

Workers' Liberty



The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself
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Stop job losses!

Qantas, ANZ, Bonds, Alcoa, Air Australia, Sleep City, Caltex, Westpac, Macquarie Bank, are cutting hundreds of jobs each.

The cost of reallocating labour from some companies and industries should not be placed on individual workers. Reallocation of productive resources and jobs should be on the grounds of social need not profit, and without loss of income to workers. If less labour is needed to satisfy needs, then we should all be able to work less hours for the same pay, and maintain our standard of living.

Instead the whole labour force lives with the threat of unemployment. We need unions to stand for:

- shorter hours with no loss of pay to share work around
- guaranteed living wage for all
- public sector jobs for all who need them, at union wages
- higher taxes on business profits and top incomes
- nationalise the finance industry

The security this would give workers could embolden the labour movement to insist that work is meaningful and socially beneficial, instead of driven by profit whatever the cost to the environment or people's well-being.

Defend NSW public sector

A deficit of \$310-million is predicted for NSW in 2012-13. The government is now more determined to cut the public sector.

Unions held large angry rallies in 2011 against O'Farrell's 2.5% pay cap for public sector workers, backed by penalties for industrial action, and stripped down rights for redundant workers.

But O'Farrell was only setting up for extensive public sector cuts, which are just beginning, and which unions should be mobilising to resist. Recent media reports point to the following:

- the move against NSW Rail is being prepared, and drastic staff cuts are an immediate threat and likely precursor to privatisation
- wholesale privatisation of jails is on the agenda, despite token denials, and the prospect of creation of a significant for-profit convict labour force
- a resurgence of privatisation of hospitals & health services is on the cards
- ferry privatisation and subsequent job losses sound like a fait accompli
- national funds previously guaranteed to TAFE are open for bidding including by for-profit providers, and TAFE students face a sharp increase in fees imposed through a loans scheme
- "local decisions for local schools" increases hire and fire power of principals, decentralises and enables cutting of school budgets, and undermines staffing of disadvantaged public schools.

Unions appear to be allowing the government to get away with closing Cronulla Fisheries, and moving to the end game in the privatisation of the NSW electricity sector. The labour movement overrode the Labor government, resisting this sector's privatisation,

but now all there is on the Unions NSW campaign-page on the issue is a petition and lobbying campaign.

Similar policies are being enforced by governments, whether Labor or Liberal, around the country (and even more drastically in Greece, see p 3-4). The Commonwealth pay cap is 3%. In Tasmania a minority Labor government dependent on the Greens has set a pay cap. No union has yet effectively broken these restrictive wages policies.

The union rallies in 2011 were well supported with 40,000 attending in September. But they were backed by very limited industrial action, and were much smaller than the rallies and strikes of 1991 that forced a backdown on cuts from the Greiner Government.

There is no sign of preparation for any follow up series of rolling industrial actions this year despite union officials stated plans in 2011.

The NSW Teachers Federation has accepted a pay rise of 2.5% for both schools and TAFE, despite a claim backed by a ballot for industrial action by TAFE teachers via the federal system and so outside the NSW laws. Other union leaderships such as the PSA appear to be waiting for mid-2012 for the next big action. This is meant to coincide with the expiration of a number of public sector salary awards.

The critical points for the public sector unions in NSW are to stand against the 2.5% salary cap, to refuse to make trade-offs, accept job losses, privatisations or abide by industrial penalties.

Activists need to campaign to commit their own unions to industrial action to assert this stand.

This commitment could be strengthened by a revival of independent activist networks across NSW unions.

Narrow win for New Zealand Tories

by Mike Kyriazopolous

Things are looking shaky for the right wing coalition that scored a narrow win in New Zealand's general election in late November 2011. The National Party won 59 out of 121 seats in Parliament, and is reliant for a majority on the neoliberal ACT party and centre-right United Future, who got one seat each. They have also signed a "confidence and supply" agreement with the three Maori Party MPs, although the party said it will not vote for National's flagship policy of "partial" state asset sales. However the Maori Party's corporate tribal backers are already eyeing up the first State Owned Enterprises to be put on the block - the energy companies. And Labour's most senior Maori MP, Shane Jones, has given his blessing to tribal corporates to buy stakes in privatised assets. National's claims to have a "mandate" are undermined its turnout in the election, the lowest since the 1880s - about a million people (26.8%) on the electoral roll did not vote.

The saving grace of the election was the result of the concurrently held referendum on the voting system - Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP) will be retained. In 1990 National gained a similar percentage of the vote, but the First Past the Post system delivered them 70% of the seats. A vicious neoliberal onslaught followed.

The Maori Party is in a tight spot. It was launched in 2004 on the back of a big spontaneous movement against the denial of indigenous claims to the foreshore and seabed by the then Labour-led government. They won four out of the seven Maori seats in 2005, but their credibility has taken a battering due to their recent close relationship with National. And now the party faces intense pressure on its left flank from the newly formed Mana Movement.

From opposition Labour is attempting rebuild under a new leader after a disastrous election result. They lost out to the Greens, with a best ever result of 11% of the party vote, and to New Zealand First, a populist nationalist party, with eight seats - its anti-privatisation propaganda centred on the perils of state assets falling into "foreign ownership".

The Maori-led, working class-orientated, Mana Movement retained its one MP, Hone Harawira, and won 1% of the party vote. Its main campaign slogans were "Tax the rich", "Feed the Kids", "Jobs for all" and "20,000 new state houses". Mana is a broad church, of Maori Sovereignty activists, plus leftists and trade unionists, especially from Unite. All the major far left organisations are now active within Mana - the three Cliffite groups (one of which has recently dissolved) and the politically heterogeneous Workers Party. It was launched less than a year ago, so 1% is not too bad, but it should have done better. Mana failed to make a real breakthrough into the Pacific Island and working class European communities, perhaps because it was perceived to be exclusively a party for Maori. In some cases, Mana's policy on asset sales veered into economic nationalism.

The most positive sign is that Mana activists have continued to hit the streets supporting striking wharfies in Auckland and state housing tenants facing eviction. National are treading a fine line, attempting to soften neoliberal policies like privatisation and Charter Schools with the occasional sop, such as granting a 50 cent rise in the minimum wage. For the potentially vulnerable National government, Mana is likely to be its staunchest opposition.

No to war and sanctions, no to the Islamic Republic: support Iranian workers!

The EU has agreed an oil embargo on Iran. In response Iran has threatened to close the strait of Hormuz (through which oil supplies pass). The US has said if that happens it could take military action.

The embargo might work, and Iran might back down. However Iran has other customers for its oil. There is a possibility there will be a stumbling into a war which could ignite a series of other conflicts across the region.

The EU's embargo comes after months of standoff between Iran and the west over Iran's nuclear programme. The prospect of the clerical-fascist regime in Iran having a nuclear bomb is alarming. We oppose Iran developing nuclear weapons.

The AWL opposes war as we oppose economic sanctions now. Sanctions help the regime whip up nationalist support for the defence of Iran.

Already in trouble, the Iranian economy is now further on the slide. Iranian workers are struggling while the rich and powerful at the top of Iranian society continue to do well.

Economic sanctions will hurt the Iranian working-class. And they will also make the enormously difficult and dangerous tasks of the secular democratic and working-class forces in Iran much harder.

Socialists should oppose these sanctions and any drive to war. We must step up our solidarity with the small and embattled working-class forces in Iran who are struggling for their freedom.

Working-class politics and anarchism - new pamphlet

A collection of articles and speeches discussing the Alliance for Workers Liberty and the politics of anarchism, by AWL members and by anarchists. Why this debate matters:

"We believe that many of the activists who are ostensibly on the "other side" of this debate from us are probably much closer to us politically than most of the self-proclaimed "Trotskyist" left with whom we notionally share a tradition. That is why we want to understand and engage with the reasons why so many young activists do not see the labour movement as a necessary political focus. We believe that if we can combine the energy, dynamism, innovation and indeed the militant anger represented by the best of the "direct-action" movement with a consistent focus on working-class organising and a long-term struggle to revolutionise the labour movement, then something like New Unionism becomes possible again."(p.8)

Download or order online www.workersliberty.org/story/2012/01/13/working-class-politics-and-anarchism

Four million refuse to pay in Greece

by *Theodora Polenta*

Four million bills for the new regressive property tax, imposed by the Greek government, had not been paid at the end of January. The government had made the new tax payable as a part of electricity bills.

The state power company DEI issued 50,000 orders for cutting off electricity to households. But the power workers' union, Genop-Dei, instructed workers to ignore the orders and actively obstruct subcontractors.

The government was forced by the huge non-payment movement to freeze the cutting-off orders.

A lot of private sector electricians' unions issued statements of solidarity with non-payers, and under pressure from the non-payment movement many private subcontractors refused the disgraceful "business" of cut-offs. First-aid teams of electricians to reconnect people's electricity supply have been organised in some areas.

The movement is stronger, and more people have refused to pay, in neighbourhoods where the movement has the active support of the council. One left-wing council asked people to refuse to pay the regressive tax and offered legal support and guarantees of reconnection if electricity were cut off. 2500 people in that area refused to pay their tax.

Other councils, under pressure from neighbourhood committees and general open meetings, made statements against the tax but have not provided active support for households that have not paid.

The non-payment movement reintroduces in every neighbourhood the concept of solidarity and the potential of collective resistance and struggle, the only tools that the people have to defeat the government.

Open meetings are held in every neighbourhood. Activists organise protests and sit-ins outside their local DEI offices and outside the subcontractors' offices where the orders for cut-offs are being received.

The private company Geroh Ltd, which had cut-off orders for the whole of Athens, was forced to shut down after an occupation of its offices by non-payment activists. Genop-Dei has published on the internet details of every private company hired for cut-offs.

A united front of the neighbourhood movement, the Genop-Dei union, and the council workers has already recorded victories against the regressive property tax.

A united front between the workers and the community movement can do more: coordinate and organise local neighbourhood activities so as to generalise and intensify the political confrontation against the government.

Greek strikers unite with the streets

(continued from back page) The two remaining party leaders of the coalition government, Pasok and New Democracy, threatened then expelled MPs who refused to vote for the second memorandum. ND expelled 21 of its MPs, and Pasok expelled from its parliamentary group the 31 Pasok MPs who voted against the memorandum or any section of it.

All three left parties (KKE, Syriza, Democratic Left) voted against the second memorandum. In the parliamentary debate, they exposed the fact that all the money supposedly handed to Greece by the EU/ECB/IMF Troika in fact goes to the bondholders.

an alternative radical solution

The new memorandum may have been voted in Parliament but it can be blocked by working-class action. The left has a duty to participate as an organic part of that movement *and* to push forward an alternative radical solution towards a people's default from debt and a new society, with our needs as its priority, a socialist, radically democratic society.

It is imperative to escalate our struggle with continuous strikes, massive civil disobedience movement, open meetings in neighbourhoods, every day protests and sit-ins and occupations of workplaces and public buildings. Now is the time for a united front and revolutionary action of the left and all the vanguard of the working class to overthrow this government and the whole of the political establishment.

It is important to form in every workplace a workers' committee to organise and direct the struggles, and establish communications with the newly formed neighbourhood committees. The aim should be the election of a Constituent Assembly, organising the struggles to come, and opening the door to the power of the working people and socialism.

The revolutionary left should take bold initiatives and contribute to the restructuring and resynthesising of the workers' movement, striving for a new revolutionary party which will attract both KKE and Syriza members, the most advanced of the Pasok workers, and the most militant workers and youth from the anti-austerity movements.

The Greek left has generally defined the current tasks as those of national liberation, anti-imperialism, or anti-monopoly struggle, placing the fight against capitalism in the distant future.

Today the revolutionary left must be clear that a victorious struggle against the austerity measures must be placed within the context of the struggle against capitalism.

The cuts in Greece

- Pensions reduced by 20%, wages slashed by 40% via the first memorandum.
- Minimum wage to be reduced by 22%, and for under-25s, by 32%. Biggest reductions in income for the poorest.
- Abolition of collective bargaining agreements and legislation that protects workers' conditions.
- Energy sector handed to private monopolies and the price of fuel doubled, in Greece's coldest ever winter, making it unaffordable for many.
- Reduced social spending on health, placing numerous restrictions on prescriptions and ending free prescriptions for pensioners.
- 400,000 small shopkeepers closed up since 2009; millions relegated to unemployment and social exclusion; more than 20,000 homeless in Athens; 150,000 public sector workers unemployed by 2015. Three million (27.2%) Greeks below the poverty line.
- Dramatic increase in people living in absolute poverty.

Greek strikers unite with the streets

by *Theodora Polenta*

A 24 hour strike on 7 February called by the two union federations GSEE and ADEDY, started the week that ended with a 48-hour general strike on Friday-Saturday 10-11 February and the re-emergence of last summer's "Indignant Citizens'" movement in the city square on Sunday 12th.

Hundreds of thousands of people gathered outside the Greek parliament in Athens and in the squares of every Greek city to call for the overthrow of the Papademos coalition government and the cuts.

The massive participation signalled the start of a political meeting-up and coordination between the ongoing strike movement in the private sector and the community and neighbourhood movements (See centre pages *Four million refuse to pay*).

The government panicked and ordered the police to use gas against the protesters long before the black block started provocations. Then police infiltrators, alongside political idiots and self-proclaimed saviours of the Greek working class, started throwing Molotov cocktails and burning buildings in the centre of Athens, untouched by the police, who were focusing their attacks against unarmed peaceful protesters.

Images of looting and historic buildings in fire were instantly published, propagating a picture of Greece beset by looting and chaos and downplaying the hundreds of thousands of Syntagma Square protesters.

Papademos, and the politicians who voted through

the new cuts for him, say they want to safeguard our standard of living. They say they want to get €130 billion for Greece from the second bailout fund.

But in the single year 2012 they will be handing over €190 billion to the bondholders in interest payments and settlement of expired bonds.

The second memorandum, the conditions demanded by the EU, European Central Bank, and IMF for a further "bail-out", was handed to MPs only hours before the vote on Sunday 12 February. As in *Alice Through The Looking Glass*: voting on the second memorandum first; reading of the second memorandum later or never! Economics minister Venizelos said: "the second memorandum package must be ratified in parliament by Sunday night so that Greece will send a positive message to the markets on Monday morning".

In the birthplace of ancient Greece's direct participatory democracy, even the restricted limited parliamentary democracy has been subordinated to the wills of the speculators and bond holders.

Polls show the political parties in deep trouble. Pasok, the governing party until recently, is down to 8%. New Democracy, the conservative party, is doing better, but only at 31%. The far-right Laos is at 5%.

The left parties score 18% (Democratic Left, a split from Synaspismos), 12.5% (KKE, the diehard-Stalinist Greek Communist Party), and 12% (Syriza).

Many MPs hesitated to back the second memorandum, not because of their social sensitivities but from fear for their political careers.

Laos leader Karatzaferis made a u-turn and decided to abandon the Papademos government and vote against the second memorandum. Yet he was one of the most adamant supporters of the first memorandum and accused political parties that opposed it of being traitors. (*continued p. 3*)

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Anti-capitalist manifesto and transitional demands for Greece

- Overthrow the coalition government and any newly-emerging bourgeois government
- Down with everyone responsible for the crisis: Troika, financial speculators, capitalists both productive and unproductive, asset-strippers, and predators
- Refuse to pay for the crisis, in euros or in drachmas. No sacrifice for the euro
- Abolish the debt. Not a penny to the creditors
- Freeze and abolish workers' debts
- Abolish VAT on all basic necessities
- Civil disobedience and refusal to pay the new imposed taxes
- Increase taxes on capital
- Nationalisation under workers' control of the banks and the big business with no compensation
- Abolish the political and legal protection of companies that are declared bankrupt. Demand that the workers are paid all the wages that are owed to them.
- Expropriate the employers' wealth (both personal and in other companies) in every company that is declared "bankrupt", in order to compensate all workers and pay off their unemployment benefits.
- Workers' control of prices, wage increases, reduction in working hours, work for all
- Pension increases in line with wages, reduction in the age of retirement
- Ban redundancies. Unemployment benefit in line with wages
- For a public sector in the service of the people and society's needs, against today's public sector and its ties to corporations, contractors and corruption
- For an extension of education, health, transport, and welfare provision.