

workers power 5



Assad
massacres
Syrians



Keynes or
Marx?



1910-1914
The Great
Unrest pt.2

Summer 2012 ★ Donation – £1 suggested ★ Issue 365

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

Greece – fight for a workers' government!



AUSTERITY, ITS consequences, and how to resist: these are the issues fuelling the rise of radical Greek party Syriza. Its programme rejects the cuts imposed by the International Monetary Fund, EU Commission and European Central Bank - the so-called "Troika".

This rejection has exposed the fact that the interests of the Greek workers and youth are incompatible with the interests of international finance capital – the speculators, creditors and politicians determined to thwart the democratic will of the Greek people.

The German and French banks will not back down. They are intent

on stripping Greece of all its assets, and will brook no interference. They are robbing the Greek people of their hospitals, schools and transport systems.

Austerity is big business for Europe's major powers.

From Athens to Paris the question of using elections to express popular rejection of austerity poses enormous challenges to the dictatorship of capital.

Internationalism

Greece is not a one-off. Spain has become the fourth European country to be bailed out - to the tune of €100 billion. Because a new right

wing government is firmly in place there, carrying out austerity, Europe's bankers and politicians say they will not interfere. But no doubt if the workers resist, the Merkels and Camerons will not be slow in reading them the riot act too.

Across Europe, forces are mobilising for a decisive confrontation. Any national working class that raises its resistance to a level that threatens their government of austerity will meet the same barrage of reaction facing the Greek workers. That is why their fight is our fight.

At the same time, the forces of counter-revolution are also mobilising for the conflict.

Greek fascist party Golden Dawn has revealed its true face when its representative punched two women on a live TV debate. If the left do not take the power in a workers' government, the far right is waiting in the wings.

Revolution

For the big banks, international money markets and Europe's openly capitalist governments, rejecting austerity is not an option. For the millions in struggle against the consequences of a crisis we did not cause, Greece symbolises that not only is resistance necessary, but that victory is possible. Syriza's rise puts it on a collision

course with the most powerful forces in the EU and international markets.

The scale of popular resistance in Greece has opened a revolutionary situation - one that will be deepened by the victory of Syriza and the formation of a workers' government to renounce the debt, expropriate the banks, disband the fascist gangs and their police sympathisers, and arm the working class against the reaction of the counter-revolution.

**Victory to the Greek workers!
Internationalise the resistance!
Forward to a workers' Europe!**

Now turn to pages 7-10

Editorial

We can beat the cuts – but only with a new strategy and leadership

THE TUC has called a national demonstration against austerity in the autumn under the banner "A Future that Works".

This demo comes more than 18 months after the TUC's "March for the Alternative". By any standards, one isolated demo every year and a half is a pathetic response to the worst capitalist crisis since the 1930s.

Nevertheless, there is every possibility that we could see half a million or more on the streets on 20 October because the Coalition is increasingly hated.

Unemployment is stuck at a 20-year high of 2.65 million, with millions more stranded in part-time jobs, fictitious self-employment or the grey economy.

The image of 80 young jobseekers being forced to sleep out under London Bridge before a 14-hour shift stewarding the Queen's Jubilee - all on workfare, without receiving a penny in pay - sums up the reality of Tory Britain.

But while anger will certainly mobilise hundreds of thousands to march, it has to be set against the backdrop of a disorderly retreat in the pensions dispute that was supposed to provide a lawful pretext for united resistance to the Tory-LibDem onslaught.

On N30, 2 million workers struck against the government's "pay more, work longer, get less" pension proposals. It was the biggest single day of strike action since 1926 and coordinated the actions of 30 unions. But it was, as the French say, a strike with no tomorrow.

Within a fortnight the alliance had fatally fractured. The largest unions signed "no strike" agreements to pursue (secret) scheme-by-scheme talks, which resulted in the very same proposals that we struck against being "recommended" a few months later.

The more militant unions lost their nerve. A couple more partial strikes were mounted in March and May but despite conference votes to keep up the fight, by the summer it was all but over.

Sparks lead the way again

In complete contrast to this, electricians have reminded us how effective rank and file action can be. Fresh from their victory over construction giants like Balfour Beatty, 600 workers at Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station in Nottinghamshire, led by the "Sparks", walked out in defence of health and safety rep Jason Poulter.

Without waiting for a ballot or worrying about the anti-union laws, these workers frightened their bosses enough to win Jason's reinstatement.

The truth is that we can beat the cuts - but only if we can forge a new strategy and a new leadership. We can all follow the Sparks' example and organise at the rank and file level so when the officials sell out the fight goes on.

Local anticuts committees are generally in a poor state as a result of the union leaders' cowardice. But these committees can revive if they use the next four months to mobilise for 20 October. They should bring workers, students and benefit claimants together to plan direct action, occupations and strikes, developing into real action committees by drawing in every section of society suffering from the cuts.

For the union bureaucrats, official marches and one-day stoppages every year and a half may be enough - but we cannot afford to limit our action to polite protests and wait for Labour in 2015.

Ed Miliband could not even bring himself to support the N30 strike and says he will not reverse the Tory cuts. Now he is in talks with Lib Dem grandees with a view to forming a coalition with them after the next election. He repeatedly snubs the union leaders who pay 80 per cent of his party's expenses. How can we trust Labour to reverse the cuts or restore our ravaged health, welfare and education services?

We need a political alternative: a new party that supports every fight against austerity, both in Britain and abroad; that links these separate battles together into a class struggle against capitalism; that prepares the working class to take power so that it can run society itself without the need for an exploiting class telling us what to do.

Revolutionary times have returned to southern Europe. But they will only turn into real revolutions if socialists can draw up a revolutionary programme to guide the action of millions and forge a new mass party to fight for it in the class struggle.

Work without pay - no way!

Sally Turner

EIGHTY YOUTH from Bristol, Bath and Plymouth were forced to sleep out under London Bridge, do unpaid work and had no access to toilets for over 24 hours during the Queen's Jubilee in London.

Thirty jobseekers and 50 on apprenticeships "worked" for Close Protection UK (CPUK) under the Coalition government's workfare system.

Downing Street ignored condemnations of slave labour and made it clear they would not be changing the system, which provides the bosses with free labour while threatening to remove the claimants' benefit unless they obey.

This is by no means a one-off as workfare is rapidly expanding with ever more companies signing up to cream the benefits of an unpaid workforce.

At Argos, jobseekers work 30 hours a week for six weeks to receive weekly

benefits of just £53 - which works out to £1.30 an hour.

At a time when 2.67 million people are officially unemployed, workfare allows multi-million pound companies like Argos, Matalan and Superdrug to obtain labour at the taxpayers' expense, effectively granting them a government incentive not to hire.

It is predicted that there will be 500,000 public sector job losses over the next five years.

It is clear that the government intends to use workfare to replace gaps left in the public sector.

It is already doing this within the NHS, where under-trained volunteers are doing eight weeks of unpaid work, which includes cleaning and feeding patients.

These are important aspects of patient care and require full training - it is appalling that untrained volunteers have

been put in such a position.

The government has said it intends to double the amount of unemployed people forced to work for their benefits, which means an increase to around 80,000 places a year.

Last year George Osborne said, "Young people who do not engage with this offer will be considered for mandatory work activity and those who drop about will lose their benefits."

There are also plans for some 300,000 people suffering from either a long-term illness or disability to be introduced to mandatory work experience.

We need to be fighting back against this government of the rich and their attempts to force the unemployed into virtual slavery.

With unemployment rising you too could soon be forced to stack shelves for less than minimum wage.

Demo silences war criminal Rajapakse



Sri Lankan protesters hang an effigy of Rajapakse from a lamp-post in London

Peter Main

HUNDREDS OF demonstrators have prevented Sri Lanka's President Rajapakse from addressing a business meeting in the heart of the City of London. He had been due to deliver a keynote speech at the Commonwealth

Economic Forum at the Mansion House.

Protesters waving Tamil Tiger flags and placards demanded not only that he should not speak, but that he should be prosecuted for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Although the crowds grew in the course of the morning, it proved

impossible to prevent Rajapakse from attending a banquet with the Queen at Marlborough House on Pall Mall at lunchtime. After the orchestrated mass celebrations to mark her 60th year in office it was, at least, useful to see the kind of people she prefers to mix with.

Olympic folly

Rix Bragg

THIS SUMMER London will play host to the 30th Olympiad, a sporting extravaganza touted as a showcase of the best of British, as providing unparalleled opportunities for urban regeneration and private investment in the East End.

The reality is very different.

The promised private investment never materialised, leaving the taxpayer to foot the bill for the tremendously expensive complex of sports venues and accommodation. The city has become a militarised zone, with army and navy helicopters and RAF Typhoon jets regularly flying overhead. Residents who protested the installation of surface to air missiles on their roofs have been threatened with eviction.

To top it off, the real meaning of the term 'urban regeneration' has arrived like a slap in the face to hundreds of residents who, through a combination of housing benefits cap and rising rents, are being up-rooted from their communities and transported to Stoke-on-Trent, in a move by Newham Council that can only be described as social cleansing.

The Olympics reflect the absurdity of capitalist society, where billions are spent on grotesque follies for the amusement of the rich while the services that the poor depend on are axed in the name of austerity.

Where 'improving communities' means purging an area of the community itself and where the glittering façade of the games is an attempt to hide the rot of the system.

workers power

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

Editor: Jeremy Dewar
Deputy editor: KD Tait
International editor: Dave Stockton
Political editor: Richard Brenner
Staff writers: Marcus Halaby
Rix Bragg
Joy Maccready
Andy Yorke
Art & Design: Sean Murray

Printed by: Newsfax International Ltd.

www.workerspower.co.uk
paper@workerspower.co.uk
+44 (0) 20 7708 4331

Review: *Why it's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*

Paul Mason, published by Verso, January 2012. ISBN: 9781844678518

Chris Clough

PAUL MASON'S new book *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere* is a thought-provoking look at the wave of struggle that is currently sweeping the globe. It's an engaging narrative that effortlessly leaps between eye-opening facts and hair-raising on-the-ground accounts of working people resisting austerity and dictatorship.

Mason traces the last three years of struggles from the Iranian mass demonstrations of 2008 through the 2010 UK student movement to the year 2011, when everything truly "kicked off".

That year saw Arab dictators topple like dominoes, when young people in their hundreds of thousands took over city squares across the globe, and when the mass strike returned, rocking Europe and North Africa amidst clouds of tear gas and Molotov-throwing youths.

The chapters focusing on these seismic events are interspersed with chapters that delve into the causes of the crisis, the resistance and why it is taking the form it is. This invites the reader to think about ongoing events from a new perspective, considering the historical significant role of new technology, while debating questions such as why now, and what will happen next?

The reader is given the opportunity to re-live the experiences

of these momentous times, whether on the streets or glued to the TV, watching as hundreds of thousands chanted in unison in Tahrir Square and as protesters stormed the steps of the Greek parliament.

Mason describes the book as a work of journalism, but as most people know no news is neutral; and whether it is journalism or not political views, assumptions, analysis, and hints at solutions are woven throughout the book.

With issues as debatable and inspiring as the current worldwide upheaval, it is difficult to avoid discussing the way forward, possible solutions to the obstacles faced by today's working class and warning of the possible outcomes. Mason, however, tries his best to avoid such discussion.

He fills chapters with analyses of the different movements but then only briefly discusses their shortfalls and ways to overcome them. This leaves many chapters unsatisfactorily inconclusive, as solutions or shortfalls are often hinted at but not discussed in depth.

This regularly leaves the reader asking why things are the way they are and what hope is there for change?

Mason has a tendency to jump from trying to point out a fault in a particular way of organising and ways to remedy it on one page, to an appraisal of the movement

devoid of any constructive criticism on the next in a way that throws up contradictions.

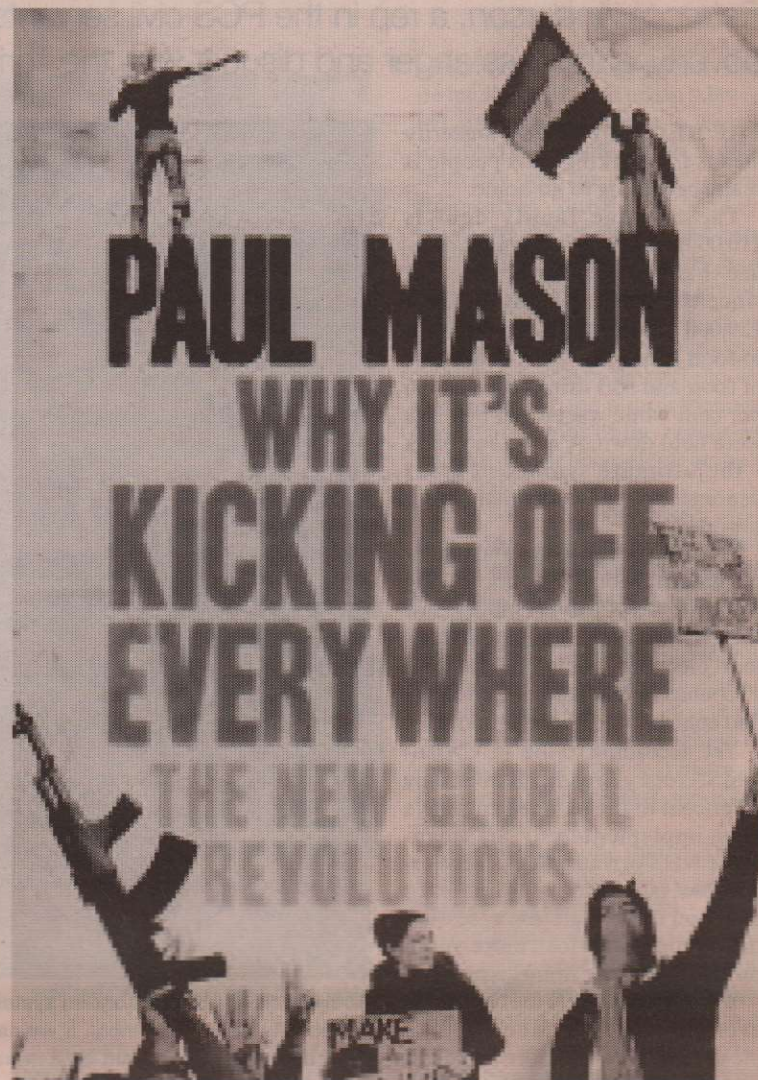
For example, in a chapter on social media, he mentions the downside of online organising in that decisions are hard to enforce and enact when agreed upon, but then goes on to praise the looseness of social media.

Similarly in one of his concluding chapters, Mason tries to remain impartial in describing the unrest across the world and how no dominant force, especially the left, has come to the fore.

But then he drops in a small paragraph where he lauds a little known anarchist manifesto as the new manifesto of the world revolution, claiming it to be the Communist Manifesto of our times.

Mason's attempts to appear impartial and his refusal to state clearly what he considers the solution to certain pressing problems leaves some chapters feeling incomplete, as the negatives of various movements are pointed out yet not given the same in-depth treatment as their positive aspects are.

However despite these shortfalls, which leave you without an answer as to how the new global revolutions can succeed, this book is a must-have for activists and those wanting a readable and informative guide to the most important events for a generation.



This book allows you to feel what it is like to be in a post-Mubarak slum or on the streets of Greece during an anti-austerity mobilisation, while at the same time encouraging you to think about how 30

years of uninterrupted free market pillaging, a huge growth in the worldwide working class and a big boom in communications technology are all impacting on the struggle for a better world.

NUT AND NASUWT launch joint campaign

Bernie McAdam Sanwell NUT

TEACHERS' unions NUT and NASUWT have announced a joint campaign to defend pensions and protect pay, working conditions and jobs. Teachers will be balloted both for strike action and action short of strike to be taken in the autumn term "should the government refuse to listen". As yet no clear objectives have been agreed apart from vague calls for a joint campaign on the above issues.

Any action to stop the attacks raining down on teachers is to be welcomed. However, these union leaders have not exactly distinguished themselves to date in the fight to protect our pensions. NUT leaders have disregarded conference decisions to hold regional strikes this term, which were meant to culminate in a national strike in June.

The pension changes have already been enacted, with reductions in take home pay now hitting teachers hard. Union leaders sense a defeat has already occurred, with the focus

now shifting to pay and conditions. They have no one to blame but themselves.

Escalate the action

Why has the largest teachers' union the NUT failed to give a fighting lead on the pensions struggle? Quite simply it has not fought for a strategy that can win. Such a strategy must involve a campaign of escalating national strike action up to and including indefinite strikes. NUT leaders have delayed even limited action, and their long strung-out isolated days of strike action pose no real threat to the government's austerity plans.

As we prepare to go into action next term the NUT must not use the joint initiative with the NASUWT as a millstone around our necks. Action must be organised on the basis of what is necessary to win and not on what is acceptable to the lowest common denominator.

The upcoming Local Associations for National Action Conference in Liverpool on 16 June will no doubt



express the anger many NUT activists feel over the recent dithering by its leaders. However, it must be able to give a lead on how to fight back against the wide-ranging attacks on education. For this it will have to argue for a campaign of escalating action with clearly defined objectives.

Rank and file movement

The Liverpool conference will no doubt decide to maintain a network of activists intent on taking national strike action. The network needs to go beyond local association delegates and teacher reps to include school groups and rank and file members. It will have to organise

independently of the leadership if it is to be capable of organising an effective and alternative way forward whenever the leaders back down. Refusal to call action next time around must be met with unofficial strikes.

A real rank and file movement would democratically overhaul the union. It would fight for strikes to be decided by the members at local, regional and national level, linking up with rank and file NASUWT members.

Strike committees under the control of mass meetings should determine the way forward, not arbitrary executive control. All officials and union representatives should be

elected and subject to recall. They should be paid the average wage of a classroom teacher.

A grassroots movement should also build cross-union support for the defence of education. A movement of all education workers should be the aim, reaching out to the whole working class community, and involving parents and students. We already know that successful struggles against academies depend on support from parents and students.

The inability of trade union leaders to win the battles against austerity demands a new form of trade unionism. It means a political fight to turn our unions into democratic fighting organisations, and a fight to build councils of action that go beyond the limits of pure trade unionism.

It also poses the question of a new working class party that can represent and lead the class as a whole towards a socialist society, where a fully funded quality education system is a right, not a privilege.

Turn anger into action

Rebecca Anderson, a rep in the PCS civil servants' union, looks at the political situation in Britain and asks why growing poverty, and mass anger and disgust with the Tories has not translated into a tidal wave of protests and strikes

THE REALITY of what austerity means for working class people is really beginning to hit home.

The average family debt is £10,000, excluding mortgages, a figure that has risen by 51 per cent since the Coalition got in. Over 129,000 people were forced to turn to food banks last year, as the cost of food and soft drinks rose by 4.6 per cent while wages and benefits were held down. A new food bank – the ultimate symbol of great depressions – opens in Britain every four days.

Growing poverty, cuts and unemployment, along with mounting media stories of Tory corruption, saw the Coalition get a kicking in May's local elections, losing 741 seats and 13 councils, while Labour gained 823 and control of 32 more councils.

Yet, according to the TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber, only 6 per cent of the planned cuts have been implemented so far. Meanwhile NHS privatisation is accelerating, we face further pay freezes or cuts, and the double-dip recession means more jobs lost, more youth on the dole, more homelessness.

It is not necessarily the case, however, that the more working people are attacked the more they fight back. Spontaneous struggles do kick off and the union tops are under pressure to organise protests, like the 26 March 2011 monster demo or 2.5 million strong 30 November public sector pension strike.

Yet for these to be more than one-offs designed to let workers blow off steam, they need to be developed into a sustained mass movement, like the anti-poll tax or anti-war movements were. Ultimately, we will need a general strike to bring down the Tories and their austerity.

To make this leap, the question of leadership proves decisive: will it remain in the hands of the 'official' leaders, such as Brendan Barber, who orchestrated the pensions sell-out and wants to limit action to what is acceptable to Labour? Or will the left take the lead itself, and develop new organisations and a new leadership – ultimately a new party – to organise the kind of action workers need to defend our standards of living and welfare state? The fate of the different struggles – the NHS, pensions, jobs, etc – and of the resistance to austerity as a whole hinges on this single question.

So what is the potential for an alternative to Labour, a united anti-cuts movement and what other developments are possible in the trade union movement?

Unite the anti-cuts movement

The anti-cuts movement has remained divided and ineffective, with a number of competing front organisations. This has left the initiative to the TUC, meaning a wait of 18 months before another



Activists from Occupy London systematically supported the sparks' protests and brought this huge banner onto the streets on 30 November. If we can unite the creativity and daring of the youth with the organised strength of the trade union movement on a more permanent basis, we could put the question of power on the agenda

mass national demonstration on 20 October.

Contrast this to the Workfare snap demos up and down the country mounted by the left in February. This was a rare victory and showed what can happen; even without coordination, the fact that several different groups, including ourselves, took up this campaign together meant that we won some concessions and gained national media coverage.

Just imagine what a united, mass campaign could achieve. We would not have to wait 18 months for the TUC to act; we could call a national demo ourselves!

Occupy has left little in its wake in terms of organisation, but it did spread a radical idea. Instead of just leafleting and maybe organising a small demo, people created a spectacle and a space, getting on the news and forcing the powers-that-be to respond.

Without permanent structures and national links it will remain fragmented so we need to go beyond Occupy as an idea to forging a national anti-cuts movement as a reality, using occupations, demonstrations and strikes to fight the cuts.

We need a national conference of all anti-cuts groups and campaigns. But Right to Work, Unite the Resistance (both fronts for the Socialist Workers Party), the National Shop Stewards Network (Socialist Party) and Coalition of Resistance (Counterfire) all oppose such a conference, manoeuvring behind the scenes and refusing to cooperate. Local groups,

union branches, and independent campaigns need to demand these pseudo-united fronts call a democratic conference – or take matters into their own hands.

The 20 October TUC demo is an important opening to revive the movement, as it will no doubt bring a huge number of workers out on the streets to voice their anger – but how can we stop it being a one day wonder?

Organise the rank and file

The pension battle is on its last legs, thanks to the sabotage of right wing union leaders (Unison's Dave Prentis) and the missed chances by the lefts (PCS, led by Mark Serwotka and the Socialist Party). Socialists are last to leave the battlefield and we will continue to argue for the strikes can be revived and escalated, by organising rank and file militants into a movement to force the leaders to fight or push forward without them.

The N30 movement was the best chance to launch a general strike against the government so far, and its collapse will be a blow to the trade union movement. We can expect different workers in the private and public sector to fight against job and pay cuts, privatisation and attacks to union rights: most recently Jobcentre staff on Merseyside, NHS workers in Birmingham and Kirklees council employees, soon to be joined by London's bus drivers.

Where they face obstruction from union officials or a hard fight by

bosses emboldened by the Tories, the result may be militant action, like the recent MMP occupation in Liverpool or the sparks' blockades of building sites. Coordinating strikes and solidarity committees could be steps towards rebuilding a mass, coordinated strike movement and directing it against the government.

This makes initiatives to develop a rank and file movement all the more essential in every struggle and across the unions. Yet so far the SWP's Unite the Resistance conferences and SP's NSSN have refused to do so, instead promoting and providing a platform for left officials like Serwotka and cheer-leading rather than seeking to organise without them, if need be.

On the other hand, the inspirational victory of the Sparks, and the revolt of teachers at the NUT conference, shows what is possible.

Political alternative

There are enormous opportunities for the development of a political alternative to Labour. The May elections were more a vote of anger against the Tories than profession of faith in the Labour Party's willingness to fight austerity. Ed Balls says Labour in power will not repeal the Tory cuts and Ed Miliband urged public sector workers to scab on N30.

But the election of parties in France and Greece that reject austerity and put forward alternative policies for growth shows that millions could be mobilised by taking

on the Coalition head on.

Likewise George Galloway's landslide victory on 29 March shows the huge constituency for an alternative to Labour. The "Bradford Spring" was based on a bold campaign of hundreds of young activists, and a vote against austerity and war – and Labour's rotten record on both.

Respect's supporters should demand it breaks from its past populist strategy aimed principally at Muslim religious leaders, and turns its anti-austerity words into protest and action. Respect's – and Galloway's – part in May's "Wastegate" occupation in Bradford is an encouraging step in this direction.

The reformist Trade Union and Socialist Coalition of the SWP, SP and left trade union leaders like the RMT's Bob Crow and FBU's Matt Wrack did badly, netting just two seats and losing one. Because it is rolled out from scratch every election rather than campaigning as a party, it is ineffective and invisible for 99 per cent of the time. We call for a critical vote for TUSC candidates, but without a mass anti-cuts movement or strike wave, anti-cuts candidates lack profile and credibility and workers will continue to vote Labour to keep the Tories and Lib Dems out.

For this reason, Workers Power helped set up the Anticapitalist Initiative in April to try to rally the forces that could launch a new party and develop a revolutionary programme. These are turbulent and exciting times, so more and more socialists will feel the need both to unite in action and to debate the way forward. There is no reason why the ACI cannot grow by the hundreds in the coming months.

At the same time, we think the unions should fight inside Labour to challenge Miliband's austerity, and those to the left of Labour, like RMT, FBU and PCS, could call a convention to found a new party, which could bring in TUSC, Respect, anti-cuts campaigns, and rank and file groups like the Sparks and Unite Grassroots Left.

The terrible crisis of leadership in the working class movement means that popular anti-cuts anger has not turned into a sustained revolt. The existing main left organisations are part of this and have so far failed the test of our radical times: building rank and file movements in the unions, uniting the anti-cuts movement, and creating a new working class party.

Workers Power will continue to campaign for these demands and call on those who agree to join us or work with us in the ACI, unions and anti-cuts groups to go forward.

To find out more about the Anticapitalist Initiative go to: www.anticapitalists.org

workerspower.co.uk

Massacres expose Assad's murderous repression

As sectarian militias roam the countryside seeking to drown the Syrian revolution in blood, *Marcus Halaby* argues that the only progressive solution is one based on class

AFTER THE MASSACRES in Houla on 25 May and in Qubair on 6 June, anyone on the left who still opposes the Syrian revolution should be treated with the contempt that they deserve. Reportedly involving the deaths of 25 men, 34 women and 49 children, the Houla massacre clearly demonstrates the Ba'athist regime's murderous determination to hold onto power, and its readiness to fan the flames of sectarian warfare.

The massacre began after the army shot at a post-Friday prayers protest at a checkpoint near Taldo village to the north of the town. The army then shelled the town centre after a retaliatory attack on the same checkpoint by armed rebels. Later that night, members of the Shabiha ("ghosts" or "thugs") – the popular name for the shadowy unofficial pro-regime militias – entered the town, looting homes and shooting, clubbing and stabbing their occupants to death.

United Nations (UN) observers who went to Houla the following day could attribute only about 20 of the casualties to artillery shelling, suggesting a deliberate targeting of civilians. Worse still, reports from survivors indicate that the Shabiha, dressed both in military and civilian clothing, came to the mainly Sunni Muslim town from the nearby Alawite villages of Kabu and Felleh, and that they scrawled sectarian slogans on the faces of their victims.

The Houla massacre is by no means the largest to have taken place since the uprising broke out. Figures compiled by the UN, the Syrian Youth Movement, Syrian Shuhada ("martyrs"), and the Syrian Revolution Digest suggest that 15,234 people were killed in the 435 days up to and including this particular atrocity – an average of 35 per day. Hundreds were killed in the January and February 2012 siege of the Baba Amr district of Homs, Syria's third largest city, during which President Bashar Assad's regime used methods every bit as indiscriminate as those used in Israel's devastation of Gaza in January 2009.

Worst hit have been Daraa, where the uprising began, and Homs, the "capital" of the revolution. Close behind them have been the rural region around Damascus – where the army's inability to maintain control only a short drive from the capital puts the regime's fragility on full display – and the Idlib and Hama regions, just inland from the Alawite coastal heartland around Tartous and Latakia, where the regime has preferred to outsource its repression to its unofficial thugs.

To the shooting of unarmed protesters, and the low-tech murder of civilians in their homes, Assad's regime has added artillery bombardment and the launching of anti-aircraft missiles at apartment blocks. These cowardly methods make sense only if one takes into account the army's low morale and the constant flow of defectors from it.

This is, however, the most visible



Mourners bury 11 factory workers killed by pro-Assad militia while on their way to work in Homs

massacre to take place since UN envoy Kofi Annan's proposed peace plan, a key element of which was the brokering of a ceasefire between the army and the armed opposition.

Originally intended as a concession to Assad's Russian and Chinese allies, who had vetoed any moves by the UN Security Council that might have opened the way to a Libya-style military intervention, the Annan plan's most important achievement from the viewpoint of the regime is that it does not call for President Assad to step down. But far from facilitating "talks" to a peaceful transition, it seems to have emboldened the regime to continue its violence, behind the thinnest screen of plausible deniability, while blaming the opposition for any breaches of the ceasefire.

True to form, the Assad regime denied responsibility for the massacre, with Syrian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Jihad Makdissi, denying that any shelling had taken place, and claiming that opposition elements had staged the massacre to discredit the regime prior to planned talks with Annan. Assad himself feigned anger at the massacre, calling it an "ugly crime" in a speech to Syria's rubber-stamp parliament, and blaming "foreign meddling" for Syria's political divisions.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, perhaps not entirely buying the lies of his Syrian protégé, announced that the rebels shared the blame for the massacre, saying that "both sides evidently had a hand in the deaths of innocent people", and calling on "every individual with a gun" to lay down their arms. Claiming that "ending the violence" was more important than who was in power, and saying that Russia "does not support the Syrian government" but rather "supports the plan of Kofi Annan", he nevertheless used the

existence of armed elements amongst the Syrian opposition to deflect blame from the regime.

This misses the point. The armed Syrian opposition consists in its majority of defectors who have refused orders to attack their own people, as well as civilians who have armed themselves in self-defence and the defence of their communities. To equate them with those soldiers and officers who continue to obey the criminal orders of their government is to blame the victim, however "tactically wise" it may have been for the armed opposition to engage the army, on this or any other occasion.

For their part, the Western powers are exploiting Assad's repression to embarrass Russia and China and to demonise an old adversary, while at the same time seeking a deal with the Russians and the Chinese for a transition that will maintain regional stability, and crucially, Israel's security.

UK Foreign Secretary William Hague, saying that Syria looked "more like Bosnia in the 1990s" than Libya in 2011, denounced Houla as an example of the "escalating depravity and criminality" of the Assad regime. But he noted that Russia had "important leverage" over Syria, and called for "consequences" if the Annan plan is not implemented, regretting that Russia had blocked "more robust and effective measures" in the UN Security Council in the past.

The ferocity of the regime's repression may seem irrational, given that conscription ensures that soldiers and officers will be forced to use arms against people who they recognise as their own, with defections and poor morale an inevitable by-product. It might seem equally irrational for this avowedly "secular" regime to be seen to engage in sec-

effect. Prominent opposition Alawite intellectuals – and urban Alawites in Latakia and elsewhere – have been involved in the anti-regime protests from day one. The popular protests themselves continue to display a markedly anti-sectarian and patriotic spirit, with "our country is our sect" being one of the most popular slogans. And, like the Alawites, the Christian minority has been split down the middle by the uprising, with the youth and the poorer elements largely in favour of the revolution, and the less plebeian elements more sceptical or pro-regime.

Moreover, this division – along class lines – also mirrors the divisions within the Sunni Muslim majority, demonstrating that class, rather than sect, has been the main dynamic of this struggle. The traditionalist bourgeoisie and upper middle class of Aleppo, Syria's second largest city, have so far stayed solidly behind the regime, despite their past history of support for the banned opposition Muslim Brotherhood.

It is this dynamic that should be encouraged. Much more quickly than in Egypt or Tunisia – where revolutionary uprisings for democratic rights began as urban revolts of "the whole people" against apparently isolated regimes before revealing their class divisions – the Syrian revolution has assumed the visible appearance of a struggle between the haves and the have-nots. Its strongholds have been in the small towns and villages that litter Syria's impoverished countryside, as well as in the poorer districts of the smaller major cities. To achieve victory, it will have to go further than Egypt or Tunisia, and develop into a struggle in which the working class – leading the farmers, the ruined middle class, urban poor and intelligentsia behind it – fights not only the Ba'athist dictatorship, but the system of class domination that it represents.

The original version of this article first appeared on the website of the New Anticapitalist Initiative at <http://anticapitalists.org/2012/06/06/houla-massacre-exposes-assads-murderous-repression/>



Protesters in Binsh, near Idlib make their point

Keynesianism: workable reformist solution to the crisis of capitalism?

Rix Bragg

WITH A SECOND economic crisis looming on Europe's horizons, there has been a turn in the public consciousness towards the economic theories of John Maynard Keynes, famous for promoting growth as a solution to the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Groups as varied as the TUC, the Peoples Charter, the Communist Party of Britain, and Counterfire have argued that Keynesian economics provides an alternative to the austerity demanded by the world's finance markets.

It has been over three years since the world was 'rescued' from the worst banking crisis in 70 years. As the globalised world economy stood on the brink of a catastrophic collapse, only the mobilisation of staggering sums of money by national governments prevented a total breakdown.

Governments embarked on an unprecedented socialisation of losses through the buying of toxic private debts, the bailout and nationalisation of failing banks and introduction of vicious austerity programmes. But the promised return to growth has not only failed to materialise, and the underlying problems that caused the first meltdown in 2008 have now brought us to the precipice of a second, even deeper crisis.

Economic indicators across the globe point towards a growing storm centred on the Greek and Eurozone crisis. Large-scale capital flight has begun to safe havens such as US and German bonds and precious metals such as gold and platinum. Capital has dramatically switched away from the higher risk areas such as the 'peripheral economies' of Greece, Italy and Spain, which have all seen their bond yields increase as investors lose confidence in their ability to repay their debts. This threatens to unleash a negative-feedback loop of spiralling debt and high interest rates, ending in bankruptcy for these countries and the ripping apart the Eurozone. Either outcome threatens to plunge the world economy into crisis.

Banks across the world are bolstering their reserves in preparation for the outbreak of a crisis, which many are increasingly viewing as inevitable.

To make matters worse, a spate of bad Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) figures show that global growth in manufacturing is beginning to slow. This has spread from the recession-hit nations of the West to the manufacturing powerhouses of China, Brazil and India. This is further confirmed by recent jobs figures in the US, which show rising unemployment in the manufacturing sector and the fall of commodity prices, as demand from the emerging economies begins to wither.

With the world heading back into recession and the risk of another



Worker on a New Deal Public Works Administration project in Los Angeles

banking crisis increasing, economists and commentators are scrambling to provide explanations for why the pursuit of growth has turned into a mirage in the deserts of austerity.

Those who advocate the purist neoliberalism of Milton Friedman see the continuing gloom as the result of continuing government intervention since the start of the crisis. They argue that the markets need to be free to correct themselves without the distortions created by government bailouts and rounds of quantitative easing.

For them the answer is further market deregulation, greater austerity and the principle that nobody is 'too big to fail'.

On the other side are the advocates of Keynesianism, who maintain that what is needed is greater regulation and further state intervention in the national economy.

With austerity programmes still yet to be fully rolled out, it's understandable that the Keynesian message of investment in jobs, infrastructure and public works is starting to appeal to those whose belts have been tightened in pursuit of non-existent 'growth'.

Keynesianism as an alternative to the current crisis-management theory is predicated on theory of under-consumptionism, a popular explanation of how economic crisis occurs.

Keynesianism sees crises as the result of a lack of demand for goods

and services, which triggers a slowdown in business, and the onset of recession. As the recession progresses people begin to lose their jobs, cut down on spending and start saving causing a further drop in demand, which triggers a negative feedback loop dragging the economy further into recession. As the slowdown progresses banks cease to lend, choosing instead to hoard their money, which not only deepens the recession but also risks triggering a banking crisis.

On this basis the Keynesians argue that to end the crisis all that is needed is to break the negative feedback cycle. This would be achieved by government intervention in the economy to bolster demand through the raising of wages, the commissioning of large infrastructure projects, the introduction of welfare and other direct stimulus measures.

For Keynes, the origins of the crisis lie in the sphere of consumption rather than production. From this comes the assumption that simply restoring demand should be sufficient to exit the crisis. This is why the New Deal of the 1930s is held up as Keynes' big success story.

Yet on closer inspection, Keynesian policies are revealed to be far more limited than generally acknowledged.

While it is true that the New Deal did dramatically increase demand for construction materials and led to

economic growth, as soon as direct stimulus of the economy ceased in 1937 the nation went back into recession. It was the stimulus of the war economy from 1939, which saw a return to GDP growth. In short Keynesianism failed to end to crisis - it merely suppressed it temporarily through state intervention.

Additionally to this, an analysis of the progress of the current crisis does not fit comfortably into the Keynesian schema.

Keynesianism sees crises progressing through stages from falling demand through to a full crisis as the economic slowdown provokes hoarding.

Yet the 2008 crisis was preceded by high demand and credit-fuelled consumption. It was the banking crisis which provoked the recession - falling demand came later. Keynesianism struggles to rationalise the post-war booms, which saw economies expand massively, despite austerity and low consumer demand.

Finally, how will the Keynesians flout the bond markets, and the attacks on economies that don't cut quickly enough? By electing Social Democrats like Francois Hollande?

Even Roosevelt's limited programme was only pushed through by the massive strike waves and unionisation of American workers in the 1930s - and US capital had nowhere else to go.

Massive class mobilisations to push even limited reforms would mean, a capital investment strike and flight from the country as in Greece, and make the crisis worse, if it comes without a revolutionary perspective to solve it with socialist measures to expropriate capital.

Rate of profit

Counterposed to the Keynesian theory of crisis is Karl Marx's theory of the tendency for the rate of profit to fall. According to Marx's theory the origin of capitalist crisis can be located in the productive sphere itself and stems from the nature of value creation.

Building upon the work of the classical liberal economists David Ricardo and Adam Smith, who discovered that additional value is created through human labour, Marx discovered that the rate of profit is derived from the ratio of surplus value to labour (variable capital) and raw materials, machinery etc. (constant capital).

This allowed him to demonstrate that only labour can add value; therefore a rise in the value of constant capital relative to labour-value reduces the rate of profit.

As those capitalists who do not innovate (expand their constant capital) tend to go bankrupt, there is a necessary drive towards a greater organic composition of capital (higher ratio of constant capital to labour) as the business cycle progresses.

The inevitable result of this is that

the rate of profit tends to decline over time. Eventually the rate falls to such an extent that it is no longer profitable to reinvest in expansion of production and a new, more profitable, outlet is sought through investments in other areas, including financial instruments.

This new investment outlet creates a ballooning of 'fictitious capital'; money which has no physical underpinning; the markets boom as a speculative bubble inflates until investors realise that the capital is massively overvalued and over-accumulated.

This triggers a confidence crisis, and the resulting banking crisis paralyses the market. The economy enters into a period of decline as a corrective devaluation begins the process of destroying the over-accumulated capital that lies at the root of the crisis.

When viewed in terms of Marx's theory the current crisis begins to make sense. The fall in the rate of profit led to a global speculative bubble which included the sub-prime mortgage market.

When it became clear that sub-prime mortgage holders could not repay their debts, the local problem turned into a world crisis as banks found themselves exposed to 'toxic' (unpayable) debts through the system of derivatives which disguised toxic debts by bundling them with other financial services and selling them on.

The panic following the realisation that huge investments were effectively worthless had the effect of a heart attack at the centre of the financial markets. Lines of credit froze as banks called in debts, in turn seizing up supply and demand.

It was against this backdrop that the first bailouts and rounds of quantitative easing occurred.

However, the underlying cause of the crisis remains the over-accumulation of capital and the consequently low rate of profit, prohibiting profitable innovation and expansion.

The massive state interventions have only served to delay the inevitable corrective devaluation.

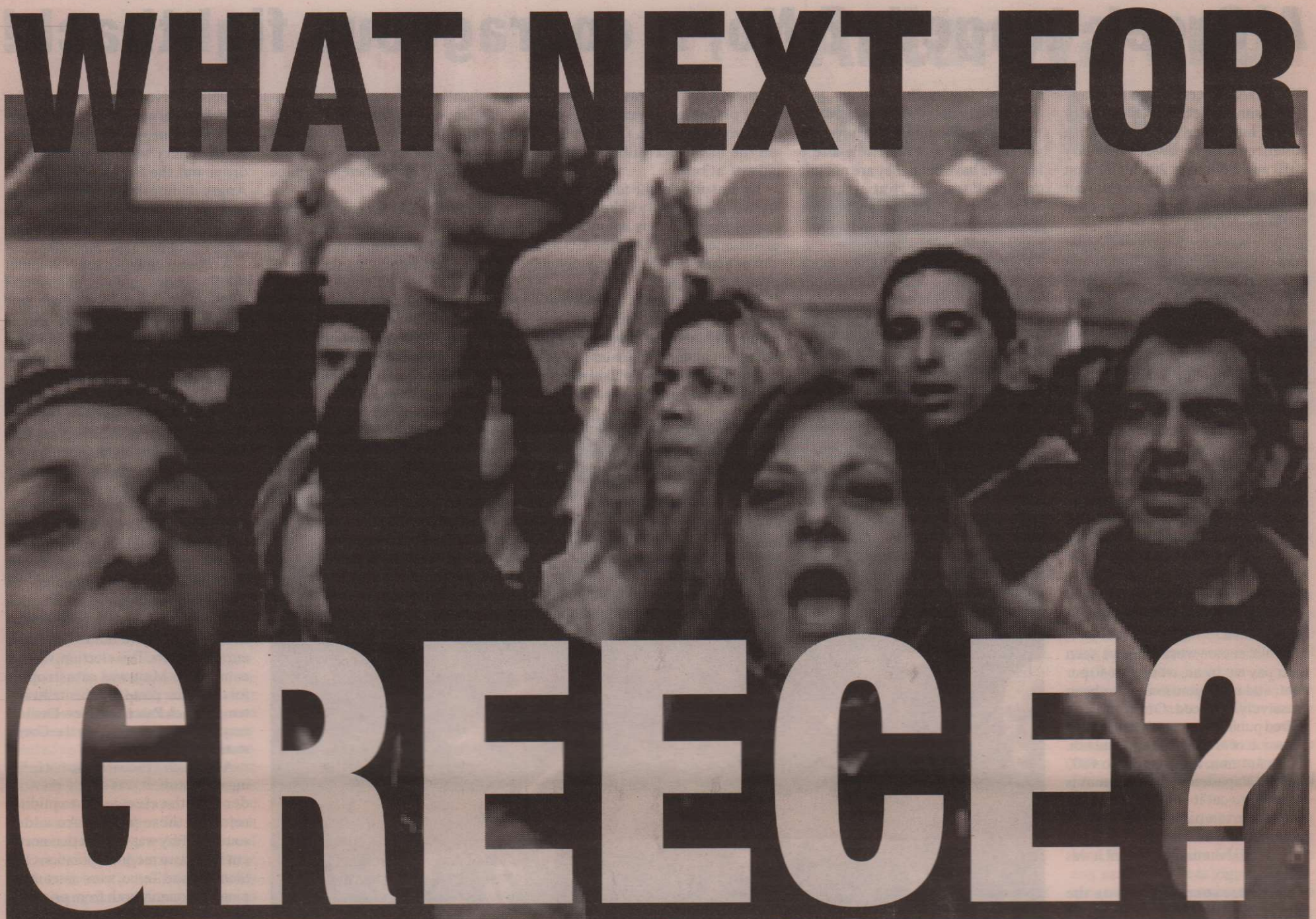
Today our choices are couched in terms of a choice between neo-liberal austerity and, increasingly, Keynesian delay tactics.

Neither provides credible solutions for the millions who continue to suffer from what is fast becoming the worst economic crisis in history. For Marxists, there is a solution, which is not based on the countless failed experiments that seek to rationalise a market based on the atomised self-interest of the profit-motive.

Rather it is based on the destruction of this system and its replacement with a more advanced economic model; one directed by the people, and decided according to the needs of the people.

This system, socialism, is the only one that can banish the recurring human catastrophe brought by each capitalist crisis to the history books.

WHAT NEXT FOR GREECE?



Over the next four pages,, *Dave Stockton* looks at why the formation of a workers' government in Greece is necessary to mobilise the popular forces to strike the decisive blow against austerity regimes in Greece, in Europe and in every country where capital insists that workers, youth and the unemployed must be made to pay for its crisis

ON 17 JUNE the election in Greece could give Syriza, a coalition of left reformist and smaller, far left organisations, a popular mandate to form a government pledged to reject the austerity programme laid out in the Memorandum imposed on Greece by the 'Troika' – the IMF, the European Commission and the European Central Bank (ECB).

This will throw the entire European Union into another spiral of its crisis. Already, a combination of economic and political factors is threatening the future development of Europe.

Globally, even the supposed engines of economic revival such as Brazil, India and China are seeing growth rates decline. In Europe itself, the banking crisis in Spain puts in question the viability of the single currency. On top of this comes the Greek election.

This combination of events would put unprecedented strains on the entire institutional structure of the EU and bring to a head a crisis that has been developing ever since the global financial crash of 2008. Although no country in the EU will

be unaffected, it is in Greece that it will immediately pose the most fundamental issues, summed up in the question: who is to rule and in whose interests?

The question of power

Syriza, it is reported, may achieve as much as 35 per cent of the vote and could be able to form a government. What would it do? It has spelt out the key measures that would constitute a clear mandate:

- Cancellation of pending bailout measures that require further cuts to private sector wages and pensions.
- Cancellation of laws abolishing collective labour agreements.
- Abolition of MPs' special privileges and immunity from prosecution as well as reform of electoral law.
- Immediate publication of the audit performed on the Greek banking system by BlackRock.
- An international auditing committee to account for public sector over-indebtedness, with a moratorium on all debt servicing until the publication of the audit findings.

The rulers of Europe have issued the direst warnings of what their response would be.

The Troika has threatened to pull the plug on the whole €130bn (£100bn) Greek bailout, potentially forcing the country to exit the Euro. Of course such actions would be risky for our rulers too. Economists have warned that a "disorderly exit" would spread the contagion to Spain, Portugal and Italy and put the survival of the euro itself into question.

That, in turn, could trigger a new European banking crisis that would throw the continent into an even deeper depression and drag the global economy back into recession.

The potential election of a government really willing to defy the naked blackmail of the Troika and the arrogant threats of Merkel or Cameron, has electrified Europe. This is hardly surprising, given that Syriza openly blames capitalism for this crisis and talks of the need for the "nationalisation/socialisation of banks, and their integration into a public banking system under social and workers' control"; for "large capitalist property ...

to be made public and managed democratically along social and ecological criteria"; for the "restoration of a strong welfare state" and for "disengagement from NATO".

If Syriza is elected and then sticks to its promise to reverse the austerity measures, tears up the Memorandum with the Troika, halts the sale of the country's assets and public services and reverses the sacking of hundreds of thousands of state employees, thereby restoring their wage levels and pensions, this will create a revolutionary situation such as we have not seen in capitalist Europe since Portugal in 1974.

Of course there is a real danger of counter-revolution against such a government, orchestrated from Berlin, Brussels, Paris and London and carried out by the Greek elite and their judiciary, police and army.

Defiant Greeks show the way for the anti-austerity movement

The threats of German Chancellor Angela Merkel are well known, but politicians from most states inside and outside the Eurozone have joined her.

The UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, was even blunter than Merkel, arrogantly declaring that the election on 17 June was actually a referendum on the euro: "We now have to send a very clear message to people in Greece: there is a choice: you can either vote to stay in the euro, with all the commitments you've made or, if you vote another way, you're effectively voting to leave."

Tory Justice Secretary, Ken Clarke, underlined the consequences would be "serious" if the Greek people elected "cranky extremists" and defaulted on their debts as a result. *The Economist*, the voice of the City of London, referred to Syriza's young leader, Alexis Tsipras, as "an upstart."

On the other hand, an example of defiance by Greece could inspire renewed mass resistance in the countries most affected by the crisis.

It will place enormous responsibilities on the left right cross Europe to come to the aid of Greece and to break any blockade of the new government by our own exploiters and to force the withdrawal of any sanctions.

A Greek tragedy? No, a courageous fightback!

WHY HAS Greece taken the lead? Quite simply because its ordinary people have been subjected to five austerity packages between February 2010 and February 2012. The first three alone amounted to a total cut of €30 billion (12.5 per cent of the 2009 Greek GDP).

There was a further cut of five per cent of GDP in 2010, and then 4 per cent in 2011. Such destruction has not been seen in Western Europe since the 1930s and is similar in its severity to the collapse of the economies in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the decade after the restoration of capitalism.

Greece's recession, which began in 2008, has continued through the so-called recovery years. Greek GDP fell by 6.9 per cent in 2011 and estimates for 2012 predict a fall of between 5 per cent (Greek Central Bank) and 7.15 per cent. (UK Economist Intelligence Unit). The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate soared from 7.5 per cent, in September 2008, to 21.7 per cent in January 2012. For young people unemployment has risen from 22 per cent to 51.1 per cent.

Public sector workers have seen their pay cut by an average of 40 per cent, and most pensions have been massively reduced. One year ago, retired public sector workers received a pension of around €1200 per month. In the autumn, that was cut to €800 and the Papademos government is planning to cut it to €600. In the private sector, too, pay rates have plummeted, in the building industry pay for casual labourers is half what it was two years ago.

There are soup kitchens on the streets of Athens, with an estimated one in 11 residents, some 400,000 people, visiting at least once daily. There has been a major increase in people sleeping rough: by February 2012, 20,000 Greeks had been made homeless over the previous year. Large numbers of unemployed are returning to their family villages, where relatives can provide a roof

and basic foodstuffs.

Yet the country's workers, young people, and unemployed have not suffered in silence. Horrible as the last years have been they are not just "a Greek tragedy" but rather an inspiration to all those in Europe already suffering austerity or imminently threatened with it.

In a sense, the Greek fight back started as long ago as December 2008 with the three weeks of the youth uprising over the murder by police of 15-year old Alexandros Grigoropoulos. However, it became a continuous movement when the first wave of savage austerity was

imposed by the Pasok government of George Papandreou, which had won election in October 2009 on the basis of avoiding cuts and privatisations.

By the spring of the following year he had caved in to "the markets", that is, the billionaire speculators in government bonds and the EU and introducing the first of the savage austerity packages.

A mass movement of resistance began with a general strike on 10 February 2010, and continued on 5 May when between 100,000 and 500,000 marched in Athens and laid siege to parliament, where the MPs were vot-

ing, chanting: "thieves, thieves!"

The movement intensified hugely the following year when it became clear that austerity was never ending. In March 2011 alone, there were three general strikes.

On 25 May 2011 Syntagma Square, and the central squares of other cities, were occupied by thousands of peaceful protesters, inspired by the actions of the Spanish Indignados movement. On May 15, there was another general strike and 300,000 demonstrators once more surrounded the Greek parliament. The square occupations with their daily assemblies carried on into August.

October-November witnessed a veritable tidal wave of protests, including a 48-hour general strike and a strike of ferry workers, which finally drove out the Pasok government. Angry demonstrators laid siege to parliament, though they were still unable to prevent the hated politicians voting for more austerity.

At the beginning of last November the Papandreou government was replaced by a "national government" headed by an economist, Lucas Papademos, supported by New Democracy and Pasok but forced to pledge a general election in the spring. Meanwhile Papademos, bolstered by the arrival of commissioners from the Troika, tried to force through another austerity package. On February 10-11 there was another general strike and 500,000 marched in Athens.

Although the 17 24-or 48-hour general strikes, the 2011 occupations and the assemblies did not overthrow the government and replace it with one that would carry out the manifest will of the people, they did create such political instability that the parties had no alternative but to face their enraged voters. This election, when it came, on 6 May, was catastrophic for the entire post 1974 clientelist system in which Pasok and New Democracy took turns at milking the Greek state.

After such a catastrophic fall in living standards, it was surely no wonder that the electorate explicitly rejected these parties. An added source of fury was the fact that northern European mega-corporations, like Siemens and Tesco, were asset stripping the country both from privatisation of the public sector and from the wave of bankruptcies in the private sector.

Support for Syriza, the only serious party that unequivocally called for an end to austerity, and whose members had actively participated in all the protests, shot up to 16.8 per cent, pushing Pasok down to 13.8 per cent and third place.



Greek workers fighting against police repression

A crisis of leadership

IT IS NO wonder that the opinion polls, immediately after 6 May gave Syriza between 23 and 28 per cent. People realised that Syriza was now a serious contender for power. They realised, after the experience of the last two years, that protest alone would never solve the problems they faced. The issue was quite simply one of power; who would form a government that would oppose and reverse the Troika's diktats?

If Syriza wins a plurality of the popular vote in the June elections, then it would gain the extra 50 seats in parliament allowed for in the Greek constitution. While it is conceivable that this could allow it to form a majority government, it is far more likely that Syriza will fall short of an

absolute majority, but be in a position to form a coalition government.

Though there are still many uncertainties ahead, it is no wonder that workers and youth across Europe, as well as in Greece, are filled with hope. No wonder either that the ruling classes of Europe are filled with fear and rage.

However, a coalition government committed to rejecting austerity, and with a democratic mandate to do just that, would only be possible if Syriza were joined by the Greek Communist Party (KKE), which won 8.48 per cent on 6 May, and the Democratic Left (Dimar) with 6.11 per cent.

As yet there is no sign that either party is willing to do this. Quite the opposite. The KKE General Secre-

tary, Aleka Papatrifa, justifies refusal to consider entering a Syriza-led government on the grounds that "under a leftist disguise it attempts to convince the people that workers and capitalists can coexist and prosper". The KKE also denounces Syriza for its policy of trying to stay within the Eurozone and negotiate over the debt, whilst declaring a moratorium on payments.

While some might see this as revolutionary intransigence on the part of the KKE, in present circumstances, it is actually a sectarian and cowardly refusal to fight to defend the interests of the working class. Of course, Syriza's programme is reformist and its proposed policy utopian but that is not the key issue today.

Millions of workers and youth see in Syriza a means of defeating austerity, revolutionaries may realise this is an illusion, they may say that it is an illusion, but that, in itself, alters nothing. If the KKE's sectarianism means that Syriza cannot form a government and, instead, Nea Demokratia and Pasok are enabled to implement austerity, then those millions will continue to believe that, if only it had got more votes, Syriza would have saved them.

In other words, the illusions would be strengthened and the ruling class would be given governmental power again.

The only effective way to dispel illusions in Syriza is for the millions who support it to see what it actually does

in government – if the KKE were to join a coalition and then criticise any deviation from the commitment to tear up the austerity programme, then it would be exercising revolutionary intransigence, where it matters, on the battlefield.

Meanwhile, Dimar also denounces Syriza, this time for "the obsession with the renunciation of the loan agreement that will mean bankruptcy and a rift with the Eurozone". Dimar says this will "make a political agreement difficult".

Clearly, what they have in mind is agreement with all those forces, inside Greece and abroad, which will insist on enforcing the terms of the loan agreement, namely, the austerity programme!

Reform or revolution?

SYRIZA IS NO revolutionary party, but neither is it a normal reformist one.

Since 6 May, Syriza has become wildly popular across Europe and around the world. In Europe, at least, it is decades since a party that could seriously challenge for power has had such radical proposals in its programme or its leaders' speeches. The rage of the millionaire media against Alexis Tsipras seems to confirm this at every turn.

Yet, Syriza's programme is still reformist. It does not envisage any revolutionary break with capitalism and its state. It does not see the working class, and democratic workers' organisations, as the prime agency for an overthrow of the system. Of course, it does talk about a radical democracy and workers' control, but it is far from committed to a radical break from bourgeois democracy and parliamentarism.

Despite seeking to renounce not only the Memorandum but also the Maastricht and Lisbon Treaties, which it sees as enshrining neoliberalism and the demolition of a social Europe, it is also reformist in its strategy. It holds out a perspective of negotiation to replace this neoliberal model of privatisation and austerity with one based on prioritising social spending and the welfare state. Tsipras has held talks with all the other parties, apart from the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn, about possible coalition terms, and discussed what his future government policy would be with the leaders of the G20. Even on the key question of debts, the demand is for an audit, not a cancellation.

Revolutionaries must criticise the utopian character of Syriza's programme, but also the failure to warn

the working class that even these demands will clash with the needs of capitalism in crisis. Any determined attempt to implement them will be met by savage attacks, not only from the rulers of the EU but also from the Greek capitalist class and its state. While there is more than a grain of truth in Tsipras' observation that a Greek default, or expulsion from the Euro, would have literally incalculable consequences for the whole financial and commercial structure of Europe, to rely on this as the main defence of a government committed to "tearing up" the Troika's Memorandum would be a miscalculation on a historic scale.

It is not enough, however, for revolutionaries simply to contrast Syriza's reformism with an anticapitalist "maximum programme". What is needed is an action programme of transitional demands that address many of the same objectives sought by Syriza activists and voters, but which do not rely on negotiations with the capitalists, or the capitalist state machine, to implement them. Rather, they need to develop the steps towards workers' control and democracy from below that already occur episodically into a class-wide movement to establish delegate-based factory committees, workers' councils and workers' militia, and to coordinate them at local, regional and national levels.

A number of developments in Syriza's history in the last decade and, indeed, the last years and months, indicate that it is not a typical left reformist party in relatively stable conditions. On the contrary, today's conditions are those in which reformist parties can take on many of the features of centrism, for example,

adopting certain revolutionary demands and attracting a growing rank and file membership that becomes subjectively revolutionary in its hopes and aspirations. The formation of Syriza by the addition of several far left groups like KOE, the split with the old Eurocommunist leadership of Synaspismos in 2010, the revolutionary situation of 2011-2012, the influx of new working class and youthful members, the mass assemblies at the base of the party, all these account for its radical stance.

Trotsky noted a similar situation in the 1930s with regard to the French Socialist Party (SFIO). He criticised "those comrades who, in appraising the Socialist Party, themselves operate with the ready-made formulas of yesterday: 'reformism', 'Second International', 'political support of the bourgeoisie'. Are these definitions correct? Yes and no. More no than yes." He went on to assert, "what we have here is a centrist party, which, by virtue of a long protracted evolution of the country, still unites extreme polar contradictions."

And, of course, he advocated an appropriate tactic for the small groups of French Trotskyists; their entry into the SFIO as a faction with their own programme, 'The Action Programme for France'. This approach would be by far the best for the Greek far left to take today. Marxists have often quoted Archimedes, "give me a place to stand and with a lever I will move the whole world". Today, we can say not only that a party is the lever needed to move Greece but also that the place to stand for the small subjective revolutionary vanguard is inside Syriza, a party that could, with intransigence and the right policy, move Greece and Europe.

Of course, it will not do so or, rather, it will not go all the way to doing so, with its present leadership and programme. They present the very real danger for the working class of bungling or betraying at the critical moment. Central to preventing this, and to forewarning the rank and file of the party, is placing demands on the reformist leaders, demanding that they take the power and that they carry out the most radical and decisive demands of their own programme, as well as agitating for workers to adopt more consistent anti-capitalist, that is, transitional demands.

At the same time, although it is necessary for revolutionaries to be in Syriza and to use these tactics here and now, they also need to preserve their total programmatic independence, embodied in an action programme for power, and their independent organisation, as a faction, not holding back from recruiting to own their ranks from fear of expulsion.

Antarsya and the far left



ANTARSYA HAS recognised the importance of the massive swing of voters behind Syriza as an act of rejection of the austerity programmes. They have elaborated a series of demands as the basis for a social movement from below and demand that Syriza should commit itself to implementing them. They are:

1. Cancellation of all Memoranda and Loan Agreements with the EU, the ECB and the IMF, cancellation of all impending measures
2. Protection of the unemployed, increases in salaries and pensions, decrease of work time, secure employment for everybody, taxation for big capital
3. Immediate cessation of payments to our creditors and unilateral cancellation of the entire usurious public debt
4. Nationalisation without compensation and with workers' control of all banks and enterprises of strategic importance
5. Reinstatement of popular sovereignty and democracy by the people, for the people, doing away with special police forces, neutralisation of Golden Dawn [the neo-Nazi party], stopping the anti-immigrant pogroms, dismantling army mechanisms that turn against people, disengagement from NATO.
6. None of the previous vital demands can be materialised without the immediate exit from the euro and euro treaties, the rupture with, and disengagement from, the EU.

Antarsya also calls for: "A rising of the entire working population - Anticapitalist revolution! Power and wealth belong in the hands of the workers!"

The first four demands are in our view essential. The fifth demand does not say what institutions would exercise popular sovereignty nor what their fundamental class character should be. Are we talking about a parliament or soviets? Nor does it say how Golden Dawn should be "neutralised" - by the state, by the armed workers? Equally, it does not say how the anti-immigrant pogroms can be stopped. On these two linked issues, two forms of organisation should be clearly named - workers' councils and a workers' militia.

Point six, however, is wrong in presenting an exit from the Euro and the EU as a strategic necessity, indeed a principle goal, of the movement. Any suggestion that formal "national" independence is a pre-condition of

working class victory is a dangerous concession to nationalism, as well as a utopian strategy. The strategic orientation of revolutionaries must be towards a pan-European overthrow of capitalism, and our tactics must serve that strategy.

That means fighting for a pan-European working class offensive against the EU authorities and the major powers, against austerity and cuts programmes everywhere, and not isolating the Greek struggle, currently the most explosive and radical, from its natural allies across the continent.

Moreover, expulsion of Greece from the Eurozone, or even from the EU, is one possible solution that could be imposed by the imperialist powers within the EU, to preserve their financial control of the remaining bloc. Why make the EU rulers' job any easier for them? Trying to create a capitalist Greece in autarky from Europe would be virtually guaranteed to lead to hyperinflation as a "New Drachma" collapsed in value, and would leave Greek workers with no greater control over their destiny than they have within the EU.

In the context of the anti-capitalist revolution called for by Antarsya, there is every reason to expect the EU authorities to impose a blockade on Greece, to isolate the revolution as a step to strangling it. In those conditions, revolutionaries everywhere would need to oppose such enforced "independence" and fight to bring down the counter-revolutionary authorities of the EU and replace them with a United Socialist States of Europe.

Last, but not least, the perspective of a revolutionary uprising is meaningless sloganeering if it does not address the question of the leadership of the working class, which at present is in the hands of reformists, whether of a left social democratic or Stalinist hue.

That existing leadership may be able to form a government within the coming month, which would immediately come under massive attack, including the threat of economic or constitutional destabilisation.

So, simply criticising Syriza, or even passively hoping it will win, while waiting for the real revolution (with soviets and insurrection, etc) to come along when the revolutionary sects are ready for it, may seem principled but is actually tactically inept to the highest degree.



The struggle in the coming weeks and months

AT THE moment, it is vitally necessary for revolutionaries to pursue such a tactic within Syriza and to campaign for maximum electoral support while criticising every limitation of its programme and leadership. Any sectarian abstention would be suicidal for the left because it would pass the initiative to the fascists, who could grow like wildfire amongst the lumpen-proletariat, the ruined petty bourgeoisie, the unemployed and the youth.

The classic conditions for fascism to emerge as a serious challenger for power are those where the working class has had the opportunity to resist a capitalist crisis but has failed to take it. An electoral victory for Syriza and other anti-austerity parties would represent such an opportunity, it would encourage the working class to fight-back against austerity, to insist on its own interests, and build its own organisations. However, defeat would have the opposite effect, tending to lower expectations and morale and demobilise resistance. Worse still would be a failure to form an anti-austerity government because of a refusal by working class parties to participate.

Any sectarian abstention in the electoral arena would be both criminal and suicidal for the Left. Yet, that is the position adopted by the KKE. Like the German KPD in the early Thirties, which refused to join forces with the Social Democracy because of its reformist politics and, thereby, allowed the Nazis to take power, the KKE, which has considerable influence within its affiliated unions, is prepared to see a pro-austerity government take office rather than fight alongside the reformists of Syriza.

While that would undoubtedly be a tragedy, the adoption of a similarly "intransigent" position by the far smaller forces organised within Antarsya is just as surely a farce. However, it is certainly no laughing matter. Any parties of the left that allow the right to continue with the austerity, despite a reaffirmed majority vote for rejection, will be unfailingly condemned by the masses, and rightly so. In such a situation, the Golden Dawn fascists would see a further huge increase in their vote and support.

Whatever the outcome of the election, the impact of the capitalist crisis and the austerity programmes will continue. Youth unemployment is already 53.8 per cent and overall unemployment is 21.7 per cent. Whether the austerity goes through or there is a default, it will get much worse. Unless there is a compromise, that is, a partial back down by Merkel and the EU, there will be a race between the forces of the left and fascism during the coming months. Greece will enter an acute revolutionary or counterrevolutionary situation.

Therefore, anticapitalist and socialist measures become not just a question of fighting for hegemonic ideas but also the only solution to the crisis. Once again, the Greek crisis shows how vital (both for good or ill) political parties are, and the terrific crisis of leadership of the workers' movement.

For a workers' government

FACED WITH this situation, revolutionaries in Greece should fight for the formation of a workers' government. The Fourth Congress of the Communist International, held in December 1922, outlined the key tasks of a workers' government;

"The most basic tasks of a workers' government must consist of arming the proletariat, disarming the bourgeois counter-revolutionary organisations, introducing [workers'] control of production, shifting the main burden of taxation to the shoulders of the rich, and breaking the resistance of the counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie. Such a workers' government is possible only if it is born from the struggles of the masses themselves and is supported by militant workers' organisations created by the most oppressed layers of the working masses."

It continues: "Even a workers' government that arises from a purely parliamentary combination, that is, one that is purely parliamentary in origin, can provide the occasion for a revival of the revolutionary workers' movement. Obviously, the birth and continued existence of a genuine workers' government, one that pursues revolutionary policies, must result in a bitter struggle with the bourgeoisie, and possibly a civil war. Even an attempt by the proletariat to form such a workers' government will encounter from the outset most determined resistance from the bourgeoisie. The slogan of the workers' government thus has the potential of uniting the proletariat and unleashing revolutionary struggle."

Trotsky repeated these principles in the Transitional Programme of 1938: "Of all parties and organisations which base themselves on the workers and peasants and speak in their name, we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for the workers' and farmers' government. On this road we promise them full support against capitalist reaction. At the same time, we indefatigably develop agitation around



those transitional demands, which should, in our opinion, form the programme of the "workers' and farmers' government."

What does this mean for revolutionaries in Greece today? It means calling on Syriza, the KKE and Dimar, if they emerge with an absolute majority, or even a plurality, to form a government to reject the austerity pacts, to restore workers' wages, pension and union rights and to defy the Troika.

They should agitate for the unions and popular organisations to join in the creation of a workers militia; appeal to the soldiers to join and arm the people, crush the Golden Dawn fascist gangs and disband the most reactionary and repressive paramilitary police and regiments of armed forces. Events in Chile and Portugal in the mid-1970s show that to leave control of armed force in the hands of the generals will be catastrophic.

Such a government should in turn appeal to the workers and youth of Europe to come to its aid by mass demonstrations and direct action to force their own governments to abandon their threats against Greece and unconditionally cancel its debts in their entirety.

This does not mean political support to, or confidence in, a Syriza-led government, not even "critical support." Revolutionaries may give critical support to workers' parties in an election, calling on them to take the power from the bourgeois parties, but we cannot give them any political endorsement while they are still de facto the executives of the capitalist state. Nor should revolutionaries join a non-revolutionary government of the workers' parties because it would

undoubtedly attack the workers in various ways and we should be in the forefront of opposition to this. If a popular front government, that is one that includes pro-capitalist parties, were formed, we would demand – kick out the capitalist ministers! Form committees of workers and youth to defend jobs and services!

We must resolutely oppose all those who take a passive, abstentionist or sectarian approach to such governments.

Just as we call on the workers' parties and the unions to take the power, when they are in power, we call on them to base their government, not on the legislature, judiciary and armed forces of the capitalist state, but on mobilising the working class to defend it against the inevitable counter-attack of the permanent repressive, bureaucratic and juridical state machine and the onslaught of the 'markets'. We would vigorously defend such a government against bourgeois counter-attack, for example, by raising demands to create a workers' militia, arming it and taking measures to expropriate the capitalists.

The recent attack by a Golden Dawn candidate against two women MPs during a television talk show prompted significant anti-fascist mobilisations across Greece. Revolutionaries must take the lead in organising now to sweep the fascists off the streets, before they secure the backing of desperate and enraged capitalists threatened by the formation of a workers' government. We must not mince our words. The fascist gangs have launched a campaign of terror against migrants, Muslims and those who defend them.

Organisations of the working-class must destroy the fascists' headquarters, disperse their rallies and organise defence of our communities and assemblies against their thugs. Organisations of defence against fascism will be the embryo of the workers' militia necessary to ensure the power won by the workers is defended by the workers themselves – not left to the spineless seat-warmers in parliament.

Greece is in an acute revolutionary situation but held back from revolution by a profound crisis of working class leadership. This has a huge potential effect on Europe as a whole, especially if taken together with Francoise Hollande's election, and his potential clash with Merkel and Germany.

There is, of course, a danger that the western European working class will be lulled into inactivity by continued anti-Greek chauvinism, but also by deceptive talk of adding growth packages to austerity programmes.

These will turn out not to be the huge public sector-based infrastructure programmes the Keynesians dream of, but further neoliberal reforms, the slashing of protective legislation, wage cuts, more precarity and more privatisations.

The centrist left, having recovered from its infatuation with the horizontals in the Occupy Movement in 2011, will doubtless now go chasing after left reformist parties that could form governments – obviously Syriza, but also the Front de Gauche in France, or even the ailing Die Linke in Germany. They may well drop the NPA-Antarsya 'anticapitalist' model.

The crucial issue in this regard is not whether it is best to intervene into 'broad', 'plural' or, indeed, centrist, organisations or to unite subjectively revolutionary forces.

Political life creates both possibilities in different circumstances, what is essential in all circumstances is that revolutionaries stick to their principles, defend and fight for a Leninist party and a transitional programme.

Towards a Socialist United States of Europe

THIS IS exactly the kind of situation that the Communist International addressed with its development of the United Front tactic and, more specifically, the Workers' Government tactic.

Today's revolutionaries should apply those tactics in the coming months. If Syriza wins enough votes and seats to form a left coalition and fulfills its promise of rejecting the Memorandum, the task of revolutionaries, however small their numbers, will be to defend it against the inevitable sabotage and revolt of all the key elements of the bourgeois state.

Our task should be to work all out to create councils of delegates from the unions, workplaces and popular communities, to ensure this.

This means appealing to all the trade unions, especially at workplace

level, to call mass meetings and elect delegates to councils of action as real alternative organs of power, located in every village town and city in Greece. The model for such assemblies has been set by those created by occupations but also by Syriza's local assemblies.

Such bodies would have to create a mass self-defence force of workers, unemployed, students, capable of defending the new power. Only a government resting on the entire mobilised working people could defy the forces of reaction at home and abroad and carry through the essential measures.

Within such bodies, we would agitate for them to take control over the large-scale firms and banks of the capitalist economy and demand that the government legitimise all such measures. We would demand that the

government, faced with retaliation from the EU and the imperialist powers, should also appeal to the workers of Europe to come to the aid of the Greek workers by taking direct action against their own governments and the EU institutions – joining their Greek sisters and brothers in a fight for a Socialist United States of Europe, as the first step to a socialist world.

As for anticapitalists and revolutionaries outside Greece, it is our urgent duty to mobilise a Europe-wide movement to demand/support the complete cancellation of the Greek state debt and the abandonment of the Fiscal (austerity) Pact.

We should call on the French, German, Spanish, Italian and Greek unions, the left social democratic and Stalinist parties, and even the main-

line Socialist and Labour parties, to mobilise on the streets and in the parliaments to demand an end to the torture of the Greek people, the complete cancellation of the Greek state debt and the total abandonment of the Fiscal (austerity) Pact.

Across Europe, revolutionaries need to unite their forces around these key policies to halt the austerity programmes, make the rich pay and put socialism and revolution on the agenda for millions.

Greece is the living laboratory in which the theories, principles and practice of revolutionaries will be put to the ultimate test – the struggle for power.

It is the duty of revolutionaries now to rally support for the Greek workers, mobilising across every border to build the practical solidarity that can deliver victory.

After Hollande's victory – workers need to fight for their own demands

Celebrations on the streets, in the Place de la Bastille and across France, greeted François Hollande's victory in the second round of the French presidential elections. The Socialist Party (PS) was back in the Elysée Palace after seventeen years in the wilderness. People do have real reasons to rejoice. With parliamentary elections taking place, Marc Lasalle looks at how workers can take their own struggles forward, holding newly elected president François Hollande to his promises and demanding action – with or without their official leaderships

NICOLAS SARKOZY has been sent into political retirement. “Virer Sarkozy” (to get rid of Sarkozy) was the objective of millions who had simply had enough of “the rich people's president”, and his attacks on pensions, on the right to strike, on jobs in the public sector, and his racist slurs against Muslims, Roma and immigrants.

But with the legislative elections for France's Assemblée Nationale approaching, François Hollande's post-election period of grace is drawing to a close. Hollande has been keen to stress his ‘sensible’ credentials – doing everything to reassure the markets, and water down workers' expectations.

Hollande's presidency will be shaped by the outcome of the legislative elections for the right and the left. The far-right Front National (FN) are seeking to consolidate themselves at the expense of the conservative UMP, while the Front de Gauche (Left Front) under Mélenchon aims to position itself as the ‘left faction’ of the Hollande government's camp.

Young people hated Nicolas Sarkozy because under him there were no jobs, or only precarious ones; access to education was narrowed and its quality reduced by cuts in funding and teaching posts. Throughout his five years in power, ordinary people have seen a real decline in their living standards. Now, 13.5 per cent of the population are living below the official poverty line of €950 a month. One million more people are now unemployed than when Sarkozy became president. France has a 10 per cent unemployment rate as compared to Germany's 5.6 per cent.

But a tiny elite did very well indeed under Sarkozy. He governed for his friends at the top of the banks and the big corporations, giving them a “fiscal shield” to lower their taxes. The same protection was applied to the biggest monopolies, like Total-Elf, who are not paying a cent to the state in tax despite their huge profits. No wonder France is running a big state debt and budget deficit.

Ironically, Sarkozy's presidency was indelibly stained by his biggest victory – over the movement against his pension reform in 2010. This was a real popular struggle with giant demonstrations and strikes but, while it proved incapable of stopping the “reform”, it turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory for Sarkozy.

Workers, young people and sections of the middle class turned to the ballot box to settle the score. The CGT, the main trade union federa-



100,000 Front de Gauche supporters fill the Place de Bastille to hear Jean-Luc Mélenchon's election speech. Now they must be mobilised again to fight austerity and cuts

tion, broke with its hundred year-old syndicalist tradition and campaigned from autumn 2011 to kick out Sarkozy. For the first time, they gave a clear indication on how to vote.

As polls made it clearer and clearer that the incumbent was heading for a humiliating defeat, he flirted increasingly openly with the ideas and slogans of Marine Le Pen and the FN. He expressed his “understanding” of FN voters and proclaimed the party part of the Republic. He targeted immigrants, especially Muslims, for not integrating into French society, for causing housing shortages and a lack of jobs. “We have too many foreigners on our territory” he said, claiming he would cut immigration to 100,000 a year.

His campaign reached a veritable paroxysm of racism in the last days before the second round, with attacks on multiculturalism, a sickening flattery of French identity, and claims he would defend national borders against “hordes” of migrants.

So, good, Sarkozy and his gang are out. But what are the prospects for the new President who, like Barack Obama, claims to represent change?

François Hollande is a true product of the PS apparatus. His rise began during the era of Lionel Jospin's leadership (1997-2002). He was chosen as party secretary because he was a low-key figure, no threat to the many ambitious rival leaders of that party. His campaign was similarly downbeat. His 60 commitments are, with a few exceptions, a catalogue of vague promises. He has promised to create 60,000 new jobs for teachers, to create some jobs

for young people, to tax the rich.

However, a repeated buzzword of his campaign was “redresser la France”. This has a very ambiguous meaning, to say the least. It can mean to set the country straight in an almost moral sense, but it also means to sort out the books. Indeed, Hollande aims to return to the Maastricht budget criteria within five years.

All this ambiguity has a reason. Hollande knew he could win simply because the hatred for Sarkozy was so strong. He also knew that the economic situation is so bad that he might have to resort to some of the austerity measures applied in other European countries, like Spain or Italy. While he promised to renegotiate the EU economic treaties to introduce some Keynesian measures, it will be a hard fight to extract any change in them from Angela Merkel. On the other hand, he also knows that he will be faced with the demands of the masses for concrete measures to improve their lives. He has promised to replace austerity with growth as his number one priority.

The direction of an Hollande presidency will be influenced in the immediate future by the outcome of the elections for the National Assembly, to be held in June. One important question is whether or not he will need the support of the Front de Gauche (Left Front) of Jean-Luc Mélenchon. This is a composite formation, including the Parti de Gauche (a split from the Socialist Party, headed by Mélenchon himself) and the French Communist

Party (PCF).

Mélenchon has already declared that he will not enter any coalition government with the PS. However, the PCF, which has supported PS-led governments for decades, has already started behind the scenes negotiations with PS for electoral pacts in the Assembly election, and this could ensure that the party gains a significant number of MPs.

The outcome of these elections depends also on the fate of Sarkozy's party, the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP). The FN will be able to stand candidates in more than 200 constituencies, including in the second round. In many cases, this would imply a defeat for UMP candidates and, indeed, the FN is counting on this to bring about an “implosion” of the UMP.

The task for revolutionaries is to mobilise the working class to fight to impose the measures needed to improve their everyday lives: major increases in jobs, housing, wages and pensions and public services. While the trade unions will undoubtedly try to cease campaigning now, in favour of discussion, urging their members not to rock the boat now that they have a friendly president and government, experience shows that only vigorous class struggle will extract any serious reforms even from a PS president and government. When workers' pressure let up on Mitterrand in the early 90s, reforms ground to a halt and went into reverse.

The best example to follow is that of 1936, when workers went on strike and occupied their factories to

obtain the reforms that the popular front government hesitated to adopt. To get the sit-down strikers out of their plants, the government granted paid holidays and big wage increases. Revolutionaries today should try to initiate a large class struggle movement on the basis of an action programme to sweep away the austerity, to bring real growth in jobs, housing, improved education and health services and citizenship rights for the ‘sans papiers’. This is a real possibility because there has been a rash of workers' struggles in recent months.

Throughout the winter, workers have been fighting against factory closures at Arcelor Mittal in Florange, PSA-Aulnay and Fralib (Marseille). Indeed, several large companies delayed announcements of job cuts or closures until after the elections, so there could be a large wave of attacks in the coming weeks. Several hundreds of thousands of activists have marched in the CGT initiated days of action and on May Day. The high score (11 per cent) for the left reformist Mélenchon and his vibrant campaign also shows this determination and readiness to fight.

The Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) can nevertheless play a vital role if it fights for a united front with the Front de Gauche and the members and supporters of the PS who voted for an end to austerity and for taxes on the rich. It needs to advance an action programme of demands that really meet the needs of workers, youth and the unemployed. It should also warn that, without a fight, no amount of pressure from within the institutions, such as Mélenchon and PCF promise, will be enough to win real gains.

The PS has already shown that it will manage the bourgeois state on behalf of the bosses and will not take any measures against them unless its survival is at stake. Revolutionaries should also promote forms of self-organisation from below to keep the control of the movement in the hands of the rank and file. However, given that reformists are in office, and could soon have all the levers of power, including the Senate, the situation is both challenging and full of potential developments.

Now workers have to push their “own” representatives to take the actions they need. It is in these struggles that the NPA could emerge as a new rallying pole for workers sick of austerity and the system – but only if the NPA separates itself from the semi-reformist Gauche Anticapitaliste and initiates a bold campaign for a “third round”, based on workers' struggles.

A Critic of Trotskyism

Pham Binh, an American socialist, has written a series of articles criticising far left groups on his Planet Anarchy website. This includes a critique of Trotskyism (<http://planetanarchy.net/trotskyism.htm>) asserting that its failure to create mass parties or lead revolutions is primarily due to the elevation of programme above all else. Since Pham Binh's ideas played an important part in the recent split from Workers Power and have become fashionable amongst sections of the left, *Andy Yorke* replies

PHAM BINH entitles his critique "Trotskyism", but in fact it would be more accurate if it were called "The Trotskyists" since he hardly criticises the main ideas or practice of Leon Trotsky. Indeed he says that Trotsky's struggle "helped preserve and expand on the Marxist tradition – tradition meaning the ideas, strategy, and tactics that guide the actions of revolutionary socialists... That is above all else Trotskyism's enduring value."

If indeed these "ideas, strategy and tactics" (otherwise known as a programme) are of "enduring value" one wonders why Pham Binh – whose central theme is the Trotskyists' obsession with programme – does not explain how what was so valuable before 1940 became worthless and dangerous thereafter.

His first charge is however the irrelevance of Trotskyist groups and parties:

"The main difficulty with Trotskyist organisations, groups, and parties is that they have been unable to become mass parties like the Bolsheviks or even influential within the workers' movement of any country during any period in the past 70-80 years. No colonies were liberated, no ruling classes were overthrown, and no fascists were defeated by Trotskyist forces."

Pham Binh seems to think this is a real knock down argument. But there is one problem here. This "failure" applies not only to Trotskyists, with their supposedly obsessive concern with programme. Countless Maoist groups (outside of China, Indonesia and India), plus many Moscow loyal Communist Parties (outside the Stalinist states and a handful of other countries, like Italy or India) also remained small sects. This "failure" applies almost universally to anarchists (outside of Spain in the 1930s). And it applies to groups in Italy in the 1970s and elsewhere that were as plural, broad and without a programme as Pham Binh could wish.

Clearly some other factor is at work condemning groups to marginality besides a supposed obsession with programme or too strict a "democratic centralist regime" – which Pham Binh adds later on as a cause of the Trotskyists' impotence.

Trotskyists and revolutions

But Pham Binh is wrong too when he asserts Trotskyists never had mass influence or led struggles. He concedes the fact that the US Trotskyists had significant influence in the revival of US trade unionism in the 1930s and in the anti-Vietnam War movement of the 1960s. But there are other examples.

In Vietnam in 1939 the Trotskyists



Ta Thu Thau, leader of the Vietnamese Trotskyists, like many of his generation, murdered by the Stalinists

launched a daily paper, won 80 per cent of the votes to the Cochinchina Colonial Council. In August 1945 they emerged as the main opposition to the Stalinists, with tens of thousands joining its contingents on demos. They initiated and led many of the 150 "People's Committees" in Southern Vietnam.

However, the Stalinists under Ho Chi Minh were murderous foes of the Trotskyists and had behind them a superpower: the Soviet Union. Far from fighting for national liberation, they supported the return of French imperialism, backed by British troops. Then they bloodily repressed the workers' committees and slaughtered the Trotskyists.

Similarly the Bolivian Trotskyists of the POR played a leading part in founding the powerful miners' union and COB trade union centre in 1946 – drafting its programme, the Pula-cayo Theses. They played a key role in the armed uprising during the Bolivian revolution of April 1952. The POR lacked neither influence nor revolutionary experience.

The reason the POR did not become a mass party was not sectarian obsession with programme, but opportunist tailing of the nationalist MNR. Its practical strategy (its real not its formal programme) diverged from that of Trotsky's idea of "permanent revolution".

The Trotskyist LSSP was the first mass workers' party in Sri Lanka and led the 1953 general strike. However,

throughout the 1950s the practice of the LSSP was increasingly limited to elections and trade unionism. In 1956 they gave the bourgeois SLFP government "responsive co-operation" and in 1960 they offered Simaravo Bandaranaike's Sinhala chauvinist regime "critical support".

Adapt or update?

Indeed far from the post-war Trotskyists being obsessed with purity of programme, after 1948-51 their main weakness was its relegation of *The Transitional Programme* of 1938 to the status of an holy relic, and its replacement in practice with the politics of various social democratic, Stalinist, or left nationalist forces.

Though becoming mass parties was their overriding objective, their adaptation to Bevanism in Britain, to Stalinism in France and Italy, to Maoism in Asia, and to Peronism, Castroism or Guevarism in Latin America brought them no breakthroughs. Why join a fake reformist, Stalinist or Guevarist party if there are real ones around?

Far from overestimating programme they ignored it. What Pham Binh calls the unorthodox Trotskyists, like Tony Cliff and the SWP tradition, openly dumped it. Since the 1960s they have scarcely mentioned programme. In fact it is no wonder that Pham Binh acknowledges Duncan Hallas (SWP ideologue) as the originator of many of his criticisms.

In fact the whole subjective side

of post-war Trotskyists' weaknesses has been their insufficient appreciation of the "valuable ideas, strategy, and tactics" inherited from Trotsky. Of course they should not have simply clung to the 1938 document; they should have regularly updated the programme to meet new challenges.

But objective economic and geographic conditions also played a huge role in preventing the Trotskyists from building mass parties. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed an unprecedented boom in Europe and North America, where most Trotskyist groups were located. Social democracy and the bureaucratized trade unions flourished. A welfare state, rising wages and full employment seemed to validate reformism and disprove revolutionary Marxism. In the imperialist heartlands outside of Italy and France, not just Trotskyism but Marxism was reduced to an isolated and often a persecuted minority.

At the same time Trotskyism's mortal enemy, Stalinism, far from going into crisis as Trotsky had predicted, prospered and expanded, even making revolutions, albeit ones that ended in totalitarian dictatorship. No wonder the Trotskyists debated and split over how to analyse these developments. Historic issues were at stake: not least whether the revolutionary programme was a utopia, and whether Stalinism or even social democracy could perform the historic tasks of social revolution.

If the Trotskyist (and Maoist and Stalinist and anarchist) groups survived in a sect-like condition this was hardly surprising. As Karl Marx said, "So long as the sects are (historically) justified, the working class is not yet ripe for an independent historic movement." (Marx to Bolte Nov

1871) The tying of the working class to the bourgeoisie, whether through the US Democrats, the Peronists, European social democracy or Anglo-Saxon Labourism, explains in large measure the sect like existence of all subjectively revolutionary trends. What it does not excuse is continued sectarianism in the 1970s and 1980s or today.

Programme or living movement?

"Trotskyist groups elevated their political program (meaning their statement of principles, formal positions, and theoretical ideas) to being the most important thing. The American SWP's founder James P. Cannon put it this way: 'in the last analysis the programme decides everything'. By contrast, Marx and Engels argued that in the last analysis it is struggle and (class) conflict that decide everything." (Pham Binh)

Pham Binh's contrast of programme with the class struggle and his wrenching of the Cannon quote is really bizarre. Cannon, no more than Trotsky, Lenin or Marx, would not have contrasted the class struggle to programme. This division is more in keeping with the revisionist Eduard Bernstein's "the movement is everything, the goal nothing". In what context does Cannon say that "in the last analysis the programme decides everything"?

"The revolutionary socialist movement of the present, although numerically smaller, is ideologically richer than its predecessors. Insofar as it has assimilated the experience of the past, in this and other countries, and incorporated their lessons in its programme, it is better prepared to understand its tasks. That represents progress for American socialism in the highest degree, for in the last analysis the programme decides everything.



Trotsky studying *Socialist Appeal*, newspaper of the US Trotskyists

“At the same time, it is obvious that the progressive growth of the industrial labour movement has not been accompanied by a corresponding development of the class consciousness of the workers. On the contrary, the recent years have seen a decline in this respect; and this is reflected in the numerical weakness of socialist political organisation. That is certainly a reactionary manifestation.” (James P. Cannon <http://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1956/debs.htm>)

Clearly what Cannon is saying is that for the revolutionary organisation its strategy for taking power (its programme) – whether it is adequate to the task or not – will indeed decide everything. If it is weak or false then the working class will suffer defeat. This is incontestably true, indeed a truism for a Leninist.

The really decisive fact is that the revolution is a conscious act of a working class. But this can only happen if the revolutionary vanguard has won the class to the goals, tactics and methods of organisation contained in its programme. Of course these masses, in their vast majority, will never read the programme or give their formal assent to it. Rather the party, like the Bolsheviks in 1917, turns its key elements into popular slogans: “all power to the soviets”, “Bread peace and land”, “Workers control of production”, etc. Obviously no tiny sect can achieve this. It can only happen if a revolutionary party has already created deep roots in the class.

Trotsky’s reason for believing the Left Opposition could “switch the points” in Germany in 1931 was related to the acuteness of the crisis, the rise of Hitler, the fact that millions of German Communists and Social Democrats knew Trotsky was the organiser of the October Revolution and that the Left Opposition was arguing for the antifascist united front, which many of them already realised was vital. Trotsky argued “a sharp axe can hew heavy beams”, by which he meant objectively vital slogans argued for skilfully, even by a relatively small nucleus of cadres, can cut through the obstruction of mass bureaucratic parties.

But since all his tactics in the 1930s were designed to help his followers gain roots in the working class, the charge that Trotsky thought the correct programme alone was enough to lead revolutions to victory falls to the ground.

Pham Binh’s most laughable mobilisation of “facts” is one all too familiar to those who know Tony Cliff’s interpretation of revolutionary history. He says:

“The Bolsheviks were too busy leading the revolution to settle on the programme that would supposedly decide everything in time for the fall 1917 insurrection that Trotsky himself organised and led. How is that for irony? Treating the programme as primary instead of secondary and subordinate to the material, living movement of working people led to issues that have plagued the Trotskyist movement from its inception until today.”

This is the old argument that because the Bolsheviks failed to amend the 1903 programme they either made the October Revolution with “the wrong programme” or with



Max Shachtman and James P. Cannon, whose programmatic faction fight led to Shachtman walking out of the US section of the Fourth International on the eve of World War II

no programme at all – or maybe “Bread, Peace, Land” (just three words!) was their only programme. Another three words reduce this silly argument to dust: The April Theses.

These replaced (not formally but actually) the sections of the 1903 programme that were based on the Russian Revolution being a bourgeois revolution, they inserted the lessons of 1905 and February 1917: the struggle for power centred on a republic of workers soviets not a democratic republic, the smashing of the capitalist state, the spreading of the revolution internationally in the context of imperialist war, the armed insurrection, etc.

In short they re-elaborated the Bolshevik programme, which in any case had been added to by programmatic resolutions of the congresses in 1905, 1906, 1907 and 1912. Only someone hidebound by pragmatism and formal logic could imagine that programme is embodied in a single document or that the Bolsheviks were too busy making the revolution to work out what they were doing.

Centrism

Pham Binh completely misses the source of post-war Trotskyism’s failure to develop mass parties. During the crucial opportunities to make a breakthrough from small groups it is largely the centrist deviations and

distortions of the Marxist programme by these propaganda societies that have blocked the route to growth, not the insistence that acceptance of this programme and agreement to fight for it form the basis for membership.

In the 1930s Trotsky countered critics who pointed to the slow growth and setbacks suffered by the International Communist League (ICL) as signs of inherent weakness, bringing the debate back to the question of programme.”

“Our international work began only in 1929 – and not on virgin territory, but on territory saturated with old and powerful organisations, and with new, confused, and often treacherous organisations that claimed adherence to our principles... The real issue is the question of programme, of the historical orientation of the tendency. The issue is a new chapter in the struggle between Marxism and centrism – a struggle that characterises our epoch.”

With tragic prescience Trotsky identified the future fate of the Spanish ex-Trotskyist Andreu Nin and his group, the POUM. The POUM was founded on a rotten compromise between organisations with incompatible programmes. Rather than putting unity above political clarity and organisational effectiveness, Trotsky rightly made programme the

precondition of unity: “Unity is an excellent thing. But demarcation on the question of the Marxist programme must precede unity... in order for that unity to be honest and long lasting.”

Though it grew from 10,000 to 40,000 in 1936-37, Trotsky warned the POUM would fail the test of the Spanish revolution and in addition “break their necks”. Nin’s entry into the Catalan Popular Front involved him in the task of holding back the workers’ revolution to bourgeois limits. But because the POUM was a centrist party – with a courageous, subjectively revolutionary membership – the Stalinists and the bourgeois parties were determined to crush it, and they did.

Should Trotsky have put unity with Nin and the Spanish POUM above the question of programme? This could only have resulted in the whole of the international Trotskyist movement being disoriented by Nin’s errors, setting back the Marxist movement on the eve of world war. The small group of Spanish Trotskyists did of course work inside the POUM – i.e. they did not isolate themselves – but they did not abandon their criticism of the POUM.

In the midst of a new historic crisis of capitalism, revolutionaries would do well to heed this advice, rather than uncritically support parties like Syriza because they have enough support to be “decisive”.

Internationalism and theory

Pham Binh complains that part of the supposedly too high level of programmatic agreement demanded of membership was also wrongly based on “foreign” issues:

“Disagreements about theory or issues facing revolutionaries in foreign countries led to splits and the resultant groups require future members to agree to their side of the issue that led to the split.

“The SWP’s 1939-40 debate over whether or not to defend the Soviet Union would have been relevant and

important if SWP members were organising in the Soviet Union and had to figure out what to do with Stalin’s police state on the one side and the prospect of Nazi invasion and occupation on the other, a daunting challenge to say the least. Fortunately, it was a harrowing reality the SWP did not face; unfortunately, they divided their forces over it...”

Leaving aside for the moment the fact that the SWP were part of the Fourth International, which had had 10,000 members in the Soviet Gulag fighting by hunger strikes the totalitarian regime of Stalin, and that the debate occurred at the onset of a world war, in which the side that the working class should take was supremely relevant to US workers, this shows Pham Binh’s extreme national centeredness. Surely the question of whether you adopt a defencist or a neutral position in a war is of some importance for a political organisation?

Also far from trying to force a split Trotsky did everything possible to avoid one, including trying to persuade the minority around Max Shachtman and James Burnham to express their views in party publications – provided they did not claim this was the line of the SWP or act against this line. It was the minority who split, precisely because they could not bear to be associated with the USSR after the Stalin-Hitler Pact and the carving up of Poland.

Lenin certainly thought defeatism or defencism in an imperialist war a defining question – even a split issue. In the First World War he fought – against Trotsky amongst others – to demand a break not only from the openly chauvinist socialists who supported their own ruling class, but also from those like Karl Kautsky who would not go beyond a pacifist position. Pham Binh is to be congratulated for taking the toughest example that he could come up with for his own argument, but it actually destroys rather than reinforces his position.

Pham Binh’s article ends with a demagogic attack, but it too boomerangs on him:

“Trotskyist groups... require a very high level of theoretical-political agreement, dedicating many hours a week to recruiting and retaining new members in the name of ‘party building’. At the same time, only a small proportion of time, effort, and resources go to leading and organising militant struggles for tangible gains like rent control or a living wage.”

Is this so? Well whatever criticism we have of the main Trotskyist groups’ sectarianism or opportunism, failure to engage in militant struggles is certainly not one of them. On the other hand the reader may be moved to inquire what the proportion of their time Pham Binh or Louis Proyect spend on “struggles for tangible gains”.

Comparing the websites like the Unrepentant Marxist (Proyect) or Planet Anarchy with the sites of the Trotskyist “sects” does not indicate the advantage lies with our critics. They might ask themselves why, if arguing over the finer points of programme and revolutionary history is so unimportant, they themselves devote so much time and space to it.



Members of the Spanish party, POUM, whose leader Andreu Nin split from Trotsky and the Fourth International in the 1930s

The Great Unrest: Militant miners create a movement of the rank and file

In part two of this commemorative article, *Dave Stockton* looks at how the miners built the first rank and file trade union movement in the UK.

IN PART one of this article, we looked at the work of Tom Mann in bringing many of the ideas of transatlantic and continental revolutionary trade unionism (syndicalism) to Britain, and linking the militancy and massive expansion of the unions here into a worldwide movement.

We saw too how syndicalism, with its doctrines of direct action and rank and file control, was a reaction to the bureaucratisation of the unions and the class collaboration of the leaders of the newly formed (1906) Labour Party.

In part two we look at the work of a group of young rank and file militants, mostly from South Wales, who were to become leaders of the Unrest and many of the struggles of the next 15 years – a highpoint of British working class history.

Cambrian Combine Strike

Wages and conditions in the mines had been deteriorating since 1907. The owners were trying simultaneously to boost production and drive down wages. Since wages were according to a complicated piece rate scale, miners in narrow or less productive seams struggled to support their families. The demand for a minimum wage began to be raised, though the employers bitterly resisted it. The year had seen a sharp recession when union leaders agreed to wage reductions. But by 1910 a recovery was underway, and naturally the employers resisted calls to restore wage levels.

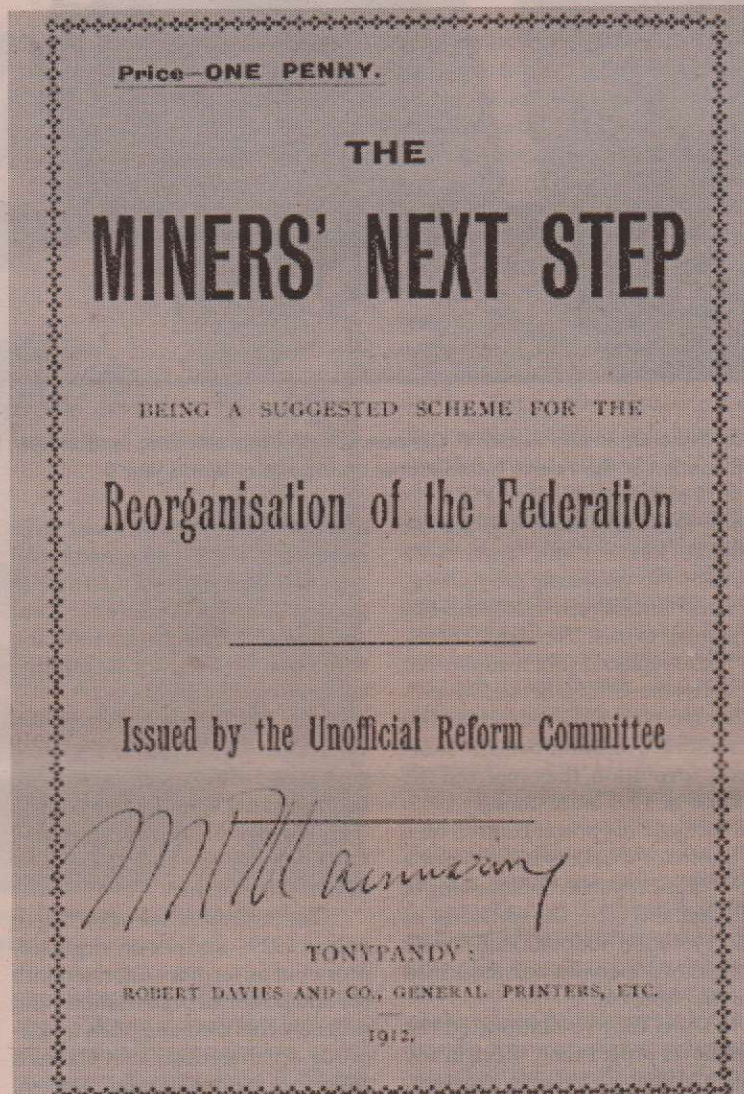
The first major eruption of the Great Unrest took place in Septem-

ber 1910 in the South Wales Rhondda Valley coalfield. It was a dispute unparalleled in its length and intensity except for the miners' lock-out of 1926 and the Great Strike of 1984-85. Indeed it foreshadowed many of the features of these fierce class battles, sustained by the tight-knit mining communities, and initiated a tradition that continued until the destruction of the industry in the 1980s and 1990s.

The strike lasted from September 1910 to August 1911. It originated in a dispute at a pit owned by the Cambrian Combine over rates to be paid per tonnage when working in "abnormal places". Twelve thousand miners walked out, rejecting a deal agreed by the established leadership of the South Wales Miners Federation (SWMF) under William Abraham (1842-1922) - nicknamed "Mabon" (the Bard) on account of his powerful voice and skills as an orator.

As MP for Rhondda since 1885, Mabon incarnated the so-called Lib-Lab policy of standing miners' candidates for parliament where they would sit as members of the Liberal Party. The Cambrian strike was thus a revolt against the traditional influence of the Liberal Party in the SWMF.

Indeed in 1909 the MFGB finally decided to join the new Labour Party. But with its 14 MPs, most, like Mabon, altering their politics not one bit and with the new party not challenging Liberals either in parliament or at the polls, its independence was largely formal. It proposed no "socialist measures", and its lead-



ers Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald made very few socialist speeches there either. This explains in large measure the anti-parliamentary bias of the syndicalists.

Unsurprisingly Mabon was ever ready to compromise with coal owners and was an advocate of submitting all disputes to conciliation boards. As a result miners' wages

had fallen by about 10 per cent since the opening of the new century. He was the very incarnation of the union policies and politics that the younger generation of miner activists were determined to oust.

In November nearly 30,000 miners in the Cambrian Combine were on strike in what proved a savage battle, with repeated fighting between strikers and an army of police brought in from other parts of Wales and London. In Tonypany in early November, one striker was killed and around 500 injured after a mass picket failed to stop police from scab herding. A veritable local uprising ensued, with "rioters" selectively targeting the shops of local magistrates who had imposed harsh sentences on strikers.

After attempts at sabotage in the mines and mobbing of the mine managers and coal owners' mansions, troops were sent to guard the pitheads by the Liberal Home Secretary Winston Churchill. As a result Churchill's name remained covered with infamy in South Wales for the rest of his life.

The dispute was taken up and supported by a host of renowned militants of the syndicalist and social-

ist movement. Tom Mann was a regular speaker throughout the dispute, and Big Bill Haywood from the American Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) crossed the Atlantic to address packed meetings in the Rhondda, as did Antoinette Cauvin (also known as Citizen Sorgue) of the French syndicalist union the *Confédération générale du travail* (CGT). Active in several countries, she was known by the police as "Madame Trouble, Europe's most dangerous woman."

The dispute remained one led and organised by young local rank and file militants – not least because of the outright hostility of the ageing bureaucrats who headed the South Wales federation. For the same reason it attracted the enthusiastic support of the syndicalist, socialist and anarchist movements in Britain and indeed worldwide. Large sums were raised to keep the struggle alive.

But the Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) under Enoch Edwards (a Liberal-Labour MP and Justice of the Peace) refused point blank to call a national strike. AJ Cook, then a young rank and file militant (27 years old), recalls in his memoirs a visit by four of the Federation's top leaders to address the strikers:

"Their visit evoked a tremendous demonstration against the official leadership. When they reached Tonypany they were met by thousands of strikers. With difficulty, surrounded by this seething mass of excited men, the four leaders made their way through the street to the meeting place, where the strike leaders were waiting for them. On their way they must have realised that what they had to deal with was a genuine popular revolt, not an artificial agitation kept alive by 'rebel' leaders in defiance of established authority..."

Eventually the leadership's blocking of effective national solidarity action condemned the strike to isolation and final defeat in August of the following year. But the strike had organised and politicised miners throughout the coalfield and beyond and exposed the Welsh and national union leaders' treachery.

Thus, though a bitter defeat for the Rhondda miners, the Cambrian Strike rapidly bore rich fruit because vital lessons were learned. Since an unofficial joint lodge committee effectively ran the strike, a true rank and file movement came into being, based on the militant lodges. 'The Miners' Next Step' was a programme for this current, written by young miners who had been active in the strike.



Miners occupying the engine room of a pithead

The Miners' Next Step

The pamphlet was issued by the "Unofficial Reform Committee", a group of militants who were both syndicalists and revolutionary socialists – Noah Ablett, William Mainwaring, Noah Rees, Will Hay and AJ Cook. After considerable discussion and amendments, their collective labours were published in Tonypany in early 1912.

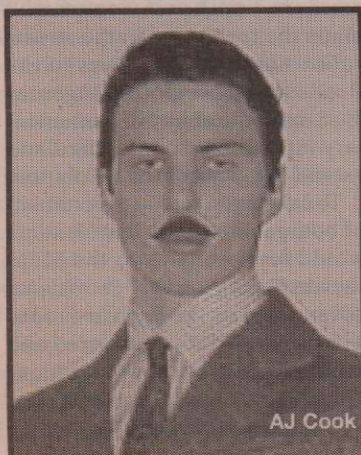
It was an immediate sensation with The Times publishing parts of it and shocked reviews carried in many national and local papers. Here it seemed was the genuine voice not only of the new revolutionary syndicalists but (by middle class standards) of "uneducated" rank and file miners. AJ Cook described them in his autobiography:

"We who were regarded as the leaders of the rank and file were all young men, most of us unknown outside the Rhondda area. We were opposed not only to the established leaders, like Mabon and Tom Richards, Alfred Onions, and others; we were also at odds with the national leaders of the miners – the late Enoch Edwards, then president of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, Thomas Ashton, its secretary, and other officers of the Federation."

'The Miners' Next Step' was a powerful polemical blast against the class collaborationist policies of Mabon and the entire leadership of the South Wales Miners Federation, and by implication that of the MFGB too. It demanded that "the old policy of identity of interest between employers and ourselves be abolished, and a policy of open hostility installed."

It called for the and solidarity between all the miners' lodges (branches) in disputes, the adoption of a unified strike policy by sovereign coalfield delegate conferences, the nationalisation of the mines and the 'elimination' of employers, with miners themselves managing the mines. It was thus one of the first proposals of what later became known as workers' control of production. In so doing – though not explicitly – it suggested an alternative basis for society and transitional steps towards it. In this sense it anticipated the demands and approach discussed in the early years of the Communist International (1919-23).

It denounced the executive's "conciliation policy" as failing to defend let alone increase miners' wages, and hampering miners in any dispute by constantly delaying action, sometimes for years. It denounced the lack of knowledge available to miners due to business secrecy:



AJ Cook



Glamorgan, Rhondda Valleys, Tonypany - includes Edgar, Alfred and Trevor Gibbons

"They [the owners] alone have the inside information. We don't audit their books, and we have no means of judging the truth of their assertions. They say the colliery won't pay. We must accept their word."

The Miners' Next Step also denounced the fact that "conciliation gives the real power of the men into the hands of a few leaders". Here it developed an initial understanding of the role of the trade union bureaucracy. It condemned them in very modern terms for undermining the workers' initiative and creativity, stating that the power of such leaders "is based on the suppression of the men, from being independent thinkers into being 'the men' or 'the mob.'"

It said of the full-time officials that controlled the SWMF:

"First, they are 'trade unionists by trade' and their profession demands certain privileges. The greatest of all these are plenary powers. Now, every inroad the rank and file make on this privilege lessens the power and prestige of the leader. Can we wonder then that leaders are averse to change? Can we wonder that they try and prevent progress? ... The leader then has an interest – a vested interest – in stopping progress. They have therefore in some things an antagonism of interests with the rank and file."

The answer was to exert control over the officials and indeed to deprive them of any power over the rank and file – to put control of the union into the hands of its members.

The pamphlet then set out those "means which will enable this new spirit of real democratic control to manifest itself. Which will not only enable the men, but which will encourage, nay compel them, to take the supreme control of their own organisation."

It proposed a whole new Constitution for the SWMF to ensure rank and file control and prevent local or regional officials from acting as masters of the union:

- The administration of the organisation shall be vested in the hands of one central executive council, who shall be elected annually by ballot vote of the members. The method of election to be determined by a conference called for that purpose.
- No agent or other permanent official of the Federation, shall be eligible to a seat on the executive council.
- The president and vice president shall be elected by the executive council, from amongst its own

members. No person shall hold the office of president for more than two years in succession.

- The Lodges have supreme control – the executive becomes unofficial, i.e. officials are excluded from all power on the executive. Agents or organisers become the servants of the men.

Though the pamphlet advocated measures to prevent the miners' members of the House of Commons, like Mabon, from controlling the union – they were to be banned from holding any official union positions and to be subject to recall by an elected rank and file executive – 'The Miners' Next Step' was not anti-political as such. Indeed it had a section headed Political Action which said:

"That the organisation shall engage in political action, both local and national, on the basis of complete independence of, and hostility to all capitalist parties, with an avowed policy of wresting whatever advantage it can for the working class."

It further explained that: "Political action must go on side by side with industrial action. Such measures as the Mines Bill, Workmen's Compensation Acts, proposals for nationalising the mines, etc., demand the presence in Parliament of men who directly represent, and are amenable to, the wishes and instructions of the workmen. While the eagerness of governments to become a bludgeoning bully on behalf of the employers could be somewhat restrained by the presence of men who were prepared to act in a courageous fashion."

In fact this perspective on politics had the weakness of nearly all syndicalist and socialist approaches before 1917 – it was unable to fuse the class struggle in industry with the use of elections and parliament into a combined revolutionary strategy for power. The Bolsheviks alone did this – opening the way for a transformation of the class struggle.

The Miners Strike of 1912

The strike of 1912 was the first national strike by coal miners in the UK and lasted some 137 days from the end of February to 6 April. Nearly one million miners took part.

In many ways the National Coal Strike of 1912 was a continuation of the issues raised in the Cambrian Strike and a result of the radicalisation and politicisation engendered by the strike. It centred on the variegated and unfair wage structures that had replaced the old 'sliding

scale', tying wages to the selling price of coal. Instead there were local price-lists, agreed by the miners' lodge and owner, with a further sum to be agreed by a conciliation board under an 'independent' chairman.

The resulting wage fluctuations meant a constant struggle for workers in these conditions. From this arose the demand passed at the MFGB conference in October 1911, which called for the union "to take immediate steps to secure an individual district minimum wage for all men and boys working in the mines... without any references to the places being abnormal".

In a national ballot well over half the MFGB membership voted for a stoppage.

So severe were the implications of a national coal strike for both British industry and the Royal Navy, that Herbert Asquith's government was quick to intervene directly in the

principle for which the Federation had fought, conceded also the employers' demand for separate district settlements on the new minimum levels. Mass meetings in the coalfields showed large-scale opposition to the terms of the Bill. But, as 'The Miners' Next Step' had described – and is still the case today – the leaders had the power to settle the dispute over their members' heads. Thanks to them the owners robbed the miners of the full fruits of their victory.

In 1913 the programme of reform put to the SWMF federation conference was defeated.

Nevertheless, for the miners the struggles of 1910-1912 enormously strengthened the union, and in the years ahead a new generation of leaders, often leaders of the unofficial ranks and file movements, came to the fore like Cook did.

The tremendous struggles of these



Troops and police, 1910

negotiations. After the Cambrian dispute, the leaders of the MFGB felt the need to bring delegates from the coalfields into the discussions in London. One of them was AJ Cook, who records an exchange he had with Asquith himself:

"You do not know", I said, "anything about the new spirit that is working in the coalfields. The miner today is better educated, and he is not content to remain a hewer of wood and drawer of water for the employing class. The younger men in the coalfields are not going to accept the conditions their fathers were willing to put up with, and in future you will be dealing with the real rank and file of the miners, not merely with their leaders in Parliament."

The strike opened at Alfreton in Derbyshire at the end of February, and spread slowly as local notices expired. Miners left work in a holiday mood.

However, the government recruited a volunteer strikebreaking force, reinforced the police and mobilised the army towards the end of the strike. But unlike in the Cambrian Combine, strike major clashes were avoided. In fact it was the government which offered to draft a bill granting a minimum wage and rush it through parliament.

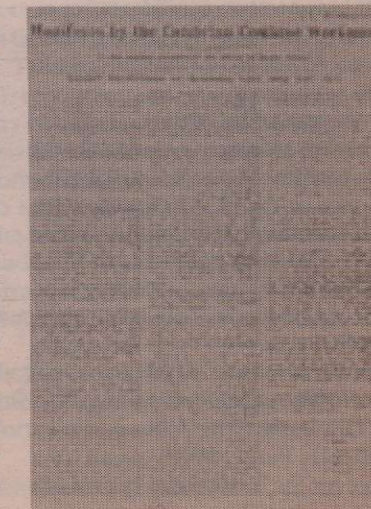
However the MFGB executive managed to snatch, if not quite defeat, then only partial gains from the jaws of victory. The Minimum Wage Act, while conceding the prin-

years are still an inspiration for a time when the building of a rank and file movement and the rebuilding of a militant and democratic union movement is a task of the highest order.

Lessons

We can learn a lot from the 'Miners' Next Step' and its goal of dissolving completely the power of the officialdom over the unions. In each union today it would be a great thing if militants gathered like Ablett and his comrades and drafted similar proposals linked to today's needs and conditions.

It would be great too if they were permeated by the same spirit of anticapitalism and the goal of a society based on workers' control and workers' power.



Egypt: elections open road to counter-revolution

Marcus Halaby

THE PRINCIPAL demand of the February 2011 protests that marked the beginning of Egypt's revolution was for President Hosni Mubarak's immediate resignation

To many, it therefore looks like a defeat for popular aspirations, that one of the two candidates for the second round is Mubarak's last prime minister, Ahmed Shafiq. Only about two fifths of the electorate voted in the first round, in which Shafiq, with a quarter of the vote, came a very close second to the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammed Mursi.

After almost a year and a half, this "democratic" revolution has not yet seen any notable democratic reforms for the masses, beyond the rights of association and free assembly (and crucially, of organisation in the workplace) that they established for themselves on the streets.

There was no candidate who could make a serious claim to represent the revolution itself. Hamdeen Sabahi of the left-nationalist Karama ("dignity") party, who came third with 21 per cent, picked up the votes of many who were alarmed at the prospect of a Brotherhood president supported by a Brotherhood-dominated parliament. But Karama, like the Brotherhood, was late to join the anti-Mubarak protests.

The ruling junta vetted the choice



of candidates even before the vote. The Brotherhood's first choice candidate, Khairat al-Shater, was disqualified on trumped-up charges, as was the veteran bourgeois liberal candi-

date Ayman Nour. The Salafist candidate Hazem Salah Abu Ismail was also barred on the basis that his mother was a naturalised US citizen, while Mubarak's vice president Omar

Suleiman was only barred following mass protests against such an obvious representative of the old order.

Nor did the rigging stop with weeding out undesirable candidates.

After the first round of voting, allegations surfaced that interior ministry officials "gave" 900,000 votes to Shafiq.

The recent mass demonstrations in Tahrir, Alexandria and other cities indicates that the lack of enthusiasm of the voters does not at all translate into apathy about the fate of the revolution. But the question of political power - and all the social, economic and democratic questions that flow from this - will not be decided by who wins the presidential elections. That must still be decided between the masses and the SCAF.

For the masses to achieve their democratic and social aspirations for radical change, they need to give the de facto power they have already won on the streets a permanent and organised expression. Popular, delegate-based assemblies can lay the basis for a source of authority that can challenge SCAF's control of the "democratic process". Similarly, organisations of self-defence against state repressions are needed to secure the rights to organise and protests, and in particular the gains of women and youth.

Above all, the socialist left need to form themselves into a party capable of arguing for these forms of popular power, and of standing against the stream of a stage-managed democratisation in which the Islamists tried to steal the revolution from those who made it.

No vote to the Muslim Brotherhood

KD Tait

AFTER A HEAVILY contested first round, the Egyptian presidential election came down to a runoff between two candidates, representing two wings of the same ruling class. As we go to press the results are not known.

The candidate of the undisguised counter-revolution is Ahmed Shafiq, puppet of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), a pillar of the old regime. Opposing him stands the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Mursi, presenting himself as a "moderate" candidate of the revolution, its respectable and socially conservative face, in fact he too represents the counter-revolution.

This makes line of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) to call for a vote for the Brotherhood candidate

as dangerous as it is unprincipled. *Socialist Worker* on 2 June stated: "This has been called a "nightmare scenario", in which Egyptians are asked to choose merely between military rule and Islamism. In fact the choice is clear. A vote for Shafiq would be a vote against the revolution. A vote for Mursi is a vote against the legacy of Mubarak and for continuing change. Revolutionary activists will not enjoy voting for Mursi. If they do not do so, however, they are likely to experience the real nightmare scenario - a president cloned from the dictator they overthrew last year. Mursi is not in a strong position. The Brotherhood has struggled since the start of the revolution. Its leaders have tried to make deals with Egypt's real rulers - the generals of the SCAF. At the same time they have been under great pres-

sure from their own members and supporters to deliver further change. They have suffered many splits and defections as it becomes clear that they can't meet the people's needs and expectations."

Reactionary positions

Aside from the little matter of principle, that Marxists never vote for the candidates of bourgeois parties, this estimate of the Brotherhood is wrong.

In fact the Brotherhood is a reactionary organisation, which gave only lukewarm support to the revolution and opposed the candidacy of women or Coptic Christians for the presidency. It also opposed the self-organisation of the workers in their new trade unions, as well as their moves towards self-defence during the February 2011 protests, which might have helped to break the

state's monopoly on violence.

Arguing that the Brotherhood's victory would be some kind of shield against the violence of the military regime is a dangerous deception. Overestimating both the democratic commitment and the interdependence of the Brotherhood's disparate petty-bourgeois mass base, this simply ensures that when the settling of accounts comes, the energy and loyalties of the working class will be divided amongst the different bourgeois factions, each competing for the favour of foreign imperialists.

Used to being a semi-tolerated "unofficial" opposition in the Mubarak years, the Brotherhood now want to reassure the army and foreign investors that Egypt under their rule will be just as good for business as it was under his regime.

The SWP have called on activists

to demand that Mursi grant government posts to left-wing figures. Why a party capable of winning an outright majority would concede its power to those opposed to its political programme is unclear.

In any case, demanding that the workers, youth and women who made the revolution in the streets subordinate their leaders to the Brotherhood promotes dangerous illusions in the ability of parliamentary institutions to safeguard and extend the gains of the revolution.

To call for a coalition government of bourgeois and workers' leaders would be analogous to the Mensheviks joining the 1917 Provisional government or the Popular Fronts, which disarmed, disempowered, and eventually crushed the revolutionary workers' movements in France and Spain during the 1930s.