



Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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www.workersliberty.org

GREECE: BLACKMAIL AND RESISTANCE



See pages 5-8

The placard, signed by Syriza, reads: Resistance

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:

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Ukraine after the debacle

By Marko Bojunc

The debacle at Debaltseve in the days following the Minsk 2 accords has given rise to two major developments.

The Ukrainian government is seeking a European Union police mission to help it hold the line against the separatists and their Russian backers; and seventeen volunteer battalions have established a joint leadership and headquarters to make them a more effective fighting force.

Both developments stem from the same recognition of the military inferiority of the Ukrainian side facing an adversary that is ready and willing to press forward into new territory.

The announcement of a new joint leadership came from Semen Semenchenko, leader of the Donbas volunteer battalion. He has fiercely criticised the military and political leadership for the Debaltseve debacle:

The new leadership is headquartered in Dnipropetrovsk and has appointed an initial staff of 35 people.

They insist that the headquarters for the volunteer battalions is not a parallel or alternative or competing authority to that of the Armed Forces General Staff, but rather a supplementary

institution.

Immediately after the joint leadership and headquarters were announced, *Ukrayinska Pravda* published statements from several battalion commanders and paramilitary group leaders declining to take part in the initiative. They said that it challenged the authority of the armed forces command and undermined the unity of the forces themselves.

The volunteer military movement is splitting under the pressure of these developments. Some whole battalions as well as separate units breaking away from their battalions are going over. So there is a new crack opening up in the already fragile unity of the military forces.

BORDERS

Meanwhile the Poroshenko-Yatseniuk coalition government wants to appeal to the European Union and the United Nations to send an EU police mission to patrol two borders.

These are the section of the Russian-Ukrainian border that Ukrainian authorities are prevented from reaching by the separatist forces, and the front line of fighting between the separatists and the Ukrainian forces further to the west.

The proposal is not for a

UN peace-keeping force because Russia as a member of the UN Security Council can veto such a proposal, or on the other hand insist on Russian peacekeepers taking part in that force.

But Poroshenko and his close circle will not long tolerate a bifurcated chain of command, especially one that weakens their control over the volunteer battalions, which are their most motivated and battle-hardened forces. The European Union will not even contemplate sending any kind of peace keeping or peace-making force into a zone where all sides have not agreed to cease fighting. And there still isn't sufficient evidence yet that the pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian volunteer battalions want to end the fighting, even if Kyiv and Moscow do now.

The wider problem, however, is that greater military capacity from within

Ukrainian society or from without cannot on its own prevent further defeats and losses of territory by the Ukrainian side, unless Russia stops backing the separatists.

The current state of the Ukrainian armed forces alone demonstrates quite convincingly that the Ukrainian state's leaders are also failing on several other critical fronts — ideological, social and economic — to rally the society and put up an effective national resistance to Russian imperialist aggression.

The Ukrainian people deserve better than that. But where will an effective strategy and leadership of national resistance come from?

And who will embark on a radical transformation of the rotten political, social and economic order, and in a time of war?

• Abridged, with thanks, from observerukraine.net/

Support Turkish health workers!

By Charlotte Zalens

On 6 December 2014 Maltepe University Hospital in Istanbul dismissed 98 workers, for being members of the Progressive Union of Health Workers.

The workers joined the union to seek to improve their working conditions in the hospital. They demanded higher wages, which have been promised for several years, and shorter working hours. Several of the sacked workers were working in the hospital for more than 10 years and received several awards. There are disabled workers as well as couples among them. Many families have been left without income.

Workers' Liberty will be joining LabourStart to gather signatures in support of the sacked health workers, and calling for their reinstatement.

You can sign the petition online at bit.ly/Hospital-workers.

Or you can download a petition to take round your workplace, trade union or students union at bit.ly/Hospital-petition

Nigerian teachers' action

Teachers in the Northern Nigerian province of Bauchi protested outside government offices after not being paid for 11 months.

The teachers carried placards reading "we cannot feed our families" and "we are suffering".

The teachers work in one of the most dangerous areas of Nigeria. Bauchi

state is often subject to attacks by Boko Haram, who have killed many teachers and children.

Teachers claim that since the abduction of 200 school girls in Chibok there have been grand yet meaningless calls for "safe schools".

Very little has been done to change their working conditions and improve student safety.



Sending an invitation

Men in Istanbul took to the streets wearing skirts on Saturday 21 February to protest at the brutal rape and murder of Ozgecan Aslan on 11 February. The action came after men in Azerbaijan and Turkey tweeted photos of themselves in skirts holding signs in solidarity with Ozgecan. One protester explained "if a miniskirt is responsible for everything, if [wearing] a miniskirt means immorality and unchastity, if a woman who wears a miniskirt is sending an invitation about what will happen to her, then we are also sending an invitation!"



London housing campaigns step up action

By Gemma Short

The occupation of the Guinness Trust estate in Brixton, South London, has ended after campaigners managed to stop the eviction of some residents and secured an agreement for shorthold tenants to be rehoused in secure Guinness Trust houses elsewhere in London.

Campaigners have vowed they will re-occupy if there are any further moves to evict the estate's 44 tenants.

A similar occupation continues at the Aylesbury Estate in Southwark, despite the best efforts of the police to carry out

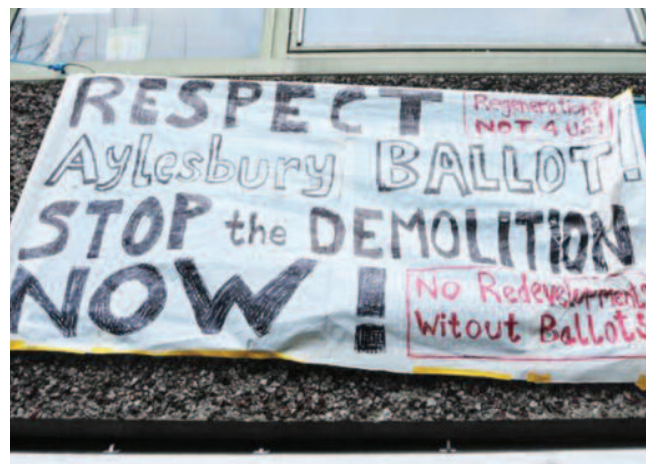
an eviction. Occupiers there are opposing the redevelopment of the site. Southwark Defend Council Housing has called a demonstration on 14 March

On Monday 23 February housing activists from across London gathered at City Hall to protest at rents, lack of council housing and private property developers profiteering. The protest coincided with Boris Johnson delivering his budget.

Residents of Sweets Way estate in Barnet and their supporters are continuing to resist evictions from the estate. And campaigners at the West Hendon estate also in Barnet are continuing to protest against the redevelopment of their estate which sees the loss of hundreds of council homes.

Similarly residents at Fred and John towers in Waltham Forest are resisting the redevelopment of the towers, which sees the loss of 70 council homes, with forced relocation of residents outside of the area.

- Find out more:
Radicalhousingnetwork.org
Lambeth housing activists: bit.ly/Lambeth-housing
Our West Hendon campaign: bit.ly/West-Hendon
Southwark Defend Council Housing: bit.ly/Southwark-Housing



£27 billion for landlords

By Gerry Bates

Private landlords gain about £27 billion a year from housing benefit and tax breaks, according to the Generation Rent lobby group.

There are about 1.6 million buy-to-let landlords in the UK, and about 4.75 million households rent from them. Numbers both of landlords and of private tenants are rising.

The £27 billion total comes from:
£9.3 billion of housing benefit

£1.69 billion of "wear-and-tear" tax relief landlords can claim on their

properties

£6.63 billion of tax that landlords do not have to pay on mortgage interest payments

£9.06 billion of tax landlords do not pay on their annual average capital gains

Generation Rent estimates the landlords' total annual income at £77.7 billion — £42.3 billion in rent and £35.4 billion in rising house prices.

In 2013, just 22,510 new social homes were built, out of a total of 109,640 newbuilds. There are about 610,000 empty homes in England.

Lewisham vs Academies

By Lewisham teacher

On Thursday 12 February Governors of the three schools in the Prendergast/Leathersellers Federation, in Lewisham, voted to press on with their plans to turn their schools in to academies.

This despite the fact they have carried out no meaningful consultation with the parents, students or the staff at the schools.

Fortunately teachers in the schools did not wait until for this decision to start a fight against the proposals.

On the same day the decision was taken, NUT members at the three schools and at Sedgemoor School struck against the threat. Only a few classes

ran in each of the schools.

Picket lines were well supported and lively. Teachers in the NASUWT and ATL, as well as support staff in the GMB, are balloting to join strike action in support of action their colleagues in the NUT are taking.

This would give a huge boost to what is already an impressive campaign. The campaign has seen off a threat to academisation at another school in the borough, Bonus Pastor.

It has also dissuaded the council's preferred academy partner, Bethnal Green Academy, from playing a role in the academisation of Sedgemoor.

- Find out more on Facebook: Stop Academies in Lewisham.

Self-serving greedy pigs!

By Charlotte Zeleus

Two politicians, and former foreign secretaries, from both the Tory and Labour parties, have been caught by undercover journalists hawking their "expertise" and "connections" for thousands of pounds.

Labour's Jack Straw has resigned from the Parliamentary Labour Party, and Tory Sir Malcolm Rifkind has resigned as chair of Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee and intends to step down as MP at the general election. Both have referred themselves to the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner.

In a film, secretly recorded by Channel 4's *Dispatches* program, Straw claimed that he was paid £60,000 a year by a commodity firm to use his influence "under the radar" to change European Union rules. He also claimed to have used "charm and menace" to convince the Ukrainian prime minister to change laws on behalf of the same firm.

Rifkind claimed he could "meet ambassadors" on behalf of the fictitious company journalists were posing as part of; he said he could write to ministers on behalf of the company.

Both politicians have insisted that they have not broken any parliamentary rules. This may well be the case, MPs are allowed to earn vast amounts outside of their MPs' salary and face very little restrictions in the work they do or services they offer.

Rifkind has insisted that MPs "cannot live on simply £60,000" a year, I wonder how he thinks the rest of us survive?



Edinburgh fights cuts

On 12 February 2015 the City of Edinburgh Council, a Labour-SNP coalition, passed a budget with £22 million of cuts which will see a reduction of 1200 jobs from the council workforce.

Fiona Menzies from Edinburgh East Save Our Services told *Solidarity*: "This did not go unmarked. Community and trade union activists both lobbied outside the council and delivered inspiring deputations inside. People can get some idea of the range of groups and the arguments being made by watching the deputations on the council webcam (bit.ly/edbgh-tv).

"There is without doubt a crisis in local government funding; but there is no opposition from Labour or the SNP. Both choose to describe cuts as savings. They try PR-spin to present what they're doing as positively

good, using language like 'community empowerment'.

"For example, the 'Neighbourhood Partnerships' have small amounts of money which they distribute to community groups. This year the council, in a clear abandonment of their own responsibility, will ask the public to vote on which groups get the money, removing any equalities framework for the allocation of this public money.

"In Edinburgh we've managed to maintain a good network of trade unions, the Trades Council, and community groups.

"Edinburgh East has been meeting fortnightly for almost three years since we set ourselves up to support the Unison anti-privatisation campaign, which won".

- Facebook: bit.ly/e-ac and bit.ly/ee-sos.

New hope on the Mexican left?

The Left
By Pablo Velasco

OPT

At a precipitous time in the history of Mexico, is the left finally getting its act together and forming a viable alternative?

Certainly Mexico is a state in crisis. Economically, it is suffering from the first wave of shocks as the oil price has slumped over the last six months. With oil a vital source of government revenue, both borrowing and debt are up and social welfare programmes under more pressure.

The economic malaise is much deeper. For three decades Mexico has been in the vanguard of neoliberal policy in Latin America. Since the debt crisis of the 1980s, the Mexican state has unleashed wave after wave of neoliberal policies — privatisations of most of the previously state-owned industry, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the maquiladora sweatshops, cuts in welfare subsidies and countless social services.

As a result Mexico is now a deeply unequal society. At the top, 27 billionaires rule the roost, among the highest number of any state anywhere across the globe. At the bottom, average wages are now lower than China, and over 50 million people (out of 120 million) living in poverty. An estimated 10% of Mexicans live in the US, a safety valve in Mexican society that is now being substantially reduced by the US state.

But Mexico is above all in political crisis. The ruling party, the PRI, was the longest serving party dictatorship in the world from the 1920s until 2000, when it lost the presidency. After two terms of the Catholic PAN, the PRI won back power in 2012. President Enrique Peña Nieto appeared to successfully press on with the neoliberal agenda in his first 18 months in office, but the veneer came off with a vengeance last year.

First, in September 2014 police apparently cooperating with drug dealers kidnapped and killed 43 students in the town of Iguala in the state of Guerrero. Protest demonstrations demanding that the students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College be returned alive, led by parents, students and teachers quickly spread to Mexico City and around the country. International solidarity saw demonstrations at embassies in several countries, including London.

HOME

At about the same time, it was revealed that the president and his wife Angélica Rivera occupied a home that was owned by a major government contractor, while Secretary of Finance Luis Videgaray had similarly bought a home from a contractor.

As Dan La Botz puts it in *Mexico Labor News & Analysis*, these events — the killings, the role of the police, and the corruption at the highest levels of government — has also created an international preoccupation with the Mexican situation.

The crisis encompasses all the mainstream parties in Mexico. The bourgeois nationalist PRD, which split from the PRI in 1988, has been damaged because the local officials in Guerrero state involved in the kidnappings and killings were members of its organisation. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the PRD's founder and long-time presidential candidate, has left the party. Two years ago another high profile PRD leader, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, left to form a new party, MORENA.

The Mexican working class has been savagely exploited, and for decades for decades it has effectively been "un proletariado sin cabeza" (a proletariat without a head), in the words of writer José Revueltas. However there some optimistic signs that the revolutionary left is at last getting its act together.

According to a report in Australian socialist journal *Links*, the Organización Política del Pueblo y los Trabajadores, OPT (People's and Worker's Political Organisation), held its first national congress in Mexico City on 12-13 December 2014. Founded in 2011, the party now has local branches registered in 16 of Mexico's 32 states. According to organisers, 200 members attended the convention held in the headquarters of the militant Mexican Electricians Trade Union (SME). The SME's secretary general and OPT national committee mem-

ber Martín Esparza Flores gave the opening address.

The OPT programme roundly denounces the PRI, the PAN and the PRD as conspirators in passing the laws that have gutted the constitution. This is important because in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Fourth International-led PRT, which had six MPs and thousands of members, squandered its independence by backing the PRD. This led to splits and its dissolution into fragments.

However some delegates expressed contrasting positions on OPT's electoral stance, ranging from tactical alliances with the PRD or Morena where possible, to total abstention from the electoral arena. Mexican undemocratic federal laws requires parties to enrol tens of thousands of members spread over a majority of the states, making it difficult for them to develop. However the PRT, in its day, was able to utilise elections to organise for working class political representation.

The congress put forward three campaigns around which the OPT proposes unity on the left. These are: the boycott of payment of fees to the new electricity company; continue building a new workers' confederation; and to participate in the left unity congress called for later this month.

Elsewhere, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), remains the most significant organisation on the far left in Mexico. On 8 October last year, the EZLN mobilised 20,000 supporters to march in San Cristóbal de las Casas in support of the Ayotzinapa students. While the Zapatistas are strong in Chiapas, they do not play a significant role in the wider social and labour movements in Mexico. There are an estimated 40 armed guerrilla organizations in Mexico, notably the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) and the Popular Revolutionary Front (FPR). According to Dan La Botz, there are several other Trotskyist, Maoist and Guevarist guerrilla groups, but none seemed to play a major role in the new wave of demonstrations over the Ayotzinapa students.

The present crisis presents the Mexican left with an opportunity to thrive. Workers in North America and Europe should continue to make solidarity and direct links with these militants and activists.

• More information:
Mexican Labor News & Analysis —
www.ueinternational.org/MLNA/index.php



Activists protest at the disappearance of 43 student teachers

Hold them to account!

Letter



Omar Raii's article about free speech on University campuses (*Solidarity* 354) was written before a recent public exchange of letters over the issue.

A number of academics and activists like Peter Tatchell have signed a letter condemning what they called the "intimidation" of comedian Kate Smurthwaite (she had a gig at Goldsmiths Uni cancelled) and the attempt last month, to get the Cambridge Union (CU) to withdraw a speaking invitation to Germaine Greer (Greer has long been anti-trans). A letter signed by activists, answered the condemnation, and set the record straight.

Indeed, neither of these incidents were attempts to "no-platform".

Smurthwaite's gig was cancelled because no one wanted to hear her jokes. Feminists on campus had debated whether or not they wanted to co-host the show, but not, as had been reported, whether they wanted to no-platform Smurthwaite. Someone had suggested organising an alternative event if people didn't fancy going to see Smurthwaite.

In the case of Germaine Greer the CU was asked to withdraw the invitation; the CU declined. That was that, so the LGBT+ society and CU Student Union Women's Campaign organised an alternative event to discuss the history of trans feminism and how feminism can be made more trans-inclu-

sive. They thought it might have been an idea for the CU to celebrate some different kinds of "feminist icons" or give a platform to people who need it more than Germaine Greer. Totally fair enough.

Not inviting, withdrawing invitations in favour of doing something different, organising alternative events, or turning up to leaflet (as also happened in Cambridge) are not "no-platforming". So good people like Tatchell, and those who are rightly concerned about free speech on campuses, shouldn't get drawn into the hyperbole.

I do have a "but" here. Let me put it positively.

It *should* be part of our tactics to debate people like Greer. Her views on trans people are distasteful and frighteningly ignorant (e.g. "I don't believe there is such a thing as transphobia") but also illogical and easy to expose. By debate I do not mean engaging in "civilised" discussion, but intervening, vigorously, challenging, and holding Greer to account.

This wouldn't be a tactic that everyone would want to, or feel able to, participate in. But direct challenges *are* effective. I think in part activists have either have lost confidence in such tactics, or do not have much experience of it. We need to learn or relearn from past struggles.

As Pragna Patel — someone who has an exemplary record on taking risks in political activism and "speaking truth to power" — argues elsewhere in this paper, struggles for accountability have been key to changing society for the better.

Cathy Nugent, Lewisham

Greece: Blackmail and resistance

By Theodora Polenta

The “win-win” approach was always illusory: the approach aiming for an agreed solution beneficial for all, from the Greek worker to the Greek banker and investor to the Eurozone, ECB and EU, and the illusions that a “national” negotiating team (including even previous memorandum “enemies”) would deliver the desired outcome smoothly.

Driven by the logic of seeking this impossible harmonious agreement, the Syriza leaders:

- Dropped the aim of writing off the majority of the debt with a European Summit similar to the German in 1953;
- froze, instead of disbanding, the official privatisation agency Tapped;
- Made vague and contradictory statements about privatisations, which include Varoufakis supporting selling-off the railways for one euro and the privatisation of Piraeus and Thessaloniki Port Authorities;
- Signalled acceptance of the capitalist golden rules of primary surpluses.

All these moves undermined the stated intention of the government to abide by its commitments in the Thessaloniki declarations.

DUTY

It is the duty of the left inside and outside Syriza to strengthen the party operations and the channels of communications, restore the collective functioning of the party, and make the Syriza party capable of pushing the government “from below” and “from the left”.

After the Friday 20 February meeting with the eurozone finance ministers, prime minister Alexis Tsipras wrote:

“Yesterday Greece achieved an important and successful result in negotiations with Europe, in a tough and difficult, for the first time real, negotiation. We have set our goals, we kept it together, we were decisive but at the same time flexible. We reached our main goal at the end... We managed to win the battle, but not yet the war. The real difficulties, not only those having to do with the negotiations and with the relations with our partners, are ahead of us.

Twenty days ago we took over the country. A country which was at the edge, with no money and with lack of liquidity. And entrapped, at the same time, in an extremely tight deadline...

Yesterday we cancelled their plans. We overcame the plan of blind, conservative forces, inside and outside of the country, to cause asphyxiation to Greece on February 28.

Greece remains standing — and with its dignity intact. We proved that Europe stands for mutually beneficial compromises — not for doling out punishments...

The Eurogroup’s joint statement... cancels de facto the commitments of the previous government for cuts in salaries and pensions. For lay offs in the public sector.... It cancels austerity and the mechanisms that implement it, like the unrealistic primary surpluses, that in fact create recession.

This agreement creates the institutional framework for much-needed, progressive reforms concerning the fight against corruption and tax evasion, as well as reforming the State and public administration, and of course overcoming the humanitarian crisis, which we consider our primary responsibility.

Yesterday, we took a decisive step, leaving austerity, the Memoranda and the Troika behind... Yesterday was not the end of the negotiations. We will be entering a new, more substantive stage in our negotiations until we reach a final agreement to transition from the catastrophic policies of the Memoranda, to policies that will focus on development, employment and social cohesion”.

The “new Memorandum” outlined in emails by the outgoing ND finance minister, Gikas Hardouvelis, has been cancelled by the government. That is a huge relief for a lot of people. But the cuts in pensions will finally be undone only if the lenders are convinced that there will be more revenue coming from tax reform. The same goes for the public sector lay-offs.

The Greek government representatives argued that the reversal of the planned cut pensions, the reintroduction of the “13th month” of pensions, the reintroduction of collective bar-



Protesters gathered in Syntagma Square, Athens, to support a firm stand by the government in negotiations

gaining agreements, an increase of the minimum wage to €751 would not affect fiscal or financial stability. But only one way exists for these measures not to affect the stability of the capitalist system and the primary surplus: never to be implemented, even if they are legislated. Already the uplift of the minimum wage to 751 euros has been shifted from late March 2015 to the end of March 2016.

Without being maximalistic, and using as our measure the implementation of Syriza’s programmatic statements, which were endorsed by the majority of the Greek working class people and popular strata, an assessment of the published Eurogroup Statement shows that the Syriza leaders’ claims of success are hollow.

“1. The Eurogroup notes, in the framework of the existing arrangement, the request from the Greek authorities for an extension of the Master Financial Assistance Facility Agreement (MFFA), which is underpinned by a set of commitments. The purpose of the extension is the successful completion of the review on the basis of the conditions in the current arrangement, making best use of the given flexibility which will be considered jointly with the Greek authorities and the institutions. This extension would also bridge the time for discussions on a possible follow-up arrangement between the Eurogroup, the institutions and Greece”.

This makes clear that the request for an extension refers to the existing agreement which contains a number of commitments — previously known as the Memorandum. It says that for the next four months the Greek government is obliged to implement the commitments the Memorandum imposes.

“3. Only approval of the conclusion of the review of the extended arrangement by the institutions in turn will allow for any disbursement of the outstanding tranche of the current EFSF programme and the transfer of the 2014 SMP profits. Both are again subject to approval by the Eurogroup.”

Here things become very clear. Even the disbursement of the €1.9 billion held by the ECB and the eurozone Central Banks as profit from the Greek bonds they have bought, is dependent on the completion of an evaluation by “the institu-

tions” — what we used to call the Troika.

“4. In view of the assessment of the institutions the Eurogroup agrees that the funds, so far available in the HFSF buffer, should be held by the EFSF, free of third party rights for the duration of the MFFA extension. The funds continue to be available for the duration of the MFFA extension and can only be used for bank recapitalisation and resolution costs. They will only be released on request by the ECB/SSM”.

€10.8 billion euros already borrowed by the Greek people can be disbursed only after approval by the ECB and used only to recapitalise the banks. Syriza’s plans to use €3 billion of it for social relief are not valid any more.

“5. The Greek authorities reiterate their unequivocal commitment to honour their financial obligations to all their creditors fully and timely”.

NEGOTIATIONS

In negotiations, probably some compromises and diplomatic formalities were necessary.

This is something else; an absolute and unequivocal commitment by the government to meet all financial obligations fully and on time. It means that the Greek Government accepts the debt, and considers it sustainable and viable. This is in complete contradiction with both the pre-election commitments of Syriza and reality.

“6. The Greek authorities have also committed to ensure the appropriate primary fiscal surpluses or financing proceeds required to guarantee debt sustainability in line with the November 2012 Eurogroup statement. The institutions will, for the 2015 primary surplus target, take the economic circumstances in 2015 into account”.

This is the only positive part of the decision of the Eurogroup: for 2015 only, “the institutions”, i.e. the renamed Troika, will take into account the economic conditions for the determination of the primary surplus. Thereafter the Greek government is committed to having the required surplus for the payment of interest — around 4.5% of GDP.

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Solidarity will be taking a break next week.

Number 356 will be out on 11 March.

Greece: blackmail and resistance

Continued from page 5

"7. In light of these commitments, we welcome that in a number of areas the Greek policy priorities can contribute to a strengthening and better implementation of the current arrangement. The Greek authorities commit to refrain from any rollback of measures and unilateral changes to the policies and structural reforms that would negatively impact fiscal targets, economic recovery or financial stability, as assessed by the institutions".

Here the whole of Syriza's program is made subject to the Troika's approval. The increase in the minimum wage and the reinstatement of the collective bargaining agreements will "affect economic recovery", i.e. competitiveness as perceived by our creditors. Contrary to the Syriza leaders' reassurances that the bailout agreement would be negotiated independently from the Syriza's programmatic statements, this clause explicitly makes implementation or non-implementation of each of Syriza's commitments depend on how it is "assessed by the institutions".

Syriza Left Platform leader, and Minister of Productive Reconstruction, Panagiotis Lafazanis stressed that no agreement with the Eurogroup should cancel the radical anti-memorandum, progressive orientation of the government. "The red lines should ensure that any agreement will not create any obstacles to the government's fundamental commitments of its electoral and programmatic statements". He insisted that "the government has not abandoned the demand to write off the majority of the Greek debt and ask for an EU summit for the restructuring of the debt".

He stated that "DEH [electricity supply], DESMHE [grid operator], and DEPA [gas supply] will not be privatised and will remain under public ownership and management and will work under developmental and social criteria." He pledged that the ports of Piraeus and Thessaloniki, and the Greek railways, will not be privatised.

Deputy Minister for Administrative Reform George Kastroulas stated that he will leave the government if the cleaners are not re-instated.

TRAP

But the government's leaders have led it into a trap.

The Thessaloniki declaration included four pillars at a cost for the first year as follows:

- €1.9 billion to address the humanitarian crisis
- €6.5 billion to restart the economy with tax cuts, establishment of the Development Bank, and an increase of the minimum wage to €751
- €3 billion in the first year and another €2 billion in the second for 300,000 jobs through a Public Employment Programme.
- Transformation of the political system with interventions in local government and in parliament.

The planned sources of funding were:

- €3 billion — settlement of debts to the tax office
- €3 billion — combatting fraud and smuggling
- €3 billion — Financial Stability Fund
- €3 billion — ESPA and other European programs

The Eurogroup's statement immediately excludes the utilisation of the €3 billion from the EFSF, and it does not look likely that the EU will give us money to finance Syriza's anti-austerity program.

The "hard" attitude in Brussels shows that for the EU the issue is both political and economic: the elimination of any notion of popular sovereignty and the simultaneous imposition of a particular model of extreme neo-liberalism. It is not that the EU could not afford some billions for Greece; it is that the EU leaders want to avoid any signal to other EU working classes that struggle, and left electoral victories, can reverse the cuts.

In the Eurogroup statement there is no mentioning of debt relief or restructuring. That leads many to say that the battle will be taking place in the future. But the lenders are the winners, as they still apply all the conditions of the existing loan agreements. The lenders did not want to change anything on the debt repayments. Instead, it was the Greek side that wanted to change something. The absence of change is a vic-

tory for the lenders.

If the Greek government is not able to extract a concession on some form of debt relief when it has a fresh popular mandate, above-80% endorsement, and rallies of support around the world, when will it be? In what ways will its negotiating position be strengthened in the next four months?

The government is not entitled to claim that the Memoranda have finished and that the Troika has left the country. Just the opposite has happened. The current government has signed a cancellation of the implementation of the mandate received by the working class and the poor popular strata on 25 January 25, and of its programmatic statements recently approved by the parliament. Later attempts to negotiate will be more difficult from now on, after the government's disorderly retreat.

The Greek government has been the victim of relentless and outright extortion, lacking all the weapons available to counteract it (nationalisation of the banks without compensation under worker's control, control of capital movements, default or pause on debt repayments, being prepared for a Plan B and a forced euro/EU exit). In defence of the Eurogroup statement, the leadership of Syriza and some of its friends argue that the main achievement of the agreement is the gaining of time. One can legitimately do what with the gained time? What exactly will change in the next four months, so that the new negotiation with our partners will take place under better conditions? What will prevent the deterioration of the political, economic and social situation of the country?

The anti-memorandum movement, the combative working class movement, Syriza's members, and Syriza's organisations need to realise the tremendous responsibility they have shouldered.

The combative working class and the broader anti-memorandum movement should not "sign up" for the government's agreement with the eurozone, and should not accept the consequences of the four-month extension of the Memorandum and of Troika supervision.

In today's conditions, the application of Syriza's reformist program to aid the income and rights of the working class people and popular strata, and to achieve a preliminary transfer of wealth from the ruling to the working class majority, directly requires revolutionary ruptures and preparation to confront the EU, the IMF, Greek capitalism, and the bourgeois state. It requires a government created by the workers themselves, based on their own structures and systematic mobilisations.

Oust now the nationalist and pro-capitalist government ministers!

For a government based on mass organisations of workers, unemployed, neighbourhood community movements, peasants!

Self-organisation and self-defence of the people against paramilitary fascist gangs and against police attacks!

Nationalisation without compensation of the banks and the strategic pillars of the economy under workers' control and management; control of capital movements!

Call for internationalist revolutionary action to the workers of Europe!

The only way to reverse the effects of the Memorandum years is via an attack on capital, i.e. the "aggressive" taxation of both the "legitimate" and the "illegitimate" profits of the capitalist class. However, there are no signs that the government intends to open an interior class war against the Greek ruling class; instead, it temporarily seeks a united front with such Greek ruling-class forces as it can persuade, claiming that this enables it to negotiate better with the international ruling class.

Those who dreamed of progress through harmonious negotiations have been refuted. The future requires conflict across the length and breadth of the Greek society and internationally. Syriza's rank and file should remind the leadership of the party and the government what Syriza's program stated in last year's European elections:

"We pledge to deal with potential threats and blackmail from the lenders with all possible weapons that we can muster, and we are ready to take up any conflict, confident that the Greek people will support us".



"Unity and co

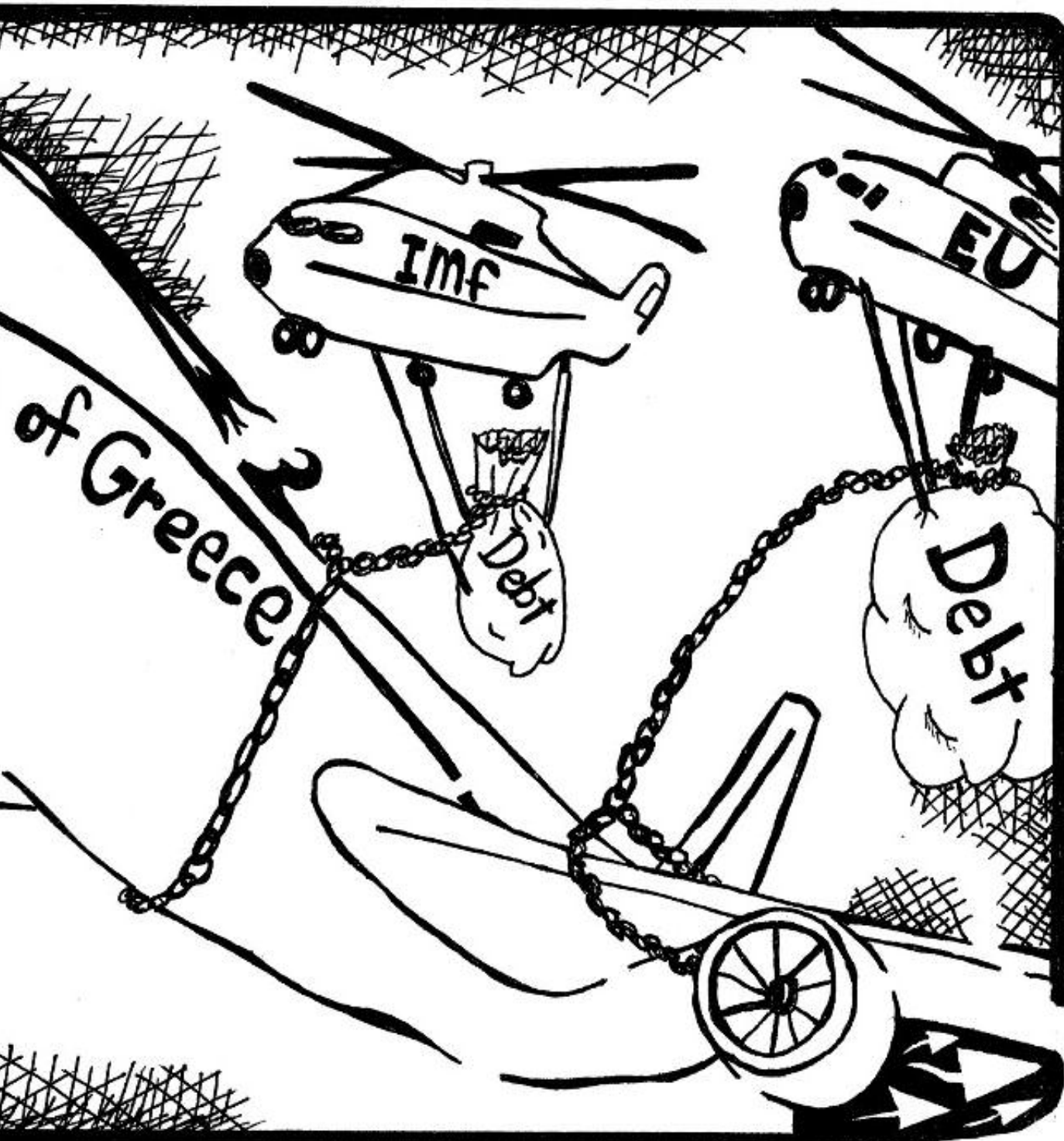
By Theodora Polenta

Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis characterised Wednesday 18 February as an "historic day", as a Left Government voted alongside ND (Greek equivalent of the Tories) for the election of a Tory (although moderate Tory) President. Two red lines were crossed at the same time.

The government renounced its opportunity to elect for the first time a left-wing President, thus emphasising symbolically a break from the past. In fact, the co-habiting of a left government with a centre-right President symbolises an era of political conciliation.

Under the Constitution the President has the power to block bills and in crisis to convene a summit of political leaders. He can hold a sword over the head of a Left that does not have an absolute majority of seats in parliament.

As with the government's handling of the negotiations with the eurozone, the presidential election showed increasing autonomy for the circle around the Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Finance Minister Varoufakis from Syriza's central and executive committees. This sort of thing is a common phenomenon in bourgeois parties, but, for the radical left, the



Greek regime submits its list

By Colin Foster

The Greek government sent “a first comprehensive list of reform measures it is envisaging” to the euro-zone finance ministers on 22 February, and the finance ministers accepted them on 23 February.

The list started with a promise of better tax collection and administration. It promised “cost-saving measures” in public spending, mostly by “rationalisation of non-salary and non-pension expenditures”. It says the Greek government will “reform the public-sector wage grid... without reducing the current wage floors but safeguarding that the public sector’s wage bill will not increase”.

Whatever that means exactly, it rules out reversal of the large cuts made to public-sector jobs and wages.

It includes a promise “to avoid, in the forthcoming period, auctions of the main residence of households [in debt] below a certain income threshold”. It restates the promise to “raise minimum wages”, but now says it will be “over time” and “in a manner that safeguards competitiveness”.

The list commits the government “not to roll back privatisations that have been completed”, and to continue privatisations with each “case examined separately and on its merits”.

• bit.ly/varo-23-2



Prokopis Pavlopoulos

Consensus”, or struggle?

de-activation of Syriza as a party in the name of urgency in negotiations will have dire consequences.

Alexis Tsipras discussed his decision to propose Prokopis Pavlopoulos as President with Syriza’s parliamentary group and not with Syriza’s elected committees. The Left Platform voiced its principled disagreement and suggested a President from the Left, but in the end it “supported the government” and voted for Prokopis Pavlopoulos. Gianna Giatani from Thessaloniki A, a Syriza MP who is a member of the Trotskyist group DEA as well as the Left Platform, issued a statement of conscious political abstention. The “Communist Tendency” of Syriza, which does not have an MP, issued a political statement condemning the class-collaborationist approach.

VOTE

295 MPs were present for the vote. 233 (ND-Syriza) voted for Prokopis Pavlopoulos, and 30 voted for Nikos Alivizatos, supported by Pasok and Potami. 32 abstained, with the KKE (Communist Party) following its usual practice in presidential elections.

Kyriakos Mitsotakis, a former minister considered to representing the ultra-neoliberal wing of ND, also abstained. The election of Prokopis Pavlopoulos is said to mark the opening

of a communication channel between the government and the so-called “Karamanlis” tendency of ND.

Syriza’s conduct in the presidential election is in direct contradiction with the decisions of several local organisations of Syriza’s rank and file, of various Syriza regional committees, and of the central committee of Syriza’s youth.

The Syriza leaders portrayed Prokopis Pavlopoulos as a gentle man, one of the most moderate politicians within the Tory party, and a well respected academic. All true, up to a point. On the other hand, Prokopis Pavlopoulos supported all the Memoranda and was the Interior and Public Order minister when Alexandros Grigoropoulos was murdered.

In his speech to the parliamentary group of Syriza, Alexis Tsipras said he sympathised with the wish of the Left Platform and the majority of the Syriza’s rank and file will to elect a President from the Left; but, he said, “the unity of our people is now more necessary than ever” and the “widest possible social and political consensus” was necessary to deal with the negotiations.

Since when the unity of the people is identified and interlinked in collaboration with the enemies of the people?

No doubt against the blackmail of the capitalist leaders, the maximum possible unity of workers, unemployed, youth and

popular strata is necessary. But the recent polls show that Syriza’s initial defiant attitude in negotiations won the support of the overwhelming majority of the Greek people, even those who voted for rival parties.

Between 12 and 17 February, 80% of the Greek people approved of the Syriza’s government handling of negotiations. 73% of the people considered Tsipras to be the most appropriate Prime Minister (as opposed to 12% for Samaras to be the most appropriate Prime Minister), and 75% had a positive opinion of Varoufakis.

Syriza’s and the government’s popularity was strengthened when they made a strong stand against the lenders, in conflict and not in harmony with Samaras, Venizelos and their parties.

The Memoranda have not affected all the “Greek people” equally. The Memoranda have increased the transfer of wealth from the working class to the capitalist class.

The ship owners, the industrialists, the big business, the bankers, the “national” Greek bond-holders, the capitalists in general, have benefited by the Memoranda, have seen their profit grow, and have greeted with satisfaction the anti-labour laws “achieved” under the Memoranda.

Greece: Five questions that demand an answer

By Costas Lapavistas, socialist economist and Syriza MP

The Eurogroup agreement has not been concluded, in part because we do not yet know what “reforms” will be proposed by the Greek government today (Monday 23 February) and which ones of those will eventually be accepted.

However, those of us that have been elected based on the program of Syriza, and see the announcements made at Thessaloniki [i.e. the “Thessaloniki Program”] as pledges that we have promised to the Greek people, we have deep concerns. It is our duty to write them down.

The general program of the agreement is as follows:

- Greece asks for the extension of the current loan support agreement, which is based on a series of commitments. The goal of this extension is to allow for the conclusion of the assessment of the current agreement and to give time for a possible new agreement.
- Greece will immediately submit a list of “reforms”, which will be assessed by the “institutions” and which will eventually be agreed on April. If the assessment is positive, then money that have not yet been given by the current agreement will be released, together with the returns from the earnings of the ECB.
- The current funds of the HFSF will be used exclusively for the needs of the banks and will be out of Greek control.
- Greece commits to fulfill fully and swiftly all of its financial obligations towards its partners.
- Greece commits to ensure “adequate” primary surpluses in order to guarantee the sustainability of the debt on the basis of the Eurogroup decisions in November 2012. The surplus for 2015 will take into consideration the economic circumstances of 2015.
- Greece will not withdraw measures, will not commit any unilateral changes that may have a negative effect on the fiscal targets, the economic recovery, or the financial stability, as they will be assessed by the “institutions”.

On this basis, Eurogroup will begin the national procedures for the 4-month extension of the current agreement and it asks from the Greek government to begin quickly the procedure for the successful completion of its evaluation.

PLEDGE

It is difficult for anyone to see how the announcements made in Thessaloniki – which include the write-off of the biggest part of the debt and the direct replacement of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) – can be implemented through this agreement.

Those of us who got elected with Syriza pledged that we would continue with the implementation of the National Plan regardless of the negotiations for the debt, because we deem it necessary for the restart of the economy and the relief of the society. It is necessary, therefore, to explain how these will be implemented and how the new government will be able to change the tragic situation that it inherited.

In order to be more specific, the National Plan included four

pillars with the following costs for the first year:

- Addressing the humanitarian crisis (1.9bn euros)
- Restarting of the economy with tax breaks, adjustment of “red loans,” creation of a Growth Bank, increase of the minimum wage to 751 euros (total of 6.5bn euros).
- Program of Public Employment for 300,000 new jobs (3bn euros for the first year, and 2bn euros for the second).
- Transformation of the political system with interventions in the local government and in the parliament.

The sources of funding, again, for the first year had been calculated as follows:

- Clearing outstanding debts towards the tax authority (3bn euros)
- Combatting tax-evasion and smuggling (3bn euros)
- HFSF (Hellenic financial stability fund) (3bn euros)
- ESPA and other European programs (3bn euros)
- Given now the Eurogroup announcement, I ask:

How will the National Plan for Reconstruction be funded, when the 3bn euros of the HFSF are now out of the control of the Greek government? Taking away these funds makes the collection of large sums of money from tax evasion and debt-clearing even more necessary, in a very short period of time. How realistic is such a prospect?

How will the debt cut-off proceed, when Greece pledges to complete fully and swiftly all of its financial obligations towards its partners?

How will the end of austerity come about, when Greece pledges to succeed in achieving “appropriate” primary surpluses in order for the current humongous debt to be made ‘sustainable’? The “sustainability” of the debt — as it used to be estimated by the Troika — was exactly the cause for this unreasonable hunt for primary surpluses. Since the debt will not be lowered substantially how will there stop being primary surpluses that are catastrophic for the Greek economy and constitute the essence of austerity?

How will any progressive change proceed in the country, when the “institutions” will be exercising a harsh monitoring and will forbid unilateral moves? Will the “institutions” allow



Syriza election posters promised “hope is coming”

for the implementation of the ‘Thessaloniki’ pillars, given that they have an direct, or indirect budgetary cost?

What exactly will change in the next four months of this ‘extension,’ such that the new negotiation with our partners will happen under a better position? What will put a stop in the worsening of the political, economic, and social situation in our country?

These moments are absolutely crucial for the society, the nation, and of course the Left. The democratic legitimization of the government is based on Syriza’s program. The least that is needed is for us to have an open discussion within the party and in the Parliamentary Group.

It is necessary to give substantial answers immediately to these questions, in order to retain the large support and the dynamism given to us by the Greek people. The answers that will be given in the upcoming time period will decide the future of the country and of the society.

• From bit.ly/costas-1 (on 23 February)

Another Brest-Litovsk?

By Colin Foster

No small country, and in fact no country at all, can simply defy and ignore the pressures of the capitalist world market, not unless it wants to reduce itself to a pauperised, shut-off condition.

It would be wrong and demagogic to denounce the Greek government just for trying to do a deal with the eurozone leaders, the European Central Bank, and the IMF. It is even more demagogic to say that it could have an easy way out of the difficulties just by quitting the European Union.

A Greece having quit the EU would still have to find ways of dealing with the capitalist world market. It would still have to seek credits and trading agreements. It would do so with added difficulties, since its new currency would lose relative value quickly (at least in the short term). It would be hard for the government even to get its new currency accepted within the country; and the government would still face demands that it repay its debts in euros, or be cut off from credit.

Equally, a Greek government which aims only at getting a better deal with the eurozone leaders, without any “plan B” which it can use to apply pressure on those leaders, is unlikely to get that better deal. Only defiance, threat, and wide international solidarity could win a passable deal.

The problem about the Greek government’s deal with the eurozone finance ministers is not just that it is less than the Greek government hoped for.

The problem is three things. One, that the deal not only obliges the Greek government to make payments to Euro-

pean high finance, but gives that high finance (through the EU/ ECB/ IMF “Troika”, renamed “the institutions”) a veto over how the government conducts itself in the class struggle within Greece.

Two: that the government did the deal only by bypassing the democracy of Syriza, and presenting Syriza’s members and voters with a fait accompli. It did the deal without trying any of the gambits which even mainstream economists have proposed as ways of putting pressure on the euro-leaders: creating new domestic credit by printing government IOUs; nationalising the banks; imposing capital controls; cutting military spending; introducing new taxes on the rich; pausing payments on the debt.

Three: that the government has called the deal a success.

After the Russian workers’ revolution of 1917, the workers’ government had to do a deal which conceded large territories to imperialist Germany, the Brest-Litovsk treaty.

But it signed the Brest-Litovsk treaty only after long and vigorous debate in the soviets and the Bolshevik party.

It gave imperialist Germany no veto over the government’s alignment with the working class in the class struggle within Russia.

Trotsky, who negotiated at Brest-Litovsk on behalf of the workers’ government, did not claim success, but declared to the German government: “the peace you have forced upon us is a peace of force and robbery”.

Syriza MP Stathis Kouvelakis has written: “Presenting a defeat as ‘success’ is perhaps much worse than the defeat... If the treaty of Brest-Litovsk... had been declared a ‘victory’, there is no doubt that would have led to the defeat of the October Revolution”.

“Greece 2012-2014: views and reports from the Greek left”

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Listen to the left in the Middle East!

Gona Saed from the Kurdish and Middle Eastern Womens Organisation spoke to Omar Raii.

Daesh (Islamic State) has been strategically defeated and driven away in Kobane, and in major areas in Shan-gal, but they still exist in some surrounding villages and are still a big threat. They occupy many cities in Syria and Iraq, they launch attacks here and there; recently they attacked the city of Kirkuk in north Iraq. They were defeated, but there are reports of them putting together forces to attack again.

Not many [independent] reports have come out, but we have seen how Daesh behave in their own propaganda and publications, how they have enforced the most barbaric rules for people living under their control. For example, that women must wear the niqab or burka, women can't go out without a male guardian, women can't be treated by male doctors.

They prohibit men shaving, they have closed down all barber shops, and they have publicly stoned women for "adultery". They recently threw an elderly man from a high building, accusing him of being homosexual. They killed a group of young men for watching football. We have seen their outrageous manifesto for women [marriage at nine, women's role is to be a mother, education up to 15]. Most people living under Daesh are in total fear, even those Sunnis who in some ways welcomed them when they first attacked Mosul city [June 2014], thinking that this force will save them from the persecution of Iraq's majority Shia government.

In Kobane and Rojava women had and still have a great role in the armed resistance. The social contract — some call it the "Equality Law" — from the Jazira canton [guaranteed equality, free marriage, prohibition of polygamy, passed November 2014], is clear evidence of the lasting effect of women's participation in armed resistance: being in the front line in Kobane has also brought a political victory for women.

This has not been the same in Iraqi Kurdistan, where women are also fighting Daesh. Women don't play the same role because the resistance to Daesh is controlled by the two ruling parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

In their 23 years of governing Iraqi Kurdistan, the KDP and PUK have not allowed women to fully participate in any areas of the social, political and economic administration of society. There are around 600 women peshmergas in Iraqi Kurdistan, but they are not equally trained; nor do the KDP and PUK depend on them as a fighting force.

PATRIARCHAL

The two ruling parties never gave women a real say or role, never empowered women to play the same role as women in Kobane.

Both parties have been very patriarchal in their structure and policies and therefore discriminate against women. Also Islam as a religion and the influence of political Islamist politics plays a significant role in their laws, and policies on every level. They have encouraged Islamists in making laws over women's freedom and participation; this has driven the whole of society into being very conservative, traditional and reactionary towards women.

Although the women of Kobane have inspired many young women in Iraqi Kurdistan to participate in the resistance, they are neither encouraged nor given the opportunity to do this.

There are some very good signs of people's power and women's role in Rojava administration. There are also signs of participation of all people as equal citizens despite ethnic and religious differences. I think all these signs are positive and should be celebrated. But there are still questions around Kurdish nationalism and its political parties; when they take power they don't allow much freedom to opposition political parties to operate freely and openly. This is certainly our experience in Iraqi Kurdistan and it has been an issue with the PKK in the past.

But it is hard to make an assessment because of war and uncertainty. I think there will be problems in Rojava once there is peace and their power has been established. But for now I think the administration should be supported and defended, not only because it resisted Daesh but also because it is one of the most progressive administrations in the whole



Gona Saed speaking at a meeting in Parliament calling for support for Kurdish people in Kobane

region

I think the left in the west has taken little interest in the rise of Daesh for various reasons. The left is not strong enough to make an international stand against this capitalist system as a whole; it is lacking an international leadership that could analyse and understand the global capitalist system and the way it works.

It is very clear that this has limited their ability to understand the role of political Islam and its place in backing up the maintenance of the global capitalist system.

Secondly I think the left is still very traditional and religiously ideological, dogmatic, in its approach to the new world order and today's capitalist system.

Third I think the left is still too occupied with their traditional resistance to the role of imperialism. This of course had its significance and necessity up until a few decades ago, but now America and other western (former direct imperialists) have now changed how they control global politics, resources and economy that they need political Islam (states, religious parties or terroristic groups) to have that control over the rich Middle East.

The left lacks the understanding that all political Islamic states, forces and oppositions have been either created, or supported by America and the west.

POLITICAL ISLAM

To me as a Middle Eastern person, and millions like me, political Islam does not represent our societies.

The bottom line is if the left in the west still have any belief in socialism, equality and a workers' state, it is time they listened to the left from the Middle East and not to religious or nationalist groups or movements who are allies of capitalists in the west.

For Kurdish communists, freedom is the right of people to determine their political future; we have advocated a referendum since the early 1990s for Kurdish people in north Iraq so they can decide whether they wanted to stay with Iraq or to be independent. We believe that we should go by what people decide, the same as people in Scotland or south Sudan.

For the nationalist parties Kurdish freedom and independence is only a playing card; this was proved at least twice in Iraqi Kurdistan in the last 23 years, since the KDP and PUK have been ruling Iraqi Kurdistan. They use independence in negotiations to gain more power, money and secure economic deals such as oil deals; they do this for their sectarian parties or the coalition government. They are not interested in independence or solving people's problems and sufferings. Since 2003 the KDP and PUK and all other parties that more recently started to share government with them are very keen on federalism for Iraq. The PKK showed a different approach in Rojava, but we are still very far away from

being able to assess that at this time. Things could change and in different ways.

Nationalists have sacrificed women's rights issues politically. In their sectarian competitions over political and economic power and votes they long relied on two bases: religious and tribes. We know that both these groupings have patriarchal values and are discriminative against women.

Women's rights have been attacked in every way; the most reactionary traditions and norms have been brought back to life. Relying on values of patriarchy and Islam for regulations and legislation, they have pushed the society's progressiveness back decades.

And then there has been the rise of Islamic parties, many Islamic TV and radio stations, hundreds of workers of literature and over 5,000 mosques giving conservative, religious and anti-women's rights messages every Friday to over 600,000 men.

The result is that we have had the phenomenon of honour killing that took the lives of thousands of women, also self-immolation and suicide is very widespread amongst women; violence against women has risen rapidly.

It is different for women in Turkish Kurdistan and Rojava of course, as women have been active participants in the nationalist movement. I think women's participation has forced the PKK to take women's rights and roles seriously.

Women's issues have been in the forefront of communist activism since the establishment of our forces in Iraqi Kurdistan

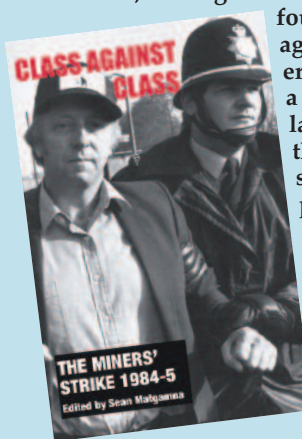
In the 1990s the socialist movement played a big role in highlighting women's issues, calling for equality, mobilising women in their own organisations, supporting women who faced violence, having a radical newspaper called *Equality* and announcing a shadow Personal Statutes law called the "equality law" in opposition to Iraqi personal statutes law that allowed for polygamy and honour killings.

• More information: www.kmewo.org

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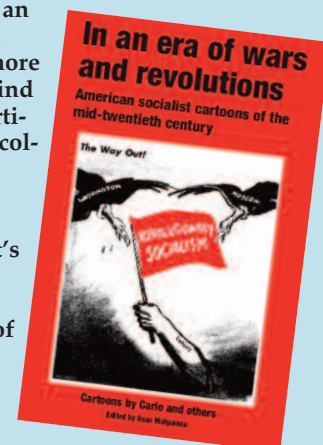
In 1984-5, mining communities all over Britain

fought a year-long battle against Thatcher's Tory government. Their fight remains a source of inspiration for the labour movement, and for those who want a democratic socialist world free of exploitation and oppression.



This new edition of *Class against class* features an addition on the role of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners during the strike.

A few bold strokes by an artist can convey an idea more vividly and fix it more firmly in the viewer's mind than an editorial or an article would. The cartoons collected here depict US politics, workers' struggles, America's "Jim Crow" racism, Roosevelt's "New Deal" and Harry Truman's "Fair Deal", and Stalinism in its era of greatest prestige and triumph, as revolutionary socialists saw them at the time.



www.workersliberty.org/books

Why I'm not voting Green this May

A letter to my Green friends by Andy Forse

What kind of a society would you like to live in?

The world I want to live in would have things like rail, energy and other basic industries socialised, owned by and run in the interests of society. It would have an education system freed from the interests of business and profit, and funded entirely by progressive taxation. Public services would be run by the people who work in them and the community they serve, not by executives on six or seven figure salaries, drawn from an Oxbridge elite.

I'd like constituents to be able to recall their MPs from parliament, and a much fuller democracy than today's, with the economy democratically-controlled by workers through their workplaces. I'd like to see the liberalisation of unnecessary drug laws and a greener economy that doesn't exploit, pollute and destroy the environment.

If someone with these views makes their choice in voting by reading through the policies of the main political parties, they might see the Green Party's manifesto and jump into bed with them quicker than you can say "petit bourgeois". In fact there are all sorts of tests you can take online to see which party you are closest to, to save you the bother of reading the manifestos. But while that might seem like a good way to make a decision and a good decision to take, history demonstrates that politics is not straightforward.

Political parties do not stick to manifestos. Political change is not won through simply the act of voting, or even being a member of a political party. Struggle, activism, organisation and working hard to call politicians to account is the way to make change.

CAPITALISM

Since early on in the history of the capitalist system, working-class organisations and socialist thinkers saw how the working class was at the mercy of grinding poverty, workhouses, child-labour, and murderous imperialist wars.

They thought these phenomena were not accidental; they were the result of huge imbalances of power that emanated from the class structure of society which dis-empowered workers and gave undue advantage to their masters.

With inspiration from Marxist and many other socialist ideas (including what we would call today anarchist) they forged networks of institutions, methods and practices — trade unions, international labour congresses, workers' education schools, the Labour Party and much in between.

Through these organisations the working class have been able to express their interests and win lasting gains for the whole of society. The welfare state, the NHS, weekends, the eight-hour day, the abolition of child labour and more recently LGBT rights, and for some, a living wage. All has been won in the heat of class struggle, sometimes as compromises from the elite aimed at quelling the surges of encroaching democracy and workers' power.

These institutions, ideas and methods that the working class has developed have always been at the centre of general progress towards equality and liberation. Their success is down to the fact that they fight their battles over the most central fulcrum of capitalist power, at the foundational level of the capitalist system — inside workplaces. It is here where wealth is created, the accumulation of profit takes place and the essentials of the system are reproduced.

Whereas once this location was the site of unfettered exploitation in Europe and North America, now, there is some protection won by collective industrial action. But also, in the major unions, there exists a democratic chain — however bureaucratised, and limited — through a hierarchy of structures, that link the worker from their productive activities on the shop floor, to the policies that the Labour Party commits to in its manifesto.

As well as the union being a means of self-defence through industrial action and so forth, it is also a conduit through which the specific interests of the working class majority can potentially be transmitted into Parliament. The importance of this structural relationship between the workplace, the unions and the Parliamentary system was understood even before the majority of men (and long before the majority of women) had the right to vote; indeed, such collective action was decisive to winning the right to vote in the first place.

The contest for democracy and economic equality takes



place primarily in the workplace through the unions, and secondarily through the ballot box.

Simply throwing one's weight behind the union movement is not adequate. The movement is stifled by layers of bureaucracy, which often hinder the escalation of challenges to bosses' rule. Socialists see it as their job as activists to break down this bureaucracy, make officials accountable, and instill democracy in the union from the ground upwards, as well as pushing policy that strengthens the solidarity of the working class.

Without voting Labour, none of the struggles going on in the trade unions — against the privatisation of the NHS, for the living wage, anti-austerity agendas, against fracking, and for workers' rights — will have the potential to realise themselves at the highest political level, at the level of government.

It is here, in the labour movement, where the potential exists to radically shift the scales of power. Simply having a radical manifesto and trying to get elected, like the Greens, is not a strategy that can have any effect in curtailing the vast power of the capitalist class — we need a movement that is combative, and rooted in the logic of class struggle if we are going to do that.

It is on this basis by which socialists and trade unionists have conducted their struggle for the last two centuries, and this struggle has proved the most progressive of any social movement ever, reaching into every country in the world, and stretching back to the beginning of our advanced civilisation. Of course, this grandest of social movements has been pushed back in the last two decades. As part of the neo-liberal assault workers' rights have been eroded, trade union rights attacked, and all major parties, including Labour, have been dragged to the right. Complicit in this are the trade union leaders who've offered little more than a sullen fight against Labour's leaders. But yet the battles for democracy still go on.

The central argument here is not of unquestioning allegiance to Labour, but of the importance of reinvigorating the institutions of the left, bequeathed to us by the wrenching battles for democracy that were fought over the 20th century. For socialists who fight within it, the Labour Party is not the be-all-and-end-all; it is one important tool through which we execute our struggle, because of its position in relation to the working class and trade unions. The Green Party cannot fulfill this role that a workers' party must play in the movement. Indeed, there may well come a time soon when the Blairite coup inside Labour is completed, and all ties to the workers' movement are severed; but in the meantime the only logical course of action is to exhaust the battles that need to be fought. If they are lost, then the answer is a new party — a new political outlet for the workers' movement, not a foray into the populist eco-liberal territory of the Greens.

The shift to the right in the general political landscape, and a period of lull and defeat for the left in the labour movement is the context for the rising popularity of the Green Party. Lefty, libertarian minded folk without a political home are gravitating towards the only obvious available electoral op-

tion for their beliefs. But while I can sympathise with this, it doesn't make sense.

The critical factor in changing society is the ability to alter the balance of forces between the two main classes in our favour, The Green Party, with no structural connection to the trade union movement, or democratic link to the working class, has no potential to seriously fight the concentrated power of the ruling class and implement their reformist manifesto. If they attempted to do something like nationalise the energy industry, or scrap Trident, the elite would go nuts and do everything in their power to paralyse or eject the government using a variety of dirty tricks.

For example, financial institutions might call an investment strike, grinding the economy to a halt. They might even use the monarchy and archaic constitutional laws to throw them out, like the Queen's Governor General did to Australia's Labor Government in 1975. In Britain under Prime Minister Harold Wilson it was revealed that elements of the aristocracy and military had spoken of orchestrating a coup d'état against the reformist Labour Government whose policies were barely more radical than the Green Party's today.

Socialists argue that the key response to a counter assault is workers' solidarity, with the working class organised and poised to hit back through mass strikes or occupations, and if necessary self-defense militia and the initiation of mutinies in the armed forces to combat the threat the establishment's suppression.

ROOTS

With the accumulated knowledge of our movement's history, socialists consider these questions and debate them openly, but the Green Party has no roots in this movement, culturally or otherwise, and answers addressing crucial questions about how to mobilise the working class in this way are not something found in the Green Party's policies or internal political life.

It is instructive to look at the Greens' management of Brighton Council, to get an indication of how they operate in a position of power. Despite claiming to be an anti-austerity party, in 2013 the Green's minority led council constructed and voted through an austerity budget that made millions of pounds of cuts to front line services, and increased council tax for residents. Notably they attacked the pay of bin workers threatening to slash £4,000 from their annual paycheck. The bin workers and recycling staff fought back, and through their GMB union went on strike and occupied the offices of their employer; rubbish was left piled high on the streets. I don't think that the Greens made cuts because they are cunning and deceitful liars; rather because they do not understand the pressures of governance and the nature of capitalist power. The Greens found themselves in a fight with a movement they claim as some sort of ally. Recently the Brighton Green Party has passed policy urging its councillors to set a no-cuts budget this year, bizarrely though, the Party's councillors are not accountable to the mass of their Party's ranks, and will probably ignore this as they have done previously.

How would the socialist movement deal with these kinds of circumstances? Well, in 1972 some staunch Labour councillors refused to implement a new pernicious housing charge onto social housing tenants. In Clay Cross the Tories sent in their own housing commissioner to do their dirty work where the Labour councillors wouldn't, but their stooge was blocked at every turn as the council refused point blank to co-operate. With the backing of the Labour movement they were able to push Labour into a supportive stance. When asked if he was afraid of going to jail for his actions, Councillor Dave Nuttall said "No. I've got too much faith in the trade union movement for any fear on that score", making reference to the "Pentonville 5" — trade unionists who were freed from jail by a huge strike.

This example, and there are many others, gives clear guidance about how to fight government cuts and take on the ruling class, but this language of struggle is not a part of the Green Party's vocabulary.

Your choices this May should not be seen as a contest between Labour and Green, but between socialism and the barbarity of austerity and poverty. We fight within the labour movement — including the Labour Party — to realise goals that you probably share, join us in executing the lessons of history as a socialist, the Green Party are a distraction from these ends.

Cleaners' pay strikes

By Charlotte Zalens

Cleaners at financial analyst Bloomberg planned to strike from 23-25 February in a continuing struggle over pay and conditions.

The cleaners, members of the IWGB union, won the Living Wage in November last year after strikes and occupations. The cleaners also got the Living Wage updated to the newest rate after threatening to strike earlier this month.

However Bloomberg still does not pay sick pay, and workers are concerned about a culture of disrespect towards them in the workplace. Matilda, a mother of two and a cleaner at Bloomberg, said "Until we are treated with the respect we deserve, we

will continue to organise and fight."

The strike was suspended after the first day after Bloomberg offered some concessions and negotiations on other areas.

The IWGB is also balloting security officers, inspectors, receptionists and controllers at the Barbican centre over their demand for a pay increase to £12 an hour.

IWGB cleaners at Burberry are fighting for the Living Wage and continue to stage strikes at protests at the company's flagship store on Regent's Street, London.

IWGB members are in dispute with the Royal Opera House, where they staged a noisy picket at the BAFTA awards ceremony.

• More info: iwgb.org.uk



IWGB members protesting at the BAFTAs

More strikes at ICO

By a PCS member

Following on from the strikes of 3-4 February and the continuing work to rule, staff at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) have announced strikes for 26-27 February and 2 March.

No meaningful progress has been made with the ICO management on PCS's demands to put members' pay in line with the rest of the civil service. It is becoming increasingly clear that the refusal by the ICO management to meet these is purely political — not wanting to be seen as too "out of step" with other public sector bodies in the current climate of austerity. Pay at the ICO is around a grade below equivalent jobs in the civil service.

Management's efforts to isolate the union by trying to coerce staff into consent-

ing the contractual changes individually has failed, with fewer than half of the total workforce agreeing to the changes on an individual basis.

The strike day on 2 March is of particular significance as this coincides with the Data Protection Practitioners' Conference which the ICO holds annually for external organisations. The threat of having key staff from the ICO refuse to attend and run the scheduled events will have a majorly disruptive effect on the ICO's ability to run the conference. There will be a lobby of the event, at the Manchester Convention Centre, by striking ICO employees on the morning of 2 March.

PCS is calling for solidarity from other PCS members and trade unionists in the Manchester area.

Unison meets on 24 March

By Ed Whitby

On 24 March local government workers from the largest union in that sector, Unison, will meet to debate the decision to call off the strike action over pay.

Activists were angry that the dispute against the employers' pathetic 1% pay offer was called off in favour of an even more pathetic 2% over two years, and members were stopped from taking action in the run up to national and local elections.

Activists were also angered with the methods used in the pay dispute, tactical errors and a failure to

offer a confident lead or properly consult before calling off this dispute.

The whole shambles led to the unprecedented decision by branches representing over 30% of unison's local government membership to successfully call a special conference against the wishes of the leadership.

The conference will discuss: the 2014-16 pay offer and the decision to call off the strike, as well as future pay consultation procedures and how to best secure a decent pay rise.

Fifty five motions have been submitted, with 12 being ruled out of order. Some of the motions ruled out of order for bureaucratic

reasons were actually raising crucial points such as national and local strike funds and coordinating across other unions.

On the table for debate at the conference are:

- Lay member control in negotiations — at present negotiations have involved no lay member representation but full time officers.

- Hardship funds/strike pay — only worded as "encourage branches to set up strike funds", but this is a start.

- Timing of pay negotiations and disputes — normally the vote to even consider strikes to reject an offer begins after the pay year. So our lowest paid

members are stuck between needing a pay rise they can live on, but needing any pay rise as soon as possible.

- Fighting for a serious flat rate increase for all members, to end poverty pay, and the serious strategy and leadership commitment to fight for this.

Lambeth Unison has called a meeting to discuss these issues and how to organise after the conference for Monday 23 March, 6pm, UCL, Archaeology Room G6, Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT.

• More information: lgworkers.blogspot.co.uk

Tube activists call for return to strikes

By Ollie Moore

Tube unions have begun pay talks with London Underground (LU).

The RMT's claim includes a four-day, 32-hour week for all grades, a pay award that reflects the rising cost of living, and the extension of staff benefits including travel passes to contractors and outsourced workers.

LU management is claiming its hands are tied by economic austerity — but not so tightly that it is unable to employ nearly 100 new "Area Managers" on £70,000

each, or spend £134 million on its plan to close ticket offices.

Consultation by workplace reps with local managers over station staffing levels will start soon, a process that was promised months ago but over which management has kept workers in the dark. Leaked sample rosters for some Northern Line stations showed a massive balance towards unsocial hours, which would increase fatigue and wreck work-life balance. Several RMT branches submitted motions to the union's Executive be-

fore the New Year calling on it to convene a reps' and activists' meeting to discuss reinstating industrial action in the dispute against job cuts. So far, the Executive has dragged its feet. The rank-and-file bulletin Tube-worker is calling for further action to be planned as soon as possible.

RMT drivers' reps also met recently to discuss how to progress the dispute against the unfair sacking of Alex McGuigan. A strike ballot returned a majority for action, and a decision on what action to take was being made as *Solidarity*

went to press on 24 February.

Tubeworker supporters across several RMT branches are also calling for a ballot for action to win reinstatement for staxtion worker Noel Roberts.

Noel was "medically terminated" (sacked) in September despite being declared fully fit by his doctors and LU Occupational Health, and not having had a day off sick in 10 months.

• More information: bit.ly/tubeworker

National Gallery strikes

Workers at the National Gallery are taking their second 5-day period of strikes from 22-26 February.

PCS union members at the gallery are striking over a proposed privatisation that will see their jobs outsourced to a private security firm. In the lead up to the first period of strikes, PCS

rep Candy Udwin was suspended, and workers are also calling for her reinstatement.

Picket lines run every day from 9-11 at the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. Thursday 26 February will be a day of action, with a rally at the gallery at 1pm, followed up a march at 1.30pm.

Fighting a 9.5% pay cut

By Gemma Short

Workers at Your Choice Barnet (YCB) are on strike on 24-25 February in their ongoing dispute over a 9.5% pay cut.

The staff, who work with a variety of vulnerable adults, will now have taken eight strike days since September. In October YCB bosses made an offer of a 7.9% pay cut, instead of 9.5%, workers rejected this offer.

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

The strike is well supported and workers are appealing to service users for support.

Unison is calling for the service to be brought



back under council control, as well as fighting the pay cut.

• Send messages of support to Unison branch secretary John Burgess — john.burgess@barnetunison.org.uk

Other industrial news

- **Firefighters will strike on Wednesday 25 February — bit.ly/Fire-strike**
- **Stop the cuts at Newcastle Council — demonstration called by Newcastle City Unison, Wednesday 4 March 4.30pm — bit.ly/Newc-cuts**
- **Vote no in the health pay ballot! — bit.ly/Vote-no**
- **Demonstrations at Crossrail sites continue as worker sacked at Whitechapel after raising safety concerns — bit.ly/BlacklistSG**



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Renationalise rail!

By Colin Foster

Labour's new shadow transport secretary, Michael Dugher, has signalled a shift towards rail renationalisation.

In an interview with the *New Statesman* on 19 February, he said: "The public sector will be running sections of our rail network as soon as we can do that". He added that he was "adamant about putting the whole franchising system, as it stands today, in the bin".

These statements show that consistent campaigning can push Labour, even today, towards support for trade-union and labour movement policies, as it has done on the bedroom tax and on repeal of the Health and Social Care Act.

But, as on those issues, there are gaps in the commitment which indicate that real change will require independent and militant campaigning, not just orderly pressure on the Labour leaders.

Labour's conference policy is for rail renationalisation. Why didn't Dugher say that?

Read his words carefully: "public sector running *sections* of the network". "As soon as we can do that". Putting the franchising system "*as it stands today*" in the bin.

Which sections? How soon is soon? Replacing the franchising system by what? A modified one, still franchising, but different from how "it stands today"?

Rail unions, and other unions, should follow up with an active on-the-streets campaign to get precise and loophole-free commitments.

The Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory combines campaigning to elect a Labour government in 2015 with seeking to put pressure on Labour for clear working-class demands, working to strengthen and transform our labour movement, and arguing for socialism.
socialistcampaignforalabourvictory.wordpress.com

Ideas for Freedom 2015 2-5 JULY, CENTRAL LONDON

IMAGINING THE FUTURE

Every year, Workers' Liberty holds a socialist summer event in central London. Ideas for Freedom is a place for discussion of socialist and leftwing ideas. Ideas for Freedom is an opportunity to explore, through talks, film showings, workshops and debates how our world works, and how we can fight for a better one. This year, the theme of the event will be visions of the socialist, egalitarian, democratic future, and strategies to fight for it.

Rosa Luxemburg said that "Freedom is always the freedom of the one who thinks differently". Come to Ideas for Freedom and get to grips with some different thinking!



Universal Credit will mean cuts and chaos

By Matthew Thompson

Universal Credit, the benefit which is to replace six payments to working-age claimants (Income Support, income-based Jobseekers' and Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit and Child and Working Tax Credit), has now been introduced for all new claims.

The Department for Work and Pensions has been piloting Universal Credit since 2013, albeit on a smaller scale than initially intended as a result of IT problems. The new system has been trialled in just four towns in the North West, Ashton-under-Lyne, Oldham, Warrington and Wigan, and only on non-complex claims from single people without children. It is supposed to be extended to all existing claimants of the benefits it is replacing by the end of 2017. But the DWP has already said that this deadline is likely to slip.

So how will Universal Credit work and how does the Government think that it will cut the cost of welfare?

Unlike Working Tax Credit, Universal Credit is fully means-tested. It reduces if you or your partner's savings are over £6,000, and isn't payable at all if they're over £16,000. The rate at which payments are reduced if your working hours increase is also steeper than with Working Tax Credit. All payments will be monthly and paid directly to claimants, unlike Housing Benefit which until now has mainly been paid to landlords. This regime is supposed to replicate the discipline of budgeting a monthly wage.

As well as reducing the amount payable to part-time workers whose hours increase, Universal Credit will also penalise self-employed people with low earnings. In addition to means-testing savings, they will be assumed to have an income from self-employment equivalent to the minimum wage for the hours they work, of around £200 a week. That just isn't the reality.

Many unemployed people have been transferred from JSA to Working Tax Credit in recent years by job centres and private providers encouraging them to turn hobbies into, often largely fictional, self-employed occupations, the former to reduce the number of people signing on and the latter to trigger target-based payments for getting claimants into work.

Universal Credit is a rip off!



Working hard at cutting people's benefits