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January-February 2014 ★ Donation - £1 suggested ★ Issue 376

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

Endless austerity



All in it together? Cameron prepares to lecture the Lord Mayor's Banquet on the need to tighten our belts (after a four-course meal, that is)

Osborne hails recovery but announces deeper cuts to services, wages and pensions. Meanwhile Ed Balls pledges to stick with Tory cuts. To save our services and raise living standards we need a new workers' party

By Jeremy Dewar

TORY CHANCELLOR George Osborne toasted in the New Year with a pledge to make further cuts, at least until 2018, twice as long as the Coalition claimed austerity would last.

He said, "We've got to make more cuts. £17 billion this coming year. £20 billion next year. And over £25 billion further across the two years after. That's more than £60 billion in total."

That's on top of the £46 billion of cuts already made and the £20 billion "savings" demanded from the NHS.

But Osborne's speech didn't come out of the blue.

Apparently oblivious to the irony of defending cuts to a room full of well-stuffed, gold and ermine bedecked bankers and CEOs, David Cameron chose the setting of a lavish, four-course banquet for the Lord Mayor of London to set out his vision of Tory Britain:

"That doesn't just mean making difficult decisions on public spending. It also means

something more profound. It means building a leaner, more efficient state. We need to do more with less. Not just now, but permanently."

Endless austerity. This millionaires' cabinet won't stop until they have destroyed the welfare state and rolled back public services and benefits to where they were in the 1930s.

No sooner has a fragile recovery, one based largely on increased household debt, the very thing that triggered the last crisis, started to emerge after the longest and deepest recession in history, than the greedy bosses demand a further tightening of the screw.

Even while they are still trying to make us pay for their crisis, they want to make us pay for their recovery too.

Cutting to the bone

Osborne's autumn statement opened the door. Here he announced:

- Bringing forward the raising of the retirement age to 68 and then 69 by about 12 years

- Introducing a cap on welfare spending, regardless of economic conditions
- Removing all benefits from under-19s without English and Maths GCSEs
- Workfare or community work for anyone unemployed for six months
- A further £2 billion of spending cuts over the next two years.

In addition, Osborne said he would look at granting the Office for Budget Responsibility powers to force future governments to deliver a budget surplus every year.

The Tories' goal of slashing another £25 billion from government spending would target benefits and council services.

The next Conservative manifesto would include the scrapping of housing benefit for 350,000 under-25s, a saving of £1.8 billion. Around half of those affected are families or single parents with children. Despite the recent small fall in the jobless figures, one in five young people are still not in

employment, education or training.

The Nasty Party are also reconsidering plans drawn up by Work and Pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith to cut £3.1 billion from benefits for families with more than two children.

Of course, many of these cuts would fall on people in work, as increasingly the benefits system is used to subsidise poverty wage-paying employers and rack-renting landlords. Wages have fallen behind prices by at least 2 per cent per year since the crash in 2008, more for the poorest; private sector rents are rising annually by around 6 per cent, more in London.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reports that for the first time ever, more than half of those living in poverty, 13 million people, are in work.

Labour

Labour, unsurprisingly, has only offered as an alternative, austerity-lite, though the lightness of its touch is relative. In par-

ticular, shadow chancellor Ed Balls remains committed to sticking to the Tories' spending plans for the first two years of the next Labour government.

Labour's Business Secretary Chuka Umunna claims there is "too much" low-skill immigration from the EU; only those with a guaranteed job should be allowed in.

Meanwhile the party's schools spokesperson Tristram Hunt has called for teachers to have a renewable "licence to practice", putting them on short-term contracts throughout their career.

These reactions from Labour's frontbench show the party is only ready to carry on where the Coalition left off.

With such an uninspiring pledge, it is far from guaranteed that enough voters will vote them into office in the first place, no matter how hated the Tories and Lib Dems are.

Besides which, many can't afford the luxury of waiting that long. University and college staff, cleaners, tube work-

ers and firefighters are all engaged in industrial action. Activists are campaigning against the bedroom tax, zero hours contracts and attacks on the disabled.

Leadership

But they are being let down by union leaders, who seem more intent on calling off strikes in favour of rotten deals, and victimising militants who demand tougher action. For the likes of Len McCluskey, Dave Prentis and Billy Hayes, nothing should threaten the safe return of a Labour government.

This strategy didn't work in the 1980s, and it won't work now.

What we need is a new party of the working class. Left Unity could develop into that party; but it will have to ditch the idea of running a "mixed" capitalist economy if elected, and adopt a fighting programme to put an end to "permanent austerity" in the here and now.

That is the task we face in 2014.

Where we stand

The capitalists' property must be expropriated, with not a penny paid in compensation.

Capitalism must be abolished across the globe and a world without class division, state repression or the oppression of women, subject races and nations, must be created. That is what revolutionary socialists call communism.

All power must pass from the capitalist elite into the hands of democratic councils of delegates from the working class, the peasantry and the poor directly elected by the masses and subject to instant recall. These councils must be supported by the armed working class and its allies.

The resistance of the exploiters must be broken by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution. Armed workers must forcibly break up the police and army that exist to support the rule of private property.

All production and distribution must be organised democratically and sustainably, without private ownership and the blind and brutal dictatorship of market forces.

Social inequality and the underdevelopment of whole continents must be overcome through the planned allocation of humanity's resources: raw materials, means of transportation, communication, technology and labour.

Imperialism, the highest and most violent stage of capitalism, means the exploitation of billions in all countries, it means blockades, invasions and occupations.

We support all resistance to imperialism and its agents and demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. We demand the withdrawal of all British troops from abroad

including from Northern Ireland. We demand the dissolution of Nato and all imperialist pacts.

We support the Palestinians' struggle to free their homeland from Zionist occupation and to create a single country "from the river to the sea", in which Arabic and Hebrew speaking citizens can live in freedom and equality.

There is only one road to this freedom. It is the road of class struggle and revolution, the fight against all forms of exploitation and oppression.

We demand equal rights for minorities, an end to all racist discrimination and an end to the lies of the racists in the mass media, which whip up violence against black people and other oppressed communities and ethnic groups. We fight against all immigration controls; they are inherently racist.

We fight for women's liberation: from the burden of childcare and domestic labour, which must be socialised; from rape, physical and mental abuse, from unequal pay and discrimination at work.

Women alone must control when and whether they have children, not the state or the churches. This includes defending and extending the right to free abortion and contraception on demand.

Lesbians, gay men and transgender people must be defended against harassment on the streets, at work and in the schools. They must have equal legal rights to marry and bring up children.

We fight the oppression of young people and demand an end to their harassment by the police, the government and the press. Young workers should have equal pay and equal rights with other workers.

We fight for free, universal education, under the control of students, teachers and other education workers themselves.

We fight for an autonomous, revolutionary socialist youth movement.

We fight the catastrophe of climate change, resisting corporations which pollute the earth, governments that refuse to take action against the emission of greenhouse gases, and policies which put the profits of big oil, the auto industry and the power generators before the very survival of our species.

We oppose reformism and the pro-capitalist policies of the Labour Party. Capitalism cannot be reformed via elections and peaceful parliamentary means; it must be overthrown by the masses through force.

We oppose the control of the trade unions by unaccountable bureaucrats. Union members should have full democratic control. All officials must be regularly elected, and subject to instant recall; they must earn the average pay of the members they claim to represent. A rank and file movement to carry out this transformation.

In the fight against austerity, we call for a united anti-austerity movement pledged to oppose every cut, for local councils of action, and for mass industrial and direct action, up to and including a general strike to halt the assault on the NHS, the welfare state and education and to kick out the coalition.

We fight for a workers' government based on the fighting organisations of the working class and the socially oppressed.

We propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in Britain to build a new working class revolutionary party. Workers Power is the British section of the League for a Fifth International. It fights for a world party organised across national boundaries on a programme for world revolution.

Don't let anti-immigrant hysteria divide us

By Bernie McAdam

HARD ON the heels of the Tories' new Immigration Bill, with its tougher stance against people coming to the UK for work, comes a new wave of hysteria surrounding the so-called "Romanian invasion".

On 1 January, Romanians and Bulgarians gained the same working rights as other European Union citizens, making them eligible to migrate to Britain. Guess what? No mass influx has occurred.

UKIP's Nigel Farage, with his talk of a "Romanian crime wave", is not the only scaremonger. Philippa Roe, Tory leader of Westminster City Council, has warned that council taxpayers face rising bills from Romanian and Bulgarian immigration. Not only that, but Roma have apparently been "begging aggressively" and "defecating" on people's front doorsteps.

The racist Roe offered no evidence for her smear, of course, preferring simply to let the stench of her comments fester in people's imagination. Presumably Roe, Farage and others believe if they put out enough unsubstantiated lies, some of them will stick.

The Daily Mail, true to its Nazi past, was only too delighted to play its role in highlighting Roe's comments. On New Year's Eve, it hysterically claimed "tens of thousands of Eastern Europeans expected in UK tomorrow".

The Mail also informed us that Staffordshire police boss Matthew Ellis claims that Romanian criminals were more prolific than those from any other country! What they failed to say was that they accounted for just 2.5 per cent of all arrests – which may say more about the police's racial profiling.

Statistics gathered over many decades strongly suggest the opposite: that migrant workers are far more likely to be the victims of crime, rather than perpetrators.

Joining in the chorus, Ed Miliband warns that an influx of low-skilled workers from Romania and Bulgaria will make life tougher for Britons and some UK nationals will "lose out". Labour's reaction to Cameron's three month



Migrant worker doing typically hard and dirty work: cleaning London Underground

block on EU migrants' access to work benefits from 1 January is no better. Labour complains this should have been done nine months ago.

At a time when austerity and cutbacks are hammering working class living standards, how convenient for politicians and the media to scapegoat immigrants. As UKIP leads the gallop to the right, the main parties look nervously at their appeal. Labour and Tories are catching up fast. All seem to agree that we have too many migrants for our own good.

Immigrants not to blame

Why is this very old right wing and racist argument that migrants are to blame a load of cock and bull? Let us look at the facts. Immigration is not a drag on the economy. It makes a net contribution to the UK economy of £3 billion.

University College London reports that migrants have made substantial contributions to public finances since 2000 and are actually less likely to claim benefits or live in social housing than native Brits. Those from the European Economic Area (EEA – the EU plus Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein) contributed 34 per cent more in taxes than they received in benefits in the decade up to 2011, while migrants from outside the EEA contributed 2 per cent more than they received in the same period.

Migrants overwhelmingly come here to find jobs; most of them are, after all, of working age. There are also those who flee war and disaster, mainly from countries that have traditionally been exploited and pillaged by Western imperialist powers. If they are working here then they should be entitled to all the social services and

legal rights of this country. All who live and work in this country should be treated equally.

Neither are they a drain on the NHS or any other service. Quite the opposite. The NHS would collapse but for the doctors and nurses from poorer countries – countries that invested in training up those workers for our benefit. The real enemy of the NHS is the Tory-led government, cutting and privatising our services.

We should also remember that British people emigrate, too. Nearly four and a half million British migrants have escaped to their top ten destinations in the world, led by just over a million ending up in Australia. Spain, Ireland, France and Germany are the main EU destinations. Those who migrate from Britain have every right to go where they wish, as have those from abroad who want to come to Britain.

Workers' unity

Immigration controls should all be scrapped. The borders should be open and people should be free to go where they want. The trade unions should fight for this and should also confront the problem of employers exploiting migrants for cheap labour. A militant campaign to unionise migrant labour and increase the minimum wage is required. This must be linked to a mass movement of all workers against austerity.

Such a struggle would lay bare the real reason for anti-migrant hysteria. It is nothing less than a convenient ruse for our rulers to divide and rule. It distracts attention from the attacks that our rulers are making on working people as a whole. There is no national interest above class – workers of all countries, unite!

CONTACT US

Workers Power is the British section of the League for the Fifth International

We can be contacted via email at: office@workerspower.co.uk
Follow us on Facebook at: facebook.com/workerspowerbritain
Visit our websites at: www.workerspower.co.uk www.fifthinternational.org
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The poverty of recovery

By KD Tait

SIX YEARS into the recession women, young people and part-time workers have suffered the biggest drop in living standards since records began in the Victorian era.

The sharp rise in inequality is the result of a deliberate policy aimed at restoring profitability for the bosses by destroying the social gains of the working class: secure jobs, decent wages and pensions, the National Health Service and the social safety net.

One third of children and 20 per cent of working age adults without children now live in poverty. For the first time, working families living in poverty now outnumber families where no one is in work.

Work doesn't pay

Millions have had their pay frozen or limited to below-inflation increases. Restrictions on access to various benefits that helped subsidise poverty pay have brought about bumper profits for payday loan sharks and misery for ordinary people.

Over five million people are now classed as "low paid", meaning they



Food Bank Britain

earn less than £13,600 per year, representing 60 per cent of national average income.

Low paid workers in the public sector have doubled to one million, a result of competition with private outsourcing firms, sacrificing workers' pay to the bottom line. A quarter of local government employees running essential services are paid poverty wages by council bosses who can earn up to £200,000 a year.

But it is the private sector that is the worst offender, with retail workers, cashiers, sales assistants and waiters

paid the minimum wage on contracts that provide no job security, pensions or sick pay.

Women and youth hit hard

The destruction of full-time posts and their partial replacement with insecure part-time or zero hours contracts have hit women and youth particularly hard, with 39 per cent of low paid jobs now done by people under 30.

In 2012, 27 per cent of women in work earned less than the living wage, compared with just 15 per cent of men. The loss of hundreds of thousands of

public sector jobs has disproportionately affected women, who are also more likely to be sacked, widening the gender pay gap for the first time in five years, to 19.7 per cent.

Instead of investing in training young people to build homes or become teachers and nurses, this millionaire coalition has conscripted tens of thousands into compulsory welfare schemes, which provide free labour for billionaire supermarket bosses.

Cost of living crisis

The wealth of the richest one per cent has increased by 10 per cent in a year. Meanwhile ordinary people are forced to choose between food and fuel, with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reporting that 350,000 people were forced to use food banks in 2012-13.

The same report shows the cost of electricity, gas and other fuels soaring by 140 per cent in the last decade, while food prices have risen faster than inflation for the last five years. Domestic water charges have risen by 69 per cent in the last decade, while the cost of public transport rose by 87 per cent.

Most painfully of all for many, rents

are now rising twice as quickly as earnings are. The government and media demonise housing benefit claimants, but most claimants are in work; and every last penny of the money that they receive lines the pockets of parasite landlords who drive up rents year after year.

Capitalism works for the rich

There is no process that automatically reduces inequality in a market economy.

Although the politics of austerity have impoverished millions, the growth of inequality is the necessary outcome of a system where production is carried out according to what is profitable for capitalists, and not according to what is necessary for society as a whole.

As long as society is governed by the anarchy of the market, the working class is compelled to enter a collective struggle to improve its living conditions. The welfare state, pensions and the right to vote were not received as gifts, but the result of struggle. Until we abolish a system run by and for the rich, then we will get only what we take by struggle, in the "recovery" just as much as in recession.

The Tories' war against the unions

By Rebecca Anderson

2014 LOOKS SET to be the year the Tories pick up where Thatcher left off and try to smash the trade unions. If the Lobbying Bill going through parliament right now is combined with new measures to restrict strikes and protests, then a comprehensive raft of anti-union laws could be passed before the next General Election.

Thatcher's government banned secondary action (action in solidarity with other workers), restricted the issues that industrial action can be taken over and imposed the use of postal rather than workplace ballots. These measures already make effective strike action almost impossible, but Cameron's government wants to take away our rights to campaign and protest against the government and employers, and for the state to have access to trade union membership lists.

TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady pointed out when the government's inquiry into trade union activities was launched in November that "we already have what is commonly acknowledged as the most restrictive anti-union laws in any dem-



Grangemouth workers take protest to boss's home

ocratic country". But the Tories want to take advantage of the unions' perceived weakness by restricting our rights even further.

The inquiry came after the defeat of the Grangemouth workers in November, when Ineos boss Jim Ratcliffe issued an ultimatum that 1,400 staff must agree to a no-strike deal and the erosion of their terms and conditions. Trade union Unite failed to stand up to this corporate bully and agreed to his terms. Once the Tories had finished slapping each other on the back,

they realised that they had the opportunity to kick the trade unions while they were down. The pretext for the inquiry was that Unite campaigners had unfairly targeted Ratcliffe in their campaign against his attacks on their jobs and conditions.

Banning protests and strikes

The inquiry will look at creating new laws against "inappropriate and intimidatory actions" in industrial disputes, although it's unlikely that it will deal seriously with issues like blacklisting

and certainly won't stop Ratcliffe from holding the country to ransom by shutting down the Grangemouth oil refinery. These new laws could involve both financial sanctions for unions and greater powers for police to harass and arrest strikers and protesters.

The inquiry will also look at industrial relations in industries that affect the national infrastructure, and at investor confidence in these industries. The threat here is that the government could take forward the idea of blanket bans on strikes in certain sectors, or greater powers for the courts to impose injunctions on strikes. One group of workers that might be targeted by such a move is tube workers organised by the RMT union. They have just announced two 48-hour strikes against plans to close ticket offices and axe 750 jobs.

This group of workers has the power to shut down London, and Tory mayor Boris Johnson would welcome the ability to ban them from defending jobs, conditions and passenger safety. As far back as 2009 he was quoted as saying: "We need to take the thumbs of the RMT off the windpipe of London commuters with a no-strike deal that gives both sides

the benefit of an independent arbitrator."

Finally, the inquiry will look at the role of the government, employers and employees in industrial relations, pointing the way towards recommendations that encourage public and private sector employers alike to mimic the government's attacks on the Civil Service trade unions last year.

Just an election stunt?

A Unite Spokesperson in November called this inquiry "a Tory election stunt which no trade unionist will collaborate with". But there aren't large numbers of strikes, and this isn't just an attempt to rally the public by accusing trade unions of switching off the lights. This inquiry could result in quite serious changes to the law, and the union movement needs to go further than non-cooperation.

After all, Labour promised in 1997 that it would repeal Thatcher's anti-union laws, but despite a large majority in Parliament it did not even table a bill. If the Tories try to pass laws further restricting the rights of trade unionists, then we need to organise to stop them, and not just wait for Labour to win an election.

Tube workers strike over safety and jobs

By Jeremy Dewar

RMT MEMBERS ON the London Underground have voted by 77 per cent to strike against nearly 1,000 job cuts and the proposed closure of all 268 ticket offices by 2015.

This is a serious attack on all tube workers and users. Not only could it leave travellers stranded and unable to buy a ticket, it would also represent another step towards a totally automated service, with driverless trains on one of the world's busiest underground rail networks.

Mayor Boris Johnson tried to sugar the pill by announcing plans to run the network for 24 hours a day on weekends.

The issue of safety

But how safe will that leave cleaning and inspecting the tunnels, or the increased fire hazard this will mean if there is no

downtime for these tasks? Understaffing stations is a threat to safety.

The argument that closures are necessary to pay for 24-hour weekend opening is entirely bogus. The £42 million annual savings made by the cuts is in fact only made necessary by the £78 million reduction in London Underground's budget by Transport for London. In any case, if you were looking for money, the incredible wealth of the City of London isn't exactly that far away.

Similarly, the claim that there will be no compulsory redundancies, and that 250 jobs will be created to ensure that stations are always staffed also misses the point.

In a period of mass unemployment, job cuts mean families unable to afford to continue to live in London and school-leavers rotting on the



dole. Indeed, London Underground's own propaganda about the changes claims that there will be an extra 1.6 million people living in London

by 2030, but only an additional 600,000 jobs.

The bigger picture is an enormous attack on the service. More will follow this year's £78

million budget cut: a colossal £270 million by 2020. Ultimately, Johnson and the tube bosses want driverless trains, so they never have to see another

tube strike bring London to a standstill ever again, with all the cost to big business and the City.

The idea of trains with no one on them to take charge in emergencies and guide passengers to safety, as drivers did during the 7 July 2005 tube bombings, should be hair-raising.

It is a great start to the campaign that drivers and other grades have voted so heavily to defend station members' jobs. This is the strength of an industrial union.

It is also significant that the union has called two 48-hour strikes in quick succession.

However, if London Underground refuse to back down, with the ambitious Tory Johnson pulling the strings behind them, or if they organise a scabbing operation, then tube workers will need to picket out Aslef members and extend the action to an all-out indefinite strike.

Vote No to Royal Mail's rotten deal

By a CWU Rep

CWU MEMBERS ARE being balloted on the new "Agenda for Growth" agreement, with the union's postal executive recommending we accept it. But postal workers should vote No, as the deal leaves us worse off and weakens the union.

Of course we deserve the 9.1 per cent pay rise over three years; we've been waiting nearly a year for it. Many will want to vote Yes to get it, despite it being only half a per

cent more than Royal Mail's original offer. The recently privatised company can certainly afford more, with profits up by a huge 50 per cent!

Get-out clauses

Looking beyond pay though, the deal gets worse. After privatisation most workers' big worry was that Royal Mail's three-year guarantee on terms and conditions weren't enough. The strike threat forced them to extend this to five and add legally binding "protections" against a two-tier workforce,

zero hours contracts, or carving up the company.

But Royal Mail can pull out of these if they are "reasonably likely to have a materially adverse effect on the employer's business or prospects", a get-out so vague it could cover almost anything.

TNT is rolling out city centre deliveries based on low wages and zero hour contracts, while Amazon is building local hubs for cheaper delivery companies. How long before Royal Mail withdraws these protections, using this threat to force

concessions in the meantime?

The deal's focus on "improvements to efficiency" is also worrying, especially for delivery staff. A review is promised in January, but how will that resolve them if current negotiations can't? A forced mediation process will make it harder for reps in all workplaces to disagree with issues, strengthening management's hand across all sectors.

CWU officials are insisting this isn't a no-strike deal, but that is perverse to say the least. Royal Mail can renege on the

deal if there is "national-scale industrial action [...] in the majority of operational workplaces" or if action is likely to have "a similarly disruptive effect".

Kick out the deal!

This deal will see more job losses, higher workloads and more bully-boy managers, resulting in a weaker union. Vote No and demand that all issues are resolved in a way that guarantees our future and maintains our workplace strength: by putting the

strike back on.

If the deal goes through, CWU tops will cosy up with Royal Mail bosses at board meetings and reviews, throwing away all our gains just to keep them from pulling out.

A strong No vote could enable the rank and file to organise and force Dave Ward and Billy Hayes to launch some hard-hitting strikes. Now, before the shareholders have settled, is the time to beat back management and show them the CWU membership is a force to be reckoned with.

3 Cosas campaign escalates struggle

By Marcus Halaby

ONE OF THE most precariously employed groups of workers in London has shown this last year that it is still possible to fight and win, given enough organisation and solidarity.

Agency cleaners at the University of London (UoL), many of them immigrants from Latin America, West Africa or Eastern Europe, struck for 48 hours on 27 November against employer Balfour Beatty

WorkPlace (BBW), and again on 3 December, demanding "3 cosas": sick pay, holiday pay and pensions in line with directly employed staff, as well as safeguards against job cuts arising from the closure of Garden Halls, and the recognition of their union, the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB).

They immediately won partial concessions on sick pay and holiday pay after their first strike. Three further strike days have been set for 27 to 29 January.

Their action received considerable support from students and others, who contributed thousands in donations to a strike fund, so that all workers were fully compensated for wages lost in the first strike.

A student occupation of UoL's Senate House on 4 December in solidarity with their second strike was violently evicted after university management called in the police without negotiations, provoking a "Cops Off Campus" demonstration the following day, at which dozens were arrested.

The 3 Cosas campaign originally began in September 2012, following a campaign by public sector union Unison's Senate House Branch for the London Living Wage of £8.50 an hour, alongside a recruitment drive. The IWGB was formed in April 2013 as a breakaway from Unison after the Unison branch chair and vice chair tried to obstruct official union funding for the campaign and the election of outsourced immigrant workers to the branch leadership.

Having broken free of the

Unison bureaucracy, the cleaners have been able to conduct action on their own terms. But they have had to do so without the benefit of an established union's resources, and without being able to challenge the bureaucracy's continued grip over it.

Crucially, the deal made by UoL and BBW management was with Unison, not the IWGB, even though it would not have been possible without the IWGB's well-attended strike and noisy solidarity demonstrations.

Similarly, this deal ignored the issues of pensions and threatened job cuts.

To go beyond what has already been achieved, here as elsewhere, what is needed is a movement in the unions to reclaim them for their members, to enable them to take action without the officials where necessary, and alongside them where possible.

The 3 Cosas campaign has already achieved the first; future struggles should aim to put the officials under the control of their rank and file.

Broad lefts or rank and file?

There is renewed interest in rank and file trade unionism among sections of the far left at the moment. Here we publish a guest article by **Tim Nelson** of the International Socialist Network (ISN) as a contribution towards future joint work

THERE IS CURRENTLY a debate within the socialist movement about the trade union bureaucracy. The recent defeat at Grangemouth and the subsequent capitulation by several union leaders in calling off strike action are just the latest in a series of examples of trade union leaderships putting the brakes on any fightback against the bosses and their austerity programme.

These defeats have also called into question the strategy of much of the left. Many on the left have, for a long period, pursued a strategy of aligning themselves with the left wing of the trade union bureaucracy in the hope of pulling them towards more militant action.

I would argue that the last two years of retreats have proved this strategy to be a failure, and that the revolutionary left needs to make a dramatic shift in orientation towards rank and file members of the unions.

We need to concentrate, wherever we can, on rebuilding workplace organisation and networks of rank and file activists, in the hope of building a movement from below which will have the potential for the militant activity necessary to fight and win.

The defeat at Grangemouth was a stunning blow for the trade union movement. Grangemouth Oil Refinery is one of the best-organised workplaces in the country. Unite, which organises its workforce, is the largest union in Britain, led by General Secretary Len McCluskey, a left wing former official.

McCluskey's supporters argue that the Grangemouth deal was the best available under the circumstances, and congratulate Unite for stopping the closure of the plant. Others accept that it was a defeat, but maintain that it was down to the lack of a "mood to fight" among rank and file workers at Grangemouth, and that while criticisms of the Unite bureaucracy may be valid, they do not answer the question why a supposedly significant and highly organised workplace capitulated.

I would argue that the very nature of the relationship between the union bureaucracy



and the rank and file is what brought about this defeat, and it is an example of the role the bureaucracy is currently playing throughout the movement. The only solution to this state of affairs is the rebuilding of a rank and file movement through workplace organisation, irrespective of how difficult this task may seem.

The Communist Party

This is the latest stage in a long running debate about the nature of the unions, and the strategy that socialists should employ within them. It can be traced, like most debates on the left, back to the Communist Party of Great Britain. A revolutionary party founded in 1920, by 1926 the Communist Party had roughly five thousand members, and asserted great influence within the unions, particularly through the National Minority Movement, which aimed to organise the militant minority within the movement, and which involved a number of key officials and leaders.

The role of the Communist Party would be put to the test by the 1926 General Strike. This was without doubt the greatest event of British trade union and working class militancy in the last century. From 3 to 13 May 1926, 1.7 million workers were out on strike in support of the

Miners' Federation. Despite high levels of support and militancy, after those ten days the TUC leadership called off the strike and capitulated to the government, leaving the miners to fight alone.

Leon Trotsky criticised the line taken by the Communist Party at this time. Their aim was to use the Minority Movement to relate to and influence the left wing union leaders in order to pull the movement towards more militant action.

Trotsky argued that while the split between left and right wing bureaucrats was real, the main division in the workers' movement was between the bureaucracy and the rank and file. The left of the bureaucracy was no more capable of leading the strike to victory than the right:

"In the British labour movement, international questions have always been the line of least resistance to the leaders. Regarding international matters as a kind of safety-valve for the radical moods of the masses, these esteemed leaders are prepared to a certain extent even to bow to a revolution (elsewhere) so that they can take still more revenge on questions of the internal class struggle. The left faction of the General Council is distinguished by its complete ide-

logical shapelessness and is therefore incapable of organisationally assuming the leadership of the trade union movement."

Union bureaucrats are privileged compared to their members. They owe their position to the workers, whose membership and activity maintain the union apparatus, but are also put at risk by increased militancy. The bureaucracy's role is to mediate between the workers and the bosses.

When workers engage in direct conflict with the bosses, they undermine this role. Their increased militancy leads them to organise themselves and generate their own leaderships and organisation, which threaten the bureaucracy's position. Bureaucrats also fear that increased militancy could lead to the smashing of the union apparatus.

These social factors override any division there may be between the left and right of the bureaucracy; even the most left wing official relies on the passivity of the working class for their position.

Trotsky's position was proven correct when the TUC called off the General Strike. Not only did the right wing of the bureaucracy sell out the strike, but they also took the left wing with them, leaving the miners to fight on.

Broad lefts

The experience of the 1926 General Strike and Trotsky's arguments have had a major influence on the perspectives of the far left ever since. As the Soviet Union degenerated, the Communist Parties pursued an increasingly bureaucratised approach to the trade union movement. The aim was to build "broad lefts" with the left of the bureaucracy, with an eye to capturing positions in the union apparatus and influencing leaders.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the International Socialists rejected this approach. They argued that rather than orientate towards the bureaucracy through broad lefts, revolutionary socialists should concentrate on building organisations among the rank and file, and that the main focus of activity should be the workplace.

As Marxists we argue that the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself, and therefore our main focus should be on encouraging its self-activity. Broad left blocs, orientating towards the bureaucracy and concentrating on winning positions within the unions substitute the activity of the few for that of the working class.

In recent years we have seen some on the far left shift away from the focus on the rank and

file towards a "broad left" approach. In some unions, such as the PCS, UCU, NUT and Unite, "united left" formations have in fact become the dominant forces, taking control of the leadership.

While left wing leaderships are of course preferable to right wing ones, these leaderships have recently proven that they are just as willing to hold back struggle as the right. Following the massive public sector pensions strikes on 30 November 2011, the union bureaucracy put a halt to any further action, including the left wing leaderships of the civil service and education unions.

The capitulation of the Unite leadership over Grangemouth further proved the limitations of left wing union leaders, as did the surrender of the CWU over the privatisation of Royal Mail. After the defeats of the 1980s and the subsequent 20 years of low-level struggle, the bureaucracy has come to dominate the trade union movement.

Rank and file participation in the unions is low, and action independent of the bureaucracy is rare. These objective factors mean that the revolutionary left seeking to initiate a new rank and file movement has only small forces available to it at the moment.

We cannot, however, continue with the strategy of tying ourselves to the bureaucracy through the united lefts, and relying on them to take the struggle forward. There are signs of embryonic rank and file organisations being formed.

In the Unite General Secretary election, Jerry Hicks won 80,000 votes as a rank and file candidate, and a new campaign, Unite Grassroots Rank and File, has been launched. The Sparks won a stunning victory in 2012, and, despite recent setbacks, postal workers continue to prove that they are capable of wildcat strikes independent of the CWU bureaucracy.

The role of revolutionaries should be to concentrate on encouraging such developments, and initiating them where we can. Members of Workers Power, the IS Network and other revolutionary organisations need to work together to maximise the

Haass peace process fails

By Bernie McAdam

THE TALKS TO iron out the problems facing the “peace process” have failed to secure an agreement amongst the five major political parties in the north of Ireland. The chosen facilitator for this initiative, Richard Haass, chosen by Peter Robinson (Democratic Unionist Party) and Martin McGuinness (Sinn Fein), has flown back to the USA with his tail between his legs.

The outstanding “problems” facing the talks were those relating to parades, flags and the legacy of “the Troubles”. Sinn Fein and the SDLP had given their approval for Haass’ draft proposals but Unionism refused to sign up.

Although the peace deal is not likely to be ditched any time soon, the strains are becoming more intense. Growing numbers of Republicans are questioning the fruits of 15 years of power sharing but an even greater number of loyalists are concerned that there is any power sharing at all.

DUP’s sinister role

The DUP and the UUP objected to the Haass Code of Conduct for parades and marches, which included a ban on loyalist bands named after sectarian murderers. Similarly, they blocked any compromise over the restricted flying of the Union flag over Belfast City Hall.

The DUP leaders have played an invidious role in all of this. First they whipped up the hysterical reaction to only flying the Union flag over the City Hall on 17 days. With UUP support, they brought loyalists onto the streets with attacks on isolated nationalist areas like the Short Strand and clashes with the police. Then they hypocritically condemned the violence!

As the local and Euro elections approach, the same parties will once more doff their caps to the “no surrender” brigade. Against the background of over a year of loyalist protests, Unionism cannot be seen to make any compromises with the nationalists over the



sectarian issues of Orange marches and the flying of the Union flag.

A sectarian peace

The collapse of the Haass initiative was inevitable. The “peace process” itself reinforces the sectarian divisions that are built into the very foundations of the northern state, which was carved out of the rest of Ireland in 1921 in such a way as to ensure a Protestant majority. To survive in that form, it had to repress the Catholic minority, which pledged allegiance to an independent Ire-

land. The maintenance of a British colony inside Ireland necessitated discrimination against the “enemy within” and the permanent supremacy of the Protestant community.

The peace deal acknowledged this “supremacy” by accepting the Unionist veto over a united Ireland. Sinn Fein accepted that no united Ireland would emerge without the consent of the majority of people in the colony. It was this massive climb down by Sinn Fein that ended the 30-year rebellion of nationalists against the British.

However, the mass anti-Unionist rebellion did ensure that the more blatant discrimination of the Orange state in jobs and housing had to go. Sinn Fein’s power sharing with the DUP appeared as ground breaking for the sectarian state of “Northern Ireland” which had always been run solely by Orange bigots.

Yet peace has not fundamentally changed the sectarian nature of that state. Each Assembly election produces a sectarian head count. The supremacist Loyalist parades and attempted

pogroms continue.

Even the experience of living in Catholic working class areas remains eerily similar to the 1960s and 1970s. As statistics in the recent Community Relations Council “Peace Monitoring Report” show, “on every single measure on the deprivation indices, Catholic families experience more deprivation than Protestants”.

Any extension of the Haass talks will be a charade. Whatever “compromises” might be in the offing, it will still be down to nationalist residents like those of the Ardoyne to challenge Orange bigots marching through their streets. As the marching season resumes later this year, nationalists will once again have to organise defence of their areas.

The peace deal has dealt us a Sinn Fein and DUP executive that is united in implementing British government cutbacks.

There is a crying need for a fighting working class party that can not only lead the fight against austerity but go on to smash the sectarian state once and for all.

Can the public university be defended?

By KD Tait

A NEW YEAR provides a new opportunity for students to reorganise resistance to the marketisation of education. The principal task for students now is to build on the success of the “Cops Off Campus” campaign, by creating a fighting student movement that can defeat privatisation and fight for a better education for all.

In December 2013, a wave of occupations by students in solidarity with a national strike by Higher Education unions prompted a crackdown that saw five students suspended at Sussex, with police evicting the Senate House occupation and a number of court injunctions banning protest on university campuses.

The backlash against the police forced the government to tighten the leash on their paid thugs, to preserve the illusion of a neutral police force that beats up students “by consent”. The police’s use of more serious forms of violence in defence of the boss class’s privileges will be saved for future, more decisive confrontations.

Nevertheless, students can rightly claim an important victory in defend-

ing the right to protest. University bosses will feel less confident about calling in the police as their private stormtroopers when students stand up to them. That fact alone will make them less confident in ignoring, bullying and victimising students in the new semester.

Nevertheless this is only a partial victory. In the short term we still have to overturn the court injunctions banning protest, and campaign to get all charges, bail conditions and disciplinary proceedings dropped immediately.

In the longer term we desperately need to build a coordinated national movement: one capable of mobilising tens of thousands of students in a campaign of demonstrations, direct action and every necessary method of struggle to stop the privatisation of education.

Building a movement

The slogan “Cops Off Campus” has served its purpose. While maintaining our vigilance, confronting every incident of police harassment, intimidation and violence, we need to return to the unglamorous but essential work



of building up democratic campus-based campaigns that anchor the resistance in every department, faculty and hall of residence.

Grassroots campaigns need to relate to the existing daily concerns of students. By enabling students to fight for better library facilities, an end to rip-off textbooks and access to decent housing, we can demonstrate how these bread and butter issues are the result of marketisation, which has brought on a general degradation of conditions (or “learning experience”) for most students.

But grassroots campaigns alone won’t force a halt to privatisation, much less a total reversal of the attacks on higher education. For that we need to coordinate an offensive on a

regional, and ultimately national scale. We need a movement which fights for a joined-up struggle alongside the trade unions and the National Union of Students (NUS), but which is also prepared to take more militant action when necessary.

The New Year will see a week of action against the privatisation of student loans, starting on 3 February. A potential strike by university unions is scheduled for 6 February. The 3 Cosas campaign continue their struggle for decent wages, sick pay and pensions with a three-day strike on 27 to 29 January. We need to be able to bring the maximum forces to bear for each of these actions, as well as to be able to react to any changes in the political situation.

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) is supporting the call for a national student meeting in Birmingham on 29 January. This could be the first step in discussing how best to coordinate a student movement that remains fragmented by the defeats of 2010. This fragmentation is entrenched by the various left groups, which have established competing student campaigns instead of combining our forces to present a united front.

We should aim for a national student conference in February after exams to discuss launching a united, democratic federation of campus “defend education” committees and networks.

In itself this is no guarantee of victory, and must develop from real roots in the universities. We can’t say in advance that uniting the free education, anti-marketisation, solidaristic wing of the student movement will bring victory.

But we certainly can say that if we fail to learn the lessons of the last few years’ experience, then we will go down to defeat, one campaign after another.

The 'Broad Party' model in Europe: theory and practice

By KD Tait

The studies of the German and French Left Parties contained in this supplement begin a series aimed at exploring the theory and practice of similar organisations, most of them belonging to the European Left Party. Though there is as yet no equivalent to them in Britain the subject is important since the Left Party Platform which won a majority at the founding conference of Left Unity obviously sees these as the model to be followed in creating a new working class party in Britain. We believe their actual record indicates quite the opposite.

The much praised "broadness" of these parties relates to the fact that they are coalitions between the two main types of reformism (Stalinism and Social Democracy) and a variety of self-styled revolutionaries – Trotskyist or Maoist. Nearly all have at their core parties which were once either old-style Communist parties like the French PCF or Eurocommu-

nist ones like the Greek Synaspismos. The pioneers of this process back in the 1990s were Rifondazione Comunista in Italy and the SED/PDS in the former East Germany.

Though these parties may have reformed themselves or undergone "mutation" – and in the process abandoning many of the worst bureaucratic features of old-style Stalinism – they maintained many of its central doctrines, most notably coalition politics (including the Popular Front) and the peaceful or parliamentary road to socialism. In short they too were reformist parties.

Around the turn of the 21st Century these "mutated" Stalinist parties began to attract left wing forces from the major Social Democratic or Socialist Parties. The latter were moving ever-rightward, abandoning their roots in the working class and adopting neoliberal privatisation and then austerity policies.

In Germany the left wing of Social Democracy led by Oskar Lafontaine

and in France a grouping led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon joined with the ex-Stalinists to form "Left Parties". To this partnership were soon added various Trotskyist or Maoist groups.

These new parties – despite attracting the more militant workers fighting austerity and neoliberalism – have, when faced with the temptation of office in coalition with the old parties of the left, carried out cuts and sabotaged the resistance.

For all their more militant rhetoric, they remain parties totally determined to re-run the film of reformism. Moreover when it comes to the imperialist actions of their ruling classes they tamely fall in behind them.

Whilst it is the duty of revolutionaries to relate to their working class membership – including in some cases joining the parties and fighting for revolutionary programmes, in others giving them electoral support and placing demands on them related to the resistance to austerity – under their present leaderships and pro-

grammes they are no real alternative leadership for the working class.

The Historic Capitalist Crisis of 2007-13 saw an initial wave of spontaneous resistance, then a crisis of leadership within the trade unions and the resistance movements as the official leadership sabotaged the fight back. But this was soon matched by a failure of the far left to present an alternative to the strategy of surrender pursued by the leaders on both the economic front and the political front.

The root of this lay, not as is fashionable to say, in their sectarianism but in their opportunism and failure to confront the union leaders and left reformist parties. Dismayed by its own impotence – the far left developed a fatalism about the sheer power and ideological hegemony of neoliberalism or just blamed the defeats on the weakness of the working class itself.

Ideas flourished about the outmoded character of the Leninist party

model and democratic centralism, about the need to reject building revolutionary organisations in the pre-party stage, etc.

It was in these circumstances that the successes of Syriza in Greece suggested to many that it and maybe other Left Parties like the Parti de gauche and Die Linke represented an alternative. To the fact of these parties undeniable reformism they have replied that we are simply not in a revolutionary period, will not be in one for the foreseeable future, and that therefore the left reformism of these "broad parties" will do nicely for the time being.

But the record of failure and betrayal by many of these parties and the likelihood of it for the others speaks heavily against this contention. They too are not fit for purpose, i.e. the purpose of resisting the historic crisis of capitalism and the capitalist solution and imposing a workers', anticapitalist and socialist solution.

Die Linke: reformism for the 21st century

By Tobi Hansen

THE GERMAN Left Party, Die Linke, was founded in 2005 as a fusion of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the successor to the former ruling Stalinist party in East Germany, and the Electoral Alliance for Work and Social Justice (WASG), a recent split from the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in West Germany.

The PDS's response to the collapse of East Germany was the adoption of an openly reformist programme, with committing it to the "social market economy" and to "parliamentary democracy". The PDS failed to have much electoral success until the foundation of the Left Party, although it was active in the West via the "Left Lists" and via cooperation with its West German sister party, the German Communist Party (DKP) and other small left wing forces.

In the East, however, the PDS was generally the second or third strongest parliamentary party throughout the 1990s. Its political method was made clear as early as 1994 when it supported an SPD-Green provincial government in Saxony. The PDS campaigned openly for a coalition with the SPD and succeeded in Mecklenburg

Gregor Gysi, Katja Kipping and Bernd Riexinger presenting Die Linke's programme for the federal elections 2013



in 1998-2006 and, most significantly, in Berlin between 2001 and 2011. Today, the Left Party remains in government in the state of Brandenburg.

It was the policies of the Federal government, a coalition of the SPD and the Greens under Schroeder and Fisher that transformed the situation. In 2003, they announced their adoption of "Agenda 2010", a programme

of harsh neo-liberal reforms that included the notorious "Hartz I-IV" laws that drastically cut welfare, social insurance and unemployment provision. This sparked a widespread revolt within the working class and its organisations.

In the East, the "Monday Demos" mobilised hundreds of thousands. In the West, a conference in November

2003 called by radical left groups and the "Initiative of the trade union left" organised an unofficial demonstration of over 100,000. Stewards and local branches supported this in the trade unions against the leadership. The SPD effectively lost control of part of the union bureaucracy.

Nonetheless, a majority of the leadership of the DGB unions remained

loyal to the SPD and its "social partnership" strategy. In Volkswagen, Michael Sommer's leadership, as a partner in the "Alliance for Work" with employers and the government not only accepted but actively implemented the introduction of agency as.

Resistance within the unions brought about two initiatives in 2003: the "Electoral Alternative 2006" and the "Initiative for Work and Social Justice".

Union members and officials set up the Electoral Alternative for Work and Social Justice (WASG) in November 2004, alongside the DKP, Linksruck (German sister organization of the Socialist Workers Party), Socialist Alternative (the Socialist Party's German co-thinkers) and Gruppe Arbeit-macht, the German section of our own international grouping, the League for the Fifth International.

The WASG's first electoral campaign was in the North Rhine-Westphalia state elections in May 2005, winning 2.2 per cent of the vote. Even so, this was significant: the state is a traditional SPD heartland and the swing away from it brought down the governing SPD-Green coalition. This gave the Christian Democrats and the Lib-

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The Parti de gauche: old wine

The Parti de gauche, founded by Jean-Luc Mélenchon in 2008 aims to unite all the forces to the left of the reformist social democratic Socialist Party.

Marc Lasalle looks at the reasons for its rapid growth as well as the current crisis in the Front de gauche, and considers the claim that it is a model for building “broad parties” in other countries in Europe

THE 15 YEARS from 1995 to 2010 saw France in the forefront of the European class struggle. Conservative governments, headed by Raffarin, de Villepin and Fillon, launched repeated attacks on the working class, targeting public services and pensions. But each time mass resistance, combining strike action with mass social movements, saw them off.

The high point came in 2005, when a “No of the Left” campaign in the referendum on the draft European Union constitutional treaty inflicted a severe defeat on the ruling class. This was followed within a year by a gigantic movement of youth and workers that overturned the government’s first employment contract (CPE) law.

These events revealed huge numbers opposed to the Right’s neoliberal “reforms”, numbers that might represent a formidable force not only on the streets but also at the ballot box.

Polls showed that the far left, the Trotskyist groups, could attract the votes of more than 10 per cent of the electorate.

This radicalisation explains the achievements of explicitly revolutionary candidates in the first rounds of presidential elections. At the same time the Socialist Party (PS) suffered serious defeats in the presidential elections of 2002 and 2007.

After the downfall of the USSR and the “actually existing socialism” of the East European states, the French Communist Party (PCF) underwent a major rethink of its old pro-Moscow Stalinism, what it called mutation. It explicitly dropped “democratic centralism” (in fact bureaucratic centralism) allowing inner party tendencies, alternative lists for central committee elections and so on. This was all hailed as a renaissance of the party. And indeed it rapidly seemed to bear fruit. The party’s secretary Robert Hue won 8.8 per cent of the vote in the first round of the 1995 presidential election, and in the 1997 parliamentary elections the PCF won 9.9 per cent and 35 seats.

But it won these advances on the basis of an alliance with the PS under Lionel Jospin – the Gauche Plurielle (“Plural Left”). Indeed the PCF got ministerial posts in Jospin’s government. But short-term gain led to long-term pain. After being implicated in Jospin’s turn to the neoliberal policies of privatisations and cuts dictated by

the Maastricht process of European integration, the PCF was discredited in the eyes of its working class electorate.

Jospin suffered a catastrophic defeat in the 2002 presidential elections, being knocked out in the first round. The PCF’s candidate Robert Hue got an all-time low of 3.37 per cent, or just 967,000 votes. The beneficiaries of this debacle for reformism were the far left groups. In 2002, Trotskyist candidates together got over 10 percent or nearly 3 million votes, humbling the once mighty PCF.

The PS and the PCF proved unable to recover by the next presidential elections in 2007 that saw the right hold on to power under Nicolas Sarkozy. And once again the far left, in the person of young postal worker Olivier Besancenot, candidate of the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR), got nearly 1.5 million votes. The PCF’s Marie-George Buffet did even worse than Robert Hue and scored 707,000 votes, or just under 2 per cent.

It appeared to both the reformist left and the far left itself that a major displacement was underway in terms of who would lead the militant vanguard of the French working class. The LCR in 2008-09 launched the campaign for a New Anticapitalist Party (Nouveau parti anticapitaliste, or NPA), which rapidly attracted around 9,000 members. But this near death experience for the PCF (and to some extent the PS) convinced sections of their leaderships of the need to create something new and more attractive to militant workers and anticapitalist youth, who might otherwise consolidate around the NPA.

Left Party formed

Since then, getting this “double digit” result has obsessed the leaders of both the radical reformist and far left. Connected with this is the project of uniting all the parties to the left of the PS. While many activists were strongly in favour of a unity candidate for the presidential elections in 2007, these discussions foundered because the PCF undemocratically tried to fix the selection process so that its own lacklustre leader, Marie-George Buffet, would win. In some sense, the foundation of both the Parti de Gauche and the NPA were different answers given to the opportunities posed by this political conjuncture.

Before 2008, Jean-Luc Mélenchon was a relatively minor figure on the left wing of the PS. A junior minister under Jospin, he did not distinguish himself by expressing any radical opinions though, like Jospin, his early political education was amongst the Trotskyist group of Pierre Lambert. Within the PS, faced with leaders like Lionel Jospin, Ségolène Royal and François Hollande, all unwilling to oppose the neoliberal “reforms” being pressed for by the EU, Mélenchon decided to split with the party and build a left reformist alternative, albeit one with as much of the rhetorical radicalism and even revolutionary slogans as he could safely borrow from the NPA. At the same time he was realistic enough to know that he needed the aid of the PCF’s bureaucratic apparatus in local and national government, and the support of the dominant union federation, the Confédération générale du travail (CGT), still dominated by the PCF.

Immediately after the announcement of the Parti de gauche (PdG) as a split from the PS in November 2008, Mélenchon and the PCF declared that they were forming an alliance for the European elections. It was to be called the “Left Front for another Europe, democratic and social, against the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and the other European treaties” – the Front de gauche (FdG).

They clarified that the Front was open to all the parties who had engaged in the victorious “No” campaign against the EU constitutional treaty in 2005. In the following months, the PdG launched a unity offensive towards the NPA, calling on it to join this Front and writing an open letter to its members.

This manoeuvre revealed the aim of both the PdG and FdG; to form an electoral bloc able to attract votes from both the far left and the PS. Their target was the substantial number who had voted for Arlette Laguiller of Lutte Ouvrière and the LCR’s Besancenot. This move had a remarkable resonance thanks to the deep divisions within the NPA, inherited from its founder, the LCR.

The destructive factional struggle which broke out within the NPA when it turned down the FdG’s unity proposals, and the subsequent growth of the latter produced a decline in the NPA’s membership and in its electoral fortunes as rapid as its rise, leaving

Mélenchon and Laurent singing the Internationale together – ironically the PdG supports French imperialist troops in Africa



the field wide open for Mélenchon and a PCF undergoing yet another renaissance.

The peak of this success was Mélenchon’s dynamic presidential campaign in 2012. In Vierzon he declared “We’re back – the France of revolution!” and “if Europe is a volcano – then France is the revolutionary crater!”

This barnstorming style culminated in his mass rally at the Place Bastille on 18 March calling for a Sixth Republic and a “citizens’ insurrection” to take back the power from the financiers and give it to the people. Once again the revolutionary verbiage was laid out thick:

“In a revolution, there are no nice bits and nasty bits. It is a whole unto itself! Yes, there may be mistakes and failures – but oh, how marvelous, how glorious, how splendid, how extraordinary, how luminous a story for humankind!”

This is a timely reminder to the far left that reformists too can fire up the revolutionary rhetoric, especially in France, given its bourgeois revolutionary as well as mass communist traditions.

Yet when it comes to the class struggle, direct action by the youth or workers’ strikes, Mélenchon and the PdG drop their revolutionary rhetoric completely. Indeed it is clear that their “revolutionism” is the posturing petty bourgeois populist sort, not a working class socialist variety.

Charter of Amiens

The PdG has consistently emphasised traditional “political” means – elections, petitions and rallies – rather than direct action and strikes. This was the

case in 2008, when Sarkozy introduced a new “reform” of the postal service. A large mobilisation by workers and service users posed the problem of how to continue the struggle. Mélenchon suggested a campaign for a referendum as an alternative to any form of direct action. When in 2009 the NPA proposed a national march of the unemployed, Mélenchon rejected the idea:

“This worries me a little. Politics should not come up like this in the social movement giving instructions. The trade unions have fought against social apathy. Our responsibility is to fight against political apathy. The link between social movements and politics is not mechanical. We need to offer a political alternative rather than to be in a competition with the unions.”

These arguments are in line with the famous 1906 Charter of Amiens, adopted by the CGT, which proclaimed the unions’ “complete independence” from political parties. Whilst its syndicalist authors saw this as a means to keep reformist socialism out of the revolutionary trade unions, in fact this division only results in blocking mass social and union struggles from espousing and attaining political goals.

In the end this condemns mass strike waves and social movements, which are regular occurrences in France, either to winning only temporary concessions or to failing completely, like the great anti-pension reform struggle of 2010. Such failures of direct action, because they cannot transform themselves into all out political strike action, end up reinforcing a vote for reformist parties as the only

in a new bottle



that is not produced in our subsoil. Central Africa has the Bakuma deposits and strategic borders with neighbours who have the precious mineral. So long as nuclear energy remains the primary source for electricity production in our country, France will control the governments which keep the keys to the African mines.”

Refreshingly frank imperialist reasoning, but not socialist let alone revolutionary.

While the NPA consistently opposes French imperialist interventions in the African countries, the PdG does not. Indeed it is plainly on the other side of the barricades on this crucial issue. Those who think that the distinction between reform and revolution is an “old twentieth century dogma” and of no use in practical politics should consider this. This is especially worth thinking about as we approach the centenary of 4 August 1914, when the socialist parties of the Second International demonstrated decisively their imperialist patriotism and became, in the words of Rosa Luxemburg, “stinking corpses” when it came to defending the interests of the working class.

In conclusion

The PdG profited from a rapid upward trajectory, developing in a year or two from a small split into a national party. Its electoral front with the PCF, the FdG, obtained significant votes (around 6 per cent) in the 2009 and 2010 European and regional elections. Mélenchon even attained the yearned-for double-digit vote (11 per cent) in the first round of the 2012 presidential elections. However, the reasons behind these successes could yet prove to be the seeds of its next crisis.

The PdG is still quite small and

mayors and many other elected and salaried positions.

The PCF’s determination to strike electoral agreements with the PS for the March 2014 local elections, especially in Paris, has outraged Mélenchon and the PdG. In October last year the PCF’s unilateral decision to do this provoked Mélenchon to delay FdG agreement for the European elections in May. Since the PCF’s summer school, a veritable vendetta has also been going on between Mélenchon and PCF leader Pierre Laurent. Mélenchon was even more furious when Laurent was elected as president of the European Left Party (the bloc of parties to left of the social democratic and labour parties in the European Parliament) and threatened to withdraw the FdG temporarily from the European Left Party.

Again this squabbling over the spoils of electoral office indicates exactly what sort of party the PdG is. It is not really a “new party” whose “broadness” should serve as a model for Left Unity in Britain or anywhere else for that matter. It is a traditional reformist party, like those we have seen betray the working class whether in power or opposition for the last hundred years.

For all its denunciation of financial capitalism, the PdG is not an anticapitalist party at all. It is a party that, for all its talk of a “citizens’ revolution” and a Sixth Republic, still supports the repressive machinery of the existing capitalist state. It is also a party that, for all its pledges of internationalism, defends French imperialism and its control of the countries of the former French empire in Africa. It is the kind of party that neither the French nor the British working class needs.

solution. Thus the defeat for the unions in 2010 opened the way for a revival of the PS.

Another classic reformist element to Mélenchon and the PdG’s politics is nationalism. This starts with his view of Europe and his criticism of German dominance:

“We need to strike at the heart of the problem, Europe. We need a break on three points. First, the French-German relationship: that is totally out of equilibrium and profits only German capitalism. Then the Euro: we have always defended the idea that the common currency could help a progressive politics, however today this is no longer possible because of the obstinacy of the European leaders. Finally the Mediterranean arc: is it not the moment to understand that we have another centre of gravity different from Germany, namely the Mediterranean?”

Here Mélenchon clarifies his view of the role of France in the world. Europe does not work because it does not profit French capitalism sufficiently. Even his allusion to the Mediterranean suggests that the natural space for France to turn to is North Africa.

Despite ambiguous statements and veiled criticisms, the reality is that the PdG supports French imperialism in Africa. When Sarkozy decided to intervene in Libya, the PdG supported this intervention. When François Hollande intervened in Mali, the FdG’s official spokesperson in the parliament voiced his full support for the intervention. Mélenchon himself, it is true, restricted himself to asking Hollande to reveal the real reasons for this intervention. But neither the PdG nor the

FdG organised any sort of demonstration against it.

More recently, in December, when France sent troops to the Central African Republic, PdG national secretary François Delapierre expressed their position pretty bluntly:

“In contrast to previous military operations, this is totally within international law because the UN Security Council has given to our country a mandate to support the African force MISCA, whose objective is to protect the civilian population and to ‘stabilise’ the country.”

He went straight on to say:

“Energy production in our country depends on this resource (uranium)

There is a rising tide of workers’ struggles in France, like the recent occupation at the Good Year factory in Amiens. But they need better leadership than the PCF or PdG can offer



Die Linke

Continued from page 7

erals a majority in the Bundesrat, the national parliament's second chamber. SPD Chancellor Schröder was forced to call a general election.

For that election in September 2005, the WASG agreed to stand alongside the PDS, and to the subsequent process that formed the Left Party. They were boosted by the defection of Oskar Lafontaine, former SPD finance minister during the coalition with the Greens, bringing with him followers from the SPD and the unions. He and PDS chairman Gregor Gysi became the leading candidates of the joint election campaign.

At its high point, the WASG had over 10,000 members, including former members of the SPD and Greens, middle ranking union officials, activists from the various left groups and from the Monday Demos movement against Hartz IV. From the beginning, it was a reformist organisation, albeit one riven with inner tensions. On the one hand, the bureaucratic leadership around the former SPD and union officials wanted to create a "real" electoral party. They therefore tried to tie the party to a programme of social reform.

On the other hand, a large number of unemployed members, while mainly reformist in political consciousness, demanded more of a commitment to action for their immediate demands. They wanted an improvement of their social situation and the abolition of the Hartz reforms, and did not want to wait for a "patient" struggle for them.

For the WASG leadership, it was clear that a viable reformist party with a strong apparatus to control it was possible only through a rapid fusion with the PDS. A large part of the membership, however, rejected this, especially after the experience of the PDS implementing severe cuts in state governments in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern.

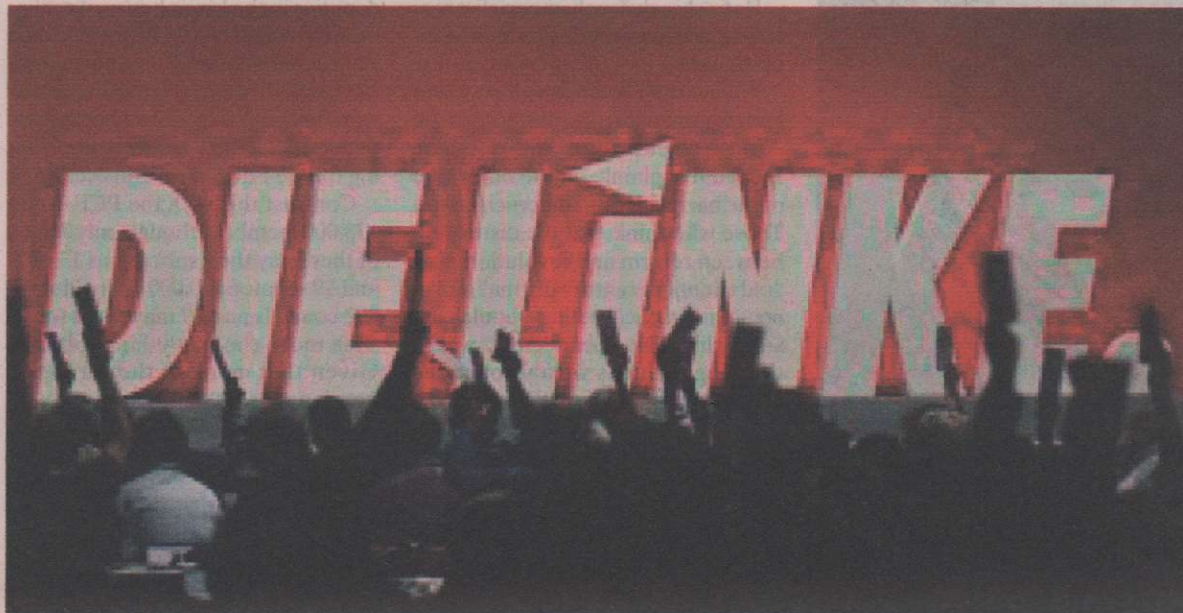
But it was the officials who set the pace, ensuring that the Left Party was founded on a reformist basis, and had a reformist leadership from the outset. They were aided in this by their opponents' failure to offer any alternative. Worse still, most of the organised left groups within the WASG accepted that the party would inevitably "have to be" reformist to begin with. This removed any basis for a principled opposition to the right wing.

Some groups with a background in Trotskyism were prepared to support the bureaucratic unification, like Linksruck and to a lesser extent the International Socialist Left (the German section of the Fourth International, represented in Britain by Socialist Resistance). Others, like Socialist Alternative initially opposed it but later backed down. Most assumed that, in time, effective campaigning, even on an inadequate pro-

gramme, would attract mass support that would push the party further to the left.

The successful electoral campaigns of 2005 and 2009 encouraged this perspective. In 2005, the Left Party was catapulted into the federal parliament with 8.7 per cent. In 2009, with 11.9 per cent, it crossed the 5 per cent hurdle for the first time even in the old West

Left Party a means of political action and social structuring. The struggle for the improvement of the situation of the disadvantaged, the development and implementation of left projects and reform plans, the changing of the relationship of forces and the introduction of political change are the measures of the success of our political practice."



Germany. Lafontaine and Gysi were often seen on talk shows, the student organisation SDS was founded and there was a real growth in members.

5 million voters in 2009 to lead a political fight against the financial crisis, the austerity packages, Hartz IV or the war in Afghanistan. Instead, it directed its energies into trying to convince the SPD and the Greens of the need for a common coalition.

In 2011, the Left Party adopted its current programme, codifying its bourgeois, reformist politics.

This programme correctly states that the property question is key to any social transformation. But in place of planning and the expropriation of capital it advocates a "mix" of different property forms, and accepts a vital role for private entrepreneurs, saying: "We want a radical renewal of democracy which encompasses economic decisions and subordinates all forms of property to emancipatory, social and ecological standards."

The means to "transform" society is to be the existing state. Of course, the Left Party wants it to become "more democratic" but, following the traditions of social democracy, it sees the existing state apparatus not as an instrument of class rule, but as standing "above" the classes. It does not set itself the task of changing existing system through parliament, and through a coalition with the SPD and the Greens:

"Parliamentary opposition, like participation in government, is, for the

"The Left strives for participation in government if by that an improvement in people's living conditions can be achieved. In this way the political force of the Left and of the social movements can be strengthened and the feeling of powerlessness and lack of an alternative that many people feel can be reduced. Participation in government should be discussed in the context of the existing conditions and judged by these political standards."

Every reformist party has promised a government that will improve the living conditions of the people. This is therefore a statement to justify the party's real goal, of entering a bourgeois reformist government. But equally, the experience of all reformist parties in government shows how rapidly such promises are forgotten under the reality of capitalism.

The political practice of the Left Party

In provincial governments in Berlin (from 2001 to 2011), in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and currently Brandenburg (since 2009), the PDS and then the Left Party have carried out, or are planning, the following attacks.

Berlin:

- Privatising 120,000 flats, more than half of all public housing privatisations since 1945
- Reducing public sector wages by 10 per cent
- Increasing the working week for teachers by 2 hours

- Bailing out Berliner Bank with taxpayers' money
- Selling off communal savings bank Berliner Sparkasse, several hospitals and part of the water company

Brandenburg:

- Cutting 15,000 public sector jobs by 2015, mainly affecting social workers

declared itself prepared to consider an alliance with the Greens and the Left Party, which would make possible coalitions with the Left Party in "West German" states. These two factors, opposition to central government policy and the prospect of entry into coalitions, will increase the tensions within the Left Party.

The Left Party today

Currently, the Party has about 63,000 members. The majority of these are in the "Eastern" states, where it could reasonably be called a mass party. About half the party's membership are pensioners and, particularly in the "East", many of these were previously professionals or state employees. The picture in West Germany is very different but here, too, the party does have a certain influence in the unions and in works councils.

For such a small party, it has a disproportionately large apparatus and elected representation. It has 250 deputies in European, federal and regional parliaments, employing at least 1,000 full time advisors or assistants. There are 386 members of local government executives, 80 of whom are working full time. It also has some 5,000 deputies in local or district councils. In addition, the party's own apparatus has several hundred full-timers. Since a large part of the membership only exists as "paper" members, this layer of functionaries and representatives constitutes most of the party's active members. It is not only an electoralist party in its strategy; work within the political system constitutes most of its activity.

Critical support

The Left Party therefore remains a small bourgeois workers' party. Its particular significance is that it was founded as an opposition to the neoliberal policies of a much bigger bourgeois workers' party, the SPD. As such, it is seen by many of the more politically conscious workers and activists as a means of defending working class interests. For revolutionaries, this is a mistaken belief. As even this brief sketch has shown, this is not the kind of party, either in its programme or in its practice that could effectively fight capitalism, let alone overthrow it.

And where such a party exists, all experience has shown that the surest way for workers to come to see through its hollow promises is to put it to the test of practice. That is why the Gruppe Arbeitermacht called for critical support for the Left Party in September.

However, in countries where a miniature bourgeois workers' party does not yet exist, there is certainly no reason to try to build one.

- Increased police powers
- Mecklenburg-Vorpommern:
- Increased police surveillance, as observed in Rostock during the 2007 G8 protests.

The concerns of the rank and file in the WASG were more than justified.

Nevertheless, the Left Party is still defined marked by its division from the SPD over Agenda 2010, and there remains an important segment of workers who see it as an alternative to the SPD. Certainly this helped the Left Party to gain between 20 and 25 per cent of the vote amongst the unemployed. The party has also been able to win positions in the unions, particularly within the public sector union Verdi. However, this has not led to the formation of an oppositional movement in the unions. Social partnership and co-management remain the DGB's policy, and the Left Party offers no alternative.

In last September's election, the Left Party slipped to 8.5 per cent but, with the formation of a Grand Coalition between Merkel's Christian Democrats and the SPD, the situation will become more like that between 2005 and 2009, when memories of the SPD in government were still fresh. Now, the SPD will have to implement (its own) policy in government and the Left Party is the strongest opposition both in Parliament and in the trade unions.

At the same time, the SPD has

2014: year of revolutionary unity?

By Dave Stockton

TO SAY THAT 2013 was a bad year for the far left in Britain would surely win the prize for understatement. Two splits from the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), each of several hundred people, and the drift of many out of organised politics altogether have weakened the forces of the revolutionary socialist left to levels not seen for decades.

The shameful handling of the allegations by two women comrades against Martin Smith, one of the SWP's top leaders, then the self-exposure by the leadership of the party's lack of the most elementary democracy fatally discredited in the eyes of many the revolutionary and Leninist principles the SWP claimed to uphold.

All this came on top of a perceived failure of the far left groups to give an effective lead and means of organising the resistance, in particular by fracturing it into false united fronts (which were in fact "fronts" in the worst sense of the term – deceptive façades under the control of one or other of the socialist groups).

Such behaviour was as much opportunist as it was sectarian. Each of these fake fronts involved an uncritical bloc with trade union leaders who were (and are) obstructing an effective fightback against the austerity government.

In criticising the SWP and its actions – a necessary and courageous act by the SWP members who rebelled against the leadership – there was and remains a danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Certainly the bathwater was dirty and needed to go down the plughole.

Besides the impunity of top leaders for aggravated sexist behaviour, there was a constitution that did not allow women members to organise to expose or confront it. It also denied opponents of the leadership the right to form tendencies or factions to press for changes in policy or a change of leadership.

But the baby that should not be thrown out is the idea of an organisation, developing a political strategy and working in a disciplined way in the class struggle, with the goal of building a revolutionary party.

The collapse of the SWP as a revolutionary organisation at the heart of almost every significant episode of working class struggle stretching back decades is a terrible setback – whatever one's criticism of their policies and however much the disgrace of its present leaders is thoroughly deserved.

A revolutionary organisation, even in its infancy, should proudly identify itself with Lenin and the Bolshevik party because its actual practice was as far apart as heaven and earth from that of the SWP and



Defending Syria's revolution: a crucial area for common action, where much of the left has failed

indeed a wide range of so-called Trotskyist organisations.

Real democratic centralism defends the freedom to criticise the leadership and organise to replace it. It is not only a way to ensure united action for a common strategy by the members, but above all a means to hold party leaders and spokespersons, journalists and elected representatives to policies democratically agreed by the membership.

Equally, the modern celebrity culture, which allows freedom of speech for academics, journalists and those with easy access to the media, but tends to silence ordinary members, is just as bad as one that only allows party bureaucrats to (mis)represent the organisation.

Towards unity

After many months of relative paralysis, a process of discussions on revolutionary regroupment, involving the International Socialist Network, Socialist Resistance, members of the Anticapitalist Initiative, Workers Power and others is beginning. Hopefully the comrades who left the SWP in December will join in too.

The aim is to hold a preliminary open conference in the spring. Discussions between representatives of the above tendencies need to work out an agenda of key topics.

Workers Power believes that the organisations should try to adopt a common action programme as a framework for joint activity and comradely discussion:

- Building a revolutionary pole in Left Unity and in the People's Assemblies
- Building rank and file groups in the trade unions
- Launching a new paper dedicated

to women's liberation with an orientation to the working class

- Fighting fascism on an active, no platform basis
- Building solidarity campaigns to defend the revolutionary struggles in the Middle East and North Africa
- Building a revolutionary socialist organisation in Britain and internationally.

Within the context of this unity in action we should hold regular dis-

cussions and debates about our different traditions – their strengths and their weaknesses – and about the deeper questions of programme and organisation.

The project of *The Exchange* – a journal of debate and discussion among those involved in revolutionary regroupment – is important. If it can provide the scaffold for a real debate, which aims at the analysis and clarification of tactics and strategy, which

can develop and enrich revolutionary Marxism, and which identifies obstacles to be rejected, then it will make a significant contribution to overcoming the isolation and confusion permeating revolutionary forces today.

No less important in a year which marks the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the First International is the question of international revolutionary regroupment. We should take an initiative or join any already underway to take the first steps towards laying the foundation of their successor.

Finally, the revolutionary civil war in Syria provides the sharpest example of the need for our organisations to develop closer working relationships. Defence of the revolution against both Assad and the rival imperialisms of East and West is a principle shared by all participants.

Where the majority of the far left has criminally slandered and abandoned the revolution, it falls to us to develop a real campaign for its practical and political defence against its enemies – starting here in Britain in the Stop the War Coalition.

The recent sizeable wave of members to depart the SWP – the so-called "Decembrists" – should in our view be warmly invited to participate in local, national and international regroupment. There are others too who have expressed an interest in participating. So let's be bold and make 2014 a year of developing revolutionary unity in Britain and beyond.

Argentine Trotskyists' electoral success

IN RECENT ELECTIONS in 2013, the Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores (Left and Workers' Front, FIT), a coalition of Trotskyist groups, won more than a million votes, or 5.12 per cent.

Christian Castillo, a member of the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialista (PTS), who was elected as a representative of the Buenos Aires region, has been recounting the experiences of Argentine socialists in a European speaking tour.

In early January he spoke to around 50 people at two meetings in London about the significance of the FIT's success and what it means for socialist and working class struggles in Argentina and internationally.

The FIT was formed by the PTS, Partido Obrero (PO) and the Izquierda Socialista (IS) around a common election programme for the 2011 presidential and congress elections. It received 500,000 votes or 2.3 per cent, gaining regional representatives in Neuquén and Córdoba.

Castillo spoke about the work of the FIT and the PTS in campaigning against the trade union bureaucracy in Argentina, which is a huge, self-serving and corrupt caste composed at its top of millionaires who wage a brutal struggle in league with the bosses to suppress left-wing rank and file activity.

In speaking about the electoral programme of the FIT, Castillo emphasised important differences between the FIT and other radical left coalitions on the European model, like Syriza in Greece or Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal. He defended standing as open revolutionaries, on a programme of defending the independence of the working class from capitalist governments and the trade union bureaucracy and the creation of a workers' government which would take measures to overturn capitalist class rule.

In the legislature Christian Castillo has put forward measures to popularise working class alternatives and expose the sham populism of both right and left.

- Campaigning to get charges against political activists dropped
- A proposal to ensure MPs and public servants are paid the same salary as teachers
- A proposal to abolish laws which impose flexibilisation and insecurity on the workforce

Although Workers Power has political differences with the PTS, it is encouraging to see revolutionary socialists rejecting the idea that it is only possible to attract significant support by reducing their programme to a reformist one, instead using elections as an arena for promoting the class struggle, where the real battle for socialism will be won or lost.

Beijing, Tokyo: playing with fire?

By Peter Main

The scenario is eerily familiar. Two imperialist powers, one continental and dynamic, the other an island power now past its peak, confront each other in a series of diplomatic incidents, military exercises and belligerent speeches. But this is not Europe in 1914; this is Asia today. Are China and Japan locked into a course towards war?

Relations between Tokyo and Beijing have deteriorated steadily since the last Japanese government made an issue of its territorial claim to the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands by buying them for the nation. China responded by re-asserting its own claim, sending naval vessels to patrol the area. More recently, Beijing declared an Air Defense Identification Zone, requiring all foreign aircraft to submit flight plans before entering the region, and announced new controls on fishing in the East China Sea at the beginning of the year.

The current Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, raised the stakes by visiting a Shinto shrine dedicated to Japan's war dead, including 12 infamous war criminals. For China and, incidentally, both Koreas, this is the equivalent of, say, Angela Merkel visiting a shrine to the Waffen-SS.

These are not isolated "incidents" of only symbolic significance. Abe has initiated steps to amend Japan's "pacifist" constitution to allow overseas military operations, welcomed the USA's "pivot to Asia", which is clearly aimed at containing any Chinese expansion, and is actively seeking "security cooperation" with Indonesia, the Philippines

Two Japanese coastguard vessels pincer a Chinese boat after activists disembark onto one of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands



and India. For its part, the Chinese government has not only militarised the dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands but asserted similar rights over other islands in the South China Sea, claimed both by the Philippines and Vietnam, and completed initial sea trials of its first aircraft carrier.

Such developments are clear evidence that both governments are looking to the future and anticipating open conflict. Nonetheless, for the moment, much of their belligerence is aimed primarily at domestic audiences. Although they are, respectively, the second and third biggest economies in the world, both China and Japan face serious economic and therefore political difficulties.

After two decades of virtually stagnant growth, Abe was elected on a programme of radical reform known as the "three arrows". The first, devaluation of the yen,

lowered export prices and raised growth rates in the first half of 2013 to an annualised 4.5 per cent. The second, an increase in government investment, helped to maintain that growth. However, the third, a major structural reform to encourage private investment, has yet to be implemented and the effects of the first two are wearing off. GDP growth for the third quarter dropped to an annualised 1.1 per cent.

Against this background, it is little wonder that Abe, a right wing nationalist, is emphasising the threat of Chinese expansion, to divert attention and generate patriotic fervour and a willingness to accept sacrifice in the "national interest". In this, however, he has to tread carefully. China is Japan's biggest trading partner, and any real escalation in the confrontation would have damaging effects on the economy.

Things are not so very different in China.

There, too, a new government, led by Xi Jinping, took office on a programme of radical reform to revitalise the economy, but has seen a third year of declining GDP growth figures. Although China has now overtaken the USA to become the world's greatest trading nation, this only serves to emphasise the failure to achieve the long declared aim of "rebalancing" the economy towards domestic growth.

The potential for internal division is greater in China than in Japan. The slowing tempo of the economy not only raises the prospect of class struggle by the huge and restive working class but also threatens divisions within the ruling party. Stirring up anti-Japanese sentiment to counter these has been used before, but carries the dual risk of economic damage and of encouraging mobilisations that then focus on Chinese issues.

China's response, therefore, has been relatively low-key. Instead of demonstrations, there have been diplomatic appeals to Japan's allies to persuade Tokyo to alter course. This is in keeping with Beijing's long-term strategy of avoiding substantial conflicts with Japan's main backer, the USA, and will remain the preferred policy for the foreseeable future.

However, as in the early twentieth century, where the underlying logic of expansion drives two, or more, imperialist powers into confrontation, even an apparently minor incident can become the trigger for war. The only means to avoid that is the class struggle within the imperialist powers. For both Japanese and Chinese workers, the main enemy is at home.

Ukraine: neither Berlin nor Moscow, but workers' internationalism

By Dave Stockton

OVER THE last month, thousands of people have occupied Independence Square in the Ukrainian capital Kiev. Their protests were initially provoked by President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to suspend negotiations for Ukraine's eventual entry into the European Union.

It had transpired during these negotiations that the EU was demanding neoliberal "reforms" similar to the austerity it has imposed on Greece or the horrific "shock therapy" that Boris Yeltsin imposed on Russia in 1992.

The effects in terms of mass unemployment, inflation and the slashing of social services would have fallen most heavily on the Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine, where much of the former Soviet Union's heavy industry was located. This is the heartland of Yanukovich and his wing of the capitalist class, drawn from former bureaucrats who grew rich from

privatisation. They could not survive against "free" competition from the West.

The rival wing of the ruling class, based in the Ukrainian-speaking west and centre of the country, want to liquidate much of this industry that they call a rustbelt. Instead they hope to act as the local agents for what they hope will be a massive inflow of German capital seeking cheap Ukrainian labour.

Yanukovich would also like to draw in Western capital; in fact, he had already gone a long way to agreeing the EU's terms and even now has not ruled out a deal. But he wants to sweeten the bitter EU pill and at the same time avoid a break with Russia's strongman, President Vladimir Putin.

A complete turn to the West, however, would quite simply destroy Yanukovich's economic and electoral base. It could also see Russia resort to devastating acts of economic retaliation. Ukraine is mas-

sively in debt to Russia for its oil and gas supplies; Putin could literally turn the country's lights off. But the West can exert some quite painful pressure of its own; Ukraine has \$17 billion in loans due to be repaid this year.

Ukraine's internal dispute thereby overlaps with growing imperialist rivalry. Both Chinese and Russian officials have protested at US and EU interference in Ukraine. These two new imperialist powers have been pulled closer by Washington's "Pivot to Asia" and by Germany's economic "Drang nach Osten" or "Drive to the East" for markets and labour.

Putin has undoubtedly exerted pressure on Yanukovich behind the scenes to escape the EU's embrace, and has offered bridging loans. But at an economic level Russia cannot match Germany and its EU partners. Sections of the US ruling class are also sticking their oar in, getting back at Putin for their humiliation

over Syria.

The protest camp in Independence Square has been visited by that old Republican warhorse Senator John McCain, who addressed a rally alongside MEP Elmar Brok of Germany's ruling Christian Democratic Union.

He met with Arseniy Yatsenyuk of the opposition Batkivshchyna (Fatherland) party, heavyweight champion and Presidential hopeful Vitali Klitschko, and Oleh Tyahnybok of the openly fascist Svoboda (Freedom) movement, whose members smashed to pieces the statue of Lenin in Independence Square.

Tyahnybok makes brazenly anti-Semitic statements, claiming Ukraine must be liberated from the "Muscovite Jewish Mafia" and the country's 400,000 Jews expelled. Yet McCain and the EU emissaries sat down to dinner with him!

This outside sponsorship of Ukraine's rival camps, by Moscow, Berlin and Washington, threatens its independence and its unity. Under these outside pressures the country

could split along its linguistic and historic lines. Only the working class can hold the country together, avoid inter-ethnic conflict and establish a meaningful independence.

Neither the pro-Western parties nor the pro-Moscow eastern oligarchs can offer a real future. The attitude of ordinary people to the Moscow and EU manipulators should be a plague on both their houses!

What is urgently needed is the independence and unity of the working class across both language groups, a militant defence of jobs and social services, and a determined reaching out to the workers of Western and Eastern Europe alike.

- Brussels and Moscow hands off the Ukraine!
- For a Ukrainian workers' republic!
- For a Socialist United States of Europe!

Egypt: the generals roll out the counter-revolution

By Marcus Halaby

ANY DOUBTS THAT the 3 July coup that brought General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to power was a victory for the counter-revolution should have been removed by the events of the last few months. Having killed hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood supporters after overthrowing Mohamed Morsi as President, Sisi's regime has now banned the Brotherhood outright. It has also announced a constitutional referendum for 14 and 15 January.

The coup regime's referendum has the support of the most conservative forces in the country: the Salafist Nour Party; the leadership of Egypt's Coptic Christian Church; the National Salvation Front of secular nationalist presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahi and former Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa; and the Tamarod ("Rebel") movement that claimed credit for organising the mass anti-Morsi protests that preceded Sisi's coup, and which is now urging the general to run for the Presidency.

Nevertheless, there is expected to

be a low turnout for the referendum vote, depriving the coup regime of its attempt to claim a spurious popular legitimacy. The Brotherhood, as might be expected, is calling for a boycott, as are the secular liberal April 6 Youth Movement and the Revolutionary Socialists, the Egyptian sister organisation of Britain's Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

The latter have formed the "Way of the Revolution Front" to oppose the military regime, a body that includes detained blogger Alaa Abd El-Fattah and novelist Ahdaf Soueif. The Brotherhood has likewise formed an "Anti-Coup Alliance" alongside a number of Islamist groups.

Suspicious that the referendum will be heavily rigged have been strengthened by interim President Adly Mansour's declaration that citizens will be allowed to vote at polling stations not connected to their registered address. An anti-regime cartoon shows an armed man pointing a gun at the back of a voter at a ballot box, asking him, "You do know that you have the right to say No?" only to receive the terrified one-word answer: "Yes!"



The proposed constitutional amendments entrench the use of military trials for civilians and deprive parliament of authority over the military budget. They also provide the military with a veto over appointments to the post of defence minister for the next eight years, seen as a sign that this will be Sisi's protected position if he chooses not to stand for election.

Repression

Keen to prevent any effective opposition, the coup regime arrested 122 members of the Brotherhood on 3 January, and has passed decrees taking over Brotherhood-linked schools and hospitals, effectively blackmailing the Brotherhood's base of support in the

poorer layers of Egyptian society with the loss of desperately needed services.

A bombing campaign by an unrelated group, Ansar Bait Al-Maqdis ("Supporters of Jerusalem"), and which the Brotherhood has condemned moreover, has been used as a pretext to label the Brotherhood a "terrorist organisation", allowing the regime to impose the death sentence on its leaders.

Security forces killed 19 people and arrested 60, and set fire to buildings in Cairo's al-Azhar University, after university students took part in a national day of protest on 27 December called by the Anti-Coup Alliance.

Nor has the repression stopped at the Brotherhood and its periphery. The April 6 Youth Movement's Ahmed Maher, Mohamed Adel and Ahmed Douma were sentenced to three years in prison on 22 December for "organising illegal protests", while blogger Alaa Abd El-Fattah is currently on trial for "assaulting a police officer". Fattah was previously arrested in October 2011 for taking part in the Maspero protests, which were attacked by Mohamed Hussein Tantawi's pre-

Morsi military government, killing 28 and injuring 212 mainly Coptic Christian demonstrators.

Alexandria-based activists Mahinour El-Masry and Hassan Moustafa of the Revolutionary Socialists, previously known for helping to expose the Mubarak-era police murder of Khaled Saeed, have also been sentenced to hard labour for violating laws against public protests.

It is clear that the military's objective is to bring the Egyptian revolution to an end and restore the privileges it lost with Mubarak's removal. It is the elementary duty of the workers' movement in the Arab world, in the West and internationally to show solidarity with all of its victims, whether secular or Islamist.

However, it was discontent with the capitalist regime of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood that paved the way for counter-revolution, and this underlines the urgent need for a revolutionary workers' party, to help ensure that the next wave of the revolution survives the repression and does not suffer the same fate as the last.

Syria: revolutionaries strike at al-Qaeda

Syrian revolutionaries are turning their guns on al-Qaeda's ISIS, in the process destroying the myth perpetuated by some that the only forces fighting Assad are reactionary sectarian Islamists. **Marcus Halaby** reports

IT HAS BEEN a long time coming, but Syria's liberated regions have finally seen the beginning of a "revolution within the revolution". Directed principally at the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known from its Arabic initials as Da'esh), it has involved both mass demonstrations (under the title of the "Friday of Martyr Abu Rayyan, Victim of Betrayal" on 3 January) and military action to dislodge ISIS from its strongholds in Idlib province, Aleppo and Raqqah.

Originating in the Iraqi al-Qaeda affiliate organisation of Jordanian Islamist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and dominated by Iraqi and other foreign Islamist fighters, ISIS has come to be seen by many anti-Assad Syrians as an alien force hostile to the democratic aims of the Syrian revolution, more interested in establishing enclaves under its puritanical rule in the liberated zones than in fighting the regime. Or in the words of a popular protest chant: "Da'esh and the regime are one hand".

Women have played an important role in these protests, most famously Souad Nofal, who conducted lone daily protests outside ISIS headquarters in Raqqah for weeks after it kidnapped her brother in law, inspiring other protests across the country.

However, the undoing for ISIS has been its own provocative actions. On 29 December, it raided Raed Fares's world-famous opposition media centre in Kafr Nabl shortly after the radio station there broadcast interviews with divorced women discussing their personal lives.

Having arrested six media activists, it released them two hours later. ISIS also attacked the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in Atarib in Aleppo province on 2 January.

Most provocatively of all, ISIS kidnapped, tortured, killed and then mutilated Dr Hussein al-Suleiman ("Abu Rayyan") a medical doctor and a commander of the Salafist militia Ahrar ash-Sham ("Free Men of the Levant"). This prompted an official condemnation by the Syrian National



Souad Nofal's daily protests against ISIS's kidnapping of her relative

Coalition on 1 January and finally brought to an end the previous semi-tolerance of ISIS by other Islamists, on the grounds of its military efficacy.

Convenient bogeyman

The fighting is not quite yet secular versus Islamist: the 60,000-strong,

Saudi-backed Islamic Front, which is dominated by Ahrar ash-Sham and the Damascus-based Brigade of Islam led by Zahran Alloush, has taken part in the anti-ISIS operations. So, too, has the Nusra Front, the rival claimant to ISIS for the title of Syria's official al-Qaeda affiliate, which helped to liberate 50 prisoners held by ISIS in Raqqah on 6 January.

Nevertheless, the Nusra Front, although less dominated by foreigners than its rival, must be worried that it will be next. Secular activists have also accused Alloush's Brigade of Islam of involvement in the kidnapping of human rights lawyer Razan Zaitouneh and several of her colleagues in December.

ISIS retaliated by threatening to hand territory under its control to the Assad regime, and by executing 70 handcuffed FSA fighters and secular activists in a children's hospital in Aleppo. It has also resorted to the use of car bombs against civilians that was its stock-in-trade in Iraq.

Suspicious of an unholy alliance

between al-Qaeda and the Assad regime were strengthened by the regime's bombardment of Atarib shortly after ISIS was expelled from it. Equally, whatever attempts at reconciliation with revolutionary forces the Nusra Front might be making now, it should not be forgotten that it received millions from the Assad regime in return for protecting the flow of oil from wells in Deir Ezzor province.

It is too early to tell what re-alignments this undoubtedly popular movement against ISIS will produce within the Syrian opposition camp. What is already clear, however, is that the movement against ISIS has undermined the propaganda of the Assad regime, for which it was a convenient enemy and bogeyman.

Freed from this counter-revolutionary parasite within its own ranks, the Syrian revolution will be better able to strike at the totalitarian Ba'athist police state, still the most dangerous enemy of Syria's workers, peasants and urban poor.

No justice – no peace!

Mark Duggan inquest verdict shows courts will never bring Met killers to justice. Only united working class action alongside black community self-defence can halt the killings and end police impunity

By KD Tait

A JURY has delivered a majority verdict of “lawful killing” in the inquest into the death of Mark Duggan, who was shot dead by police on 4 August 2011.

The jury delivered the verdict based solely on accepting that the officer who fired the fatal shot had an “honestly held belief” that Duggan was armed.

During the inquest two officers claimed they saw Duggan holding a gun. All the other officers testified that they did not see any weapon.

The only independent witness of the shooting itself, a person who filmed the event from a nearby block of flats, said that he saw Duggan with his hands above his head holding a mobile phone when he was shot. The witness has no historical links with Tottenham and did not know Duggan or his family; he had no motive to lie.

The police claimed that Mark Duggan threw a gun wrapped in a sock over a wall before he was shot. This was despite the fact that all the officers who surrounded him at the time said they did not see him throw anything.

The gun was found seven meters away from Duggan’s body. There was no trace of his DNA or fingerprints on the gun or the sock. Mark was not wearing gloves at the time of his shooting.

Although Duggan’s prints were found on the lid of the box, though not inside it, at no point in the journey or after they were stopped did the taxi driver see him open the box, in which the gun was alleged to have been transported.

Despite rejecting the police claim that Duggan was armed by an 8-2 majority, the jury decided nevertheless that it was lawful for the police officer to shoot him because he “believed” that Duggan was armed.

It is clear that at no point did Mark Duggan have the gun in his hand. Every police witness testified that they did not see Duggan throw the gun over the wall. Despite this the police could not – and did not have to – explain how they knew where to find the gun.

The verdict comes at the end of an



Carol Duggan, Mark's aunt, gives a fist salute of defiance after the inquest jury delivered their verdict

investigation, which has taken more than two years, during which Mark Duggan was repeatedly slandered as a “gangster” and “one of Europe’s most dangerous criminals” by both the police and the press.

Smear campaign

Yet immediately after the fatal shooting, the Met and the Independent Police Complaints Commission briefed the media that Mark was an armed criminal, out on a revenge mission, and had shot and injured a police officer first, before the officers returned fire.

Forensic evidence later proved the officer was shot by one of his own marksmen. The bullet lodged in his radio was police issue.

Soon headlines were being written saying Duggan was one of the most violent men in Europe, came from a “gangster family” and was a large scale drug dealer.

At no point during the inquest, however, did the police provide any evidence to back up their claims that Duggan was a gang member, nor did they provide evidence for their claim

that Duggan was preparing to collect a gun.

It was an old-fashioned smear, which suggests two things. One: that the police knew instantly that they had shot an unarmed man and had to build a cover-up story fast. Two: that the IPCC is not independent at all.

In this case as in so many others, the family and friends, trying to find the truth and receive justice, have come to detest the IPCC, who let a lie, smearing their loved one, do the rounds for three whole days before “correcting” it, and allowed key evidence, like the taxi, be contaminated before it could be properly searched.

Pattern

The verdict is not so much a whitewash as a brazen reassertion of the right of the police to execute people with impunity.

This impunity has been demonstrated again and again. It is sadly the case that Mark Duggan joins a long line of young black men who have died mysteriously in police custody. Colin Roach, Roger Sylvester, Christopher Alder, Smiley Culture, Sean Rigg... the

list goes on and is still being added to.

No police officer has ever been convicted of murder resulting from a death on duty, though many trials and inquests have proved beyond their guilt beyond doubt.

The inquest into Mark Duggan’s death proves once again that the police are held to a different standard than ordinary people; especially if their victims are working class and even more so if they are black. They are still – as the Macpherson Report into Stephen Lawrence’s murder found – “institutionally racist”.

They are not “just citizens in uniform” as we are taught at school but a force that stands above the people and, as far as concerns black people, other ethnic minorities and the working class majority, above the law.

This is because the police are the first line of defence for an unjust, exploitative and racist system – one whose injustice is defended by the whole apparatus of the state and justified by media monopolies owned and directed by billionaires.

In the words of Carole Duggan “we

are going to fight until we have no breath left in our body” – not just for Mark Duggan, his family and children, but to see every officer responsible for the daily battery of crimes committed against ordinary people brought to justice.

Disarm the police

There can be no peace without justice. The police have intimidated and terrorised working class communities, pursued private vendettas and acted as judge, jury and executioner for too long.

They – along with politicians like local MPs David Lammy and Diane Abbott – now want the family and wider community to settle matters in a “normal” way.

When the family organised a vigil outside Tottenham Police Station on 11 January, the police lined the back streets with vans of riot cops and predicted violence. The treatment of the victims as criminals continues.

Nevertheless, hundreds turned up – black, white, Kurdish and Turkish – to show their respect and anger. How can they fight on for justice?

The police and the worse than useless IPCC cannot be reformed or made accountable to the communities they are supposed to serve.

If the police lied through their teeth and backed each other up for 16 months just to bring down Tory Minister Andrew Mitchell – just think what they would be prepared to do against working class families.

The police need to be disarmed. All of them. The special firearms units and teams of spies that they send in to discredit victims of violence, like the Lawrences, need to be disbanded.

But in the end, no amount of scrutiny and reform will protect us from the miscarriages of justice, the deaths in custody, or the casual day-to-day violence and abuse in the cells and on the streets.

Working class communities need to rely on their own organised defence groups to protect them from violence wherever it comes from: police, racists or gangs. And not to forget any of the victims of the police.

No justice – no peace!