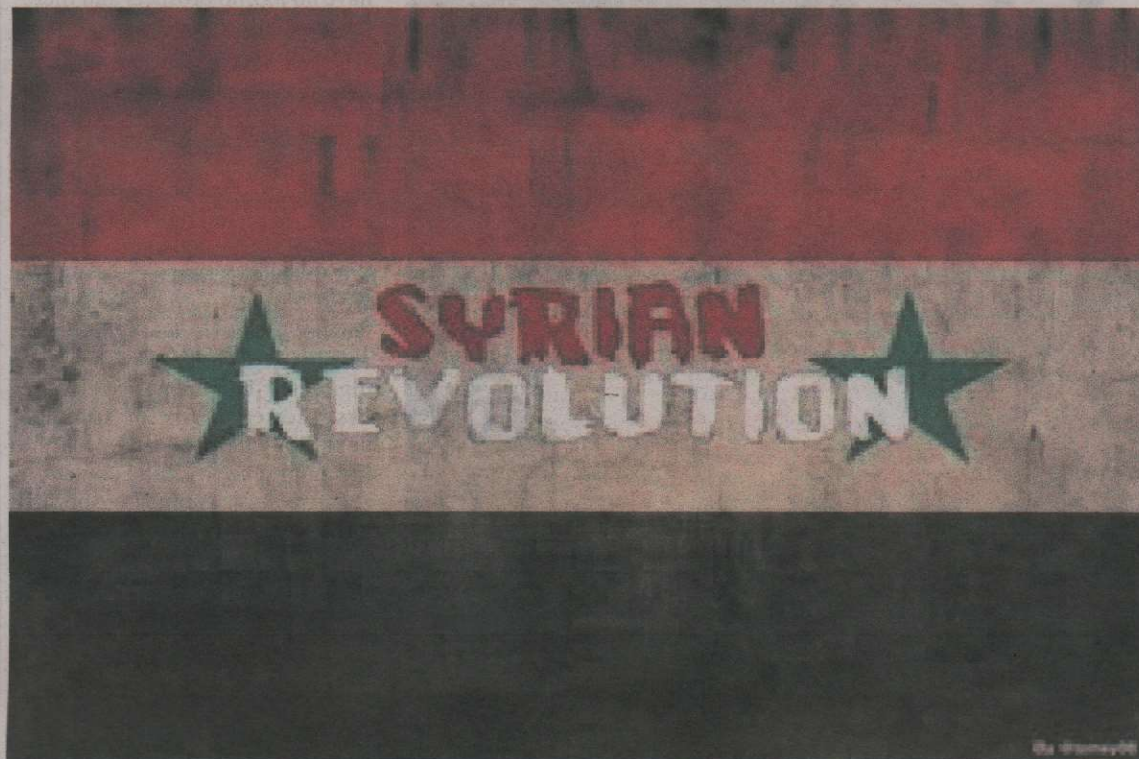
Repression

The blame for this weakness of the left belongs partly to the overthrown or embattled Arab dictatorships, which repressed independent workers' organisations and civil society in such a way that the mosque was often the only legal forum for political expression. Primarily, however, it is because the Arab left is still paying the price for the failure of the two great ideologies that dominated it – Stalinism and Arab nationalism.

The young Arab generation, which has come out onto the streets in the last 18 months, has emerged in a world where the socialist left appears either to be incidental to its concerns or a relic of the order they have risked their lives to overthrow.

This problem has been especially pronounced in Syria. Syria under the kleptocratic Ba'ath party was a Soviet ally for almost four decades. It claims to be a socialist party, presenting its dictatorship as a "resistance regime" fighting Israel and the imperialist West. Syria's working class movement was largely neutralised or co-opted into the state apparatus a whole decade before President Bashar al-Assad's neoliberal economic policies demolished his regime's old base of support in the peasantry and lower middle class.

The last great wave of revolt that



swept the Arab world – from the Free Officers' coup in Egypt in 1952 to the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1975 – largely saw workers' movements led by pro-Soviet Communist Parties compete for hegemony with nationalist currents emerging from the lower middle class, and exercising an influence over the junior and middle-ranking officers.

Revolution in stages

Acting on a misguided programme derived ultimately from Stalinism, these Communist Parties saw their task not as leading a struggle for power by the working class, but as supporting "progressive" bourgeois and middle class forces in a struggle for national independence.

They theorised this into a view that the emerging revolutions would have to proceed by stages, the first of which would involve a "national" or "democratic" regime that would sweep away foreign influence and the remnants of pre-capitalist social classes, with the struggle for socialism relegated to the distant future.

In practice, this meant that they supported left nationalist military dictators and tried to keep the emergent workers' movements from challenging their rule – at least so long as these dictators remained friendly to the Soviet Union.

In Iraq this led to the wholesale slaughter of Communists and trade unionists, when their favoured local dictator, Abd al-Karim Qasim, was overthrown from the right in a CIA-backed coup in 1963. In Egypt, it meant that the worker's movement was bound hand and foot to Presi-

dent Gamal Abdel Nasser, its militants loudly supporting his regime even as they were thrown into its prisons.

Syrian Communism

As the recently arrested Palestinian-Syrian intellectual Salameh Kaileh has argued, the Arab left consistently hitched its wagon to the more powerful forces of Ba'athism and Nasserism, even when these movements discredited themselves in power.

In Syria, the Communist Party of Khalid Bakdash would prostrate itself to a Ba'athist military regime that was initially often to the left of it on social and economic questions, joining its National Progressive Front (NPF) just as the regime turned to the right in 1970. In return, it received a (heavily circumscribed) legal existence, and a meaningless share in "power", at the expense of its influence over the masses and its ability to inspire a new generation of intellectuals and youth.

Bakdash would also call in the favours of the Ba'athist regime's repressive apparatus to deal with rebellions within his own party, producing at least two splits from his party that would later join him in the NPF, further weakening the Syrian left and entrenching Ba'athist rule. Numerous other splits would enter the anti-regime camp, although without entirely abandoning the misguided theory of a "revolution in stages" that lay at the heart of the betrayals of the discredited leaders they left behind.

Of these, two of the most significant have been the Syrian Demo-

cratic People's Party of Riyad al-Turk, currently affiliated to the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC), and the Syrian Communist Action Party, whose militants have played a role in the current uprising.

Syrian Revolutionary Left

By contrast, the Syrian Revolutionary Left (SRL), a group close to the Fourth International, has recently published a "Transitional Programme". It quite rightly identifies the weakness of the left as a result of "the enrolment of the traditional communist movement with the current regime, enabling its brutal repression".

It criticises the broader Syrian opposition movement, noting that the bourgeois liberal and Islamist-led SNC supports the "militarisation" of the uprising from exile, primarily in order to sidestep its own lack of influence inside the country, and, more dangerously, calls for "external military intervention".

Equally, it castigates the more "moderate" National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC) for advocating a dialogue with the Assad regime, for fear that its precipitous overthrow might trigger a foreign intervention.

By contrast, the SRL notes "the revolutionary groups on the ground, which are leading the movement, emphasise their commitment to the three principles (peaceful revolution; absolute rejection of foreign military intervention; and the determination to overthrow the regime and abstention from dialogue with it)".

Opposition both to imperialism and to dialogue with the murderous

regime are basic principles. It is also correct to recognise that the reduction of the uprising to a purely military struggle means fighting the regime where it is strongest, sidelining the mass struggle and paving the way for the indirect intervention of Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia through their sponsorship of a carefully chosen part of the armed opposition.

But it is necessary to call for the arming and organising of the masses for self-defence. Unfortunately the programme's emphasis on the lingering illusion of the possibility of "peaceful revolution" allows the advocates of imperialist-backed "militarisation" to look like realists.

Moreover, while the SRL's programme includes a list of economic and social demands aimed at reversing the last ten years of neoliberalism in Syria, it also repeats the notion of a "revolution in stages", calling for a "general alliance of the democratic and social forces in the face of the dictatorship" to build a "democratic, secular and pluralist state".

This conflates the need for practical solidarity with all political forces facing repression with the idea that the programme of the revolution should be limited to demands that these forces can support.

The programme of the Watan Coalition, supported by the SRL, goes further, explicitly arguing for a "civil, democratic state, based on law, justice and citizenship" and a revolution "of all the classes and components of the Syrian people", without making any class-based demands whatsoever.

Permanent revolution

What is needed is a programme that places the struggle of the working class for the overthrow of capitalism centre stage, in a way that allows the working class to come to the head of the insurgent people as the leading class in the struggle for democratic rights.

Nor is this just a matter of Trotskyist dogmatism. Of all of the Arab revolutions to date, in which the myth has arisen that the "whole people" faced weak regimes with no popular support, it has been in Syria that naked class divisions have been visible earliest, pitting the nouveau riche and a part of the middle class that has benefited from neoliberalism against working class, the urban and rural poor, the youth and the decimated lower middle class.

This programme – of permanent revolution – far from dividing a broad democratic movement, provides the only means by which the people can be united around their most coherent and self-sacrificing component.

A rout for the parties of austerity – an opportunity for the left

Dave Stockton

THE GREEK ELECTIONS have demonstrated a massive popular rejection of the governing parties who support the EU-IMF austerity memorandum that has caused so much suffering to ordinary Greek people over the last two years.

New Democracy (ND), which won 33.5 per cent in 2009, is in first place with 18.9 per cent, a loss of 14.6 per cent of the popular vote. Pasok, which won 43.9 per cent of the vote in 2009, slumped to third place with 13.2 per cent, down by a staggering 30.7 per cent.

By contrast, the left reformist coalition Syriza leapt into second place with 16.7 per cent (up from 4.6 per cent in 2009). This increase of 12.2 per cent of the popular vote represents almost four times as many actual votes. Dimar, a split off to the right from Syriza, gained 6.07 per cent.

The Syriza leader, Alexis Tsipras, says that he wants to form a coalition of the left wing parties that reject the terms of Greece's bailouts. "The parties that signed the memorandum (with the EU and the IMF) are now a minority. The public verdict has de-legitimised them," he said, "Our proposal is a left wing government that, with the backing of the people, will negate the memorandum and put a stop to our nation's pre-determined course towards misery."

The traditional party of the most militant, industrially-based, section of the Greek working class, the Greek Communist Party (KKE), gained relatively little in the overall polarisation of Greek politics between right and left. It gained 8.41 per cent, only 0.9 per cent more than in 2009.

Of course, as in all varieties of capitalist democracy, there are many distorting measures built into the Greek constitution aimed at frustrating the popular will and making sure that the outcome is not "the rule of the people". New Democracy will get 50 bonus seats because it is the first party, around 110 out of the total of 300, with less than 20% of the votes! The second party, Syriza, will get 51 seats with 16.5% of the votes. So a 3.2% difference in votes is turned into a 59 seat, virtually 20%, advantage for ND.

Syriza has undoubtedly surged forward because it proposed – in however reformist a way – a governmental alternative to the "major parties". It has called for a left coalition that "rejects austerity". The KKE did relatively poorly because, for all its left talk and its associated union PAME's militancy, it is obstructing the formation of such a "rejectionist" government.

Moreover, despite its old style, left Stalinist "revolutionary rhetoric", it and PAME have for two years blocked calls for an all out general strike to bring down the austerity



Alexis Tsipras, leader of Syriza, says his coalition will not govern with pro-austerity parties

government. Given the severity of the Greek crisis and the revolutionary situation testified by the string of one and two day general strikes, its intransigence is entirely bogus.

The swing to the left parties and the growth of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn (6.92 per cent and 21 seats) are clear evidence that Greece is in a deep pre-revolutionary situation.

In such conditions, the KKE's policy, refusing to form a coalition with the other left parties on the grounds that it would be a bourgeois government, is a massive obstacle to keeping out the pro-austerity right and centre right parties. This is like a crude copy of the German Communist Party's "third period" policy in 1929-33, obstructing a united front against the Nazis with the reformist SPD and its huge trade unions because they were reformist and pro-capitalist.

It is encouraging that the small forces of the far left grouped in Antarsya also quadrupled their vote to 1.19 per cent from 0.36 per cent in 2009. Antarsya is a coalition of 10 far left organisations, including the section of the Fourth International (OKDE-Spartakos) and the International Socialist Tendency (SEK). The name is an acronym for Anticapitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow but also sounds the same as the Greek word for mutiny.

Antarsya's programme

Antarsya put forward a militant policy of rejection of the EU memorandum and key demands to protect and preserve the social gains, wages and jobs of the working and popular classes. Their key demands are

- Immediately terminate the loan agreement, any memoranda and all related measures.
- Do not recognise the debt – debt cancellation and suspension of payments.

- Break with the system and with the euro/EU.
- Nationalise the banks and corporations without compensation and under workers' control.
- Immediately increase wages and pensions! Cancel the poll tax and increase the taxation of capital.
- Prohibit layoffs and fully protect the unemployed. Shorten working hours and reduce the retirement age.
- Expropriate hundreds of closed factories and re-commission them, controlled by the employees themselves.
- Provide cheap and good quality food through agricultural cooperatives, poor and middle farmers, without middlemen and large producers.

To impose these measures Antarsya calls for "an uprising of the entire working population, an anticapitalist revolution".

It states: "Our way leads to a break with capitalism, by the overthrow of the current authoritarian political system and its replacement with a democracy and the power of the workers, with the widest control to be exercised by the workers and by the people. If the united front of workers, intellectuals and creative people take over leadership, we can live in dignity, use the social productive forces collectively and break with the logic of profit, the market, 'competitiveness' and environmental degradation."

On the question of the outcome of the election, however, Antarsya's programme was a terrible muddle. It did not even address the fact that the reformist parties – Syriza, KKE, and DIMA – plus the trade unions, represent the overwhelming mass of the working class and that the working class rejects austerity and is seeking a way out of it via these parties. Although it is certainly true, and has to be said clearly, that the workers

are mistaken and "their" parties will betray them, it is not enough to leave it at that.

The burning question is how the workers can break from their leaders before they are betrayed and defeated. Only to denounce the leaders will never be enough to break workers' illusions in them and to form a new leadership. Even though they denounce the Troika regime, the reformist parties and unions, under their present policies and leaderships, represent a formidable obstacle to "a working people's uprising" and "an anticapitalist revolution." The question is how to break up this obstacle?

United front

Revolutionary strategy must be based on doing more than exposure plus carrying on, however bravely and energetically, at a local and national level with protests, direct action, demonstrations, occupations and with the 24 or 48 hour protest general strikes.

Antarsya calls for a united front but "a united front of all those who want a break with the system and revolution". But this means a united front with those who already agree with Antarsya's objectives. That is not the united front that the Greek working class needs, and needs urgently. What it needs is a united front of all the forces that want to reject austerity – be they reformist or revolutionary.

That should not be confused with the unity that Antarsya itself needs. That needs the unification of the 10 organisations within Antarsya into a single, democratic, disciplined and centralised party around an action programme for working class power.

At the same time, that party should call on the reformist parties and unions to form a mass united front and it should direct that call both to their mass membership and to their leaders.

At city, town and even village level, the rejectionist united front should be based on resisting the cuts and closures, mobilising the unemployed, pupils, students, and pensioners alongside public and private sector workers. Mass meetings in the workplaces and the localities should elect councils of recallable delegates. In these bodies, the revolutionaries, rejecting sectarianism, must seek to draw in those from all the workers' parties and those outside the parties. The growth of the neo-Nazi New Dawn, as well as police repression, makes the formation of workers' and youth defence guards a vital necessity at local level.

But such a united front will be ineffective in breaking the hold of the reformist leaders over their mass following unless it includes agitating for these leaders to unite against the crisis at all levels. This includes a call on these leaders to break with the capitalist parties, with the EU memorandum and the agencies of the Troika, and to form a workers' government to reject the austerity and make the rich, including the billionaire bondholders of Europe, pay.

They should depend not on the forces and bureaucratic apparatus of the capitalist state but upon councils of action formed by the unions, the popular assemblies, the youth and the unemployed. They should create a mass popular militia to enforce its decrees.

A large majority of Greeks (65 per cent) voted to reject austerity. There is, thus, a popular mandate against a ND-Pasok continuation of the destruction of the lives of the people. Even a parliamentary minority government would have the sympathy of the popular majority if it acted to cancel the debts and break with the Troika. It could rely on the mass mobilisation of the unions, the assemblies of the youth and the unemployed, the small farmers and ruined small business people even to defend it against the sabotage of the bourgeois parties and the state machine.

Of course, the reformist leaders would waver and seek to betray but, if their supporters were mobilised alongside revolutionary forces, this could be checked and the road opened to a real anticapitalist revolution that would put power into the hands of the workers, youth and small farmers.

Such an active revolutionary strategy, aimed at winning the reformist workers away from their opportunist (Syriza) and sectarian (KKE) leaders is truly vital. If the Greek working class remains paralysed from struggling for power by its leaders, then the forces of the fascist right will continue to grow; a situation ripe for revolution will go rotten. As Trotsky said; the wine will turn to vinegar.

Time is not limitless, a re-evaluation of revolutionary policy is urgent and then action on this basis even more so.

The Great Unrest: organising the rank and file 1910-1914

In this timely commemorative article, **Dave Stockton** looks at the lessons from the great working class struggles before World War One. Part two will follow next month

WE HAVE just marked the 100th anniversary of the miners' strike of February-April 1912. This was the first national strike by a section of workers who in the century ahead were to prove to be "the guards regiment" of the British labour movement.

The strike was at the centre of a period that has gone down in history as the Great Unrest. This period between 1910 and 1914 is one rich in lessons, yet is neglected compared to the struggles of the 1920s or the 1970s and 1980s. It was a period when an initially quite small nucleus of grassroots militants, plus a handful of courageous leaders, changed the face of British trade unionism, giving it a class struggle and anticapitalist character. This is the first of a two-part series looking at these remarkable years and their lessons for today.

The decade or so before the WWI was a period pregnant with revolutionary change. In the 1890s capitalism had emerged from a difficult period of economic stagnation, which began in the 1870s. From 1896 to 1907-08 it witnessed a feverish period of expansion based on the opening up of the Far East, particularly China, as well as Africa and South America. New dynamic capitalist powers – Germany, Japan, the US – were challenging the older colonial powers, Britain and France. Both Radical Liberals and Marxists of the early 20th century called this phenomenon imperialism.

After the outbreak of WWI, they came to see it as a whole new epoch distinct from the epoch of free trade capitalism, which had characterised most of the 19th century. The formation of huge firms and banks by amalgamations and takeovers was underway. Employers formed cartels – blocks both against one another and to hold down the wages of their workers. Trade unions – often small and craft based – came under pressure from new, aggressive employers' associations.

Nor was this development simply an economic phenomenon. In Africa and China the major powers, now joined by the US, Germany and Japan, began to seize hold of ports and territories, both to exploit their raw materials and potential markets to invest capital in railways and infrastructure, but also to exclude one another from the plunder. To aid this process the newcomers began to build up their armies and navies to protect and expand their interests.

This led to an arms race. International incidents between the powers (Fashoda in 1898, Bosnia 1908,

Agadir 1911) were a warning that a war between the great powers was possible, indeed inevitable. At the same time a series of revolutions wracked the more backward countries: Russia, Mexico, China, and Iran. In the developed capitalist countries – France, US, Italy, Britain – the tempo and scale of class struggle, focusing on the unions, became a pronounced phenomenon. Many commentators considered that in the decade before WWI it was a race between world war or world revolution: which would break out first?

In Britain the years 1910-14 saw the first truly national strikes in a number of vital industries: in 1911 the Liverpool General Transport Strike, a national rail strike, a wave of engineering workers strikes, plus nearly 12 South Wales Cambrian coal strikes. The peak was the national miners strike of February-April 1912 and the Dublin Lockout of 1913.

Ernest Bevin, leader of the Transport and General Workers Union, said in 1920: "It was a period which, if the war had not broken out, would have, I believe, seen one of the greatest industrial revolts the world ever had seen."

David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Home Secretary in the Liberal Government and a shrewd observer of the labour movement, in his memoirs also recalled this situation in Britain before August 1914.

"In the summer of 1914 there was every sign that the autumn would witness a series of industrial disturbances without precedent. Trouble was threatening in the railways, mining, engineering, and building industries, disagreements were active not only between employers and employed, but in the internal organisation of the workers. A strong 'rank and file' movement, keenly critical of the policies and methods of the official leaders of trade unionism had sprung up and was gaining steadily in strength. Such was the state of the home front when the nation was plunged into war."

The scale of the unrest

Between 1900 and 1909 the annual number of days lost to strikes was 2.5 to 3 million. Between 1910 and 1914 the average were over 10 million days lost per annum – and in 1912 the figure rose to 41 million.

The 1912 miners strike was the crest of a wave of strikes that rose in the previous two years: a nine-months miners strike in South Wales in 1910-11, which saw riots in Tony-pandy and Llanelli and soldiers with



Tom Mann, founder of The Industrial Syndicalist and founding member of the Independent Labour Party, played a huge role in the Great Unrest

machine guns garrisoned in the pit-heads; then a national rail workers strike which saw two battleships in the Mersey. These struggles led to massive increases in union membership.

In 1905 the total number of unionists in Britain was around 2 million. Between 1910 and 1914 a further 1.5 million joined the ranks of organised labour. The rail workers union grew from 60,000 in 1900 to 116,000 in 1912. Between 1903 and 1913 the transport unions increased their membership by more than half a million, textile unions doubled and the engineering workers grew by 60 per cent. In the same timeframe, the miners increased their numbers by 400,000 to over a million members. These years saw the creation and consolidation of national union federations and, just before the WWI, the formation of a Triple Alliance of miners, railworkers and transport workers, pledged to come to one another's aid if any section were attacked.

This increase was not a result of peaceful organising and strike-free collective bargaining, nor was this growth the work of the old generation of union officials. It took place under the impulse of a new generation of young union activists, many of whom called themselves syndicalists or industrial unionists. This period saw the birth of the first organised grassroots movement in the unions. It stood for increased democracy, against bureaucracy, and for militant revolutionary class struggle. As a result these years saw the spread of a mass anticapitalist consciousness that had not been seen since the days of the Chartists.

Revolutionaries around the world

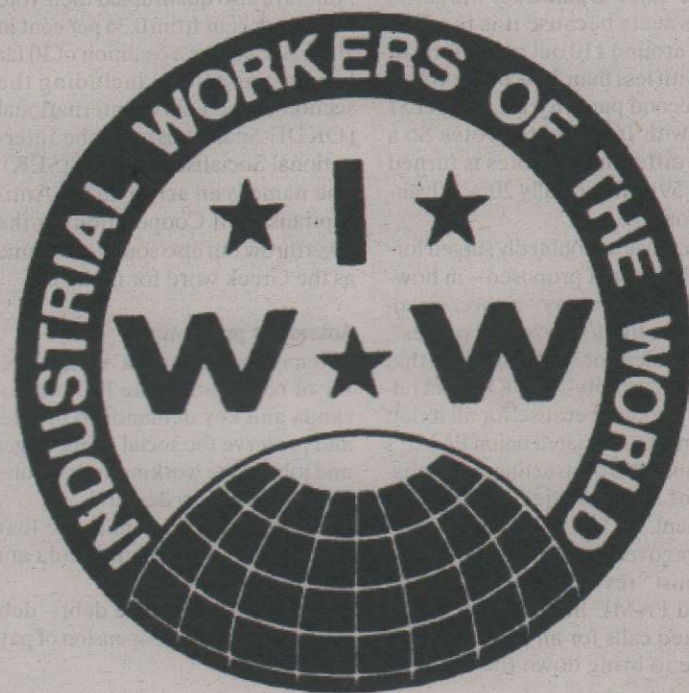
cannot be expressed in figures but is felt by all."

Bob Holton, author of *British Syndicalism 1900-1914* (1976), describes the conditions that gave rise to the uprising and the role of the syndicalists within it: "British syndicalism emerged in the years after 1900 in response to a set of urgent economic and political problems facing the working class. These included falling real wages, the increasing concentration of capitalist industrial power, the skill displacing consequences of industrial change and the incorporation of labour leaders within collective bargaining systems and parliamentary politics."

Syndicalism: its strengths and weaknesses

Syndicalism is simply the word for trade unionism in French and Spanish. In France and Spain the trade movement came to be dominated by advocates of using the unions, not simply to fight for improvements in workers' wages, conditions and civil rights, but for the overthrow of capitalism itself by workers direct action (strikes, sabotage of production), centring on the use of the general strike to effect a revolution. Then the French and Spanish syndicalists envisaged the running of industry, at workplace level by workers' control, and nationally by industrial unions or federations. Thus syndicalism as a term was adopted to mean a revolutionary anticapitalist trade union theory and practice.

In France, the key organisational unit was the bourse du travail (labour or employment exchange). These fulfilled the functions that in Britain were carried out by trades councils and Australia and the US by labour halls or temples, i.e. coordinating solidarity between the different sectors. Overcoming sectionalism and organ-



ising the unemployed or precariously employed was a central theme of syndicalism, as opposed to the craft unions that ignored or excluded the great mass of unskilled workers.

The Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) was formed in 1895, and saw itself as a national organisation that would encourage self-education, mutual aid and organise communication between local workers' syndicates. Strongly influenced by anarchism, with its refusal to engage in any sort of struggle for political power but standing for the abolition of the state as the immediate task of the social revolution, it adopted its key document, the Charte d'Amiens, in 1906. This rejected parliamentarism and political action in favour of direct action by unions, which it regarded as the only form of revolutionary class struggle.

The Charter defined two aims for the unions: the defence of immediate and daily demands; and the struggle for a global transformation of society in complete independence from political parties and from the state. Immediate goals included reducing the working day to eight hours and increasing wages. But it always linked these to preparing the way for the "expropriation of the capitalists" through the means of a general strike.

The Charter asserted the complete freedom for its members to choose membership of any party they wished, but in exchange demanded that union members should not introduce into the union political opinions they professed outside.

The strengths of this approach was that it spread a strong anticapitalist consciousness among the workers, warned against and combatted the pro-capitalist ideas of the craft union leaders and their bureaucratic centralised control of the unions. Likewise they warned against the parliamentary parties compromises and deception of their working class voters.

The problem was that it left the field of electoral politics to the reformists and opportunists within the workers' movement, or to outright bourgeoisie parties. Moreover its programme for overthrowing capitalism was very weak. The belief that a strike alone – even a mass withdrawal of labour – could bring about the surrender of the capitalist class, the abandonment of its property and state power, was simply an illusion. Indeed the capitalist state, its courts, police and army, would inevitably intervene to break up any general strike. Then the workers would have to fight the state forces – something that could not be improvised at the last minute or done spontaneously.

Many syndicalists did realise that it would be necessary to win over the soldiers, but what they did not recognise clearly was that the workers must prepare an armed uprising or insurrection against the state power of the bosses. And the type of organisation needed for this was not primarily a trade union, although unions could play a vital auxiliary role if they were under the right leadership.

The syndicalists failed to observe that the Russian workers in 1905 had created such organisations – workers councils or soviets – that led gen-



Mass strikers meeting in the Liverpool docks

eral strikes bigger than those launched by any trade unions, and in Moscow in December had even launched an armed uprising. But above all, the militant minority were organised in a revolutionary party, radically different to the vote-catching machines of the western socialist parties; this was precisely the type of party Lenin and his comrades were building in these years.

Syndicalism in Britain

Although there were groups of syndicalists in Britain before 1910, notably young militant workers and intellectuals such as EJB Allen and Guy Bowman, syndicalism achieved mass influence after the return of a heroic figure of the British union and socialist movement, Tom Mann.

Mann was a founder of the Eight Hour League movements, of the 'New Unionism' of the 1888-92 period (the match girls' strike, the gas workers' strike, the dockers' strike) and a founder member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). He had emigrated to New Zealand, Australia and South Africa for over eight years, also visiting the US and working with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), also known as the Wobblies.

In May 1910 Bowman met Mann on the dockside at the end of his voyage back home. Mann's first words were: "Let's go and meet the men of direct action!", by which he meant the French syndicalists.

Bowman could speak fluent French and within the month they were in Paris discussing with the leaders of the CGT, as well as addressing mass meetings. There they met among others Alfred Rosmer, the future antiwar activist and friend of Leon Trotsky, then editor with Pierre Monatte of the syndicalist paper *La Vie Ouvrière* (Workers Life.)

Mann returned to Britain a convinced syndicalist. He launched a monthly newspaper *The Industrial Syndicalist* in July 1910, which was soon recording sales of 20,000 per issue. Mann and Bowman went on to establish contacts with existing British

syndicalists and the Irish activist James Larkin. Together they founded the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) at a conference in November 1910 in Manchester, of some 200 delegates claiming to represent some 60,000 workers.

The very first issue of the *Industrial Syndicalist* carried a programmatic pamphlet by Mann entitled "Prepare for Action". It was internationalist in perspective from its first words, describing a "great world movement" coming into being, which was "aiming definitely and decisively at the economic emancipation of the workers". He described the formation of the IWW and the CGT.

Mann outlined the IWW's conception of "the organisation of all the workers on the basis of working class solidarity, irrespective of occupation" – what came to be expressed in the famous IWW slogan One Big Union. Mann's views, despite his close personal links with IWW leader William (Big Bill) Hayward, were closer to those known as 'industrial unionism', the project of forming a union in every industry, overcoming craft and sectional divisions.

"There are 700,000 unionists in France and a large majority are covered by the CGT. They possess the fighting instinct. They are genuinely revolutionary. They too seek to secure better conditions en route, always giving attention to the reduction of working hours. And they are bent on an international propaganda for the overthrow of the capitalist system... They favour resorting, when advisable, to the general strike... they are for the most part anti-patriotic and antimilitarist, e.g. they declare the workers have no country and are not prepared to fight for the interests of a bureaucracy but most distinctly are prepared to fight for the overthrow of capitalism in France and elsewhere."

Mann was not dogmatic about rejecting all political action. He joined the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the main British Marxist organisation, in 1910 but left because



One of two battleships moved into the Mersey during the rail strike

its leader HM Hyndman had an extremely negative attitude, not only to syndicalism, but also to strikes. Thus in 1912, in the midst of the biggest strike wave in working class history, all that Hyndman had to say was: "Can anything be imagined more foolish, more harmful, more in the widest sense of the word unsocial than a strike? I have never yet advocated a strike. I have never known a successful strike."

Mann was not opposed to standing candidates in elections, but he believed that parliamentary action was at best weak and at worst harmful without a primary building up of the strength of workers in the workplace, by militant strikes and mass organising. Although the Labour Representation Committee (founded in 1901 and renamed the Labour Party in 1906) had won more than 40 seats by this time, nearly all were unopposed by the Liberals and for a good reason.

Behind the scenes Labour leaders Kier Hardy and Ramsay MacDonald had struck a secret deal to support the Liberals on nearly all issues and not to bring forward specifically socialist measures. In return they got a Trade Union Act, which restored unions' rights to organise without the

threat of being sued, something that had been imposed by the Taff Vale judgement of 1901.

Their tameness in parliament had disillusioned many of their followers. On the other hand the SDP, because of Britain's anti-democratic electoral system, was never able to win a seat. Contrary to the widespread belief that Britain has been a democracy for centuries, in 1912 all women and 40 per cent of men over 21 still did not have the right to vote. The mistake of Mann and the syndicalists was to underestimate the potential that the slogan of universal, equal and direct suffrage would have, especially if linked to direct action.

Mann did take up propaganda for the tactic of the general strike, which was also taken up by revolutionary Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky and Lenin, believing that it could prove the critical weapon for taking power from the capitalist class. He also argued that the existence of socialist MPs could be useful providing they were open and bold in their socialist programme. He supported the young left-wing member of the

Independent Labour Party, Victor Grayson, elected for Colne Valley in 1907 on an uncompromising revolutionary socialist platform.

But like all syndicalists, and indeed most revolutionary Marxists before 1917, Mann had no clear idea about how the political and the industrial struggles would come together in a revolution. It required the historic experience of the Russian Revolution, with its workers' and soldiers' delegate councils (soviets) uniting with a political party, which was not primarily parliamentary in its strategy and organisation, but insurrectionist. It was the success of Bolshevism in applying this strategy to win power that drew syndicalists like Mann to the newly founded Communist International.

Conclusion

It was in South Wales and among the miners that the new revolutionary trade unionism was to strike its deepest roots and build up a movement of rank and file miners that would transform the union. In the second part of this article we will look at miners' programmatic pamphlet 'The Miners' Next Step' and their leading role in the great strikes of 1910, 1911 and 1912.

French left returns to power after 17 years

KD Tait

THE VICTORY of Francois Hollande has raised huge expectations among workers across France and Europe of an end to austerity, posing the possibility of major struggles ahead. On a high turnout of 81 per cent, right-wing incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy was booted from office, leaving the Elysée Palace to be occupied by a Socialist President for the first time in nearly two decades. As in 1981, youthful supporters of the left flocked to the place Bastille. There Hollande made them a pledge: "Carry this message far! Remember for the rest of your life this great gathering at the Bastille because it must give a taste to other peoples, to the whole of Europe, of the change that is coming. In all the capitals, beyond government leaders and state leaders, there are people who, thanks to us, are hoping, are looking to us and want to put an end to austerity."

However, it's clear that with a programme promising government investment in public services and tax rises on the rich, Hollande has bucked the European trend since 2008, which has seen once-dominant social democratic parties triangulate with neoliberal austerity, only to be rejected at the polls by their disillusioned supporters.

Hollande's victory – despite the ambiguous and limited character of many of its promises – reflects a growing popular opposition to the effects of years of austerity regimes. Even more clearly is this the case with the rise of ex-PS Minister Jean-Luc Melenchon's Front de Gauche (Left Front) in the first round, with his anti-rich rhetoric.

Yet radicalisation goes right as well as left. The mainstream media have made the far-right National Front – who doubled their vote – the story of the elections. Young voters were split between the far left and far right parties, with the majority abstaining.

The markets are one of the most important elements in the whole election. With their threats to sink a Hollande government partially assuaged by Hollande's trip to the City of London in April, it's clear that they are flexing their muscles ahead of any attempts to water down EU-wide austerity.

Currently France spends more paying off its debt than it does on



healthcare. These debts were mostly acquired by borrowing money to bail out the national banks. Now this money has to be paid back, with interest, to the same bankers who crashed the economy.

This is the root of austerity, which is driving countries like Greece, Spain and Britain into deeper and deeper crises.

Hollande has promised to undo many of Sarkozy's most unpopular austerity cuts including reversing the 60,000 job losses in education, as well as protecting the national health service. In this he has placed himself ahead of most European social democrats and the British Labour Party. Many will now be contrasting his victory with the position of Labour in UK who have consistently refused to commit to reversing any of the cuts to our pensions, education and the NHS.

Ultimately both Hollande and Sarkozy campaigned on a platform of reducing the government debt – Sarkozy by 2016 and Hollande by 2017. The difference is who will pay these debts and how. Hollande has won on the basis of investing in public services, and using the growth in jobs combined with higher taxes on the rich to restore government finances

Sarkozy was determined to repli-

cate the strategy of the Tories in Britain – privatise the welfare state to enrich a handful of billionaires and release the state from the financial 'burden' of social care. This is codified in the Fiscal Treaty, concocted by 'Merkozy' and which Hollande has pledged to re-negotiate.

However, the election revealed where the real power in society lies. During campaigning markets threatened to unleash havoc on France by ditching its bonds and forcing Hollande to stick to the EU-wide austerity programme. There can be little doubt that were he to stick to his promise – Merkel has talked about a 'growth pact' but has said that renegotiating the Fiscal Treaty is out of the question – then the markets would unleash all their fury.

Then Hollande's mettle would be tested. But more importantly so would that of the French labour movement and youth. For the only defence – the only alternative to capitulation – would be defiance; i.e. a real attack on the rich, the bankers, the bond and stock markets.

And this is where a powerful united front of trade unionists, supporters of Melenchon and the far left, the youth, the immigrant communities would have to take direct action to demand and enforce real

anticapitalist measures.

Hollande victory represents a vote against austerity but key now is to continue to mobilise pressure at the base to hold PS to account.

The election of a PS president for the first time since 1988 is a critical moment.

As the EU plunges back into crisis, Hollande will find himself caught between two great forces: on the one hand the European and international investors and speculators who rely on a strong Franco-German alliance, ensuring that austerity is waged pitilessly in Spain, Greece, Portugal and Italy.

On the other, there is the French working class, just recovering from by the defeats of the 2010 pension struggle. Throughout the winter, workers have been fighting against factory closures, like Arcelor Mittal in Florange, PSA-Aulnay, Fralib (Marseille), etc. Indeed, several large companies have delayed announcements of job cuts or closures until after the elections and there could be a large wave of attacks in the coming weeks. Several hundred of thousands of activists marched in the CGT initiated days of action and on May Day. The high score (11 per cent) for Melenchon and his vibrant campaign also shows this determination and readiness to fight.

The vote for the French "far left" hasn't increased in 10 years. The difference is that the vote has gone to the left-reformism of Melenchon's Left Front, with negligible votes for the once-dynamic NPA and perennial Lutte Ouvrière.

The problem is that the revolutionary left stubbornly refuses to utilise united front tactics with the PS except on the narrowest basis of 'vote PS to kick out Sarkozy' A critique of the reformist politics of the PS and its long history of betrayals is insufficient. Millions of workers are expecting an end to austerity from Hollande.

We need to work with them to force Hollande to stick to his pledges, indeed go much further. If or rather when he stops short then there is a real possibility of winning masses of them to a real revolutionary alternative.

Mobilising to kick out Sarkozy is only the beginning of the struggle. Now the trade unions must be made to place the same pressure on Hollande – we have to make him yield to the stronger of two forces – us.

The German, Spanish and British governments are resolutely opposed to any renegotiation of the EU austerity treaty which binds millions of people into seeing their jobs and services axed to fuel self-destructive austerity budgets.

Their political opposition will be matched by the opposition of the international financiers who will furiously defend their privileges, using their unaccountable power to threaten Hollande should he try to stick to his plan for growth.

If Hollande sticks to his anti-austerity pledge at the Bastille, if cuts are reversed and jobs created then it will be because French workers and youth mobilise. And down the road, and maybe not so far either, it will only produce another wave of capitalist crisis and sabotage.

That is why the continued resistance has to take more organised expression in the form of coordinations, councils of action. We need an all out offensive as in 1936, to enforce measures in the interests of the workers, ones are also as the Communist Manifesto says, "despotic inroads" on the power and wealth of the capitalist class. But to fight for such a strategy we also need a growing revolutionary alternative; a party armed with an action programme for working class power.