



For a
workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

No 350 21 January 2015 30p/80p

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**Against 1%
who own
half world's
wealth,
fight for:**



**ECONOMIC
DEMOCRACY**

**See
page
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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, bisexual and transgender 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.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

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Left slate challenges NUS leaders

The left-wing National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts network (NCAFC) has initiated a left slate of candidates to stand for President and the five Vice President positions in the National Union of Students (NUS).

Workers' Liberty member Beth Redmond from City & Islington College is standing for President, and RS21 member Barnaby Raine of Oxford University for Vice President (Union Development). Both are also standing for the part-time Block

of 15 section of NUS National Executive. Unaffiliated socialist Hattie Craig, former Birmingham Guild of Students Vice President, is standing for VP (Higher Education).

For the VP (Society & Citizenship) position, NCAFC has said it will support left incumbent Piers Telemaque (former President at Bradford College), who is supporting the rest of the slate, if he makes a strong statement over NUS's betrayal of the free education demo.

The NUS leadership's can-

didate for President is likely to be Megan Dunn, the current VP (Higher Education) who was key to NUS withdrawing its support from demo in November.

NUS conference takes place in Liverpool, 21-23 April.



Hattie Craig, Beth Redmond and Deborah Hermanns telling you they are marching for free education

"A movement that helps people fight and win"

An interview with unaffiliated socialist Hattie Craig, who is standing for NUS Vice President Higher Education.

I've been involved in education activism since the big struggles of 2010, when I was a sixth former in Northamptonshire.

As a student union (SU) sabbatical I saw NUS more from the inside, and that just reinforced my view further. Very few NUS officials say anything radical; many fewer do anything radical. Finally, being involved in NCAFC and organising last term's national demo gave me a very direct experience of NUS standing in the way of student struggle. I'm

standing to promote a student movement and national union that helps students fight and win.

What are your key demands?

We want to build up a grassroots movement on the streets and on campuses.

This will not be won through deft negotiations with VCs and politicians, but by putting the pressure on through struggle. And we have a wider conception of free education. We want living grants for all, we want decent housing, we want a diverse, liberatory curriculum. We need to challenge the racist and xenophobic situation faced by international students.

We need to build solidarity with campus workers and fight for democracy in our institutions.

What can student activists do about this?

Get delegated to conference, put motions through your SU, come along and caucus with us. Even if you're not a delegate help out.

But it's also about building the campaign for free education, joining NCAFC, building up local organisation and activism. It's about making political arguments on your campus. It's partly about doing things we should all be doing anyway, but we hope the NUS campaign will help with that as

well as being helped by it.

What's the measure of success?

The most important thing is to come away with a stronger movement, make new links, win new activists for NCAFC and get more people involved in campaigning.

Obviously we want to win free education again, hopefully by a bigger margin, but there are other things to fight for too. Living grants is a big deal.

We don't just want bur-saries or a promise to bring back EMA, but a decent income for all students.

"Class-struggle arguments for a different movement"

An interview with Workers' Liberty member Beth Redmond, who is standing for NUS President.

I'm coming into this NUS candidacy in a different way from the majority of candidates, even candidates the left has stood.

I have never been a sabbatical officer, but have been heavily involved in grassroots organising over the past two years. The disconnect between the National Union of Students and actual activists on the ground is worth highlighting over and over.

I played a big role in organising the national demonstration last term, alongside other women in NCAFC, and I experienced

first hand just how cynical some of the NUS leadership are. I never fully understood just how much electioneering and posturing these people do. Some of them backed the demo for electoral reasons; some of them backed out of supporting it because of elections next year. It's hard to know what these people actually think about anything except their own importance. It's difficult to trust what these people are doing with our national union when all they seem to care about is their own career. My candidacy is the opposite of that: grassroots organising and clear socialist politics.

I'm going to be talking about free education, living grants, opposing cuts, stu-

dent housing, as well as wider political questions like the General Election, migrants' rights, international solidarity and building links with workers' in struggle. I'm going to argue to transform the NUS and student unions into militant, political, campaigning organisations, and aim to build student struggle on campuses and on the streets.

I will make anti-capitalist, class-struggle arguments for a different student movement as an essential part of the fight for a different society.

Isn't NUS a waste of time?

The chance to speak to that many students about my politics and ideas is too good to pass up.

No one can deny that NUS has major reach and influence in sections of the student movement, and if we trace back the steps of this new free education movement we can see that it initially came from NUS. I've met very good activists because of it, who stayed involved when NUS turned its back on us.

We capitalise on the sabbatical officers we have in NCAFC because they have things we so desperately need; money, space and time to organise.

If I won, I could carry on organising but be exponentially more effective by having access to a wealth of necessary resources.

100,000 against Pegida

By Colin Foster

On the Monday following the massacres at Charlie Hebdo and a Jewish supermarket in Paris, tens of thousands marched in German cities against Germany's new right-wing anti-Muslim movement, Pegida ("Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West", or, more precisely, "of the Occident").

In Pegida's stronghold, Dresden, 35,000 turned out against them. In Munich, 20,000. In Hanover, 17,000. In Leipzig, 30,000.

In most places, Pegida demonstrations (which are always on Mondays) were much smaller. Pegida's turnout in Dresden was big — 25,000 — but still smaller than the counter-demonstration.

The counter-demonstrations were conservative in tone, sponsored by state governments, city councils, and mainstream politicians, and the threat still remains that Pegida will gain ground among people disillusioned for good reasons with the

status quo.

On Monday 13 January Eritrean asylum seeker Khaled Idris Bahray was murdered in Dresden. Just three days before, a swastika was painted on his flat door along with "we'll get you all".

On Saturday 17 several thousand people demonstrated in Dresden in memory of Khaled, carrying signs that read "Ich bin Khaled".

A reader in Berlin writes: "Die Linke parliamentary leader (ex-PDS, ex-SED / East German CP) Gregor Gysi said this week Pegida's 'success' was caused by East Germans only 'knowing the world through what they saw on a television screen'."

The reader comments that "Pegida is really only big in Dresden", and suggests this may be "because this is the portion of East Germany that couldn't get West German television (for geographical reasons) so they were very badly informed about lots of things for decades. And when the wall came down they immediately got rubbish from RTL,



Anti-Pegida marchers in Dresden

Bertelsmann, Springer etc. and preferred that to public-service broadcasting from the west...

"Interesting also is the relationship between Pegida and the AfD (the 'German Ukip'). This could be make or break for the AfD as a serious political force. If the AfD does lash-up with Pegida more closely, then it will define itself as a hard-right party, probably only regionally successful, and probably lose a lot of its 'protest vote' potential, and many votes in the west.

"Another theory is that Pegida has failed to kick off in the west because in the west, non-Germans, 'Islamic' or otherwise, are more integrated, are people's workmates, have broadly speaking the same kind of lives as everyone else.

"In the east, non-Germans are often refugees and are cut off from the population as a whole, banned from working, seen as 'benefit scroungers', and housed in the middle of nowhere".

The Sun "drops" page 3

By Rachel Barnes

Supporters of the No More Page 3 campaign celebrated a victory on Monday 19 January as rumours of *The Sun* getting rid of bare breasts in its newspaper did the rounds on the internet.

Apart from a tweet from its head of PR (who told followers that page 3 would be in the same place it's always been, between pages 2 and 4), the newspaper has given no formal statement on the matter, only removed nipples gradually from its print over the last few months.

The No More Page 3 cam-

paign has been working for 28 months under the banner "Boobs Aren't News", and supposedly against the objectification of women in what they call a "family newspaper". They would like women "to be represented with respect in the newspaper, rather like men are". Rather like all those men involved in Hillsborough who were the victims of a slander campaign headed by *The Sun*?

Page 3 models have expressed disdain for the campaign in the past. One model, Holly Hagan, pointed out that page 3 is the only place in magazines and newspapers where

women's bodies aren't being shamed for the way they look.

The problems with claiming this as a victory lie in that the objectification of women will continue. Topless models will continue to pose for the publication, only now the images will be shown on their website instead. Pictures of celebrity women in bikinis, who often don't consent to their photographs being taken, still plaster the pages of the printed edition, with captions unmistakably objectifying them. The problem hasn't gone away; it's just been hidden from your immediate view.

The Sun will continue to write articles perpetuating the image of women as objects, of immigrants as criminals and of working-class people as scroungers. Liberal MPs patting themselves on the back for wearing a t-shirt (which surely must have contributed to this "win") pull back the cover of their shallow nature even further, revealing the conservative truth that they are actually only concerned with the modesty of women.

If they were actually against the objectification, it would make no sense to stop at this point.

Boko Haram kidnap 80

By Rosalind Robson

On Monday 19 January the ultra-Islamist Boko Haram crossed the border from Nigeria into northern Cameroon and attacked villages, kidnaping eighty people, mostly children.

This latest attack is part of a bid by the group to carve out an Islamic state in north-east Nigeria. In the last five years around 16,000 have been killed and 1.5 million displaced. Boko Haram now control 20,000 square miles of territory, an area the size of Belgium.

Boko Haram have stepped up their attacks as Nigeria's presidential election approaches (14 February); their attacks have included using children as suicide bombers.

The electoral contest is between incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, and the former military ruler, Muhammadu Buhari.

Boko Haram may be modelling itself on Islamic State (ISIS) and figure they can enjoy the same "success". But the movement is also a criminal gang, profiting from theft, extortion and kidnapping which by their own account is in fact slave raiding. And there is also a ethnic-exclusive element to the group. Boko Haram's unofficial headquarters is in the town of Gwoza in Borno state, the homeland of the



Muhammadu Buhari

Kanuri people, to which the group's leader Abubakar Shekau belongs.

Neighbouring African states are beginning to prepare a military response to the Boko Haram threat. Cameroon has deployed thousands of additional troops to its border with Nigeria and has called on the Chad government to provide additional troops. Chad is one of the stronger military powers in the region. The African Union is due to discuss creating a special force to fight Boko Haram.

Why has the Nigerian government, which benefits from huge oil wealth and which has at its disposal one of the strongest armies in Africa, not been able to contain Boko Haram? Deeply entrenched and thoroughgoing corruption.

The government claim to have launched ground action backed by air strikes to reclaim the area Boko Haram now control. But in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, Nigerian soldiers trying to defend the city (and still holding it), say they are inadequately armed against Boko Haram's sophisticated weapons.

Last year, the federal government allocated 20 per cent of its budget to the armed forces — over £4 billion. A large proportion of the military budget simply disappeared into the pockets of senior officers.

Despite being the headquarters of the 7th division, Maiduguri lives under the constant threat of attack. It has become home to about 10,000 Catholic refugees.

• More on the Nigerian election: <http://freethoughtblogs.com/yemmyning>

France's Front National tries to exploit *Charlie Hebdo* attack

By Bill Holmes

The far right in France appear to be recent terrorist attacks as political currency to attack both the government and the EU on immigration.

The Front National has said the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* magazine and an assault on a Jewish supermarket are the final proof that

open borders and poor efforts to tackle immigration in France have led to an "enemy within".

Party leader Marine Le Pen described terrorism as a tool of Islamic fundamentalism which had been allowed to develop in France's cities because people did not want to talk about the issue for fear of being politically incorrect.

To some extent she is

right. Fascism — whether it comes in the form of extreme Islamism, or from the Front National or the British National Party — breeds on discontent among worse-off people.

The role we have as socialists is to show the disaffected that their problem lies not with other members of their class, who are also facing deprivation, on the basis of the colour of their

skin or their religion.

Instead we must demonstrate that it is only by uniting and taking control of economic life from the wealthy minority that we can break the shackles of capitalism.

Closing the borders also does not solve this problem, but merely criminalises people who want to change where they live in a bid to improve their living and

working conditions.

In an interview with the BBC, Le Pen also urged Britain to break from its model of community relations and its difference from the French model of "laïcité" which completely removes religion from the state.

The two differing models are certainly worthy of debate. We oppose religious fundamentalism. We also

protect the rights of individuals to follow and express their beliefs, and equally to have and to express no religious belief.

And we are not sectarian secularists; anti-religious propaganda is necessary, but should be regulated in style and timing by the priority of workers' unity.

Cameron versus the Pope

Press

Daily Mail

By Harry Davies

The Pope's response to the murderous attack on the journalists and workers at *Charlie Hebdo* was essentially "the wife beater's defence".

"If my good friend Dr Gasparri says a curse word against my mother, he can expect a punch. It's normal... You cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others. You cannot make fun of the faith of others."

David Cameron made an uncharacteristically robust and perhaps slightly controversial response to the Pope. In a widely reported interview he said: "I think in a free society, there is a right to cause offence about someone's religion."

"I'm a Christian; if someone says something offensive about Jesus, I might find that offensive, but in a free society I don't have a right to wreak vengeance on them."

That put the papers in a bit of a quandary. Which side should they take?

The *Mail* reported Cameron's comments but went onto say "many people have defended the satirical magazine". Such a neutral tone on an issue it is nearly impossible to be neutral about is open to question.

It's possible to interpret it as an attempt to keep as distant as possible from religious controversy of any sort. It's also possible the paper is trying hard not to hang too closely onto Cameron's words, just in case he falls out of favour with the core *Mail* readership, or starts looking bad in the pre-election opinion polls.

The *Express* largely played down or ignored Cameron's response, preferring to focus on the Pope's comment though using a noticeably wider range of emotive language regarding the massacre than the *Mail's* rather clinical and downplayed description.

The *Express* took great delight in describing the Pope aiming a fake right hook to his aide, to illustrate his meaning. I've no idea why they want to play up the macho side of the Pontiff, but they do on this occasion.

Oddly, they seemed less inclined to mention terrorism as a major threat in the same week, but ran with a story about Argentina leasing supersonic fighters from Russia, with the clear implication that the Falkland Islands better watch out. This week it was safer to stick to the old wars.

Odd again that neither the *Express* nor the *Mail* took the opportunity to spread a bit of fear and panic by reporting another comment made by Cameron, to the effect that another terrorist attack is highly likely.

It was left to the *Guardian* to address the "war on terror" issue. They win the prize for most deadpan reporting when appending a comment to another part of the Cameron interview where Cameron mentions Obama's statement about there no strategy for dealing with ISIS.

The *Guardian*: "Mr. Cameron states that there is now a strategy. That is all."



An attempt at clarification

Letters



Colin Foster (Solidarity 349) still seems to be struggling to understand what I am driving at in my "stream of letters of complaint about Jon Lansman's article in *Solidarity* 343". I am sorry if I am being unclear. Let me try and clarify.

I objected to the article not because it was wrong (it wasn't) or because it was right wing (which it was by dint of what it didn't say) but because it was pointless.

It was not a programme for action, it didn't raise any points that would be contentious or even interesting to *Solidarity* readers and it didn't inform. So why am I concerned by it? Because it seems to me to mark a further drift towards a right wing Labourite focus by the AWL.

Having comment pieces on the machinations of the parliamentary Labour Party, which is surely all it was, is not something a revolutionary paper should do. I have asked repeatedly for an example of where we have done this before. I haven't been offered any examples. We didn't run articles defending Brown against the Blairite coups. We generally didn't comment, that approach would be appropriate in this case too.

In our correspondence, Colin and I have touched on two other issues, which I think require further comment.

I asserted in my original letter that it would be a coup in the Parliamentary Party, which would remove Miliband. Colin argued that the MPs couldn't topple a leader, yet. Now he recognises that "a right-wing surge to make Miliband resign and ... install a more right-wing leader" is what we are talking about.

Secondly, there has been a discussion about whether a left campaign for the leadership of the British Labour Party is

possible. I would simply point out that there hasn't been a genuine left candidate on the ballot paper for Labour leader since Benn stood against Kinnock in 1988.

You could make a case that Diane Abbott was a left candidate in 2010, but she didn't stand for a working-class alternative to New Labour but rather a kind of identity politics. The focus of her campaign was her personality rather than her policies and she made no attempt to create a movement around her. She also relied on the nomination of Harriet Harman amongst others to get on the paper, and then received only 7% of the vote.

This suggests that Colin's view that there is a better situation for left challenges in the British Party than in the Scottish Party, where the recent genuinely left-wing campaign for the leadership garnered one-third of the vote, is simply wrong.

Duncan Morrison, Deptford

Issue number 337 (24 Sept. 2014) of *Solidarity* included a review (by myself) of Guy Standing's book *A Precariat Charter*, which stated that the French writer Andre Gorz was opposed to the idea of the Basic Income (a regular payment made by the state to everyone regardless of their work situation) and one of the central planks of Standing's Charter.

In fact, although Gorz was opposed to the Basic Income and wrote a number of articles criticising it, towards the end of his life he changed his mind and declared himself in favour. Unfortunately, he does not appear to have elaborated on his change of position before his suicide in 2007.

Readers who wish to know more about the notion of the Basic Income are advised to have a look at the BIEN (Basic Income Earth Network) website.

John Cunningham

A poet for our times

Songs of Liberty & Rebellion



Percy Bysshe Shelley is known as a romantic poet. He was also a radical, militant atheist and a campaigner for women's rights and Catholic emancipation in Ireland.

His first poem, *Queen Mab*, written when he was only 20 years old, was used by the Chartists as an educational text. In *Queen Mab*, Shelley uses the literary device of a fantasy fairy taking a child away from Earth to gain a perspective upon it. It looks at how seemingly permanent and strong systems from the beginning of time have collapsed and fallen. It looks at tyranny and injustice, hunger and war. Many of these topics are touched upon in this short extract (the poem itself is long).

The Vectian

Whence, thinkest thou, kings and parasites arose?
Whence that unnatural line of drones who heap
Toil and unvanquishable penury
On those who build their palaces and bring
Their daily bread? — From vice, black loathsome
vice;
From rapine, madness, treachery, and wrong;
From all that genders misery, and makes
Of earth this thorny wilderness; from lust,
Revenge, and murder. — And when reason's voice,
Loud as the voice of Nature, shall have waked
The nations; and mankind perceive that vice
Is discord, war and misery; that virtue
Is peace and happiness and harmony;
When man's maturer nature shall disdain
The playthings of its childhood; — kingly glare
Will lose its power to dazzle, its authority
Will silently pass by; the gorgeous throne
Shall stand unnoticed in the regal hall,
Fast falling to decay; whilst falsehood's trade
Shall be as hateful and unprofitable
As that of truth is now.

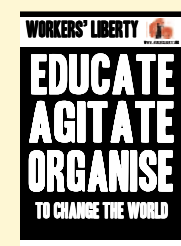
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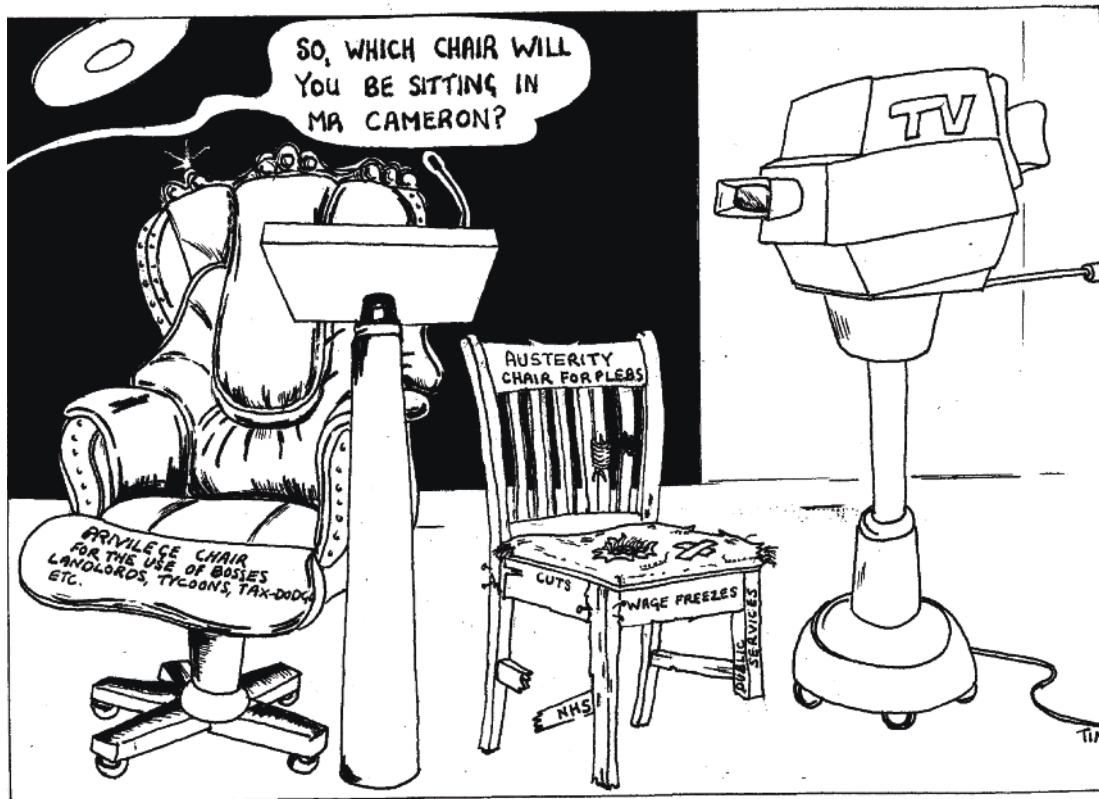
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Ideas for designs and slogans to bethredmond93@gmail.com.

Order from workersliberty.org/autocollants





For economic democracy!

On 19 January Oxfam reported that the richest one per cent own 48% of the whole world's wealth.

Their super-domination has increased in the economic depression, from 44 per cent in 2009. At this rate it will be more than 50 per cent in 2016. The top one per cent had an average wealth of US\$2.7m per adult in 2014.

The bottom 80% have, between them, just 5.5% of global wealth, an average US\$3,851 per adult. Just 80 ultra-billionaires have the same wealth as the poorest 50 per cent.

This economic inequality is a different thing from a few having much more musical or scientific talent than the many. Ultra-wealth also means ultra-power over others, and the ability, indeed the compulsion, to exploit.

The super-wealthy own the giant corporations which dominate the world's economy, their factories, their offices, their transport and communication networks. They monopolise

control over the most advanced technologies.

The rest of us can live only by selling our labour-power, our capacity to produce, to those super-wealthy. They buy our labour-power — i.e., pay us wages — only on the basis that we produce value for them which outstrips those wages.

The super-wealthy stay super-wealthy only by competing with each other to squeeze more profits out of their workers. They squeeze more profits by constantly increasing the insecurity and stress of working life, even for better-paid workers.

At the other end of the scale, even in relatively well-off Britain, nearly four out of ten households with children, or 8.1 million, are below a "minimum income threshold" calculated by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as the income necessary not just to avoid starvation or homelessness but to participate

normally in society.

The number below that minimum threshold has increased by more a third since 2008/9, over the same period that the super-wealth of the super-wealthy has soared.

We are supposed to have one vote each, in political democracy. But in the economic affairs which decide so much in our lives, a tiny minority "vote" with vastly more pounds, or euros, or dollars, than the majority.

Solidarity campaigns for economic democracy. The factories, offices, transport and communication networks, and technologies should be put under common ownership and democratic control.

As a start, we demand that the rich be taxed to reverse the cuts and organise reasonable, well-paid jobs for all.

The prospects for a left-led Greece

If a left, or left-led, government takes office in Greece after 25 January, then what are the prospects for it winning concessions on debt from the EU leaders?

French finance minister Michel Sapin says "it is absolutely fair and legitimate that discussions should take place between the EU and the new Greek government", trying to secure "the stability of the eurozone".

Yet Germany's finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, says "there is no alternative" to the current programme. Finland's prime minister, Alexander Stubb, promises "a resounding no" to concessions.

Francesco Saraceno, an economist who used to advise the Italian government, writes that "with the European economy back into deflation the costs, for creditor countries as well as for debtors, of a long stagnation, seem far bigger than the loss associated with [a] debt restructuring for Greece..."

Syriza, he reckons, is only asking the EU leaders "to address the problem of unsustainable debt, so far hidden under the rug, and to finally acknowledge the need for a comprehensive plan to restart the European economy".

So, Saraceno thinks, "debt restructuring in some form will

probably happen".

Greek journalist Nick Malkoutsis, however, reckons that the new government will face rapid problems. The failure, probably the deliberate failure, of the outgoing Samaras government, to conclude the "review" with the EU/ECB/IMF Troika that began in September 2014 has led to Greece not getting some €7.2 billion credits previously promised.

The Samaras administration agreed a two-month extension to the bailout process, and those two months expire before the end of February.

On top of that, rich Greeks worried in advance about the election result took €3 billion out of Greek banks in December alone, to stash somewhere else. A year ago LSE professor Gabriel Zucman calculated that wealthy Greeks already had €60 billion in Swiss banks.

There are two reasons for pessimism, even with the narrow range of options sketched by these different reckonings.

One, that, because of the way the EU is set up, concessions require a lot of people to agree. If all the other eurozone governments favour concessions, still Germany and Finland can block them. There is a bias towards inertia.

Secondly, the EU leaders will be reluctant to agree concessions precisely because the case for them is so strong. The EU could easily afford concessions to Greece: but then what if every other country wants similar concessions?

Alexis Tsipras and the other Syriza leaders have gradually diluted their programme until now it really comes down to negotiating the best deal they can get from the EU, then redistributing the proceeds to workers and worse-off people in Greece. This "moderate" stance paradoxically makes it less likely they will get concessions — for the same reason that a trade union asking the bosses for the best pay rise available by negotiations will get less than a union demanding a pay rise and planning a strike if it doesn't get that.

If, however, the left inside Syriza and outside can create a real threat that Alexis Tsipras and his friends will be pushed aside, and replaced by more radical people, then concessions can be won.

Socialists should seek the widest possible workers' unity across Europe to defend Greece against EU and IMF impositions.

What will a Syriza victory mean?

“Activists from past years will make the difference in next stage”

Ioanna Gaitani, from the Greek socialist group International Workers' Left (DEA), spoke to *Solidarity*.

The people tried to overthrow the memoranda between 2010-13, but they couldn't overcome the state's reaction, the brutality of the police and legal system, the betrayals or lack of planning from their own trade-union leaders.

It was natural that they started moving away from their political and trade-union leaders (from the neo-liberal parties) and place their hopes on Syriza. Their interest was elevated towards the question of power, even in a “distorted” parliamentary way, as a next means of tackling the crisis.

Increasingly, since 2012, it has been up to Syriza to direct the people's attention towards a reconstruction of the movement on a higher basis, with a friendly government on its side. A Syriza victory and the implementation of some of its urgent measures could encourage the workers to fight for all they have been deprived of.

There are struggles still going on, such as the laid-off public servants (teachers, janitors, school guardians). Nevertheless demonstrations and strikes have weakened and people in struggle are also waiting for the elections, at least temporarily. Yet all these struggles (and the recent victorious one, against the lay-offs in the public sector, against the “re-deployment” process) have created a mood of public exasperation. That hindered the next memorandum planned by the former government and forced them to resign in the hope that a “left-break” would be short-lived.

If Syriza wins then, the urgent measures for the first 100 days will, as set out in the Thessaloniki declaration, consist of some measures that we, as DEA, find useful or critical to give confidence to the labour movement. These are:

- Restoration of the minimum wage (up to 751 euros, a 30% raise)
- Restoration of all the labour laws and the collective labour contracts
- A €12,000 tax-threshold
- Free health care for all the uninsured
- Abolition of socially unjust taxing
- Free electricity for 300,000 households
- A program for 300,000 new jobs in the public and private sector.

Not every issue is fully addressed. The questions of unemployment and of the evaporated pension funds need more immediate and determined attention. We hope that the movement will push for the most radical solutions, the ones Syriza's majority faction try to overlook or postpone. But the overall programme of priorities is very promising. Many people hope for half of it to be realised as fast as is being promised.

There have been clashes inside Syriza over the question of candidacies for the municipal and more recently the parlia-

mentary elections. This was over programmatic points and lately over the necessity of the party itself and the party's democratic processes. These battles have produced a wider realisation of the hard dilemmas and dangers in our way. This has potential for the more radical wing of Syriza.

The political scenery is going to change drastically with Syriza in office. The pressure of the movement will be an added factor. Everyone, and not only the left theoreticians and politicians and activists, will find him/herself at the crossroad of rupture of the consensus within the system. The capitalists are not going to offer even a minimum wage of €751 or the recognition of collective labour agreements and contracts. They will not tolerate a rejuvenated public health or public education system. And they will certainly not accept paying more taxes for the above. There are retired policemen, now members of Syriza, who are warning us of provocations and turmoil to come from the so-called “deep-state”.

That's why a radical working-class program will need pressure and protection and criticism and support from the movement.

SUPPORT

There is a majority for Syriza among the people. There are messages coming from abroad from those who intend to vote.

In the “plebeian” strata, there is a minority of Syriza enthusiasts and a hostile minority as well, who are intimidated by the mass media's fear-for-the-tomorrow-campaign. Most people support Syriza passively, some with not much hope. “I'll be satisfied if Tsipras does one-third of what he promises”, they often say. They are disenchanted with the old political system, yet Syriza has not managed to convince them. It's partially Syriza's fault as well, with their lack of initiative. Partially this is from people who have never been unionised or organised.

On the other hand, I believe that it is going to be the activists and the strikers of the past years that will make the difference in the next stage. We should also bear in mind that in periods of social turmoil — and I hope we witness one after 25 January — the most passive oppressed strata become electrified and burst into the foreground as protagonists.

Syriza and Tsipras declare publicly that the memoranda and the internal austerity policies will not be “negotiated” but cancelled immediately. It is the debt and its payment that will be negotiated.

I personally believe that for the questions of debt, banking system and the relations with the EU, Syriza will be obliged to implement even more radical policies in order to achieve even the minimum goals of the first 100 days — policies such as not paying the debt, nationalising the banks and quickly

expropriating wealth (e.g. with urgent taxes) — for example to fund the pension system, even before they try to implement public investment.

We will face the deep-state apparatus and the mass media as well as capitalists thugs and economic sabotage. In this process the choices are either backing-off and being overthrown, or taking further and further steps. Which of the two will happen, for how long and with what other developments? It is no time for prophecies, but for political and organising struggle.

DEA try to patiently explain what is at stake and what is the right solution for every problem that will get in the way of a left government. That means we work inside Syriza. We try get the fighters of the movements we meet in the streets involved in Syriza. Some of these leaders and people from unions are in alignment with our cause and organisation.

We try to do many things with relatively small resources and membership. We think the most important thing we do is within Syriza itself, as a partial but unique example of a political front between revolutionary and reformist left. There are high stakes here, in our era of crisis. This work has succeeded in making the left the epicentre of political life and that has managed to involve and keep large masses of people in touch with politics.

Assemblies of Syriza members still exist, but they have faded. Usually they are partially regrouped just before the elections. There is a lack of political discussion and therefore of will for action. This has to do with the electoral tradition of Synaspismos, as well as the lack of a centrally coordinated specific political plan and aim for most of the time. The first time we remember a wide gathering of regional Syriza caucuses for an aim other than elections, was just recently — for the general strike of 2 November. Syriza's people, that is the vast majority of the active leftists in Greece, have been used to just following and defending the movements. Those who might have had the numbers to take initiatives, weren't used to taking them. The more radical people, with their minority numbers, often don't know how. We're still learning.

I think there is a high chance the KKE will be forced to back Syriza, if it is the first party in parliament, but with no absolute majority. We will call on the KKE to critically support the 100-day program, and it will find it hard to refuse. If they do refuse, they will undoubtedly pay a high price.

European workers and the left can support us by gathering around existing or new political parties of the left, uniting as much of the bigger left groupings as possible, and fighting against your own austerity programs. In the near future this will involve rejecting all the anti-Greek propaganda and not allowing any country to be isolated, economically or politically. I also want to underline resistance against racism, Islamophobia and imperialism, as this seems to us that these are intensifying.

It would be rather hard for the Troika to expel Syriza-led Greece from the Euro. But nevertheless they can put financial or political pressure on Syriza with other means, as they did with Cyprus. All kinds of such pressure should be answered with equal determination. We want extra burdens and difficulties to be loaded on the capitalists, not the people. “Enough sacrifices”, as Tsipras recently said, or “no sacrifice for the Euro”, as our Congress had exclaimed.

Nothing is to be taken for granted, for Syriza, or for our class adversaries. It is going to be a period of strife, class struggle, abrupt and frequent political manoeuvring from all sides. Whether it's going to be a short period or a prolonged one, and be followed by a rise of the far-right or the beginning of a workers' counter-offensive, nobody really knows. We can only fight for the best.



Greece 2012-2014: views and reports from the Greek left is a new Workers' Liberty pamphlet presenting interviews and discussions with many different groups in the Greek left and labour movement, plus an article from 7 January 2015, by Greek socialist Theodora Polenta, explaining the new political crisis there.

60 pages (A4). £4 bit.ly/greece-pamphlet



Cleaners at the Ministry of Finance have staged pickets of the building since they were sacked

“All the possibilities are open”

Nicos Anastasiadis, from Internationalist Workers' Left (DEA), spoke to *Solidarity*.

The first reaction to a Syriza victory will be great joy from the working people and poor who have suffered from Memorandum policies. We will see a great wave of expectation of change.

We already have some sign of how the right wing and the capitalists will react. There are two types of reaction against the possibility of a Syriza win. Part of the capitalist class wants a hard line; but another part wants to negotiate. This is because the crisis is very deep, and they are not sure if Greece was forced out of the Euro, what result that would have. They will have a huge fear of what our message will mean to the people of Europe.

The capitalists will wait to see what Syriza does; they will not immediately react against the government. But if Syriza's policy deepens, and holds to what it has promised, we can see many different reactions. People in Syriza are discussing the possibility that the organs of the state will not co-operate with us, but obviously no-one knows what is going to happen. We in DEA think that a large scale victory will block any possibility of action against the government for a period, but that period will not last long. We have seen how bosses react to class struggles — lock-outs and so on. But no-one knows for sure exactly what will happen.

The class struggle is lower now than it was in 2010-2. I think the reason is that the labour movement and the unions, which were controlled by Pasok and ND, did not want to overthrow the Pasok-ND government. The mass movement overthrew the first two governments [after 2010], but not the Memorandum policies as the political forces in the unions did not want to, and Syriza was not strong enough. That contributed to demoralisation.

Another reason is that the left, Syriza, KKE and Antarsya, did not co-operate. This was not Syriza's fault. The KKE and Antarsya were resistant to the discussions about a left government. And we, Syriza, had told the mass movement that

the government would collapse from its own difficulties, but this also did not happen immediately. But this was a lesser problem. The people got tired, they believed that they could not overturn the Memorandum, and they waited for the elections. Now we have elections, and people will vote for Syriza, but this is not enough.

We can see a current among the people which is pro-Syriza, but this does not mean that there are strikes or things like that.

It is not that there have been no fights since 2012. There were many small but hard-fought struggles. For example the sacked teachers, the school guardians, the women who cleaned the Ministry of Finance, the Coca Cola factory workers who are still in dispute. People are realistic, they want a way to change things and see that in the elections. The mood is calm right now. There are no demonstrations or fights. But there is clearly a left wing current, and that has to do with all the fights that have happened over the last three years.

There has been no change in Syriza policy. We have never said that we would re-negotiate the Memorandum. Some Syriza candidates said that, maybe, but our conference decision is that we will dismantle the Memorandum.

As for nationalising the banks, there is a discussion. We will have to react in a certain way, depending upon how the capitalists react. If people try to move money out of the country, we would have to respond. But we want a radical policy.

There is a majority and minority in Syriza. The majority has come from a reformist party (a part of it at least), Synaspismos. But Syriza is moving. Even the majority is not fixed. Political tendencies who are against some left ideas in the party may change their views. There is not a majority that can do everything and a minority which can do nothing. This is part of the dynamics behind Syriza's success.

Kokkino and DEA are now one organisation, and we believe that this unification has strengthened revolutionary left ideas within the party and this will help us to face the difficulties which changes in policy from the majority of Syriza

will produce.

There were many candidates that the majority leaders wanted to be Syriza candidate, but the party did not like it, so they were not included. For example, a comedian in Thessaloniki was wanted on the list by the leadership, but they could not do that because the party reacted. Not only left platform members reacted, majority members also reacted. So nothing is fixed. The reaction from the party rank-and-file was the reason for the collapse of recent co-operation talks between Syriza and Dimar [Democratic Left]. I don't know if Dimar will even be in the next parliament.

DEA have five candidates, including in Thessaloniki. We want to have a presence in the parliament. We also want to help Syriza to have a large-scale victory. We try to contribute to every action of Syriza in the electoral campaign. Apart from that, we try to win people to revolutionary ideas. All the people who work with us in the elections are people who we will discuss with about continuing to work with us; we will be part of the struggles and fights for the next period.

The most important question under discussion in Syriza is whether we will have a majority in the parliament. If we do, we will not be obliged to go to a second round of elections or look at something like a “Government of National Salvation”, which some in Syriza leadership want. Some in Syriza think that this could be an answer to the problem we will face if we do not have 151 MPs. This is an open debate.

KKE

KKE have said that they will not support a minority government of Syriza. But I do not believe that this will be easy for them.

If we go to a second round in the elections, KKE will suffer and lose a lot of votes to us. They will not want to face this problem. Rank-and-file members of KKE have had a change in mood. They think they want Syriza to form a government. They won't be easy allies, but most of them will give Syriza a chance. The leaders of KKE have no intention of co-operating with Syriza at all, however.

Golden Dawn, including their youth support, have fallen back. They may still get a lot of votes. It will be nothing like when they participated before, but they do have a base of support and we do not ignore the danger. They have fallen back because most of the leadership is in jail, and they have a lot of difficulty in doing what they do — killing innocent immigrants, destroying left-wing gatherings and so on. Also there is an anti-fascist movement in Greece which has stopped them from doing these things. That movement is the reason why the ND government sent them to jail.

The European dimension is something that bothers us. The victory of Syriza will have an impact on the left throughout Europe. Hundreds of comrades will be coming to Greece from all over Europe to see what happens. Comrades must send the message throughout Europe that the left alternative to neo-liberalism is something that can happen. There are two pictures: France, with Le Pen and the army on the streets; and the other picture is that of Greece and the left hope which comes with the victory of Syriza.

All possibilities are open, including revolution, and we must work together for a left alternative, for socialism. This is what we must go on fighting for.

Greece: Is workers' power on the agenda?

**28 January, 7pm. Bentham House,
Seminar Room 1, Endsleigh Gardens,
London WC1E 6BT.**

**With Greek socialist Theodora
Polenta and report from delegation
visiting Greece 23-26 January.**

Song of the mothers

First World War poems
By Janine Booth



During the 1914-18 war, well over 2,000 people wrote published poetry in the UK. Most of them were not soldiers writing from the trenches.

The “soldier poets” such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon spoke eloquently of the suffering in the trenches to a British public still being told of the war’s glory by their rulers. Rightly, their poetry is getting plenty of attention in the centenary of that war.

But what of the poets on the home front? Many also speak eloquently, of the harsh realities of the war for those back home.

This poem articulates the anguish of women whose sons went to war to die. It is not just a cry of fear and bereavement, though, but a political dissection of those who sent them and what they stood for.

O Liberty, we have given up our sons!
Let it not be in vain!
They in their lovely youth by steel and guns
Are miserably slain.
We who approve it not have given to war
That which was born of passion and long pain;
O Liberty, we ask than this no more
That it be not in vain!

O Liberty, men use thy name for death,
Blindly blaspheming thee:
Each nation shouts thy glory in a breath,
But we, unfrenzied we,
Whose passion burns in sorrow, watch and wait,
And by deep grief’s remorseless vision see
Truth, undisguised by fear’s distorting hate,
Naked, and stern, and free.

O Liberty, have all men loved thy name
In days of peace gone by?
Have not some put thy prophets to foul shame
who for thy sake did cry
For freedom’s justice: those who bawl now “Slay
The threatening Fiend!” ... and send our sons to die
And kill the innocent? what shall these pay
Whose offence stinks most high?

O Liberty, for all our crucified,
We pray the overthrow
Of greed, oppression, lust, fat-bellied pride;
These stalk the world with woe!
We do believe that men shall see the face
At last, by hell’s glare, of their common foe!
We do believe by love’s compassionate grace
Another world shall grow!

Therefore, O Liberty, though we now weep,
We deem it not in vain!
The precipice of death is dark and steep,
Yet from our darling slain
We see at last a resurrected God, and cry
“Their death shall be new life! Immortal gain!
O, innocent, but not in vain they die!
It cannot be in vain!”

Irene Rutherford McLeod. Published in
The Woman’s Dreadnought, Christmas 1916



The Greek left needs our solidarity

By Theodora Polenta

The epitome of the election campaign for 25 January of Greece’s main right-wing party, New Democracy, is ND candidate Makis Voridis — former member of a neo-fascist youth organisation and minister of health in the last government, using language from the Greek civil war of the 1940s and asking people to defend the values of “Country, Religion, and Family” against Syriza’s “communist threat”.

ND leader and outgoing prime minister Antonis Samaras escalates this argument with statements in defence of Orthodox Christianity and getting himself photographed next to the fence and barbed wire on the border in Evros (the area of Greece next to the border with Turkey).

Samaras and his party and their median parrots present Syriza as the carrier of seven plagues which will take us out the euro and into an “Asia Minor catastrophe”; lead to a flight of bank deposits and a stock market crash; make farmers will lose their European subsidies; destroy pensions; demolish the barrier in Evros and flood us with immigrants; disarm the police so that criminals and terrorists will invade our homes and kidnap our kids...

The ruling class-memorandum system, having long lost the ability to convince the people and achieve the general consensus that the interests of the bourgeoisie represents the general social interest, has reversed its strategy: it identifies Syriza with the general social disaster!

While Samaras intensifies his strategy of fear, the European chancelleries and IMF leaders have already ceased to be unanimous, with a sizeable proportion of conservative leaders saying that they will respect the verdict of the Greek people. Ruling-class voices are asking for respect for the verdict of the Greek people and of the right for Syriza to demand measures to stimulate growth and to writeoff the non-viable debt.

The US administration is tired of the way the EU has handled the financial crisis from 2009; fears that slowing global growth will have a negative effect for the US economy; and wants change in economic policy both from the “strong” Eurozone countries and from the ECB itself.

TWO REACTIONS

Mainstream economist Willem Buiter says: “It would be a huge disaster if Greece abandoned the Eurozone. The markets would begin to ask what country would be the next candidate for withdrawal...”

“The German government knows that if Greece is out of the euro the whole Eurozone will be exposed.” “If Germany continues to insist on maintaining the existing monetary and financial policy in the euro zone, the euro cannot survive politically. The situation is extremely serious. Never before was I as worried as I am today”.

The chief economist of Citigroup says: “The faster the ECB announces the purchase of bonds, the better. There may be a special meeting of the ECB immediately after the Greek elections”.

The mainstream German weekly *Die Zeit* reports (7 January) that: “In Berlin and Brussels discussions are going on about how a possible compromise with Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras might look... for example... extending the maturity of the outstanding loans” [i.e. postponing when they have to be repaid].

There are different reactions within Syriza and within the left. Some express an untenable confidence that the eurozone will almost definitely tolerate the write-off of the debt and the reversal of the austerity in Greece. This assessment sees only one side of reality: the crisis of the system that makes it vulnerable and insecure.

In contrast, much of the left outside Syriza declares that the Syriza government is condemned to surrender to the austerity agenda and there is no scope for manoeuvre. This underestimates the depth of the crisis of the system and the Eurozone and the potential to break the weak links within it.

The Greek bourgeoisie wants to “encircle” and undermine and suppress mutiny against memoranda and austerity, even this relatively timid electoral mutiny. At the same time, because of its own crisis and the destruction of many political reserves, the Greek bourgeoisie cannot have a single strategy and a centre to implement this strategy.

The only thing definite is conflict and confrontation. The



If Syriza win the election, one thing is sure — there will sooner or later be a confrontation with capitalist leaders

outcome of the conflict is not fixed in advance. Austerity will not be reversed without confronting the system, but this will be a confrontation against a capitalist system and a eurozone in deep crisis, which makes them non-omnipotent.

It will be objectively impossible, however, in the not-so-long term, for Syriza to reconcile both sides, the markets and the radical left.

The leaders of Syriza so far base everything on the belief that the EU leaders will backtrack when they start negotiations. They have so far presented no Plan B in the case that the negotiations are unsuccessful. They perceive the threats of the lenders that they will cut off any financial aid to any government that refuses to extend their austerity policies as a bluff.

However, one leader of the majority, John Dragasakis, admitted in a recent debate that if by July no solution has been found, then Greece will not be able to pay the €6 billion due to the ECB then.

The Syriza leaders’ optimistic perspective is not shared by everyone in the party, and especially by the Left Platform, who argue that there will be conflict, but under certain conditions the government of the Left.

The ruling-class side is definitely preparing. It would be tragic for our side not to prepare with the corresponding seriousness and determination, and to cultivate illusions that everything can be done with a tough but still civilised “dialogue”.

We should have four axes.

First of all the strict application of Syriza’s “Thessaloniki programme” and its conference decisions: repealing the Memoranda and austerity, restoring workers’ rights, wages and conditions, and removing most of the debt.

Secondly, the awareness of the asymmetry of the correlation of forces. Even after a Syriza election victory, the main centres of powers, economically, socially, and within the state, will be controlled by the enemy. The re-invigoration of Syriza’s rank and file and a new wave of radicalisation are the only way to confront the enemy.

Thirdly, persisting in our argument for a United Front of the Left, despite the refusal of the leadership of the KKE (Communist Party) to promise support for Syriza against the right. We should not forget that there is a decisive difference between electoral power and links with the organised labour movement, and in the organised labour movement, outside-Syriza left forces retain a big role.

Fourthly, the weapon of Syriza and the Greek working class is going to be working class internationalism and solidarity. The prospect of a Syriza has generated a wave of solidarity and hope for all the political and social forces that are suffocating within the present neoliberal framework in Europe and all over the world.

How can we undercut Islamists?

By Clive Bradley

Two books about Islamism, Ed Husain's *The Islamist* and Maaajid Nawaz's *Radical*, have an obvious relevance after Charlie Hebdo.

There's some crossover: the two writers knew each other in Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) (indeed Nawaz, who's a bit younger, was Husain's protege), and then, a decade later, set up the Quilliam Foundation together. Interestingly, at the time Husain wrote *The Islamist*, Nawaz was yet to leave HT, and he figures in the book as a possibly-dissident yet still-loyal member.

Husain's book is more informative on how Islamist movements more generally operate in "Muslim communities" (that is, in particular mosques — East London, in the first place — and among Muslim students in Tower Hamlets and Newham). Husain was involved in the youth wing of the Jamaat Islami, which is quite similar to the Muslim Brotherhood except Pakistani, so he underwent an evolution through more "moderate" Islamism to HT — though that, in turn, falls short of out-and-out jihadism on the al Qaeda/IS model.

Nawaz was a hip hop kid in Southend who was drawn more or less directly into HT at college. But his subsequent evolution is more interesting, or certainly more colourful. Husain was actually quite quickly disillusioned with Islamism, and sought out a more spiritual version of Islam; a big part of the book is about his realisation that radical Islamists often know very little about the religion (don't, for instance, sometimes, even know how to pray).

Nawaz was sent overseas by HT to build the organisation — in Pakistan, in Denmark, and then in Egypt, where he was arrested, tortured (or almost, though even the psychological stuff is pretty horrific), and spent five years in jail.

Husain gives, I think, much more of a sense of how the Islamist groups, or HT at least, operate locally and at colleges, and of the nuances in Islamist ideologies (stuff about how you can tell different types of Islamist, more traditional Salafists compared to more radical HT-types, by how they dress, etc.). Before he was drawn to Islamism he was already quite religious, learnt how to recite the Quran, etc. His evolution was more to do with the role and activities of organised groups within the community of which he was part. (That's oversimplifying a bit, but it's the gist).

NOT RELIGIOUS

Nawaz, on the other hand, wasn't religious at all. He gives a much stronger sense of how it was racism that drove him towards Islamism.

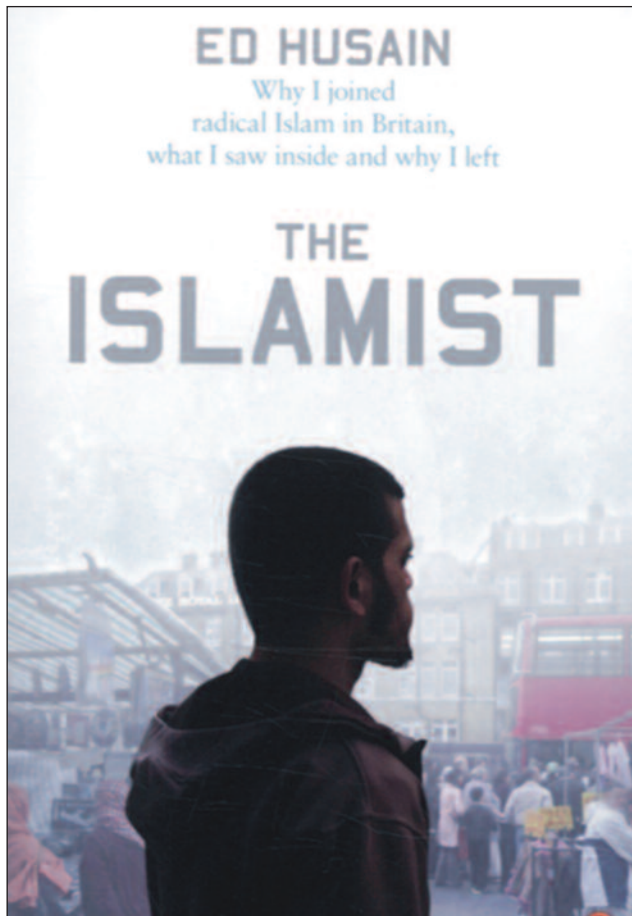
In Southend as a youth he faced constant racism from violent skinheads. He describes a very powerful moment where he and his brother were confronted and outnumbered by local racists; his brother warned the racists he had a bomb in his rucksack and he wasn't afraid to die. For the first time, the racists were afraid of them, and after that left them alone. Islamism, in the broadest sense, had given him a power he had never experienced before over the racists.

Both books give a strong sense of how Islamism forms a hermetically sealed ideology, a kind of "meta-narrative" which enables you to explain everything, and of how this has easy appeal to Muslim youth (and not just youth) who experience different kinds of racism, who oppose US foreign policy and so forth, and who have a religious bedrock culture.

The Husain book is especially clear on how far the Islamists see nonbelievers — kuffar — as inferior non-people not worthy of much consideration. It's only Muslims who matter. (HT seems to be less concerned with defining who really is and isn't a Muslim than, say, ISIL. They're a Sunni group, and they are contemptuous of Muslims who they think have sold out to the west, but less brazenly sectarian).

The Husain book also gives a particularly clear picture of how Islamism differs from mere religious belief, that it's a political project to create a state.

HT has an especially crude concept of this. (Hence, for instance, infiltrating the Pakistani army: they literally think that if they can organise a coup in a Muslim country they can start to set up a global Caliphate. As opposed to organising war like al Qaeda or IS). Interestingly, for both of Husain and Nawaz it seems to have been a profound moment when they realised that so much of the ideology of Islamism (states, sys-



tems of law, political parties, etc) is taken from modern Western political philosophy, that they (HT, but it would be true more generally) are, as Nawaz puts it "the bastard child of colonialism".

Both writers are deeply contemptuous of the "Orientalist" left who don't understand how poisonous and dangerous Islamism is.

My intention here isn't to summarise the books. I want to draw out some issues which are worth discussing.

First: what both these books show is that even people who've been heavily indoctrinated (I think they both use this term) are capable of thinking their way out of it. In both cases the hypocrisy and lack of accountability of the HT leadership seems to have played a role in this; in both cases this led them to question whether giving unchecked power to such people was a good idea!

But, in both cases, their evolution was to a more personalised Islam, shorn of its Islamist contamination, as they see it. One could say a "depoliticised" Islam, but that's not true: part of the point of Quilliam is to inject democracy into Islam itself (Nawaz doesn't use the term, but he's talking about a kind of "reformation").

Quilliam is very bourgeois in its outlook. Nawaz describes the time he met George W Bush, and friendly advice chats at Number 10 with Cameron; at the end of the book it's unclear if he intends to stand for the Lib Dems. Quilliam is known to be friendly with Blair, though Nawaz is very critical of Blair in his book. (Nawaz describes the grassroots movement they initiated in Pakistan, Khudi Pakistan — which sounds very different.)

A big role was played in Nawaz's break with Islamism by the support he received from Amnesty when he was in jail in Egypt, by the fact that his lawyer was a communist who had himself been in jail, and by meeting principled liberals (like the academic Saad Eddin Ibrahim) in jail. He realised that you didn't have to be an Islamist to have strong principles.

Of course the lesson to be drawn here is that a robust, secular, liberal in the widest sense (that is, democratic and pluralist) movement is the necessary counter to Islamism. But the problems in this regard are legion.

The Islamists, starting with the Jamaat Islami types, through Saudi-funded imams and mosques, through HT to the most extreme groups, the conduits to Syria, etc, have been building deep roots in Muslim communities in Europe, and have been largely uncontested. Both writers are very critical of cack-handed attempts by governments to promote "mod-



Ed Husain's book (left) and Maaajid Nawaz (above)

erate" Muslim leaders who are actually just "moderate" Islamists, thus giving the entire Islamist project and "narrative" more, not less, legitimacy.

The Quilliam bourgeois approach might be wrong, but who is going to compete with the Islamists in those communities? This is not simply a problem of political will. Even if part of the left decided tomorrow to prioritise building support in, say, the Bengali community in East London (and assuming we could agree the political basis for it), we are tiny, we have no powerful movement to point to. Of course that's not a reason not to try; and maybe if you could win one or two impressive individuals to revolutionary socialism quite a lot would change as a result. But the objective obstacles are immense.

Of course the weakness of the left is a more general problem in the world today. It's not just a problem among Muslims. But the difference is that in "Muslim communities" (a problematic term, but I use it for shorthand) there are these forces which are, in a certain sense, "like us" — organised, grass roots movements which are proposing radical political solutions. But these forces are immensely more powerful and with stronger roots.

People like Husain and Nawaz would, I am sure, be tremendous assets to a socialist group. But they didn't gravitate in that direction. You can understand the attraction of straightforward liberalism as an alternative to Islamism (indeed, it must be said, I would understand if someone like that was suspicious of what they saw as another "totalising" ideology, or "meta-narrative"). But in any case, bourgeois liberalism has a social weight. Revolutionary socialism does not (yet).

The trouble with bourgeois liberalism is that it's never going to win over the mass of disenfranchised "Muslim" (assuming this is how they self-identify) youth in the French banlieues or wherever. It doesn't have enough social weight, especially in times of economic crisis. But we are very far indeed from having a movement which can be counterposed to the Islamists.

There are groups we could build stronger links with (Southall Black Sisters for instance), as part of a wider secular, grass-roots united front of sorts reaching out into those communities but independent of the Quilliam types.

I think the work some comrades have done around Kobane is very important in this regard. Is it conceivable that these kind of struggles could be amplified into a general challenge to Islamism?

One of the strongest appeals of Islamism, clearly, is that it claims to be about belief, principle, passion. It's about certainty, and quite rightly the left, or at least any properly democratic and rational left, is much less "certain" in this simple sense. There's something in the Kobane conflict which cuts through all that.

How ruling class sees the last 50 years

By a school teacher

The Tories are threatening the NHS. But they register that people are bothered about the issue, and they must step carefully. And some people in the ruling class have “internalised” the pressure on them from the labour movement enough that they themselves cherish the NHS.

How do the ruling class explain themselves, and what do they think they must look out for? I was given some insight on this recently when a business “grandee”, chair of many companies and member of many official committees and working groups, visited our school for an “inspirational address” to years 12 and 13.

He framed his talk round comparisons between today and when he was the students’ age, in the mid-60s. His overview of the social changes wrought by himself and his friends, the ruling class of recent decades, was... that they’ve made things worse! Evidently he saw that as unremarkable, not even something to be explained away by reference to unavoidable constraints.

The only improvements he cited since the mid-60s were “technology” (evidently meaning small computers, the internet, and mobile phones) and greater ease of travel. He offered no picture at all of how today’s teenagers might collectively make a better world, but only advised them, as individuals, to work hard and to take chances to travel.

Generally, he said, teenagers face a more difficult world than in the mid-60s.

He said that in the mid-60s people could be confident of a “job for life” and a good pension. In fact, that’s just not true. Greater working-class insecurity today than in the 60s comes not because jobs were then “for life”, but because then you could get another job easily. Unemployment was 1.5% in 1965, but has been over 5%, and often much higher, since 1976. I suppose what he had in mind is that managers, “pro-

fessionals”, and such had a “job for life” in the 1960s, and don’t now. That registers as a “problem” in the ruling class.

He didn’t mention the spiralling of economic inequality since the late 1970s, or the trashing of trade-union rights in the 1980s.

In an odd way, he depicted capitalist development as worse than it has really been. It’s a way of deleting from view the fact that, despite all our setbacks, labour movements and democratic struggles have retained some capacity to win improvements and limit deteriorations.

A grandee speaking in a non-selective school in the mid-60s would see only a few older students (in the 60s most students left at 15), and probably only white-British and Afro-Caribbean students (with, if my impressions from then are reliable, the white and the Afro-Caribbean students choosing to sit separately). In 1964 a Tory MP won his constituency with the slogan “if you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labour”.

BETTER

In 1965 Risinghill school, in London, was shut down by the education authority because the head teacher and staff refused to hit the students. Something has changed for the better there.

The 60s were a time of the “rediscovery” of poverty. Poor people had always known they were poor, but late-50s official discourse had been that “you never had it so good” (Tory election campaign, 1959) and we were in “the affluent society” (J K Galbraith’s book, 1958). Then books like *The Other America* (Michael Harrington, 1962), *The poor and the poorest* (Townsend and Abel-Smith, 1965), and *St Ann’s* (Coates and Silburn, 1967) — and a slightly nascent left — restored poverty as a “problem” which the ruling class had to say at least something about.

In 1962 only 33% of households in the UK had a fridge; in 1970-1 only 30% had central heating, only 35% a phone, and

64% a washing machine. There were no laws to stop pay or job discrimination against women, and before 1967 male homosexuality was flatly illegal. We’ve made some gains.

Popular struggles have overthrown Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe, military dictatorships in Latin America, and apartheid in South Africa.

The grandee might have tried to annex the gains since the 60s as credits for capitalism. My guess about why he didn’t is that, not quite consciously, he shied away from highlighting the threat to many of those gains from the new rise of the far right.

That rise figured in his discourse only very selectively and slantways. He said that the great insecurity of the 60s was the threat of nuclear war, and the equivalent today is “what we have just seen in Paris”. So today’s equivalent of nuclear disarmament is... suppression of civil liberties motivated as “anti-terrorist”?

In spring 1962 the OAS set off about 120 bombs *per day*, and killed dozens per day, in a last-ditch terror campaign against Algerian independence. There was terrorism in the 60s, too! True, that could be and was terminated by Algerian independence, and there is no similar straightforward answer to terrorism by Daesh, Al Qaeda, and Boko Haram.

But there is no proportion between Islamist violence, even in Nigeria or Raqqa, and the threat of nuclear annihilation — or the threat of ecological catastrophe. The grandee’s implied message? Life is insecure, but at least you have smartphones and cheap flights, and the worst threat can be warded off by more powers for the police.

The ruling class has no vision for the future, and a blurred vision of the present. Older socialists need to explain to young people both what has been won and urgently needs defending; how the next generations can build a much better world; and how, immediately, we can make more issues into those on which the ruling class knows it has to be defensive and cautious.

Working through the contradictions

How I became a socialist By Kieran Miles



I had been interested in politics from a young age, but I thought being political meant watching the news and paying attention in history lessons. It wasn’t until the Tories were elected in summer 2010 that I began to think about politics in a serious way. I was horrified by the cuts.

When I heard that a few people were setting up an anti-cuts group at my university, I was hesitant about going along, but I did, and really enjoyed meeting like-minded people. It started small — having debates, writing articles for our blog and the college paper, leafleting for meetings. But these are the building blocks for an activist group, and many of us grew in political confidence, and got a good number of people around us. We were soon attending big demos in London, and we organised an occupation on campus, the first of several. (One of which, in 2012, actually saved some jobs). Doing something about the cuts was incredibly exciting and empowering.

The struggle was transformative in so many way. Lectures became places to do shout-outs about the next demo and to leaflet. It became usual to go out leafleting, not just for demos, but organising meetings and political debates. I was hungry for ideas, and would pore over articles shared on social media, blogs, books from the library, books borrowed from friends, newspapers, journals, anything. I think I read more in the months of November and December 2010 and January 2011 than I did for the rest of my time at university.

But I still held lots of reactionary ideas, in contradiction to these exciting new ones. Throughout university I had remained a member of the sea cadets, and ultimately I planned to join the Navy. I held lots of sexist and moralistic ideas. And I retained lots of Cold War propaganda I got at school — Leninism was Stalinism etc.

My experience at the big tuition fees demo in December

2010 ironed these ideas out somewhat. On that demo, I was charged by horses, I was hit with batons, I saw people battered to the floor, had to treat cuts and broken fingers with my first aid kit, and saw the most appalling police brutality. That was the demo when Alfie Meadows nearly died, and required emergency brain surgery.

Any lingering respect I had for the police was thoroughly undone. I started to square up the ideas I had about society, with what I had understood from the last few months. Suddenly it made sense. The police weren’t there to help, they would put people in hospital just to protect the windows of the Ministry of Justice, to block big societal change, like stopping the trebling of tuition fees. It was painful to think how the bosses and the politicians and the landlords were laughing as they enriched themselves through our collective immiseration. Within a week or two I had quit the cadets, and thought of myself as an anti-capitalist. New terms started to swirl in my head: class, capitalist, proletarian, production. I started reading Marx and Proudhon and others.

THOUGHT

I knew what I was against. I knew what the root cause of society’s ills were, if in a raw way. I knew this was a fight I wanted to be a part of. But what was I actually for? What kind of future society did I want?

The big 26 March 2011 TUC demo was another thought-provoking day for me. Seeing half a million people was pretty inspiring.

That excitement soon wore off when I saw the passivity of labour movement bureaucrats (who would in due course sell out the pensions dispute), and, the more exciting, but very limited in scope, direct action affinity groups. Where I had been leaning towards the latter over the last few months, inspired by our anti-cuts group’s self-activity, March 26 revealed the political limitations of both approaches.

By this time I had met members of Workers’ Liberty. I was struck that they had no time for the sell-outs of the trade union leadership, but had a long term plan beyond smashing

windows. They spoke openly about workers’ control of production, about democracy permeating every aspect of society, about socialism.

I bought *Solidarity*, went to the odd day school, and met up with members to discuss big ideas.

In our anti-cuts group there was a good Socialist Party trade union activist who impressed me enough to meet up with him, but the SP’s ideas were terrible. Whether it was the big stuff (I remember laughing at a pamphlet which was apologetic for the CCP), or the bread and butter activity (I attended an NSSN conference where the SP decided to set up its own front anti-cuts organisation and decry the pre-existing organisations as sectarian), they were just wrong.

Workers’ Liberty had the right approach to the student movement, I thought. The two biggest strategies on the student left were to dominate or destroy the campaigns they were involved in through bureaucratic manoeuvring (e.g. the SWP), or else to swing the opposite way, and refuse to talk about big ideas. AWL members were hard-working members of the NCAFC, but openly sold *Solidarity*. They would propose initiatives, but were also interested in what you had to say. They tried to win support, not by hiding their ideas, or trying to smash up a group, but by arguing for their politics.

This, combined with the group’s distinctive third camp socialist ideas, meant I soon joined the AWL. Perhaps it was a little premature, I could have done more reading and discussing of ideas. But I agreed with what they thought, I agreed with the collective projects the group was involved in — why in those circumstances should I not join?

The biggest thing I learnt from my own “journey” to socialist politics is that you can hold some wildly contradictory ideas in your head! But I see this as a positive — it means socialists can convince millions of people, if we can just work through the contradictions.

Every paper sale, every demo, every union branch, campaign meeting, or picket line, is an opportunity to do just that.

Bus drivers fight for fair pay

George Michael, a Unite rep at the Wood Green bus garage, spoke to *Solidarity* about the London bus dispute.

“Bus drivers in this country spend longer stints behind the wheel than drivers in any other European country.

“The EU maximum driving time is 4.5 hours without a break. In the UK, we do 5.5 hours. Every hour you spend behind the wheel, you’re responsible for people’s lives. And it’s not like working in an office or something where you can switch off now and then. It’s a fast environment – stopping, pulling out, dealing with passengers, watching the road. You’re constantly alert. And the volume of passengers in London has gone up, but there has been no increase in the service to

match it.

“Drivers are being pushed to the extreme. Every day at work is a difficult day. It’s getting to the point where we are now worried about safety. You only have to look in the papers to see the accidents that are happening. It isn’t that we’re worse than we were five years ago. It’s the increase in volume in those five years.

“Money is a big issue for our drivers, too. If you’re not earning enough, you’ll do extra hours. That can take it out of you. After a week of getting up at 3 am to do a nine-hour shift, you’re not alert. Your body can’t keep up with shift changes, and that has implications for safety.

“Our timetables are not adequate to the task in hand and don’t allow us to do the job safely. Drivers won’t rush to keep to a timetable if



that means compromising passenger safety, but then we get harassed by managers and supervisors.

“Engineers have a difficult job to do. They’re under enormous pressure: there aren’t enough of them, the fleet is made up of outdated vehicles, and companies don’t often stock the right parts for these older models. So, where they’re unable to get the parts, engineers are obliged to perform short-term fixes to get the buses ready to go out on the road – but they can’t solve the problems permanently, and the buses keep on coming back for repairs. Engineers can feel very frustrated in their work because it feels like they’re never finishing the jobs they start.

“Most engineers are in the union. Engineers tend to be paid better than drivers – but new engineers are now being put on a contract which will give them worse

pay and different shift patterns. They also don’t have pay equality across the companies.

“I don’t think it’s likely that engineers will join the drivers’ dispute straight away – but this attack on new engineers’ conditions is going to store up trouble for the future, and we will likely see joint action further down the line.

“Strike action is always the last resort, and asking our members to strike is hard. They are so badly paid, striking makes a big dent in their incomes. We started on 13 January, and there isn’t a timetable for the next actions yet. We are waiting for updates from the union on how the situation has changed, and then we’ll see what will happen next.

“We want to talk to the company – all they have to do is to pick up the phone.”

As of 2015, new drivers with Arriva – the lowest payer for starter drivers – get £9.69 an hour. The previous starting rate with Arriva, before 2015, was £9.30 an hour. After eight years, a driver is on £12.89 an hour.

For Stagecoach drivers – the highest payer for starter drivers – the rate is £11.46. After two years, they reach the top rate of £15.63 an hour.

There are 80 different

pay scales for drivers in London, across 18 different companies. They vary based on the company and the year that a driver started. TfL gives drivers a pass that works on public transport – buses, the tube and the Overground line.

The pass does not cover national rail trains, and many drivers commute from outside of London.

Fight for rank and file control in Unison!

By Simon Nelson

The defeat of the Local Government pay dispute and the current uneven impact of the NHS strikes over the current pay claim have shown the current weakness of branch and workplace organisation in both health and local government.

Sections of the left in Unison have taken the defeat as a basis to direct their energy into the upcoming elections for the National Executive and General Secretary, as a way to build confidence. Calls for the left to unite around agreed candidates are of course welcome, but they don’t allow discussion of ways to transform the union or to build power in individual workplaces. Rather they are electoral lash ups that break apart as soon as the ballots close, formed on the basis

of who shouts the loudest, avoiding discussion of disagreements and preferring sectarian manoeuvres over honest and sharp debate.

The Unison local government special conference in March gives us an opportunity to connect a movement against the rotten pay deal with a positive plan to ensure we cannot be sold out again. The process of reforming the structures and behaviours of the national union has to be backed up with stronger branches, livelier and bigger branches, representative of the workers in the workplace. Where action is taken it should be to win, not as a token demonstration of anger.

Our starting point must always be supporting workers in struggle against their bosses. To build a movement capable of winning and popularising socialist ideas we have to

fight for the control of disputes to be at the workplace level, with strike funds and strike committees, cross-union where relevant, that meet regularly to democratically decide how to push a dispute forward. We need to be creative and presenting a strategy that can include selective action and a strategy announced at the start of a dispute. To do this will require the left to put motions forward at conference and also to transform our branches and discuss these ideas with the people we

work with (not just those who are currently active).

Control at the workplace level will require fighting for such policies regionally and nationally, if we can connect branches across the country and cross-union local disputes will be much better placed to win, create new activists and break down the divide between union members’ local and national union structures.

• More information: lgworkers.blogspot.co.uk

Where next for Unison democracy and local government pay?

Fringe meeting at Unison Special Conference called by Lambeth local government Unison Monday 23 March, 6pm Archaeology G6, UCL, Gower St, London WC1E 6BT

Health unions meet government

By Peggy Carter

As *Solidarity* went to press on 20 January, health unions were meeting with Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt.

The NHS pay dispute is escalating. It started timidly with two days of four-hour strikes. But now there will be a 12 hour strike on 29 January, followed by a 24 hour strike on 25 February involving most of the unions in the NHS.

There were problems with

the two four hour strikes. In some areas unions scuppered their own action by granting lavish “exemptions”, encouraging many members to go to work.

However there has been large public support for strikes, and picket lines have been lively.

Health workers should have a say in negotiations with the government. Union full timers should not be able to make deals to call off strikes without members’ knowledge and consent.

New offer at Lambeth

By Gemma Short

As *Solidarity* went to press on 20 January, UCU members at Lambeth College were hearing of an improved offer from college management.

On Monday 19 January workers were beginning an indefinite strike, having already struck for five days this month and six in December, in the dispute over contract changes.

Reports suggest the new offer from management means no existing staff will be forced onto new contracts, even if they change their hours, and some concessions on sick pay. There is no suggestion that the new offer does anything to protect any future staff, who will likely be given the new contracts.

UCU members will meet on Wednesday 21 January to decide on the offer.

Brighton hospital workers balloted

By Charlotte Zalens

Union GMB is balloting outsourced cleaners, caterers, housekeepers and porters at Brighton and Haywards Heath Hospitals.

The workers, employed by Sodexo, are calling for Sodexo to pay at least the living wage and for other improvements to end the two-tier workforce at the hospitals resulting from the

outsourcing of contracts.

Gary Palmer, GMB Regional Officer, said: “GMB would not support a contention that decreased profits for Sodexo shareholders is a rationale for not taking this step towards ending the two tier workforce for staff at the Trust.

“Any such argument will hold little weight in light of the financial detriments and struggles our members have to deal with on a daily basis.”

Care workers to strike

Union members at Your Choice Barnet (YCB) will strike on January 22 and 23.

These are the workers’ fifth and sixth days on strike in a dispute over a 9.5% pay cut. Unison says staff in the supported living and autism service rejected an offer to reduce the pay cut to 7.9% in October, but delayed strike action until the new

year in order to save the service over Christmas.

Barnet council are still refusing to meet with Unison and YCB, despite the fact that they hold the purse strings for the outsourced service.

Strikers will have picket lines at Flower Lane Day Centre, NW7 2JN and Rosa Morrison Day Centre, EN5 1NA.



Let Greece breathe!

By Colin Foster

Syriza is set to win Greece's general election on 25 January.

A strong left wing within Syriza wants a left-wing Syriza government to confront the EU leaders and the banks which stand behind them; tackle the shipping magnates, church hierarchy, military machine, and business oligarchs who siphon off Greece's wealth; and empower the working class.

The majority leadership of Syriza is more cautious. They reckon instead to form a "government of national salvation", a coalition with this or that centrist group, and to renegotiate Greece's terms with the EU and the European Central Bank so that its debt burden is eased and social cuts can be reversed.

The Greek working class and the Greek people are battered by five years of economic assault.

Over one-third of them live below the official poverty level. Trade-union collective bargaining has been trashed. Real wages have been cut by at least a quarter, on average. Unemployment is about 26%. Hundreds of thousands of people face eviction from their homes for debt. Health care is scarce: hospitals can't buy supplies because they don't get the payments they expect from insurance funds.

For now, they hope that a Syriza-led government can win some relief. But the EU leaders are likely to stall. They will offer only minor concessions. In the battle likely to open up between the Greek people and the EU leaders, Greece's hopes depend on Europe-wide solidarity. If labour movements across Europe apply enough pressure, the EU leaders will be forced to ease their grip. And that will be a gain for other workers, too.

A cancellation of Greece's debt — which the European Central Bank could organise at will — or even a loosening of the debt stranglehold on Greece, will force a loosening for other countries too.

Indeed, that is why the EU leaders prefer to stall. If the Greek workers show that staging 20-odd general strikes, mobilising large street protests, and electing a left government can win concessions, then workers in other countries will be encouraged to do the same, and will expect at least the same concessions as Greece.

The lesson holds for the British labour movement, too. A victory for the Greek left will make untenable the Tories' plan to increase cuts, and the Labour leaders' craven commitment to continue cuts.

Solidarity with the Greek working class!



Essex firefighters strikes solid despite lock out

By Darren Bedford

Essex firefighters and 999 control staff completed three days of solid strikes on 16 January, despite their employers' draconian step of locking them out for whole shifts.

The series of short strikes — some only an hour long — took place on 14, 15 and 16 January. The strikes totalled 29 hours, but fire chiefs decided to lock out striking firefighters continuously for the whole three days so they can stop even more pay as punishment. And some officers were locked-out without pay until Saturday morning for standing with the frontline crews.

The net effect for the public in Essex was that fire chiefs decided to remove fire cover from the public continuously for the whole

three days, with only a quarter of fire engines available compared to the normal service.

The strikes were about drastic cuts to the fire and rescue service in Essex, which will also put the public permanently at risk. Full time firefighter numbers have already been cut in Essex from 750 to 656 since 2010. The plans would see the number of wholtime firefighters serving at front-

line fire stations further reduced, as well as a reduction of emergency control staff by 20%.

Essex firefighters will now debate the next steps in their campaign. With more cuts to fire and rescue services planned across the country for this year — and apparently for years to come — this kind of fightback will be absolutely central to stopping the rot.



All the rage

Socialist feminist conference organised by women in Workers' Liberty

Saturday 28 February

**Cruciform, UCL, Gower St,
London WC1E 6BT**

11:30 - 17:30

£4/6/10 - Free creche

Women workers fight

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womensfightback.wordpress.com

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