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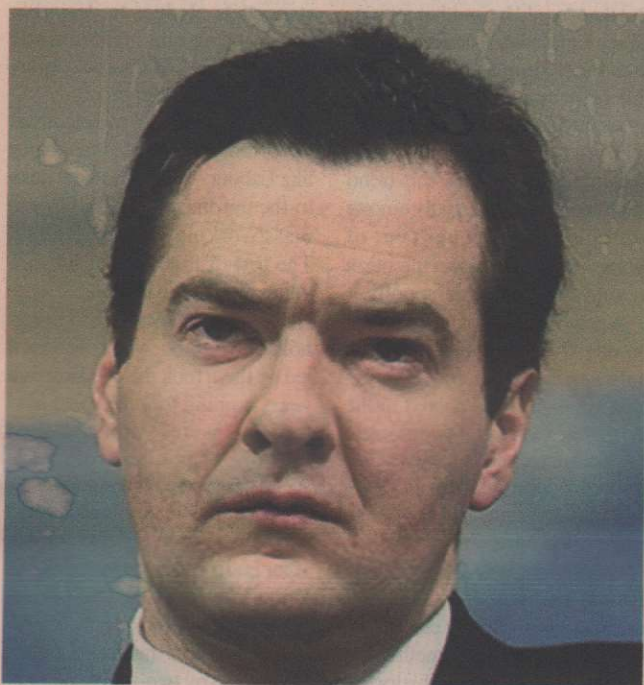
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Workers power 5

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Stop the Tory attacks



In May the Conservatives want to win the election to make even deeper cuts, which will take us back to the 1930s. We must stop them.

By Jeremy Dewar

FORGET GEORGE Osborne's claim that Britain could become the richest country in the world. Don't be fooled by David Cameron's desire to see full employment.

These are just soundbites to divert attention from their record in government. A smokescreen to hide their real intentions.

Remember the Coalition promised they would eliminate the deficit and reduce Britain's debt by 2015. That didn't happen.

Instead the deficit has ballooned to over £100 billion this year. Why? Because we have just suffered the longest and deepest recession in a lifetime.

Half the deficit is spent – not on hospitals, schools or green energy production – but on servicing the debt. £1 billion a week

straight to the bondholders, the very same people who caused the great crash in the first place.

That debt now stands at £1.45 trillion and is set to grow and grow. Far from reducing the debt, the Tories' cuts have increased it.

The Tories think that they hold a trump card when it comes to employment: record numbers in work and the official unemployment rate down below 2 million.

Only the truth is a lot different and most working class people know it.

A TUC survey estimates that there are now 1 million jobless people who are not included in the figures, because they are denied benefits under the toughest regime ever.

Millions more have been hounded into declaring themselves self-employed, whereas in

reality they are earning way below the minimum wage. Similar numbers are trapped in precarious jobs: part-time, zero-hours contract, agency, minimum wage.

No wonder real wages have crashed through the floor. Even Bank of England economist Andrew Haldane says we are living through the longest and steepest decline in wages since the mid-1800s: a 10 per cent drop on average.

Cuts

Osborne announced another round of austerity in his final autumn statement. Another £55 billion of cuts on top of the £35 billion already made. The next five years will see austerity accelerate.

The A&E crisis is the net result of £20 billion of cuts and £7 billion of privatisation in the NHS.

But the Tories want another five years to finish off the job of dismantling the NHS.

They cut 630,000 public sector jobs in the last five years. The new package would cull another 1.1 million.

Osborne's latest austerity programme would take public spending, as a proportion of national wealth, down to levels not seen since the 1930s, since before the creation of the modern welfare state.

Their Lib Dem partners in crime claim this would be a disaster, even "political suicide" according to David Laws. Hypocrites.

Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg and treasury minister Danny Alexander actually signed off this austerity package. They agreed to it only last December.

But these liars want to worm

their way back into office – with the Tories again or with Labour, they just don't care! They deserve the punishment at the polls that they will surely get.

In anticipation at the anger this scale of attack will produce, the Tories are proposing more restrictions on our right to strike:

- A minimum 50 per cent turnout on all strike ballots
- A minimum 40 per cent of all those balloted voting for action
- Companies can employ agency workers to scab on strikes
- New "minimum service levels" to keep public services running during strikes.

The TUC's Frances O'Grady called this "a democratic outrage". Quite right. No government since 1945 achieved these margins. The Conservatives only won 23.5 per cent of those eligible to vote in 2010, so who are they to dictate

to us?

Throw them out

The Tories are neck and neck with Labour in the polls. The billionaire owned media will campaign hard to turn this into a right wing majority. But this is by no means a certainty. We can stop the Tories winning another term.

To do this, the unions are key. Sure they will send thousands of full-timers and activists out to canvass and campaign on the doorstep, but the reality is that working class voters will not turn out in their millions unless we can force the union leaders to place clear demands on Labour:

- Fully fund the NHS
- Tax the rich, make them pay
- Reverse the cuts
- Raise the minimum wage – £10 an hour
- Cancel the debt

Where we stand

CAPITALISM is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need. Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militias can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the rule of the working class in society. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

THE LABOUR PARTY is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party – pro-capitalist in its politics and practice, but based on the working class via the trade unions and supported by the mass of workers at the polls. We are for the creation of a genuine workers' party, based on a programme for the overthrow of capitalism and the implementation of socialism and workers' power.

THE TRADE UNIONS must be transformed by a rank and file movement to put control of the unions into the hands of the members. All officials must be regularly elected and subject to instant recall; they must earn the average wage of the members they represent. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class – factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action and workers' defence organisations.

OCTOBER 1917 The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The parasitic bureaucratic caste led these states to crisis and destruction. Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances with the capitalists (popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class worldwide. These parties are reformist and offer no perspective for workers' revolution.

SOCIAL OPPRESSION is an integral feature of capitalism, which systematically oppresses people on the basis of race, age, gender and sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all-class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.

IMPERIALISM is a world system, which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of the oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. Against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists we fight for permanent revolution – working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist and semi-colonial countries, we are for the victory of those oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland and all other countries. We fight imperialist war, not with pacifist pleas, but with militant class struggle methods, including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

WORKERS POWER is a revolutionary communist organisation. We stand in the tradition of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and the revolutionary policies of the first four congresses of the Third International. Workers Power is the British Section of the League for the Fifth International. The LSI is pledged to refound a revolutionary communist International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. If you are a class-conscious fighter against capitalism, if you are an internationalist – join us!

The Greens – neither a socialist nor a working class party

By Dave Stockton

IF THE Scottish National Party is touted to cause the electoral upset of the century and maybe lose Labour the Westminster election, then the ballooning support and membership of the Green Party is the big story south of the border. Greens are regularly leading the Lib Dems in opinion polls, with recent results as high as 9 per cent.

The party's membership has more than doubled since September to 43,829 members, passing UKIP's last reported membership of 41,943, and pressing hard on the heels of the Lib Dems (44,576).

The Greens are clearly attracting a substantial number of younger voters, looking for a radical "party of the left": one with policies that stress not just the mounting threats to the environment but also issues of social justice and opposition to the austerity mania of the main parties.

Its recently amended Philosophical Basis (PB) document talks of "making social justice central" and asserts that "Green politics and social justice are fundamentally dependent – without environmentalism, the planet will become uninhabitable; without social justice, the planet isn't worth living on."

It goes on:

"A system based on inequality and exploitation is threatening the future of the planet on which we depend, and encouraging reckless and environmentally damaging consumerism. A world based on cooperation and democracy would prioritise the many, not the few, and would not risk the planet's future with environmental destruction and unsustainable consumption."

Trade unions

Its new leader Natalie Bennett, in her acceptance speech to conference, also proclaimed, "the trade union movement plays a vital role in defending the interests of working people" and urged "all the party's members to be active trade unionists".

Its immediate slogans include raising in the minimum wage to £10 per hour, a change from austerity and welfare cuts to investment in decent jobs, and moving "from privatisation for the benefit of the 1 per cent to public management of essential services not driven by corporate greed".

The party's most prominent spokespersons tend to belong to the left of the party, people who openly call themselves socialists like Caroline Lucas, the party's only MP and prominent in the antiwar movement, who regularly speaks at anticuts rallies, visits picket lines and supports strikes.

It is widely reported that there is a haemorrhage of supporters

from the left of Labour to the Greens. Even Left Unity reports losses in that direction.

In Labour's case the reasons are obvious. In practice it has long abandoned its priority of serious measures of social justice, by accepting the straight-jacket of Tory-Lib Dem priorities of balancing the budget and paying off the bankers' debt. It is unable to offer serious change for the better, either on welfare or the environment.

As for Left Unity it is of course much smaller (2,000 members) and cannot field more than a handful of candidates in May, whereas the Greens are intending to stand in 75 per cent of constituencies. But there could be another reason. Given Left Unity's determination thus far to limit its policies to a left reformist framework, and given the Greens' (like the SNP's) robbing the Labour Party of its discarded left clothes, this trend might continue, especially among young people, 19 per cent of whom are recording an intention to vote Green in opinion polls.

A genuine party of the left must be one for whom elections are only a means to an end, creating a party of activists rooted in the struggles waged by the unions in the workplaces and by campaigners in the communities, and with an open and unashamedly anti-capitalist programme.

So why not vote Green? Quite simply because it is neither a socialist nor a working class party, either in the goals and methods of its programme or in its historical and contemporary links to the labour movement.

It still talks of being "neither right nor left", and whatever individual leaders may say it is not openly socialist or anticapitalist. It wants to reform the behaviour of property owners, making them live up to their social responsibilities rather than taking their property and putting it under the ownership and control of working people. Without this, all talk of supporting "community self-government over corporate rights" is just that: talk.

The best you get is waffle such as the following in the Philosophical Basis:

"Property laws should permit neither states nor individuals to treat their property in whatever way they choose. Instead they should aim to ensure that all people, where they wish it, have their needs met through access to the land and its resources, while maintaining its quality for future generations. Property laws should therefore impose duties on owners as well as granting rights."

The Green Party is plainly a party heavily based on the intelligentsia. According to its 2013 Equality and Diversity membership survey the proportion of

members with a university degree was 57 per cent, more than double the national figure of 26 per cent, and within this figure 37 per cent had a Masters, PhD or other higher degree. And 56 per cent of members described themselves as "lower middle class"; under a quarter (23 per cent) identified themselves as "working class" in any form.

Petit-bourgeois

So the Green Party is unsurprisingly a petit-bourgeois party – with no historic links to the working class movement and, despite Bennett's overtures to the union leaders, no real identification with it. In these circumstances its pledges to desirable pro-working class reforms and the "leftness" of its spokespersons are not decisive.

It also retains all the electoral opportunism of a reformist party like Labour – but without its links to the unions and its traditional mass working class electorate. The test of this is what they do when they are in office.

This can be seen in its stronghold of Brighton, where a council led by them took the decision two years running to implement austerity measures, which slashed millions of pounds from adult social care and children's services. Their council leader Jason Kitcat was almost proud of this stating, "Our budget showed up the opposition's favourite lie, that Greens aren't up to the job of governing."

Nevertheless the Party Conference voted by two-thirds majority to support these decisions.

So the Greens – even if they are party "of the left" with policies to the left of Labour – have neither the organisational nor the historic roots of the latter, let alone the mass support of millions of workers. These features make it possible, and indeed necessary for revolutionary socialists to work with these Labour supporters to reveal in practice their party's inability to address their burning needs, in the process winning them to the project of a radically different kind of working class party.

Of course it is a legitimate tactic to unite with the Greens in supporting strikes, opposing cuts, fighting wars and racism, and of course environmental destruction. This is a united front – marching separately, striking together. But voting for the Greens, let alone joining them, means building neither a party with an anticapitalist programme, nor an activist party based on the working class and its struggles. It is to endorse them and their programme for power, however unlikely they are to attain it. It is in effect deserting the working class movement for petit-bourgeois radicalism and populism.

FEEDBACK

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Editorial

What Labour and socialist candidates should be fighting for

IT IS a total diversion to call for a vote for capitalist parties like the SNP, or for the middle class Greens, who do not have any historical or organised links to the working class and do not even claim to represent it.

We should criticise the pro-capitalist policy of the Labour leaders, their adoption of Osborne's budget cuts, their reactionary policies on benefits, privatisation, pay, immigration, and their Nato warmongering.

These are the sorts of demands Workers Power will be campaigning around, both where we support Left Unity candidates and where we support Labour.

- Stop all the cuts and reverse all those made since 2008.
- Restore public spending by taxing the rich.
- Nationalise the banks and merge them into a single state investment bank.
- Scrap privatisation and PFI/PPP schemes in the NHS, bringing the entire service from the GPs to hospitals back into state ownership and employment under the democratic control of workers and users.
- Bring the utilities and commanding heights of the economy into public hands, without compensation and under workers' control.
- End the break-up of public education, end Academies and free schools, nationalise all private schools, combining them all into a fully comprehensive state system under democratic management, involving local councils, and representatives of education workers, parents and pupils. Free public nursery provision for all pre-school age children.
- Solve the housing crisis by a huge building programme of socially owned accommodation, taking over unused or underused premises and repairing or refurbishing run-down council properties. This can be paid for by a steeply progressive tax on property, business and incomes, levied locally and nationally.
- Create full employment by a programme of socially useful public projects, like building houses, hospitals, nurseries and schools, improving flood defences, extending free provision of health, education and childcare.
- Legislate for a £10 an hour minimum wage immediately and a maximum 30 hour working week with no loss of pay
- Reinstate the earnings link to the state pensions, and reintroduce final salary pension schemes.
- Scrap the bedroom tax, reinstate disability benefits, end benefit sanctions, raise housing benefit, and introduce rent controls.
- Repeal the anti-trade union laws.
- Scrap tuition fees and bring back maintenance grants for students, including those in further education colleges.
- Free abortion and contraception on demand. State funded local women's centres and refuges under users and workers' management.
- Freedom of movement and an end to immigration controls.
- Abolition of all remaining discriminatory laws against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people.
- Not a penny, not a person for the defence of this exploitative system. Stop all wars and withdraw all troops from overseas, from Afghanistan, Iraq, Central and Eastern Europe, and Ireland, Break all ties with Israel.
- Bring racist police to justice. Disband the special units, squads and undercover spies. Disarm the police.
- Votes at 16 and proportional representation – restore the powers of local councils.
- Abolish the House of Lords and the Monarchy.

Election 2015 – a race to the bottom

By Dave Stockton

RAMPANT INEQUALITY, falling real wages, the NHS in crisis, young people unemployed or condemned to crap jobs or piling up debt to get an education. These are the real results of governments, both Labour and the Tory led-coalition, trying to rescue capitalism from its historically long and severe crisis at the expense of ordinary people.

The billionaire press barons – Richard Desmond, Viscount Rothermere and Rupert Murdoch – and their hate filled rags – the Express, the Mail and the Sun – take the responsibility for covering up for those really to blame for all this.

They foment hatred for immigrants, who claim far less in benefits than they pay in national insurance and taxes. They stigmatise as scroungers and freeloaders the most vulnerable and impoverished in our society. And the supposedly liberal Channel 4 joins in with programmes like the "Benefits Street" series. What our rulers are up to? It's simply a case of divide and rule.

In fact, divert and rule, too. Divert attention away from the real causes of the suffering affecting the great majority and aim all the indignation at those at the bottom, rather than the top of society.

The working class with jobs – nurses, train and bus crews, engineers, builders, teachers – all struggling on falling real wages are encouraged to target their anger on the unemployed, or those whose wages are so low they are forced to draw benefits and rely on food banks. Meanwhile, the rich, never as well off as today, laugh all the way to their banks.

Labour's straightjacket

Of course, it is no surprise that the press and the right wing parties ignore the suffering they have inflicted as they defend the privilege of the rich at the expense of the poor. But what about Labour, the party of the trade unions, the party of the working class? What are they saying?

Instead of using the platform of parliament and reportage in the media to reply to Tory, Lib-Dem and Ukip lies, Labour all too often echoes them, claiming that it is listening to "public opinion". When media "experts" claim that Labour has a credibility gap on the economy, which can only be narrowed by adopting policies closer to those of the Coalition, Labour does just that!

It promises that it will not borrow to expand public services because that would "get Britain into debt". Instead of exposing the ridiculous lie that government debt is the result of Labour spending on public services by reminding people that the enormous borrowing was actually to rescue the banks and the City of London, the Labour leaders meekly bow their heads and apologise. Then they promise to continue with George Osborne's cuts, but to make them more fairly and over a longer time.

Labour's shadow chancellor, Ed Balls, promises not only to stick with Osborne's cuts, but to continue with wage restraint in the public sector. He has even promised to trap himself into a "neither tax-raising



nor borrowing" straightjacket. At Labour's conference he declared:

"We will legislate for these tough fiscal rules in the first year after the election and they will be independently monitored by the Office for Budget Responsibility. So in our manifesto there will be no proposals for any new spending paid for by additional borrowing."

The Guardian purred that, "business liked what it heard from Ed Balls in his speech to Labour's conference," noting that, "what was unusual about the address was that it contained nothing new to wow the party faithful". Instead, what they got was "fiscal responsibility in the national interest". And, in Business and Industry Shadow Secretary Chuka Umunna, big business has another firm friend, one touted to succeed Miliband as leader if Labour loses.

Ed Miliband himself emphasises, "I would be a prime minister who champions the rights of the consumer and the rights of businesses to succeed and make profits in a competitive market" while, at the same time, promising "sensible cuts".

Class politics

Yet Labour is the party founded over a century ago to stand up for the poor, the exploited, the victimised and the voiceless. It still depends on the unions for money, though Miliband has reformed the procedure for the payment of affiliation fees. Despite this, apart from a few marginal reforms, such as the "mansion tax" and a tax on tobacco companies, the party will not dare either to borrow or to raise taxes.

Neither will it dare to advance a plan to eradicate unemployment altogether or to end insecure under-employment. True, they have promised to end zero-hours contracts and to raise the minimum wage a little, but putting young people back to work, or allowing them to go to college without piling up half a lifetime of debt requires something far more radical than that.

It needs a major programme of public works – to build, equip and staff more houses, schools and hospitals, to prepare defences against the effects of climate change, to turn the paltry minimum wage into a real living wage, at least £10 an hour, to unshackle the unions from the most undemocratic laws in Europe so they can strike to force up pay.

Despite widespread public support,

they dare not pledge to renationalise all the rail companies or the Royal Mail. Although they are promising to repeal Lansley's Health and Social Security Act, they do not dare proclaim that they will end PFI and cancel all the PFI debts, with no compensation to the parasites currently running hospitals into the ground.

Why? Because they know this will not mean a real fight with the capitalist class, with the industrialists, bankers and bondholders, who would take revenge on them. So their response is to promise only policies that have been costed and approved by the bosses' own experts, even though they know this will not meet the crying needs of their supporters.

Mass movement

Of course, if after the election a Labour government only has a pile of votes behind it, then the City and the media could easily push it around. But Labour, as its founders envisaged it, was not to be simply a parliamentary or a municipal party, but the representative in parliament or local councils of a mass movement made up of millions of trade unionists.

That is still true today, although to a greatly reduced degree. That movement, mobilised in the workplaces, in the communities and on the streets, could give Labour the backing to force through many of the measures needed by the working class. Instead of raising taxes on ordinary people, it could make the rich pay. Even if they only coughed up the vast fortunes they have made since the crisis of 2008, this would go some way to doing this.

Because of the party's continued connections to the trade unions, millions of working class people still hope that by supporting it they will get a better life and some protection from the Tories. Supporting Labour at the polls, while demanding that they go much further than current policies, can raise the horizons of the great mass of the working class.

Union members, whose subs fund Labour, should insist it carries out the policies of no cuts and renationalisation that their own conferences have repeatedly voted for. Such a campaign could not only give them hope of reversing the onslaught on the welfare state, on their real wage levels, their pensions and their children's access to a first class education, but also create a movement to enforce their demands.



PCS 'left' ditches democracy



Mark Serwotka doesn't want to be doing this again anytime soon

By Rebecca Anderson

THE NATIONAL Executive Committee of the Public and Commercial Services union has made the outrageous decision to cancel annual elections for both their own committee and the Group Executive Committees that lead the various departmental unions, like the DWP.

Ironically the current leadership of PCS took the leadership of its predecessor union to court over the issues of democracy and annual elections.

The union leaders' reason is that the government has launched an unprecedented attack – massive job cuts in the civil service, a scab union in HMRC, cuts to facility time and now the withdrawal of the union's ability to take subs out of members' wages (the "check-off" system). The latter measure means having to persuade every member to set up a direct debit.

Job losses have been slowly eroding the union's membership for years, which now stands at around 230,000, and the withdrawal of check-off has created an immediate crisis where the NEC has estimated that they need to save around £3 million in non-staff cuts.

The NEC are meeting again in late January to decide how to save this money, but the decision to cancel the elections (which cost around £600,000) was taken in December because the election timetable meant that they either had to be cancelled or go ahead at that point.

The NEC has said in their defence that all of their decisions – except the one to sell the union

headquarters – can be reversed at the May conference and therefore that the ability of the membership to hold them to account has been retained. In other words, we have taken away your democratic rights now, but you can ask for them back after the event!

One of the main concerns of the growing number of reps and activists in revolt is that there was absolutely no warning given to the membership. Surely the NEC saw the union sliding into financial crisis; yet they did not consult the branches and instead took a unilateral decision to have another term in office.

On the contrary, at the 2014 conference, when the membership was debating whether to pursue a merger with Unite, we were assured that the union's finances were healthy. To now find out that we are in such dire straits that the leadership would rather cancel an election than spend a small proportion of the £25 million raised from the sale of the headquarters is shocking.

Two campaigns – one by dissidents from the leading Left Unity faction and another by the Independent Left – have been set up to demand the reinstatement of elections. Some branches have passed motions to this effect, while reps and activists from other branches have put their names to statements.

It is testament to the PCS leadership's political as well as financial bankruptcy that its first act is to discard democracy. And it is a scandal that this includes Socialist Party members. Democracy is not a luxury for a working class organisation, it is its lifeblood.

Does the SNP offer a way forward

The Scottish National Party claims it is a social democratic party and it is widely seen as an anti-austerity party to the left of Labour. What should socialists make of this, asks **Andy Yorke**

SINCE THE 45 per cent "yes" vote in the independence referendum, the SNP's membership has nearly quadrupled to 92,000, making it the biggest party in Scotland by far. The SNP's skyrocketing ascent is matched only by the implosion of Scottish Labour.

Recent polls for the 2015 general election show the SNP's support as double that of Labour, with up to 52 per cent of vote, leading to claims that it could sweep up 54 out of 59 Scottish Westminster seats, far surpassing its record of 11 MPs in 1974. But while an SNP landslide is a possibility, it remains to be seen if voters at the last minute shudder at the thought of another Tory government and switch back to Labour.

However, the SNP's new leader Nicola Sturgeon claims it will hold the balance of power in Westminster, and pledged the SNP will not join a Conservative-led coalition, so a vote for the SNP would not necessarily mean "you wake up to the Tories" as Labour claims. She has however refused to commit the SNP to a coalition with Labour, instead possibly supporting it on an issue-by-issue basis for maximum leverage.

Left helps the nationalists

Now sections of the pro-independence left, after enabling the SNP's leap forward by providing foot-soldiers and left cover for the Yes campaign in the referendum, are adding to the damage by calling for a vote for the SNP in 2015. Tommy Sheridan, leader of Solidarity, has said, "in order to maximise the pro-independence vote in next May's General Election I believe all Yes supporters should vote for the SNP".

Solidarity itself has yet to

decide its stance, though two of its components, the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party are against an alliance with the SNP. For the SP, the answer is the small electoral beer of TUSC.

The Scottish Socialist Party's Colin Fox has also written an open letter urging, "the SNP and the Greens to join with the SSP in standing 'Independence Alliance' candidates in 2015, put our own individual interests to one side, and break the Labour Party's historic stranglehold on Scottish politics".

After a much-hyped build-up to its November conference and floating the idea of a Podemos-style, new Scottish left party, the Radical Independence Movement delivered a dud, launching nothing and agreeing no electoral strategy. Instead it has simply benefited the SNP. Whether advocating a vote for the SNP or ducking the issue, the left's promotion of a Yes vote has benefitted the nationalists, with 70,000 new members streaming into the SNP.

As SNP stalwart George Kerevan pointed out:

"Unfortunately for a Scottish Podemos, this revolutionary wave has flowed straight into the SNP, by-passing the far left. Tens of thousands of those new recruits are working class. SNP branch meetings now resemble in social composition and accent those of the Labour Party of a generation ago. The SNP's trade union section now has more members than Labour has ordinary members in Scotland." (The Scotsman 18.1.15)

This shows that the Yes vote was not a "class vote" in the double speak of the Yes socialists, but a straightforward nationalist vote.

A working class party?

With its 92,000 members, the SNP almost certainly does have more workers and trade unionists in it than Scottish Labour, which could now have less than 10,000 members. The SNP has won an unprecedented base in traditional Labour heartland areas as a reaction to the SNP's limited defence of reforms and Ed Miliband's commitment to austerity, be that austerity-lite or not. And with the right wing Blairite Jim Murphy in charge, Scottish Labour is very unlikely to change its spots.

But that doesn't make the SNP a workers' party.

The SNP has traditionally been a party of the middle class, managers, professionals and the "labour aristocracy" based in public services. Even assuming the proportion of working class members has risen, a contradiction remains: the trade unions are affiliated in their bulk to Labour and they will be directing their members to vote Labour.

On the other hand, workers in the SNP exist only as atomised individuals, mixed in with a mass of middle class members, who have flowed in... and who can flow back out again.

If Kerevan is right, no doubt a struggle will begin to break sections of the unions, possibly beginning with the more militant ones, from Labour to the SNP. However, this would be a struggle opposed to the formation of a new workers' party, a party directed against capitalism as a system and united north and south of the border on a class basis.

And while Labour overwhelmingly relies on union donations, resources and

activists at election time, the SNP's funding is more reliant on alternative sources, including the billionaire Stagecoach mogul and homophobe Brian Souter, whose £500,000 donation meant the SNP "underdog" outspent Labour in the 2007 elections, helping it win extra seats.

One month later the SNP dropped its promise to re-regulate the bus network, proving the adage: he who pays the piper calls the tune. It also proves that the SNP is not a "capitalist workers' party", to borrow Lenin's description of Labour, but an out-and-out capitalist party.

That is not to deny the SNP has grown among the working class or that many more workers now have leftwing illusions in nationalism, but it is to counter those on the left who deny this damage or want to deepen it, block criticisms of the SNP or fall for its "social-democratic" propaganda.

Left populism

The SNP's overall strategy for an independent Scotland is a neoliberal dream of a pro-big business environment, centred on a 3 per cent cut in corporation tax to create one of "most competitive and attractive economies in Europe".

Meanwhile, the SNP government in Holyrood and SNP-run local councils roll out the cuts and closures demanded by the crisis: 500,000 public sector jobs have been lost and another 600,000 are slated to go. The SNP's 2015-16 budget includes £513 million in Westminster cuts; this follows the £3 billion already slashed from the Scottish budget since 2010. SNP councils pass on austerity cuts no less than the other parties.

Bus workers challenge 80 different pay

By Bernie McAdam

ON 13 JANUARY over 20,000 striking London bus drivers in Unite paralysed services. Pickets were held outside every bus garage in the capital. Boris Johnson's claim that a third of the service was running is rubbish. Only one in 10 routes were active, if you can call one bus every 20 minutes "active".

Many, if not most picket lines had between 50 and 100 members on them, blowing horns and waving red flags. At Camberwell, drivers even held an impromptu rave, which was recorded and tweeted far and wide. The mood was one of exhilaration, members remem-

bering the successful Olympic strike of 2012, but also keen to restart the battle for equal pay which began back in 2008.

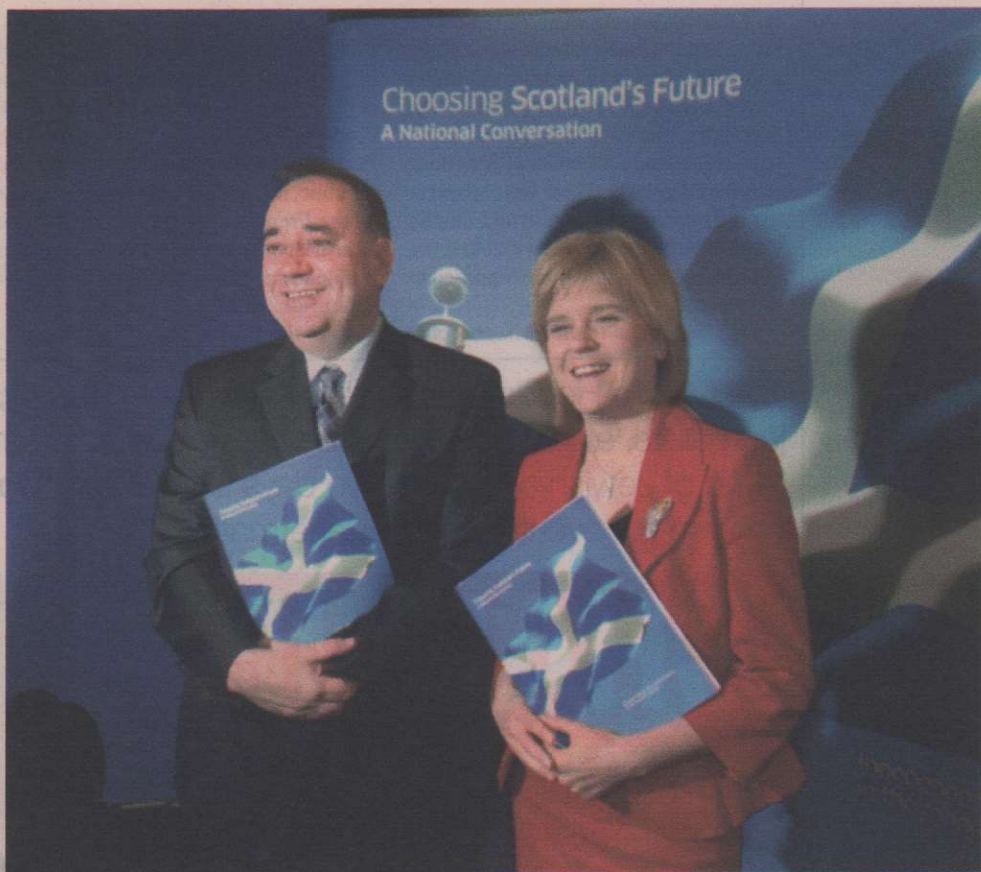
The strike was caused by a refusal of bus operators to negotiate an end to the grossly unfair pay disparities across London's 18 bus companies. Unite is fighting for one pay scale and one set of terms and conditions for all bus workers.

There are over eighty different pay rates covering London's bus drivers, doing the same job, even driving the same route, for different rates of pay. As Unite regional officer Wayne King put it, "Bus passengers pay the same fare, so why shouldn't bus drivers be paid the same rate?"



London bus drivers show solidarity on the picket line in Willesden

for the left in Scotland?



Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon face right for the bosses, left for the workers

The SNP-led Dundee city council dishonestly held back the news of £8 million in cuts till after the referendum, and now plans £30 million cuts in total, leading up to 2017.

Even the reforms of the Salmond years – blocking tuition fees, abolishing prescription charges, neutralising the bedroom tax, extending free school meals and childcare – aimed at winning SNP votes and the referendum, have been largely shut off. Sturgeon's legislative programme of 12 bills consists of tweaks, consultations, and minor changes.

Instead she boasts: "My job, as First Minister, will be to champion the interests of Scottish business at home and around the globe" since it is the "vibrant business base earning the wealth that makes that [redistribution] possi-

ble". If independence had been won in September, this "social neoliberalism" would just become ever more naked neoliberalism. And independent or not, Scotland faces a sizeable deficit and debt, putting into question the durability of most of the SNP's limited "reforms".

The SNP's proposal for independence also supported the monarchy, the pound and the Nato alliance with its nuclear first strike policy – hardly consistent with its commitment to a nuclear weapons free Scotland, its totemic policy since their introduction at Faslane in the 1960s.

No vote for the SNP

Rather than help deepen working class illusions (and membership) in the SNP, the left urgently needs to reorient to join with socialists

south of the border in the project of building a new mass working class party. It should expose the SNP's record and agenda at every turn, defending the working class from nationalist divisions and austerity, be it from Westminster or Holyrood.

And it needs to fight to win larger and larger layers of workers and youth away from the SNP and Labour and for revolution and socialism. It can start this process by standing candidates on clear anticuts platforms, urging workers from both the Yes and No camps to unite against the bosses, and by placing clear demands on the unions and Labour to resist the cuts and reverse the damage done by the Tories and Lib Dems.

rates with one solid strike

Privatisation

The root of the problem lies in the privatisation of London buses back in 1994-95. Since then we have seen a marked deterioration in drivers' pay, terms and conditions. There have been effective pay cuts, as minuscule rises do not match inflation. Management bullying is at record levels, as written warnings are tossed around at whim.

Huge differences in pay have inevitably opened up across the different companies. New drivers can start on anything from £9.30 to £12.34 per hour, depending on the company. No wonder bus workers voted for strike action by 85 per cent!

The latest accounts for the capital's bus operators show the com-

panies making combined profits of £171.7 million, with directors' pay totalling £7.24 million a year. These profits and perks are explained by the ability of the bosses to drive down wages in a race to the bottom.

No Backtracking

The strike was a fantastic response to years of divide and rule by the bosses. But many on the picket lines recognized that one day will not be enough. If the bus operators do not open up talks, then a two day strike may well be on the cards.

But even with negotiations there is no guarantee of winning a single pay scale for all bus drivers, let alone a substantial pay rise. Drivers need to force their

leaders to call an all-out indefinite strike, and not to be deflected by more "talks" so often used by the bosses (and union officials) as a means of dissipating action.

If Unite leaders fail to escalate the action or end up doing a rotten deal, then mass garage meetings should take over the running of this dispute, deciding on action themselves and developing a strategy for victory. Bus drivers can't afford to lose this battle. A victory on equalising pay scales would provide the confidence to launch action for better pay and, most important of all, to nationalise all the bus companies and put them under workers' control.



Bolshie Women

Ched Evans and rape

By Joy Macready

CHED EVANS is a rapist. He was convicted by a jury in April 2012 and sentenced to five years in prison. He is on the sex offenders register indefinitely.

But more than that, he is an unapologetic and unrepentant rapist. He doesn't deny the events that led up to his conviction, but maintains his innocence by arguing that having sex with a woman so incapacitated that she has no memory of what happened that night does not constitute rape.

Yet that is the definition of rape – sex without consent.

Evans' conviction should be seen in context of how difficult it is for rape victims to get justice in the UK. Not only do they have to go through the ordeal of detailing the rape to the police, put under scrutiny for their behaviour and dress, but the majority of rape cases don't even make it to court.

In 2012-2013, the police only sent 31% of all reports they received onto the CPS for prosecution – a total of 5,400 cases. This is despite a 30% increase in the number of rapes being reported. Only 60% of cases brought to trial resulted in a conviction.

When he was released in October after serving half of his sentence, Evans was set to restart his high profile, professional football career. The Professional Footballers' Association welcomed his return and "rehabilitation", and asked that his former club Sheffield United let him train there.

This sparked a huge public outcry. Olympic champion Jessica Ennis-Hill was one of the first to speak out, threatening to

sever ties with the club. An online petition on change.org to stop Evans being rehired by the club collected more than 170,000 signatures.

A second petition against Oldham signing Evans has already attracted close to 71,000 signatures – sponsors Verlin and Mecca Bingo have said that they would terminate their relationship with the club if it signed Evans.

This popular response, far from the "mob rule" that Evans ascribes to it, is part of a developing social movement against rape and sexual abuse – and a cult of celebrity that turns a blind eye to the likes of Jimmy Savile, DJ Ray Teret, Bill Cosby and Rolf Harris.

Evans is not the first footballer to use his celebrity status to rape. Footballers are known to frequent nightclubs to pick up women to have sex with, which they call "harvesting". There exists a grotesque sex culture, with "roasting" – the seduction of young women into degrading group sex in which they are passed from player to player and often filmed – a common and accepted practice. The trial made it clear that Evans and his cronies were engaging in exactly this sort of vile behaviour when the young woman was raped.

If the campaign against Evans helps make such practices socially unacceptable, then it has done a power of good.

But what about his victim? She has been forced to change her name and move away from her hometown after her identity was revealed on Twitter and she became the target of online abuse. Rape victims can never

return to their old life. They live in fear of another attack, can suffer panic attacks and sexual anxiety, and some attempt suicide. It can take years to return to what looks like 'normality' from the outside.

This public outcry also comes at a time when the government's austerity programme is savagely attacking support for rape victims, shutting rape crisis centres and refuges and cutting funding to local services.

The media glamorisation of celebrities has created a climate where the lifestyle of the rich and famous is presented as something to aspire to. Material wealth is one part of this aspiration, but another is the ability to escape the limits and moral standards that dominate the lives of most people. Celebrities are seen to get away with behaviour that would ordinarily be punished. People are right to be resent this obnoxious manifestation of class inequality.

Socialists should aim to relate to the growing anger in society at the impunity with which the elite are able to engage in all kinds of abuses, while using their influence and power to avoid the consequences.

Preventing Ched Evans returning to top flight football may result in a small measure of satisfaction, but the fate of an individual is a drop in the ocean. We need to take the attention that his case has brought to Britain's rape problem and transform it into a movement which targets the systemic causes – the sexist subordination of women which props up a society in which a wealthy minority lord it over a disenfranchised and oppressed majority.

How Marxists criticise religion

THE 7 JANUARY killing of journalists from French satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo, and the racist murder of four Jewish people two days later, were acts of terror intended to escalate racial tensions between Arabs, Jews, Christians and those of no religion.

In this aim, they succeeded. There has been a spike in attacks against Arab and Muslim targets motivated by religious hatred across France. In Niger, a former French colony, the Christian minority was targeted in pogroms.

The terrorist attacks and racist reprisals which followed have been condemned by socialists across Europe. But the question of how socialists should respond in the aftermath has proved divisive.

Many point correctly to the racist backlash and the “Republican demonstration” of “national unity” and argue the priority for socialists is to take the initiative in opposing the racist stigmatisation of Muslims.

Others have said our focus should be on defending “free speech” and the right to be offensive towards all religions. This is not a simple question of emphasis. Socialists are both the most consistent defenders of the right to a free press, as well as intransigent opponents of racist and religious intolerance.

In the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attack, we must decide how to balance these two objectives.

Is all criticism equal?

It is clearly not racist to have a critique of Islam as a religion. It is absolutely right to criticise the social and political agenda of those parties and leaders like Erdogan in Turkey, or the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which define themselves by association with a religion, as well as the ultra-reactionaries like ISIS or al-Qaeda.

Anti-clerical satire from their political opponents in these countries is a legitimate, courageous and often very dangerous, act whose purpose is to challenge the privileges and reactionary role of a religion that benefits from state integration or promotion.

In France and Britain, two European countries with large Muslim minorities, there is an obvious difference. Clearly socialists oppose the often reactionary

politics and social norms preached in mosques along with those preached in ultra-conservative synagogues and fundamentalist churches.

But we have to recognise that Muslims in Europe are a socially oppressed minority, one singled out for particular harassment and demonisation by the state and media in the context of our rulers’ imperialist interventions and occupations of Muslim-majority countries. These invasions are justified as a war against the threat of terrorism, and this threat has to be constantly amplified in the face of widespread opposition to these wars.

The media and governments therefore promote a disproportionate attention to “domestic terrorism” carried out by “Islamic extremists”. Certainly many young people are “radicalised” by the British state’s occupations and the brutal actions of its soldiers. Often they are not particularly religious, but become so through identification with that force most clearly identified (in the media, if not always in reality) as leading the resistance to British, US and French imperialism.

It is undeniable that many regimes use Islam as justification for their attacks on women, LGBT people, secularists and so on. Yet states around the world deploy all religions in pursuit of these reactionary objectives. Singling out Islam from other religions as having intrinsically reactionary characteristics is not only analytically worthless, but worse, it contributes to the insidious ruling class propaganda that Muslims in general are a reactionary and dangerous alien element within Europe.

This incitement to Islamophobia, that is, hatred and fear of Muslims, is just as bad as antisemitic incitement. This sort of “criticism of Islam as a religion”, whether it is engaged in by secularists, liberals or open racists, cannot be isolated from the fact that the vast majority of Muslims are non-white.

The right to offend

Marxists – as is well known – are atheists and secularists. We demand the state should be entirely free from supporting or advocating any religion in all its functions including education. However, this applies to its institutions – its courts, its

schools, its hospitals and town halls and parliaments. We do not demand that religious people attending these be obliged to ignore their religion’s dress codes, observance of regular prayers, dietary laws etc. To stop Muslim girls wearing the hijab or niqab in school is as unjust as forbidding orthodox Jews to wear a kippah or yarmulke.

Where Marxists differ from Anarchism and bourgeois republican anticlericalism is our belief that, as a struggle against religion, mocking and abusing objects or figures of religious veneration, or its doctrines and symbols is utterly useless and actually counterproductive. Moreover, as we see with antisemitism, such actions can become a cover for racism – one the far right has recently adopted to evade laws against racial incitement.

Charlie Hebdo was not a far right wing or generally racist magazine. It has called for banning the Front National and subjected its leaders to merciless satire. It has mocked the Pope and other religions including Judaism. But its attacks on Muslims and mockery of Islam cannot be isolated from their social context and championed as legitimate anti-clericalism.

When Charlie Hebdo went beyond caricaturing individual reactionary Muslim political figures, to portraying Muslims in general as ignorant adherents of a backward religion, it contributed to the pervasive idea that there is something intrinsic about Islam that makes it “incompatible” with “Western values” and its adherents more likely to express themselves with the bullet rather than the ballot.

To defend the right to publish such material, wherever it is not a direct incitement to violence against its targets, is one thing. Revolutionaries – indeed all parts of the labour movement – should do so because we will recognise that the capitalist state cannot be neutral or colour-blind in its censorship.

Religious authorities must not be off-limits to criticism. However, just because we defend the right to publish does not mean we defend the decision to do so or endorse the content of material whose result – if not its intention – is to reinforce the reactionary ideas prevailing in society. In this sense we are not Charlie Hebdo.

‘Je ne suis pas Charlie’

IN RESPONSE to the hypocritical charade of Republican France’s “National unity” demonstrations, youth in the suburbs assembled under the slogan “Je ne suis pas Charlie”. This explicit rejection of a common interest between the establishment and the youth denounced as “scum” by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, sparked a mixture of denunciation and soul-searching about why young people don’t identify with “French values”.

For socialists, who with the youth of the banlieues reject totally the lie that working class people have anything in common with our rulers beyond the

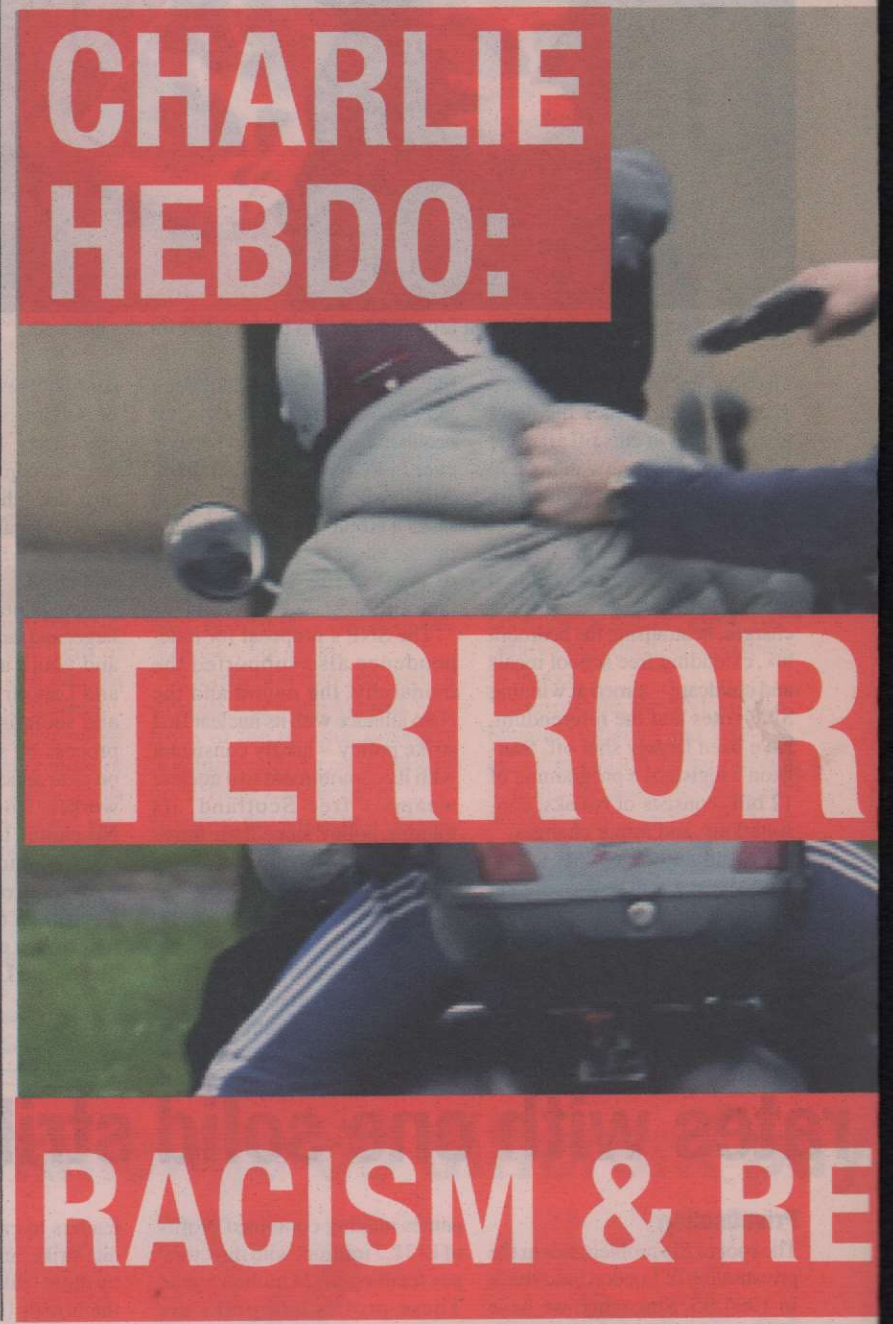
Secularism, multi

IN FRANCE, secularism (laïcité) and biting satire against religious teachings and authorities have a long tradition rooted in the great revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries, and embodied in the secular laws and constitutional provisions introduced in 1906. These were aimed at the still tremendously powerful Catholic Church, which repeatedly backed the counter-revolutionary forces opposed to the republic.

Defence of that tradition has become

a central plank of the ideology of the French bourgeoisie, a fundamental part of its claim to represent modernity and civilisation. Since the time of the Popular Front in France, when the Communist Party adopted defence of the bourgeois republic, it has seeped into the traditions of the French labour movement. The British labour movement has the opposite problem, a tolerance for religion in education, etc., inherited from Labourism’s roots in the nonconformist chapels).

The Charlie Hebdo massacre in Paris on 7 January, when journalists, a worker and a police officer, shocked the world, was followed by the killing of Jewish shoppers two days later. **Dave Stockton** analyse the events and their aftermath



CHARLIE HEBDO:

TERROR

RACISM & RE

antagonism that exists between exploited and exploiter, the reasons are clear.

When François Hollande permits the state terrorist Benjamin Netanyahu, orchestrator of recent Gaza massacres, to take the front row in a demonstration against terrorism how could young Muslims or those of an Arab family background fail to take this as a slap in the face?

When Hollande’s immediate predecessor, Sarkozy, stated that the attack on Charlie Hebdo “was a declaration of war on civilisation” and that “faced with barbarity, civilisation must defend itself” he hoped people would not remember the

French state’s own record of “barbarism”

They experience regular police harassment in their neighbourhoods and their numbers in French jails exist out of all proportion to their numbers in the general population – similar to black youth in the USA. Then there is the racist agitation from the growing forces of Marine Le Pen’s Front National.

At home Sarkozy has no reason to be taken seriously as a defender of civilised values. His threat to “karcheriser” (steam clean) the banlieues, which contributed to a wave of rioting by youth is only one instance among many that explain why

culturalism and working class integration

In Britain after the 7/7 attacks, as in France today, the discovery that the bombers had been brought up in Europe, but somehow had been “radicalised,” set off a series of agonising about Muslim communities “in our midst”. Why did some young people within these communities, who had been to “our” schools and in many cases initially assimilated “our” culture, become radicalised?

This was a challenge for both these two countries’ different traditions. French

two terrorists murdered 12
world, as did the subsequent
and Marcus Halaby



republican secularism, by declaring religion to be a purely private matter, beyond the state's remit, sees the country's two largest minorities (Jewish and Muslim) in religious terms. While it is willing to recognise and combat antisemitism it is wary of recognising Islamophobia as a form of racism.

Moreover its insistence on imposing a total ban on wearing the niqab in public and the hijab in all state buildings (courts, schools etc.) actually incites Islamophobia, with reports of women wearing the hijab on the street having it ripped off, etc.

British liberal multiculturalism instead patronises our minorities with a show of “tolerance”, while demanding their self-appointed “community leaders” report radicalised youth to the police and endorse “British values”. Both countries in their different ways demand assimilation from their Muslim citizens.

The media and politicians, while insisting they are not against Islam as a religion, see their minorities as a problem because of their resistance to our rulers’ supposedly universal and democratic values, and in particular for the tendency of their disaffected youth to identify with the victims of our rulers’ global aggressions instead of with their perpetrators.

On this however Western governments like to remain as silent as possible; it is not part of their propaganda that it is the invasions and occupations of their Nato allies, Israel, Russia etc. in the Muslim world of the past twenty years that make outraged young Muslims want to fight back against them.

President George W Bush posed a question to the American public shortly after 9/11: “Americans are asking, why do they hate us... they hate our freedoms, our freedom of speech, our freedom of religion.”

As if there were not more immediate and tangible things to hate for young people who for obvious cultural, national as well as religious reasons are justifiably outraged at the consequences of imperialism's subjugation and plunder of much of the Muslim world.

Within the last half-century, Western imperialism has armed and funded vicious dictatorships and corrupt ruling dynasties across the Arab and Muslim world, and supported or turned a blind eye to Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people and its invasions and occupations of Arab lands, all the while defending Israel's “security” and its right to exist as a “Jewish state”, and stigmatising all who criticise it as antisemitic racists.

Three quarters or more of French Mus-

lims originate from Algeria, a country that had to wage a bitter eight-year struggle for independence from France that ended in 1962. In the course of it around 1.5 million Algerians died and 2 million were displaced, out of a population of 10 million, of which 1 million were privileged European settlers lording it over the rest. Tens of thousands were tortured or imprisoned, while in Paris the police massacred 200 unarmed Algerian protesters in October 1961, meeting with little response from a labour movement dominated by the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF), which opposed Algerian independence.

And in 1991, French imperialism supported a coup by Algeria's “secular” generals to prevent the election of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), beginning a decade of civil war in which up to 150,000 died. These experiences are embedded into the collective memory of French Muslims, even if the wider population is often oblivious to them.

In Britain, Muslim communities of predominantly Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin have the memory of the British Empire's rule over the Indian subcontinent, followed by Partition in 1947, and Western support for several military takeovers in Pakistan since.

Is it any wonder then that young people from these communities become radical opponents of the British or French state's global actions or its official ideology? Add to this a daily experience of racist police harassment, politicians, journalists and neighbours, and finger-wagging in defence of a “civilisation” that relies on racism to delegitimise opponents of its wars’ at home, and is it no wonder many justifiably reject it all as rank hypocrisy.

Of course, on its own, this does not explain why political Islamism has emerged as the main form of oppositional politics in the Arab and Muslim world – and alongside it, the phenomenon of armed religious ultra-reactionaries acting as a pole of attraction to a small minority there and amongst Muslim minorities in the West. Here, we must take into the account the failure of secular nationalist regimes that promised modernisation to provide either prosperity or democracy to their peoples.

These regimes, like Egypt's Mubarak and the Algerian generals, often became corrupt lackeys of their former colonial masters little different to the corrupted Gulf sheikhdoms to which they were once counterposed; or, like Saddam's Iraq and Syria under the Assads, became totalitarian states visiting a level of violence on their own people that far surpassed even Israel's against the Palestinians.

Even so, the emergence of an explicitly

anti-imperialist movement against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan actually did “integrate” British Muslims into it. Its mistake was not that it made the fight against Islamophobia and racism a key component of the struggle against imperialist war, but that its leading component, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), tried to channel its political expression into a woefully inadequate electoral vehicle headed by maverick ex-Labour MP George Galloway.

By forming the Respect Coalition on a broadly anti-war but explicitly non-class and non-socialist basis, in a bid to draw the formerly pro-Labour and socially conservative Muslim “community leaders” and their followings into it, Respect's advocates on the organised left practically handed over the layer of Muslim working-class youth radicalised by opposition to war to “leaders” with whom many of them were just as disillusioned as they

were with Blair's New Labour.

In this way, they helped to ensure that “the Muslims” and “the left” would continue to exist in their own separate spheres, and so squandered the opportunity to draw this layer of youth into a lasting engagement with the labour movement and the left, as the representatives of the only force ultimately capable of putting an end to racism and war – the organised working class.

And this is the only “integration” that we are in favour of – not the subordination of minorities or their representatives to a “national culture” or a “national identity”, but the integration of working-class people and youth from all communities into a common struggle against our real common enemies: the capitalist billionaires and their global system.

Stop Pegida

The British press have, in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo massacre, woken up to the growing Islamophobic movement in Germany. Peter Main investigates

The German Pegida movement is probably the most organised expression of Islamophobia in Europe. The name itself comes from the initials of its name in German, Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West, and that alone sums up the distorted ideas upon which it is based. Europeans have no single country to be patriotic about, and the idea that “the West” is about to be subject to Islam is about as bizarre as it is possible to imagine.

What it really means, of course, is “White people against immigrants”.

The movement began as a Facebook page, underlining that it is not only progressive forces that can make use of social media. It was established by Lutz Bachmann in Dresden, in what was East Germany. The location is significant; like many other regions in the East, Dresden has remained relatively poorer than the West. As a result, it is not an area with a large immigrant population, but it certainly has its share of deprivation, which is the material basis for widespread discontent.

Pegida has been able to harness that, in particular, by playing on themes that were developed in the period before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Its first public demonstration only attracted a couple of hundred but its anti-establishment slogan, “We are the People”, was the motto of 1989, and its Monday evening marches echoed those that began in Leipzig that year and rapidly spread to all the cities of the German Democratic Republic.

A similar development is clearly Pegida's aim. Attempts have been made to hold marches in many other cities, Berlin, Cologne, Leipzig, for example, but these have not reached anything approaching those in Dresden where on 12 January some 25,000 marched.

Far right

The importance of Pegida is not to be found in its far-fetched claims of “Islamisation” but in its creation of at least the beginnings of a right wing mass movement, fuelled by the undoubted grievances of hundreds of thousands who suffer the consequences of austerity policies even in the richest country in the EU. It is a movement within which the organised forces of the extreme right can grow. That means not only the Alliance for Germany, comparable to Ukip, but also the neo-Nazis of the National Democratic Party and the street fighters of “The Fist of the East”.

The killing of Khaled Idris Bahray, a young Eritrean refugee in Nuremberg, on the night of the last Pegida march in that city is a chilling reminder of the forces that are encouraged in the wake of such mobilisations; two days before, a swastika was painted on his front door.

Much has been made of Angela Merkel's explicit attack on the movement in her New Year speech, in which she accused its leaders of being motivated by hate. This is Germany's official line, emphasising a degree of sympathy for the plight of the marchers, but urging them not to be duped by racists and fascists. In reality, it is a concession to the racists and will only encourage them to denounce the politicians, who pretend to care for the “poor Germans” but whose policies create the problem in the first place.

The only effective response to the rise of the right is to combine direct action to prevent the fascist elements from establishing themselves and to protect vulnerable communities with mobilisations of the main working class organisations against the impoverishing policies of the government and the bosses.

the brazen cynicism and double standards of France's political elite and their international allies like Cameron and Merkel, alienates and revolts young people and “radicalises” them. Indeed these youth have every right to reject this hypocritical “civilisation” which treats them as second class citizens while lecturing other countries about democratic values.

Far from exporting “enduring freedom”, “democracy” and “Western civilisation” to the victims of the “barbaric” Taliban or Saddam Hussein, the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq have shattered these countries' social fabrics, and

provoked armed resistance under the leadership of reactionary Islamist forces. Moreover these wars, as all those of us who opposed them predicted, ultimately led to the blowback of terrorism to the countries whose governments were responsible for it.

All this means that young people from immigrant backgrounds should indeed be radical – not in the sense of committing terrorist acts here, which only helps the Western leaders justify their wars and makes life harder and more dangerous for Muslim people here – but in the sense of seeking a radical alternative to their

oppression and exploitation. These roots lie in capitalism, imperialism and racism, and fighting them requires us to be not just radical but revolutionary.

The duty of the working class and youth movements in the West is to generate the sort of mass movement we did during the 2003-06 peak of the antiwar movement, as we have done during the bombing of Gaza. We need to fight to get Nato troops right out of the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa too. Such a movement will go a long way to countering the justified alienation and feelings of persecution that turn into more terrorist outrages.

In from the cold or into the fire?

As the US moves to 'normalise' relations with Cuba, **Jeremy Dewar** asks, is this the end of the Cuban road to socialism?

"THESE 50 YEARS have shown that isolation has not worked. It's time for a new approach."

With these words President Barack Obama announced on 17 December the first softening towards Cuba since the revolution of 1959, the expropriation of American and other foreign capitalists in 1961 and the doomed Bay of Pigs invasion of the same year.

This was the culmination of 18 months of secret negotiations, hosted by Canada and facilitated by Pope Francis. Canada is one of Cuba's biggest trading partners, accounting for 17 per cent of Cuba's exports, while the Pope is the spiritual leader not only of Cuba's 10 million Catholics (60 per cent of the population) but also many of the 1.8 million emigrants concentrated in Miami, New York, New Jersey and California.

Embargo

Nevertheless the US sanctions regime – the most extensive in history – remains in place. As Republicans dominate both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and are both fiercely opposed to anything Obama proposes and closely tied to the exiled Cuban capitalists, sanctions may not be lifted anytime soon.

The Foreign Resistance Act (1962) and Cuban Assets Control Regulations (1963) outlawed all trade with Cuba by US corporations and individuals, whether based in the USA or not. Private money transfers were also prohibited, denying Cuba access to hard currency, while travel to Cuba was banned.

The embargo pushed Cuba even more firmly into the arms of the USSR and its economic bloc, Comecon. In 1965, the 26th of July Movement, which had led a revolution on a bourgeois programme of national sovereignty under capitalism, merged with the small Cuban Communist Party. By the end of the decade, almost all of Cuba's economy was nationalised and production organised according to a bureaucratic plan.

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 took away Cuba's export market, including its lifeline, the sugar-for-oil trade, which accounted for 73 per cent of Cuba's exports and nominally paid about four times more for sugar than the world market price. However, this did not lead to a restoration of capitalism, as occurred in Eastern Europe.

US imperialism saw its chance to finally bring down a "communist" regime only 170 km southeast of its territory. In 1996, Bill Clinton signed off the Helms-Burton Act. Its purpose was literally to starve Cuba into submission: Cuba has to import roughly half its food. It penalised foreign companies that traded with Cuba and barred their employees from entry into the USA. It banned all Cuban-related activity on Wall Street and debarred ships that had been to Cuba in the past six months, forcing companies to declare the nature of their activity on the island.

The fact that this openly violates "international law", so often cited by the imperialists when it is to their favour, counted for nothing.

Survival

How has Cuba survived this isolation? Its survival surprised almost all the commentators, especially the US-based Cubanologists who relentlessly advocate a policy of privatisation, dismantling of planning mechanisms and full exposure of all parts of the economy to the market. They have consistently blamed all on the stubbornness of the "evil" Fidel Castro.

Certainly the economic collapse in the early 1990s was severe. As much as 80 per cent of



Man waits to shine tourists' shoes under the shadow of Ché, Fidel and Raúl

foreign trade was lost. Imports fell from \$8 billion to \$2 billion over three years. GDP fell by 31.6 per cent between 1989 and 1993. Sugar production, dependent on exports to the Soviet bloc, dropped by nearly 60 per cent between 1989 and 1995. Even in 2000 its output was only half of its 1989 value.

Aside from political repression, which for example outlaws public criticism of the regime's economic programme, it is undoubtedly continuing mass support which made this survival possible. Although there were protests and clashes with the police in Havana in 1994, no mass movement against the regime has yet emerged.

The government called this mass scarcity of everything, including food supplies, the "special period". Energy supplies collapsed as Soviet oil imports dried up. Things recovered only slightly when Venezuela under Hugo Chávez granted oil exports on favourable terms from 2000 on.

The regime began minor economic reforms. In 1993 the use of hard currency and the transfer of US dollars from abroad were legalised. State farms were converted into cooperatives, farmers' markets were liberalised and a limited private sector was introduced. Foreign investment, in the form of joint ventures with the state, were also encouraged, especially in tourism, which was to replace sugar as the main economic sector.

Parallel to this, the government began to reduce the state sector. From 1989 to 1998, the proportion of workers employed by the state fell from about 95 to 79 per cent. Many ended up in the informal sector, which was gradually legalised.

The reforms had its price, paid for by the working class. Real social expenditure per capita decreased by 78 per cent. A two-class society gradually emerged: those who had access to dollars, mainly in tourism, and those who didn't.

With dollars, Cubans could buy scarce consumer goods not otherwise available. Skilled workers, doctors, teachers and mechanics, abandoned their jobs and started to work as hotel staff or taxi drivers. Hotels and resorts became privileged zones, which ordinary Cubans could not enter. Prostitution, enormously reduced after the revolution, began to flourish again, along with the black market.

By 2000 there were 400 joint ventures, with estimated foreign investments of more than \$2 billion, the Cuban military holding shares in the most important. In 1999 Carlos Lage, vice-president of the Council of State of Cuba and a member of the Politburo, explained his economic strategy: "All past and future changes will be performed within our socialist system." But he continued:

"By the way, Cuba offers conditions to investors that they don't find in most countries of the Third World: security, stability and a population with a high level of health and education; an economy which found its own way and continuing growth, a country without corruption, without drugs and without organised crime."

The Cuban bureaucracy was trying to take a course similar to China's. But the bureaucracy itself is no monolithic bloc. The traditional party elites see market reforms as a necessary evil, and want to maintain state control and bureaucratic planning. Another tendency increasingly sees the market reforms as a desirable way forward and is eager to expand them.

At each turning point, in 1991, 2001 and 2011, the regime has conducted mass "consultations", not just within the party but also the wider population. Sometimes it has even altered its plans in the light of criticism.

The official party youth paper, *Juventud Rebelde* has even stated (rightly) that bureaucratic planning and lack of workers' democracy are Cuba's main problems: "Socialism is only possible where transparent, democratic and real workers' control exists." Its significance is limited, however, because it doesn't reflect the material interests of any faction of the ruling bureaucracy.

Life after Fidel

At the end of 2007, the 81 year old Fidel Castro renounced all his state offices, due to health problems. In February 2008, the National Assembly elected Fidel's designated successor as the new head of state: his younger brother Raúl Castro, a Stalinist hardliner once known as the "fist of the Revolution". It fits to that reputation and the nature of Stalinism that it is now, under his rule, that moves to restore capitalism are advancing further.

In September 2010, the government announced the dismissal of half a million state

sector employees, about 10 per cent of Cuba's workforce, while another half a million would be sacked in the coming years. Self-employment was widened to 178 activities, financial credits were introduced for new entrepreneurs and licenses for 250 000 economic freelancers were issued. Private sector farming, already accounting for 71 per cent of production, was also increased.

By the end of 2015, 1.8 million workers will work in the private sector, rising from 5 to 45 per cent of GDP. Raúl Castro explained this new policy with the words: "We have to erase forever the notion that Cuba is the only country in the world where one can live without working."

In January 2014, Cuba's first free trade zone at the new port of El Mariel was inaugurated by Raúl Castro, together with Brazil's President, Dilma Rousseff. Brazil's government financed 75 per cent of the port, built under the control of Brazilian construction multinational Odebrecht.

Two months later, the National Assembly passed a law opening up all sectors to foreign investment, except for health, education and press. It guarantees tax exemptions for eight years and protection of property and profits. Currency convertibility between the dollar and the peso is also set to take place.

This is why the pressure on the USA to change course has increased, and why the Republicans' pet Cuban exile politicians have lost influence. US companies are being invited to make profits on the island. The real reason for the embargo is being weakened.

As Julia E. Sweig, director of Latin America Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations put it: "You see players other than Venezuela coming in, most prominently Brazil, China, some Russia, a little bit of Mexico. Europe now is involved in a deep political dialogue that is going to result in more investment by its member countries, and I think Cuba has kind of reserved a slice of that portfolio for the United States."

Political revolution

However, it may not go that way. Far too often the Cuban revolution has been written off and the return of capitalism heralded as just a matter of time. The Cuban working class is highly politicised. Because the regime could never realistically defend itself militarily – even in the Bay of Pigs crisis, it had to arm and mobilise 100,000 volunteers – the Cuban Communist Party rests far more than other post-capitalist Stalinist regimes on a degree of popular support.

Cuban workers and youth have every reason to fear any rapprochement with the USA. Not only is there the historic memory of life under former US puppet Fulgencio Batista, but also 55 years of invasion and siege. This will be an obstacle to the USA's ability to conjure up a "colour revolution" led by its stooges, along the lines of Georgia, Ukraine and elsewhere.

The opening up of the economy, on the other hand, will continue to fragment the bureaucracy and create opportunities for a working-class opposition to emerge. It is vital that a revolutionary Trotskyist party is formed in the coming period, to defend the gains of the Cuban revolution. These are by no means small, with a lower infant mortality rate than the USA and longer life expectancy than almost any Latin American country. But to do so, it will also have to destroy the bureaucratic apparatus that ultimately can only lead the country back to capitalist exploitation.

From Euromaidan to Euro catastrophe

By KD Tait

UKRAINE'S PARLIAMENT has approved economic reforms described by a pro-government politician as amounting to "genocide". Prime minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk says they are necessary to reform Ukraine's bankrupt economy, declaring that, "everything that wasn't done in the past 23 years, needs to be done in 23 months."

By "everything" he means the irreversible destruction of the remaining social protections inherited from the Soviet planned economy.

Ukraine's working class is one of Europe's poorest, while its oligarchs are among the world's richest. After two decades of exploitation by a kleptocratic elite, the workers and peasants of Ukraine will now be squeezed even harder to secure Ukraine's integration into the EU's economic sphere.

The 2008 financial crisis destroyed Ukraine's currency, leaving it limping along on Russian and IMF loans. Resentment at a wealthy elite, who avoided the everyday humiliations of poverty and corruption, nourished popular hostility to the government.

For many, all hopes of improvement were vested in outside forces, particularly the prosperous EU. Former president Viktor Yanukovich's delay in signing the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement in November 2013 dashed their hopes for economic growth and democratic reform through closer ties to Europe.

Thousands turned out to protest in Kiev's Maidan Nezalezhnosti, and an alliance of oligarchs, liberals and fascists coalesced in a "Euromaidan" movement whose contradictions were papered over by a common hostility to Russia, and a sense that Europe would champion their diverse aspirations.

On 21 February last year, Yanukovich fled. The new coalition government excluded the liberal Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform, whose leader, Vitali Klitschko, had denounced the violence of the movement's fascist wing. Within months, Russia had annexed the Crimea, civil war was raging in the Donbass region and Ukraine had signed the neoliberal Association Agreement.

The government

The new government nailed its anti-Russian colours firmly to the mast. Within days, parliament passed a bill abolishing the protections granted to minority languages, confirming the fears of the Russian-speaking third of Ukrainians that the new regime would exploit nationalism to shore up its support at their expense. The veto of this provocation by acting president Oleksandr Turchynov came too late and was viewed as a cynical ploy.

Even at this stage, acting prime minister Yatsenyuk described his government as "political suicide". In a poll of 3,200 people across former president Yanukovich's southeastern stronghold, 74 per cent regarded his regime as illegitimate.

Newly elected president, Petro Poroshenko called fresh elections in September 2014, saying that they were necessary to "purge" parliament of obstructions to economic reform and military victory in the Donbass.

October saw a fresh cohort of MPs



Porochenko takes aim – but who's in his sights?

come in, with Yanukovich's former Party of Regions reduced to a rump. Five of the six main parties joined a new coalition, whose agreed priorities were accession to NATO, neoliberal economic "reform" and the promotion of "national-patriotic values".

The previous interim government's law on "social lustration" aimed to purge state officials connected to Yanukovich's regime. Many Euromaidan supporters wanted democratic reform and a reining in of the oligarchs, a sentiment shared by many of its opponents.

However, patronage remains in place. And it says a lot about the class character of the dominant forces in Euromaidan that this "revolution" did not establish durable structures that could have mobilised opposition to a new government of oligarchs.

Oligarch president Poroshenko, the "Chocolate King", is a political operator who has had a hand in almost every government since the late 1990s, most recently as Yanukovich's foreign minister.

Former acting president Turchynov now chairs the National Security and Defence Council. Yatsenyuk himself was personally approved by US State Department envoy Victoria Nuland in her infamous leaked phone call to the US ambassador to Ukraine.

Former Ukrainian ambassador to the USA Valentyn Nalyvaichenko is now chief of the secret service, the SBU, while far right ideologue Serhiy Kvit, former member of the "Tryzub" group, the main component of the fascist Right Sector, has used his position as education minister to encourage the neo-Nazi Azov battalion's propaganda visits to state schools; he will be responsible for new compulsory classes promoting "national-patriotic values".

Eight out of the 20 ministers previously served under Yulia Tymoshenko's government. Amongst them is minister of agrarian policy and food, Oleksiy Pavlenko, an investment banker who is also boss of his own agricultural company. Minister of fuel and energy Volodymyr Demchyn previously worked at tax-avoidance specialists Ernst & Young and as boss of Investment Capital Ukraine.

Yuriy Stets, previously boss of Poroshenko's 5 Kanal television channel, will head a new ministry of information policy, denounced by Ukrainian journalists and by Reporters Without Borders as an attack on media freedom.

The government's anti-corruption credentials are limited to the appointment of three foreign "specialists", ostensibly less tied to established interests. Minister of economic development and trade Aivaras Abromavicius was previously a trader and portfolio manager. Alexander Kvitashvili, who privatised Georgia's healthcare system under pro-US president Mikheil Saakashvili, has been picked to do much the same job in Ukraine. And US-born investment banker Natalie Jaresko, a former US State Department apparatchik and financial advisor to former president Viktor Yushchenko, will be the new minister of finance, tasked with dealing with the IMF.

The government programme

The only things really new are that, for the first time since independence, Ukraine has a government with an overwhelming parliamentary majority, which has moved decisively to end the country's non-aligned status. Parliament voted 303 to 8 on 23 December to repeal legislation that barred it from Nato membership.

For the moment this a statement of intent more than anything else; however Ukraine's geostrategic importance both to Russia and to the USA makes this a provocative act and confirms its role as a pawn in the "great game" of inter-imperialist rivalry.

By contrast, democratic reforms barely feature in the coalition agreement. At most there will be some minor reforms to the electoral system.

The government's domestic programme is effectively a dose of IMF medicine so toxic it is more likely to kill the patient than cure it. The "patient" in this case is Ukraine's uncompetitive extractive and heavy industries, which export military technology and means of production to Russia (relying on subsidised Russian energy).

One-tenth of all state employees are to be sacked in the next five years. Benefits for children, mothers, pensioners and con-

scripts will be axed, as will inflation indexing for wages, price controls on medicines and subsidies for coal and gas. Privatisation of coal mining will bring the closure of mines that cannot be sold.

Meanwhile, military spending will rise to 5 per cent of GDP, alongside a 40 per cent cut in healthcare spending and a 20 per cent cut in education. Hundreds of rural schools will be closed, and increased hours for teachers will lead to 100,000 job losses.

Such are the credentials of Euromaidan's "democratic revolution" so idly championed by many Western leftists. The economic programme of the new government, dictated as the price of EU and IMF assistance, shows that Euromaidan's hopes of European salvation were illusions.

Internal contradictions

To impose this social catastrophe, the ruling clique have de-emphasised "European values" in favour of the poisonous narrative of a "national revolution" against the "Russian yoke". A few minor reforms will act as sop to the liberal intelligentsia who earn their living demonising a third of the population as "Moskals" and "terrorists".

The Soviet legacy weighs like a nightmare on the minds of Ukraine's nationalists. Accordingly, Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera is to be "admired" and his genocidal Ukrainian Insurgent Army regarded as "heroes". Those Ukrainians who fought in the Soviet Army and partisans are to be wiped from history and their memorials destroyed. Ukraine's Soviet past, whose legacy includes large-scale industry, is to be transformed into a tale of Russian colonisation.

Yatsenyuk's commitment to do in 23 months what a generation of politicians failed to do in 23 years will fall hardest on the working class and poor farmers. However, the main obstacle to this project for the last two decades has been the balance of power between rival blocs of oligarchs in the east and west of the country. Yatsenyuk will therefore have to impose his programme on those oligarchs who depend on trade with Russia and the golden goose of state subsidies.

Ukraine's domestic politics reflect this

basic fact: of two camps of capital, based in two halves of the country. Control of state structures allows each camp to command the votes of populations with distinct histories and nationalistic narratives. This is what lies behind the "nationalism" of Tymoshenko's Fatherland union and Yatsenyuk's People's Front, and the "pro-Russian" character of the Party of Regions.

For ordinary Ukrainians, these rival attitudes have consequences for how they see their status within Ukraine today. For the oligarchs, these competing ideologies are merely tools in their struggles over a state apparatus used both as a source of personal enrichment and a means to repress their opponents.

Socialism

The struggle against the oligarchs and reactionary nationalist agendas has been obstructed by the legacy of Stalinism. While the working class in the east retained its relatively privileged position, as compared to the more agricultural west, this was not a product of its own strength but rather of its reliance on the nexus of business interests, trade union bureaucracies and a state bureaucratic caste inherited from Stalinism.

This reliance is now reinforced from two sides: by an ultra-nationalist regime in Kiev, hostile to the the working class in the east, and by eastern workers' own desire to preserve their region's heavy industry.

Escalating social and economic crisis will expose these tensions. Socialists in Ukraine should expose the fact that the rival oligarchs and competing imperialist powers all have a common cause in keeping all sections of the working class politically reliant on the representatives of the capital.

The creation of a working class party independent of all the oligarchs is the most urgent priority. This means a party that advocates socialist revolution to put the economy under the control of the working class, organised by democratic workers' councils and defended by the armed population in place of the present-day police, army and secret services. This is the only way to end exploitation and reorganise production to meet the needs of ordinary people.

Socialists in Europe and in Russia should aid this struggle by opposing the attempts of their own ruling classes to subordinate Ukrainian workers to rival nationalist agendas, to impose their proxies in power and to force Ukraine to choose between exploitation at the hands of one or another imperialist camp. In Britain, this means a struggle against Nato's militarisation of eastern Europe and opposition to our government's support for Kiev's ultra-nationalist regime.

As this regime's austerity offensive gathers pace, the possibility of awakening the workers and youth of western and central Ukraine from their dreams of an idealised "Europe" will grow, and with it the opportunities to reunite the working people of Ukraine.

However, to succeed in that, a party will also have to prove its independence of Russian imperialism and its own agents. This is the only hope for saving the country from destruction at the hands

Who will take advantage of Rajapaksa's downfall?

The victory of Sirisena represents the transfer of power from one bourgeois faction over another. Nevertheless, argues **Peter Main**, it may offer new opportunities for the left

THE DEFEAT of Mahinda Rajapaksa in the Sri Lankan presidential election has opened up a period of flux in the island's politics. The new president, Maithripala Sirisena, was Minister of Health in Rajapaksa's government so his election does not represent the victory of any consistent opponent to government policy. When he announced his candidacy he made it clear it was because "the entire economy and every aspect of society is controlled by one family".

The emphasis on the corruption and cronyism of the Rajapaksa administration made it clear that he was the candidate of the majority of Sri Lanka's wealthier families who had been frozen out by the Rajapaksa clan. This was the basis for the carefully planned and highly secret coalition that ensured there was only one major opponent to Rajapaksa in the election. In other words, the election was mainly about which faction of the bourgeoisie was to get its hands on the wealth of the country.

Within hours of the announcement of his candidacy, other senior figures from the government "crossed the floor" to join the opposition, to be followed by a steady stream of defectors throughout the election campaign. In a country where one family really did control everything, deserters from government needed to be very sure that they would be rewarded for their disloyalty. There can be little doubt that their expectations were underwritten by US support for the removal of Rajapaksa, who was increasingly seen as too reliant on China for the financing of reconstruction and development projects. The change of government therefore has a real significance internationally.

Domestically, the clearing out of the old administration and the re-allocation of posts and patronage will inevitably also mean a relaxation of the increasingly repressive rule that has suffocated political life for the last ten years. The working class and its organisations can take advantage of this to organise and mobilise.

Given the structure of Sri Lanka's population, only having the support of sections of the Sinhalese bourgeoisie would not have been enough to ensure victory for Sirisena. In order to gain the backing of wider layers of society, especially the political leaders of the Tamil and Muslim minorities, he promised not only early elections but also the repeal of constitutional changes that had given the presidency huge executive power. He did not, however, promise any measures that might be interpreted as concessions to greater autonomy for the Tamil or Muslim districts.

It remains to be seen whether the pre-election promises will be kept, particularly with regard to presidential powers, but parliamentary elections are in Sirisena's interests and are scheduled for 23 April. They will undoubtedly be held in very different circumstances from those in 2010 when, in the aftermath of the defeat of the Tamil independence movement, Rajapaksa rode a wave of Sinhalese chauvinism, reinforced by a totally subservient media, and gained a more than two-thirds majority in Parliament.



Maithripala Sirisena

The Left and the elections

Given the presentation of Sirisena as the "Common Opposition Candidate" and his backing by substantial interest groups, not to mention international powers, it was not surprising that the election turned into a two horse race. As the results show, "other candidates" in total received just 1.1 per cent of the votes cast.

The existence of a broad, anti-Rajapaksa coalition proved too great a temptation to the opportunist right wing of the Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International, the Nava Sama Samaj Party (NSSP), which called for a vote for Sirisena. The NSSP's Vickramabahu Karunaratne justified this by saying that working class forces should unite even with bourgeois parties against Rajapaksa because his was an increasingly "fascist" government.

This is the rationale of the popular front strategy developed by Stalinism as an alternative to the workers' united front proposed by Trotskyists in the struggle against fascism in the 1930s. While it is permissible to unite with anyone in practical actions, demonstrations, strikes, occupations or in defence of democratic rights, this cannot be applied at the level of government. There can never be an agreement on government between the working class and any of its exploiters. What the NSSP has done, insofar as it has any influence, is facilitate the smooth transfer of power from one bourgeois faction to another.

Karunaratne may now say that, having got rid of Rajapaksa, the working class and the oppressed minorities will be free to fight for their own interests, but we guarantee that, if they do, Sirisena will use all his powers against them... and the supposed Trotskyists of the NSSP will have helped him. Moreover, the logic of supporting Sirisena is likely to lead to support for, perhaps even participation in his administration.

In the elections, there were candidates representing three ostensibly revolutionary parties: the Socialist Equality Party (International Committee of the Fourth International) the United Socialist Party (Committee for a Workers' International) and the Frontline Socialist Party. Across the island, these candidates got

quite similar results: the FSP 9,941 votes, the USP, 8,840, the SEP 4,277, the NSSP 4,047. The significance of this is that the FSP is a very much bigger organisation than either SEP or USP. When it split from the Janathā Vimukthi Peramūṇa (JVP), it claimed some 15,000 members, so the results suggest it was not even able to convince its own members to vote for its candidate.

The Socialist Party of Sri Lanka (SPSL – the section of the League for the Fifth International) gave critical support to the FSP candidate who was standing as the candidate of the Left Front, an electoral alliance that also included those NSSP members who did not support Sirisena, Maoists and non-aligned lefts. The attempt to build a single electoral campaign as a clear socialist alternative to the candidate of the bourgeois opposition was a worthwhile initiative, understood as part of a longer term project to overcome the disintegration of the left in Sri Lanka. However, if that project is to make any progress, lessons will have to be learnt from the experience of the campaign.

The very low level of support for any of the candidates of the left groups cannot be ignored. For comparison, Siritunga Jayasuriya of the USP gained 35,425 votes in 2005. That alone underlines the urgent need to overcome the fragmentation of the left. However, the results also show that nearly 30,000 voters did support candidates who declared themselves as socialist and insisted that the working class and oppressed of Sri Lanka should not side with either of the bourgeois candidates.

Unity

Were those 30,000 organised around a common programme, fighting for the needs of the workers and oppressed in the trades unions, women's organisations, student unions and community campaigns, week in and week out, not just at election times, they would surely have an impact far greater than mere votes would suggest.

The Left Front remains a forum within which important steps towards that goal can be taken. The programme upon which its candidate stood represented a clear move to the

left by the FSP, the biggest component of the Left Front. Certainly, it also had very important weaknesses, particularly regarding the state and the right of self-determination of the Tamils but, in the interest of continuing the struggle for principled positions on those issues, we were prepared to give critical support to the campaign.

But it also contained this statement: "The Security Forces, Police and Intelligence Services maintained with the purpose of repressing the public will be dissolved and people's voluntary militia units will be formed for public security." And it went on to say that "ownership of large scale production modes, decision making on production and benefits of production will be transferred to the working class through the state and factories and workers' councils".

While these formulations do not adequately express the Marxist notion that the working class is the active revolutionary agent and seem to suggest that it would be the recipient of powers conferred on it by the state, rather than a class fighting to impose its rule over the capitalist class, they are nevertheless centrist, rather than reformist. In this sense the manifesto of the Left Front was a step forward. Moreover, through the different organisations involved, the Left Front had genuine links to trade unions, representing some 20 per cent of the country's unionised workforce.

We therefore disagreed with the decisions of the NSSP and USP to oppose the Left Front candidacy and stand their own candidates. The USP has claimed that this was because the FSP did not support the self-determination of the Tamils, but for the last two years their candidate Siritunga Jayasuriya has been sharing "anti-Rajapaksa" platforms with Ranil Wickremasinghe, the leader of the main bourgeois party, the UNP. The actual political practice of the USP, then, has been essentially the same as the NSSP: support for the "Common Opposition Candidate".

In the period up to the parliamentary elections, Sri Lankan politics will be more open than they have been for many years. The first priority in this period should be the organisation and mobilisation of the working class and oppressed minorities to demand their needs are met, both economically and politically. The organisations within the Left Front should take the lead in promoting united campaigns, drawing in unions and community organisations and, wherever possible, forming new organisations to coordinate action.

This work is essential not only because of what can be gained in the short term but because of its potential longer term role in advancing workers' interests under whatever government comes to office after 23 April.

At the same time, the Left Front needs to clarify its programme while standing candidates for that election, learning from the experience, positive and negative, of the presidential election. In that way, the opportunities offered by the fall of Rajapaksa can be turned into concrete advances for the left on the road to the building of a new workers' party in Sri Lanka.

Syriza's modest proposal

By Tobi Hansen and KD Tait

cont. from back page Many on the left have argued that Syriza's current success vindicates its approach. Certainly Syriza has played the parliamentary game skilfully, but at what price? Syriza's strategic decision to pursue the limited power granted by governmental office was made at the expense of the far greater potential power embodied in the massive social movement that had vested its hopes in Syriza's radical message.

Without a strategy for mobilising the power of the working class, Syriza's parliamentary deputies were powerless to prevent the ruthless imposition of IMF austerity. At the same time, the workers, youth and unemployed, who were in the forefront of European resistance to austerity, were left without a perspective of struggle centred on their own capacity for action. The square occupations, the assemblies that limited themselves to consensus decision-making, were no substitute for a party structure that could have democratically led, and effectively coordinated, the struggle of millions.

The militant resistance that brought Syriza to the verge of power in 2012 wilted under the blows of mass unemployment and the demoralising experience of 30 general strikes that failed to stem the onslaught, much less stop it in its tracks.

The channelling of struggle from fragmented trade union struggles to the political arena means Syriza can expect a large vote and a real democratic mandate for its programme. Its victory will inspire a degree of confidence amongst the most militant layers.

This presents a real opportunity to overcome the legacy of defeat and prepare the working class organisationally and politically to seize the initiative, rather than relying passively on the ability of a Syriza government to resist the tremendous pressure that European and Greek capital will bring to bear on it.

Syriza's programme

Syriza's opposition to austerity has rightly earned it the sympathy of much of the European left. Its 'immediate programme' represents a genuine attempt to alleviate the pressure on workers and reverse some of the most damaging attacks. It promises to reverse cuts to wages and pensions, provide free electricity for the poorest households, end privatisation and institute a programme of state investment to kick start economic growth. A steeper progressive tax system will be levied on the rich and big business and the conditions attached to previous bailouts scrapped.

Syriza's programme calls neither for revolution, nor for a transfer of ownership and control of the commanding heights of the economy from the bosses to the working class. It is an "emergency programme" of Keynesian measures to refloat Greek capitalism as the material basis for reversing the worst effects of austerity. Its modest proposal is designed to placate its creditors while satisfying the most urgent needs of its working class supporters.

It is this fundamental defence of capitalist interests that Syriza hopes will persuade European capitalism to give it the

benefit of the doubt, negotiate, and ultimately collaborate with Syriza's perspective of replacing the EU's fixation on austerity with a turn towards Keynesian growth strategies.

This is no mere fantasy. The general political situation in Europe is markedly different from 2012. Keynesian policies are still vigorously opposed by German imperialism, which has an interest in imposing austerity policies on its neighbours. In the short term, that gives it an advantage over its competitors.

However, Keynesian measures have their supporters among sections of European capital, championed by their political servants in the social democracy. As Europe faces up to the prospect of another recession, prompted in part by the counter-productive austerity measures as well as by its entanglement in the trade war between Russia and the USA, some sort of break with Berlin's economic orthodoxy by sections of the European bourgeoisie becomes a possibility. This is what Syriza's economists are gambling on.

Syriza believes that the divisions provoked by a climate of economic uncertainty, alongside the rise of similar anti-austerity parties like Podemos in Spain, place it in a stronger position to bargain for its strategy within the EU. Europe is entering a period of instability and with doubts emerging even within the German ruling class, there is a possibility that Syriza could find allies in powerful places.

This is a dangerous gamble and one made less effective if it leads to the party keeping Greek workers in a passive state of waiting for "saviours from on high to deliver them" (in the words of the Internationale), whether these be the Syriza ministers or Mario Draghi, the President of the European Central Bank.

A programme based on collaboration and compromise with a capitalist system in deep crisis and unable to afford social reforms, or solve its crisis of profitability, offers no long-term solution. Even short term remission will be given only if the alternative is a massive eruption of class struggle which threatens the power of the capitalist class. Protest alone, as Greece's 30 one day general strikes have shown, is quite insufficient to shake the bosses' determination to resolve the crisis at the expense of the working class.

Syriza's strategy is based on using control of state power to mitigate the effects of austerity and deflect the demands of international capital by manoeuvres and appeals to the reformist wing of capital to join it in a campaign to alter the whole political direction of the European bourgeoisie.

This necessarily casts a Syriza government in the role of mediator between the aspirations of its working class base for an end to austerity and the desire of Greece's creditors to bleed the Greek working class dry. Since these two are clearly incompatible, Syriza hopes to delay having to come down decisively in favour of one side or the other by exploiting the emerging tensions in the bourgeois establishment. This is an exercise in diplomatic cretinism, which relegates the Greek working class to the role of passive spectators.

Nevertheless, governments that intend to mediate between labour and capital often find themselves having to mobilise

their working class base to "encourage" concessions from capital. The corollary of this is that the government also has to discipline the working class in order to convince capital that it is the only force that stands between private property and the overthrow of capital's dictatorship. Syriza, for all its appeals for international working class solidarity, and the genuinely held convictions of its leaders, will not solve this fundamental contradiction.

Although Tsipras summarises the character of a Syriza government as "not a government of profit but rather a government which protects the people and defends their interests", his programme is to force the capitalists to accept a limit to their profits while guaranteeing their right to derive profit through the exploitation of workers.

This settlement cannot please everyone indefinitely, but it can and has won support from millions of workers who will vote for Syriza's programme as a measure of protection against the ruling class offensive. In this situation, the aim of socialists is to help workers ensure that Syriza does not capitulate to the class enemy, but carries out its programme to the fullest extent, whilst preparing the working class for the need to go beyond the straightjacket of a government committed to ruling within the limits of capitalism.

To do this we need to develop tactics that expose the limitations of Syriza's strategy without cutting us off from the workers who align themselves with the aims of a Syriza government. We have to show not only that a government of reforms is still at the mercy of the bankers and bondholders but that their rule is backed up by the Greek state - with its reactionary, pro-fascist police force and an army which has launched coups within the living memory of older Greeks.

A workers' government

Greece needs a workers' government, that is, one which is defended and controlled by a mobilised working class, whether or not it has a parliamentary majority. In the struggles of 2010-12, Greek workers and youth occupied workplaces, built organisations to defend themselves against police and fascist attacks and created local assemblies to coordinate local struggles. Those are the kinds of organisation that will be needed to support and defend a workers' government but, at the time, neither Syriza nor the KKE were offering a lead to develop them from means of struggle to potential organs of power.

The protests against the closure of the public broadcaster, ERT, in August 2013 were the last united mobilisation of the Greek left. Since then, the main focus has been combatting the rise of the fascist organisation, Golden Dawn. Within that, all the left organisations and parties, including Syriza, the KKE and Antarsya, have formed their own anti-fascist structures which, in some cases, such as after the murder of the hip hopper Pavlos Fyssas, have organised joint demonstrations. Again, these show the possibility and the need to go further; to create united front defence guards that can tackle not just the fascist gangs but the police and paramilitary forces.

The divisions within the "socialist" left and, likewise, those amongst anarchist

circles, were not overcome spontaneously during the mass protests, to say nothing of any conscious tactic to overcome these divisions. Thus, in November and December, anarchist circles were still pursuing their own militant confrontations with the police around the hunger strike of one of their political prisoners, without much support from the left movement.

Equally, the KKE organised several general strikes and demonstrations with "their" trade union, PAME, separately from other organisations of the left. At the same time, Syriza oriented itself very strongly towards electoral success and developing a base in the unions without strengthening the social movements or playing a leading role in them.

All of this has led not only to a weakening of the resistance but to the lack of any perspective of resistance. Today, probably hundreds of thousands of Greeks are organising their own social structures, from clinics and childcare to soup kitchens but without these being seen or used as the beginning of a "counter-power" and the self-organisation of the class.

Lastly, the two main trade union confederations, GSSE and ADEDY have seen a massive loss of influence. Mass unemployment, 28 percent of all workers, 55 per cent of youth, and mass sackings have meant that union struggles have almost completely disappeared from the landscape.

If a Syriza government tries to impose its most radical measures it will face a concerted attack from its class enemies both inside and outside Greece. With a government between a rock and a hard place, it is the task of socialists to prepare the working class both in Greece and in Europe to be harder on Syriza than the Troika is.

In the event of a Syriza government, other left "Communist" parties and MPs must defend it against the attacks of the EU, Greek capital and/or the Greek fascists, just as they should mobilise the class in order to ensure and oversee the implementation of Tsipras's electoral promises.

Syriza has proposed participation in a "left government" to the KKE and Antarsya, just as they did in 2012. In 2015, they got the same answer, No. Clearly, the KKE and Antarsya know well enough that they have little to set against the electoral dominance of Syriza.

The policy of the KKE is truly scandalous. For it, the fact that Syriza does not demand an exit from the EU is evidence of further subordination to EU imperialism. For the KKE, an exit from the EU and the euro is the only way to overcome the crisis. What would then become of Greek capital and to what extent the reintroduction of the drachma would revive the economy remains completely unanswered; they probably continue to have hopes that a "progressive" element of the "non-monopolistic" Greek bourgeoisie will revive the economy and join them in a popular front government.

Instead of such a reactionary utopia, the revolutionary left needs a tactic by which, together with the left currents within Syriza, they can support a Syriza government against the ruling class and the European Union but, at the same time, push it forward and confront it directly

with the demands of the working class.

The attitude of socialists towards a Syriza government can be summed up as: full support for those measures which benefit the working class combined with independent workers' mobilisation to carry through those measures which the government will not.

Solidarity

Greece's creditors demand European governments act to protect their lucrative loans. Socialists must do everything we can to stop our rulers sabotaging a Syriza government or bending it to their will. Whether it ends in a victory or defeat, the experience of Syriza will have enormous ramifications far beyond the borders of Greece. It has already enthused many on the left, previously disheartened by the failures of the anti-austerity movement, whether the one-day protests of the unions or the square occupations.

The party's lightning rise from the radical fringes of politics to a force that commands the loyalty of millions, like the rise of Podemos in Spain, shows that, in times of deep and prolonged crisis for capitalism, dramatic changes are possible. If there is a leadership to point a way forward. Left critics of Syriza, including ourselves, must not, however, stand on the sidelines predicting inevitable betrayal and defeat.

A few years ago, it seemed that the working class was doomed to see its political parties implement austerity while its union leaders blocked all effective resistance, resistance that could challenge the capitalist parties for political power. Though Syriza is no revolutionary party, its rise in response to the militancy of Greek workers and youth shows that this dire situation need not be accepted fatalistically. New parties armed with new strategies can be created if only we have the will and courage to do so. Nor is it inevitable that they must be reformist parties like Syriza. Indeed, if they are, and if it is the strategy of compromise and negotiation that wins out, then even more severe defeats lie ahead.

So, if the Greek workers elect a Syriza government, the only effective tactic is to back it against its enemies, who are also our enemies, while preparing, inside and outside Syriza, a revolutionary political alternative, a party of class struggle, a party of workers power.

Today, the European left must stand solidly on the side of Greek workers. This means not only demonstrations in their support but relaunching the most powerful fight for a real socialist alternative to crisis, poverty, capitalism and the EU. This EU is the EU of capital and austerity; a revolutionary left must fight for workers' governments right across Europe, and for a united socialist states of the continent, not a retreat into national isolation.

Is this possible? Yes it is. In Italy and Belgium in November and December, hundreds of thousands took action against impending cuts in wages and social benefits in a general strike that proves that the European working class remains capable of fighting. Greece should inspire us.

For the bosses and the workers across the continent, from stock exchanges to picket lines, everyone has a major stake in the choice that Greece's workers and popular masses make.

Can Syriza rescue Greek workers?



Greece's new Prime Minister?

By Tobi Hansen and KD

Tait

A SNAP general election in Greece looks set to end in victory for radical left wing party Syriza, ending a six-year monopoly of pro-austerity governments across Europe.

The prospect of a government that rejects the massive social cuts and privatisation dictated by European Union institutions and the International Monetary Fund has provoked ruling class alarm and enthusiasm amongst millions of European workers, who share Syriza's belief that jobs, pensions and social security should not be sacrificed to maintain the profits of the banks.

The contest between Syriza and the governing New Democracy-led coalition has become a referendum on four years of austerity. Nowhere have cuts been pursued more rigorously, more ruthlessly and with such vindictive indifference to the human cost than in Greece.

Syriza's rise has challenged the consensus that there is no alternative to austerity. In victory or defeat, the question has been bluntly put: who should pay for the crisis? How Syriza attempts to answer this question in Greece will shape the course of the class struggle across Europe.

The crisis of austerity

The dramatic events unfolding in Greece were triggered by early legislative elections but have their roots in the tensions within Greek politics about how to deal with its debt and the country's relations with the European Union.

The government of Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, elected as a coalition

of New Democracy, the rump Pasok, and a rightist split from Syriza, the Democratic Left (Dimar), was the willing tool of Greek capitalism, the European Union and the global institutions of finance capital, who are all doing a brisk and profitable trade in Greece's debt.

Although Dimar abandoned the coalition after it closed down state broadcaster ERT, the coalition used its slim majority to force the IMF's medicine down the throats of Greek workers, destroying decades of social gains in less than three years.

Six years of recession in Greece have seen a quarter of the workforce thrown onto the scrapheap. Amongst youth, this figure rises to more than 50 per cent, precipitating large-scale migration to other EU countries. Some 2.5 million people cannot afford medical insurance, or have to choose between that and paying for electricity, even in working households.

Although all its actions demonstrated that Samaras' government was committed to ensuring the bulk of the crisis fell on the backs of workers, pensioners, the youth and the unemployed, Greece's subordination to the Eurozone institutions has obstructed Greek capital from taking full advantage of the large profit margins opened up by the collapse in wages and the huge army of unemployed.

So, although Greek shipping families have regained their leading position in the international sea transport market, the basis for the development of domestic manufacturing or finance capital does not exist within the Eurozone. In effect, austerity has guaranteed the loans of Greece's creditors and protected the position of the strongest elements of capital, but has been unable to resolve the crisis

and establish the basis for a new round of profitable production.

Austerity has undermined the economic foundations of the Greek economy and in so doing undermined the confidence of sections of the capitalist class, and above all, the ruined petty bourgeoisie. Greek capital has no perspective for surviving outside the Eurozone, but it also has little indication that its situation is about to improve.

This is the context in which Prime Minister Samaras sought to capitalise on this "success" in securing a "technical extension" to Greece's second bailout by bringing forward the presidential election.

The candidate of the ruling coalition was New Democracy member and former EU Commissioner, Stavros Dimas. To secure victory, the government deployed the carrot of potential ministerial positions alongside the threat of new elections in which many MPs would be certain to lose their seats.

The European bourgeoisie resorted to open blackmail in support of their Greek proxies, with President of the EU Commission Jean-Claude Juncker saying, "I think that the Greeks – who have a very difficult life – know very well what a wrong election result would mean for Greece and the Eurozone".

The failure of the parliament to back the government's candidate, despite the bribes and threats, shows that an important section of Greece's political class is unwilling to take responsibility for implementing further austerity. Even if it has no real alternative, it would rather gamble on its influence in a new alignment of forces following an election than face certain political annihilation by backing Samaras.

The early presidential election was intended to steal a march on Syriza, which had been leading New Democracy in the polls for over half a year, and to rally the forces of austerity behind the government. The failure of this tactic spooked the markets and opened up the road to a Syriza victory and the potential for a Europe-wide challenge to austerity.

Years lost or gained?

This is Syriza's second chance at power, following their defeat in the June 2012 election. All polls point to Syriza as, at least, the biggest party, but the effect of three years of grinding austerity has not made the political landscape favourable to a Syriza government.

The years 2010-12 were the high point of working class resistance to austerity, characterised by a succession of general strikes, a social movement based in the square occupations and violent confrontations between the youth and police. The ability of capital to impose its policy against this movement was in real doubt.

The ruling social-democratic Pasok and the conservative New Democracy both sang from the IMF hymn sheet, insisting that Greek workers had to make sacrifices in the national interest.

Against this capitulation to the diktats of finance capital, Syriza counterposed renunciation of the debt and shredding the "memorandum" that amounted to an understanding that, while the EU would help Greece pay off its debts, Greek workers would be forced to repay this money many times over.

Syriza's intransigent opposition to this criminal racket won it the support of millions of workers confident that the ruling class offensive could be stopped and reversed. Between February and June,

Syriza was catapulted from minority party to mainstream opposition.

It is no secret that many in Syriza felt their party was unprepared for government in 2012. When the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) rejected Syriza's appeal for a coalition government of workers' parties, it condemned Greek workers to years of austerity and forced Syriza to decide how it would maintain its support in the face of a massive ruling class offensive.

The explosion in its electoral support was a powerful boost to the dominant reformist leadership of Syriza who favoured a primary orientation to the parliamentary arena. Syriza's leadership calculated that, having established themselves as the only serious contender amongst anti-austerity forces by intransigence, they should now concentrate on developing a "responsible" programme for government.

Instead of using the backing of over a quarter of the electorate to mobilise direct action to block the austerity on the streets, challenging the hostile Communist Party, the KKE, to show its boasted leftism in action, Alexis Tsipras declared Syriza would be a "loyal opposition". The party attempted to position itself as a legitimate component of the political terrain, one that could be entrusted with the reins of power.

It dropped its demand to repudiate the debt in favour of renegotiation and Tsipras toured Europe, meeting with far more captains of industry than trade union leaders, let alone rank and file workers. There was, and is, only one problem with this; "Europe", and in particular Germany under Chancellor Angela Merkel, would hear of no other solution but cuts to save the bankers. *cont on p.11*