

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

**Greece: "we
won't pay"**
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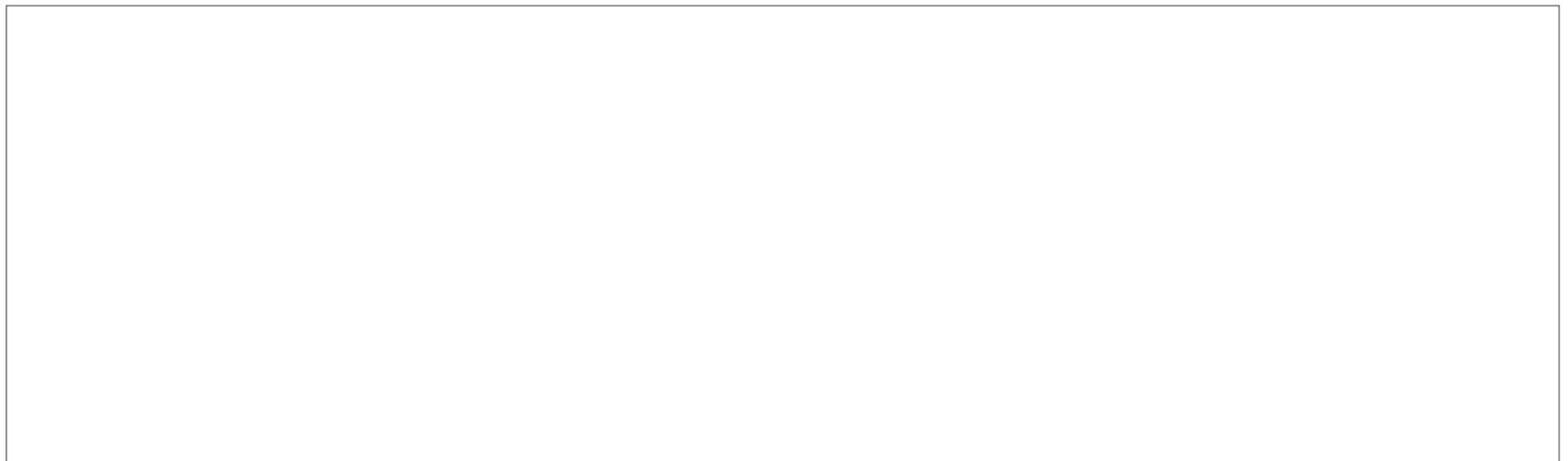


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AFTER 30 NOVEMBER



THE NEXT STEPS:

- **Escalate the campaign**
 - **Rolling and selective strikes**
 - **Name more strike dates**
 - **Rank-and-file control**
 - **Political campaigning:
pensions for all**
- See
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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.



Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
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Labour left resolves to combat capital, not "Europe"

By Vicki Morris

The *Morning Star* has attacked the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) conference decision on 19 November "Against British nationalism: for a Workers' United Europe". I have written to the *Star*:

Anti-EU politics are a distraction from the work we need to do: building working class unity across Europe (and the world). This is our proper task, not weighing in on the side of one or other bloc of bourgeois opinion on the question of capitalist integration — a particularly vexed debate in the UK, where both sides of the argument should be abhorrent to socialists.

The *Morning Star* represents a particular current in British politics. After the LRC conference you are surprised to find that your views on the EU are

not as widely shared as you thought; we are not. The current turmoil in the world economy and in Europe in particular makes building European workers' solidarity ever more urgent, and the LRC conference recognised that.

Your report of the LRC vote for the AWL motion misrepresents our position. We don't call for a "workers' EU", we call for... a workers' united Europe.

Workers shouldn't take responsibility for propping up the EU, or help the bosses and our respective bourgeois governments try to make it work. The EU is a reflection of capitalism's innate tendency to grow beyond national borders; we don't support capitalism, so we don't support European capitalist integration — but we don't oppose it either.

There are specific aspects of European integra-

tion that we might campaign against per se: the Growth and Stability Pact, for example. We would also fight for reforms within the EU: for the EU Commission to be more accountable to the EU Parliament, for example. But neither of these affects our general attitude to the EU (and such questions as UK in or out of the euro) which should be one of pushing to go forward to a more democratic Europe, not back to higher barriers between countries.

Disintegration of the EU now, the possible collapse of the euro, will not help the workers' movement. In the short term, they will do great harm to all the economies of Europe. There is nothing to cheer in that.

Retreating to a Europe of divided and competing, even warring, capitalist nations — to a situation similar to that before the current European integra-

tion project began — would be a nightmare for workers.

The EU is one form that capitalism takes; another form is competing, warring capitalist nations. We want neither.

It is a mistake to make withdrawal from the EU a key demand of the workers' movement, as the *Morning Star* does.

PAME in Greece and the CGTP in Portugal call for EU withdrawal, yet other trade union and left forces in those countries do not. Many in those countries know that withdrawal — or expulsion — from the EU will make life at least as hard for workers as staying inside.

In either case, though the manifestations differ, the enemy is capitalism.

- LRC resolution: alturl.com/8oyim
- *Morning Star* article: alturl.com/xa9wd

Ed Miliband calls for action (but not much)

By Gerry Bates

Ed Miliband has called for a Labour Party "day of action" to protest against youth unemployment on 26 November.

That's good, but the positive content of the day of action is weak: a "five point plan" including such things as "a one year cut in VAT to 5% on home improvements", which are obviously not on the scale required to make decent jobs for one million young unemployed people.

And so far Ed Miliband is silent about 30 November. At other levels the Labour Party machine is edging towards support for the strike. A number of Labour councils and constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) have declared sup-

port; Labour members of the Scottish parliament and Welsh Assembly have pledged not to cross picket lines.

TULO, the umbrella group for trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party, which usually limits itself to backroom stuff, has written to CLPs asking them to support 30 November.

Will Ed Miliband support the strike? Will the Labour Party open a democratic discussion — in place of Liam Byrne's "policy review", which does not even involve Labour's not-very-democratic National Policy Forum — on a proper workers' plan for the crisis?

Will Miliband and Ed Balls commit themselves to reversing the Tory/Lib-Dem cuts?

- Poor choices in Scottish Labour leadership poll: workersliberty.org/node/17837

Labour councillors pledge against cuts

Two initiatives at the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) conference on 19 November (see above) may open new possibilities.

One lunchtime caucus initiated a new LRC youth and student group. Another, initiated by Broxtowe (Notts) Labour councillors Greg Marshall and Andrea Oates, started to organise a network of

Labour councillors committed to vote against cuts.

The anti-cuts Labour councillors have issued a statement:

The budgets set by local councils for 2011/2012 imposed swingeing cuts without significant opposition from Labour Party councillors. We cannot allow this to be repeated in 2012/2013. Labour Party councillors need to

do more than 'oppose Tory cuts' — we should vote against them and fight for the preservation of jobs and services.

We will vote against the cuts budgets in 2012/2013 and in their place propose needs-based budgets. We will give our full support to trade unions taking industrial action to defend jobs, conditions and services. In the coming months, we will build and

extend links with trade unions and anti-cuts campaigns to build labour movement opposition to this government.

To facilitate these activities, we support the development of a network of anti-cuts Labour Party councillors to provide solidarity, support and coordination in the coming months.

- www.l-r-c.org.uk

Parachuted into Thurrock

In "Refounding Labour", one little-noticed clause deleted almost all the rulebook said about selection procedures for parliamentary candidates.

Now, in Thurrock, a marginal constituency in Essex, a small selection committee has completely bypassed all nomination procedures, and declared a shortlist of two (one an apparatchik from Ed Miliband's office, both parachuted in without any connection to the local labour movement). Local Labour Party members get a say only in a vote-out between those two, on 3 December.

Labour Parties and affiliated unions round the country should bombard Labour HQ with protests.

Local committees spread across Greece

By Theodora Polenta

A wave of struggles, occupations, and protests has erupted across Greece against the regressive property tax of €3.6 billion which is being collected via utility bills.

The government backs the tax demand with the threat of cutting off electricity to those who refuse to pay the tax, because of poverty - monthly incomes of €300, €400, or €500 - or because of political opposition to the tax. To cut off electricity for ill people, the elderly, and little kids is an act of naked barbarism.

But the central office from which orders to cut off electricity were to be distributed round Greece have been occupied by trade-union, community, and left wing activists.

Representatives of the left groupings, Syriza, KKE, and Antarsya, were present and expressed their unconditional solidarity with the "Don't Pay" campaign. "Illegal is not the non-payment of the regressive property tax. Illegal are not the struggles of people resisting the tax. Illegal is this government's attempts to cut off electricity".

The occupation has epitomised the solidarity and fraternity of what are considered as the "privileged"

sections of the working class (for example, utility workers) towards the most vulnerable.

As of Monday night 21 November, the minister of Energy and Climate Change, Giorgos Papakostandinou, has asked for a judge's intervention in order to declare the union's occupation of the central office illegal. The judge has called for the breaking-up of the occupation and for the arrest of the union activists.

In response, a large number of people have joined the occupation and are physically defending it.

THREAT

In about 40 to 50 local authorities, all around Greece, despite the threat of disciplinary actions by the government, mayors and councillors have joined and in some cases led the fight against the regressive property tax.

Massive open neighbourhood meetings are being organised in every city square, and occupations of utility sector buildings are increasing from day to day.

Citizens are storming council meetings and utility sector buildings and asking councillors and utility sector workers to form a united front of refusal to pay the regressive property tax. People's

committees are being formed to defend people's homes and re-connect electricity wherever it is cut off. Lawyers are offering free legal advice.

Pushed by open neighbourhood meetings with the participation of left-wing activists and a lot of ordinary people, councils have pledged to block cut-offs, to re-connect electricity supply where it is cut off, and to give legal aid.

Under the pressure of the emerging civil disobedience movement, the first cracks have started to appear in the front of the National Unity Government. Dora Bakogianni of DHSY (a neo-liberal splinter from New Democracy) has stated that her party does not support the regressive property tax.

Antonis Samaras, the leader of ND (equivalent to the Tory party) has asked the government (of which ND is part) to exempt lower-income families from the tax. Giorgos Karatzaferis of the ultra-right populist LAOS has called on the government (of which LAOS is also part) to exempt citizens that own small properties.

Already, under the pressure of the neighbourhood movement, the government has exempted very disabled people from having their electricity cut off. (Even under pressure, the government's sensitivity

comes in small doses!).

The regressive property tax is only a continuity of all the anti-working-class measures of the last 18 months, imposed by the Pasok government and the European Union/ ECB/ IMF Troika with the effective support of the whole bourgeois political establishment.

It has been imposed to pay for a class-created debt which the people neither created nor benefited from. It is part of the comprehensive attacks by the government and the Troika on every aspect of workers' lives: wages, pensions, jobs, welfare, pensions). All the different movements that are developing against different parts of this attack should be united in a dynamic movement of disobedience, resistance and revolutionary overthrow of this system.

SCHEME

Already the government has started active implementation of the scheme to put tens of thousands of public-sector workers in "reserve" (efedria) prior to redundancy by sending out the relevant paperwork.

In response to the threat, transport workers on the trams and the metro have called a three hour strike for Tuesday 22 November.

The rank and file workers movement should de-

mand from GSEE (the union federation for private sector workers) and ADEDY (public sector workers) a call for a general strike on 7 December, the day that the 2012 budget will be voted on in parliament. However, a one day general strike called by the union bureaucracy is not enough.

Greek workers should aim at a continuous general strike alongside the poor peasants, the ruined small shop owners, the pensioners, the unemployed, the school and university students, and the neighbourhood community movements.

Workers in every workplace should form workers' committees in order to organise and direct their struggle from below. As the struggles evolve and escalate the workers are looking at solutions, to defend their lives and rights, outside the "whole system" and its laws and structures. It is essential for the revolutionary left, not only to participate and observe the struggles, but to help organise, coordinate, support, defend, escalate and politicise the struggles.

The revolutionary left should be at the vanguard of all the struggles and win workers on a radical, anti-capitalist program of transitional demands.

Killing continues in Syria: support the uprising!

By Dan Katz

3,500 have been killed and perhaps 20,000 detained since the Syrian opposition movement began to take to the streets in March.

The vast majority have died at the hands of the disgusting Ba'athist dictatorship of Bashar Assad. However, increasingly fighting is taking place between defectors from the army and state forces. Civilians are also arming themselves.

The dissident Free Syrian Army, based in Turkey, claims responsibility for an attack inside the capital, Damascus, on Sunday 20 November. At least two rocket-propelled grenades hit a Ba'ath party building which was later seen surrounded by fire engines and security police. A few days earlier a military intelligence base outside Damascus was attacked. Such attacks against important regime targets, inside its heartland, appear to be very significant.

The state is losing its grip inside the country. Syria's economy is in crisis.

Assad has responded with defiance and attempts

to mobilise his supporters. Large pro-regime demonstrations have taken place in Damascus, and in the second city and commercial hub, Aleppo. However, many of those who attend these rallies do so under duress. Universities and public buildings are shut to ensure participation. On 13 November a number of 'pro-regime' demonstrators were shot dead when they began to chant against the regime.

Internationally the Syrian state has had two torrid weeks. Although it continues to find cover from China and Russia on the UN Security Council, its regional support is collapsing.

Turkey, once an ally of Assad's, is hardening its attitude towards Damascus. Turkey is extremely alarmed by the instability in Syria and has demanded the regime talk to dissidents and reform. These calls have been ignored and Turkey recently threatened to cut electricity exports to Syria in retaliation.

On Saturday Turkish newspapers said Ankara had contingency plans to create no-fly or buffer zones to protect civilians in

neighbouring Syria if the bloodshed worsened.

The Arab League has suspended Syrian membership after the Syrian state reneged on a promise to release political prisoners, remove tanks from its own cities, and to allow Arab observers into the country.

THE NATURE OF THE OPPOSITION

The basic feature of the movement in the country, now, is positive and democratic. It is organised by networks of activists and local co-ordinating committees.

These committees are not politically identical to — and often ignore — Syrian exiles abroad.

The political front, the Syrian National Council (SNC) based in Turkey, has a worryingly strong representation from the Islamist

Muslim Brothers, as well as including secular liberals and Kurds. A second opposition committee, the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change, includes leftists and nationalists. Its best known figure is the writer, Michel Kilo.

The Free Syrian Army has its own command structure, and the attacks it is launching against regime targets in Damascus are probably independent of the local committees, although some army deserters have clearly been involved in local self-defence.

The FSA states it is non-sectarian and is simply in favour of freedom.

CIVIL WAR?

The Syrian demonstrators not only have a right to defend themselves from state violence, they are right to do so.

It makes no sense that innocent protesters offer themselves up, week after week, as martyrs to be mown down by the state's thugs.

Beyond the question of local self-defence there is now a question of civil war. The fact is that — short of

an utter collapse of morale, which is not currently likely — this regime will have to be removed by force. At least that must be the assumption based on current evidence.

There is a difference between a civil war being fought for democracy against a dictatorship that can be removed by no means other than violence, and a sectarian civil war.

A sectarian civil war would lead Syria into intercommunal bloodletting.

It may be the case that the Syrian opposition takes on an overtly Sunni sectarian or religious character. Sunnis make up 70% of the population and there is a polarisation taking place. If the opposition does move in this direction a part of the blame will fall on the regime which is itself a sectarian entity, resting on the Alawite sect (forming 10% of the population, the Alawites are a dissenting Shia grouping), but maintaining the fiction of being opposed to sectarianism.

A civil war for democracy could slip into another sectarian conflict leading to the sort of fighting that took place in Lebanon in the 1970s.

The real "disruption"

Edd Bauer, the victimised Vice President Education at the Birmingham University Guild of Students and National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts supporter, recently received a letter from Carolyn Pike (the University's Director of Legal Services) informing him he was banned from campus. Here is an abridged version of his reply.

Dear Carolyn,

Thank you for your letter of 17 November 2011, revoking my "right" to be on campus. Unfortunately I cannot abide by the ban and I regret to inform you that I have already returned to campus.

I appreciate your concern for the "disruption" to students' education; it would be nice if the university actions matched its words. The real threat of disruption to education at the University of Birmingham is the £10 million worth of cuts and 200 job losses that yourself and the other university managers are pushing on us, not to mention the disruption caused by raising the university hall fees, which has caused immense stress to students. The continued hikes in undergraduate and post-graduate tuition fees are not only going to disrupt people's education but will completely deny

them the opportunity to come to a university like the University of Birmingham.

I am happy to stop campaigning on campus if the university pledges to undertake these seven steps:

1. To publicly condemn the White Paper and call for it to be withdrawn
2. To guarantee no course closures
3. To guarantee no job cuts and no adverse changes to staff terms and conditions
4. To provide bursaries for all students who need them — not fee waivers
5. To guarantee no cuts to library, student support or learning resources
6. To guarantee no cuts to access schemes or foundation courses
7. To guarantee that the university will remain a public and a not-for-profit body.

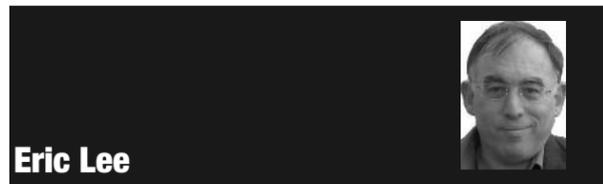
All the best,

Edd Bauer

Vice President of Education (in exile)

• www.anticuts.com

Global labour conference harmed by pro-BDS campaigners



Eric Lee

Last week's LabourStart Global Solidarity Conference in Istanbul was meant to be an extraordinary event. Activists from the newly-independent unions of the "Arab Spring" countries were due to meet with colleagues from established unions from both developed and developing countries.

As Canadian union activist Derek Blackadder put it, "100 unions, 30 countries, one class".

And there were high points, such as the visit by conference delegates to a picket line outside a factory owned by the German company GEA. The Turkish workers, locked out for weeks, were clearly moved by the presence of so many people from so many different countries.

But there was also an attempt by anti-Israel activists to break up the conference and undermine the solidarity being built.

It was decided to hold the conference in Istanbul despite the risks of this sort of thing happening. All the major Turkish unions were supportive and formed a broad-based organising committee. The oil workers union Petrol-Is donated their facilities, in part to thank LabourStart for the online campaigns it has waged over the years in support of the union's struggles.

The conference agenda was packed with workshops and plenaries on subjects like precarious work, the role of women in the trade union movement, organising migrant workers, and global campaigning.

The first indication that things might go terribly wrong came when several North African delegates walked out during the opening plenary when I mentioned Israel (among many other countries) in my keynote address.

My remarks were followed by a video address from Sharan Burrow, the general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, who spoke directly about the Israel-Palestinian conflict, reaffirming the ITUC's commitment to a two-state solution.

The conference broke up into workshops the first of which was entitled "what is LabourStart?" The first intervention from the floor came from a Palestinian trade union-

ist who wanted to discuss a 2006 article of mine supporting Israel's right to self-defence when attacked by Iran through its proxy, Hizbollah. Others rose to repeat similar "charges" — that LabourStart was somehow a "Zionist" project, and was tainted by this.

At the end of the session, at my suggestion, an emergency meeting was held between myself and the North African delegates in an attempt to clear the air. I told them it was essential that we be open and transparent, and that I would honestly answer any questions. It was an initially tense but ultimately productive meeting as one by one I dealt with idiotic rumors that had been spreading for years — such as that LabourStart suppresses Palestinian labour news. (Something easily disproved by simply looking at the LabourStart website.)

Meanwhile, the local anti-Israel activists, led by an English expat (and member of the pro-Hamas Socialist Workers Party), were gearing up for a full assault on the conference. They began circulating a "resolution" opposing the presence of representatives of the "racist Zionist" Histadrut at the conference.

ODD

Their campaign was an odd one for at least two reasons. There were five Israeli citizens (one a Palestinian Arab woman) but none of them came to represent the Histadrut.

Second, LabourStart conferences are not decision-making bodies, so no resolutions are ever debated or adopted.

Around this time, rumours began flying that someone had uncovered photos of myself, in military uniform, participating in the occupation of the West Bank.

While this was going on, the conference continued peacefully with very productive sessions. One featured Palestinian trade unionists from two rival organisations at which neither one mentioned the campaign for boycotts, divestments and sanctions — BDS — targeting the Jewish state.

Another very interesting workshop featured two Israelis (one Arab, one Jewish) from the Workers' Advice Center, a left-wing alternative union.

The Israelis were mingling with people they would never have been allowed to talk to before — including delegates who came from the illegal independent unions in Iran.

One of the most interesting workshops was entitled "Echoes of the Arab Spring" and featured speakers from the USA, Israel and Iraqi Kurdistan to discuss uprisings that have taken place outside the Arab world, but which

were inspired by Tunisia and Egypt.

The little room was packed with delegates from more than a dozen countries, including several from Arab countries. But as soon as the session began, a handful of Turkish pro-BDS campaigners demanded to know if the Israeli speaker was a member of the Histadrut. I moderated the session, and intervened to prevent the disruption — I told them that I had been a member of Histadrut when I lived in Israel, and that Histadrut members were certainly welcome here.

The disruptors shouted abuse, and eventually stormed out, slamming the door behind them. Not a single Arab left the room and a very fruitful discussion was held.

While we discussed the Occupy Wall Street movement, the social protests in Israel and the 62-day long uprising in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Israel-haters were busily posting hand-written signs all over the building saying that the "racist Zionist Histadrut" was not welcome — and specifically naming not only the Israeli activists, but myself. There was a tense moment as one of the handful of Jewish participants tried to take down one of the signs, but violence was averted.

During the final plenary session, there was an attempted disruption as a pro-Hamas activist rushed the stage claiming to be representing the conference organising committee. Following a long rant about Zionism, one of the North African delegates demanded the floor — and spoke out against the anti-Israel disruptors.

On the day after the conference closed, the Arab delegates from Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain and North Africa stayed behind for a very fruitful session with LabourStart and the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center.

In the end, the conference was a success. A real contribution was being made to the creation of a new global solidarity network for trade unionists.

The anti-Israel activists couldn't have cared less. Their only goal was to get out their message of hatred — that Israelis were not welcome there.

But in the end, they failed in their effort to destroy this historic attempt to bring together trade unionists from many countries. Their attempt to do so showed up the BDS campaigners as people with no interest in social justice or global solidarity, but simply as Jew-haters.

• *Morning Star* sells "Protocols of the Elders of Zion". See: Dave Osler's blog: davidosler.com



Letters

Continuity thesis not tenable

Sam Farber's work is always worth reading, but I don't think Martyn Hudson does anyone any favours by rehashing selected bits that coincide with his preconceptions (*Solidarity* 224, 9 November).

Farber and Pirani deserve to be read seriously, but neither appears to subscribe to the view advanced repeatedly by Martyn: namely the "continuity thesis" that Leninism led to Stalinism. In the article Martyn quotes (from *Against the Current* 136), Farber states that there were major "qualitative differences" between Leninism in power and Stalinism.

In my view, the continuity thesis is a Cold War relic with little relevance today, not least because the differences between the regimes before and after 1928 are abundantly clear.

The point is also existential: anyone who seriously believes there is continuity between Leninism and Stalinism will find it difficult to remain a revolutionary socialist. The working class cannot make a successful socialist revolution and hold power without its own revolutionary party. If such a party is inevitably doomed to degenerate into Stalinism in power, then such a revolution would not be a goal worth pursuing on working-class democratic grounds.

Martyn conflates two issues: first, the relationship between Bolshevism and Stalinism and second, the character of the regime in power after the 1917 revolution and the possibilities for workers' democracy between 1921 and 1924.

Farber and Pirani are mainly concerned with the latter. Farber argues that the Leninist regime (1921-24) "harmed workers' democracy for reasons that could not be simply reduced to "objective necessity" and seriously weakened the possibilities of successful resistance to Stalinism". He believes the regime "politically disarmed the working class and the peasantry and made them unable to resist the onslaught of Stalinism".

Farber and Pirani are right to criticise those who exaggerate objective circumstances, structures and contexts during this transition period, to the exclusion of agency, strategy and tactics. However they do not represent adequately Lenin and Trotsky's perspective when they fought against

the bureaucratic regime as it emerged.

Lenin and Trotsky believed that the agents for any kind of workers' self-rule in Russia in the early 1920s were the vanguard workers within the ruling party. Their assessment was that the forces forged before the revolution together with those tempered by the experience of 1917 and the resulting civil war were the principal agents that could fight the burgeoning bureaucracy. Hence Lenin and Trotsky's concentration on the party cadres to prolong workers' rule.

Of course the party contained more than a few rotten bureaucrats. Some decent, class conscious workers did leave the party in disgust at what was growing within the state and the party they had built — and made some valid criticisms. But I'm not convinced that forces outside the party were a real alternative to the mainstream Bolsheviks around Lenin and Trotsky, somehow better able to have sustained a more serious fight against the rising state bureaucracy, its power and its privileges.

The Bolsheviks made mistakes during and after the civil war. But would alternative Bolshevik policies have made a difference? Interestingly, Pirani argues that even more democratic choices were unlikely to have greatly altered the course of history. Rightly he accepts that the "mountainous obstacles" of "Russia's economic backwardness and the failure of the revolution to spread" were central to the rise of the bureaucratic ruling class.

The main thing I take from Pirani's research and other recent studies is the evidence of persistent political zest in the Russian working class and hence the possibility of some democratic reform in the 1920s. But I think the party cadres were still the key to this unlocking this potential, however limiting the circumstances were.

I also think Pirani's wider political conclusions are mistaken: first, his view that the Bolshevik party is no longer a model for today; and second, his argument that Russia beyond the first months after the 1917 revolution was not a "workers' state" of any kind, whatever the qualifications. These are much bigger questions — but I don't think these conclusions necessarily follow from Pirani's or other research.

Unfortunately Martyn's letters have not adequately grappled with these substantial issues and short letters are probably the worst vehicle for doing so, since inevitably they compress much that requires elaboration. A fully rounded assessment of the Bolshevik regime and its mistakes from 1917 to 1928 is worthwhile on its own terms and for the lessons it might offer for today.

I hope Martyn will develop his views in greater depth and with more precision.

Paul Hampton, South London

Nuclear corrections

Unfortunately, due to a miscommunication between myself and the editor, the article on nuclear power that was printed in last week's *Solidarity* was actually a first draft which I had substantially revised.

There are two points that I made in this first draft which I now think are wrong.

I made a claim that thorium technology was not economically attractive because it involved "an enormous initial investment combined with very low levels of exploitable labour". This section was omitted from the final draft because I think it is wrong.

The ratio between constant and variable capital is varied between different industries. Compare a fruit smoothie stall trading on the roadside with a driverless train network, like the Docklands Light Railway. The smoothie stall owner has very low amount of constant capital in the form of fruit, a blender, a table, some cups etc. in comparison to variable capital, the wages of the worker.

The DLR has a huge amount of constant capital in the form of trains, track, power supply, computer system compared with the variable capital in the form of the few workers needed to maintain the network. After the initial outlay on fixed capital, the value added by the DLR workforce is very small compared with the value added by the worker making the smoothies.

This poses a problem for advocates of the labour theory of value. It seems to imply that no capitalist in their right mind would ever invest in driverless train networks and everyone would be investing in smoothie stalls. Marx solves this problem with his theory of the equalisation of the rate of profit in *Capital* Volume 3.

In the final draft I omitted the section on the relationship between technology and unfolding human history. The implication is that technological decisions are shaped by class interests, as the title implies.

In the past I believed all sorts of technologies, such as televisions and cars, to be "capitalist" by their very nature. However, I now think this view is too crude and has more in common with the early Soviet advocates of Proletkult than a Marxist understanding of science and culture.

It is more correct to say that the requirements of the Cold War must have influenced the decision to back uranium power over thorium technology and avoid the sweeping generalisations.

Stuart Jordan, London

• The final draft is here: www.workersliberty.org/node/17809

Where next after N30?

On picket lines on N30 and in meetings on the day and after, strikers should be developing plans of action for extending and escalating the dispute, and deepening it beyond isolated single days of strike action.

The pensions dispute will be won if, and only if, the government is convinced that the unions will escalate action and will hold out longer than the government will. Workers should not be left to wait until union leaders decide it's time for another one-off "day of action".

As well as all-out days of action, we need rolling and selective action across different sectors — teachers striking, then local government workers, then civil servants and so on. Rolling action should also focus on mobilising those workers whose action will cause the most disruption to normal economic functioning — school workers, whose action impacts across communities if schools are forced to close, and workers like tax collectors and parking attendants who can hit local and national government revenue streams.

School workers can take as a model the campaign by state school teachers in Victoria, Australia, in 2008. The teachers staged three state-wide strikes to punctuate five weeks of region-by-region rolling strikes. The rolling strikes were not passive, stay-at-home affairs, but linked to large protests at the electorate offices of state MPs in each area. Union members took part in regular, large members' meetings, discussing and debating strategy. The state government finally backed down, giving large pay rises and some concessions on conditions, after teachers set walk-outs to disrupt Australia's equivalent of SATs.

Unions should campaign for private sector workers forced to stay at home to look after children unable to attend school to be paid, in order to short-circuit media hysteria about the inconvenience caused by the strikes.

The action needs to escalate. National days of cross-union strike action should extend from one day to two, then three, and so on, and rolling and selective action should be planned on an escalating schedule.

National unions, and local trade union branches, should set up strike levies to build up war-chests that can finance prolonged action. The knowledge that our unions can ease some of the financial burden of striking can help give workers the confidence for prolonged action.

This programme of action needs to be discussed and developed *now*, and we need to begin building for it immedi-

ately. We cannot allow the dispute to develop into a Duke of York scenario, with 3,000,000 trade union members reduced to the role of a stage army marched out for a day and then marched back to work again to await further orders.

A single day of mass strike action will not be enough to make the government back down. Brian Stratton of the general union GMB has spoken publicly of a dispute stretching well into 2012, and at the "Unite The Resistance" rally on Saturday 19 November, Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) leader Mark Serwotka said that his union would be "lobbying the TUC" for another "day of action" early in 2012.

But trade union leaders are leading and organising little democratic debate about forms of action.

Ever since preparations for the 26 March "March for the Alternative" began, labour movement officialdom has been operating on the basis of "big days out", first 26 March, then 30 June, then the 2 October demonstration at Tory Party conference and now N30, each one followed by advice to wait for the word from on high about future action. There has been no sustained action in between, and no coherent campaign to tie the set-piece actions together.

The far left in the labour movement has largely gone along with this approach, with groups like the SWP typically seeking to position themselves as the most enthusiastic builders of each event rather than also offering an alternative strategy.

This battle is too important to be treated as a sectarian cash-cow for left groups to harvest recruits from by attempting to outdo each other in the talking-up stakes.

The duty of the revolutionary left in this dispute is to catalyse a discussion about strategy and perspective, and help rank-and-file workers organise together to gain control of the dispute.

AWL industrial bulletins

- **Public Disorder (local government workers)** tinyurl.com/publicdisorderbulletin

- **Germ's Eye View (health workers)** tinyurl.com/germseeyview

- **Lambeth Council Worker (local government workers in Lambeth)**

workersliberty.org/lambethcouncilworker

- **Tubeworker (London Underground)** workersliberty.org/tubeworker

Open debate at Irish "Marxism"



AWL news

By Ed Maltby and Liam McNulty

On the weekend of 19-20 November we attended the Irish Socialist Workers' Party's Marxism Festival.

There were roughly 200 participants at the event, and the general culture was very open. This, in contrast to the atmosphere at the UK Marxism event, where SWP activists will often meet members of other groups with shrill denunciations and critical interventions are unwelcome. Activists at the Dublin festival were keen to discuss ideas with Workers' Liberty. Sales of our pamphlet on the Ennis labourers' strike were brisk.

On Saturday afternoon, a debate took place on The Future of the Left involving Richard Boyd Barrett TD (SWP/People Before Profit), councillor Mick Barry (Socialist Party), academic and activist Helena Sheehan, and Michael Taft, a left-wing Labour Party member.

Sheehan stressed the need for existing left-wing parties to reach out to the "unaffiliated left" like herself and pointed to the hostility to the SWP at Occupy Dame Street in Dublin as a symptom of potential problems.

Taft argued that the austerity budget represents an explicit class project which necessitates a response involving the broadest possible alliance of people agreed on a set of principles to further working-class interests. He proposed as a programme of public investment through a nationalised banking system, an explicit and non-negotiable demand to stop all cuts to public spending, a tax on the wealth and capital of the rich, and a default on debt owed as a re-

sult of nationalising Anglo-Irish Bank.

The most interesting exchange of the afternoon was between Mick Barry and Richard Boyd Barrett. It demonstrated some stark differences of approach between the SP and the SWP in Ireland. Barry was strong on ruling out Sinn Féin as a left-wing force, pointing to their role administering cuts in Northern Ireland. He had some criticisms for his ULA colleagues in the SWP, saying that the "Enough Campaign" to call for a referendum on the IMF/EU deal was an exclusionary front group, and accusing the SWP of watering down their programme in the interests of unprincipled coalition-building.

Richard Boyd Barrett's response was weak, beginning with platitudes about how great the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement have been and arguing that although the SWP is explicitly a revolutionary socialist organisation, most people on the left do not yet identify themselves as such. The imperative for Barrett was "being non-sectarian" and appealing to people using "different language".

POLARISED

The debate from the floor consisted mainly of SP and SWP members defending these mutually polarised perspectives. The debate took place in terms that previous generations of Marxists would find unintelligible.

For the SWP, reaching out to a broader constituency is an issue of branding (language, the appeal of front campaigns) rather than providing a programme to the labour movement. The SP stressed the need to make an appeal on the basis of a socialist programme, but lacked tactical ideas about how to do this beyond building the ULA.

We suggested that both sides could learn a lot from the debates in the Communist movement of the 1920s, when Communist Parties found themselves as minorities in the labour movement. Lenin and Trotsky's ideas of the United Front are crucial tools for revolutionary socialists seeking to reach out to non-revolutionary workers on the basis of day-

to-day struggles, demonstrating the relevance of communists to fight for the class and thereby winning over people to the banner of revolutionary socialism. This does not necessitate sacrificing political or programmatic independence, a position summed up Trotsky's line: "March separately, but strike together!"

Mick Barry hoped that the ULA could become a mass workers' party, and both SP and SWP members agreed that it needs to become a democratic, membership-led organisation. Organisationally this points to a fruitful way forward but also needed is a programme with a set of interlocking transitional demands which will bridge the gap between where we are now and where we wish to finish up: socialism!

On Sunday there was a debate on the eurozone crisis. From the platform, Alex Callinicos said that the left needed to articulate a clear plan for the crisis, including taking over the banks. Good! But the rest of the programme seemed hazy. Brian O'Boyle, speaking after Callinicos, said that the United Left Alliance needed to call for an exit from the euro — this would not be a nationalist exit or a rightwing exit, but a "workers' exit". We argued for uniting workers and levelling up conditions across Europe. That means pushing through the capitalist EU, not collapsing back into competing national capitalisms. Although a workers' government might be forced to leave the euro, the immediate demand to quit the euro, as such, would not advance the struggle for a workers' government, but would feed into nationalism. If successful, the call for a return to the Punt would hit workers' living standards even harder!

Most people will not make the distinction between a "left-wing" and a "rightwing" call to leave the euro — especially given that the logic of leaving the euro points in a nationalist direction in practice.

Furthermore, if leaving the euro is only a consequence of the struggle against austerity, then why call for it?

After N30: Build rank-and

Building the strike in the NHS

By a health worker

Preparations for 30 November in the NHS have been extremely mixed. In some places branches have risen to the challenge and organised. In other places, it has been like watching two old enemies preparing for war, after 30 years of peace in which both parties have forgotten the rules of combat.

After decades of social partnership (the delusional belief that bosses and workers have common interests), many health branches of the main NHS union Unison are run by old blokes who think, act and live like management. They have been forced into this industrial action by forces of history beyond their ken and are now trying to apply their old collaborationist methods to the problem of organising a strike.

Everyone agrees that healthworkers should not aim for total, all-out strike action that would leave patients at risk. Non-emergency services should shut down despite the fact that this would cause patients some discomfort. Acute inpatient units or emergency services should run at bank holiday staffing levels. In some branches, these old blokes have signed a partnership agreement exempting all union members who usually work on bank holidays. This means that large numbers of union members will go to work as usual on 30 November, alongside the strike-breakers, doctors and management. In many ways it will be a normal day at the office.

If the union was well organised, had 100% density and could ensure that it had total control over the strike day, then it would organise the emergency cover under union control. Shorter shifts (e.g. 4 hours at a time) could be shared out among striking workers allowing the maximum number of people to take part in the action. All sorts of inessential duties could be avoided for the duration of the strike days, and we would aim at maximum workers' control, rather than disruption to patient care.

However, we do not have 100% density and the level of organisation among union members is extremely low. For 30 November, the goal of the strike is to take out as many workers as possible and create a staffing vacuum in the wards so that non-union members, management and doctors have to act down and fill these posts. In most hospitals, management intend to break the strike. Our role is to make sure they cannot spend the day in their office. If we manage to get senior managers to work night shifts as nursing assistants on the acute wards, then the strike would have been successful.

Where we have higher density and can take out the majority of the life and limb staff, then management may have a problem in covering all the shifts. In this case, they should approach the union and request that some members are exempted from the action. These members should go into work but under union control and should donate their wages to the strike fund.

We are in favour of strike action because it allows workers to feel increasingly confident about their industrial power and their abilities to organise independently of management dictats. Taking strike action allows us to imagine another world where we don't always have to do what our bosses tell us to do but can organise collectively and in our own interests. If we can achieve this kind of rebellion then it will make the government feel very uncomfortable.

In branches where all inpatient staff have been exempted, it is likely that management wrote the policy and some tired old lay official rubber stamped it. Inpatient staff should ignore the exemption and organise for the maximum level of strike action. There is a legal right to strike, and nurses and midwives are covered by the NMC code of conduct to take part in industrial action.

Through the process of defying both management and their collaborators within the union movement, we can rebuild the trade unions with a new layer of activists schooled in the experience of organising effective class struggle.

By Ira Berkovic

To orient the pensions battle after N30 around clear demands and to launch a programme of rolling, selective and escalating action that can win those demands, we have to create spaces where grassroots union members — the “rank-and-file” — can discuss, coordinate and organise together.

Those spaces can be levers of resistance against any attempt by union bureaucracies to derail or sell out the dispute.

At a workplace level that could be something as simple as having regular, cross-union workplace meetings. Without such forums, participation in a strike can become a passive experience. With regular opportunities to discuss the direction of the dispute, and to keep up to date with the latest developments, workers can develop our own strategies from the bottom-up.

Every town should have a strike committee — a cross-union body of elected delegates of striking unions that can coordinate direct action on strike days and act as a hub to facilitate solidarity. Strike committees (or Trades Councils or union branches where strike committees don't exist) should

organise strikers' assemblies so workers can discuss their experiences of the strike and develop plans for pushing their unions into further action.

In the run up to N30, some Unison health branches in London provoked their members' ire by effectively telling them to take symbolic action at lunchtime rather than a full day's walkout. Teachers' union NASUWT has seemed to equivocate over N30 itself, talking up its work-to-rule which begins on 1 December instead.

There is a battle to be had in every union to win the freedom to take the action that can win, rather than being given instructions to take the action that union leaders think will improve the chances of winning a few more crumbs from the government's table.

In the long-term, permanent rank-and-file networks — linking up shop stewards, other reps and activists both within and between unions — are needed to act as counterweights to the bureaucracy and to challenge them for control of our unions.

If the embryos of rank-and-file power that have already been built up in some places around N30 can be grown, developed, and proliferated, then the strike will have a lasting significance well beyond its immediate impact on a particular industrial issue.

Southampton workers vote to fight on

staging post in the dispute as a whole will be a joint stewards' meeting in early December which will formulate strategy for continuing the dispute.

The legal side of the campaign is continuing but no tribunal hearing is expected until Spring of next year. We're also campaigning politically, and producing joint union newsletters to put our case which we'll be delivering door-to-door to targeted areas within Southampton City Council boundaries.

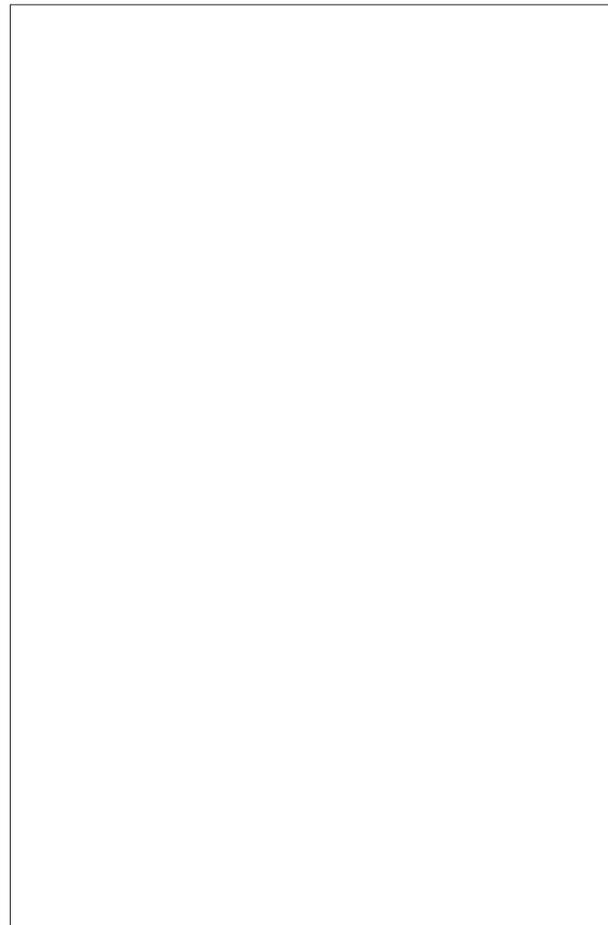
The action short of strike is continuing but it has dropped off a bit recently. People are somewhat fatigued, and they've been readjusting to prepare for 30 November, which has cut across the local dispute to an extent. Finally, the bombshell of the council's "commissioning" proposal — which is basically a green light for the wholesale privatisation of council services — has had an impact. That's another phase in the battle and that issue will be receiving our stewards' attention in the next period.

In terms of the next steps in the dispute, we'll be led by our shop stewards. Gaining an impression of the feeling at workplace level will inform our strategy. People are a little anxious about being outside the protected period for participation in industrial action and are worried that people may start getting disciplined, but that's not the main thought. People aren't fearful of strike action but they want a discussion about the next steps. We certainly won't stand in the way of anyone who wants to take further action.

There's been some crossover between the rank-and-file bodies that've been coordinating the local dispute and the local coordination for 30 November. Representatives from the local dispute strike committee sit on a broader strike committee that's been planning action for the day. There'll be a local march and rally, which is one of several across Hampshire.

The most important lesson from our dispute is the absolute centrality of cross-union reps' meetings, picket line meetings and other forums where the mass of workers taking part in the strike could have a say in how the dispute was run and discuss the way forward. We always made sure our picket lines were well-supported; many turned into what were effectively static protests, such as the picket outside the town depot in Northam on 6 October when we had 150 people out. We also had 80 out in the other depot at Shirley, where a lot of maintenance workers work. Selective action isn't the be all and end all but it's what suited us in our circumstances.

Disputes throw up a variety of tactics; there's no limit to how creative workers can be when given the opportunity to take ownership over their own strikes.



Southampton council workers have voted to reject the council's latest offer in a long-running battle over attacks on pay and conditions. 53% of Unison members, 62.5% of construction union UCATT members and 83.4% of Unite members voted to reject the proposal. Unite regional organiser Ian Woodland spoke to *Solidarity*.

The ballot results reflect the very deep anger that's still felt about the council's proposals.

Our higher vote for rejection is probably a result of our stewards voting to recommend rejection of the deal [Unison did not put out a recommendation]. Unite stewards will meet on 23 November to discuss our next steps, and the next key

file power. Fight to win!



Busting the jargon

Already the Government has changed inflation-uprating for pensions from one price index, RPI, to another, CPI, which on average is about 0.8% lower each year. That's an accumulated cut of 15% in your pension after 20 years of retirement. Or if, say, you work as a teacher for 20 years, and do other work for a further 20 years, then the value of the pension you claim from your teaching work will have been cut by 15% even before you retire.

The Government wants to increase workers' contributions to public-sector pension schemes; to raise the age at which pensions can be claimed; and to change public-sector pensions from "final salary" to "career average"

The RPI-to-CPI change applies to all pensions: public-sector, state, and private-sector schemes too (unless their terms state explicitly that inflation-uprating means RPI: the Government talks of legislation to override the terms for those schemes).

The Government wants to raise the age at which both the state pension and public-sector pensions can be claimed. The women's pension age will be raised to 65 by November 2018. The state pension age will then increase to 66 for both men and women from December 2018 to April 2020. Chancellor George Osborne has talked of further increases in pension age which could push it up to 70 before the middle of the century.

The Government says the public sector pension schemes are "unaffordable" because people are living longer, but its own Hutton Report shows that existing public sector pension schemes can balance their books up to about 2060, which is as far ahead as anyone can see.

The extent of "living longer" varies enormously with social class. Men in the Parkhead district of Glasgow have a life expectancy of 59; they will be lucky to claim a pension at all. In well-off Kensington men's life expectancy is 84.

In any case, economic output generally rises over the decades, so a greater share can be allocated to pensioners without having to cut down standards for working-age people or children.

The problem is not that economic output is insufficient in general. It is that over recent decades private employers have almost entirely opted out of contributing to pensions; that governments have been unwilling to tax private wealth; and that pension pay-outs are large for the very well-off and meagre for workers.

Most private-sector pensions for ordinary workers (as against top managers) have been trashed. According to the *Financial Times*, the Government's planned changes in state pension provision will now push the "diminishing rump" of private-sector employers with decent pension plans to scrap them. The answer is compulsion on private-sector bosses to contribute to decent pension funds for their workers, and have those funds controlled by the workers. The unions should be campaigning for that, and for better state pensions, as well as defending public-sector schemes.

In early November the Government ballyhooed some "concessions". That shows action, and the threat of action, can make a difference. But those first concessions were like telling someone you'll break her or his arm, but that's all right because you'd planned to bruise their fingers too.

The Government offered to keep pension age unchanged for those within ten years of retirement (but they will still suffer from the CPI/RPI change, and still have to pay increased contributions). It offered to keep the "accrual rate" (the portion of full pension you accrue for each year spent in a job) at 1/60 (but that is what it is now: it's not an improvement).

The Government claims that "career average" is fairer than "final salary". It's true that managers and the like get many promotions in their working lives, and end up on much higher pay than routine workers, and so inequality during working lives is magnified in retirement under "final salary" schemes.

There is a very big hitch. A calculation of your "career average" pay depends on the inflation-uprating applied to the pay you got 30 or 20 years ago. If the inflation-uprating is at a low rate, or if the "accruals" rate is not improved (since, even for the less-promoted, "career average" will still be less than "final salary"), then a "career average" scheme ends up worse than "final salary".

Newcastle College student union strike meeting banned by college management

By Ed Whitby, Newcastle Unison (pc)

On 16 November, in the run up to the massive public sector strike, Newcastle college students mobilised to get their student union to vote to not only to support the strike, but to call a college student strike for the day.

They also agreed to organise a public meeting with trade union speakers to call on students to strike alongside lecturers and support staff on the day.

But the meeting, planned for 22 November, was then banned by college management. It has had to take place off college premises. Effectively the management at the college has banned trade union activity and student union activity at the college.

The Chief Executive of the college, Jackie Fisher, who is on £300,000 a year, sees the college as a private business to make money rather than promote learning.

Students across all colleges and universities are organising now to build the strike and to make sure that we challenge the college to respect the independence of the student union.

"The alternative" is working-class control

Maria Exall



The joint union action on 30 November looks set to be the biggest strike for a generation. The fact that so many public sector workers are protesting against being forced to pay for the crisis caused by the excesses of the financial services sector and the failure of neo-liberal economic orthodoxy is good and necessary. We need resistance.

It has the potential to move things forward both on the public sector pensions issue and on the wider ideological matter of the necessity of a cuts agenda. However, resistance is not enough. No matter how big or successful N30 is, there are key challenges faced by the labour movement in coming few months.

Firstly — be prepared for the backlash. After N30, Coalition politicians and the reactionary media will be re-raising the familiar arguments against trade union rights and pressing for changes that make it harder to take industrial action. They are also highly likely to include attacks on employment rights in general under the guise of getting rid of "red tape". Union leaders need to stand firm and be prepared to mobilise against such attacks. Secondly — where is the strategy to take the pensions fight further? Though all the union leaders are making clear current government proposals are unacceptable, many union activists suspect the bottom line will be a compromise that erodes pension provision in the long term.

Thirdly — what next in the fight against the cuts agenda itself? The TUC has set aside a campaign fund of £1 million to make the case for the alternative to cuts, at an ideological, strategic and grassroots level. There will be an anti-austerity conference in the new year and "community organisers" are currently being appointed. But all this campaigning will only work if a clear economic alternative is articulated.

Lastly then, there is an urgent need to win the battle of ideas on political economy. Vague references to workers' co-operatives and economic democracy are not sufficient. We need to popularise a clear alternative and organise support for it. Yes, we need democracy in our economy, but that can only be achieved by a political fight.

As socialists we need to argue the case for working-class control of industry through public ownership and democratic control. This applies not just to the financial sector, but to other utilities and areas of mass production in the private sector. And the case for the economic alternative also needs to be made in a public sector that is run on "private sector disciplines", where low pay, casualisation, contracting out and other forms of marketisation have been well-rooted since Blairite reforms of the public services. Which brings us back to the matter of pensions.

If those managing the public sector can relieve themselves of the burdens of pensions, obligations which amount to billions of pounds, that means full steam ahead for full scale privatisation.

Strikes and shallow slogans



Left
By Rhodri Evans

“Strikes can smash the Tories”. “November 30: our day to smash the Tories”. “Mass strikes can kick out Con-Dems”. “Force Cameron out!”

The text under such headlines in *Socialist Worker* and *The Socialist* varies, and sometimes does not really fit the headlines, but the headline message is common and frequent.

You can see why SWP and SP think the message will be catchy. Strikes against cuts? Good. More of them? Better. Bring down the Tory/Lib-Dem government? Excellent. Combine the two ideas in a snappy phrase? Has to be even better.

Increased mobilisation and agitation *could* destabilise the government. Deeper economic crisis could destabilise it. Since the crash of 2008, governments have fallen in Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece.

But let's tease the issues through. Making the government fall is not necessarily a step forward. In Portugal and Spain, for example, the toppled administrations were replaced by regimes akin to Tories; in Greece and Italy, party administrations have been replaced by “technocrat” administrations designed to be less vulnerable to popular resistance to the cuts they push through.

In Britain the fall of the government would probably mean it being replaced by Labour. That would be a step forward. The new government, though under Ed Miliband pro-capitalist, would be more easily pushed by working-class pressure, and that working-class pressure, against a Labour government, could more directly shake up and transform the labour movement.

But it would not be adequate, even for winning the im-

mediate battle on pension cuts. Balls and Miliband have refused to promise to reverse the coalition government's measures, and will not budge from that refusal without intense and organised political mobilisation within the labour movement. Slogans which present toppling the government as the supreme prize to be won by increased strikes are thus a snare.

The SWP and SP headlines suggest to the casual reader that a good turnout on 30 November could force Cameron from office. In the small print SWP and SP recognise that more is needed.

Earlier this year SW suggested a general strike. “If the pressure gets intense enough, it can lead to the kind of united action that really does have the power to bring down the Tory/Lib-Dem coalition — a general strike” (22 March).

The suggestion has now faded to an exercise in “imagining”. “Imagine the impact if millions more said they would come out — and then decided to stay out...” (1 October). But the thought still seems to be that “smashing the Tories” is not what 30 November can achieve, but what a future general strike could win. The SP suggests something similar, though by way of saying: “we must prepare for a two-day strike as the next stage of the escalating action”.

PRIZE

In other words, the headlines mean: “We want more strikes. And if the strikes become really big, as big as we want, then they can win the supreme prize: topple the government”.

They mean that if strikes rise to a high pitch, capable of winning large concessions, then socialists will have presented the ruling class in advance with a convenient let-out. “You've made your point. Calm down, and we'll call a general election”.

Having presented forcing a general election as the ultimate prize, the socialists will have weakened themselves in the battle that will follow, when we will have to argue against the Labour leaders' inevitable story that the crisis means that they can't change much, or quickly, from the To-

ries' plans. Specific, “hard” demands for the strike, like “fair pensions for all”, are sharper in that situation than the apparently-radical “bring down the government”.

It is also far from certain that Labour would win the general election. When the great May-June 1968 general strike in France was finally stifled, in part with the promise of a quick general election, De Gaulle's right wing won that 23/30 June election with an increased majority. Millions of strikers disappointed by the failure of the general strike to change society then voted for “the party of order”.

Even if Cameron lost the election, the replacement might well not be Labour but a Labour/ Lib-Dem coalition. Ed Miliband signals that he is angling for that.

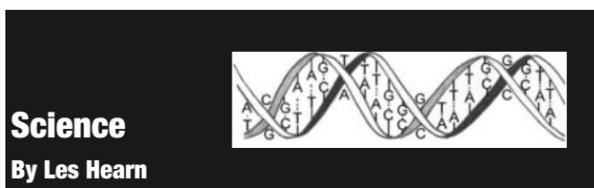
To take the working class forward politically, the negative call for “kicking out the Con-Dems” or “smashing the Tories” has to be linked to a clear positive call for a Labour government, not a new coalition, and for the unions and the working class to organise for sharp demands on the Labour leaders. The call must be linked to politics, not just more strikes.

Neither the SWP nor the SP makes that link. The SP refuses to vote Labour or to fight for unions to reshape Labour. (Its article under the headline “Force Cameron Out!” ends by quarter-suggesting that it envisages an SP government replacing him. The last of the article's concluding list of demands is: “Support the *Socialist* newspaper and join the Socialist Party”).

The SWP is not so dogmatic. But as of now it says nothing about Labour except to make the obvious points about Ed Miliband's poor politics. As used by both SWP and SP, the “smash the Tories” or “kick out the Con-Dems” slogans are further examples of flim-flam “agitationalism” — socialists trying to catch the wind by shouting popular “anti” slogans without spelling out clear positive alternatives.

And to present flim-flam “agitationalist” aims as the best thing that the best development of strikes could achieve is harmful for the development of purposeful, clear-headed working-class action to win definite advances, and of serious political action.

What is CERN and what good is it?



Science
By Les Hearn

What do they do at CERN? It's simple — they smash things, ions for example, together at high speed. Why do they do that? It's even more simple — to see what happens! CERN is an example of “blue skies” research: particles are not smashed together to solve any practical problem but to test theories of matter and energy. We're paying for it — and we should be!

Physicists have been smashing particles for quite a long time, over 50 years at CERN and about 100 years altogether. It first revealed the structure of atoms. In 1911, Rutherford's team bombarded gold atoms with fast-moving alpha particles. Their behaviour showed that atoms are almost entirely empty space populated by some electrons, with an incredibly dense nucleus (1 cubic millimetre of nuclei would weigh about 200000 tonnes). This “blue skies” research gave rise to modern atomic theory and the nuclear age.

More recently, particle accelerators proved a theory about the forces of nature. In 1983, particles predicted by the proposed unification of the electromagnetic and weak forces, vector bosons, were produced at CERN. This helped support the so-called Standard Model which seeks a unified description of three of the four forces of nature.

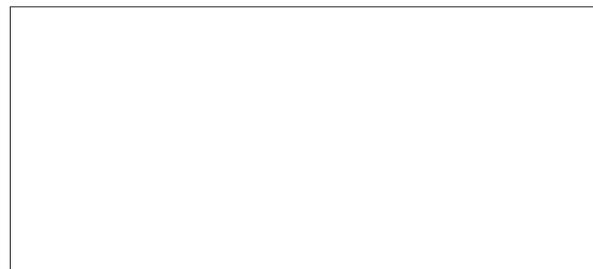
What is the Large Hadron Collider (LHC)?

The LHC is a colossal piece of apparatus designed to produce the predicted Higgs boson, a particle that gives mass to other particles. This would further confirm the Standard Model.

It accelerates two beams of charged particles round a 27km tunnel beneath the Swiss-French border until they almost reach the speed of light (c), nearly 300,000km/s. They circulate some 10,000 times per second.

Bending their paths to follow the tube requires thousands of the most powerful electromagnets which require enormous electric currents. Normally, the heat released would vapourise the whole lot so superconducting wires are used. Cooled to -271 °C (colder than outer space) by liquid helium, these conduct without any resistance whatever.

When the particles collide, their (increased) mass is con-



Smashing particles together

verted into energy, simulating the conditions of the “Big Bang”. The energy then condenses into new unstable particles. These decay into gamma rays, X-rays, and other particles, identified using six enormous detectors in huge caverns; one, ATLAS, weighs 7,000 tonnes.

ATLAS, one of the largest physics collaborations ever, involves 1,800 physicists in 35 countries collecting and analysing data. Communication of the data would be virtually impossible without the internet.

CERN is arguably the wonder of the modern world.

What are accelerators?

Accelerators apply electric fields to charged particles, electrons, protons or ions. These make the particles move faster and faster. For instance, one volt gives an electron one electron-volt (eV) of energy and accelerates it to about 2% of c. The LHC produces energies of 7 TeV (tera = million million). Old TV sets used 5,000V to accelerate electrons to about a quarter of c before smashing into the screen and causing a flash (Yes! We had particle accelerators in our living rooms. Who knew?).

Developed for fundamental, curiosity-driven, research, there are now about 30,000 accelerators worldwide, mostly in industry and health (see spin-offs).

Research accelerators operate at such high voltages that the particles are moving at a fraction below c. They can't exceed this because as they get closer some of the extra energy is converted into mass and the particles become heavier, as Einstein predicted. At 99.9998% of the speed of light, a mouse would weigh as much as an elephant, and the LHC can accelerate particles more than this.

Some spin-offs from particle acceleration research

- **Radiation therapy.** Proton/carbon ion treatment: ions

accelerated to appropriate speed (kinetic energy) to reach the tumour; they penetrate healthy tissue but deliver most of their energy to the target tumour, damaging the cancer cells' DNA so much that they die.

- **Ion implantation.** Used for making semiconductors and hardening/corrosion-proofing metal tools. Ions of particular elements are accelerated and then bombard the surface of silicon chips, metal tools or artificial joints. The elements alter the electrical properties of the silicon, and make metal surfaces resist cracking and corrosion.

- **Detectors.** PET scans result in emission of positrons from radioactive isotopes passing through blood vessels. These annihilate when they meet ordinary electrons, emitting two gamma rays. Detectors are used to build up a pattern of blood flow in the body, highlighting any abnormalities. And the isotopes are made in accelerators.

- **Super-conducting electromagnets.** Used in MRI scanners.

- **Data handling.** CERN generated greater and greater amounts of data as time went on. This led computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee to invent the World-Wide Web in 1989 as a way of sharing information between scientists; it was opened up to the world in 1994. It is obviously the most far-reaching spin-off from CERN, though there is no way it could have been predicted.

- **Safer nuclear power.** An exciting potential use is in accelerator-driven systems (ADS) firing neutrons at thorium fuel, releasing energy. Unlike conventional nuclear reactors, the process can be immediately stopped by switching off the accelerator. The other advantage of ADS is that they can burn up nuclear waste, reducing drastically the problem of disposal. India is planning a pilot thorium-fuelled ADS by 2020.

Fundamental research — is it worthwhile?

Populist politicians often point to tax-payers' money being “wasted” on the curiosity of scientists. Governments often favour applied research, cutting fundamental research to save money in the short term.

Looking at some spin-offs from particle accelerators shows how unwise this is. And CERN's originating the internet is alone enough to justify all the money spent.

Two hundred years ago, applied research into lighting would have meant better candles or gas flames. No one could have predicted that Faraday's research would lead to using electricity to make clean bright light anywhere. When Faraday was asked what good his discoveries were, he replied “What good is a new-born baby?”

What's happening to the EDL?

The Radicalism and New Media research group at the University of Northampton has produced a lengthy report, *The EDL: Britain's New Far Right Social Movement* (see www.radicalism-new-media.org), describing some of the distinct features of the English Defence League as compared to other, classical far right and fascist organisations.

The report argues the organisational structure of the EDL is best understood as a Social Movement Organisation (SMO). A SMO "has a limited central organisational structure ... which offers a level of coherent organisation, with a broad party line, to a wider set of networked followers." This definition has more commonly been applied to left-wing protest groups in the past.

The report authors say such an organisational set-up allows for significant mobilisations of support by appealing to general anti-Muslim sentiment without replicating the political problems common to more formal organisational structures.

So whilst central EDL figures like Stephen Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson) have well documented and exposed histories with racist and fascist organisations and the BNP in particular, those affiliated to and mobilised by the EDL do not necessarily share the same politics.

Whilst the EDL focusses upon and mobilises support off the back of anti-Muslim racism, its structure allows participants to "register more general discontent with mainstream politics."

At its high point, the BNP attracted significant "protest votes" at election time. With the BNP's decline, this passive support could be directed towards more public sympathy with the EDL. But such support will inevitably put pressure upon the EDL to become more politically coherent and could even propel the group into the electoral field.

The report points to other developments. Despite the SMO structure, the central EDL leadership has managed to maintain almost total control over the "core political message". However, the lack of centralisation means the slightest disagreement or any potential leadership crisis could produce ready formed organisational splinters. The emergence of the "Infidels" fragment in the North East and North West is just one example of this potential.

It is believed that the "Infidels" are responsible for the attacks and threats of attack on the "Occupy" movement, socialist meetings and the Unite trade union office in Liverpool.

Whether the EDL either continues to grow, plateaus or fragments the results are will be significant for the formation of a new extreme right wing and possibly openly fascist party, organisation or larger "movement".

SUPPORTERS

Another recent report by Demos (a think tank closely associated with New Labour) *Inside the EDL: populist politics in a digital age, uses data volunteered by people connected to the EDL Facebook page (i.e. self-identified EDL supporters) and gives some startling "headline" results.*

First: "We estimate the total size of the active membership to be at least 25,000–35,000 people. Of these, around half have been involved in demonstrations and/or marches."

Second: EDL supporters are "disproportionately likely to be out of work". In the younger age bracket, this figure is 8%

above the national average. In the upper age bracket, the figure for EDL supporters is 28% whilst the national average is 6%.

Third: "Immigration is the biggest concern among EDL supporters", which neatly complements, feeds from and boosts the core anti-Muslim message.

Fourth: The BNP is the most popular party amongst EDL members and the overwhelming majority believe that political action can make a positive difference to society. Significantly, many EDL supporters are convinced that the electoral process is vitally important.

Whilst the methodology of the report is "innovative" and as such open to criticism and whilst — like the previous report — many of the policy conclusions need to be sharply contested within the workers' movement, the data points to important potential developments.

If we understand the EDL as an SMO, then the figure of 25,000 to 30,000 "members" does not represent a "concrete" and obedient membership. But the figures do represent a sizeable political network.

The disproportionately high levels of unemployment amongst EDL supporters points to the already obvious social factor in far right political mobilisation. And the current social, political and economic situation — one where open class warfare is already a major factor — still provides the conditions in which a group like the EDL can thrive,

Finally, the support for the BNP and the high levels of identification with the mainstream political process indicates that pressure will be brought upon the centre of the SMO to change political tack when the BNP finally bites the dust. This in turn will have a significant impact on factions within the EDL.

The job of working out a coherent analysis of the data from these reports and from the movement more generally must continue. As well as developing a strategy against a re-composed far right movement/fascist organisation, it will be necessary to develop sharp opposition to the dominant analysis of the "official" anti-fascisms.

Whereas groups like Hope not Hate and interested parties around Labour couch their views around the idea that the state can prevent the rise of "extremism" through bans, total proscription and strategies like "Prevent", UAF holds that ineffectual rallies and shouting "Nazi scum" at EDL members will crush the movement. That does come close to the mark. We need to answer some critical questions and develop strategies within the working class movement around the answers.

1. If support for the EDL is real and growing in the working class, how can this be effectively countered by working-class organisation?

2. If the EDL continues to use racist violence and stage provocative mass demonstrations against Muslims, what more can militant anti-racists do to prevent them?

3. What relation does the EDL have to the emergence of a new European far right and what does the European experience tell us about potential developments here?

4. What is the significance of developments like the "Infidels" faction and how should the left respond to the urgent task of self-defence?

5. **What are the prospects for developing a broad based working class anti-fascist movement at a time of increasing working class mobilisation and industrial action?**

By Charlie Salmon

At the start of 2010, the BNP looked poised to consolidate the greatest electoral achievements of any fascist organisation in this country by making party leader Nick Griffin a member of parliament as well as a MEP. The total quashing of these aspirations and the intensification of disputes within the BNP has significantly altered the far-right political landscape.

The BNP is now at the point of almost total disintegration. The party is suffering not only from a series of personal and political splits, but is under investigation by the Electoral Commission (for late submission of accounts) and by the European Parliament for financial "mismanagement".

The results of these investigations could see Griffin and other leading BNPs bankrupted, politically sanctioned or even behind bars.

Large numbers of rank-and-file BNP members have dropped out of politics or moved on to smaller organisations. Leading BNP cadre have likewise jumped ship to organisations as varied as the National Front, UKIP and the English Democrats.

Clearly the era of the BNP and Nick Griffin as the "uniting force" of fascism and the far-right is over. What remains is a far more disparate and fragmented political scene, the shape and dynamic of which has yet to be settled.

EDL

Central to the formation of a "new far right" is the English Defence League.

According to the Socialist Workers Party and its Unite Against Fascism front, the EDL is nothing more than a straightforward fascist group. The presence of current and former BNP members, high-profile fascists and racists — many of them organised in football "hooligan" firms — within the ranks of the EDL made this an easy characterisation to make: fascists are active within the EDL, therefore it's a fascist group.

For Workers' Liberty and others the EDL represented something more complicated. A central focus of the EDL is anti-Muslim bigotry and racism. Whilst strenuously distancing themselves from groups like the BNP in public and claiming to focus solely upon "Islamic extremism", the EDL has mobilised violent mass and smaller scale demonstrations that have indiscriminately targeted individual Muslims and Muslim communities. The key to their success was tapping into a very real and widespread prejudice.

Woven into its analysis of modern Britain and the threats posed to "English identity" were sharp criticisms of those who allowed and facilitated the growing influence of political Islamism. The critical language used was both populist and conspiratorial, blaming an establishment that is wilfully compromising the future of the UK.

Anti-Muslim racist populism, a conspiratorial view of politics, combined with a "march and grow" organisational approach typical of classical fascist organisations have been the hallmark of EDL activity. But there are new developments.

EDL splinter targets labour movement

By an anti-fascist activist

EDL splinter group the "Infidels" now says it wants to target trade union, anti-fascist and socialist organisations.

Quoted in the *Observer* (20 November), Infidels leader John "Snowy" Shaw states: "We have decided to put all our efforts into opposing everything you [the left] do. Regardless of the issue at hand, it's your organisations we oppose."

The "Infidels" and other EDL splinters have already attacked meetings of the Socialist Workers Party, the "Occupy Newcastle" camp and most recently the offices of the Unite union in Liverpool.

The reasoning behind this new orientation is of a piece with the deadly "logic" behind the murderous actions of Anders Behring Breivik, who slaughtered 77 children and young adults at a Labour Party youth camp in Norway last July.

Breivik's self-aggrandising pseudo-manifesto blamed the Norwegian labour movement and its Labour government for providing cover and laying the foundations for a creeping Islamist conspiracy to take over Europe. Shaw et al claim that the British left is playing the self-same role.

The left should take this new development seriously. Groups like the Infidels have already made contact with and been infiltrated by elements of the fragmentary fascist right: those splitting from the British National Party and groups like the National Front.

Meanwhile on Saturday 19 November Scottish Defence League (SDL) thugs attacked a Glasgow Palestine Human Rights Campaign stall in Glasgow city centre.

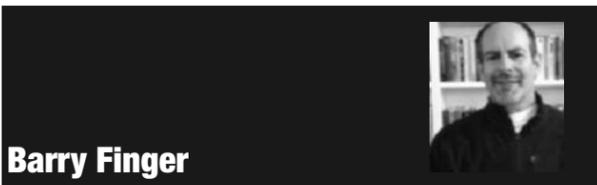
Initial reports refer to around 30 or 40 turning up wearing masks at about 4:30pm, assaulting the campaign members on the stall, and trashing the stall. They then ran off shouting: "Whose Streets? Our Streets!"

The SDL attack on the Palestinian Human Rights stall marks a new development for the SDL similar to its counterparts in England.

Those attending the 26 November annual Scottish TUC anti-racist march (10.30am Glasgow Green) should follow up the demonstration with defence of the Palestine Human Rights stall, and the various left stalls in the same street, against a possible return by the SDL.

The left and anti-capitalist activists need to be prepared to defend ourselves. Defending ourselves will mean more than relying on the police and the Home Secretary.

Europe: death to the rentier!



Barry Finger

The immediate crisis demonstrates, if there were any lingering doubts, that the architecture of the European Monetary Union is incompatible with countercyclical intervention.

It was designed solely to contain inflation at 2%. There is no central fiscal authority and no mandate to either maintain acceptable levels of employment or to sustain working class living standards against the ravages of the business cycle. As it stands, not one proposal emanating from Europe's ruling classes attends to anything beyond saving its banks to forestall further private sector contagion, while asking these banks to accept nothing more than a modest write down of a small portion of their toxic assets. And even this request exempts the European Central Bank and the IMF. The further provision of underwriting loan guarantees to ailing private lenders to augment the hastily cobbled bailout fund is akin to recruiting kidney donors in a dialysis ward by offering them free health insurance.

The more ramified component is the imposition of draconian austerity on Europe's southern periphery. It has only two functions with the same purpose: to transfer public wealth from debtor nations to private financial interests abroad, and to contract the internal price structure of these self-same nations in the vain hope that this will lead to an improvement in their balance of trade. And that is needed only to service foreign debt obligations and recapitalize the banks.

Therefore, even in the highly unlikely event that the balance of trade was to actually improve for the south — and not merely further balloon deficits as burgeoning unemployment imposes additional demands on these states — it would have little stimulative effect on the internal markets of European capitalism's weak links. Funds that would otherwise supplement domestic demand would be drained to satisfy external debt obligations. And to the extent that the targeted nations contract, the living standards of German workers and their employers' profits — whose livelihoods are codependent on the availability and expansion of foreign markets — would likewise be imperiled.

MERKEL

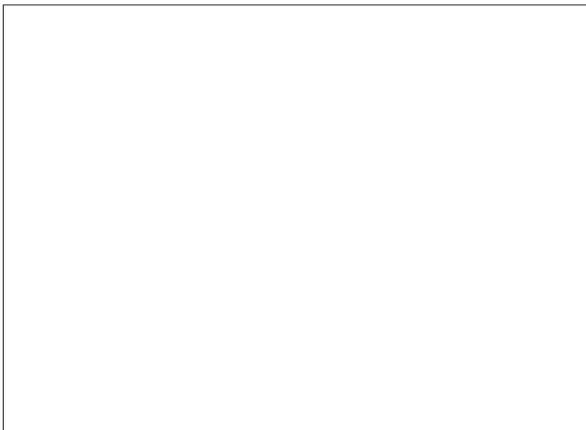
German balance of trade surpluses have hitherto provided the same internal function as government deficits would have by supplementing aggregate demand as their internal market shrinks. This, of course, makes the condescending lectures from German elites all the more insufferable.

The vaunted financial frugality of the Merkel government was only made possible by the wholesale transfer of income from the supposedly profligate south. The bailout package is simply a far more painful route to the same end.

If European economies maintained separate non-commodity moneys, foreign currency exchange rates would have the function of reducing units of labour of average skill and intensity in each national market into their foreign equivalents. Were a trade imbalance to persist, assuming exchange rates to be freely floating, this would signal the need for modifications in the pre-existing arrangements; a change in how the average labour hour expended in one economy is equated with the value creating power of an average hour in another. The eurozone was designed, on the other hand, as if labour power in its various national components were equally productive, that a worker of average Greek education and training would operate with the same level of efficiency in a German factory as the typical German worker. Under such hypothetical circumstances, there would be no a priori reason for nations to experience persistent trade imbalances.

The working class of the southern periphery of Europe however has not experienced the same mix of training, education and industrial discipline as its northern counterparts. A unitary currency therefore puts them at a dual disadvantage. It systematically "overvalues" the output of the periphery relative to the northern core. Therefore, unable to trade without running up huge deficits in their balance of trade, the south is also unable to compensate for this disadvantage by allowing its currency to float downwards. It can only, under existing circumstances, rebalance by deflating its entire cost structure — forcing aggregate prices below aggregate values — which would require being subject to prolonged semi-depression like conditions. This is generally unacceptable to the Greeks, bankers aside, for obvious reasons.

Otherwise, the persistent drain on aggregate demand



(domestic spending) caused by the excess of imports over exports must be offset, all other things being equal, by government deficits on a one to one basis. These budgetary deficits, like the trade imbalances that invoke them, therefore take on the character of being a structural component of the system's architecture. The relative portion of Greek government outlays composed of debt may undoubtedly be exaggerated by the ingrained habits of elite tax avoidance. But the absolute size of the debt itself is dictated by the leakages from the domestic economy itself, not by how effective the state is in harvesting its potential tax base.

Were there a politically accountable fiscal authority in the euro zone, the expansion of euros could be aligned solely to democratic — and structural and counter cyclical — considerations. Conceptually there are no a priori limits on the expansion of public demand denominated in a fiat currency, unlike a gold based currency, beyond the productive capacity of the system to accommodate the additional public demands placed on it. That limit is reached when demand expansion cannot induce any further capacity utilization or increased output. The system can then only respond to such additional demand by enhanced rationing via price increases.

But we have seen across the board that capitalist elites seek to confine the operations of the public sector to that which would remain feasible were it actually subject to the discipline of the gold standard. The euro zone architects accomplished this most directly by their deliberate failure to create a consolidated fiscal authority answerable to a European parliament. In compelling the operations of the various component states to finance their sovereign operations by filling the gap between tax revenues and expenditures with loans from private financiers, the European ruling classes assured themselves truncated democracies ever subjected to the discipline of the bond market.

ALTERNATIVE PATHS

But the dirty little secret is this. Fiat money contains within it the potential for euthanising the rentier class. It does so by providing alternative paths to finance public provisions at the central level that can be extended to its component states.

Liquidity does not first have to be pumped out of the private sector for it to then flow back to the market as state induced demand. Because the state (or in this case, the European Central Bank) is the monopoly issuer of its currency, it (or the European Union) is not revenue constrained. It does not need to operate by first diverting the stream of financial flows into the state so that the state can then access privately produced commodities.

This means that entities which are sovereign with respect to the issuance of currency, and whose external debts are payable in that currency, no longer need operate on the same financial basis as the private sector. There are no external limitations on the computer keystrokes (deposits) that sovereign entities can make to the accounts of private producers in payment for state purchases. The state does not need revenue on hand (tax receipts) or access to lines of credit (debt) before it can access goods and services.

Of course, the European Union is no different from the United States, Britain and every other state issuer of currency all of whose governing classes studiously refuse to exploit the openings this has created for fear of losing effective veto power over the state.

There are many good egalitarian reasons to tax the rich. And they stand on their own merits. But a countercyclical program requires an increase in net spending, not merely an equal transference of spending power from the rich to government. A policy that redistributes the incidence of taxes from the working class to the wealthy, without any net additions to aggregate demand, simply finances existing outlays on a more "equal" basis. (Of course, "equal" in this context is a misnomer insofar as all taxes paid by the rich were first pumped out of the working class by capital through their appropriation of surplus labor time.) So for "taxing the rich" to be an expansionary demand as well as

a limited demand for justice, there must be parallel tax relief for the working class that exceeds the additional taxes imposed on the wealthy.

But overhauling tax codes is the most roundabout means to countercyclical ends.

The only immediate way to break the grip of Wall Street and the Bourse over the state is to press for a real democratisation of fiscal authority. The expansion of "entitlements" and mass public works projects are dependent only on the willingness of the state's central bank to create demand ex nihilo, an operation that fiat money arrangements fully support.

Capital is understandably wary of this. And it is not only because of the tight labour markets and enhanced working class power that this would sustain, though this is undoubtedly always a consideration. Business suspects that the expansion of induced profits would fall short of the additional future taxes needed to service and retire the ballooning public debt now summoned into existence to set this process in motion. And if the system was indeed subject to the discipline of the private bond market — as it is under current arrangements — such suspicions would be well grounded.

But this again represents an inverted understanding of the mechanics of public debt and taxes under a fiat system of money. If this is a constraint, it is by legal alignment rather than operational necessity. When the state spends, it actually injects an asset (dollars, pounds, or conceivably, euros etc.) into the private sector. It can simultaneously neutralise this additional demand through taxation; or it can issue a bond for the same amount thereby swapping the non interest bearing asset (dollars, pounds or conceivably euros) for an interest bearing asset on a one to one basis.

But the point is this: government spending, taxing and bond issuance are three separate and distinct operations. Public spending per se creates a net addition to private assets. This means that bond issuance involves no actual borrowing from the private sector whatsoever. The sole purpose of bond issuance is to allow government to influence interest rates levels in the private sector. Fiat money eliminates the need for any state reliance on the private banking system; it eliminates any need to face the consequences of "sovereign" debt crises. In the hands of socialists it would mean euthanasia for the rentier class; the complete severance of governmental operations from the private banking system and a huge victory in the war for democracy.

GREECE

There are no shortages of excellent socialist proposals for a Greek workers' government. Some have advocated a go it alone policy, while others have conceded that any actions needed to realise a left program would certainly result in the expulsion of Greece from the euro zone.

Either way, this would entail the reintroduction of a national fiat currency, the drachma, and either a debt default or a write down of debt payable in drachmas. Workers in the European core would be squeezed to compensate for the banking losses that capital will insist has been imposed upon them by "irresponsible" Greek workers.

Though a Greek workers' government would have all the benefits that fiat money accesses, the retaliatory trade barriers that will likely ensue would nevertheless wall them in. From north to south, all the reactionary nationalist poisons would be unleashed throughout the continent.

Any real program based on working class internationalism should build instead on the democratic openings made possible by fiat money. In the US and Britain this struggle first needs to expose the "debt" crisis for the complete farce it is. It is nothing more than the capitalism holding democracy in check as the profit system unravels.

But for the southern periphery of Europe, whose national constituents cannot issue their own currencies, this ideological struggle also demands a continent wide struggle for an overhauled, consolidated fiscal authority under democratic supervision. If the euro system is to be maintained for the convenience of capital, the periphery will need to run perpetual deficits until the continental level of working class productivity is equalized. And beyond that, the general need for countercyclical spending would mean that the European Central Bank would have to finance the additional deficits that arise in all member states when capital accumulation stagnates.

There is absolutely no reason why these deficits, whether structural or conjunctural, need to be underwritten by the private financial sector with all the punitive measures and restrictions this entails both to workers in the periphery and in the core of Europe.

For now, it is death to the rentier class and not the call for isolated workers' governments that allows a way out for Europe's rank and file.

Leeds teachers strike against Academy plan

By Patrick Murphy, Leeds NUT and NUT National Executive (pc)

Over 60 teachers at Prince Henry's Grammar School in Otley, Leeds, are involved in an intensive programme of strike action against plans to turn their school into an academy.

Members of the NUT and NASUWT started the action with a one day strike on 10 November but their unions announced plans to increase this to two days the following week (16 and 17 November) and three days the week after that. After talks to resolve the dispute broke down on Friday 18 November, a large meeting of union members voted overwhelmingly to stick to plans to strike this week. As a result they will walk out again from Tuesday 22 to Thursday 24.

It has become unusual to see school staff taking action against academy status, especially since the

Con-Dem Academies Act, which allows some schools to convert on a very fast timetable and with little or no effective consultation.

The anger in Otley has been produced partly by some particular features of the academy process there.

First there was strong opposition on the school's governing body from the start. A number of attempts to move to academy status were prevented by as many as 10 governors who were determined to defend its links with the local authority.

CONVERT

The decision to convert was made at a meeting which one of those governors could not attend and was carried by one vote.

In a naive move, nine of the anti-academy governors then resigned in protest thinking the fight was over and not wanting to be associated with the academy.

Two public consultation meetings were arranged by

Students from Prince Henry Grammar School, Otley

the school during the process. Both were well attended (80 and 100 people) and were almost unanimously opposed to the academy conversion. A vote held at the second meeting, at the insistence of the audience, was 72-1 against. A survey of staff, also carried out by the school, showed that two thirds were opposed to academy status. The largest union in the school, NASUWT, balloted members for strike action and action short of strike action in July and began some non-strike action at the end of the summer term. The NUT then balloted members in October and the two

unions agreed to move to co-ordinated strike action in response to the decision to ignore all the consultation and convert.

ESCALATING

The reason for the escalating programme of action is that governors are determined to turn the school into an academy from 1 December.

With only a few weeks to prevent this, the teachers had to make a huge impact in a very short period of time. Whether or not they stop these plans they have certainly had a major impact on the town.

There have been up to 50 teachers on picket lines and

after the first day of action they have been joined by parents and sixth-form students.

Messages of support have flooded in not only from other unions but, most encouraging of all, from parents in that area. A Facebook group in support of the striking teachers has been joined by over 150 people and they have organised town centre leafleting and picketing support. Far from the debate being over, opposition to the academy proposal has never been stronger.

The industrial dispute is about the threat to terms and conditions of teachers whose contracts will transfer over to the academy from the local authority if this goes ahead. Last week the two unions offered to suspend the action on condition that the proposed conversion date was dropped and a ballot of parents held with both sides of the argument put in the ballot material to parents. This was rejected by the Head and Vice Chair of governors, presumably

for fear that they cannot win the argument.

The Otley teachers have shown tremendous and all-too-unusual determination and principle in taking this action and they are being put under great pressure to give up. They have held firm largely because of the inspiring levels of support they have had from the local community and other trade unionists. On Tuesday 22 November a public meeting organised by the local town council will take place to oppose academy status and support the teachers with speakers from the NUT, NASUWT and the ex-governors.

The Otley strike and wider campaign is evidence that academies can still be fought and, against all the odds, it is not impossible that it could win.

• Send messages of support to the school reps Lisa Walsh (NUT) and James Babington (NASUWT) via leedsnut@btconnect.com and leedsnasuwt@nasuwt.net

Job losses at British Gas?

By Pdraig O'Brien

Centrica, the company which owns British Gas, has announced plans to cut 850 jobs as part of a cost-savings drive that could see further attacks for its 34,000 employees.

Reduced energy use by homes and business during an unusually hot autumn is being blamed by Centrica for the cuts, but although its takings fell its operating profit for 2011 was still nearly £2.5 billion. Its

North Sea oil and gas operation could be next in line for the chop after the initial 850 redundancies.

Mike Jeram, head of Business and Environment at the trade union Unison, said:

"This is seriously bad news on the day that the latest unemployment figures are announced and we learn that more than one million young people are now desperate for jobs.

"These 850 job losses come on top of the 270 British Gas is making in

other business streams, so the true total stands at more than 1,100. British Gas claims these cuts won't harm customer service, but we will challenge them very hard to demonstrate exactly how they will guarantee to maintain decent levels of service, while axing this number of staff.

"In the face of recent price increases, customers will be very sceptical about the company's claims that standards won't be hit."

Liverpool Airport workers to strike

By Darren Bedford

Aviation workers at Liverpool John Lennon Airport will strike on Wednesday 23 November as part of a rolling programme of action which will continue into December.

Ground service provider Servisair, which serves airlines including Ryanair and EasyJet, had initially threatened to axe 75 jobs. Although negotiation reduced the figure to 47,

the workers' union – the GMB – has maintained its opposition to any compulsory redundancies whatsoever and will now strike in an attempt to save the jobs. Union members working for Servisair vote 85% in favour of taking strike action and 95% in favour of taking action short of a strike.

GMB organiser Eddie Parker said: "Given the level of unemployment on Merseyside and given that Servisair is making a profit

compulsory redundancies are not acceptable.

"Throughout these discussions GMB has requested financial information from Servisair to allow GMB the opportunity to have meaningful discussions on how a resolution can be achieved. Servisair have failed to provide this information.

"They claim that the job losses are being made to make sure they continue to make money into the future."

SNP government plans rail cuts

By Dale Street

Higher fares, cuts in services, longer standing times, hiving off the most profitable routes, station closures and fewer direct routes.

These proposals are contained in the SNP Holyrood government's consultation paper on the future of the rail network in Scotland, published last week as the first stage in preparing for the re-franchising of ScotRail in 2014.

Before this year's Holyrood elections, the SNP pledged that annual fare increases would not be higher than RPI plus. But last week's consultation paper suggests increases of RPI plus 3%.

The paper also suggests above-average fare increases on railway routes where there has been significant investment, on the

basis that the travellers who benefit from the investments should pay for them, rather than the public in general.

Whereas cross-border services currently end in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness or Aberdeen, the paper argues the supposed case for ending all cross-border services in Edinburgh, with passengers wishing to travel further north (or west to Glasgow) switching over to Scottish-run trains.

Train services in Scotland (apart from cross-border services) are currently run by a single franchisee (First Group). The consultation paper, however, raises the idea of putting the most profitable routes (most obviously: the Glasgow-Edinburgh line) out to tender separately.

This would allow private operators to cherry-

pick the most profitable routes. Profits would therefore go into the pockets of those operators, rather than subsidising the unprofitable, but socially necessary, routes.

The paper encourages the next franchisee to make more money where possible, subject only to the qualification that the "ScotRail brand" should not be compromised.

SNP Transport Minister Keith Brown writes that the SNP's aim is to create a railway system which "incorporates the best private sector attributes with the ethos of public service."

Keith Brown is a former Unison full-timer. Did he ever notice the inherent conflict between "private sector attributes" and "public service ethos"?

• Abridged from bit.ly/rZdm5h

Threat to union politics

The Committee for Standards in Public Life (CSPL), a quango set up in 1994, on 22 November published its long-delayed recommendations for change in political party funding.

It demands that unions require members to opt in to the political levy (as between 1927 and 1945) rather than giving them the chance to opt out. And it would ban union donations to Labour (or any party) bigger than £10,000 in addition to affiliation fees.

The recommendations are dangerous. It looks unlikely that they will be implemented fast. Lib-Dem leader Nick Clegg has said: "It would not be right to ask our hard-pressed taxpayers to pay more to political parties at a time when they are having to deal with so many cuts and savings elsewhere".

Since the CSPL plans including a limit of £10,000 on all donations, the CSPL's "compensatory" proposal for £3 per vote to be paid by the state to all political parties (or £1.50 per vote in European, Welsh, and Scottish polls), is essential to the package, and Clegg's comment would seem to kibosh the whole plan.

The Tory rep on the CSPL has written a minority report objecting to the £10,000 limit, and the Labour rep one objecting to changes on union money.

However, the CSPL report could lay down a marker for implementation when a government feels more secure than today.

Labour and the unions should clearly reject the report and defend the right for working-class organisations collectively to fund political representation.

Reinstatement fight goes on

By an NUT activist

The campaign to defend victimised teacher trade unionist Pat Markey will discuss a possible resolution.

The disciplinary hearing at which Pat faced dismissal (scheduled for Monday 21 November) was postponed.

A spokesperson from Northampton National Union of Teachers said "It's clear that the school is negotiating seriously because of the threat of strike action."

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Picture: Tom Dale

Egypt: revolt against the army

By Clive Bradley

Protests in Egypt left at least 28 dead and hundreds of injured.

On Friday 18 November, Tahrir Square filled with demonstrators, frustrated with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) which has held power since Mubarak's removal in February.

Parliamentary elections are due to start on 28 November — though several parties have declared a boycott in light of this weekend's events. The army, initially reluctant to give up power, is promising a new President by June 2012 and has accepted the resignation of the current cabinet.

When the army intervened during the revolution at the beginning of the year it was widely seen as a "people's army", in contrast with the hated police. But nine months of SCAF rule have seen more, not less, repressive legislation, 12,000 arrests of activists (usually tried by military, rather than civilian, courts), and a gradual slowing down of the democratic transition.

The clampdown on Sunday night, 20 November, was described by presi-

dential hopeful and Nobel laureate Muhammed al Baradei as a 'slaughterhouse'. Whatever lingering illusions many protestors may have had in the "people's army" have now, it seems, been lost.

In fact, despite the ferocity of the repression, it failed to disperse Tahrir Square. On the contrary: the protestors fought back. According to *The Guardian*: "Outnumbered and outfought, the soldiers fled, though not before some had been captured."

POPULAR

Over recent months popular mobilisations had been small and increasingly fractious.

The past few days have seen a major revival in the protests, and perhaps a new phase in the revolution itself.

The first day, Friday November 18, was dominated by religious forces, both the well-organised Muslim Brotherhood and the conservative Salafist movement. The Brotherhood's mobilisation itself marks a significant breakdown in its relations with the military government. Some reports suggested that many liberal and secular movements did not initially par-

ticipate in the demonstration on Friday (which is the Muslim Sabbath).

By Saturday that had clearly changed, though the weight of different opposition movements in Tahrir Square is hard to judge. For sure, however, this was not simply a confrontation between the army and the Islamists.

Protests have spread throughout Egypt — first, along with those in Tahrir, calling for faster progress towards democracy and the release of political prisoners (several prominent bloggers associated with the January revolution are currently under arrest, for example), and now demanding an end to the clampdown.

It remains to be seen how these events will affect the scheduled elections.

REVOLUTION

The revolution in January took Egypt's rulers, and most of the rest of the world, by surprise.

Inevitably, the initial revolutionary enthusiasm had ebbed somewhat in the months since. Growing frustration with the army is mirrored in growing impatience with "the revolution". In August, when

soldiers cleared protestors out of Tahrir Square, local shopkeepers — who had actively supported the "Arab Spring" — cheered. Election candidates calling for "the revolution to continue", including in poor neighbourhoods, have met opposition, even hostility. There has been no change in the terrible economic circumstances most Egyptians face, and for many people "the revolution" has meant only greater instability and chaos.

But a powerful labour movement has emerged. For sure one reason the SCAF has been only half-hearted in its repression until now — or rather, has alternated between repressions and concessions; introduced anti-protest laws but failed on the whole to implement them — is because of the continued strength of this new movement and the strikes it has organised.

Egypt is the Middle East's most populous country. It was in many ways the epicentre of the "Arab Spring".

What happens in the next few weeks and months could determine the evolution of the revolutionary wave across the whole region.

Eurozone crisis: big chance to attack workers' rights

By Gerry Bates

David Cameron has suggested to German chancellor [prime minister] Angela Merkel that he would support a quick change in European treaties, to increase economic integration and help tackle the eurozone crisis, if only he gets a payback with the scrapping of European Union labour laws.

Especially mentioned is the European Working Time Directive, which imposes limits on working hours. The Tories would surely also like to scrap the Agency Workers' Directive.

Merkel has agreed to discuss the deal "constructively". There are a dozen large obstacles in the way of treaty change, but the labour movement should take note of the warning.

On Wednesday 23 November the European Commission [the EU's "civil service"] will publish a report favouring the introduction of "eurobonds", i.e. a system where each eurozone government's IOUs would be guaranteed by the whole eurozone. Debt crises like those hitting Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Italy, and maybe tomorrow France, would be ruled out short of a cataclysmic collapse of the whole eurozone, and weaker EU governments would no longer have to pay over the odds to bor-

row.

Those "eurobonds" would certainly help. The snag is that they would require a sizeable change in EU treaties (though there is frantic discussion of devious tactics to get round that), and that the eurozone leaders, if they decide in desperation to go for eurobonds, would certainly couple the introduction with a search for guarantees of severe cuts in weaker economies and maybe with measures like Cameron's proposal of scrapping labour laws.

Also under discussion is a "financial transactions", or "Tobin", or "Robin Hood" tax. European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso is pushing the idea; many European governments agree; the British government opposes it vehemently.

Cameron's opposition is because far more financial transactions happen in London than in any European centre. And there is reason to welcome any move in the direction of taxing the rich.

However, the appearance that a "Tobin" tax could raise vast revenues without any of the conflict which direct taxes on high income or large wealth would require is illusory. Some analysts, including left-wingers, have even suggested that it could backfire.

Socialists should stick with the general programme of taxing the rich, and not see the "Tobin" tax as a cure-all.

Putin's assault on LGBT rights

By Rosalind Robson

Vladimir Putin's ruling party is pushing a bill which would severely curtail freedom of speech and assembly for LGBT people in Russia.

The bill was proposed

by the dominant United Russia party and passed a first reading on Wednesday 16 November. It will impose a maximum fine of \$1,600 for "public actions aimed at propaganda for pederasty, lesbianism, bisexuality, and transgenerism among minors."

Although homosexuality was decriminalised in Russia in 1993, the Russian state has a recent history of shocking violence and repression against LGBT activists who campaign against homophobia and discrimination in Russian society.

The city authorities in Moscow have banned Pride marches under pressure from the Orthodox Church, although the European Court of Human Rights has ruled in favour of Moscow Pride's right to take place.