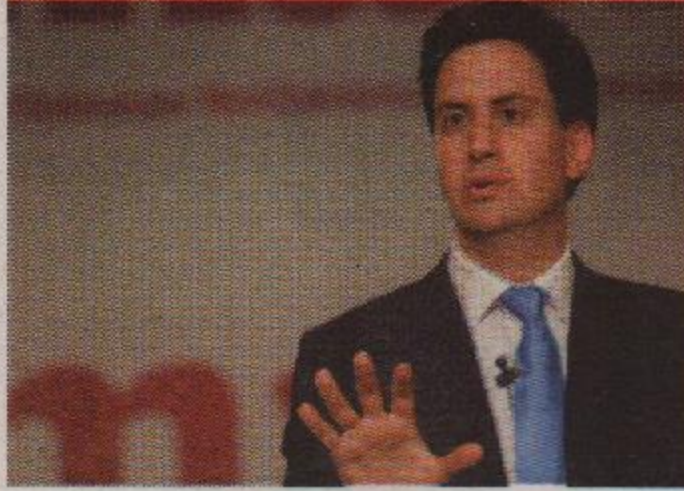


# workers power 5



Labour conference let down



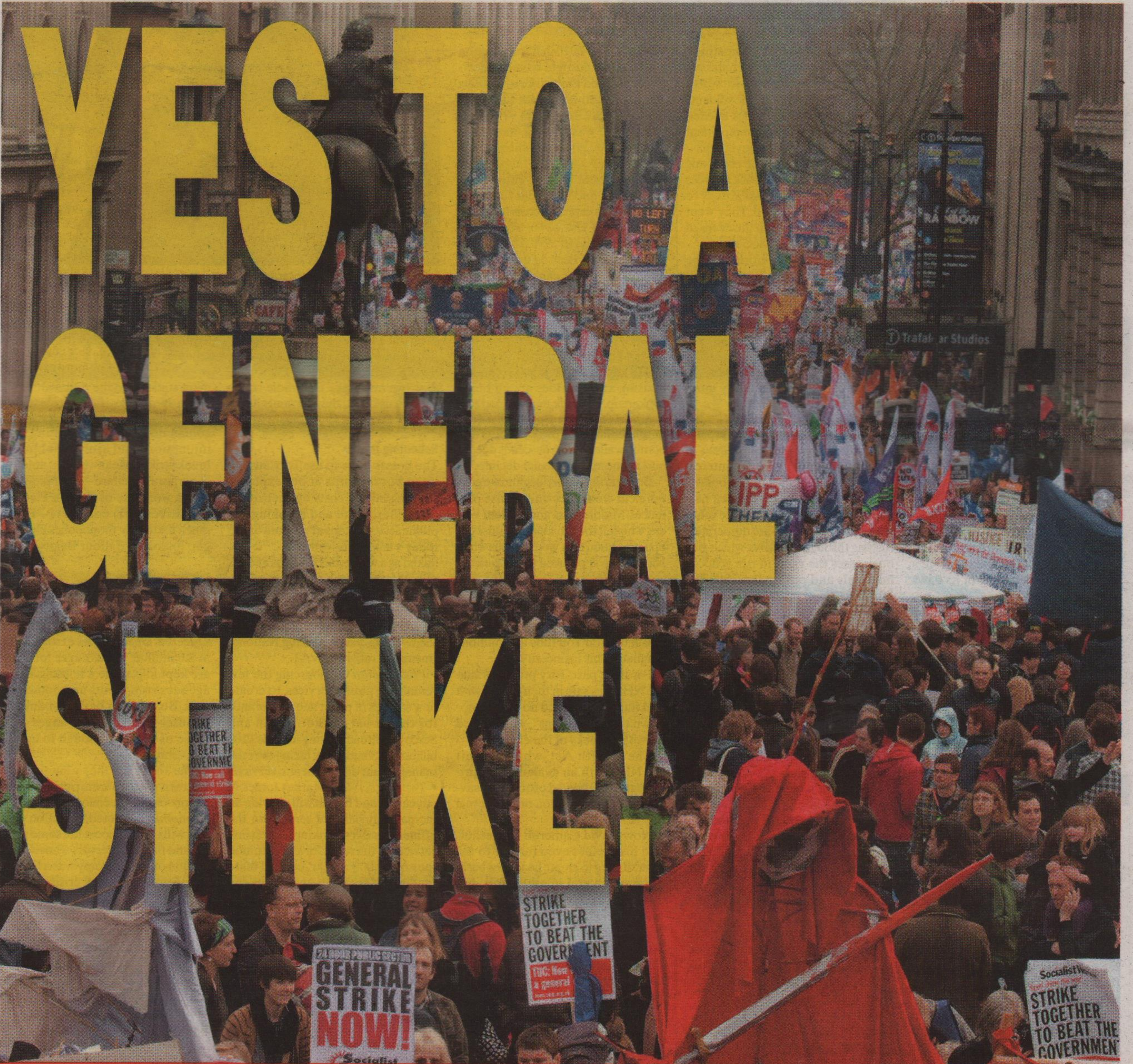
Campaigning for a general strike



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October 2012 ★ Donation – £1 suggested ★ Issue 367

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



United all out action can bring down the Tories

# GENERATION FREE

## Schools for profits

Sally Turner

“TIME TO TACKLE the dumbing down” is the new slogan of the Tory education reforms which aim to make school serve the needs of the market, not the students.

At their heart these reforms aim to segregate students by class, limiting working class students to basic literacy and numeracy skills or technical vocational courses, while middle class parents are guaranteed their kids get academic qualifications.

The introduction of English Baccalaureate (EBacc) to replace GCSE subjects is the latest reform to undermine the principle of universal education. It follows the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) in January 2010, increasing the financial burden for working class students and their families.

The rigging of GCSE results was a cynical attempt to look tough on so-called “grade inflation”. Sixty thousand students were penalised, missing out on college places. As a result you’d think introducing a new exam system would be subject to rigorous study and pilot schemes. The exam regulator, Ofqual, even promised that all major exam reforms would be piloted in advance.

Not a chance. The EBacc will be rolled out from 2015 with no conventional pre-trials. This means there’s no useful understanding of its flaws or consequences.

The Tories couldn’t wait until the next election to ram through their proposals. This decision reveals the government’s total contempt for the future of millions of young people.

### Education for sale

By introducing the profit motive into education, schools will have to compete for students, teachers and resources. A small minority can shop around for decent schools. The vast majority of people have no choice but their local school. The private education “providers” (i.e. corporates) understand this, and know the new “free” schools give them free reign to fleece working class families.

The new exam will seriously disadvantage students with learning difficulties. Modular courses and multiple exams have boosted their success rates and therefore their chances of finding secure work or getting a university education.

Coursework and modular exams will be scrapped – making a single end-of-year exam a make or break test for students. The Tories have openly said it will mean many thousands leaving school with no qualifications, and disadvantaged teenagers will be channelled into non-academic courses from age

14.

The new exam programme is a step backwards to a two-tier system.

Schools run for profit are schools with bigger class sizes, fewer support services and a focus on competition to drive down costs. This will reinforce social division as schools with working class and minority ethnic students are starved of the resources needed to overcome poverty, unemployment and academic under-achievement.

The Tories are using the economic crisis as an excuse to roll back decades of struggle to win equal access to decent education for all. They want education tailored to suit the needs of employers rather than society.

The result of their reforms will be a two-tier system where a small minority benefit from private education and personal tutors, while the majority make do with second-rate qualifications and shelf-stacking “apprenticeships”. It is intended to re-introduce grammar schools for the middle classes and secondary moderns for the working class.

### Schools for students – not for profit

Education is one of the last areas of the economy not run in the interest of private profit. Part of the bosses’ solution to the crisis is to open new markets to invest in. This is the other reason why the Tories are desperately rushing through new laws, which give businesses the right to run schools, hospitals and public services. The introduction of academies and free schools enables capitalists to profit from education.

Privatisation, new exams and higher fees – all have the aim of eroding the ability of state schools to function outside of the market. Directly by buying schools, or indirectly by influencing government policy in backrooms deals, employers will gain powers to dictate the education they want working class people to have.

Education reform is a permanent task of any society. But if reform means “improvement” then that can only come with greater investment. This investment should be under the control of education workers, students and communities – those who know best what their educational needs are.

The bosses’ vision for education is one which imposes flexibility, insecurity and division as facts of life, which future generations will learn from their first day in school.

But the biggest barrier to this vision is the students, their parents and carers, and the staff themselves – those who will be funnelled through a superficial, stripped-back education industry and those who are expected to work in it.

Together we can fight for free quality education for all.

## ★ TORY ATTACKS

# Let’s break the Coalition – before it breaks us

Andy Yorke

WHEN THE 2010 general election produced no outright winner, uncertainty gripped the markets: would a weak government push austerity hard enough? But within weeks the champagne was flowing once more in City pubs and Tory shires, with Chancellor George Osborne’s announcement of huge cuts.

The Tory and Lib Dem Coalition are using this capitalist crisis to launch part two of the revolution that Thatcher began in 1979. Their aim is quite simply to destroy the post-war welfare state. This cabinet of 23 millionaires is openly a government of the top 1 per cent of bankers and millionaires who own 21 per cent of all private wealth.

The National Health Service (NHS), education, welfare, social housing and pensions are all being broken up, cut back and opened to a swarm of profiteers. But there are still untold billions for bank bailouts and bombs, while Britain descends deeper into economic and social decline.

Both parties in this illegitimate government won votes under false pretences. Middle class and student voters, who fell for Lib Dem promises to oppose tuition fees, were furious when Nick Clegg supported the Tories.

### A government built on lies

His grovelling “apology” to them backfired when it was instantly mashed up on YouTube and millions laughed at his insincerity.

For their part, Tory promises that the NHS was safe in their hands, with real funding rises and no more “top-down reorganisations”, were ripped up within weeks of the election.

The Health Act, which has hit the NHS with an avalanche of privatisation, followed efficiency “savings” worth £20 billion of cuts in real terms.

Now David Cameron has reshuffled his cabinet even further to the right, aiming to create headlines bashing Europe and immigration, and pushing law and order buttons, to distract people from austerity and other unpopular policies. Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt, for example, wasted no time coming out with his view that the time limit on abortions should be halved to 12 weeks.

This widely hated Coalition holds together because both parties, and especially the Lib Dems, have no option but to cling to each other and sit it out in government. It’s not polls but a mass action and a general strike that will kick these millionaire axemen out of power.

Before the election, George



Wipe the smiles off their faces

Osborne said that “we’re all in this together”, that everyone would make sacrifices to clear the debt. After the election, Cameron said cuts would be “open, responsible and fair” and that “we must take the whole country with us”. And they certainly have: they’ve taken us to the cleaners!

### Rebooting profits

The bosses hope to use Tory austerity to boost profits at our expense, slashing labour costs by destroying the welfare state and breaking the public sector unions at the core of the today’s labour movement.

Taken as a whole, this involves a series of obvious, brutal transfers from the 99 per cent to the super-rich:

- **Austerity** Slashing state spending by £83 billion while raising taxes on the working class, by hiking National Insurance rates and VAT.

- **Privatisation** Outsourcing the few remaining public services, to create new sources of profit and new brands for the global market. Virgin and Serco are already eating into the £100 billion NHS budget by taking over the management of local health services.

- **Two-tier services** Market forces in education and health will provide an increasingly paid-for service for the affluent, and a shrinking, shoestring service for the rest. University tuition fees of £9,000 a year, central state funding for selective Academies and “free schools”, and Gove’s new English Baccalaureate (EBacc) will mean the end of comprehensive education, pushing working class kids away from university and into low-paid jobs.

- **Attacking public sector workers’ pensions, pay, and jobs** With 880,000 jobs predicted to be cut by 2017, this will mean the smallest public sector since the Second World War, making roughly the same number of private sector workers unemployed, and hitting women workers particularly hard.

- **Slashing workers’ rights** Attacking employment rights, access to legal aid,

pensions and (especially) benefits will create a new low wage, super-exploited workforce, with workfare schemes to force the unemployed to work for free (massaging unemployment statistics in the process).

Trade unions if they resist this process are to be broken, with draconian new rules on balloting, and injunctions and army scabbing to break strikes. Meanwhile no amount of corporate welfare – Olympics contracts, workfare or Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts – is too much for the big monopolies like Virgin, Tesco and Balfour Beatty.

### Britain in decline

After four years of a double-dip recession the wealthy are doing just fine, while the rest of us are being squeezed. Unemployment stays stuck at 2.6 million; hands eager for work are kept idle, while a housing shortage sees rising rents and homelessness. Boardroom pay and bankers’ bonuses rise while our wages – for those of us lucky enough to have a job – stay flat.

The Tories say they want to make Britain a more competitive and export-oriented economy. But as *The Economist* has noted, Coalition policies will instead boost the same service and financial sectors whose domination of the economy was a feature of the great financial crisis of 2008.

The trillion pound bank bailout that followed it saw the capitalist class loot the state’s coffers. It was their bubble of speculation that torpedoed the rest of the economy and created the 2009 recession, deepening the crisis of state finances and adding to the debt. We didn’t cause this crisis, why should we pay for it?

Workers must struggle to break this wave of austerity, renounce the debts, and kick out the Tories. It’s we, and not the bankers, who can run a productive economy, to end poverty and fulfill human needs instead of private profit.

# Ed Miliband steals the Tories' clothes

This year's Labour Party conference saw what has become an annual ritual: the Labour leader and his shadow chancellor trying to steal the Tories clothes and 'standing up to the unions'. **Bernie McAdam** looks at what happened in Manchester

THIS YEAR Labour's message was plain enough. Workers should wait quietly and patiently for another two and a half years, and then vote out this cabinet of Tory public school-boys. And then?

Then we will get a cabinet of comprehensive school (and Oxbridge) graduates that will not undo the Tory-Lib Dem cuts or the privatisation of the National Health Service, that will not raise public sector workers' pay, and that will stick to the Tories' spending cuts for at least one or two years.

In opposition over the last two and a half years, Labour has repeatedly spurned the opportunity to mobilise working people's growing anger and disillusionment. No turn to the left there. It has hardly even dared to defend our NHS – the crown jewels of Labour Party history.

The wretchedly unoriginal Ed Miliband modelled his speech in

Manchester on David Cameron's fake unscripted speech to the 2009 Tory Party Conference (just as Cameron copied Tony Blair, and he in turn copied Bill Clinton). His speechwriters even rummaged through the Tories' costume set for a Victorian outfit, Benjamin Disraeli's "One Nation" Toryism, with only the party label changed.

The Daily Mirror duly proclaimed it was "like seeing a footballer written off as a donkey score a hat-trick."

Similarly cringe-making stuff has been said about Ed Balls' speech, in which he made it clear that there would be no reversal of the cuts and no return to "tax and spend." This time, one of the gushers was Unite's Len McCluskey, who on the eve of conference had spoken of "kicking the New Labour cuckoos out of our nest." But after the show he was a tamed man declaring, "Ed's speech was a good one.

A really, really good one."

Neither Miliband nor Balls will pledge to repeal the Tories' NHS legislation. Miliband says he will not waste £3 billion re-organising the health service. Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary Liam Byrne actually pledged to cut the welfare budget. And to show how strong a leader he is, Miliband paraded his credentials for standing up to the union leaders by supporting cuts to public sector workers' pay.

In fact, any politically astute person could see through Miliband and Balls' performances. The real keynote message was summed up in the former's claim that "we are not a party of any special interest group" – by which he means the working class. So why are the union general secretaries spending tens of millions of pounds of working class members' money on getting Balls and Miliband elected to

carry out Tory policies?

McCluskey heads Unite, which with 1.5 million members is the UK's largest union. It is Labour's biggest donor, handing over more than £6 million in the past two years, almost a third of the party's total donations. And what does he get in return? Only put-downs. Has the man no pride? Once again Lenin and Trotsky have been proven correct. Labour is indeed "the bourgeois labour party" and "the party that leans upon the workers but serves the bourgeoisie." And we pay them to do it!

With the millions the unions pour into Labour's election war-chest, we could, almost at a stroke, have a party in Britain that stands in solidarity with workers in struggle, that pledges to reverse all the cuts to health and education, that is ready to take back the billions given by Brown and Cameron to the bankers.

We could have a party that chose as its leaders men and women who are not afraid to march shoulder to shoulder in a fight by the unions, and not afraid to call for mass direct action to kick this gang of wreckers out of power, rather than pledging, à la Blair, to safeguard the Tories' legacy of destruction.

But this will never happen as long as Len McCluskey, Dave Prentis and Paul Kenny lord it over Unite, Unison and the GMB, keeping their members locked up in the Labour holding cell.

That is why their grip on the unions must be broken by organising their rank and file, not just in militant defence of our economic and social gains but for a political fightback: one that once again emblazons on its banner, "the common ownership of the means of production", but that this time both means it and knows how to bring it about.

## Editorial

# Yes to a general strike – and to a new party

THE TRADES UNION Congress has agreed to consider the practicality of a general strike in response to the government's austerity programme. Their first step should be to ask their 6 million members what they think. Are they willing to take action in defence of jobs, wages, pensions, health and education? The entire left should be agitating for a resounding and overwhelming YES to a general strike.

Frankly, there is no alternative. How else can we stop the Tories ripping up everything we have gained since 1945? We can protest, strike and occupy against each individual attack – we have no choice. But to push back the cuts and privatisation, we need to weave all the threads of struggle into a mighty rope strong enough to pull this government down.

In every workplace, in every school, college and university, on every housing estate, we must raise the demand for a general strike now.

If some people do not know what it means, tell them it means bringing the country to a grinding halt so the profits of the bankers and the bosses stop rolling in. It means halting their transport, communications, commerce, indeed the whole machinery of state, so that the total dependence of society on the working class becomes clear to all.

It means the working class will discover its own power and can say to the government: you will stop and reverse every one of these cuts or we will reverse them for you.

If others say a general strike won't happen, we should tell them that Greek, Spanish, French and Portuguese workers have done it, so why not here?

If still more say it's illegal, we should ask them where they're going to hold six million or more people? The jails are not big enough to incarcerate us all.

Sceptics may dismiss the TUC vote to consider a general strike, but the Tories fear work-

ers would respond positively to any such call. That's why they've alerted the armed forces and demanded the TUC withdraw their threat.

Our job is to demand the TUC get on with it, that they call a general strike as soon as possible. In the words of the great revolutionary poet Percy Shelley, "We are many, they are few". On 20 October and after we need to say – YES to a general strike!

## New party

But the raising of the general strike slogan poses as many questions as it does answers. We devote the centre four pages of this issue of Workers Power to dealing with some of them:

- How can we force the union leaders to call the strike?
- How can rank and file workers stop our leaders selling it out?
- And how do we counteract the inevitable intervention of the police and the courts?

The general strike also poses another, bigger question: the question of power. As Leon Trotsky pointed out:

"Whatever may be the slogans and the motive for which the general strike is initiated, if it includes the genuine masses, and if these masses are quite resolved to struggle, the general strike inevitably poses before all the classes in the nation the question: who will be the master of the house?" (Once Again Whither France)

To this there can only be two answers: the tiny super-rich class of capitalists, bankers and multinational bosses; or the working class, the vast majority of the people, who need hospitals and homes, a living wage and a sustainable environment. Given the acute crisis of the profit system, these demands are incompatible; something – or someone – must give.

If we look across Europe, the country where the struggle has to date reached the greatest

height, and where this question has most clearly been posed is Greece. Here there have been 18 general strikes since the crisis broke, but it was the intervention of a new party – intransigent in its opposition to all the cuts and in its insistence that the debt must be cancelled – that brought the crisis to a head.

Syriza came from nowhere, scoring 4.6 per cent in 2009, leaping to 16 per cent in May 2012 and nearly 27 per cent in the re-run a month later. They came within three points of winning, eclipsing the old "socialist" party Pasok in the process.

The reason working class voters flocked to Syriza was that it held out the prospect of ripping up the austerity programme and refusing to pay debt that ordinary people had not incurred. Isn't it time we in Britain made ready our answer to the question, "Who is the master in the house?" If so, then we need a political party to struggle for power and rally the millions of workers behind it.

Who could form such a party? Every force opposed to the cuts. In practice that means both leaders and the rank and file:

- The Labour left around John McDonnell and the Labour Representation Committee
- Left wing union leaders like Len McCluskey, Bob Crow and Mark Serwotka
- Rank and file militants in every union, and organisations like Unite Construction Rank and File and the Grass Roots Left
- Direct action groups like Occupy, Disabled People Against the Cuts and UK Uncut
- Last but not least, it means the far left groups and networks.

We know well enough that there are many obstacles in the way of such a new party coming into being. It will not happen without a struggle. It requires an intense debate over policies and programme – including that old-new debate: reform or revolution?

But this debate can be serious and productive if it takes place in the context of unity in action on every front where we are under attack, and if we bring into the debate thousands of working class fighters thrown up by the struggle.

To those who are sceptical, we repeat the question, what is the alternative? Even if a general strike were to oust the Coalition, today we could only replace it with a Labour government under Ed Miliband, one committed to keeping most of the Tory cuts and implementing further austerity measures. What we would need would be a genuine workers' government – and for that we need a genuine workers' party.

That is why, for Workers Power, the campaign for a general strike includes the demand on the entire left to organise a democratic conference to launch a new workers' party.

## workers power

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# Bolshie Women

## Free abortion on demand

Joy Macready

IN SEPTEMBER, a woman was jailed for terminating her pregnancy in its final stage. Sarah Catt took a drug that she purchased on the Internet to cause an abortion in 2009, and now faces eight years in prison for it.

To give her sentence some perspective, it is two years longer than Joseph Moran's, who raped a 23-year-old woman in Nottingham last December, and four years longer than Stephen Woodward's, who admitted stabbing his wife to death on Christmas Day.

In his sentencing speech, Justice Jeremy Cooke said that Catt had made a "deliberate and calculated decision" to end her pregnancy. He added that Catt had "robbed" the baby of the life it was about to have and said the seriousness of the crime "lay between manslaughter and murder".

He added that: "There is no mitigation available by reference to the Abortion Act, whatever view one takes of its provisions which are, wrongly, liberally construed in practice so as to make abortion available essentially on demand prior to 24 weeks with the approval of registered medical practitioners."

Cooke's condescending and moralising tone should be seen alongside his membership of the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship (LCF), which has campaigned for more conservative abortion laws. But the harsh sentence meted out to Catt – and indeed the fact that she was on trial at all – demonstrates that the UK's 1967 Abortion Act does not give women the right to control their own fertility.

Catt had tried to obtain a legal abortion at a clinic at 30 weeks, but had been told she was too far along. The law only allows a woman to abort within a time limit of 24 weeks in most cases.

Although a sight better than in many countries, such as Ireland, Egypt and Argentina, where abortion is illegal except when the woman's life is in danger, UK law clearly does not grant abortion on demand. Women in the UK have access to legal abortion only when two doctors agree that continuing the pregnancy would be a risk to the physical or mental health of the woman.

### Fight for the right to choose

And every year the limited gains of the Abortion Act are threatened with being rolled back. Justice Cooke has given anti-abortion campaigners the green light to charge forward. LIFE, the anti-abortion charity, said that his verdict "reflects the gravity of the offence committed and demands a rethink of the law that allows abortion up to birth".

The verdict will also be a signal to those in the Tory party, like Nadine Dorries, who are trying to change public opinion by stealth. Last year Dorries attempted to strip abortion providers of their role in counselling women, while earlier this year she put forward a bill that would have forced schools to promote "abstinence".

Both moves were defeated. But new health secretary Jeremy Hunt's recent announcement that he supports halving the legal time limit for abortion to 12 weeks is a sign that we can expect more attacks on women's right to choose.

The effect of denying women control over their fertility is that they cannot participate equally with men in production, social and political life. The burden of repeated pregnancy and many children, of uncertainty about whether or when another child will be added to the family, the restriction of sexual pleasure as a result of fear of pregnancy – all of these undermine women's ability to participate fully in social life, and achieve independence and control over their individual lives.

The provision of free contraception and abortion on demand for all women is therefore an essential part of women's liberation. The choice as to when and whether to have a child gives working class women the ability to decide on their personal role in life and their relation to the world of work.

The labour movement and socialists must fight for state funding to allow women access to free contraception and abortion on demand, without a time limit.

### Nursery closures

But at the same time that the state is attacking women's right to control their bodies, it is also planning to close eight affordable and high quality workplace nurseries for HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) staff and local families. Nurseries in East Kilbride, Leeds, Salford, Blackburn, Leicester, Cardiff, Wolverhampton and Nottingham are to close in November.

But nursery workers and families are fighting against the closures. Over 2,000 people have signed an online petition ([tinyurl.com/9zvsewh](http://tinyurl.com/9zvsewh)), and parents have held demonstrations and have set up a Facebook campaign page called "Save HMRC's Nurseries": [facebook.com/SaveHmrcsNurseries](http://facebook.com/SaveHmrcsNurseries).

Spiralling costs of childcare are forcing many women out of a job and plunging working class families further into poverty. With around one in eight women in the UK having left a job and one in five turning down a job offer over childcare costs, it's clear that the consequence of vicious cuts is forcing women out of the workplace and into the home.

We demand that free 24-hour childcare should be provided and funded by taxing the rich.

## ★ FIGHTBACK

# Unite and strike against the pay freeze

Rebecca Anderson

THE GOVERNMENT has tried to impose a 1 per cent pay cap on public sector workers after two years of pay freezes. If they are successful, then many public sector workers will lose more than 10 per cent of their pay in real terms over a four year period.

Teaching unions NUT and NASUWT were the first to announce their intention to ballot, but many others have followed suit. Unions in higher education have submitted a pay claim of 7 per cent to make up for pay already lost through freezes and to keep up with inflation. The general union GMB (representing support staff in higher education), lecturers' union UCU and Scottish teachers' union EIS have all announced ballots.

Unison, another general union representing support staff, got a ballot result of just over 50 per cent in favour of strikes, but the leadership has not yet said whether this small majority will make them will with-

draw from co-ordinated action. In contrast, 82.5 per cent of NUT members voted for strikes, but all their leadership have announced so far is action short of a strike that began on 3 October.

### Co-ordination

September's Trades Union Congress (TUC) voted to co-ordinate action over the public sector pay freeze, and Mark Serwotka of the civil servants' union PCS said that a "sense of urgency" was needed.

PCS is arguing that strikes should start soon after the TUC demonstration on 20 October, but the massive Unison and GMB unions have said that in most sectors they are waiting for pay negotiations with the government in the spring before balloting. PCS have not yet said whether they would strike alongside the education unions if they take action this autumn.

After the debacle of the 2011 pensions strike, where the TUC co-ordinated one day of action before letting it all fall apart, we cannot simply

wait for the TUC. Nor can we wait for those unions that broke off joint action last year and subsequently sold their members down the river. It was absolutely right for PCS to bring a motion to the TUC calling on that body to co-ordinate action, but now we need to put pressure on them to do it and be prepared to act without them if they prevaricate.

The demonstration on 20 October should be the launchpad for strike action across the whole working class, bringing together the issues of pay, pensions, job cuts and all the other attacks that the coalition is mounting against us. Rather than allow the momentum to be lost, the education unions, PCS and all other unions in favour of autumn action should set a date and demand the TUC's support. We should demand that ballots to begin immediately in the public sector as a whole.

This essential step will not happen without the pressure of ordinary reps and members of trade unions, and would almost certainly require them to organise together in their unions and across unions to lobby their leaderships, and prepare to take action without them if necessary.

## Sparks fly at Crossrail

Marcus Halaby

LONDON'S SPARKS have targeted rogue construction outfit BFK for some special treatment – flying pickets, direct action and brand contamination.

The capital's high-profile Crossrail project received some unwelcome publicity when building workers, students and supporters blocked traffic near Tottenham Court Road for an hour.

But matters got worse for the blacklisting and corner-cutting consortium a week later when an even larger protest blocked Oxford Street.

The Crossrail became a target following BFK's sacking of 28 union members. Unite safety rep Rodney Valentine and shop steward Frank Morris were also banned from Crossrail's Westbourne Park site after raising safety concerns.

Shortly after this, an earth-moving conveyor collapsed, although without any injury on this occasion. This exposes the callous disregard for the lives of the workers who are making BFK bosses' profits.

Daily pickets have been taking place at Westbourne Park ever since and have now spread to Leeds.

### Raise the minimum wage

Unite's union leader Len McCluskey has said that he would support calls for "co-ordinated industrial action" on pay and other issues, and that there is "a real chance" of such action, "if not this winter then certainly early next year".

But to unite public and private sector workers in common struggle, we need to fight for demands that address their common concerns. A call to raise the national minimum wage to £10 per hour for all workers, to undo a decade or more of rising inequality and falling living standards for the least well off, could be the starting point for such a fighting unity.

For more news and revolutionary analysis go to our website at: [workerspower.co.uk](http://workerspower.co.uk)



# Say YES to a general strike

After TUC agrees to consider a general strike, step up the pressure for real action, argues **Dave Stockton**

BY A SIZEABLE majority, TUC delegates have voted for a motion from the Prison Officers Association, which says:

“Congress accepts that the trade union movement must continue leading from the front against this uncaring government with a coalition of resistance taking coordinated action where possible with far-reaching campaigns including the consideration and practicalities of a general strike.”

Before the vote, this paper commented that, while this was “the best motion” to the Congress, it “does not commit the TUC to actually doing anything”.

Its weaknesses are plain enough – it talks only of “consideration” and investigating the “practicalities” of a general strike. But now we have to take account of the fact that it was enthusiastically passed by Congress delegates, indicating that rank and file union members are fed up with their leaders’ inaction.

No wonder! Three years of a pay freeze in the public sector, vicious cuts in jobs and services, pensions fiddled and now the promise of another round of cuts this autumn. With only one national demonstration and two days of coordinated strikes since the Coalition came to office, the TUC has certainly not been “leading from the front”.

So it is no surprise that delegates loudly cheered the words of Bob Crow of the RMT when he said: “The only way if we have spears being thrown at us is to put up shields. If it means a general strike, let’s do it and get on with it.”

Other supporters of the resolution were the post union CWU, Unite and Ucat, the builders’ union. PCS vice-president and Socialist Party member John McNally added that after the next TUC demonstration on 20 October a one-day general strike should be considered.

## Turning words into action

Union activists and socialist organisations now need to unite their forces to put maximum pressure on the TUC leaders to live up to their words – not just to “consider” but to mobilise for and CALL a general strike!

There will be no lack of opposition to this within the top ranks of the union bureaucracy.

The attitude of outgoing General Secretary Brendan Barber and Congress House was summed up by ITV news: “TUC sources” had warned that a general strike “would be virtually impossible, since it would involve every union member in every company in the UK finding a dispute with



Photo: Gary Duncan, Sunderland Against the Cuts sunderlandagainstthecuts.co.uk

Last year’s TUC demo brought 500,000 from across Britain together. A general strike is the next step to stop the government’s cuts

their employer in order to legally take strike action”.

If we leave examination of the “practicalities” to the officials of the TUC then we know what their conclusions will be. A general strike is unlawful so it cannot be done.

Progressive lawyers KD Ewing and John Hendy are arguing that the European Court of Human Rights could rule a one-day general strike lawful under Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. But to go down this route would be a dangerous diversion.

There can be little doubt that British courts would not recognise these rulings or would grant injunctions to employers against unions even balloting for such action. Appealing to the High Court or the Supreme Court, let alone the ECHR, would put off action till it is too late, disrupt the coordination, allow and right wing unions to back out. Also it effectively concedes that a strike must be lawful to be effective and “practicable”.

A general strike has never been legal in Britain and probably never will be. The only safeguard against the law and the unelected ruling class judges lies in numbers. They can’t arrest millions, so we all must strike together.

## The next steps

The first people the TUC needs to consult on the “practicality” of a general strike are not the lawyers but the

six million members of the unions themselves.

The first step is to push hard for the TUC’s “consideration” of a general strike to begin NOW. To make our voice heard the left unions and the anti-cuts campaigns should launch a mass petition addressed to the TUC general council, to be signed in the workplaces, on the streets and online, saying “YES we want a general strike”, backing this up with print and web articles putting the case for united action.

In every workplace, in every town and city, in the run up to the demonstration on 20 October we should start this “investigation” by calling public meetings, to explain why we need not just to demonstrate but to strike all together to defend

- Our pensions against robbery
- Our wages against public – and private – sector pay freezes
- Our NHS, schools and universities against privatisation, break-up and “reforms”
- Our young people against a life of unemployment, or low pay, long hours and temporary jobs.

Unite has already called for coordinated action against the pay freeze and is balloting. The NUT has voted for a strike against pay restraint. Linking these actions together could help create a powerful impulse towards joint action and a general strike, and make it harder for the union tops to ignore the mood for action or claim members don’t want a strike.

But above all, it would be a way

to start organising the forces from below that want action. Everyone who signed the petition could be drawn into campaigning for it themselves, getting their workmates to sign, then coming together in local meetings. We need to organise from the grassroots – in every workplace, including the remote and isolated ones and those not yet organised.

The government has already threatened to use the army to break the strike. We will need to organise regular pickets and flying pickets to stop strikebreakers and resist police and army harassment of strikers.

The students could play a role in this too. The NUS plans a demonstration in November. The National Campaign against Fees and Cuts should launch a campaign now to mobilise college and school students to join the TUC demo to defend education, scrap the fees and restore the EMA, linking all of this to a clear call for a general strike. The aim should be another outburst of mass direct action around the time of the NUS demo.

Other sections of the working class and poor can also be drawn in – disabled people campaigning against ATOS, pensioners fighting cuts, unemployed campaigns, youth, black and immigrant workers’ groups.

## Organising from below

The TUC leaders are only talking tough, letting off steam about “considering” a general strike because they know union members are angry,

but in reality planning no action at all. They may come back after a long slow process of ‘investigation’ and announce that we can’t do it.

The more left wing of the union leaders may be looking for a repeat of the “coordinated strike” over pensions – legal because all involved were in officially recognised disputes with their employers, but vulnerable to being divided as each union negotiated and withdrew action separately.

That is why organising from below for a general strike is now the key. This would mean everyone striking together until the government falls. It means busting the anti-union laws and making them totally unworkable.

Of course the TUC is a treacherous leadership; it will do everything the can to avoid calling a general strike or to call it off as soon as possible. But it cannot be ignored as long as it is the official leadership of six million workers.

The answer to this problem is that the agitation and the organisation for a general strike must come from below, from the workplaces, the rank and file. And if this mass pressure can bring about a situation where the union leaders seriously consider or call a general strike, then we will have created the mechanisms to exert control from below and even to take over leadership if – or rather when – the leaders desert the fray.

The agitation for a general strike on 20 October is only the start. Far from it deflecting from the tasks of strengthening branches, workplace organisation, rank and file groups and local campaigns, it would stimulate them, unite them, infuse them with a political goal: the defeat of all the cuts and the downfall of this reactionary government. It is the division of all these struggles that tends to lower confidence that we can win.

As in Greece a general strike – even a one-day protest as a start – would also raise the question of what sort of government and what sort of party we need: not only to abandon all the cuts and bankers’ bailouts, but to make the rich pay and open the prospect of a revolutionary alternative to capitalism.

All those in favour of a general strike should come together now in united mobilising committees to make it happen and to control any action once it starts. We should encourage all workplaces and union branches, pensioners’ groups and anti-cuts campaigns, student bodies and welfare action groups to send delegates to this committee so we can reach out to the widest possible layers of supporters.

Unions and campaigning groups will also need to keep any 20 October mobilising committees active after the demo. We should develop them into delegate-based councils of action, really able to organise the strike at a local level.

Step up the fight now – for a general strike to bring down the Tories!

# Campaigning for a gene

On these pages we look in more depth about how we can achieve a general strike. **Peter Main** explains what we mean by a rank and file movement, while **Joy Macready** asks what went wrong in the pensions dispute and **Rebecca Anderson** calls for unity in the anti-cuts movement. In his regular Agitator column, **Jeremy Dewar** reviews the anti-union laws and says how we can get rid of them

## What is a rank and file movement?

**Peter Main**

THE CALL for a rank and file movement is not a proposal for a new organisation. Like the “anti-war movement” or the “shop stewards’ movement” of the 1960s, a rank-and-file movement would mobilise thousands, probably tens of thousands of people already involved in any number of campaigns and organisations in their own workplaces and localities.

What would transform those activists into a rank and file movement would be a common recognition that to fight effectively they need to overcome the bureaucratic organisation of the trade unions and replace it by the democratic control of the members themselves, the rank and file.

What we need are unions in which policy is decided by directly elected delegates of the members concerned, elected delegates control negotiations and all officials are subject to election and paid the average wage of those they represent.

This marks out a rank and file movement from other union reform campaigns, like the Socialist Teachers Alliance (NUT), United Left (Unite) or Left Unity (PCS), which are primarily election machines and leave the unions’ bureaucratic structures in tact. A rank and file movement would of course seek to win elections, but would primarily be based in the workplace and seek to organise action – with the officials where possible, but without and even against them where necessary.

Our programme would certainly mean a radical reorganisation of every union and a re-writing of their rulebooks, but it is not simply an organisational issue. The fundamental reason why the current leaders and officials do everything to avoid a decisive fight with the government and the bosses is a

political reason.

At heart, they believe it would be wrong to force the government or the bosses to retreat because that would destabilise British capitalism. In other words, like their political representatives in the Labour Party, the union leaders and officials accept that cuts, job losses and “wage restraint” are necessary to keep British capital profitable. The most they are prepared to do is try to “negotiate” the sacrifices the working class must make – and thereby safeguard their own positions as the negotiators.

That is why a different politics is necessary in every campaign, a politics that does not begin from what capitalists need but from what the workers need. It is also why the fight against the bosses is a political fight that has to be taken into the unions themselves. Unlike the National Shop Stewards Network, which declares that it will not “interfere in internal trade union business”, a real rank and file movement will certainly “interfere” with how the unions are run and how they make policy.

The fight for control of the workers’ own organisations is not separate from the militant defence of workers’ interests in the here and now. The thousands of militants campaigning to make 20 October the starting point for a real fight against the coalition have to be won not only to the fight for militant direct action up to an all out general strike, but also for all decisions on action to be taken by democratic mass meetings of the members.

Forcing the government to retreat will certainly destabilise British capitalism, it will pose the questions who is to rule in society, what is society’s wealth to be used for – and that is why taking control of the unions and transforming them can also be the first step to taking control of society and transforming it.



## Why do we need four anti-cuts campaigns?

**Rebecca Anderson**

IF WE ARE to stop the cuts, beat privatisation and banish austerity we need to be united and organised. We need a mass movement that can call huge demonstrations, put pressure on the union leaders and bring solidarity to every struggle.

As it stands, most of the initiative is left to the TUC, the reluctant leadership of the anti-cuts movement. So we desperately need an alternative leadership. Several organisations have attempted to do this but have failed because they have all tried to build separate anti-cuts campaigns rather than one massive, powerful one.

The National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN), Right to Work (RtW), Coalition of Resistance (CoR) and Unite the Resistance (UtR) stage a range of activities from protests outside the TUC, to calling for solidarity trips to Greece. Combined they consist of only a few thousand people, but a few thousand united is more powerful than a few thousand divided. In fact one anti-cuts campaign would be far more attractive to activists and have greater authority in their eyes,

so the numbers involved could grow quickly.

A cynical – but nonetheless accurate – interpretation of how this came about is that each of these fronts is the property of a far left organisation; the Socialist Party (SP) control the NSSN; the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has RtW and UtR; and Counterfire calls the shots in CoR. Why does the SWP have two fronts? Possibly because RTW’s national secretary Chris Bamberry left the party, so a new front was needed. I say “possibly”, because in these supposedly independent campaigns the elected leadership rarely meets and “officers” take the real decisions by behind the scenes.

There are political differences; for example CoR is against a general strike to stop the cuts, while the NSSN would limit such a strike to 24 hours. But they are all against the cuts and tactics could be debated and decided democratically at a unity conference. With a united anti-cuts campaign we could put far more pressure on the TUC to call strikes and demonstrations – or organise them from below.

A united campaign, bringing together workers, youth, people from all walks of life, would also have the potential to organise local anti-cuts assemblies that could debate ideas and take action as well as co-ordinating nationally for huge demonstrations. In local assemblies activists could meet each other, work together and provide an alternative source of support should the reformist leaders abandon the struggle or it sell out.

Our aim should be to build a movement capable of mounting serious resistance, like they have in Greece and Spain. As the movement grows, it will inevitably draw in more and more sectors of the working class and oppressed.

In this situation, anti-cuts assemblies could draw in delegates from every workplace, neighbourhood and community, who can make collective decisions for action based on this information and execute these decisions immediately. Such bodies would be real councils of action, which could open the road to a decisive showdown not only with the government but with the system it defends.

# ral strike



Construction workers and supporters rediscover the traditions of the 1970s by using flying pickets to shut down Crossrail in London over victimisation of 28 union members

Photo: Guy Smallman

## The TUC's failures – right and 'left'

Joy Macready

WHEN THE TORIES cobbled together the Con-Dem Coalition in May 2010, they were clear about how they were going to tackle the economic downturn – by making the working class pay for the capitalist crisis. With the Lib Dems limping lamely behind them, the Tories set in motion their plan to rip society apart and rebuild it in the naked interest of private profit.

When the TUC saw the massive cuts coming down the line, it took them almost a year to call a demonstration: the March for the Alternative. Yet, when over a quarter of a million workers turned out, the TUC leaders murmured not a word about stepping up the fight or coordinating action. Instead they waited another 18 months before... calling another demo, A Future that Works.

Then in June 2011, over 750,000 teachers, lecturers and the civil servants took strike action for one day. But instead of linking this to the defence of the NHS, education or welfare, uniting public and private sector workers who all depend on these services, the union leaders limited the fight to the issue of public sector pensions – in the belief that they could defeat the government while keeping it legal.

Yet despite the limited scope, two million workers went on strike again in November, with NHS and council employees joining in. But almost immediately after, the leaders of Unison and GMB began cutting rotten deals, the more militant union leaders faltered and the coordination fell apart.

At every turn, millions of people have shown their willingness to fight the cuts, yet the TUC failed to be the organising centre for action. Even its left wing has been unwilling to step up to the plate and lead the charge.

One-day strikes, separated by months of inactivity, are not enough to beat the government. They can be useful as warning shots that demonstrate the power of the workers, but it's no warning if your enemy knows you are bluffing.

The fight to stop the Coalition's cuts will take all-out, united strike action – a general strike – with the clear aim of bringing the government down. Instead of these stop-start strikes, which leave the union officials in control of talks and the tempo and duration of the action, all-out strikes really pile the pressure on the bosses and their coalition government.

That's why the cowardly officials run a mile from indefinite, united strike action – and why the rank and file should fight for it.

the  
**ag**itator

## Fighting for the right to strike

Jeremy Dewar

THERE IS no legal right to strike in Britain. This simple statement can come as a surprise to many British trade unionists. To European workers, it is a bizarre idea.

But it is true nonetheless. Even if a valid trades dispute is registered, membership databases are accurate, full notice is given, a majority vote for a strike, further notice is sent to the employer and there are only six pickets... strikers can still be locked out, that is, sacked *en masse*.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that in the country that gave birth to trade unions, there is also the longest opposition to their rights. Britain's bosses were early learners when it comes to fear and loathing for the unions.

Striking in the UK constitutes a breach of contract for which you can be dismissed; when you fail to turn up for work, you can be sacked. But if you are in a trade dispute with your employer, then certain "immunities" from prosecution for damages have been granted by parliament – though for over a century and a half judges, using the common law have chipped away and reversed them.

From the late 1960s Acts of Parliament have sought to narrow these immunities.

### Thatcher's anti-union laws

The most famous of these restrictions date from 1980 to 1993: the Tory anti-union laws. As Tony Blair boasted during the 1997 election campaign, these laws are "the most restrictive on trade unions in the Western world". So what are they?

First Margaret Thatcher ruled that the trade dispute could only be with one's "own" employer and that there could only be six pickets outside their own workplace. "Secondary picketing" was outlawed; workers could not call for solidarity in firms for which they supplied goods.

The Gate Gourmet strike showed what this means. Catering workers were sacked in 2005 because British Airways, the sole customer for their in-flight meals, demanded Gate Gourmet reduce costs. But when they went on strike, the women were not permitted to picket BA. And when BA workers struck in solidarity, their stewards were sacked. The bosses held all the cards.

The law allowed the police to arrest pickets and the courts to place restrictions on their movements. In the miners' strike, this led to flying pickets being stopped on motorways and told to turn round. News International printers were not allowed to picket anywhere because their Fleet Street workplace was closed down when Rupert Murdoch started printing *The Sun* and *The Times* with a new, scab workforce in Wapping.

In 1984 secret ballots became mandatory. Later postal ballots were required; the employers were shown the wording on the ballot; members' names, addresses, job titles and workplaces were also handed over. The employer was entitled to seven days notice of a ballot and a further seven days notice after the vote, before any action could take place. This took about a month.

It had an enormous effect on workers' ability to resist management diktat. In the 1960s and '70s, rank and file militants mounted lightning strikes, which paralysed production, often when it cost the bosses most – when the concrete had just been poured on a building site, for example. Grievances were discussed at the moment they occurred and in the workplace, where collectivity and solidarity bore heavily on workers' minds.

By stretching out the process and balloting in the isolation of workers' homes, the bosses gained the upper hand. The TV slandered the unions' case. Management sent out letters threatening instant dismissal to those who voted "Yes". They organised scab teams to break strikes. They moved production elsewhere.

More recently employers have gained injunctions on the basis that some of the names, addresses and work details of union members were out of date. At enormous expense, unions had to reballot; meanwhile workers were

sacked and contracts changed. The momentum was lost and so were disputes. Then unofficial strikers lost all immunity and could be sacked individually (or selectively), and unions were made liable for all action, official or unofficial, unless they explicitly repudiated it.

No longer could union officials quietly encourage members to get round the laws by acting unofficially, like Bob Crow did in the 1989 wildcat tube strikes. In 1990 the Tories closed this loophole by making unions responsible for the actions of their members. Failing to do so could see the unions lose their assets.

### Can we turn back the clock?

To their eternal shame the 1997-2010 Labour government never repealed any of these laws. Nor did the TUC launch a serious campaign to defy or abolish them after 1982. Instead it has been left to the Labour left and individual unions like the RMT to fight for the Trade Union Rights and Freedoms Bill – unfortunately without any hope of getting it heard, let alone passed.

So it has been left to rank and file militants to lead the way. Some workers faced with dismissal and closure of their workplaces – often without warning or redundancy pay and with their pension pots stolen – have defied the law and occupied their factories and plants.

Visteon, Vestas and Prisme workers took this courageous route when the crisis erupted in 2009; none of them were fined or jailed; some important concessions were won. This proves we can fight the law and win.

Likewise in 2007, CWU members brought Royal Mail to its knees by walking out in Edinburgh against victimisation, spreading the wildcat down to Watford before union officials came to the bosses' rescue and called off all action for talks... which led to a sell-out.

And there's the rub. The anti-union laws have not only strengthened the state against the unions, but also the union bureaucracy against the rank and file. Only union officials can now organise ballots and call strikes. Only they can represent the union in court and suspend action in order to reballot. No wonder they have been none too keen on getting rid of these laws!

### Rank and file must lead the way

We must return workers' democracy to the centre of trade union life: the workplace meeting and a vote to decide on the form of action and the goals of the dispute – followed immediately by the implementation of these decisions. This will once again strike fear into the bosses because they are faced with the problem of how to get production or service back on – rather than setting lawyers to thwart the democratic will of the workers.

To protect workers in dispute and strengthen their action against intransigent employers, we must restore solidarity between workplaces and between industries.

The capitalists are coordinating a class war against us, from the government all the way down to individual managers. We need to see our role as the coordinators of a class struggle – not confined to trade disputes – to push back this political attack.

And finally, we need to re-raise the slogan, defiance not compliance. When threatened with an injunction, we should refuse to bow before the judges, who are nakedly protecting their class interests on the flimsiest evidence and rankest reason. And if the police arrest our rank and file leaders, every militant in the land should call for solidarity – as they did for the dockers in 1972.

But can this really be done in 2012? Ask the sparks, who every week lead walkouts and picket sites. Despite the deep downturn in the construction industry, they have held the line, protecting pay and conditions, and saving the jobs of reps and stewards. Now is the time for other workers – in the public as well as the private sector – to take up and adapt their tactics. Will it take courage and sacrifices? Of course it will. But a movement that officially celebrates the Tolpuddle Martyrs every year should not flinch from this.

# 1926: How the TUC betrayed the General Strike

The 1926 General Strike is rich in lessons for today. In this first of a two-part feature article, **Dave Stockton** looks at how the ruling class prepared for it while the unions leaders did not. The second part will be printed next month

IN THE MID-1920s the Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) had almost a million members, and was the militant core of the working class movement. Coal was still the main fuel of trade and Empire, powering factories, railways and the electricity supply. It fuelled the world's largest navy, which in turn guarded an empire containing 458 million people, a fifth of the world's population.

In October 1924, Tory Stanley Baldwin was elected prime minister with a huge majority. Baldwin's Chancellor Winston Churchill headed a fiercely anti-working class group in the cabinet: Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain, India Secretary F E Smith (Lord Birkenhead) and Home Secretary William Joynson-Hicks. They were eager to "put the trade unions in their place" and crush the young Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) to boot. At key moments they rather than Baldwin called the shots.

On 30 June 1925, mine owners announced plans to cut miner's wages and increase their working hours. Miners responded with the slogan "Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day." At the head of the MFGB stood one of the most combative union leaders in British history, A J Cook.

Cook had been elected with the support of the CPGB and the Miners' Minority Movement, the rank and file organisation formed by the CPGB and its allies in January 1924, which became a cross-union body in the summer of that year. Most other trade union and Labour Party leaders hated him with a passion.

Fred Bramley, Trades Union Congress (TUC) general secretary, commented to his assistant, Walter Citrine: "Have you seen who has been elected secretary of the Miners' Federation? Cook, a raving, tearing Communist."

Labour Party leader Ramsay MacDonald called him "a guttersnipe", while Beatrice Webb, ideologue of Labour's reformist Fabian right, wrote of him that: "He looks low-caste - not at all the skilled artisan type, more the agricultural labourer... an inspired idiot".

## The Lefts

Transport workers' leader Ernest Bevin had represented the union movement's left wing until Cook's election. Previously, right-wingers like rail workers' leader James Henry Thomas, textile union leader John Robert Clynes and Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) leader Arthur Pugh had dominated the TUC, until Thomas and Clynes left the TUC General Council to join MacDonald's short-lived minority Labour cabinet in January 1924.

This opened the way for the election of a number of "lefts" to the General Council, including Alf Purcell of the furniture union, Alonzo Swales



Miners' leader A.J. Cook addresses a mass meeting

of the engineers, George Hicks of the builders' union, and A J Cook.

These figures pressed for the TUC to support an initiative for unity between the Amsterdam-based International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) and the Moscow-based Red International of Labour Unions (RILU). When the IFTU rejected this initiative, the TUC formed the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee with the Soviet trade unions.

Following MacDonald's defeat and Baldwin's re-election, the mine owners demanded wage cuts, an increase of the working day from seven hours to eight, and coalfield wage agreements in place of a national one. The new General Council promised industrial action in support of the MFGB. Taken by surprise and unprepared, Baldwin's government played for time and agreed to a nine month government subsidy to the mine owners to avoid a strike on 31 July 1925.

Labour paper *The Daily Herald* dubbed this tactical retreat "Red Friday", a great victory for working class solidarity. But for Baldwin this was only a breathing space for preparations to smash the unions, first and foremost the miners. He lulled the unions into quiescence with the time-honoured ruse of a Royal Commission, to investigate conditions in the mining industry. Under the chairmanship of Sir Herbert Samuel, the Commission was to report in March 1926.

## 'All Power to the General Council'

The CPGB and the Minority Movement argued for unions to give more power to the General Council so that it could act as "the general staff of Labour", and in particular so that it could call a general strike. Nevertheless it also warned that the existing leaders were not to be trusted to

use that power in the interest of the workers.

In August 1924 the National Minority Movement (NMM) stated: "It must not be imagined that the increase of the powers of the General Council will have the tendency to make it less reactionary. On the contrary, the tendency will be for it to become more so... We can guard against the General Council becoming a machine of the capitalists, and can only really evolve from the General Council a Workers' General Staff, only by, in the first place and fundamentally, developing a revolutionary class consciousness among the Trade Union membership."

J R Campbell wrote in the *Communist Review* in October 1924 that: "It would be a suicidal policy for the Communist Party and the Minority Movement to place too much reliance on what we have called the official left wing. It is the duty of our Party and the NMM to criticise its weaknesses relentlessly. The revolutionary workers must never for-



'Left wing' furniture union leader, Alonzo Swales

get that their main activity must be devoted to capturing the masses."

The weakness in this position is that it did not spell out how the union rank and file could assert its control over the union leaders and replace them if they wavered or betrayed. Worse, a real degeneration in the CPGB and the minority movement position was at hand - a collapse into a zig-zagging policy that cloaks climb-downs with "revolutionary" phrases and compromises with reformism. The origins of this lay in Moscow.

## Soviet shift

A critical change in the Soviet Communist Party's leadership had taken place. The first phase of this (between 1923 and 1925) saw the rise of Grigori Zinoviev, supported by the growing Soviet bureaucracy, and marginalised the revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky. Zinoviev had become impatient with the small CPGB's slow growth and looked to the left union leaders as a vehicle for the emergence of a mass communist party. Under his leadership, the Communist International's wooing of the TUC lefts began in earnest.

Trotsky later described this rotten method:

"This only possible road (building a revolutionary party), however, appeared too long and uncertain to the bureaucrats of the Communist International. They considered that by means of personal influence upon Purcell, Hicks, Cook and the others (conversations behind the scenes, correspondence, banquets, friendly back-slapping, gentle exhortations), they would gradually and imperceptibly draw the 'left' opposition ('the broad current') into the stream of the Communist International."

Joseph Stalin and Nicolai Bukharin

ousted Zinoviev from the right in early 1926, adopting a strategy of building "socialism in one country." This consigned national sections of the Communist International (Comintern) to the role of protecting the Soviet Union first, and subordinating revolutionary strategy in their own countries to this goal.

In Britain this meant that the Anglo-Russian Committee, and the TUC as a whole, were regarded as a vital ally of the Soviet Union against the British and French warmongers. The independent policy of the CPGB had to be sacrificed to this. It had to express complete confidence in the TUC lefts and tone down its criticism of the TUC right. This led to the CPGB concentrating more and more on the slogan "All Power to the General Council", with none of the warnings that Campbell and the NMM had previously issued.

In September 1925, the TUC's congress in Scarborough seemed to indicate a further swing to the left. But it also indicated the CPGB's swing to the right. Alonzo Swales in his chairman's remarks claimed to observe "clear indications of a world movement rising in revolt and determined to shake off the shackles of wage slavery." CPGB leader Willie Gallagher welcomed this uncritically, saying: "In the stern, tough voice of Swales spoke the working class dictatorship."

Trotsky's estimate of the congress was far more accurate: "it was left so long as it had to accept no practical obligations." Indeed a closer inspection would have revealed that a larger right wing, headed by J H Thomas, had come back onto the General Council.

A big shock to the Communists came immediately after, when the Labour Party's conference in Liverpool extended bans on CPGB members joining, and the CPGB's application to affiliate to the Labour Party was defeated even more overwhelmingly than in previous years. Moreover the General Council lefts failed to speak up for the Communists.

But the Communists only made excuses, claiming that their failure was merely due to "lack of confidence". The fact that the CPGB's allies were broken reeds however was not lost on Stanley Baldwin. On 14 October, police raided the CPGB's headquarters, arrested twelve members of its executive and charged them under the Incitement to Mutiny Act of 1797. Willie Gallagher, Wal Hannington and Harry Pollitt were shut up in Wandsworth Prison for twelve months.

The TUC leaders knew well that a massive struggle would break out in the spring when Samuel's Commission finally reported and the government subsidy ran out. They watched as the Tories prepared to militarise the country and break a general strike, and did nothing.



# Obama's broken promises in power

Dan Zaleski

IT SEEMS LIKE only yesterday that America faced the question of whether Barack Obama would be the country's first black president. In the months running up to the November 2008 election, his campaign unleashed a seemingly inexhaustible enthusiasm from millions desperate for "hope" and "change". Four years on, those hopes have been dashed.

For many, Obama's victory marked a turning point for the US, to leave behind the Dubya era, with its endless "War on Terror", its restrictions on civil liberties, its bankers' bailouts and tax breaks for the super-rich, its jobless recovery and its attacks on workers' rights to unionise.

Millions of the poorest, particularly African-Americans, looked to Obama to deliver them from a decades-long decline in wages and welfare rights, as mass unemployment and soup kitchens spread across the richest country in the world.

However rather than the light of the end of the tunnel, Obama proved to be more of the same. His rational style and skilful rhetoric could not hide policies that rewarded the Democrats' millionaire backers rather than the poor and youth who turned out in their millions to vote the Democrats in.

First the Democrats cited their perennial excuse that they needed time to clean up the Republicans' mess, despite controlling the White House and both houses of Congress. But by serving Wall Street and big business before their working class supporters they created their own defeat in 2010, with a Republican landslide taking the House of Representatives.

The Democrats' second tried and tested excuse was then wheeled out: that Obama's hands were now tied, that compromises were necessary, and that their promises would have to wait until after his re-election.

## Obama's shameful record

When car companies needed a bailout they were given a pro-capitalist restructuring policy with the President's blessing, paid for by cuts to autoworkers' jobs and wages. But the Employee Free-Choice Act was dropped, despite its being the trade unions' key demand in exchange for supporting Obama in 2008.

The already bled-dry working and middle-class taxpayers were made to re-capitalise ailing banks, buying their worthless assets and paying for the "stimulus" package. This did not put the millions of unemployed back to work, but only boosted the stock markets and bankers' profits.

Obama has kept Guantanamo and extended the CIA-led programme of drone strikes, killing hundreds of innocent women and children in Pak-



The Occupy Movement protesting against the 1 per cent

istan, Yemen and Somalia, in direct violation of their national sovereignty.

But Obama's administration has made remarkable efforts to deport immigrants from Latin America, with 400,000 "undocumented" people rounded up and kicked out since 2010. This betrayal of people promised sanctuary both to live and work, and the Latino constituency that voted for Obama, is one of the most disgraceful of all.

The one achievement the President's die-hard supporters point to is his success in passing health-care reform. Yet even this does more for health corporations than it does for workers, with millions remaining without health coverage even after the new bill is put into effect.

Now the subsidies necessary to make sure millions of people do not have to pay a fine for not having health insurance will come out of the state Medicare system instead of taxing the rich, robbing one section of workers to pay another.

As always, on every issue the Democrats' excuse to their supporters is that "the Republicans are even worse"!

## No vote for the Democrats

Obama's greatest strength is the divisions in the Republican camp, which gave the Republican candidacy to the unpopular millionaire Mitt Romney. Unsurprisingly, there is no repeat of the 2008 "movement", which saw tens of thousands of young, Black and union activists working for an Obama break, just election year business-as-usual as its costs pass the billion-dollar mark.

Though the Democrats try to pass themselves off as more progressive than the Republicans, both are big business parties, despite trade union support for the Democrats. The working class should not fall for this to vote for Obama as the "lesser evil." What's

the point of playing the lesser-evil card when the lesser evil takes office and conducts policy that is indistinguishable overall from the "greater evil"?

Activists are told to "wait" for the Democrats to deliver. Then when they deliver inadequate policies – or actually attack workers – they are told, "don't rock the boat or the Republicans will get in". This hamstringing any serious fight against war, racism and neoliberal policies. Any "gains" won this way are minimal, far less than could be gained by mobilising workers or the oppressed in a real struggle. These gains either fit in with capitalism, like Obama's health-care that requires workers to enrol for expensive plans or be fined, or see a few of the sharpest aspects of an attack knocked off, while the overall decline in living standards continues.

American workers can't keep watching their position decline forever; many are already on the bread-line. They need organisations that will mount mass campaigns, protests and strikes to defeat the policies that enrich the one per cent, whether from Obama or Romney. This is especially true as the US debt crisis comes to a head, and both parties threaten to attack key welfare gains like Social Security.

Rather than voting Obama to block the Republicans and hoping he'll be different this time around, workers, youth, and the socially oppressed should abstain from the polls and organise themselves to be ready for the inevitable class battles looming on the horizon.

To end the Democrat-Republican cycle of government that just leaves everyone worse off, the trade unions and anti-cuts movements in the US need to launch an independent working class party, with a strategy not only to block the worst effects of the capitalist system, but get rid of it completely, through a revolutionary struggle for a Socialist United States of America.

## Imperialism in the dock



## Afghanistan: troops out

Marcus Halaby

IN LATE August the number of American troops killed in the war in Afghanistan reached a total of 2,000. This includes those killed in Pakistan and other neighbouring countries.

Of particular concern to the US-led occupation forces has been the sharp rise in "green-on-blue" attacks by Afghan army and police on coalition troops, which now account for about a quarter of NATO casualties.

As a result, NATO has suspended joint operations with the very same Afghan forces that it has been training to take over the country, throwing into doubt talk of an early withdrawal of British troops.

US soldiers now have to arrange for armed guards during their meetings with Afghan forces, signalling that they no longer trust them.

The cost of the war to the Afghan people has been much higher, with around 15,000 civilians killed in the first 10 years of the occupation. A NATO air strike killed least eight women and young girls collecting firewood in Afghanistan's eastern Laghman province.

This war without clearly defined enemies began when the US President George Bush led a coalition that invaded Afghanistan after the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. It allowed Bush to survive a stolen election to unite the American people on a wave of jingoism.

Declaring a global "War on Terror" in which the US was entitled to wage anywhere in the world, Bush and Tony Blair told us that it would bring democracy, stability and women's rights to Afghanistan.

In fact, Afghanistan remains as violent and unstable now as it has ever been since the Soviet Union's invasion in 1979, the civil war that followed it – in which the US and its allies armed and funded the Muslim fundamentalist "Mujahideen" out of which the Taliban emerged – or the chaos that followed the collapse of the pro-Soviet Najibullah regime in 1992, which allowed the Taliban to take power in 1996.

The weak and corrupt government of President Hamid Karzai is not democratic. Installed in power by a foreign occupation, Karzai blatantly rigged the presidential elections in 2009.

His brother Mahmud Karzai and the rest of his family are mired in corruption, looting billions from "reconstruction" aid provided by the occupying powers, while his half-brother Ahmed Wali Karzai, assassinated last July, was known to dominate the country's vast and illegal opium trade.

As for women's rights, Karzai's government approved a law that legalises rape within marriage for members of the country's Shi'a minority in 2009, while sexual violence and the brutal treatment of women continue unabated in rural regions. Women can be jailed for complicity in "adultery" if they are raped by men to whom they are not married, while the Taliban now enjoy an increased popularity and hold sway over much of the southern part of the country as a result of their resistance to the occupation.

## Real reason for war

In fact, the real motivation for war was Afghanistan's strategic location. Sensing the re-emergence of Russia a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the concurrent rise of China, India and Brazil, the "neoconservative" faction of the US ruling class around Bush saw the invasion of Afghanistan – and later of Iraq – as an unmissable opportunity to offset the decline of US power by controlling their global rivals' access to strategic resources.

A secondary issue is Afghanistan's untapped mineral and energy resources, estimated to be worth at least \$1 trillion. And this struggle – one waged by our ruling classes for the right to plunder the rest of the world – is one that the working class in the "democratic" West has no interest in supporting.

In fact, the reverse is true. The soldiers sent to fight and die in this predatory war, who often return home either brutalised or traumatised by the experience of holding down another people by force – with all the death and destruction that involves – come overwhelmingly from working-class communities, often suffering from high levels of unemployment, who have joined the army to escape boredom and poverty. It is these communities – and not the politicians and journalists who continue to cheerlead an unpopular war – that will suffer the human cost of this war at home.

In addition, by violating the Afghan people's democratic right to determine their own national future, and thereby fanning the flames of resentment, this war has exposed ordinary people in the West to a greater risk of terrorism than previously.

It is for all of these reasons that socialists opposed the invasion of Afghanistan, oppose its continued occupation, and support the right of the Afghan people to eject the foreign occupying forces from their country.

# Europe against the bosses' offensive

The continent is still deep in recession. Coordinated by Germany, France, the European Commission and Central Bank, savage austerity is being imposed on its weaker economies. **KD Tait** looks at resistance in Portugal and Greece, plus opposition in France to the new Fiscal Treaty

**THE SOUTHERN states of the European Union – Portugal, Italy and Spain – are imposing brutal cuts to public services. The EU heavyweights, Germany, France, and even non-eurozone Britain, demand endless cuts and privatisation. These are being reinforced by a new European Fiscal Treaty.**

**The treaty introduces a “golden rule” making balanced budgets mandatory. Every state’s structural deficit would be capped at 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product. “Automatic brakes” will be triggered if this goal is missed.**

**The Europe-wide austerity policy and the new treaty for the eurozone will drive most countries into even deeper recession, more debt and increased misery for working people.**

**German workers get only the crumbs from this pillaging, but the workers of Europe should not line up with “our” bosses and governments, whose cuts prove they have no loyalty to us. Instead we must use the international character of the crisis as a weapon against the capitalists and their institutions.**

**Mass, coordinated action across Europe is vital. Workers in Germany, France and Britain need not only to organise solidarity, but also to fight to cancel illegitimate loans which impoverish other nations and reinforce national divisions.**

## Greece – the challenge to Syriza

A GENERAL STRIKE set the scene for the first confrontation between Greece’s three-month old government and the anti-cuts movement. Anywhere between 300,000 and one million people took to the streets as docks and transport ground to a halt.

Shopworkers, tax-collectors and air traffic controllers also joined the strike. Running battles broke out between protestors and some of the 3,000 police deployed in the centre of Athens.

After five years of recession and punishing austerity, the EU continues to demand what it is not owed from those who do not owe it – and the Greek government continues to promise what it is not theirs to give away.

Specifically a further £9.5 billion cuts will be made over the next two years in return for the next EU bailout. The recipe is the same old fare: deep cuts to wages, pensions, jobs and social security. Youth unemployment stands at 55 per cent, with a quarter of the working population on the dole.

These conditions are ripe for organised forces to channel popular anger against the system which caused the crisis, and against the institutions which implement the austerity.

But Syriza – the reformist-led coalition that came from the fringe of politics to nearly forming a government in the June elections – has, since then, definitely been tempering its radicalism. Hoping to coast through to electoral victory in spring 2013, its leader, Alex Tsipras, is doing more to reassure European bosses that he’s a man they can do business with, rather than involving his party in the struggles of the poor and oppressed suffering social disintegration.

Were it elected on its current programme, Syriza would use its newfound influence in the trade union bureaucracy to play a dangerous game, attempting to use the radical expectations of its mass base as bargaining chips against the IMF and EU.

But a party of government can only rule in the interests of one class. Without a programme for workers’ control of production, outright rejection of all debts and a direct call for international solidarity action, it will end up carrying out the policy of the EU moneylenders.

### Workers’ government

Nevertheless Syriza represents the most serious force for uniting the anti-austerity movement behind a programme for power. Greek workers and youth should join Syriza. But in there they must fight intransigently for the policies necessary for a workers’ government that would take decisive anticapitalist measures.

To grow and sustain a struggle which can kick out Samaras and co means rebuilding popular assemblies, committees of action capable of coordinating trade union struggles, whenever the leadership is not willing to fight. Given the rise and rise of Golden Dawn it is vital to build a united anti-fascist defence force, drawing in left parties including the Communist KKE, the unions and immigrant organisations.

Out of these bodies can emerge local councils of action which could form the basis for a genuine workers’ government – where production and the monopoly of armed force is democratically controlled by the working class itself, not a tiny clique of millionaires and the racist institutions of the capitalist state.

## Portugal on the streets



ON 15 SEPTEMBER 500,000 flooded the streets of Lisbon (10 per cent of the city’s population) and a similar number came out in other towns and cities across the country. The protests were against the latest round of cuts imposed in return for a EU bailout of €78 billion.

These demonstrations were the biggest since the Portuguese Revolution of 1974, which saw the downfall of the military dictatorship. Their slogans included “Out with the Troika!” and “We want our lives!”

Then on 4 October transport workers struck, increasing the pressure on the centre-right government of Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho. Walk-

outs on the underground and strikes on the railways and bus networks delivered a clear statement of intent from workers angry at further tax hikes and cuts.

Coelho had just announced further income tax increases for next year and his finance minister, Vitor Gaspar, added that the hike would be “enormous”. In addition the government warned the contraction of the economy will continue well into 2013 – making it a fourth year of recession. Unemployment, already 15.9 per cent is expected to rise to 16.4 percent.

The CGTP, the largest union federation with 600,000 members, has already announced a one-day gen-

eral strike against austerity on 14 November. But such days of action with long delays between them only give the government time to rally its forces, while interrupting the momentum of the movement in the streets. Portugal’s Left Bloc has laid out a three-prong strategy.

“Firstly, urgent support for popular mobilisation; secondly, support for a general strike which would unify the entire trade union movement and broaden out socially; thirdly, appealing to the Constitutional Court, with a motion of censure and a fight in Parliament to present clear alternatives.” (*International Viewpoint* October 2012)

If this means a struggle for an all-out indefinite strike to bring down Coelho then all well and good. But this will require building local delegate committees to direct a general strike to victory and protect it against a sell-out by the union leaders. If the Left Bloc’s proposals mean trailing behind the union leaders and concentrating on parliamentary manoeuvres it is too little, too late. The far left needs to spell out concrete measures for solving the crisis.

The rising tide of mass anger, and the similar struggles in Portugal’s big neighbour, requires an overtly anti-capitalist action programme and a revolutionary party able to win the masses to it.

## France: time to rebuild a revolutionary leadership

AROUND 50,000 PEOPLE marched in Paris on Saturday, under the slogan “No to the Fiscal Austerity Pact”.

Gathered under the banners of more than 60 organisations, the protesters demanded the scrapping of the treaty which will turn over control of government spending to EU bureaucrats.

The protest marked the end of Socialist president Francois Hollande’s post-election “period of grace”. The government’s austerity budget has dispelled many illusions in the Socialist Party’s ability to end the politics of making workers and

youth pay for the crisis.

The announcement of a job-creation scheme for young people is a drop in the ocean when the youth unemployment rate stands at nearly 25 per cent – rising to 50 per cent amongst immigrant and North African youth.

Headline-grabbing taxes of 75 per cent for those earning more than €1 million a year will be of little comfort to France’s three million unemployed. Inflation and wage cuts have demolished workers’ living standards, while enriching a tiny elite.

When Jean-Luc Melenchon, leader

of the Left Front, said, “today is the day the French people launch a movement against austerity”, it begged the question, what he and his allies in the Communist Party have been doing since 2008.

### Reject fiscal pact

Although a promising step forward, the movement in France continues to struggle with serious limitations. Not least of which is the Left Front’s demand for a referendum on the EU treaty.

Although, the Socialist Party’s is attempting to railroad through the

treaty, a call for a referendum is a diversion from the struggle. French workers should recognise not the slightest legitimacy in a Fiscal Pact whose only purpose is to make the working class bear the burden of the bosses’ attempts to recover from the crisis.

The timid strategy of the leadership of the French working class is a recipe for demoralisation and defeat. The failure of the wildcat refinery strikes in 2010 exposed both the union leaders’ readiness to compromise rather than fight and the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste’s (NPA) inability to challenge them for leadership.

Faced with this attack from a government elected on the promise of jobs, not cuts, the French working class has the urgent task of rebuilding a revolutionary leadership. This means organising the most militant workers in an organisation capable of taking the offensive with a strategy to beat the cuts.

This means calling for an end to all cuts, the cancellation of all the debts, nationalisation of companies which close or sack workers, rejection of the EU Austerity Pact and coordination of all the anti-austerity struggles across Europe.

# South African miners rock the ANC

Mineworkers are striking for a living wage in the face of repression from the ANC government, writes **Keith Spencer**

OVER THE LAST two months South African miners have halted gold and platinum production in a series of militant wildcat strikes. These strikes are spreading, but the struggle has cost 48 lives, mainly among the strikers.

With the world recession deepening its effect on South Africa's economy – Moody's has just downgraded its credit rating and predictions of GDP growth continue to fall – the country is headed for class struggles that could reach revolutionary proportions.

And so dependent is the world economy on South African gold and platinum, that this could have global repercussions.

## A wave of struggle

Workers are demanding wage increases of up to 16,000 rand (about £1,200) a month following the victory of the Marikana strike last month.

AngloGold Ashanti, the country's biggest bullion producer, has seen a walkout of 35,000 miners. Gold Fields has shut down as 24,000 of its workers walked out. At Anglo American group subsidiary Kumba Iron Ore, 300 strikers blockaded the giant mine at Sishen in Northern Cape province. All of these strikes are illegal under South Africa's still extremely restrictive labour laws.

Discontent is spreading to other sectors, with 20,000 truck drivers on a two-week official strike over pay. Shell is no longer able to fulfil its petrol supply contracts and the transport union involved, SATAWU, has announced that it will call out rail and port workers in mid-October, potentially crippling coal and other mineral exports.

On 5 October the world's biggest platinum producer, Anglo American Platinum (Amplats), sacked 12,000 striking miners, after three weeks of wildcat strikes by 28,000 workers had cost it £51m in lost revenue. These strikes have reduced global platinum production, pushing the market price of platinum to a five-month high of about £1,000 an ounce, more than the value of a mineworker's monthly wages.

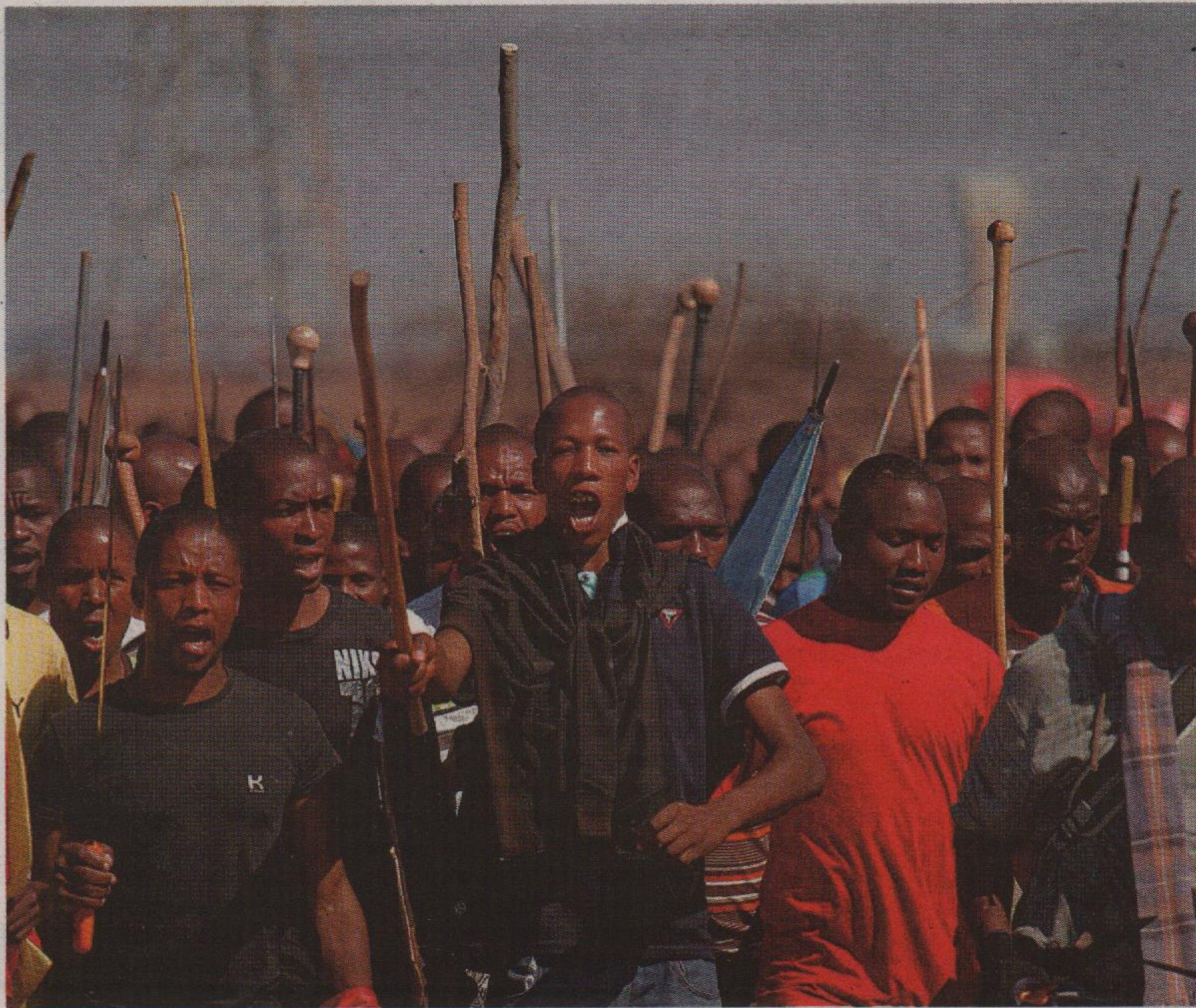
Heavily armed police have attacked picketing miners and outlawed their marches, using rubber bullets and water cannon in clashes in which one worker has been killed so far.

But workers fought back with the use of flying columns of strikers, bringing out different mines on strike and closing a fifth of them at any one time.

Amplats' action in sacking such a huge part of its workforce is clearly aimed at holding the line for all mine owners, against widespread demands for improvements in pay and working conditions to a common decency level following the victory of the Marikana strike. It is a risky strategy.

## Marikana victory

Miners at the Marikana platinum mine won a pay rise of 22 per cent, raising wages to about £900 a month.



South African miners on strike against Amplats, the world's top platinum producer

Zolisa Bodlani, a worker's leader at the mine, told Reuters: "It's a huge achievement. No union has achieved a 22 per cent increase before."

The Marikana miners faced the total intransigence of their employers, backed by the armed might of the South African state. Thirty-four miners were shot dead by the police on 16 August. Then more than 200 of them were arrested and charged with responsibility for their colleagues' deaths under the Apartheid-era "common purpose" laws. Only a national and international outcry forced the government to release them.

But still not one policeman has been charged for the murders.

Meanwhile, the ANC government has reacted to the current strikes by sending in more troops. Last month, President Jacob Zuma told parliament in Cape Town that the government would crack down on anybody stirring up trouble. "It is not just the miners striking. It is also some people of some description who are going there to instigate miners. We are going to be acting very soon."

Zuma imposed martial law and authorised the deployment of soldiers alongside the South African Police in the mining areas. He plainly intends to defeat the miners on behalf of the mine companies.

And despite formal government regrets over the Marikana massacre, the killings of workers continues. Police killed a miner with rubber bullets at a demonstration, and another was killed when he was run over by an armoured car.

## ANC betrayal

Despite the pledges of three ANC presidents since the fall of Apartheid, little has been done to improve the lives of millions of black workers. The World Bank reported in July that:

- Unemployment stands at around 33 per cent.
- The top 10 per cent of the population receives 58 per cent of the income.
- The poorest half of the population receives only 8 per cent of the income.
- The Gini co-efficient, a global measure of inequality, stands at 0.7 – one of the highest in the world and higher than it was under Apartheid (0.66).

The much talked about "black empowerment" has meant the empowerment and enrichment of an ANC-connected elite and their business cronies. The old white elite has held onto their incomes, their farms and investments. And the ANC has become the darling of the neo-liberals at the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as it handed South Africa over to the fat cats at the head of the multinationals.

Anglo American head Cynthia Carroll earned £2.2m last year, and Ian Farmer, who heads Marikana's owners Lonmin, took home £1.2m. Meanwhile their employees work in dangerous conditions and are being killed by the police for demanding £1,000 a month.

## Corruption of the unions

But serving the billionaires in London and New York are the bureaucrats of the ANC and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), many of whom have done well out of their newly-found connections.

For example, Cyril Ramaphosa was the leader of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in the late 1980s, when it led 300,000 workers on strike under the Apartheid regime. Today, he is a multi-millionaire, sits on the ANC's National Executive Committee, as well as on the board of directors at Lonmin, who paid him £61,000 as a non-executive director last year.

One miner's leader at Marikana mine told the New York Times: "We made the ANC what it is today, but they have no time for us. Nothing has changed, only the people on top, and they just keep getting more money."

ANC leaders' business relations with the bosses also affect the unions. Officials in the once-militant NUM police the union and attack those fighting for better wages. This has led to a split, with the Association of Mine Workers and Construction Union (AMCU) taking a leading part in the Marikana strike.

So bitter was the dispute in the mines between the unions that the NUM tried to blame the AMCU for the massacre. It was the militant opposition to the bosses by the AMCU that forced Lonmin to agree to a deal that satisfied both unions.

Former ANC youth leader Julius Malema visited the strikers and made

speeches in their support. He has defended them from vilification and attacked the role of the ANC in selling out the promises it made before the downfall of Apartheid.

But his motives are basically to oust Zuma and his cronies within the ANC. Were he to succeed there can be little doubt that he would defend capitalist exploitation and succumb to corruption as Zuma did before him.

In fact the records of betrayals and corruption are a natural result of the whole strategy of the ANC and its inspirers the South African Communist Party. Its Stalinist theory dictated an extended stage of capitalism after the end of Apartheid. Meanwhile the workers would have to be patient. The ANC governments under Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma carried out this programme to the hilt.

It meant workers had to work for the same bosses at the same pitiful wages while the natural riches of the country flowed abroad or at best into the pockets of a few South African middlemen. Whether these were black or white doesn't really make that much difference. Agricultural land remains largely in the hands of those who stole it a hundred years ago.

Housing, education and medical facilities improved at a snail's pace for shantytowns dwellers. The miners still suffered under a brutal regime in the mines for pitifully low wages. Yet it was the workers in the townships and the mines who waged the revolutionary struggle that eventually brought down Apartheid. They were robbed of the fruit of their victory.

Twenty years on, this new miners' uprising holds the potential to right this wrong, and complete the South African revolution.

But this time it needs to be rooted in Leon Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution. This means starting from the struggle for today's burning necessities (a living wage, a decent house, schools and clinic etc.) but goes on to deal with the unburied corpse of Apartheid in terms of inequality and reactionary labour laws, taking the road of workers' control of production and poses the anti-capitalist measures that will lay the foundations of socialism.

That is why the task of building a revolutionary party in South Africa is an urgent one. The workers and the poor in South Africa need a party that is made up of the trade unionists who are leading the mining strikes. This party it needs workers from industry and the land and the networks of community activists and the anti-privatisation forums, it needs the unemployed youth of the townships and the students from schools and colleges. If all these forces come together now to support the miners and transport workers then the foundations of such a party can be laid in the months and years ahead.

## Spain rises up against austerity

HUNDREDS OF MASKED, black-clad police advance, firing rubber bullets into the backs of fleeing protesters. In a side street young people confront vans of riot police behind a blazing barricade.

These were the streets of Madrid as Spain's government announced a further £8 billion of cuts to education, health and welfare spending in next year's budget.

Spain's pro-cuts government is taking Greece's place as the eye of the storm. Millions turned out for three demonstrations in five days against wave after wave of cuts that are destroying jobs and communities with the aim of boosting profits for the rich.

### Cuts don't work

Years of austerity have been a disaster for Spain. The latest protests come after £22 billion was slashed from this year's budget and a further £8 billion of cuts were announced for next year's. On top of this, the £50 billion EU bailout of Spain's banks will be paid for by millions of Spanish workers through cuts in jobs and pay.

More than 100,000 public sector workers have already been sacked. Total unemployment is above 25 per cent. Those who remain are enduring a third year of pay freezes, while workload intensifies as employees try to compensate for the shortfall.

With youth unemployment pushing 55 per cent, there is no shortage of the angry, young and poor ready to defy the police curfews. During the "Occupy Congress" demonstration on 25 September, thousands of youthful indignados abandoned their previous peaceful tactics and tried to storm the police barriers shielding Spain's political elite.

After the months of bitter struggle by miners and their communities to defend their jobs, the increasing violence of the protests reveals growing anger, against premier Mariano Rajoy and his right-wing government but also frustration at the failure of the political and trade union leadership of the working class to organise genuine resistance.

### Crisis of leadership

In Spain, as elsewhere, union leaders have stuck to a series of limited one day protest strikes and mass demon-

This struggle against savage austerity has spread from Greece to Spain and beyond. KD Tait looks at how the struggles can halt the attacks



Photo: Guy Smallman

strations, each followed by a long period of inaction – a strategy which can only lead to defeat. Desperate to maintain their privileged positions as go-betweens for the working class, the government and the employers, reformist union bosses and politicians

alike have exercised a dampening effect on these protests. Why? To demonstrate the invaluable service they can render to the bosses and extract some limited concessions that will save their face. Some hope!

Given the severity of this crisis this

will mean nothing less than negotiating away decades of hard-won employment rights, public services and the rights of workers, youth, women, national minorities and immigrants.

Insecurity, flexibility and profitabil-

### Not separation but socialist revolution

The Spanish right wing government is besieged from all sides. It faces a deepening political crisis, as the central government proves unable or unwilling to rescue bankrupt regional governments.

The million-strong demonstration for Catalan independence in Barcelona on 11 September reveals the growth of secessionist ideas as both a rejection of Spanish state austerity, and a popular desire for greater democratic control.

In reality the goal of an independent and prosperous capitalist Catalonia is a pipe dream. Wrapped in populist and even left wing slogans, its foundations lie in the naked interest of the region's wealthy bosses, who don't want to see their profits used to subsidise poorer areas. A new, tiny country would be even weaker against the ravages of the international capitalist speculators and bond markets. The economic price would be the sacrifice of public services.

The reaction of the Spanish military – "We will do

everything to protect the integrity of the Spanish state" – is an ugly reminder of the role the army generals played in defending Franco's dictatorship. The Catalans and the Basques should have the right to determine whether to stay as part of the Spanish state – that is the most elementary democracy and it is a sign of how incomplete the democratisation of the 1970s was that it can be rudely rejected by Rajoy and Franco's successor party, Partido Popular.

If the non-Castilian peoples of the Spanish state democratically vote to secede, the entire Spanish workers' movement must support them. But for socialists this separation should not be our goal.

The future of Spanish workers lies with one another and with all the workers of Europe. But the undemocratic imperialist EU is a bosses' club, which exists to defend the common interests of Europe's ruling class. The crisis has exposed it as a naked instrument of class rule. That's why we must fight for a socialist Spain in a Socialist United States of Europe.

ity are the objectives of endless cuts. If the privileged leaders of the working class are too compromised by their association with the bosses, then we need to fight for the working class to build truly independent, accountable bodies capable of coordinating and leading action.

Nor does the Occupy Movement, as it stands, offer any strategy which points the way forward. Occupying squares, besieging the parliament may involve militant sections of the unemployed and youth for more extended periods than a one-day strike or mass demonstration.

But it does not address the question: how do we get rid of the government that is imposing these cuts? It may give a feeling of empowerment but it does not give people power. The limits of direct action, violent as well as non-violent, have been demonstrated in Greece for three years, in the United States by the Occupy Movement, in Spain itself over the last twelve months.

### The need for parties

As Greece showed in June the struggle is above all a political one – the austerity governments must be driven from power. For that we need assemblies – yes. More than that we need committees of action, elected in the workplaces but also in the squares and the communities blighted by unemployment, to plan and organise a general strike. We need to draw in the immigrant workers, defending them against police and right wing attack.

But we also need parties – parties of the class struggle – ones not afraid to say open: "We are fighting for power, power to change the world, to end the exploitation and austerity of capitalism for good."

With such organisations it would be possible to launch not just a one-day protest strike but an all-out indefinite general strike to smash the austerity programme and drive out Rajoy and his government. It will then be possible to pose the question to all the parties and unions that have fought in the struggle – unite to create a workers' government to make the rich pay for their crisis and provide jobs and restore services on the road to a socialist Spain.