Euro on the brink. Cuts sweep sweep continent

Spain has 20% unemployment, and things look like getting worse

CAPITALISM WRECKS EUROPE

See pages 6-7
By Gerry Bates

“Our plan B”, so some Treasury official was recently quoted, “is to do plan A, but for longer”. And maybe with even more destructive cuts.

The international economic organisation OECD reckons that the UK is already into a double recession, at least for the end of 2011 and the start of 2012. The government’s claims that its cuts would close the budget deficit are way off the mark.

In his autumn statement on 29 November, chancellor for George Osborne responded with some feeble “growth” stunts, and re-opened cuts; public sector pay rises will be frozen at one per cent, amidst 5% inflation. The state pension age will be raised quicker. Tax credits will be cut in real terms.

Back in 2010, Ed Balls was saying that “cutting billions of pounds in public services and taking billions of pounds out of family budgets” would kill jobs and growth, and that Labour should consider cutting “only once growth is fully secured”. It was an argument within orthodox capitalist economics, from the Keynesian rather than monetarist side, but it’s turned out completely right as far as it went.Labour and the unions should now be pressing the case for expanded public services, against cuts.

Instead, Balls limits himself to potting “the five point growth plan”, not much stronger than Osborne’s “growth” stunts.

By Edward Malbty

At 1am on 24 November, Loumamba Mohsni, a long-time Tunisian Trotskyist activist — died of a heart attack following a long illness.

Loumamba spent years in exile, and suffered spells in jail, where he was tortured. Acting in secrecy, living the nocturnal life of an underground agitator, Loumamba made a great contribution to keeping Trotskyism alive in a country where the Marxist left was dominated by Stalinist and nationalist ideas.

After the long years of darkness, that organisation has burst out into the light as the Left Workers’ League (LGC). The emergence of a visible Trotskyist current of any size in Tunisia would not have been possible without the long years of sacrifice of activists like Loumamba.

That work in conditions of great danger and personal moralisation is now bearing fruit.

HISTORY

The history of the modern Trotskyist movement in Tunisia begins in 1985 with the emergence of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (OCR), launched by a group of students and workers.

In those days, the country was wracked by social and economic crisis. Habib Bourguiba’s (limited) welfare state was dismantled by IMF-diktat and an era of neoliberal policies was ushered in.

During these hunger riots Bourguiba’s interior minister, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, made his name by marching into the middle of a demonstrating crowd in the working-class suburb of Ettadamen and personally shooting a ten-year-old boy named Othman. In 1987, Ben Ali ousted Bourguiba and assumed the presidency. He in turn became the mouthpiece for neoliberal policies.

The OCR published a newspaper called Chaaraa ("the Spark") and operated illegally. Literature was distributed by being slid anonymously under doors, at night. Militants would meet at midnight, and keep membership of the organisation secret, operating as trade union activists or supporters of more-or-less tolerated campaigns.

Loumamba was a student activist in this period. His exiled comrade Khaled Faouire recalls: “Everyone remembers this intractable militant of the Tunisian camps, a well-known face of the far left.”

The first major blow of repression from Ben Ali’s Dakhlia or secret police came with mass arrests of 40 activists. Many long prison sentences were handed out and some leading comrades were forced under-ground or exiled.

The OCR continued to function, but under a greater weight of repression, until around 2001, when Loumamba and other leading comrades launched the illegal journal Kasr El-Darama (“The Bowl of Dignity”). A re-opened campaign of repression met this initiative.

On 30 January 2002, as Loumamba waited for a taxi, two secret police agents pulled upon up on mopeds and beat him with iron bars before leaving him for dead.

Following the contested 2004 election, a new wave of repression saw Loumamba forced to seek asylum in France. Here he was persecuted by the French state! His house was raided in 2009. Loumamba remained politically active as a writer and activist, making contacts. It was through this work that Workers’ Liberty activists came into contact with him. As the workers’ movement in the Arab world takes momentous steps forward, the organisations and ideas fostered by activists of Loumamba’s generation — many of whose names will never be known, will be invaluable for moving a generation for socialism in the region.

Loudmamba Mohsni, 1963-2011

By Clare Benitez

The 25 November elections in Morocco were won by a soft-Islamist party, the party for Justice and Development, which dominates itself on the ruling Turkish Islamic party. The runner-up was Isilal, a conservative nationalist party.

The elections took place amidst intensifying protests. Much of the left participated in a boycott of the elections. The Moroccan opposition movement has been split between a liberal right wing, regrouping social democrats, nationalists and Islamists with its base in the centre of the country and the capital Rabat, a left wing of Marxist parties, trade unionists and Berber communities, in the south and north — with the main points of division being over social demands and the demand for a republic. The government’s strategy has been to isolate anti-monarchist elements by presenting a new constitution, placing the monarchy within a system with marginally more power in the hands of parliament. However, there were unprecedentedly large demonstrations on 13th April this year.

These, combined with a very low voter registration rate, according to the government’s own, probably less than 50%, indicate that the government’s strategy hasn’t been successful.
Justice for Joe Paraskeva

By Todd Hamer

Joe Paraskeva is in jail, on an indefinite sentence, essentially being mentally ill.

In October 2010, he was admitted to psychiatric hospital under section 2 of the Mental Health Act. Joe had a diagnosis of bipolar affective disorder and had had several admissions to hospital whilst he was a teenager.

Joe attempted to escape from the ward by trying to burn down the locked ex -
trance to the ward using a lighter and can of deodorant.

He was remanded to prison. On 5 April 2011, Joe was sent to an IPP (Indeterminate imprisonment for Public Protection) for arson. The controversial IPP is effectively a life sentence. Joe has been out of prison this week.

Joe is being published. If a paper dential and private information could then be used to check at present is super-

vacy could then be used to

safeguards and I have been
told this could not have happened. There should be an independent advocate, who will all police stations, at all courts and in prisons, to ensure this cannot go on happening. I would like a full investigation and re-

view of how the NHS and the criminal justice system interact when dealing with vulnerable people, such as those with mental health problems.

In Scotland there are safeguards and I have been told this could not have happened. There should be an independent advocate, who will all police stations, at all courts and in prisons, to ensure this cannot go on happening. I would like a full investigation and re-

view of how the NHS and the criminal justice system interact when dealing with vulnerable people, such as those with mental health problems.

In Scotland there are safeguards and I have been told this could not have happened. There should be an independent advocate, who will all police stations, at all courts and in prisons, to ensure this cannot go on happening. I would like a full investigation and re-

view of how the NHS and the criminal justice system interact when dealing with vulnerable people, such as those with mental health problems.

In Scotland there are safeguards and I have been told this could not have happened. There should be an independent advocate, who will all police stations, at all courts and in prisons, to ensure this cannot go on happening. I would like a full investigation and re-

view of how the NHS and the criminal justice system interact when dealing with vulnerable people, such as those with mental health problems.

In Scotland there are safeguards and I have been told this could not have happened. There should be an independent advocate, who will all police stations, at all courts and in prisons, to ensure this cannot go on happening. I would like a full investigation and re-

view of how the NHS and the criminal justice system interact when dealing with vulnerable people, such as those with mental health problems.
There have been three events in the last month that have directly or indirectly raised the issue of how the cuts are bad for women.

A march against cuts was held on 19 November. A demonstration on 30 November strike over public sector pension cuts. It fully met outside Saison Poetry Library, level 5, Royal Festival Hall, Waterloo. The venue for Choice talked about threats to sex education. Liberty will discuss in depth at a future event. We want to continue to discuss and work with all these women!

The event also hosted a successful “planning forum” for student women, organised by the National Campaign for Fees and Cuts. The group discussed a Charter for Education and for the freedom of students. Watch this space.

A big thank you to everyone who drove equipment and food around London, organised, spoke, made banners, and worked so hard to make the event a success.

How good was it?

Overcoming the myths

Letters

Paul Hampton (Solidarity 229) seems to have me down as some kind of Gold Warrior or Nouveau Philosopher attempting to find in Marxism some kind of logic which cannot be seriously challenged by our cleverer lemming opponents. One does not have to abandon Marxism, in some kind of contemporary God that Failed attempt to conflate Marxism with dictatorship, in an effort to understand what actually happened and what the Bolsheviks could have done about the situation they were faced with. It just happens that I think the wrong choices were made in terrible circumstances and that the decisive break between Stalinism and Bolshevism is easy to mark when one looks in detail at the record of the Bolsheviks up to 1924.

I am not an advocate of a “continuity thesis” as I have already stated — there were breaks and continuities — but certainly the road to despotism was made all the easier by the suspension of basic political liberties, the rise of the secret security services, and the eclipse of basic standards of working class democracy.

Paul makes an interesting point — the difficulty of remaining a revolutionary socialist if one accepts that Stalinism is born of Leninism. This simply doesn’t add up. Many of those who fought on the “wrong” side at Kronstadt continued to be defenders of the October Revolution — many of them in exile worked for the very regime that had exiled them.

Many Mensheviks and anarchists continued as revolutionaries whilst denouncing the particular revolutionary version of the Bolsheviks. One has to sympathise with the humour of the socialist who, when we all have a joke about “circumstances” destroying the revolution. Many Mensheviks and Menshevik-Internationalists had made themselves hoarse in making the same point before, during and after the Bolshevik accession to power — that dictatorship would be inextricably linked to the revolution and the dictatorship was the price of victory. The backwardness of our time and the advent of the concrete that the Opposition and Stalin posed differing and often complementary routes out of the conundrum that the October adventure had led them to.

Of course Stalin developed the project of violence and intimidation to the nth degree, but it was a retention of not something entirely new — except in scale. One has to recall the mass deceptions from the Left Opposition after 1929, and not for reasons of personal survival.

The Trotskyists, attempting to understand their revolution, are much better placed than the French, looked towards Bukharin and the Right opposition as the Thermidorians. The almost wholesale adoption of the Left Opposition’s economic programme did much to ensure that Bukharin continued as the leader of the party. The Trotskyists, in particular, rejected the.Left Opposition programme, and perhaps most tellingly, announced that in the event of Bukharin’s overthrow, Trotsky’s erstwhile right hand man, who later became the butcher of the Barcelonais uprising in charge of eliminating the POUM and the anarchists.

I don’t want to take any great lesson from this — except for the fact that the Left Opposition did not understand what was happening to them, didn’t understand Stalinism effectively as an amalgam of various programmes under the weight of a bureaucracy, and obfuscated Trotsky and the opposition’s own role in sealing their own fate before the advent of the bureaucracy.

Paul points to Lenin and Trotsky’s hope that the party cadres would be the catalyst to get the revolution back on track, angling at the same time for the extension of the revolution’s gains to the west. Of course the objective circumstances of the continued failure of the German revolution was crucial — but its demise was again the product of paternalism and heavy bureaucratic control. Workers in Kronstadt fought for a different kind of revolution.

Certainly within the party in the Soviet Union it was the party cadres aided by the Lenin levy that were the first to detect to the bureaucratic — as Zinoviev would point out later. By intimidation and stealth, the Stalinists took the party cells over.

What made this possible was the actions of Trotsky specifically and in general the distaste of the Old Bolsheviks for Trotsky and his Left Opposition. Bukharin and the Mensheviks had started and as Thermidorians — not least by those around the Workers’ Opposition (who incidentally were amongst the first to be converted to Trotskyism) and in some cases simply because they hated the dictatorial arrogance of Trotsky and those left communists like Bukharin who would soon start to coalesce, in partnership with Stalin, as the pro-peasant wing of the party.

Bukharin’s astonishing revelation to Fyodor Dan on uncovering the nature of the revolution is telling and displays a greater clarity to Trotsky ever achieved in his own analysis of Stalin. Faced with the absurdity of the bureaucratic clique, the Left Opposition had little choice to act when they found it hard to understand what it actually was. I think Paul is correct when he argues that we were convinced that forces outside the party were a real alternative. Me neither really. I think the struggle against dictatorship and the return of the party to working class democracy and political liberty before 1924. This would perhaps have galvanized the international movement rather than compartmentalised it.

There is a quantitative and qualitative difference between the early stages of Bolshevism, rule and Stalinism, but we should not in 2011 still be firing our own guns in the murder of an expropriation of the banks, and putting their companies under a state-backed command by a publicly-owned company under democratic control. Coupon payments on most bonds could then be cancelled, or become only a matter of internal book-keeping within public finances.

Furthermore, the comparison of state counterproduction of an indefinite or almost indefinend expansion of fiat money (that is, in the form of banknotes, permanent and unrepayable IOUs from the government).

By Barry Finger (Solidarity 229) exaggerates “the democratic openings made possible by fiat money”.

The current crisis reveals states held in check to banks and a financial institution along with the last stocks of government IOUs (bonds). To release that strangegy, we should call for the expropriation of the banks, and put their companies under a state-backed command by a publicly-owned company under democratic control. Coupon payments on most bonds could then be cancelled, or become only a matter of internal book-keeping within public finances.

I think Barry Finger (Solidarity 229) exaggerates “the democratic openings made possible by fiat money”.

The Bolsheviks were wrong, understandably, but wrong. Trotsky in his debates on this period with Serge has shown that and motion towards the Left Opposition it.

How could we have been convinced that forces outside the party were a real alternative? Me neither really. I think the struggle against dictatorship and the return of the party to working class democracy and political liberty before 1924. This would perhaps have galvanized the international movement rather than compartmentalised it.

There is a quantitative and qualitative difference between the early stages of Bolshevism rule and Stalinism, but we should not in 2011 still be firing our own guns in the murder of an expropriation of the banks, and putting their companies under a state-backed command by a publicly-owned company under democratic control. Coupon payments on most bonds could then be cancelled, or become only a matter of internal book-keeping within public finances.

The Bolsheviks were wrong, understandably, but wrong. Trotsky in his debates on this period with Serge has shown that and motion towards the Left Opposition it.
The immediate impact of the mass public sector strike on 30 November was to demonstrate the potential solidarity of the working class to a generation of workers who had not experienced it before. It gave a glimpse of the mass labour movement as a vital social force.

But if the strike is to play a role in actually defeating the government, rank-and-file trade unionists need to fight for a different strategy from the one on offer from their leaders.

In meetings and conversations on 30 November, strikers were clear that one day is not enough, and that they want further action and a faster-paced campaign. But no union leader has indicated any hard plans for follow-up.

Mark Serwotka, leader of the PCS civil service union (in a speech at the “Unite the Resistance” event on Saturday 19 November), stated that his union executive wants a cross-union meeting “within two weeks” of N30, and another one-day strike “as early as 2012 as we can have it”.

The Executive of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) will “consider a programme of rolling strikes and other possible action, including at least one further national day of action in the Spring” at its December and January meetings. It expects not to have plans defined or ready to announce until, at earliest, a meeting of the TUC’s Public Sector Liaison Group (PSLG) in January 2012.

We cannot afford to wait until some indefinite time in 2012 for the next set of action. Agreed, workers are not currently confident enough to take all-out strike action for an indefinite period of time. But the effect of gearing up for scattered crescendos and then told to stand down and wait until the union leaders announce the next “big day” can only be demoralising in the long run.

One of the arguments of the right of the far-left is that, since N30, the potential of ongoing joint action that N30 unions can begin building for.

This strategy is based on two key ideas — rank-and-file power, and fighting to win.

• local “where next?” meetings where strikers can discuss the next steps in genuine political discussions, not stage-managed affairs with an endless litany of top table speakers
• a programme of action to be announced and built for now, not in the new year
• a strategy that includes rolling and selective action (bringing out different sections of the public sector workforce at different times) and escalating action (striking for more than one day at a time)
• strike funds, levied from union dues, to finance sustained action
• the establishment of cross-union strike committees, made up of rank-and-file delegates, in every town
• open up the negotiations: regularly inform union members about the content of ongoing negotiations and subject them to democratic scrutiny

KEY IDEAS

This strategy is based on two key ideas — rank-and-file power, and fighting to win.

Rank-and-file power, because we believe striking workers should be in control of their own strikes (foot unselected and unaccountable union officials), and fighting to win because we think that strikes should not merely be expressions of discontent but strategic actions designed to exercise sufficient pressure on bosses or government to force concessions.

We cannot afford to wait until some indefinite time in 2012 for the next set of action. Agreed, workers are not currently confident enough to take all-out strike action for an indefinite period of time. But the effect of gearing up for scattered crescendos and then told to stand down and wait until the union leaders announce the next “big day” can only be demoralising in the long run.

Apart from the odd bit of soundbite rhetoric, no union leader has attempted to situate N30 within an ongoing strategy. From the platform of the central London rally, there was much talk of further action — “if the government doesn’t negotiate with us, we’ll be back in the new year” one speaker announced. It’s hardly inspiring stuff, is the only aim, the only demand, for further negotiations (which are ongoing anyway?) And as for “we’ll be back in the new year” — when in the new year? And “back for what” — another single day of strike action, or something more?

As well as the risk that the dispute will continue to lurch from one “big day” to the other, there is a further risk of the entire campaign being limited to the pace of the slowest, most conservative unions.

The unity that has been developed is vitally important, but that does not mean unions should not act alone — or in small groups — if they are more ready to do so.

Union members should fight for their leaders to take a concrete proposal for ongoing action to the TUC public sector group meeting and fight to win as much support for it as possible. In the meantime, local cross-union strike committees should organise assemblies to discuss what action might be possible on a local level. The essential task is to maintain constant pressure on the government rather than relying on a disconnected series of single days of action. With even the more left-wing leaders of the PCS tied to the “big day” perspective, rank-and-file organisation is absolutely crucial.

London demonstration. Photos: Vicki Morris

London demonstration. Photos: Vicki Morris

London demonstration. Photos: Vicki Morris

London demonstration. Photos: Vicki Morris

London demonstration. Photos: Vicki Morris

London demonstration. Photos: Vicki Morris

NOW WE SAY

Next steps after 30 November

The battle cannot be fought on the industrial front alone. A cross-union political campaign for decent pensions for all, which presents a vision of society run for need rather than profit, is essential.

Unions affiliated to the Labour Party should use that affiliation to force the Labour Party to throw its political weight behind union campaigning.

The fight is not just about pensions, but about the austerity programme of a government determined to massacre public services and strengthen the supreme rule of the markets, so shaken by the economic crisis. Resisting that programme requires not just a defensive struggle against each new attack, but a fight for a different kind of government; a government by, of, and for the working-class majority, based on and accountable to our organisations.

Paved as “socialism-is-the-answer” jargon, that perspective can seem alien — and alienating — to most workers. But posed as the simple reality that, to fight a millionaire government attempting to entrench the rule of millionaires, we need an equivalent fight to remake society and make it work for us, for working-class people, the perspective is less abstract.

Working-class social power — a workers’ government — is not a “demand” to be fought for in the same way that a wage increase or the defence of a pension scheme is; it is a perspective that can link those kind of demand-centred fights into an overall political struggle for a different kind of society.

It is not one that can be won or even catalysed overnight. But after 30 November, a day when a generation of working-class people saw their own class take mass action for the first time, it is a struggle that seems a little less distant.

By taking steps to build rank-and-file power to reorganise and reinvigorate our movement, revolutionary socialists and other working-class militants can bring it closer still.

• For reports on N30 picket lines, demonstrations and other actions, see page 11 and workersliberty.org/n30reports
Euro-exit is no shortcut to left victory


It seeks to present a left-wing case for Greece quitting the euro. Oddly, though the report collects valuable information and analysis on the eurozone crisis as a whole, it says almost nothing about policies in other countries.

"To keep the analysis manageable, it is assumed that only Greece defaults and exits, abstracting from the possibility of another country following suit."

The proposal, then, is that the eurozone continues, only minus Greece.

A workers' government in Greece, which moved decisively against the bankers, the bosses, and the rich, would not submit quietly to eurozone and EU rules. It would make large demands for the cancellation of debt, and might well end up going for default on the debt and exit from the eurozone. It would need to stimulate solidarity across other countries in order to thrive.

Greece is a small country, which, as the report notes, "lacks foreign-exchange reserves". It is dependent on imports for energy and many foodstuffs and medicine, as well as high technology. It imports much more than it exports ($48 billion as against $16 billion in 2010), and depends on tourism to make good much of the difference. It has a large export of services which could suddenly become super-competitive in world markets with a little extra investment.

A government independent solely on the force and sharpness of Greece's economic elites in the global markets would be in trouble. Yet workers across Europe face cuts similar to those in Greece, and sometimes only a few degrees less severe, and could be inspired into common struggle by a Greek workers' offensive raising Europe-wide resistance.

The converse sequence, recommended by the report, that default and exit "could trigger a deep and progressive transformation of the Greek economy" or be preparable to a broad programme that would restructure Greek economy and society (for the better), has less logic.

www.researchonmoneyandfinance.org
Euro is botched, but the root of the crisis is in global capital

By Rhodri Evans

The euro, as the new “Research on Money and Finance” (RMF) report argues, was botched from the start because of political constraints. “The euro is not simply a common currency devised to facilitate trade and financial flows among member countries... it is an international reserve currency... a form of world money”.

It was shaped in the 1990s, amidst the wave of capitalist triumphalism which followed the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the USSR in 1989-91, and the subsequent strutting of the USA as hyperpower. The euro-leaders pushed it through fast, skating over difficulties and hoping they would dissolve over time, the better to create an integrated economic space which could draw in Eastern Europe.

The euro is the world’s second most important reserve currency, though way behind the US dollar. To uphold that status, the European Central Bank was given an odd shape. Formally, its only mandate is to defend the value of the euro, keeping inflation low. It does not have the mandate which other central banks have, to be “the lender of last resort” in crisis. At the same time, it is less secure, because it does not have a unified state, with tax-raising powers, behind it.

The euro has also, so the RMF argues, been “a means of establishing a hierarchy among states and ultimately a weapon of imperial power”, essentially of German hegemony.

Thus the crisis since 2008 has led to banks being more closely linked with their national governments. Banks and governments are now locked in a sort of dance of death.

That is the picture painted by the report. It is true as far as it goes, but it seems to me one-sided, and one-sided in a way that gives the false impression that exit from the eurozone would release Greece (and presumably other smaller countries) into an altogether friendlier environment where they would have greater clout and autonomy.

Capitalism is dog-eat-dog both inside the eurozone and outside. Germany is hegemonic in the eurozone. But German capitalism, once it had managed the reunification of its country, was always going to be the leading force in Europe. The eurozone has given a particular shape to that hegemony, but it has not erected it out of previous evenness.

Greek, or other “peripheral”, capitalism would not have flourished better outside the eurozone. Other weaker European economies, not in the eurozone, such as Hungary, have suffered as much or worse in the crisis.

Between the introduction of the euro in 1999 and the onset of crisis in 2008, Greece’s income per head (in PPP calculations) increased from 68% of Germany’s to 80%. Spain’s increased from 80% to 90%. Ireland’s increased from 105% to 115%. And, as the RMF report notes, productivity rose much faster in Greece and Ireland than in Germany.

The report presents the neo-liberal structures and rules of the eurozone as rigid, solid, and unbudgeable however well the labour movement mobilises, whereas it suggests that countries outside the eurozone would melt into what it calls “progressive” policies just by default and exit.

Oddly, it suggests that the structures of the EU could become more fluid and subject to partial reshaping under working-class pressure, but only if Greece first quits the eurozone. The report specifically does not recommend Greece quitting the European Union (as distinct from the eurozone), and thanks it “likely that progressive Greek default and exit would lead to rapid change in the EU” for the better.

No concessions will be won, from the EU, from the eurozone, or from a euro-exited Greek capitalist government, without labour movement mobilisation.

But once mobilisation is underway, and if it is focused and clear, there is probably more space for winning concessions from the eurozone leaders, who are both alarmed and rich enough to afford concessions, than from a euro-exited Greek capitalist government impoverished by a huge flight of capital and scrabbling to hold its own in global markets.

Working-class policies before “exit” policies

The RMF report argues that default and exit by Greece are likely in any event. They could be “creditor-led”, i.e. forced on Greece by the banks which it owes money to and the states behind them.

Or they could be chaotic, leading to “social disintegration” in Greece. Or “conservative”, led by right-wing forces, and resulting in “an authoritarian polity atop an economy characterised by successive devaluations, poor growth outcomes, and worsening income distribution”.

“Yet”, the report says, “there could also be ‘progressive exit’“. It spends many pages on argument as to why default and exit could be less damaging (in terms of inflation, output, national soverignty, human rights, etc.) than other economists have reckoned, but it agrees that exit could fail to be “progressive”.

It is vague about the agency that would make exit “progressive” rather than “conservative”. “It would be necessary”, the report says, “to adopt a broad programme including, at the very least, public ownership and control over financial institutions... and total restructuring of the state in a democratic direction... in essence... a transitional programme for the Greek economy... in the direction of labour ascendency” (This programme includes a comprehensive reform of the Greek tax system, which at present is full of exemptions disproportionately used by the rich, but, oddly, net a reduction in Greece’s military budget, proportionally the biggest in Europe).

It would be necessary... for a particular type of capital to adopt this “transitional programme”? The report never says. It appears to envisage “a progressive government” of some sort of leftist bourgeois forces “that drew strength from popular support, particularly from organised labour”.

The Greek left and labour movement should be directed towards establishing their own “transitional programme” and “labour ascendency” first, as a precondition for default and exit being incidents in a move forward, rather than towards pushing “default and exit” as their first priority, and hoping it will “trigger” some other bourgeois government into “progressive transformation”.

Working-class policies before “exit” policies

The RMF report argues that default and exit by Greece are likely in any event. They could be “creditor-led”, i.e. forced on Greece by the banks which it owes money to and the states behind them.

Or they could be chaotic, leading to “social disintegration” in Greece. Or “conservative”, led by right-wing forces, and resulting in “an authoritarian polity atop an economy characterised by successive devaluations, poor growth outcomes, and worsening income distribution”.

“Yet”, the report says, “there could also be ‘progressive exit’“. It spends many pages on argument as to why default and exit could be less damaging (in terms of inflation, output, national soverignty, human rights, etc.) than other economists have reckoned, but it agrees that exit could fail to be “progressive”.

It is vague about the agency that would make exit “progressive” rather than “conservative”. “It would be necessary”, the report says, “to adopt a broad programme including, at the very least, public ownership and control over financial institutions... and total restructuring of the state in a democratic direction... in essence... a transitional programme for the Greek economy... in the direction of labour ascendency” (This programme includes a comprehensive reform of the Greek tax system, which at present is full of exemptions disproportionately used by the rich, but, oddly, net a reduction in Greece’s military budget, proportionally the biggest in Europe).

It would be necessary... for a particular type of capital to adopt this “transitional programme”? The report never says. It appears to envisage “a progressive government” of some sort of leftist bourgeois forces “that drew strength from popular support, particularly from organised labour”.

The Greek left and labour movement should be directed towards establishing their own “transitional programme” and “labour ascendency” first, as a precondition for default and exit being incidents in a move forward, rather than towards pushing “default and exit” as their first priority, and hoping it will “trigger” some other bourgeois government into “progressive transformation”.

Portuguese general strike, 24 November
Public and private sector workers unite in Greece

By Theodora Polenta

The paper work has now been sent out and 16,000 public sector workers will be placed in “reserve” (“efedreia”). From 1 January 2011, a further 120,000 public sector workers will be losing their jobs. The Troika has set a target of 270,000 fewer public sector jobs by 2015.

Occupations and protests are starting to erupt in the pub lic sector organisations. Transport workers staged a two- hour strike in the week ending 26 November. On Thursday 24 November, public sector workers staged a 24 hour strike and an occupation of management build -ings in an attempt to blockade the processing of lists of pub lic sector workers to be placed in “reserve”. The occupations continued on Friday.

On Monday 28 November, workers in the air transport in -dustry called a 24 hour strike and occupied their manage -ment offices as a response to the start of implementation of “reserve” in their workplaces.

The plans to put workers in “reserve” and cut jobs are linked with further privatisation of the public sector and the government’s plan to sell €65 billion worth by the end of 2015.

They are part of the overall attack by the government and the Troika on wages, pensions, unemployment, welfare... Can we believe in anything that the government’s line to the very end, and I do fear the same thing will happen with us.

What is the attitude of grassroot activists to what the Labour Party is doing in government?

There’s huge frustration among young activists, verging on despair. As each new story comes out about what’s going to be in the [December] budget (student fees, cuts in social welfare, increase in VAT etc.) it just becomes harder and harder to believe that the party leadership can rationalise the role the party is playing in government. There’s massive anger.

Labour is supposed going into government, but the vast majority of the rest of the party supported its decision. It is hoped that the majority still support the leadership, but dissatisfaction may be beginning to grow. At a recent local meeting a minister spoke defending cuts and was greeted with deafening silence. That was encouraging.

How is the Party leadership defending its actions? Do these defences hold weight with ordinary members?

They say there’s no alternative to cuts because the deficit is out of control , but the IMF is making them do it, that they are committed to continuing socialisation of the banks’ losses by the bailout deal made by last government. Even though even the IMF will tell you that’s nonsense.

It does hold weight with a lot of ordinary party members, though not youth members. I look to the Greens in the last government and see how the members stuck with the lead -ership’s line to the very end, and I do fear the same thing may happen with us.

Trade unions fund the party and have 10% of the vote at conferences. The Labour Party is supposed to exempt by the rank-and-file of the unions to hold the Party to account?

There are eleven trade unions currently affiliated with the party. The biggest is the Service, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), which has about 200,000 members. Another important affiliate is the Irish wing of Unite.

The influence of unions on the Labour Party is much smaller than in Britain. Not only is their share of vote smaller, but the dues from trade unions only form a small proportion of the party’s funding, which mainly comes from government grants.

The country’s unions were effectively neutralised over the course of 20 years by an extremely ineffective form of social partnership with business and governments. That only broke down a few years ago. The whole culture of the main trade unions isn’t exactly militant.

Another problem is the Croke Park Agreement which the unions made with the last government, in which the previ ous government agreed not to impose public sector layoffs or further public sector pay cuts in exchange for coopera -tion with wide-scale public sector reform. There have been a lot of calls for this to be renegotiated, for public servants to take more pain. In that way is something that the govern -ment can hang over unions in case they get too vocal about its policies.

That said, there are encouraging signs. Unite is a very strong force of opposition, in fact they were one of the only organisations along with Labour Youth to oppose coalition, although unfortunately they’re fairly small here. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has also published a very progres sive alternative budget proposal, and is organising a march against cuts.

What alternative policy to the cuts do you think the Labour Party should follow?

The budget is supposed to make a fiscal correction of €3.6 billion according to the Memorandum of Understanding with the IMF and EU but it’s open to negotiation as to where those savings are made.

Numerous budget proposals have shown that savings of well over €3 billion could be made in progressive taxation measures; for example introducing a third rate of tax on high incomes, a wealth tax and ending tax reliefs on prop erty and pensions. A stimulus package could also be intro duced without even affecting the deficit, using money from the pension reserve fund and European Investment Bank.

Then there’s the question of the banks. The government is set to repay €3 billion in bank debt every year for the next twenty-odd years. That’s insane and should be renegotiated immediately. The government has a 99.6% share in AngloIrish Bank, one of the country’s main banks. It’s socialised this disaster, not the profits or strategy. That has to change as well.

A political leaders are worried about upsetting Europe and the IMF but that’s an incredibly stupid attitude. If you compare Ireland and Greece, Ireland has received glowing praise from international leaders for being the “good stu -dent” among countries who have made debt deals with Eu rope. Meanwhile the Greeks have been the bad boys of the group but now Greece has a 50% write-down on its debt and we have nothing like that.

What do you think of the call from some on the left for Ireland to quit the euro and the EU? I’m completely against this. The economic consequences of leaving the euro would be catastrophic. The EU needs more integration, not less. The only way global capital can be resisted is through international cooperation. It’s true that the current EU system is incredibly undemocratic, but simply by its existence it gives the possibility of building something better in the future. Giving up on the EU project would, in the long run, amount to surrendering all our power of action to global capital.

What was Labour Left and do you see any prospects for creating something like it today? How should the left in the Party fight for an alternative political to the leader ship?

Labour Left was an organised group within the Irish Labour Party in the 1980s that was calling for the Labour Party to end its strategy of entering government as a minor -ity party. It called for a much more radical form of indus trial, developmentalism and intervention in the economy than the more moderate stance of the party leadership. It was eventually neutralised by the leadership but it had a much larger-term impact on party strategy.

I’ll be harder to organise now. In 1982 40% of the party membership voted against going into government, earlier that year was less than 10% and it was incumbent on us to do something to change the current dynamic.

I think in the period between the budget and party conference next spring there needs to be the develop -ment of a coherent and concerted opposition to leader -ship policy, and some sort of confrontation conference, even though we will still be a minority.
Anarchism without trade unions: fresh wave, or utopianism?

By Ira Berkovic

Yves Coleman’s article in Solidarity 224 (“Five things Trotskyists Should Know About Today’s Young ‘Anarchists’”) is a little difficult to get to grips with much like the politics of the people — “today’s young ‘anarchists’” — whose corner Yves has chosen to fight. The marshalling of content and form is a neat trick, but it doesn’t make a fruitful exchange particularly easy.

Yves objects to a recent series of articles (presumably Martin Thomas’s review of Lucien VanDer Walt and Michael Schmidt’s book Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism), which he found “too much centered on ‘old-style’ 19th-century anarchism and not on today’s diverse, confused libertarian and anarchist currents.”

As a point-of-departure, this is a little unfair; the series was a macro-view of a recently-published book about the “anarchist tradition” which was recommended by an anarchist in debate with us as the best statement of anarchist views. The series did not pretend to be a comprehensive engagement with all of today’s currents. If Yves’s objection is that we have not devoted sufficient time to attempting such an engagement, I can only suggest that he takes another look at our recent work and written material. He might try, just for starters, Ed Maltby’s “How to organise to change the world”, Bob Sutton on the dissolution of Climate Camp or my own “Open letter to a direct-action militant” or “Can we build a revolutionary workers’ movement?”

He should also note our work in and building up network — like Climate Camp, Workers’ Climate Action and Feminist Fightback — direct-action, activist coordinations that unite Trotskyists, anarchists and others to organise on the basis of shared class-struggle politics within wider anti-capitalist milieus. Perhaps Yves considers these efforts inadequate or differently structured, but I suggest that we only engage with anarchists as they were all nothing more than slavish acolytes of Bakunin and Proudhon is unreasonable.

Unlike other Trotskyist organisations (such as the SWP, whose dreadful recent series on “anarchism” used the term interchangeably with “autonomism”), we have attempted to engage with anarchists in its form as a discrete theoretical tradition and in its more diffuse modern manifestations.

So Yves’s ostensible starting point (merely to chirrup the AWL, without agenda, into an engagement with a different expression of “anarchist” ideas) is at the very least, misplaced. What is the article’s purpose? In a correspondence reply and the anarchist-dominated website Like Thinkers, Yves writes: “If you read my conclusion with accurate glasses it seems clear (at least to me) that if Trotskyists want to continue to exist they should question — to de-glam and leave Trotskyism in the ‘dustbins of history’”. I have no problem with Yves attempting to persuade us to break with Trotskyism, but if this is his aim he should be upfront about it.

REAL

I know Yves is committed to real debate — non-sectarian but sharp and serious. Despite his warm words for young anarchists interested in old texts, he has given much of his own energy in recent years to digging out and publishing... old texts of anarchism and Marxism. He should write, therefore, so that we can debate the words on the page without “glasses” — “accurate” or otherwise.

I argue that there are specific politics and general ways-of-thinking which have become incorporated into “Trotskyist” common-sense (most of them inherited wholesale from Stalinism) that do belong in the “dustbin of history”. But exactly what specific ideas Yves thinks we should throw out, and what ideas from anarchist traditions — if any — we should replace them with remains a mystery. He doesn’t spell it out in his article or for my part I’m just not worried the right “glasses”.

He is not even clear about whether he agrees with the politics of “today’s young anarchists”, whose defender and advocate he has apparently appointed himself. On “militancy at work”, for example, Yves argues that “young anarchists” are more interested in “direct action in their community” rather than the workplace. The implication is that pacification has shifted the emphasis, and that unionists can be challenged away from struggles in workplaces and the organisation of themselves out of them (that is, unions).

Yves describes a “Trotskyist” strategy of “infiltrating the trade union bureaucracy” (apparent to denote by this, not just attempting to position in the official machine, like say the SP’s in PCS, but any systematic engagement with trade-union organisation) and says some anarchists share it, but highlights the fact that many anarchists maintain an overt hostility to established labour movements. Certainly, some anarchists do think this. But are they right to think so?

Does the proliferation of precarious work (all centres, service and retail sector jobs etc.), particularly amongst young people, somehow alter the fundamental analysis that sees the wage relation, in workplaces, specifically (rather than what some anarchists mystically describe as “hierarchy” or “power relations”), pervading diffusely throughout all of society and no more or less hegemonic in the workplace than in a classroom or on a housing estate as the nuclear core of capitalism? We believe that it doesn’t. Certainly, the “shape” of the working class has changed since the 60s, 70s and 80s but the essential DNA of capitalism has not. On the question of “direct action”, to give another example, the debate is not whether we should organise it “now” (which the anarchists want, apparently), or reject it until we achieve a “primitive accumulation of missionaries (or cadres) to build the party” we can all agree that “direct action now” is necessary. The questions are what kind of direct action, by whom, and for what? Yves’s article doesn’t scratch the surface of those fundamental questions, and is rather poorer for it.

Part of Yves’s problem is that, in attempting to speak on behalf of a milieu that is, by definition and by his own admission, diffuse, contradictory and “confused”, he can only deal in impressionistic brush-strokes. The politics of the people Yves is attempting to describe are not fixed. They are on a journey — some towards more theoretically-concrete “classical anarchism”, some towards anarcho-syndicalism, some perhaps towards the revolutionary syndicalism which bears a great deal in common with our own politics; some away from working-class anti-capitalism altogether and towards individualist libertarian utopianism. When the AWL meets people at various stages of that political journey, we attempt to engage with them, and not by throwing critiques of Bakunin at them but by trying to identify shared politics to organise around. That common organisation sometimes involves us learning from them, but it also involves identifying where we think they’re wrong and attempting to persuade them of our ideas.

It is on that terrain, on the terrain of which ideas are right and which are wrong, that the engagement between “Trotskyists” and “today’s young ‘anarchists’” must take place. The fact that, according to Yves, some “young anarchists [...] are not looking for a coherent, scientific point of view” doesn’t change this, it simply means that that, too, is an idea worth engaging with.

Many of the ideas Yves describes — a focus on building cooperatives or social centres, an emphasis on organisng “non-traditional” groups of workers, a perspective that sees squeezing a building as equally anti-capitalist/revolutionary as organising a strike — are modern echoes of pre-Marxist utopian socialism. You can see them, alive and well, in the Occupy movement, many of whose activists see the establishment and maintenance of the protest camps as an end in itself rather than a symbolic act or an action designed to provide leverage to win political demands (as per the ego-graph on Yves’s article — “when I cook for the Occupy movement, I contribute to changing the world.”)

21st century utopians (which would perhaps be a better label than “anarchists” for the people Yves is describing, although anarchism has always had utopian elements) start from an opposition to capitalism, but often without a clear analysis of what it is or how it works, and a vague idea of an alternative, but without an identifiable agency for achieving it.

CLASS

The AWL believes that capitalism is not simply an accumulation of its symptoms or bad effects, but a specific system predicated fundamentally on the exploitation of wage labour. It can only be disrupted and overthrown by subverting that exploitative relationship. This means that workers’ self-organisation, at the point of exploitation, is “privileged” as a form of organisation. It means that strikes, sit-ins and other forms of class-struggle direct action are “privileged” as forms of action. It means that the organisations organically generated from capitalist class relations (trade unions) are key sites of struggle, no matter how bureaucratic or badly-led they may be. And it means that only workers’ self-organisation and struggle can provide a basis for building a new society.

“Today’s young ‘anarchists’” — our 21st century utopians — don’t agree, Yves tells us. Fine. But, to be perhaps a little blunter than Yves would like, they are wrong. The Marxist critique of such perspectives is as valid now as it was in 1848, and is one aspect of our tradition that we are not prepared to junk. If Yves wants to contribute more productively to a continuing engagement between the AWL and anarchists of whatever stripe and school, he would do better to say precisely what he believes are right and which wrong, rather than setting himself up as an ostensibly-neutral (but in fact partisan) conduit for the constantly-shifting ideas of a layer of activists with which we already have a long experience of engaging.

Enough with the glasses, Yves; let’s have the debate in plain view.

Not even looking for a coherent view?

... are not looking for a coherent, scientific point of view"
By Martin Thomas

In one of the crazy autobiographical fragments he wrote in his last years, the famous French Stalinist philosopher R. Alix claimed that his father, a bank manager, ran his branch on the following lines:

"It was his custom not to say anything, or to make absolutely unintelligible remarks. His subordinates dared not admit they had understood nothing, but went off and usually managed very well on their own, though they still wondered if they might not be mistaken and this kept them on their toes."

"If Marx, the philosopher" is presented by many exegetists as posthumously running the Marxist movement in the same way as Althusser senior ran the bank. Marx himself explicitly said that he had moved on from philosophy; and scarcely ever made "philosophical" statements; yet, according to the exegetists, a philosophy which somehow can somehow be cooked up from scattered and often cryptic remarks by Marx is the basic stuff of Marxism.

Marx made two, and only two, considered statements, polished and prepared for publication, on his "method of work". The major one is in the postface to the second edition of *Capital*.

Marx noted that various reviewers had criticised the book for not applying dialectical Hegelian sophistry. He claimed that by citing other reviewers who (more accurately, in Marx's view) saw him as using "deductive method" and "muddling her for making a fuss about the issue.

To describe his own "dialectical method", Marx quoted a Russian reviewer, who saw these main features:

- a focus on "the law of variation... transition from one form into another, from one series of connections into a different one";
- the priority being, "that the facts be investigated as accurately as possible", in order to enable "a precise analysis of the different states of development of the sequentiae and links within which the different stages of development present themselves";
- to prove "both the necessity of the present order of things, and the necessity of another order into which the first must inevitably pass over".

By Molly Thomas

David Cameron seems to think that child poverty is something one might act against only in order to keep Polly Toynbee happy.

In the Guardian magazine on 26 November, he answered questions from selected celebrities, and was asked about child poverty by Polly Toynbee. His response concluded: "There are many things I can do in life, but making Polly happy is not one of them..."

**Apologists**

Marx recognised that "Feuerbach's dialectic" had "overcome" the Hegelian dialectic and showed that Hegelian dialectic to be a system of reconciliation and apologists in which "reason finds itself at home in unanswerable arguments", a "false positivism or merely apparent criticism".

It was not that Hegel had conditioned a radical philosopher in order to keep his academic post. The "falsehood is the falsehood of his very principle".

"Feuerbach, not satisfied with abstract thinking, wants contemplation; but... Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the finitude of his thinking, in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question".

In Marx's early writings, "Hegelian" is an adjective of condemnation. ("It is Hegelian trash, it is not history", he exclaimed against Proudhon's account of times past). Later, when Marx wrote his "postface to Capital", he seems to have become more "Hegelian". He denounces those who dismiss Hegel as "a dead dog"; "I openly avowed myself the pupil of a reactionary thinker"

He is hostile to the myopic empiricism of writers like Leopold von Ranke ("merely tell us how it really was"). But pupils can and do move on from their teachers.

Marx was scrupulous about acknowledging everyone idea which he took from another source. Many writers appear in the footnotes of *Capital*, Hegel, too, sometimes; but never as someone serious or mine. Many of the footnoted references to Hegel are obviously joks. I would argue that all of them are literally frivolous. As Engels emphasises again and again: "Anti-Dühring (a polemic against a writer, Dühring, who had developed his own version of dialectics), Marx never in *Capital* cites a Hegelian trope as a substantive argument for a conclusion. Marx only invokes phrases from Hegel and was a brilliant author of mind-joking phrases to decorate conclusions drawn from sober factual reasoning.

But not only is this evoative — Cameron seems to think that the point isn't to use them but doesn't say that they won't — it's also extremely offensive.

By Martin Thomas

In one of the crazy autobiographical fragments he wrote in his last years, the famous French Stalinist philosopher R. Alix claimed that his father, a bank manager, ran his branch on the following lines:

"It was his custom not to say anything, or to make absolutely unintelligible remarks. His subordinates dared not admit they had understood nothing, but went off and usually managed very well on their own, though they still wondered if they might not be mistaken and this kept them on their toes."

"If Marx, the philosopher" is presented by many exegetists as posthumously running the Marxist movement in the same way as Althusser senior ran the bank. Marx himself explicitly said that he had moved on from philosophy; and scarcely ever made "philosophical" statements; yet, according to the exegetists, a philosophy which somehow can somehow be cooked up from scattered and often cryptic remarks by Marx is the basic stuff of Marxism.

Marx made two, and only two, considered statements, polished and prepared for publication, on his “method of work”. The major one is in the postface to the second edition of *Capital*.

Marx noted that various reviewers had criticised the book for not applying dialectical Hegelian sophistry. He claimed that by citing other reviewers who (more accurately, in Marx’s view) saw him as using “deductive method” and “muddling her for making a fuss about the issue.

To describe his own “dialectical method”, Marx quoted a Russian reviewer, who saw these main features:

- a focus on “the law of variation... transition from one form into another, from one series of connections into a different one”;
- the priority being, “that the facts be investigated as accurately as possible”, in order to enable “a precise analysis of the different states of development of the sequentiae and links within which the different stages of development present themselves”;
- to prove “both the necessity of the present order of things, and the necessity of another order into which the first must inevitably pass over”.

By Molly Thomas

David Cameron seems to think that child poverty is something one might act against only in order to keep Polly Toynbee happy.

In the Guardian magazine on 26 November, he answered questions from selected celebrities, and was asked about child poverty by Polly Toynbee. His response concluded: “There are many things I can do in life, but making Polly happy is not one of them...”

**FORERUNNER**

Marx also cited his own preface to his 1858 book which had been a forerunner to *Capital*. There he had argued that “the mode of production of material life conditions the mode of social, political and intellectual life. That mode of production, however, changes from one historic epoch to another, and each of the modes of production in history is torn and spurred by “that antagonism that emanates from the individuals’ social conditions of existence”.

Further (in the *Capital* postface) Marx claimed that “the dialectic” is Hegelian sophistry. He holds in his postface to *Capital* that “dialectic” is a method that lets us know straight off that any object in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well... [in its very essence critical and revolutionary].

**IDEALISM**

The special thing about Hegel’s dialectics is that for him dialectics was idealism, idealism was dialectics, and idealism and dialectics were science.

“By Dialectic is meant the indwelling tendency outwards by which the one-sidedness and limitation of the predicates of understanding is seen in its true light, and shown to be the negation of them. For anything to be finite is just supress itself and put itself aside. Thus understood the Dialectical principle constitutes the perfection of all soul dialectic progress, the dynamic which alone gives imminent connection on the body of science; and, in a word, is seen to constitute the real and true, as opposed to the external, exaltation above the finite”;

"There is no truth and truth, as opposed to the external","exaltation above the finite”; a method which produced real truth, in “the opposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind” — that was dialectics for Hegel.

The dialectical dialogue was between the Idea and itself, and that dialogue, the self-development of the Idea, was not just “about” reality. It was reality, it was truth, as opposed to the flimsy-fan of ephemeral facts.

Ludwig Feuerbach, as Marx would recognise, showed that Hegel’s philosophy was nothing, but religion conceptualised and rationally developed it.

He proposed a different dialectical dialogue. Feuerbach: “The true dialectic is not a monologue of the solitary thinker with himself [notonaly of the Idea with itself; in fact of the philosopher with himself]. It is a dialogue between ‘I’ and ‘Thou’. It is therefore a process of abstraction, combination and reconsideration, not a one-and-for-all revelation.

**APOLGETICS**

Marx recognised that “Feuerbach’s dialectic” had “overcome” the Hegelian dialectic and showed that Hegelian dialectic to be a system of reconciliation and apologists in which “reason finds itself at home in unanswerable arguments”, a “false positivism or merely apparent criticism”.

It was not that Hegel had conditioned a radical philosopher in order to keep his academic post. The “falsehood is the falsehood of his very principle”.

“Feuerbach, not satisfied with abstract thinking, wants contemplation; but... Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the finitude of his thinking, in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question”.

In Marx’s early writings, “Hegelian” is an adjective of condemnation. ("It is Hegelian trash, it is not history", he exclaimed against Proudhon’s account of times past). Later, when Marx wrote his “postface to Capital”, he seems to have become more “Hegelian”. He denounces those who dismiss Hegel as “a dead dog”; “I openly avowed myself the pupil of a reactionary thinker”.

He is hostile to the myopic empiricism of writers like Leopold von Ranke (“merely tell us how it really was”). But pupils can and do move on from their teachers.

Marx was scrupulous about acknowledging every idea which he took from another source. Many writers appear in the footnotes of *Capital*, Hegel, too, sometimes; but never as someone serious or mine. Many of the footnoted references to Hegel are obviously jokes. I would argue that all of them are literally frivolous. As Engels emphasises again and again: “Anti-Dühring (a polemic against a writer, Dühring, who had developed his own version of dialectics), Marx never in *Capital* cites a Hegelian trope as a substantive argument for a conclusion. Marx only invokes phrases from Hegel (and Hegel was a brilliant author of mind-joking phrases to decorate conclusions drawn from sober factual reasoning.

But not only is this evocative — Cameron seems to think that the point isn’t to use them but doesn’t say that they won’t — it’s also extremely offensive.

**FEATURE**

Varieties of dialectics

Cameron “answers” his critics
The 30 November public sector strike was the biggest single piece of industrial action in Britain for a generation. Millions of workers from 25 different trade unions took part, organizing lively picket lines, marches, and rallies across the UK. Despite Prime Minister David Cameron characterizing the strike as a “damp squib”, the government’s own figures admit that the strike shut or partially closed over 16,000 schools (nearly 75% of all state schools in the country) and led to the cancellation of 7,000 routine (non-emergency) NHS procedures. In Scotland, only 30 schools out of thousands opened and 80% of Welsh schools were shut. On page 5, we give our views on how the strike movement can develop.

Here, we collapse reports from across the country.

• More: workersliberty.org/ rlbReports
• Next steps after N30: see page 5

Lively pickets at Edgware Hospital

By Vicki Morris, Barnet TUC (pc)

There was a lively, ebullient picket of Edgeware Community Hospital in Barnet. Pickets representing Unison, the Chantred Society of Physiotherapists and the Society of Podiatrists were on one gate. There was another picket at the main entrance to the hospital staffed largely by podiatrists. The branches represented had also organised a picket at Finchley Memorial Hospital.

I spoke to the branch secretary and chair of the Unison Barnet PC&T and Mental Health branch, Ben Nunes and Sylvia Saltier. They were happy with the level of emergency work.

Cover they had negotiated with management. They told me that some clinic appointments had been cancelled, but said the wards, district nurse service and walk-in centre head were still open. I said that seemed a rather high level of service and asked whether they were confident their action was effective. They replied it wouldn’t make any protest than a strike. They seemed confident the action was worthwhile. They were particularly concerned about the impact on women workers of the pensions changes. Sylvia said: “The change to career average pensions will particularly hit women, who have periods of work in the workplace. The strikers had been buoyed by public support, including leaflets brought by the local pharmacy and residents.

By Stewart Ward

Management at an East London school has turned to old-fashioned strike-breaking tactics as teachers stage their battle against ex- cessive workloads.

Teachers in the Langdon School in Newham, who are members of the National Union of Teachers, struck for the fourth time on Thursday 24 November and plan to strike again on Tuesday 29 November and Wednesday 30 November as part of the pension strike. 70 teachers took part in the last round of strike action, but the school’s assistant head teacher insisted on keeping the school open despite the low staffing levels.

In a new turn, the school has hired new staff to break the strike. The union has written to the school demanding reinstatement of the assistant head teacher and received assurances that the school would keep the assistant head teacher, who has been told to do the work of striking employees, the school has negotiated direct Local Authority contracts for the strikers. The local union will keep the grounds for a dispute, but is unable to fully support as a whole, as Langdon School specifically.

In a message to supporters, NUT reps at the school said: “This is a very tough dispute — and one we’re amazed has got this far. We are proud of our members’ resilience and solidarity. We also need all the support we can get. We know from your messages that many of you feel frustrated by issues of workload and oppressive management that we face.

“We thought from the start that this was a fight for all teachers. Now we know it is.”

Messages of support can be sent to nutlangdon@ntl.co.uk.

Teachers fight strike-breaking

By Darren Bedford

Electricians working for Balfour Beatty Engineer- ing Services have voted by 81% to take strike action in their battle against their employer’s attempt to unilaterally withdraw from the Joint Industry Board (JIB), the body which oversees union-negotiated pay and working conditions. Balfour Beatty, along with six other major mechanical and electrical construction contractors, are proposing to replace the JIB with a new agreement, the “Building Engineering Services National Agreement” (BESNA), which is not union-negotiated.

Workers currently employed by the seven contractors have been told they have until 7 December to sign up to BESNA, or risk losing their jobs. The new contracts would mean a 35% cut for workers. A London-based rank-and-file committee, around the Siteworker bulletin, has kept up a weekly programme of “flashmob” style direct actions, including a light-house occupation of the head offices of the JIB and Balfour Beatty on Wednesday 23 November.

Sparks vote to strike

By Darren Bedford

A strike by thousands of workers at Unilever (which manufactures well-known products including Marmite and other household goods) could be the first major set-piece pensions battle in the private sector, after Unite, GMB and USDAW all returned massive majorities for action.

Workes are attempting to prevent the abolition of final salary schemes, and instead keep accrual based pensions, for both new and existing workers. A new scheme will mean that some scheme members will retain accrued benefits, but will not receive their full final-salary pensions and will instead be transferred onto career-average pensions. On January 1, 2012 this would mean enormous losses for many workers. According to Unite, one member has already calculated that it represents a loss of £500,000 if he lives for just 15 years after retirement.

A company statement said: “Our pensions arrangements in the UK have to reflect today’s realities if they are going to be sustainable into the future. This means making tough choices, including an acceleration in the move away from final salary pensions. We give the best years of their lives to our local government and then they’re thrown on the scrapheap. “We think we need selective action, taking out school workers, cleaners. Let low-paid workers have a chance.”

Thousand march in Cambridge

By Liam McLulhy, Cambridge Defend Education (pc)

Cambridge Evening News reported 2,000 people at the noon rally on 30 November.

Speeches were of variable quality but were overall held by local trade unions active in the workplace rather than inside the meeting. The Cambridge Occupation worked with local trade unionists to produce a leaflet inviting striking workers to join them at 4pm to discuss students' and workers' unity and how to take the dispute forward beyond today’s strike. Occupiers sent a fleet of bikes around all the picket lines nearly in the morning to offer solidarity, discuss the strike and publicise the meeting. They also handed out leaflets at the rally.

Around 50 people attended and issues of rank-and-file control, the importance of trade union and student union together trades council, student and town anti-cuts structures were debated.

Rita Ash, a Unison activist, spoke to Solidarity: “We can’t do anything until the government starts talking.

“The situation’s hard for us, dinner ladies were only allowed into the pension scheme in 1994. I work 35 termtime, so it counts as part-time, meaning that even though I’ve been in the scheme 17 years, only 14 are recognised.

“Dinner ladies are constantly carrying heavy loads, getting in overtime... people often can’t physically work even up to 60, and they get dismissed. They give the best years of their lives to their local government and then they’re thrown on the scrapheap.

“We think we need selective action, taking out school workers, cleaners. Let low-paid workers have a chance.”

SOLIDARITY 11

Unilever workers take pensions fight to private sector

By Darren Bedford

A strike by thousands of workers at Unilever (which manufactures well-known products including Marmite and other household goods) could be the first major set-piece pensions battle in the private sector, after Unite, GMB and USDAW all returned massive majorities for action.

Workes are attempting to prevent the abolition of final salary schemes, and instead keep accrual based pensions, for both new and existing workers. A new scheme will mean that some scheme members will retain accrued benefits, but will not receive their full final-salary pensions and will instead be transferred onto career-average pensions. On January 1, 2012 this would mean enormous losses for many workers. According to Unite, one member has already calculated that it represents a loss of £500,000 if he lives for just 15 years after retirement.

A company statement said: “Our pensions arrangements in the UK have to reflect today’s realities if they are going to be sustainable into the future. This means making tough choices, including an acceleration in the move away from final salary pensions. We give the best years of their lives to our local government and then they’re thrown on the scrapheap. “We think we need selective action, taking out school workers, cleaners. Let low-paid workers have a chance.”

Around 2,000 of Unilever’s 7,000 UK private sector workers have voted to take strike action, the first major set-piece pensions battle in the private sector since 2007.

A strike by thousands of workers at Unilever (which manufactures well-known products including Marmite and other household goods) could be the first major set-piece pensions battle in the private sector, after Unite, GMB and USDAW all returned massive majorities for action.

Workes are attempting to prevent the abolition of final salary schemes, and instead keep accrual based pensions, for both new and existing workers. A new scheme will mean that some scheme members will retain accrued benefits, but will not receive their full final-salary pensions and will instead be transferred onto career-average pensions. On January 1, 2012 this would mean enormous losses for many workers. According to Unite, one member has already calculated that it represents a loss of £500,000 if he lives for just 15 years after retirement.

A company statement said: “Our pensions arrangements in the UK have to reflect today’s realities if they are going to be sustainable into the future. This means making tough choices, including an acceleration in the move away from final salary pensions. We give the best years of their lives to our local government and then they’re thrown on the scrapheap. “We think we need selective action, taking out school workers, cleaners. Let low-paid workers have a chance.”

Teachers fight strike-breaking

By Stewart Ward

Management at an East London school has turned to old-fashioned strike-breaking tactics as teachers stage their battle against ex- cessive workloads.

Teachers in the Langdon School in Newham, who are members of the National Union of Teachers, struck for the fourth time on Thursday 24 November and plan to strike again on Tuesday 29 November and Wednesday 30 November as part of the pension strike. 70 teachers took part in the last round of strike action, but the school’s assistant head teacher insisted on keeping the school open despite the low staffing levels.

In a new turn, the school has hired new staff to break the strike. The union has written to the school demanding reinstatement of the assistant head teacher and received assurances that the school would keep the assistant head teacher, who has been told to do the work of striking employees, the school has negotiated direct Local Authority contracts for the strikers. The local union will keep the grounds for a dispute, but is unable to fully support as a whole, as Langdon School specifically.
**Egypt: protest continue as election begins**

By Clive Bradley

Voting has started — in a process which will take four months — in Egyptian elections, the first since the fall of Hosni Mubarak in February. Polling stations in some areas had to stay open late to accommodate the huge numbers of Egyptians wanting to cast their vote. This is despite a call for a boycott from some of the protesters who have reconciled Cairo’s Tahrir Square and the centres of other cities. Does this re- veal a gulf between the protesters and the mass of Egyptians? A distance, but probably not a gulf. The protests have been spurred by continued repression meted out from the government of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) which removed Mubarak. The military has not only kept “emergency” legislation in place, it has added new repressive laws. And in the months since February, perhaps 12,000 activists have been arrested, most of them tried by military rather than civilian courts. The arrest and imprisonment of well-known bloggers was a particular spur to the recent resurgence in popular protest.

**KILLED**

Over forty people have been killed by the army in the last week, and thousands injured.

A popular symbol of the new demonstrations in the eye-patch — representing those who have lost eyes due to rubber bullets and other weapons used to disperse protesters. But the mass demonstrations continue:

A notable absence from these protests as an organised force has been the Muslim Brotherhood, expected to emerge from the elections as the biggest single party. That is to say, in the shape of their official Freedom and Justice Party. The Brotherhood has chosen to stay away from the protests for hours, they say, of inflaming the situation: their presence might make the protests a declaration of war on the government. For sure also their ears are closer to the ground in the suburbs and villages, where people have been anxious to vote.

One factor behind the popular liberal demand that the army “go now” — before, and indeed canceling elections — is hand over power to a civilian government (the domi - nant version of this seems to be a government headed by Mohammed al Baradei) is fear of Muslim Brotherhood domination of the new parliament. A consistent liberal and leftist concern has been that the Brotherhood is better organised — it has had years to prepare itself, whereas secular and leftist groups have only had, for the most part, a few months.

Even more conservative “salafist” Islamic groups are expected to do well in the elections also (perhaps especially in the rural areas).

**TAHIR**

For sure, however, the anger with the military government expressed by the tens of thousands of activists in Tahrir Square and elsewhere is shared by the majority of Egyptians.

Reports suggest that al - though voters disagree with the boycott call — anxious to take part in what they see as the first real elections in their lives — they identify with the revolution and want to see it go further.

Military rule has done nothing to improve the situation of most Egyptians, struggling to earn a living in an impoverished country hard hit by world re - cession and years of privatisation and govern - ment corruption.

The militant independ - ent trade union movement which has emerged since the beginning of this year has begun to address these issues.

But for the moment the best organised political groups are the Brother - hood on the one hand and the moderate liberal secularists on the other — neither of which offers much comfort.