

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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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.

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

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- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
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US withdraws from Iraq

By Martin Thomas

At the end of December, the last US troops will withdraw from Iraq, eight years and eight months after the invasion of March 2003.

Bungling to the last, the USA sent vice-president Joe Biden to tour Iraq declaring the operation a success, and he held forth to a puzzled audience on the great things the USA has done in Baku. Baku is in Azerbaijan, not Iraq.

The invasion was the product of a surge of US triumphalism following the collapse of European and Russian Stalinism in 1991, easy US military successes in Kuwait (1991), Bosnia (1995), and Kosova (1999), and seeming US military success in Afghanistan (2001).

By invading, US politicians around George Bush thought they could cut short a possible process of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein gradually regaining the regional support and influence he had lost after the Kuwait war in 1991. With a quick, sharp blow, they thought they could get a US-friendly, market-friendly regime in Iraq and use it as a lever to transform the Middle East and North Africa, which would otherwise fall to political Islamists when the



decrepit old dictators like Mubarak, Assad, Qaddafi, Ben Ali, and the Saudi monarchy finally went.

In those terms, the invasion failed heavily. Iraq has a government dominated by Shia Islamists; the Iranian government, hated by the USA, probably has more influence in Iraq now than the US does, despite the fact that 16,000 US citizens (staff at the gigantic Baghdad embassy, and mercenary paramilitaries) remain in Iraq.

US clout in the region and the world has declined.

The USA has repeatedly declared it wants a two-states settlement in Israel/Palestine, and quickly, but has been unable to produce even a significant nudge in that direction.

The collapse of the old dictatorships which dominated the Middle East and North Africa for decades is now underway, with the "Arab Spring". The effect of the war in Iraq on that outcome has probably been to help the Islamists who now, with the election results in Egypt and Tunisia and the first declarations of the post-Qaddafi rulers in Libya, look like coming out on top.

Hardly anyone in Iraq positively endorsed the US invasion.

Some of Iraq's Shia majority, long suppressed by Saddam, were at first willing grudgingly to welcome the US's overthrow of the dictator and to deal with the US troops on a wary "wait and see" basis, hoping they would tidy up and leave soon. Hassan

Jumaa, leader of the oil workers' union which sprang up in southern Iraq after the fall of Saddam's police-state, said: "The occupation is like a headache, but Saddam was like death".

The wariness soon turned to outright hostility, as the US clumsily destroyed the fabric of civil government in Iraq and tipped the country into a gangster-ridden chaos over which Americans strode demanding flat-rate taxes and rapid privatisations.

The USA was sucked into a long military presence. The chaos led the majority of Iraqis to demand that the US withdraw - but also to say that the withdrawal should come only after some civil order had been restored, so that withdrawal would not tip the country into full-scale sectarian civil war and the destruction of all the limited democratic and labour-movement opportunities which had opened with Saddam's fall.

Socialists hoped that the new Iraqi labour movement would shape that reconstruction.

In fact, after a year of almost-exploding sectarian civil war in 2006, the uneasy exhaustion into which Iraqi society finally fell from late 2007 was under the rule of a cabal of Shia Islamist parties, in loose alliance with Kurdish nationalists, and gradually reconstructing a state machine around themselves.

The Iraqi labour movement remains alive, though battered and still scarcely semi-legal, since Saddam's old anti-union laws remain on the books and have been supplemented by others.

It will still need our solidarity after the US withdrawal.

Climate change: their solutions and ours

The Durban Climate Conference, which participants are hailing as a great success, concluded on 12 December.

Its 194 participants (including the world's "big three" emitters — USA, China and India) agreed a legal framework for re-

ducing carbon emissions and controlling temperature increase.

The world has been here before; negotiations at Kyoto and Cancun also presented themselves as historic achievements.

Writing before the conference, AWL member and

Unite activist Max Munday looks at how the workers' movement can develop our own solutions for fighting climate change which don't rely on bourgeois diplomacy:

• tinyurl.com/climatesolutions

Syrian state lashes out as sanctions bite

By Dan Katz

The Syrian police state is now responsible for over 4,000 deaths since the opposition movement emerged onto the streets in March.

This week, the regime staged local elections — part of a sham "reform" programme — with 17,000 candidates standing for 43,000 seats. State media reported voters were "flocking" to the polls. The on-the-ground opposition inside the country called for a boycott, and turnout seems to have been poor.

On Sunday the opposition called an open-ended "Strike for Dignity" — the main effects being closure

of small businesses and keeping children home from school. The strikers' main demands are the release of political prisoners and the withdrawal of the Syrian military from urban centres. In areas where the rebels are strong — in Homs, Deraa in the south, and northern areas close to the Turkish border — the strike seems strong.

The BBC quoted an activist in Homs as saying, "The [regime is] attacking five neighbourhoods with heavy artillery in Homs. Many houses are damaged. You ask me about the election? The polling stations are empty, the only people there are government supervisors, that's it."

Al Jazeera noted that the regime was taking revenge on shopkeepers who were observing the strike, burning down scores of stores in Deraa.

On 27 November, the 22-country Arab League took an unprecedented decision to impose economic sanctions on a member. It voted to stop trading with the Syrian state in everything but essential goods, to ban Arab investments in Syria, to freeze assets held by senior members of the regime abroad, and to end dealings with Syria's central bank.

The Banque Saudi Fransi, a Saudi bank, announced it is selling its 27% interest in one of Syria's private banks.

Three days later Turkey, one of Syria's biggest trading partners, said it would follow suit.

American and EU sanctions have also been imposed. A ban on oil imports, begun by America in August and the EU in September, is costing Syria \$400m a month. The Syrian pound has fallen 25% against the dollar.

Foreign investment has halted. Tourism, which accounted for over 10% of GDP in 2010, has ended. International credit cards no longer work.

Economic sanctions are beginning to hurt. Most Syrians have no heat because mazout (fuel oil) is scarce in most regions of Syria.

Islamists gain in Egypt's poll

By Gerry Bates

The second and third stages of elections to the lower house of Egypt's parliament are due on 14 December and 3 January.

Elections to the upper house will start on 29 January, and the new parliament - whose powers are still uncertain - will meet in March.

In the first stage of the lower-house elections, on 28 November, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party won 36.6% of the party-list vote.

The more devout and rigid "salafist" Islamists of

Al-Nour got 24.4%, making an Islamist total of 61%. Anecdotal evidence is that many workers voted for the Islamists on grounds that they seemed more "grass-roots" and in touch with people's lives than the liberal, secularist, and leftist parties. They were unworried by the Islamists' repressive attitudes or perhaps accepted their reassuring claims to be moderate.

The Egyptian Bloc (left-liberal) got 13.4%; al-Wafd (the traditional party of the Egyptian bourgeoisie), 7.1%; al-Wasat (a semi-secularising split from the Muslim Brotherhood)

4.3%; and the Revolution Continues Alliance (leftish) 3.5%.

The small new workers' parties in Egypt were unable to stand any candidates.

The further stages of the election, held in remoter rural areas, are likely to increase the Islamists' majority.

The Islamists may well move slowly and cautiously; but these election results pose a threat to the openings for democracy and a new workers' movement created by the Arab Spring and the overthrow of Mubarak.

Narrow win for New Zealand Tories

By Mike Kyriazopolous

New Zealand's Tories, the National Party, have been returned to lead the government, but only by the narrowest of margins.

National won 59 out of 121 seats in Parliament, and is reliant for a majority on the neoliberal ACT party and centre-right United Future, who got one seat each. Turnout was the lowest since the 1880s - about a million people (26.8%) on the electoral roll did not vote. The saving grace of the election was the result of the concurrently held referendum on the voting system - Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP) will be retained. In 1990 National gained a similar percentage of the vote, but the First Past the Post system delivered them 70% of the seats. A vicious neoliberal onslaught followed.

National ran a dumber-down election campaign, banking on the national euphoria of a Rugby World Cup win and the remarkable personal popularity rating of its leader, John Key. Labour's campaign centred around opposition to privatisation, but it also advocated raising the state retirement age from 65 to 67 (which National opposed), and tried to attack the government from the right on police recruitment numbers. Labour's share of vote collapsed in virtually every electorate, except in South Auckland, where they ran a vigorous

campaign. The party's leader resigned immediately following the election.

ACT's meltdown was spectacular - it went from five seats to one. However its single MP (given a generous cabinet portfolio) will provide useful political cover for Key, especially when trying to justify hard right policies, such as Charter Schools (Academies). The Maori Party suffered from its close relationship with National over the last term, as well as facing pressure on its left flank from the newly launched Mana Movement. The Greens got their best ever result winning 11% of the party vote. New Zealand First, a populist nationalist party, also did well winning eight seats - their anti-privatisation propaganda centred on the perils of state assets falling into "foreign ownership".

MANA

The Maori-led, working class-orientated Mana Movement retained its one MP, Hone Harawira, and won 1% of the party vote.

Its main campaign slogans were "Tax the rich", "Feed the Kids", "Jobs for all" and "20,000 new state houses". Mana was only launched a few months ago, so 1% is not too bad, but it should have and could have done better. Mana failed to make a real breakthrough into the Pacific Island and working class European communities, perhaps because it was perceived to be exclu-

sively a party for Maori. Mana did develop a decent policy on Pacific Islanders - equal rights with immigrants from Australia; and a 12 month amnesty for visa overstayers - but it was launched very late in the day.

Mana is a broad church, composed mainly of Maori Sovereignty activists, plus leftists and trade unionists, especially from Unite. All the major far left organisations are now active within Mana - the three Cliffite groups and the politically heterogeneous Workers Party.

ANALYSIS

In its post election analysis, the Workers Party identified contradictions in Mana's propaganda on asset sales.

It is sometimes progressive, other times economic nationalist - concluding: "We in Mana need to be sharp on economic nationalism if we want to grow beyond 1% of the party vote. After all, if our policies are presented as a pale imitation of New Zealand First, we can hardly be surprised if voters end up going for the real deal instead."

The most positive sign is that Mana activists are continuing to hit the streets immediately following the election, supporting locked out meat workers and state housing tenants facing eviction.

For the potentially vulnerable National-led government, Mana is likely to be the staunchest opposition it will face over the next three years.

Protests shake Putin regime

By Dale Street

Demonstrators took to the streets in cities throughout Russia on 10 December as the latest stage in the campaign against ballot-rigging in the parliamentary elections.

Such protests went ahead despite police violence, the mass arrests of protestors, the summary imposition of two-week jail sentences on those arrested on previous demonstrations and the flooding of the capital Moscow with 50,000 police and 2,000 interior troops in preparation for the anti-government rally.

Estimates of the numbers demonstrating in Moscow varied from 35,000 to 85,000. In St Petersburg around 10,000 protested.

The protests in 99 cities represented not just the biggest public protests in Russia for some two decades but also the first sizeable protests against the twelve-year-old Putin regime.

Putin was appointed acting President by Boris Yeltsin in late 1999.

He subsequently served two four-year terms of office. In 2008 Putin stood down as President - the constitution barred him from serving more than two consecutive terms of office - and was immediately appointed Prime Minister.

In September of this year Putin announced his intention to run for President in March 2012. Due to constitutional changes, he could end up in office until 2024.

Both as President and as Prime Minister Putin has presided over a regime which has been defined by authoritarianism, corruption, growing social inequality, an increasingly chauvinistic nationalism, and a more aggressive foreign policy towards states bordering Russia.

The main television channels and some of the major newspapers have slavishly supported Putin's policies and effectively blacked out oppositional voices. Even last week's Russia-wide protests received hardly any coverage on television

or in the pro-Putin press.

Oligarchs who had grown super-rich under Yeltsin but who fell out with Putin were forced into exile or prosecuted and imprisoned. Those who remained on good terms with him, however, continued to amass their fortunes: Putin cut the tax on company profits from 35% to 24%, and also introduced a flat rate income tax of 13%.

Years of economic growth, especially after the virtual collapse of the Russian economy under Yeltsin, combined with Putin's apparent determination to put an end to the social chaos of the Yeltsin years, initially secured Putin and his party (United Russia) broad support amongst the Russian electorate.

Putin was re-elected President in 2004 with 70% of the vote. And in the last parliamentary elections, held in 2007, United Russia won 64% of the vote, giving it 315 of the 450 seats in the Duma (Russian parliament).

DISILLUSIONMENT
But by 2011 disillusionment had begun to set in. Bloggers exposed a series of government-sanctioned financial scandals.

Despite Putin's promises to crack down on corruption, Russia had become the world's most corrupt major economy, with a worse level of corruption than Pakistan.

Annual economic growth of 7% a year and real wages growth of 15% a year faded away under the impact of the global economic crisis. Increases in wages stalled. Rates of economic growth fell by half. To balance the budget Putin and United Russia were left with the choice of cutting social spending or increasing the retirement age.

This disillusionment expressed itself in declining electoral support for United Russia.

Even according to official figures, United Russia won only 49% of the votes - down from 64% in 2007 - in this month's parliamentary elections. But Russian and international

observers put the party's share of the vote far lower.

The Russian vote-monitoring organisation "Golos" ("Vote") received 1,500 complaints of electoral abuse, including the fact that participation in the election in the Rostov region amounted to 146% of the electorate.

Based on data collected by 300 volunteers from 800 polling stations, Golos estimated United Russia's real share of the vote amounted to just 30%. In Moscow alone a million fictitious votes had been added to United Russia's share of the poll.

Observers from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) visited 150 polling stations and judged counting at 34 of them as "very bad". The OSCE also condemned media bias, state interference in the electoral process, and procedural violations including ballot-box stuffing.

OPPOSITION

In the week following the election the opposition movement, triggered by evidence of electoral fraud, coalesced around a number of basic demands.

These included demands that the results should be annulled, fresh elections held, an investigation conducted into the ballot-rigging, and all arrested protestors released.

But in terms of its overall politics, the opposition movement is politically amorphous and generally concerned to stress its moderate nature. It also contains some particularly unpleasant elements.

Alexei Navalny, for example, who has been praised in the Western media for his anti-corruption campaigning and anti-government blogging, is a hardline nationalist who scapegoats immigrants for what he calls "ethnic crimes", attends the annual "Russian March" rallies organised by neo-Nazis, and is a self-confessed admirer of French fascist leader Jean-Marie Le Pen.

24 December is to be the next day for nationally co-ordinated protests.

Life on Labour?



Dave Osler

Despite the failure of Russia's latest space probe, scientists are rightly determined to continue their search for life on Mars. The way things are going right now, it looks like that quest will reach fruition long before anyone ever discovers signs of life in the Labour Party.

It's not that I saw the defeat of New Labour at the ballot box last year as a prelude to a rerun of the Bennite years. Apart from anything else, the weight of the left both inside and outside Labour is insufficient to permit stuff like that. To revamp a period slogan, it's never again for "never again".

But as a Labour Party member myself, my expectation was that some sort of internal discussion over the way Labour governed for 13 years would open up. Perhaps some leading figures would finally give voice some of the criticisms they had been bottling up while the Thought Police held sway throughout Oceania.

Even the re-emergence of a distinctly social democratic current would mark a step forward of sorts, especially if it were open to dialogue with Marxism. But more than 18 months after the return of the ConDems, nobody on the left has even properly attempted a balance sheet of the 1997-2010 experience, and asked what lessons should have been learned.

Interestingly, soon after Cameron got the keys to 10 Downing Street, there were reports of an upsurge in new recruits to Labour. Some of these people briefly made an appearance at my ward meetings. I hate to generalise from the particular, but no attempt seems to have been made systematically to integrate this layer.

Then there was the election of Ed Miliband to the leadership, by the narrowest of margins. Red Ed — as he was misleadingly dubbed by the tabloids — sometimes seems to speak in a strange kind of political code.

SOFT

This or that comment is designed to be read between the lines as an encouragement to the soft left, although even then, they are usually counterbalanced with some ostensibly even-handed sop to rightist opinion. Is he or is he not to the left of, say, Hugh Gaitskell? Discuss.

Nor does what remains of Labour's small remaining hard left seem to be striding ahead, if the recent Labour Representation Committee conference is anything to go by. The LRC claims to have grown by 10% in the last year, although that is from a low base.

But attendance at the event appeared to be down on last year. Many executive places were uncontested, and even the LRC's undoubted leading MP John McDonnell found constituency commitments more pressing than staying to the end of the proceedings.

In so far as what is going on in the Labour Party tells us things about the state of consciousness in the British working class, all this stuff actually does matter.

I am not an AWL member, but as the organisation makes at least some of its internal debates public, I recall that orientation towards Labour was controversial within the group a couple of years back.

Majority opinion believed that it was worth maintaining some sort of presence, and at least one other far left grouping seem to have reached a similar conclusion, with familiar faces cropping up in new guises at Labour Party events.

But it is worth asking what revolutionary socialists can usefully achieve in stumping up for a Labour Party card. The old entrist tactic of past decades seems scarcely applicable. The contentions that Labour can be transformed into a revolutionary party, or even that a mass revolutionary current can be built inside it, seems more farfetched even then before.

Nor is it obvious to me that the membership are especially receptive to socialist ideas; a substantial proportion of it is actively hostile. And if it is radical youth and students you are after, the Labour Party is just about the last place you will find them.

The most persuasive argument is that there are so few other outlets for activity, to the point where even limited possibilities can start to look appealing. Permit me to briefly revert to the life on Mars analogy; life on Labour, even if it only amounts to the presence of microbes, would at least establish that we are not alone in the universe. At least for now, we should keep looking.

Social democracy: the rift widens



Eric Lee

In a recent interview for an Australian newspaper, the leader of the world's trade union movement made an interesting observation.

"Have progressive parties lost the narrative that connects them with working people in many countries?" asked Sharan Burrow, general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

One would have expected a diplomatic answer — something along the lines of, well, it varies from country to country, clearly some labour and social democratic parties remain closer to their roots, and so on.

But that is not what she said. Burrow, who chose not to pursue a political career in Australia and instead moved to Brussels to take over the ITUC, was blunt:

"The answer is yes, absolutely," she said. Labour and social democratic parties have lost their connection with the working class.

So next you'd expect her to say that it was really important for those parties to rebuild those connections, that unions and the parties they founded needed to re-connect, and so on. But once again, her answer was surprising.

"My job is not to worry about the parties," she said, "but to build the issues on which we can base a conversation with workers." "We" in this case means the trade union movement.

She did have one final comment for the politicians, though. "If any smart politician who shares even an ounce of our values can't get elected on the basis of that conversation, that is, frankly, pretty despairing stuff."

I found her comments very interesting coming in the wake of 30 November public sector strike here in the UK — a strike which went ahead without the support of the Labour Party or its leader, Ed Miliband, who was elected with the support of unions.

Trade unionists in a number of countries are finding that the political parties acting in their names are doing very little on their behalf. In some cases, this is causing unions to turn inward. When Sharan Burrow says "my job is not to worry about the parties" it's a clear expression of that feeling.

And the feeling is global. In the USA, many trade union-

ists have expressed a deep frustration with the Obama administration. Unions had a long shopping list for the first Democrat to win a national election since 1996 — and the top of their list was passage of labour law reform. They didn't get it. Banks got bailed out, but unions got very little.

Marxists like to point out that the Democratic Party in the USA is a bourgeois party, so that's pretty much what we can expect.

But this is a naive explanation. Unions in the USA play roughly the same role with regard to the Democrats as British unions do with regard to the Labour Party here. Sometimes, Democratic politicians even sound more left-wing than their British labour counterparts.

There are even worse cases like these — such as the Greek social democrats managing an austerity drive that triggered massive street protests. One imagines that Greek trade unionists have little time for "progressive" politicians these days.

There are, of course, notable exceptions. In Canada, the union-backed New Democratic Party which did extremely well in the most recent federal elections, threw its parliamentary support behind postal workers and others in recent national disputes.

One doesn't have to be a supporter of the Fourth International to get that there is a growing rift between the working class and the social democratic and labour parties that speak in its name.

To hear a moderate, mainstream trade union leader like Sharan Burrow make comments like that shows just how far things have gone.

At the end of the interview, Burrow says "we believe in non-violent protest, absolutely." But then she adds, "if there's no capacity to resolve the problem, then we are on the streets."

The question is not how mainstream left parties can re-connect to their base. Burrow is right about that. It's a bigger problem.

And yet her comments leave many unanswered questions.

Can unions go it alone? Do they not need to be engaged in politics? Can parliaments and local governments be left in the hands of those who have no sympathy for and no connection to the working class? Is being "on the streets" a strategy?

The willingness of trade union leaders like Burrow to speak the plain truth opens the possibility of having a serious conversation about these issues in the labour movement. And that's a conversation in which Marxists have something to say.



Letter

The suppression of Kronstadt: Bolsheviks had no choice

Martyn Hudson's latest letter (*Solidarity* 227) only confirms my fear that he does not have a coherent assessment of the revolutionary workers' regime in Russia in the early 1920s.

Martyn says "we should not in 2011 still be firing our own metaphorical cannons into the garrison of Kronstadt. The Bolsheviks were wrong, understandably wrong, but wrong". I disagree. I think the Bolsheviks had no choice but to suppress the rebels.

The traditional Lenin-Trotsky defence of the suppression of the Kronstadt mutiny highlights the sailors' mistaken programme, their social and political composition and their links to White Guards. I would concede that much in these arguments is not particularly solid in the light of recent historical research.

The sailors tried to distinguish their revolt from the White Guards and subsequent investigations have found few substantial links with right wing forces or imperialist governments at the time, though they were made after the rebel leaders had fled. Far from being denuded of revolutionary workers and composed mainly of fractious peasants, the evidence presented by Israel Getzler suggests that around 90% of the sailors had joined the navy before the civil war and half before the 1917 revolution. He also estimates that three-quarters of the mutineers' Revolutionary Committee had served through the revolution and the civil war on the Bolshevik side.

The sailors said they wanted equal rations instead of privileges for soviet bureaucrats and concessions to the peasantry similar to those the Bolsheviks would introduce shortly after with the New Economic Policy. If we take the words of the Petropavlovsk resolution at face value, the

Kronstadt sailors wanted free elections to the soviets. They opposed the demand for a constituent assembly.

However the SR-Maximalists slogan "Power to the Soviets and not to Parties" was used on the masthead of the Kronstadt *Izvestia* newspaper and in the first radio broadcast. Beneath the slogans, it was clear their rebellion was militarily opposing Bolshevik party rule.

Perhaps if agrarian reform had been implemented earlier, or the Bolsheviks taken a more diplomatic approach at the beginning of the revolt, the bloodshed might have been spared. Perhaps the Bolsheviks were overzealous in slandering the sailors during and after the revolt and too harsh in their repression of the mutineers. These were important matters, but essentially secondary in retrospect.

Even if all the surrounding arguments in the Lenin-Trotsky position are assailed, the fundamental reason to suppress the revolt still seems to me entirely valid. Faced with an armed revolt so soon after the civil war in a strategically important naval base close to Petrograd, with other cities simmering and armed rebellions in the South, the Bolshevik government ultimately had no option than to use repression.

As Trotsky put it just before he was murdered, "what the Soviet government did reluctantly at Kronstadt was a tragic necessity". He had earlier written that the revolt "could bring nothing but a victory of counter-revolution, entirely independent of the ideas the sailors had in their heads... when the insurgents took possession of the arms in the forts they could only be crushed with the aid of arms". Had the uprising triumphed, it would have been what Lenin called a "stepping stone" — perhaps with a short interregnum — the precursor for the Whites and the capitalist powers to restart the civil war.

Paul Avrich wrote one of the most thorough accounts of Kronstadt, criticising many of the arguments traditionally used by Trotskyists against the sailors. However even he concluded that "the historian can sympathise with the rebels and still concede that the Bolsheviks were justified in subduing them".

The logic is clear — if you believe Russia in 1921 was some kind of workers' state (albeit with bureaucratic deformations), then the Bolshevik government was justified in using force to suppress the mutiny and prevent even the tenuous forms of workers' self-rule from unravelling.

Paul Hampton, south-west London

For a united Europe!

The *Morning Star*, the paper associated with the Communist Party of Britain, carried a naively self-revealing editorial on 9 December: "There's a huge feeling of guilt and confusion when a leader writer in the *Morning Star* feels even a momentary twinge of fellow feeling with chief speculators' stooge David Cameron..."

Hadn't Cameron done at least something good? He "refused to allow Britain to be sucked further into what amounted to a further consolidation of a European super-state..."

The *Star* escaped its embarrassing alliance by reflecting that "Cameron remains wedded to Britain's place in Europe" — as if Cameron would be progressive if only he went the full way with the old-fashioned Tory right, and insisted that Britain keep aloof from Europe — and anyway Cameron had vetoed only "to protect the privileged position of the City of London's speculators".

But the instinctive fellow-feeling with Cameron was so strong it could not be denied.

For decades now the *Morning Star* and others have campaigned against "Europe" and "Brussels" as if they were the cause of all capitalist evils, and national capitalist leaders their helpless victims. As if democracy can exist only in walled-off nation-states, and democratic control over the necessarily international mechanisms of today's economic life is both impossible and unnecessary.

Capitalism operating with high barriers between countries in Europe is not better than a united capitalist Europe. It is worse. The bringing-down of barriers is good, although under capitalism, of course, it comes together with many things we oppose.

Agitation and argument like the *Star's* leave the working class and the labour movement wide open to the demagoguery of the Tory right. David Cameron's veto at the European summit on 9 December set off a surge of that demagoguery.

Right-wing Tory MPs described the veto as "incredibly, incredibly exciting", and called for a referendum on British withdrawal from the European Union.

BULLDOG

The *Mail's* front-page headlines for the three days after 9 December were: "The day he [Cameron] put Britain first"; "Tory fury at Clegg's 'pygmy' insult to Britain"; "Yes, Cameron got it right".

The *Express*: "Britain close to EU exit"; "End of EU is unstoppable".

The *Sun* was more nuanced in the small print, but headlined: "Up Eurs: bulldog PM sticks up for Britain".

If today's crisis leads to a break-up or loosening of the European Union, and a rebuilding of barriers between countries as different capitalist centres scramble to win out in sharpened competition, then that will be regression, not advance.

It will lead to fiercer cuts and privatisation, helped through by the claim that they are necessary to help "the nation" compete.

It is the Tory right which rightfully owns the anti-EU cause, and the "No2EU" left which has erred onto Tory ground, not vice versa.

The leaders of the rail union RMT, left-wing on other issues, have backed the "People's Pledge" campaign, which demands a referendum to get out Britain out of the EU, highlights on its website a *Daily Express* front page boosting the Pledge — "New hope to get out of EU" — and calls on people to vote only for parliamentary candidates who support a referendum.

The Pledge campaign itself, founded by former Tory students' chair Marc-Henri Glendenning and "pro-car" campaigner Stuart Coster, is fronted by Labour Party leftist Mark Seddon.

The Socialist Party ran a joint campaign with the RMT leadership in the 2009 Euro-elections under the slogan "No2EU".

If the *Morning Star* can find itself shocked into "guilt and confusion" by the Cameron veto, then those groups should too.

Supporting a united Europe does not mean supporting Merkel and Sarkozy, or Nick Clegg, any more than welcoming modern communications means endorsing Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg.

It is an essential reference point for the united labour-movement action, across the continent, which we need to resist the new waves of cuts and point the way to an alternative.

The labour movement should unite across Europe — at least as much as the bosses, and more

For a democratic Europe!

Europe is in crisis. And all the decisions about the crisis are being taken not by the people tormented, baffled, and troubled by it, but by a tiny elite of government leaders.

Both the majority decision of the 9 December Euro-summit, and the veto stance of David Cameron, were irrelevant or harmful for the crisis. The leaders saw no way of dealing with the crisis other than to make the people pay, by cuts, or, for Cameron, cuts plus special protection for the bankers of the City of London.

And no-one got a vote, except in the very indirect way of having voted in national elections from which, in one way or another, the government leaders who met in Brussels on 8-9 December emerged at the top.

No-one was consulted, not even Britain's deputy prime minister. Nobody gets a say now, except maybe a "take it or leave it" vote on a new treaty, if that emerges.

In Italy and Greece, Monti and Papademos have been installed as heads of government explicitly on the grounds that they are immune to democratic pressure: they are not elected and will not seek re-election.

BONDS

In December 2010, the elected European Parliament called for a "system of eurobonds" to ease the euro debt crisis — in other words, for the EU's richer states to provide credit guarantees which will enable troubled governments to borrow in financial markets at affordable rates.

It insisted that eurobonds "should serve to restore sustainable growth and not be achieved at the expense of the most vulnerable and therefore should not equate to lowering minimum incomes and aggravating poverty and inequalities".

Looking at the EU's actions a year later, in November 2011, elected Members of the European Parliament protested at the "lack of democratic legitimacy as a result of the Commission's insistence on the need for stronger budgetary discipline and surveillance".

These were weak decisions, by a weak parliament that has made no effort to assert itself. We could get stronger decisions if the peoples of Europe knew about these decisions by their elected representatives at a European level, and expected the elected representatives to control what happens.

In Germany, the liberal (once Marxist) philosopher Jürgen Habermas has created a major public debate with a pamphlet protesting at the way European undemocracy has mushroomed in the crisis as fast as debt overhangs and cuts budgets. "All signs indicate that they [Merkel, Sarkozy, and the rest] would both like to transform the executive federalism enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty into an intergovernmental supremacy of the European Council [the cabal of heads of government]... We are actually experiencing a dismantling of democracy".

EMPIRE

In Britain, the public debate is poorer. It is dominated by the nonsensical nationalist bluster of the Tories and papers like the *Daily Mail*.

They talk and write as if the last sixty, or even the last hundred, years never happened. Mentally, they still live in the days of the British Empire and of only-loosely-connected national economies.

In real life, national economies in Europe are closely interwoven, and could be disentangled and separated out only at the cost of huge economic regression (and, probably, military conflict).

"Little England" (or little Greece, Italy, Spain, Ireland...) is a myth. An attempt at it would be a step backwards. Either we fight for and win cross-border democratic control over those economic interweavings; or they mechanically dominate us, through the brutal arbitration of market forces; or, as now, we are subjected to inept attempts to tackle those interweavings by government leaders acting without control or mandate.

The leaders act on the principle that important economic matters are too vital and too complex to be put under democratic control; and, themselves, as slaves to neoliberal superstition.

The crisis calls for a Constituent Assembly of Europe — a renewed European Parliament, elected democratically, and with rights to reshape the whole construction, rather than feebly advising the government leaders.

It calls for a labour movement united across Europe, with a programme of thoroughgoing democratic and economic reconstruction in the interests of the working classes.

It calls for resistance, now, to the cuts enforced across the continent, and the building of links and cross-border unity through solidarity in the struggle.

Help your weekly paper!

This time last year *Workers' Liberty* was looking forward to the New Year, to moving into new offices, upping our pace and making *Solidarity* a weekly. In the past year *Solidarity* has been much more of an activist and organising tool for our ideas because of that.

But for *Solidarity* to continue as weekly, we need more money. If you think our ideas and the amplification *Solidarity* gives to those ideas in the working-class movement, are important then you should support us financially.

Solidarity is not a generically socialist publication, arguing for lowest-common-denominator left politics. Our ideas about independent working-class politics and consistent democracy are sadly not common currency in the labour movement.

This paper says things which, if we did not say them, would go unsaid. Such ideas are likely to matter more in the next year, as the economic and social crisis deepens.

It matters too that *Solidarity* does not just parrot a party line. Unlike most left papers, it's a space for discussion, debate and dissent.

Please help us carry on fighting for our ideas and approach to socialist politics.

We're in the process of revamping our website to make it more accessible and to make the sharing and discussion of ideas easier. That also takes money.

In the New Year we will be launching a fund drive. Please donate now. A one-off Xmas gift of just a few pounds will help. A regular monthly standing order, even if that too is just a few pounds, is even better.

• For information on how to donate, visit www.workersliberty.org/donate. Cheques should be made payable to "AWL" and sent to *Workers' Liberty*, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.

United, workers can stop Monti

By Hugh Edwards

The sharp fall in the interest rate demanded of Italian debt on Monday 5 December signalled a malignant spirit of celebration in the international markets. Prime Minister Mario Monti's government of "neutral technocrats" — some of them in tears just to prove it! — had done what they were asked to do: unload upon the backs of the Italian masses further massive cuts and reforms of 63 billion between now and 2014.

Such is the price for the survival of both Italian capitalism, and the wider economic and financial community of the eurozone whose possible collapse would threaten the established global system.

Now Monti hopes his country's ruling class will be permitted to rejoin their German and French buddies at the helm of the European order of things after Berlusconi's buffoonery failed to stop Italy's chronic decline and saw it demoted in the capitalist powers league table.

From January 2012 2.5 million workers reaching pension age will now have to work between another three (for women) and six (for men) years. Eventually both sexes will be compelled to work to 70.

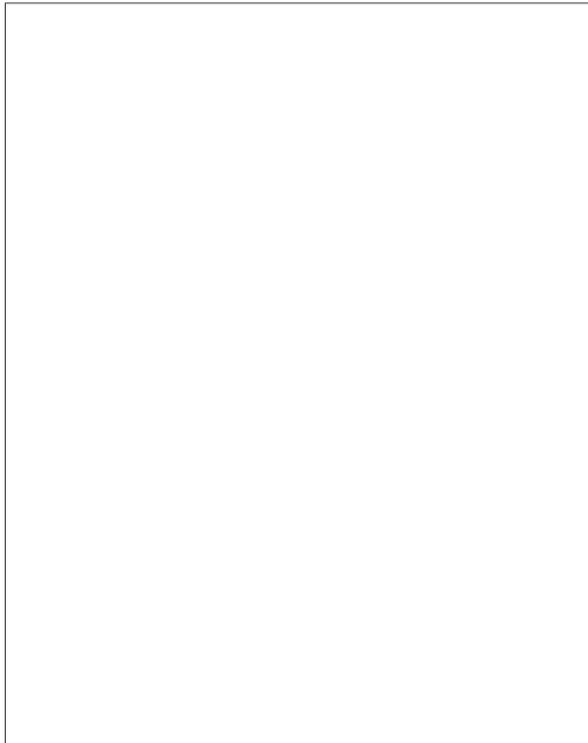
Above a minimum level pensions will no longer be indexed. An already derisory pension scheme will add more misery to the eight million or so families in poverty.

The grotesque spectacle of hearing obscenely rich University professors, among them not a few one-time feminists, and leading journalists of the liberal press, saluting the reforms as both a victory for women and a boon to the health and paypackets of the workers as a whole says much about the political quality of the opposition!

There will also be a hike of 2% on the Italian equivalent of VAT, the reintroduction of a swingeing house tax — this for a population with the largest percentage of home ownership in Europe.

A raft of communal and regional taxes will further hollow-out and dismantle what remains of the "local state" as the public, social and welfare areas life are eroded or handed over to private enterprise.

Naturally, given that Monti and his government of ex-admirals, businessmen and Church worthies have declared



12 December strike action

that the "Save Italy" crusade means sacrifices for all, the rich and powerful have been hit hard. Their yachts, limousines and big houses come under the axe — to the tune of 500 million in new taxes on capital and other assets.

That is nothing! Their enormous incomes, swollen by the billion pound industry of tax-evasion will be hardly noticed; and widespread endemic corruption among business, public administration politicians and the mafia, leeching billions from the public purse, will continue to be ignored.

Given that Monti's accession to office had been supported

by all but the Northern League party the official opposition of the Democratic Party and Italy of Values had, as Oscar Wilde put it, "nothing to say and they said it". The former, effectively the political referent of the largest union confederation CGIL, is relying on the latter, and the other unions, to do what they have done for decades — divert, diffuse and derail the anger and protests of their members.

Having welcomed the arrival of Monti the opposition anticipated a better display of window-dressing from him. Offended by the lack of enough "equity" to sell to their members, the unions announced a three hour (sic) strike for 12 December, with the intention of getting negotiations up and running.

But the metalworkers of FIOM, the most militant section of CGIL, are opposed to the whole exercise of bailing out the bosses' system. They struck for the day, simultaneously against the FIAT bosses' campaign to destroy FIOM as the champion of democratic trade unionism in Italy.

With the metalworkers are the Base unions, mainly drawn from the public sector and the bulk of the radical left parties and groups. But the largest of those groups — SEL, formerly the Bertinotti wing of Communist Refoundation and led by Nicky Vendola — has found itself stranded by the same opportunism towards the Democratic Party that split CR after its disastrous role in the last Prodi government.

The forces that are up for a fight and real resistance cannot be faulted for lack of will or good intentions — more strikes are posted for later in December. But we have been here before, where rhetoric and gesture promise much, but deliver little, other than disappointment.

The leaders of the Italian radical left need to learn the lessons from the fact that Berlusconi was turfed out by his own class, not his victims, and this underlines the impotence of the left. They bear a major responsibility for the fact that those masses find themselves in a worsening situation; a condition that urgently cries out for precise, concrete political answers.

These must start starting from the imperative to build unity in struggle against the attack, while simultaneously posing the need for a life or death challenge to all and every aspect of bourgeois rule, crowned, above all in the demand and fight for a workers' government.

Their main enemy is... Clegg



Here's a Christmas puzzle for *Solidarity* readers. Who is most confused and disoriented by David Cameron's refusal to sign up for EU fiscal unity — the *Daily Express* and *Mail* or the *Morning Star*?

The *Express* and *Mail* have been, as you might expect, fairly jubilant about Cameron's willingness to isolate himself (or "stand up for Britain", as they preferred to put it).

The *Express* ran a poll which, in true Albanian style, had 99% of their readers backing Cameron. They quoted the aptly named Tory MP Peter Bone declaring that it was "Better to be a British bulldog than a Brussels poodle".

But beneath the joy of the right-wing press there was some confusion. The *Express* in particular worked itself up into a frenzy about the treacherous and anti-British behaviours of the leading EU states.

Within hours of the end of the summit EU leaders were, we were told, "plotting their revenge" on Britain. First there will be "more red tape and regulation" in fact "a deluge" of the stuff. But the second element of the revenge plot is even more sinister; European leaders are apparently threatening "to drive the UK out of the EU". Devious bastards eh?

But just a minute, is that really such a terrible thing? The *Express* describes the 99% support for Cameron's stance as an overwhelming endorsement of the paper's own "crusade to get Britain out of the EU". Faced with clear evidence that the EU leaders and the *Express* have a common goal, UK withdrawal, you might expect more harmony and co-operation between them.

For most of the British right-wing press the main enemy was not Merkel or Sarkozy or even "the Germans" or "the French". As ever and as recommended by all good socialists, the main enemy was at home. It was Nick Clegg. When he finally tried to put some distance between himself and

Cameron on the EU deal the full range of Tory insults was unleashed. He is Madame Fifi, his party are "waxwork dummies" and above all he had crossed a serious line when he described Britain as "a pygmy on the world stage" in what the *Express* described as "a live TV rant".

It wasn't Clegg's racist language that was being attacked here but his alleged failure to be patriotic and puff up the influence of the declining power he represents.

All the right-wing press dismissed Lib Dem opposition as empty and safe. The consensus is that they face electoral oblivion outside the Coalition and are too frightened to pull it down.

Alongside Clegg, the *Mail*, *Express* and *Sun* also had a pop at Ken Clarke and Michael Heseltine for similar patriotic shortcomings. These old Tories might claim to believe that the interests of UK bosses would be better served by strengthening their links with the EU, but their real agenda was euro-federalism and a lingering bitterness over how they had been treated by the unquestionably great Maggie Thatcher.

SUN

Strangely enough the most steely and hard-headed Euro-sceptic assessment of Cameron's actions came from Trevor Kavanagh in the *Sun*. Cameron, he claimed, did not want to be in this position. "You could almost read the thought bubble over his head as he left 'what the hell have I done'."

Kavanagh clearly recognises that, in his own words, Britain seems friendless and the Coalition is splintering, but he registers these things not to suggest that the Tory leader made a mistake. On the contrary he urges him to take his stance to the logical, principled conclusion. Slash corporation tax on profits now, challenge the EU with your defiance, and then leave.

Kavanagh's take on the Lib Dems is also more acerbic. They have "learned to enjoy ministerial power and chauffeured limos". They are, he implies, going nowhere anytime soon.

And so to the *Morning Star*, whose leader writer on the day after the summit confesses to "a momentary twinge of

fellow feeling with chief speculators stooge David Cameron". Much is spent in the ensuing article underlining the difference between Cameron and the *Morning Star* but they hardly lessen the contradictions.

The CP line can be summed up as "Cameron did the right thing for wrong reasons". One of the wrong reasons is, correctly, identified as defence of the City from regulation and the Tobin tax. Beyond that however the basic criticism is this: "Make no mistake about it, Cameron remains wedded to Britain's place in Europe". Well, let us make no mistake about it — the *Morning Star's* central criticism of the Tory leader is that he is not anti-European enough.

When it comes to what is wrong with UK involvement in the EU the *Star* has two problems. The first is that "ever since Britain has been involved in the EU, the percentage of GDP generated by manufacturing has declined rapidly."

This is a link of such monumental economic ignorance that the writer cannot even sustain it for a few paragraphs in a short article. Within a short time he admits that the decline of manufacturing industry "can be clearly identified as stemming from the policies of the Thatcher government in the early 1980s when it began its huge programme of privatisation in industry in tandem with a shift of policy emphasis from manufacturing to finance as the core of the British economy".

And what was Cameron most objecting too in the EU deal other than the threat to regulate and tax the finance capitalists in the City?

The better reason given by the *Morning Star* for objecting to the EU deal is the lack of democracy. They do not, however suggest a remedy for that. They do not demand democratic control of EU powers and decisions nor democratic control of the banks, nor a levelling up of social rights. Instead they offer the alternative of national withdrawal and some way in the future "the socialist way".

Given that this is a paper that spent the vast majority of its history championing and lying about the greatest prison house of nations in history, the totalitarian Eastern bloc, they are hardly well-placed to lecture anyone on the merits of democracy.

What the Greek left is saying

By Theodora Polenta

As Greece struggles through huge cuts under the instructions of the European Union/European Central Bank/ IMF “Troika”, a lot of emotive language has been used, drawing parallels with the Greeks’ national liberation struggle against the German-fascist invasion in the 1940s.

Greek flags, and alliances with nationalist and chauvinist forces, have been widely accepted, even by parts of the left, as symbolising the struggle for national liberation, the struggle of the dependent Greek nation against the German and EU imperialism.

A post-modernist analysis, offered by Greek intellectuals and groups such as the Spitha movement founded by the famous composer Mikis Theodorakis in 2010, talks about the transition to a new meta-left era in which the Greek people will build from below a new “national-popular-class” unity against the memorandum, the Troika, and the foreign creditors.

But is Greece really “under occupation”? Can we draw a valid historical analogy with the 1940s? Is it really the duty of the Greek workers and the Greek left to propagate and build up an “anti-imperialist struggle for national liberation” together with supposedly progressive forces of the capitalist class, defined as progressive by their anti-German and anti-EU stance?

Such analysis has very short legs.

The majority of the eurozone countries that are described in this analysis as German protectorates are capitalist developed countries. Italy is a major economy, the third biggest in the eurozone, the eighth biggest in the world.

In today’s Greece the ruling class has not been defeated militarily and escaped to Egypt, as in 1940s. The Greek capitalists have control of their companies, their banks, and their state.

The Troika instructions are a product of negotiations with the Greek capitalist class. They are imposed on the Greek people after the prior agreement and consent of the Greek capitalists and the Greek government.

Contrary to prevailing myths, Greece is one of the most developed countries in the world. In 2010, it was the 31st richest country in the world, and the average GDP per person was €28,500.

PARENT

Both the European Union and the eurozone played a key part in the above achievement. After 1989-1991, Greek capitalism became the driving force in the exploitation and imperialist domination of the Balkan states. The Greek banks became the parent companies of banks in Tirana, Bucharest, and Ankara.

That led to the neglect of previous areas of capitalist investment such as the agriculture production; the metal industry; and the food industry. The shift of capitalist interests to financial operations was a strategic decision by the Greek capitalist class, not imposed by Brussels or other foreign powers.

The Greek capitalist class reoriented, became the centre of financial transactions for all the Balkans, and discarded Greece’s previous self-sufficiency in sugar, wheat, and other products.

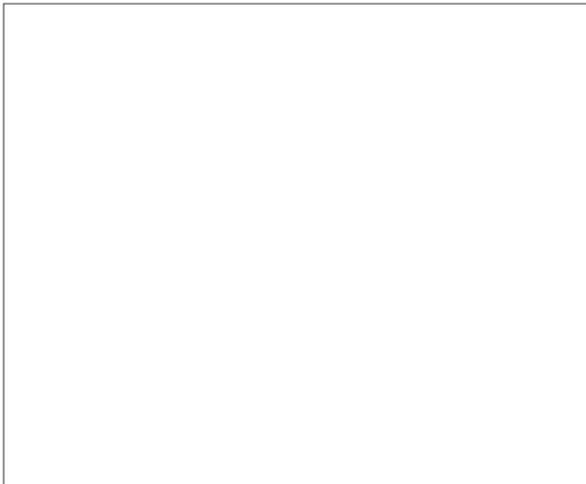
The rapid expansion along that path was only achieved due to Greece’s entry into the eurozone and the “hardness” of the euro as a currency.

The reorientation of Greek capitalism in the 1990s was, on a smaller scale, comparable to the shift in British capitalism during the Thatcher years. Thatcher abandoned the miners and the car industry in “return” for the City of London becoming the world centre for financial transactions.

That is why the majority of the Greek capitalist class want to stay in the eurozone, and negotiate the necessary cuts at the expense of the Greek workers. By supporting Greece’s position within the eurozone the Greek capitalist class are supporting their position within the world capitalist hierarchy. For the Greek people and the Greek working class, no struggle against the austerity measures can be victorious if it does not first of all prioritise the class struggle against our “Greek” capitalist class.

In Greece, alongside the fascist groups, a sizeable minority of the “respectable” right in New Democracy (equivalent to the Tory party) advocates the “national” reorientation of Greek capitalism, a return to the drachma (i.e. exit from the eurozone and the EU), and a shift of Greece to a tough export policy. (That means a further devaluation and degradation of the people’s wages and working conditions, the better to compete in world markets, but they gloss over that). They want a “multidimensional” foreign policy which would include accepting loans from and making alliances with Chinese and Russian capital.

The most dynamic sections of the Greek capitalist class



vehemently oppose Greek exit from the eurozone, or the prospect of Greece going bankrupt or refusing to paying its debts. They do that for class reasons.

The ultra-right populist party LAOS, a party that acts as an umbrella for a lot of openly fascist and anti-Semitic politicians and is part of the recently formed National Unity government, advocates safeguarding Greece’s position in the eurozone, whatever the cost to the Greek people, and the implementation of all the Troika’s austerity measures.

The pleas from LAOS to the Troika that they should not further polarise further the political climate, or else the “disorderly forces of the left will come to power, establishing chaos and transforming Greece into a Cuba of the Balkans”, show the blurring of the borders between the “cosmopolitan” and pro-European sections of the capitalist class and the ultra-right, racist, anti-Semitic, chauvinistic and fascist parties.

Both strands of right-wing agitation cuts against what the left must do.

After the 9 December European agreement, the possibility of Greece being expelled from the eurozone in the short term has decreased. There are no legal grounds, under existing EU legislation, to expel Greece; and the majority of the eurozone states now have “excessive” debt and deficit problems on the 9 December criteria. It is difficult or impossible to set Maastricht-type criteria which are violated only by Greece violates and not by bigger eurozone countries such as France or Italy.

But the left still needs to work out how to respond to the dilemma “euro or drachma”? How should the left respond to the possibility, immediate or remote, of Greece’s expulsion from the eurozone under Merkel’s and Sarkozy’s instructions?

The Greek left’s motto should be: “We are not taking sides in favour of the euro speculators against the drachma speculators, or vice versa”. The slogan “No sacrifice for the euro” provides the right political direction for left-wing movements to lead the struggle against austerity policies.

DRACHMA

Despite the good intentions of those parts of the left and progressive academics who advocate it, return to the drachma within a capitalist framework would lead to an even more extreme degradation of the Greek working class’s living standards and conditions.

If such a move succeeded in its own terms, by boosting productive development and exports (and it might well not), then that would happen only on the backs of the working class and the majority of the Greek people.

True, the euro is not a neutral symbol. It is linked with aggressive neoliberal policies and the austerity measures. A socialist revolution and a workers’ government in Greece, if they emerged in that country alone, in advance of the rest of Europe, would have to break the eurozone framework as well as other frameworks (such as free movement of the capital etc.)

But that is different from claiming that exit from the eurozone and the EU will open the road to socialism.

If George Papandreou had proceeded with the referendum he promised at the end of October, then he was going to pose to the Greek people the blackmailing dilemma: either vote for the Troika’s bailout fund and all the austerity measures that come with it, or accept that Greece is out of the eurozone and possibly the EU. In that sort of case, the left should vote against the cuts and the blackmail, and against the euro in that sense. However, that is a case of practical political duty, and should not be theorised into a general rule.

What is the Greek left saying?

The most extreme version of the pro-EU stance is expressed by DHMAR, a centre-left split from Syriza. DHMAR supports the safeguarding of Greece’s position in

the EU and in the eurozone at all costs. Its zeal and loyalty was manifested when it came close to giving a vote of confidence to the National Unity government which has an unelected banker as a prime minister and four fascist politicians as part of the cabinet.

DHMAR acts as a naive left wing adviser to Merkel and Sarkozy. But the 9 December decisions and their predecessors are not a German mistake. Merkel and the German capitalist know very well that the proposed policies will lead the eurozone countries to stagnation and not to growth. That is a conscious political choice. The aim of the left cannot be to persuade Merkel and her allies of the wrongness of their choices so they can rectify their mistakes, but to contribute in the development of a pan European workers’ movement to force Merkel to abandon the politics of neoliberalism and German capitalist domination.

Syriza pushes a “European-Keynesian” response to the crisis, with eurobonds and productive investment of EU funds in poorer areas as part of a progressive democratisation of the European Union. It is confined to legalistic forms of struggles and protests and dreams of broader green and centre left coalitions which will miraculously lead Greece and the eurozone out of crisis.

Like DHMAR, though inadvertently, Syriza confines itself to being an adviser of the government and the European Union. Its leadership hesitates to adopt well-matured slogans within the anti austerity movement such as the cancellation of the debt and the nationalisation of the banks.

SHIFT

Left-wing sections of Synaspismos, and other parties that participate in Syriza, have more radical and left-wing political positions, but they do not have the political weight to shift the main line.

Synaspismos exposes and denounces the ultra-right’s anti-EU sentiments; but its “internationalism” is empty, abstract, and stripped of class-based politics.

KKE has stuck to its opportunistic and reformist policy of an “anti-monopoly popular people’s government” and the theory of stages. It has put forward a nationalistic version of Keynesian policies, advocating exit from the European Union without a direct connection with the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the strategic aim of socialism.

KKE refuses to raise aggressive transitional demands and reduces itself to raising defensive slogans (for the working class to secure its current wages and working conditions). KKE uses revolutionary lingo, but refuses to form a united front with the workers who are leaving the PASOK party and losing their faith in the trade union leaders.

In an odd twist, KKE advocates the exit of Greece from the EU, but refuses to call for the exit of Greece from the eurozone. It says that “euro or drachma” is a false dilemma.

KKE insists on Greece’s national road to development at a time where every Greek worker instinctively is starting to understand the commonality of the attacks across all the eurozone countries. The commonality of the attacks places as a duty the commonality of the workers’ struggle. And, certainly, a socialist revolution in Greece depends on the solidarity and level of struggle of the European workers.

The current crisis is not primarily a Greek crisis, as the shift of the crisis to Italy and France is clearly showing and the threat of Moody’s and Standard and Poor’s to downgrade the credit status of 15 of the eurozone countries (despite the 9 of December commitments) demonstrates clearly. It is a structural crisis of the capitalist system.

Even the strongest capitalist nations have exceedingly big debts (Japan 190% of GDP, Italy 120%, Belgium 102%, Canada 83%, UK 81%, Germany 77%, USA 70%...)

The current crisis is not a by-product of the nations’ deficits; on the contrary, the deficits are a by-product of the current capitalist crisis. The crisis is not due to the idiocy or incompetence of the European leaders. It is associated with the very core and inner workings of the capitalist system.

The challenge of the left is to persuade the working class that the only way to defend their standards of livings and working conditions is through the route of uncompromising struggle and confrontation - against the EU and the IMF, but primarily against a part of the Greek nation: the Greek capitalist class.

The left has a duty to fight against the degradation of parliamentary democracy and against violations of national sovereignty and against the continuous blackmails by the eurozone leaders, but from a class perspective

The revolutionary left should take bold initiatives and contribute to the restructuring and resynthesizing of the workers movement for the build-up of a new revolutionary party.

That must attract into its ranks the vanguard and rank-and-file of both KKE and Syriza members as well as the most advanced of the PASOK workers, but most importantly the most vanguard and militant sections of workers and youth that are emerging from the struggle.

Euro-leaders set course for worse crisis

By Martin Thomas

David Cameron's veto, on 9 December, of the plan for a new economic treaty backed by all 26 other European Union governments, may shake British politics and Britain's future relations with the EU.

The 9 December summit itself may shake more. The 26 adopted a plan which has little chance of smoothing the financial crisis shaking the eurozone, and may make it worse.

Felix Salmon, economic commentator for Reuters, was the sharpest of many mainstream economists who saw it that way: "A continent which has risen to multiple occasions over the past 66 years has, in 2011, decided to implode in a spectacle of pathetic ignominy. Its individual countries will survive, of course, albeit in unnecessarily straitened circumstances. But the dream of European unity is dissolving in real time, as the eyes of the world look on in disbelief. Europe's leaders have set a course which leads directly to a gruesome global recession..."

Kevin Authers in the *Financial Times* (10 December) posed the "mundane question": "Has it [the 9 December plan] done enough to get us through to Christmas?... Probably not".

The plan is mostly a souped-up version of the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which on paper committed all EU states (in-

cluding the two who "opted out" from commitment to join the euro at some point, Denmark and the UK) to limit budget deficits to 3% of GDP and accumulated government debt to 60% of GDP.

Even supposing that is a good idea long-term (and it's not), it has little relevance short-term. Its only short-term relevance could be that it provided an excuse, or "cover", for the European Central Bank to do what it has so far refused to do, i.e. really "bail out" the hard-hit governments of Europe in roughly the same way as many central banks "bailed out" stricken commercial banks in 2008. The ECB is theoretically independent, so the EU summit could not directly and formally decide what it would do.

But the day after the 9 November Euro-summit, ECB chief Mario Draghi declared that while the ECB is the lender of last resort for Europe's banks, it is not prepared to play the same role for Europe's governments.

Far from replacing the inadequate European Financial Stability Facility (put together in 2010 as a sort of substitute for the ECB in the business of bailing out governments), the 9 December summit only noted that the plan by the last Euro-summit, on 27 October, to boost EFSF funds to 1000 billion euros, had proved unworkable. The EFSF will be lucky to get half that.

Draghi did promise easier credit for European banks, who at present are running nearly 200 billion euros short on new loans they planned to raise this year to repay bonds (fixed-term IOUs) issued in previous years and falling due for repayment in 2011. But the credit backstop for European governments in difficulty is weaker, not stronger, than was promised in the inadequate 27 October plan.

It is conceivable, I suppose, that greater ECB aid to the banks could ease the whole crisis. The banks' credit crisis and the governments' credit crisis are interwoven, since governments stretch their credit to support banks (the Irish government's debt crisis is entirely one caused by its actions to stop Irish banks collapsing), and banks' difficulties are increased when the government bonds which they hold lose value.

WORSENING CRISIS

However, to me, and to many mainstream economists, it seems unlikely that increased ECB aid to the banks will be enough to stave off catastrophe.

Wolfgang Münchau, the *Financial Times's* commentator on the European economy, wrote: "All they [the EU leaders] did in the early hours of Friday morning was to create a new crisis without resolving the existing one".

Kevin O'Rourke, professor of economic history at Oxford, wrote: "The 'fiscal stability union' that [the Euro-summit] proposed is nothing of the sort. Rather than creating an inter-regional insurance mechanism involving counter-cyclical transfers [i.e. spending to offset slumps], the version on offer would constitutionalise pro-cyclical adjustment [cuts to worsen slumps] in recession-hit countries, with no counter-vailling measures to boost demand elsewhere in the eurozone. Describing this as a 'fiscal union', as some have done, constitutes a near-Orwellian abuse of language.

"What is needed to save the eurozone in the immediate future is a European Central Bank that acts like a proper monetary authority". The 9 December plan does not include that.

Looking at the shape of the 9 December plan before it was finalised, Martin Wolf of the *Financial Times* wrote that easing the eurozone crisis "requires a buoyant eurozone economy, higher inflation and vigorous credit expansion in surplus countries [i.e. countries like Germany exporting more than they import]. All of this now seems inconceivable" (6 December).

The Euro-leaders' action on 9 December — pushing for more cuts — will, if anything, worsen the crisis. It may also be ineffectual in its own terms. The new treaty they planned may well be overtaken by crisis, and never emerge, or emerge only with drastic changes; and even if it does emerge, its enforcement mechanisms will be at best erratic.

The Euro-leaders' inaction (no ECB bail-out for govern-

ments) increases the probability that at some point, possibly soon, Greece or some other government will just not have enough cash to pay its debts falling due. At that point, either the Euro-leaders will change course, or, in some way or other, the ECB will repeal the license for the Greek central bank to issue new euro notes (i.e. to pay its way by ECB IOUs). Rich Greeks will rush to get their euros out of the country (even more than they have done already).

The Greek government will have to print its own new money — new drachmas, or whatever — to sustain current operations, and compel Greek government employees and suppliers to accept it for wages and payments. For some period Greece will have a dual-currency economy (some things will be available only for payment in euros, though drachmas will be the official money), but Greece will be out of the eurozone.

If that happens, financiers already demanding sky-high interest rates to buy Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Irish bonds will be even more reluctant to lend there rather than elsewhere in the global markets. There will probably be a domino effect. One government after another will be unable to raise the new loans it needs to repay old bonds coming up for repayment (usually after ten years). The domino effect could go far. If Italy fails to pay its debts falling due, then many French banks will be ruined, and could drag the French government down with them.

The Euro-leaders know the dangers, but see them in a blinkered way.

There is a tendency among Marxists to think that all the phenomena of capitalist crisis are rigidly determined by the basic contradictions of capitalism itself, or, to put it another way, that capitalist government policies in crisis are always the most rational (in capitalist terms), or make no difference.

That is not true, and Karl Marx himself did not think it was true. He wrote at length in *Capital* volume 3 about the effects of the misguided 1844 Bank Act in making crisis worse in Britain. Even the wisest policies (in capitalist terms) by the Euro leaders would leave capitalist Europe in trouble, but the 9 December policies are unwise even in capitalist terms.

German chancellor Angela Merkel declared her priority as being "show that Europe is a 'safe place to invest'" (*FT*, 5 December). This is the characteristic priority of neo-liberal government policy, or, in other words, of the dominant trend of capitalist government policy since the early 1980s except in the brief "Keynesian moment" of 2008.

Economically, Governments aim at establishing their countries as good sites for quick-moving global capital, not as relatively-autonomous, relatively-integrated economic complexes. Especially if they are relatively high-wage, high-tech economies, the governments will want to develop infrastructure and education; but keeping regulation light, keeping social overheads low, creating new investment openings by privatisation, keeping their currency as a reliable, easily-traded token in global markets, and ensuring that their government bonds figure in markets as reliable and easily-traded, are their first principles.

The real risks of a sizeable decline in the value of the euro relative to other currencies (dollar, yen, etc.), and of bigger inflation across the eurozone, loom very large in the minds of most Euro-leaders.

They genuinely believe that the root of the current crisis is that some European governments "overspent". In fact, the countries with the worst debt crises have big deficits and debts as a consequence of the crisis, not crisis as a consequence of big deficits.

As Martin Wolf has pointed out in the *Financial Times*, on the "Maastricht" criterion of budget deficits less than 3% of GDP, all the crisis-hit countries were doing fine before the global crash, except Greece (on revised figures, though not on the figures cited at the time). The four "worst" governments for deficits were Italy, France, Germany, and Austria.

If the ratio to GDP of stock of debt, rather than flow of deficit, is taken as criterion, then Estonia, Ireland, and Spain were doing much better than Germany.

Labour TD expelled for defying Ireland's austerity budget

By Liam McNulty

The Fine Gael-Labour Irish coalition government has passed its first austerity budget, aimed at making workers pay the cost of the deepening crisis of capitalism.

In the fifth such budget since 2009, Fine Gael Finance Minister Michael Noonan is picking up from where the previous Fianna Fail government left off.

While corporation and income tax were frozen, a regressive flat-rate household charge of €100 has been introduced and VAT was raised from 21% to 23%. Cuts were made to Child Benefit for third and subsequent children, fuel payments, and the allowance for young adults with disabilities.

For students, the Student Contribution has been raised by a further €250, along with cuts to undergraduate maintenance grants and the abolition of maintenance grants for new postgraduates.

The newly-elected Labour TD for Dublin West & Swords, Patrick Nulty, was the only coalition backbencher to vote against the Budget. He has been expelled from the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Deputy Nulty told *Solidarity*, "I voted against the budget because austerity is not working. I believe the most vulnerable were hit hardest by this budget and that the reductions in jobs and investment will hamper economic recovery. I believe alternatives exist and those who have most must pay most."

In a sign of growing grassroots anger, Labour Youth have come out in support of Nulty.

National Chairperson Conor Ryan said that "many grassroots activists rightly respect Patrick hugely for the stand of principled opposition he has taken on behalf of ordinary people in this budget.

"I call on the PLP to listen to what he and other colleagues who have recently lost the Whip have to say on this budget, and ensure that the values of the Labour Party find voice in this government to a greater extent than is currently the case."

The New Year will see the crisis get worse and will bring more social protests

Thomas Catan summed up in the *Wall Street Journal*: "If public debt is your yardstick, then the Spaniards were paragons of virtue. They borrowed lightly despite the fact that their euro-zone membership gave them an all-you-can-eat buffet of financing at bargain-basement rates" (9 December).

Government overspending was not the cause of the crisis. Rapidly cutting government deficits now will harm, not help.

But, proverbially "Germans don't read Keynes" (the great mid-20th century bourgeois economist who showed that capitalist governments can best deal with slumps by deficit spending, not cuts). On the Amazon online bookstore, Keynes's *General Theory* ranks no.11,572 for the best-selling list in Britain (quite high for a difficult book of economic theory); it is no.21,950 in the USA, and (in translation) no.24,089 in France, as high as no.5,911 in Italy, but... no.102,749 in Germany.

The textbooks of Greg Mankiw, the Harvard professor whose students recently walked out of a lecture to protest at his conservative bias, sell much better in Germany. Karl Marx's *Capital*, and other socialist economic theory, sell well in Germany, but not to the people who influence Merkel.

Capitalist leaders, and especially the hegemonic capitalist leaders of Europe, in Germany, think in neoliberal blinkers, and that has warped their response to the crisis.

That is the problem, rather than (as some have it) a nationalist drive for German domination (an explanation which makes it hard to see why 25 of 26 other leaders backed Merkel, and Cameron dissented only on special-interest grounds).

David Cameron's government is as blinkeredly neoliberal as any, and his objection to the 9 December plan was not its neoliberal doctrine.

On 9 December, he made little comment one way or another about the content of the proposed new treaty as it was discussed. When the discussion was moving to a close, about 2am, he abruptly announced that he would veto the plan unless it was agreed that the treaty would include specific promises to Britain on financial-market issues.

He wanted guarantees written into the treaty that the EU would not proceed with a "Tobin" or "Robin Hood" tax on financial transactions, and that it would not introduce rules to force firms making financial-market transactions in euros to do them through a financial centre in the eurozone. (At present, most of those transactions are done in London, outside the eurozone).

Both "Tobin" tax and re-siting of euro transactions are under discussion in the EU, but quite separately from the

new treaty plan. Cameron responded like a US Senator refusing to vote for some major federal legislation unless some earmark of federal funds for a particular project in his or her electorate is attached. He had made no effort to convince other governments, or to round out his stance so as to broaden support.

Even then Merkel, keen to get all 27 on board, was "willing to offer declarations and assurances" on Cameron's gripes. Unsurprisingly, however, she was not willing to complicate things by having them "in the treaty" (*Guardian*, 10 December). No-one else backed Cameron.

I think Cameron probably decided in advance, and because of Tory party pressure, that he didn't want to sign up to a new treaty. He then "found" the demands which would give him a pretext for refusing, and announced the demands in a way that guaranteed they would not be accepted.

It appears to be a matter of Cameron being sensitive to the special demands of the City, but I think it's not just that. As early as 10 December, the *Financial Times* reported that many City financiers thought that Cameron's stance would backfire.

SUPERVISOR

As Wolfgang Münchau explains, a new treaty area "will have to develop a highly integrated financial market with a single financial supervisor. [It will not] allow a situation to persist where its main financial centre is located offshore. It will also want to set labour market rules and co-ordinate tax policies".

If Britain is outside the treaty area, then the City is likely to find itself outside the financial markets of the treaty area, and deprived of the political leverage it would otherwise have to maintain its historic advantages.

Many Tories would find that a fair price to pay. Some of them genuinely believe the nationalist rubbish put out by the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* after 9 December; others think that Britain, with closer economic links to the USA than any other EU country, and a uniquely overdeveloped global financial centre, would do better with a status similar to that of Switzerland, Norway, or Iceland, which would allow it to escape EU social regulations.

In a catastrophic outcome, the treaty plan of 9 December will probably come to nothing, or be drastically revised. A full destruction of the capitalist semi-integration of Europe achieved over the last half-century and more is a remote danger, barring further huge shocks. More likely is a shrinking of the eurozone (by way of countries falling out of it), a closer integration of a reconfigured "core" Europe, and a larger division between that "core" and a second-tier Eu-

rope, or maybe an untidy multiplicity of tiers.

Such a division already exists. Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland are not in the EU, but have agreed to accept most of EU law. They comply with most of the conditions about free movement of people, goods, services and capital that apply to full member states (only they have no say in formulating the details of those conditions). They pay into the EU budget (but don't get anything back in regional development funds or the like).

One possible development from the coming tumult is a redrawing of the division, this time with more countries, including Britain and some debt-defaulters, in the outer tier.

That possibility does not correspond to the stupid bluster of former *Sun* editor Kelvin Mackenzie about Britain standing alone as "an island nation, a warrior nation". Other Tories also use nationalist bluster, but probably in a cynical way. Their real position is to favour the "Swiss option" as a matter of cool calculation.

Since 9 December, Lib-Dem leader Nick Clegg has declared that the Lib Dems will not leave the coalition government, but in a way that indicates that he has seriously considered it, and rejected it only because the Lib Dems would be wiped out in the quick general election which it would force. The Lib Dems want Britain in core Europe, and many of them, including probably Clegg himself, are Lib Dems rather than Tories because of that issue. It is a big deal for them.

By 11 December, Clegg was openly attacking Cameron. He was "bitterly disappointed by the outcome", denied claims that he had approved Cameron's stance in advance, and declared that "things would have been different" if he himself had been in Brussels. He said he would try to reverse Cameron's opt-out, loudly welcomed by Tory MPs, with a "strategy for re-engagement".

Further euro-shocks, which are likely, will strain the coalition further, and maybe open up splits in the Tory party too.

Three things are important for the labour movement's response:

- To understand that this crisis has seriously weakened the coalition government;
- To reject the nationalist bluster of the Tories, which is still too often echoed on the would-be left;
- **To counterpose to it not, of course, support for Merkel-Sarkozy's botched treaty plan, but a working-class programme for the reconstruction of a united Europe, centred round European-wide democracy, European-level public ownership and democratic control of the banks and financial institutions, and social "levelling-up" of rights and conditions across the continent.**

Blairite drops out of Scottish leadership fight

Scotland
By Dale Street



With less than a week to go to the close of voting in the Scottish Labour Party leader and deputy leader elections arch-Blairite MP and candidate for leader Tom Harris has conceded defeat.

Given that he did not have the support of a single MSP, and the support of only one Constituency Labour Party (his own), Harris's bid for the leader's position was doomed from the outset.

But in conceding defeat Harris has provided a timely reminder of the elitist, patronising and divorced-from-reality nature of the New Labour project.

According to Harris, Party members in Scotland are simply too backward to appreciate the virtues of Blairism:

"There persists a myth — and it is a myth — that Scottish Labour rejected Blairism because we were too socialist. Wrong: Scottish Labour rejected Blairism and New Labour because we were too conservative."

Change will therefore have to be forced upon the swinish multitude of the party membership:

"The kind of change the party needs is not the easy or comfortable kind. If our new leader implements change with which members are comfortable, then it's either not enough of a change, or it's the wrong kind of change."

Trade union involvement in Labour Party leadership contests should be scrapped: "We need to prevent members of affiliated trade unions — many of whom vote for our political opponents — having a say in the election of our leader."

Labour should also ditch old-fashioned ideas about a class society:

"And we need to shake off our attachment to out-dated class divisions, just as the vast majority of the Scottish public have done [!] and look at policy solutions with a fresh perspective ... which transcends outmoded ideas of 'left' and 'right'."

Instead of being seen as "the party that's just a bit suspicious of aspiration and of the desire to be better off," Labour should "once more become the party of aspiration."

In conceding defeat in such vitriolic terms Harris was effectively giving a nod and a wink, albeit late in the day, to the scattered handfuls of his supporters to support Ken Macintosh for leader.

Macintosh is a Blairite as well, but one less vocal about it than is Harris. In fact, the only weighty argument in support of a vote for Joanne Lamont in the leadership contest is that a victory for her would be a defeat for Macintosh.

Harris should not be surprised by the demise of his election campaign.

He had no support from one third of the electorate (MSPs), dismissed another third as out-of-touch fuddy-duddys (the party's individual membership), and told the final third that they should not even have the right to vote (affiliated trade unions).

And yet he is the self-proclaimed Blairite strategic genius who claims that he, and only he, would guide Labour to power in Scotland!

New electoral initiative, old politics

Around 50 people attended a meeting held in Glasgow on 10 December to launch the Socialist Party's latest Scottish electoral initiative: the Scottish Anti-Cuts Coalition (SACC).

Of the first 15 speakers from the floor seven were members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), five were from the Socialist Party Scotland (SPS), and one each were members of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), the International Socialist Group (ISG) and the rump "Solidarity — Scotland's Socialist Movement".

Clearly, the meeting was anything but a broad-based initiative to stand anti-cuts candidates in next May's Scottish local government elections.

Unfortunately there was absolutely no accounting for previous electoral initiatives following the split in the SSP in 2006. Since then the SPS has variously stood candidates as "Solidarity", "No to EU, Yes to Democracy", and even "George Galloway — Respect Party".

In last May's Holyrood elections the SPS argued that the

way to build anti-cuts campaigning was to ally with, and vote for, George Galloway. It has yet to publish a single word criticising such idiocy.

Nor was there any discussion of the current poor state of anti-cuts campaigning in Scotland, even though the self-proclaimed purpose of the meeting was to provide "a political voice" for such campaigning.

Developments in the Labour Party were neatly side-stepped at the meeting. The fact that Labour MSPs refused to cross picket lines at Holyrood on 30 November and supported local demonstrations and picket lines received a single passing mention.

But there was no discussion about what this implied about the current state of trade union-Labour Party relations, or about how such relations might evolve (and be shaped by the active intervention of socialists).

Even the relationship of standing anti-cuts candidates to broader anti-cuts campaigning was left aside. Were such candidates standing in the hope of winning seats? Were they standing simply to put pressure on other candidates, as one speaker argued? Or were they standing just to make general propaganda?

And some of the claims made at the meeting were more than dubious, above all the claim from one SPS speaker that anti-cuts candidates would be backed by 30,000 PCS members in Scotland.

Although there was a general consensus at the meeting that setting up SACC as an umbrella body for anti-cuts candidates was a good idea, there were clearly underlying political differences.

For the ISG, standing anti-cuts candidates is really a cop-out — candidates should stand on a more rounded socialist programme. The SSP, on the other hand, has already begun selecting its own candidates and is looking for a non-aggression pact with the SACC.

And the gist of some of the SWP's contributions was: "This is a great initiative. But it's really a total waste of time. Don't give me elections! I want action!"

Even allowing for the existence of multi-member wards and proportional representation in Scottish local government elections, unless there is a sudden upsurge of anti-cuts campaigning in early 2012 the SACC has all the hallmarks of yet another SPS electoral initiative which is going nowhere.

Neither Washington nor Tehran!

Left

By Cathy Nugent



Last month the UN's nuclear energy watchdog passed a resolution calling on Iran to come clean about whether or not it was developing nuclear weaponry. How has the left responded?

Socialist Worker's (2 December) response: "Western powers, fresh from their intervention in Libya, are keen to assert themselves elsewhere."

Eh? Are western powers — the US, UK — really champing at the bit to go to war with Iran? Well, the same article concludes with words to the effect, "Not really"! So what is the fuss about?

Clearly the US and others are "rattling sabres" at Iran. But the resolution from the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), though critical, did not even advocate further sanctions.

Nonetheless there is always an opportunity for left received wisdom. The *Morning Star* wanted to point out that IAEA restraint was due to the farsighted political intervention of the Chinese leaders.

"China's ambassador to the UN has already warned director general of the IAEA Yukiya Amano not to create 'unfounded' evidence to justify a military attack on Iran".

And Chinese business interests in Iran would have nothing to do with its political position?

Socialist Worker's verdict on the IAEA report which preceded the resolution and claimed evidence that Iran is

building a nuclear bomb was short:

"There is little new in these allegations."

Uncannily this echoed the reaction of Ali Ashgar Soltanieh, the Iranian envoy to the IAEA: "It is a regretful, disappointing, politically motivated resolution which has nothing in it".

No doubt the IAEA report is at least in part the product of political pressure. But *Socialist Worker's* political point scoring is characteristically evasive. Do they not believe there is any chance at all that Iran is building a nuclear bomb? (We think there is a chance.) Do they think that the idea of Iran having a nuclear bomb is not something to worry about? (We think it is worrying.)

Socialist Worker's main business is, as ever, is to point the finger at the "enemy at home", at the west, at the UK Tory government.

"[the IAEA claims] have been used as an excuse by the West to issue new threats and ratchet up tension."

"... The US and Britain have imposed sanctions and broken links with financial institutions in Iran. And foreign secretary William Hague ordered Iranian diplomats out of Britain after the British embassy in Tehran was stormed last week."

A reasonable person might point out — at least in passing — that the British diplomats in Tehran were nearly killed... not *Socialist Worker*.

The *Morning Star* goes further: "Hague, the blood on his hands not yet dry from Libya, has used the embassy episode to exploit to the full what have become 'common sense' perceptions of a demonic Iran that are prevalent among the British public."

A reasonable person might wonder if the Iranian government tries to live up to its unfortunate image. No matter. Nothing much the Iranian government do matters; for both *Socialist Worker* and the *Morning Star* the only political point

worth making is the anti-imperialist one.

"Once again the West wants to claim that it is intervening on the side of 'freedom' and 'democracy'." (*Morning Star*).

Well of course. But surely there is much more to say about this story than western hypocrisy? One does not have to support the threats of military intervention (most likely to come, if at all, from Israel, which incidentally both papers steer clear of mentioning) or to be blind to the probability of covert western intervention in Iran, to be very alarmed by even a half chance that the regime in Iran is building a nuclear bomb.

Socialist Worker's focus winds up by distorting reality. They say "[western threats] allow [Ahmedinejad] to portray himself as an anti-imperialist and to crack down on internal dissent". But the Iranian regime does not need any kind of UN threats to justify any number of "crack downs" on the Iranian people! It has been brutally locking up or murdering anyone who has opposed their regime for years... whatever the political weather abroad. But the top prize for pro-Iranian propaganda disguised as anti-imperialist concern goes, once again, to Seamus Milne in the *Guardian*.

"Iran is of course an authoritarian state, though not as repressive as western allies such as Saudi Arabia. But it has invaded no one in 200 years."

Well that's all right then. Being "authoritarian" is not nice but avoids saying what Iran's regime really is — which is, brutal, fascist, clerical dictatorship. Not as repressive as Saudi Arabia? That's a point I'd like to see Milne argue with the parents of the young people who "disappeared" or were raped and tortured after the 2009 protest movement. It has invaded no one in 200 years. But it has been occupying — and suppressing the people of — a large part of Kurdistan.

No socialist, ourselves included, wants to see war. But no serious socialist opposition to war would cover up for, or lie about, the regime in Tehran.

The meaning of the mass strike

By Ed Maltby

Discussion is growing in the British labour movement about shifting the public sector pensions battle from a string of “demonstration strikes”, with long gaps in between, to a more active and self-controlling battle. Elsewhere in Europe, working-class resistance is already developing beyond the stage of occasional set-piece one-day strikes.

A debate from 1910 is relevant.

It took place within the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), between Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky. The SPD was the largest of the European socialist parties of the time, with 720,000 members, cadres active throughout the workers’ movement, a leading position in the main trade unions, dozens of cultural organisations, many newspapers, and 43 seats in the Reichstag [all-German parliament].

The dispute was billed as over “the mass strike”. In fact more fundamental issues were at stake in the argument between Luxemburg, who later become one of the pioneers of the revolutionary Communist movement, and Kautsky, a former radical drifting into time-serving and evasion. They were arguing about the role of the revolutionary party and how workers’ struggle today relates to revolution in the future.

The debate was translated into English for the first time in *Workers’ Action*, a forerunner of *Solidarity*, in 1979, and is now being collated with translations from other relevant texts of the same time for publication in book form.

The debate on the mass strike had been opened when the 1905 Russian Revolution erupted, with mass strikes that shook the state, and gave a picture of how a workers’ revolution might come about.

Previously, ideas within the workers’ movement of how a revolution would work had been confused. It was more or less admitted that the old street-tumult model of revolutions like the French of 1789-93 was outdated.

Now it was thought that the workers’ movement would gradually build up its organisation, and meanwhile capitalism would move toward a severe and final capitalist crisis, in which the workers’ movement would be strong enough to “ride through” the catastrophe and emerge as the leading force in the reconstruction of society. Some place in this scenario was played by the growing representation of workers’ parties in bourgeois parliaments; for some socialists, increasingly, that parliamentary action became the whole of strategy.

ANARCHISTS

Anarchists imagined a general strike which would smoothly overturn society. Marxists responded that the perfect organisation required to sustain and continue that general strike was impossible under capitalism; and anyway, if it could be reached, the perfect organisation would make the detour of a general strike unnecessary.

Some Marxists, the followers of Daniel De Leon, imagined the working class “taking and holding” industry in a sort of mass occupation wave backed up by a parliamentary majority.

In all these visions of the revolution, how the scenario related to the here and now was unclear. They were millenarian visions of the future. They didn’t explain clearly how political action today could lead towards a revolution. There was no “road map”.

The scenarios could be used either to provide “left” cover for bureaucratic routinism and inaction, or they could lead to well-intentioned blundering.

Some fresh debate had started after the mass strike movement in Russia in 1905, on which Rosa Luxemburg wrote a pamphlet.

It restarted in 1910. The biggest issue in German politics then was voting reform. The political battles over voting reform were the biggest and most dramatic in Prussia, the most powerful of the German states. Prussia had no secret ballot, and a three-class voting system which ranked people by wealth. Each vote from the first, richest, class was worth 17.5 votes from the poorest class.

The powerful land-owning aristocracy (“Junkers”) wanted to block democratic reform, but liberal sections of the capitalist class wanted to see limited change. German Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg promised reforms. This raised the hopes of many liberals, but also of the disenfranchised workers of Prussia (and Germany), and spurred on Social-Democratic agitation for democracy.

When the reforms were unveiled in February 1910, and proved to be badly watered-down, the Social Democrats responded with mass meetings and demonstrations for voting rights across all of Germany from February to April. On 13 February there were demonstrations in every city in Prussia, and street battles with the police. By 6 March there were 150,000 demonstrators in Berlin’s Tiergarten.



Many SPD cadres realised that a movement of this magnitude had to go somewhere: forwards to a higher pitch, or fall back. At the same time as the “Suffrage Storm” was unfolding, serious industrial unrest was sweeping German, with more days lost across Germany to strikes and lockouts than any other year since 1905, especially in the coalfields.

“WHAT NEXT?”

In an article in the *Dortmunder Arbeiterzeitung* on 14 March 1910, Rosa Luxemburg argued that the movement had created a “frame of mind” and a “situation on the battlefield” which “leads past the demonstrations... and makes further steps and stronger methods unavoidably necessary”.

Her proposal was twofold — for a demonstration strike, and for general discussion of mass strike tactics by party activists in the wider movement.

Luxemburg also argued that the party should tie in industrial struggles with the suffrage battle. “A healthy, viable movement, such as the present Prussian campaign, must... draw its sustenance from all the accumulated inflammatory social material. On the other hand, the success of the narrower cause of the miners can only be furthered if they enter into a broader political cause, thereby imbuing their opponents — the coal magnates and the government — with greater fear.”

Kautsky responded to this 1910 article, in the first place, by arguing that the whole discussion should not be taking place: “the whole discussion would be... as if one wanted a council of war to discuss whether to give battle to the enemy within his hearing”.

Kautsky had published a pamphlet in 1909 entitled *The Road to Power*. He declared the world was entering a period of heightened class antagonisms. The working class was becoming more organised. It was increasingly likely that there would be a political crisis that would lead to the collapse of the bourgeois order.

The way that a revolution might play out was impossible to predict, so in the meantime socialists should steadily build up their organisations and avoid “provocations”.

In other words, for Kautsky, the only link between present-day struggles and the coming revolutionary crisis was the growth of the SPD as an organisation. No sharp offensives, twists, turns, or drastic manoeuvres figured in his vision — at least, not until some obscure point in the future.

Luxemburg’s initiative in 1910 alarmed him.

In her 1906 pamphlet *The Mass Strike* Luxemburg had described in detail how the mass strike movement in Russia in 1905 — not a single set-piece stoppage, but a tumultuous succession of battles, both partial and all-out — linked the everyday struggles of workers with revolution.

The strikes, combined with socialist agitation, raised the

political temperature in Russia until government could no longer rule: “By many small channels of partial economic struggles and little ‘accidental’ occurrences it flowed rapidly to a raging sea, and changed the entire south of the czarist empire for some weeks into a bizarre revolutionary workers’ republic”.

For Luxemburg, the mass strike movement denoted not just the events of 1905, but a years-long accumulation of struggles stretching back to the 1890s, starting with quite minimal struggles, which broke out like a “straw fire”, here and there, each inspiring another, and which combined with the political conditions to create a general atmosphere of confrontation between classes at the highest level.

The start of the strike could have been: “...accidental, even unimportant, its outbreak elementary; but in the success of the movement the fruits of agitation extending over several years, of the social democracy were seen and in the course of the general strike the social democratic agitators stood at the head of the movement, directed it, and used it to stir up revolutionary agitation. Further, the strike was outwardly a mere economic struggle for wages, but the attitude of the government and the agitation of the social democracy made it a political phenomenon of the first rank”.

She was describing something very different from a one-day demonstration strike. In modern terms we might look at the strike wave in Egypt that ran from 2008 to 2011, or the years-long labour unrest in Iran; or at the struggles in Poland in 1980-1 that created *Solidarnosc*.

In British history, New Unionism or the Great Unrest, waves of struggle to organise workers in non-union industries in the 1880s and in the years up to 1914, were nearer to what Luxemburg thought of as “mass strike movements” than even the General Strike of 1926, let alone the pensions strike of 30 November 2011.

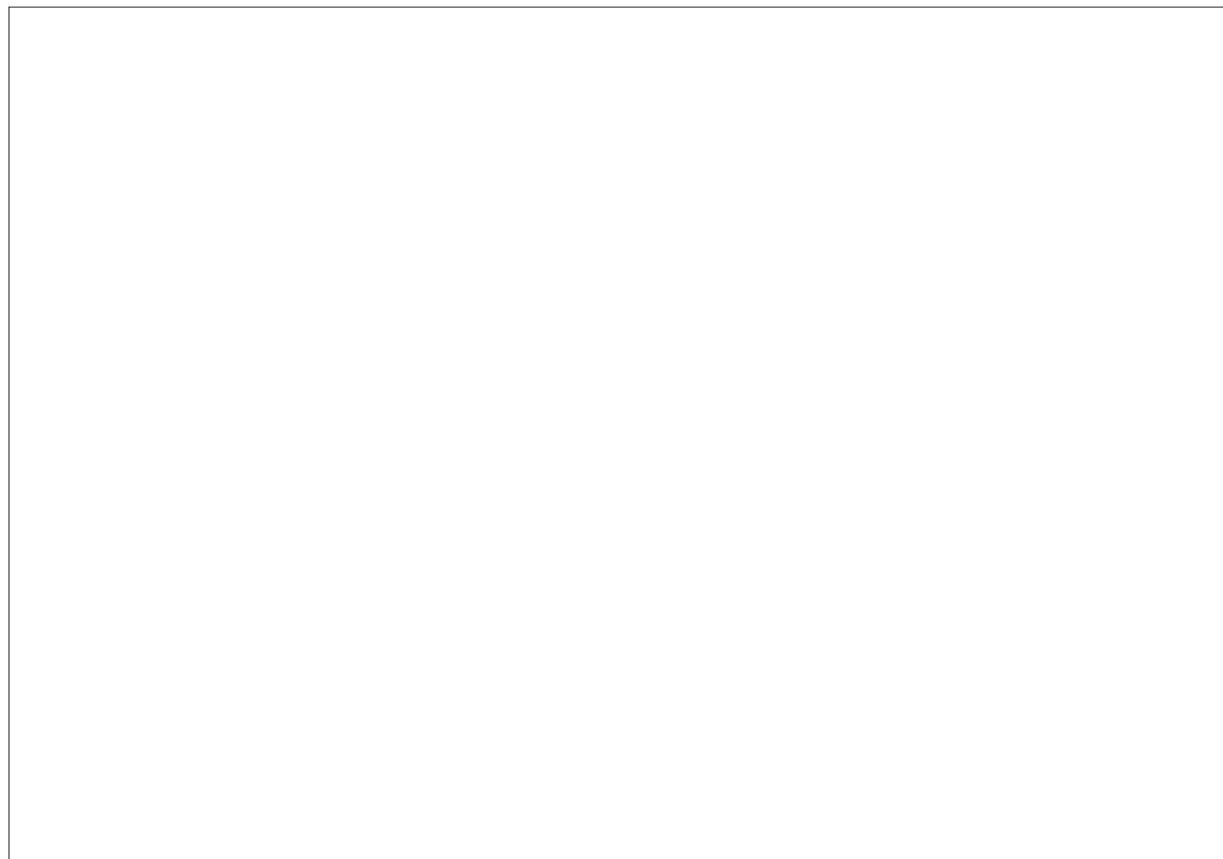
The mass strike movement is not something that can be called from above or made to order on a given day, but is the result of the coming-together of certain social factors and the fruit of a long and unspectacular work of agitation and organisation by socialists and activists.

ACTIVIST DEBATE — NOT SECRET PLANS

Luxemburg argued that Kautsky had a wooden, bureaucratic idea of how a mass strike comes about:

“Kautsky... attaches to accomplishment of the political mass strike — strictest secrecy of preparations, decision-making by the supreme ‘war council’ of the party, the greatest possible surprise of the enemy — [an] image which bears a strong resemblance to the ‘final Great Day’ of the general strike after the anarchist formula”.

The mass strike is not something which can be decreed by party chiefs. A mass strike is a characteristic of a certain level of class struggle and confrontation. But at the same time socialists have a role in taking it to a higher level:



Council workers in Southampton strike against cuts. Can Luxemburg and Kautsky's debates help us develop strike strategies for 2011?

"Mass strikes ... cannot be 'made' by an order from the 'supreme command', they must arise from the masses and their advancing action. But politically, in the sense of an energetic tactic, a powerful offensive, to so lead this action forward that the masses are ever more conscious of their tasks — that the party can do, and that is also its duty. Social Democracy cannot artificially create a revolutionary mass movement; but, circumstances permitting, it can certainly cripple the finest mass action through its wavering, feeble tactics."

Kautsky wrote as if the argument were over whether or not the Party leaders should call a mass strike movement. At first he said that even discussion of the mass strike was out of place.

In a later article he mocked Luxemburg for being satisfied simply because the mass strike had been discussed within the party. "She triumphantly assures us that she has completely achieved what she wanted, because the mass strike is — talked about".

Luxemburg saw rank and file militants as the key agents in the development of the mass strike. For her, the role of the party in a mass strike was less to issue "calls", and more to provide a "leavening", a layer of catalytic activists throughout the labour movement — to skilfully link each local battle into the overall programme of the struggle for suffrage, the republic, and workers' rule; to make tactical judgments at the local level, and to discuss and make propaganda for the mass strike so that "the workers are not taken unawares and... the masses themselves should be prepared for all political eventualities and decide on action for themselves."

If you think of party activists as agitators, educators and organisers who need to have a keen understanding, then public discussion of the mass strike within the labour movement is crucially important. It is through public debate that the workers' movement clarifies its ideas and chooses slogans; and it is through debate that activists get a feel for how to apply a programme or steer a struggle.

Luxemburg's and Kautsky's different attitudes towards debate show two very different ideas of how a mass strike comes about — but also two very different ideas of the role of a revolutionary party and its relationship with the working class.

A "VERY BIG DISPUTE"?

Kautsky warns: "the political mass strike as a means of exercising compulsion is undertaken in order to compel the holders of political power... to do something... It is carried out with all possible forces until such time as it either achieves its goal or the masses collapse in a state of exhaustion".

In Kautsky's view, a mass strike is like a scaled-up version of a single dispute — scaled up to the level of a general class confrontation. So, either the strike wins outright and the balance of power swings far in the favour of the working class, even to the point of revolutionary overthrow — or if the primary "demands" of the mass strike are not conceded, the action collapses and the whole working class suffers the fate of a local union branch which has lost a strike — massive demoralisation and the breaking of its organisations. Hence, best not even discuss mass-strike tactics until you are confident that the action will win tidily.

The mass strike as Luxemburg described it is not just a very large dispute. It is a period of heightened struggle in which many scores are settled, political and economic, from the local to the national level. Its success and failure are judged by different criteria.

"None of the mass strikes known till now was a 'final' struggle 'to the death'... Success was mostly a partial and an indirect one. The miners' giant strikes usually ended in a direct defeat: but as a further consequence, they realised important social reforms through their pressure — in Austria the nine-hour day, in France the eight-hour day.

"The most important consequence of the Belgian mass strike in 1893 was the conquest of universal, unequal suffrage. Last year's Swedish mass strike, formally concluded with a compromise, actually warded off a general attack by the confederated business world on the Swedish unions. In Austria, demonstration strikes have mightily hastened electoral reform. The mass strikes of the farm workers, with their formal partial ineffectiveness, have greatly strengthened the organisation among the farm workers of Italy and Galicia."

PROGRAMME

For Kautsky, the suffrage battle was a separate, specific campaign around one goal. But for Luxemburg, it was "a partial manifestation of our general socialist class struggle".

Luxemburg was concerned to find ways of binding the different fronts of the class struggle together — to work agitation for political rights into the party's work in economic struggles, and to raise slogans which broadened out the fight over suffrage so as to express more general class interests and placed a dividing line between the working-class suffrage movement and liberal capitalist strands of thought which might join in with agitation for voting reform.

Luxemburg wanted the workers' movement to develop an independent class politics, which would aspire to more than just voting reform:

"By pushing forward the republican character of Social Democracy we win, above all, one more opportunity to illustrate in a palpable, popular fashion our principled opposition as a class party of the proletariat to the united camp of all bourgeois parties. For the frightening downfall of bourgeois liberalism in Germany is revealed most drastically in its Byzantine genuflection to the monarchy, in which liberal burgerdom runs only a nose behind conservative Junkerdom..."

"The semi-absolute monarchy with its personal authority has formed for a quarter century, and with every year more so, the stronghold of militarism, the driving force of battleship diplomacy, the leading spirit of geopolitical adventure, just as it has been the shield of Junkerdom in Prussia and the bulwark of the ascendancy of Prussia's political backwardness in the entire Reich."

Whereas Kautsky wanted to keep Social-Democratic agitation focussing first on one reform, then another, first on one election campaign, then another, in a very measured, controlled way, Luxemburg grasped the idea of the class struggle as unfolding on all fronts simultaneously. She saw the programme of the working class not as a linear series of steps but as a ramifying network of demands which interact with each other, the struggles for which support each

other and which, seen as a whole, represent a totally different programme for organising society.

This is the same vision of an interlocking set of demands which Trotsky and others would later call a "transitional programme".

Luxemburg saw the work of party activists in making the mass strike as about broadening out and linking up the battles of the working class, underlining their class character, and working their different demands into a single vision of a different social order. In that sense she anticipates many of the debates about programme that happened in the later communist movement.

LESSONS

It is difficult to draw direct "lessons" from the 1910 polemic between Kautsky and Luxemburg on the question of the mass strike and paste them onto the 2011 pensions dispute. But the debates over the mass strike are very important to helping us understand politics.

The way that Luxemburg describes the Russian strikes of 1905 in her *Mass Strike* pamphlet can help us get an idea of the processes at work in modern mass strikes, like the Egyptian strike movement.

Luxemburg's insistences that the class struggles of the present moment are connected to the revolutionary struggles of the future, that economic and political struggles flow into each other, that an overall vision of a working-class reconstruction of society is necessary, one that draws together the different economic and political demands of the labour movement into an overall independent class programme — these are a vivid illustration of the ideas of transitional programme and transitional demands, and expose the problems with reformist or mechanical ideas of how to fight for reforms.

Luxemburg's arguments against Kautsky's mechanical understanding of the role of the party are an antidote to some of the bureaucratic thinking on the far left and in trade unions today. A union or a party is not an army that executes the will of the leadership one fine day, but a collective of activists which is democratic, which interacts with the broad labour movement openly and through debate, and whose activists and cadres must closely relate to the broader movement, learn from it and have policies to propose to it.

Workers' Liberty activists try to apply these lessons in the way that we relate to the British labour movement today. We don't issue abstract calls for this or that labour movement body to call a general strike. Rather, our activists look at the next step that the labour movement needs to take in order to advance itself.

We call for rank-and-file networks to be set up, unions to be democratised, and to turn the work of building for a one-day strike into a work of renovating the grassroots bodies of the labour movement. We agitate to bind the fight to win on local, secondary issues together with the national disputes.

We don't see ourselves as an army of tin-soldier activists executing orders from our Central Committee, but as a democratic collective that debates as it acts, and proposes initiatives and ideas to the broader labour movement, and following the logic of the class struggle rather than imposing the logic of a slogan cooked up behind closed doors.

Rather than hopping from one single-issue campaign to another, looking for what may "catch the wind", we propose an interlocking set of demands, that link up the political and the economic, and the low-level struggles of today with the bigger struggles of tomorrow. Taken as a whole they form a vision of a different society, reconstructed along working-class lines: our Workers' Plan for the Crisis.

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Academies to teach “marriage is best”

By Lucy Clement

Dozens of academy schools have signed up to teach the ‘importance of marriage’ as part of their deal to get government funding.

The Government has quietly changed the previous guidance on relationship education, which previously emphasized that care should be taken ‘to avoid stigmatisation of children based on their home circumstances’. Instead, in an appeal to the Tory right, schools have been given a green light to say ‘marriage is best’.

Thirty per cent of children in the UK live with one parent. They, along with children with unmarried parents, gay co-parents or any other family set-up that doesn’t fit the Government’s preferred model can now be told that their families are second-rate. Just as many of the religious organisations now running state-funded academies believe.

The clause also requires schools to avoid using ‘inappropriate teaching materials’ for sex and relationship education. But it says nothing about what ‘inappropriate’ means — and it will clearly be interpreted by some academy funders as anything they disagree with. On top of this the Government has ditched even Labour’s inadequate plan to end parents’ right to withdrawn fifteen-year-olds from sex education.

The new clause (see box) is part of the model funding agreement presented by the government to academies and free schools when they opt out of local authority control. Although in theory schools could ask for an alternative agreement, a random sample of the deals signed so far, excluding those of religious schools certain to agree with the clause, did not find a single one without it.

MARRIAGE

The reality is that marriage is an institution in decline. And the government’s plans to promote it stigmatise young, working-class mothers above all.

Since 1981 the number of marriages conducted each year in the UK has fallen by a third. The year 2009 saw the lowest number of marriages since 1895. In England and Wales 46% of babies were born outside marriage in 2009, up from 38% in 1999. Seventy-four per cent of babies born to 20-24 year-old women, and 95% of babies born to under-20s were born outside marriage. These are overwhelmingly the children of working-class women, who are more likely to have children than their middle-class counterparts, and who do so earlier.

The Government’s proposal labels these women as inferior parents. In fact, it labels as inferior any parent whose relationships don’t fall into its narrow, moralistic definition of what constitutes a good family unit.

The academy clause has a chilling echo of the infamous Section 28. Introduced by the Tory government of the 1980s, it banned local authorities from “promoting the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship” and “promoting homosexuality” more generally.

No-one was ever prosecuted under Section 28. But the implicit threat to councils — which received (and receive) most of their funding from central government — led many to self-censor. Further education colleges banned lesbian and gay groups. Austin Allen, a teacher, was sacked after telling

Spot the difference

Sex and Relationship Education Guidance, July 2000

“Pupils should be taught about the nature and importance of marriage for family life and bringing up children.

“But the Government recognises that there are strong and mutually supportive relationships outside marriage.

“Therefore pupils should learn the significance of marriage and stable relationships as key building blocks of community and society. Care needs to be taken to ensure that there is no stigmatisation of children based on their home circumstances.”

Free School Model Funding Agreement and Academy Model Funding Agreement, July 2011

“The Academy Trust shall have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State on sex and relationship education to ensure that children at the academy are protected from inappropriate teaching materials and they learn the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and for bringing up children.”

US Republican bigotry

In the USA, three Republican presidential candidates have signed up to an explicitly anti-gay pledge to defend marriage.

Rick Perry, Rick Santorum and Michele Bachmann have backed the call from right-wing Christian organisation The Family Leader for candidates to defend heterosexual marriage. The pledge declares that homosexuality is a choice and a health risk, and commits candidates to the appointment of Supreme Court judges who will defend the status quo definition of marriage as between one man and one woman.

The pledge bears little resemblance to the reality of most American lives: the US has seen a huge decline of marriage and an increasingly positive public reception of alternative family structures in recent decades.

- The pledge: bit.ly/vhaSYe
- Background: bit.ly/rIbJCT

students he was gay, though a union campaign won him reinstatement.

The academy clause is likely to have a similar effect. It will be a stick for the moralistic right to beat schools that dare to take a progressive, evidence-based approach to sex and relationship education. Many, perhaps most, will avoid any material that might offend. It will only take one vocal parent to complain that the school isn’t teaching the ‘importance of marriage’ properly to tie up school staff in a protracted dispute.

While Section 28 made gay people its target, the new pro-marriage moralism is vaguer. But it’s no less pernicious. A look at David Cameron’s record on gay rights shows how the ground has shifted. In 2003 when Labour finally abolished Section 28 he voted to keep it. A year earlier, he had backed an amendment to the Adoption and Children Bill that would have specifically excluded gay couples from adopting (it was defeated).

Later, though, he changed tack. In 2009, before the General Election, he apologised for Section 8. By this year’s Conservative Party conference he had become a supporter of gay marriage.

THE NEW MORALISM

The lines of the new moralism are now drawn not between straight and gay, as they were by Section 28. They are drawn between the state-sanctioned, “stable”, “committed” married couples, and everyone else.

Never mind that we might want to organise our relationships in a different way, or that we might not want to pretend that relationships are for life. In a big recent survey of marriage trends in America, only 28% of respondents thought there was ‘only one true love’ for every person. Why — if that’s the case — is the Government so set on promoting marriage?

First, because the Government wants to shift the blame for the poor prospects of working-class children. The target can’t be greedy bankers or exploitative bosses or rapacious landlords or any of the Tories’ other friends. The Government wants to be able to say that if children do badly in life, if they drop out of school or end up rioting, it’s not because their parents are poor, but because their mothers are unmarried. And worse — they want children to internalise that message.

Second, the family is the system through which, in capitalist society, the next generation of workers is created. If families — and in practice mostly women — didn’t do this job for free, the state would have to provide far more for children than the pitiful benefits it currently pays. The UK has a particularly poor record on support for bringing up children. Here, a couple on average wages spend 27% of their income on childcare. Across the thirty-four countries of the OECD, that figure is 12%. In Sweden full-time childcare for the first child costs £114 a month — and for subsequent children even less. But the Government’s priority is... marriage.

Marriage is an institution that gives state recognition, and thereby privilege, to one form of sexual relationship above others. Socialists should oppose it. But while it continues to exist, we should insist that its special status is not used to stigmatise children.

And though there are many other reasons to oppose the creation of academies, if an academy goes ahead campaigners should fight to ensure that this clause is struck out of its agreement with the Government.

Hugo spends his life trying to fix an automaton

Intricate and visually sumptuous

Molly Thomas reviews Martin Scorsese’s new film *Hugo*.

At first glance, *Hugo* seems to be about little more than a lonely young boy; but as the film progresses, it becomes clear that Martin Scorsese’s ambitions lie much further: the story of the birth of film itself.

Based on the 2007 illustrated novel *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick, the plot (set in 1930s France) weaves the narrative of the fictional titular character (played by the young though experienced Asa Butterfield) with a surprisingly accurate historical account of early filmmaker Georges Méliès (played by Ben Kingsley).

Near the end, the film shifts into a spectacular retelling of the rise and fall of Méliès, the climax being the showing of one of his most famous films, *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (*A Trip to the Moon*). The sequence is beautifully rendered, and one wonders if Scorsese didn’t feel tempted to remove the fictional story and instead focus on Méliès.

That desire is quite clear through the film. The opening scenes feel slightly aimless. The visuals are wondrous, however, and the setting in a Paris train station and the flashback scenes are beautifully rendered.

The performances are uniformly good, especially Butterfield and Kingsley’s leads. Sacha Baron Cohen plays the antagonist Inspector Gustav, a man villainously pursuing Hugo in order to place him in an orphanage but also softened by his affection for Lisette, the flower girl at the station (Emily Mortimer in a role that doesn’t require much effort).

Chloë Grace Moretz is great as usual as Isabelle, Méliès’s adopted daughter and Hugo’s friend, and so is Helen McCrory as Méliès’s wife, the real-life actress Jeanne d’Alcy.

To describe the plot would be much too complicated as it is exceptionally intricate for a children’s film. The occasionally heavy-handed story-telling may cause some groans amongst adults. Too.

However, Scorsese and the rest of the *Hugo* team deserve the plaudits they have received for creating a visually sumptuous, well-acted, and imaginatively plotted story which is clearly not just for children.

Should faith keep its fortresses?

By Molly Thomas

While I am an atheist, I still respect people with faith (or superstition, as it is sometimes called). But should we respect faith itself? Is there a real difference between faith and superstition, or are they just different words that people use for the same thing, depending on whether they want to refer to it warmly (faith) or coldly (superstition)?

Some people who are atheists themselves argue that faith should be respected as a valid way of knowing on questions which science cannot reach.

Stephen Jay Gould, a widely-read and left-wing science writer, claims that faith is a strong way of knowing in religion and morals. "The net of science covers the empirical universe: what is it made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The net of religion extends over questions of moral meaning and value. These two magisteria [science and religion] do not overlap... I may, for example, privately suspect that papal insistence on divine infusion of the soul represents a sop to our fears... But I also know that souls represent a subject outside the magisterium of science..."

Faith gets a good deal in Gould's proposal. It has to hand over to science the grunt work, like working out how the planets move, or what causes epilepsy and how it can be fixed. In return it gets dominion over what is right or wrong, good or evil.

Others have granted faith a fortress in another way: by conceding that faith is not a way of knowing, but in fact a way of believing where knowledge is impossible.

Immanuel Kant, in the 1780s, demolished the traditional arguments for the existence of God, and formulated a comprehensive account of how the phenomenal world could be known by reason and evidence. He "made room" for faith as a mode of belief (not knowing) for things outside the phenomenal world: "I cannot even make the assumption... of God, freedom, and immortality, if I do not deprive speculative reason of its pretensions to transcendent insight.... I must, therefore, abolish knowledge, to make room for belief".

KNOWING

Faith is seen as a way of knowing because it appears to provide people with answers and comfort. More than 95% of Americans profess belief in "God or a Universal Spirit".

After the Queensland floods, church attendance increased as "people sought more comfort in their faith". This faith is emotionally rational for the person suffering. Ostensibly, this outpouring of support shows the strength of faith as a way of knowing. However, these people are not seeking knowledge, like how to stop floods in future, but are rather seeking emotional support which has nothing to do with knowledge.

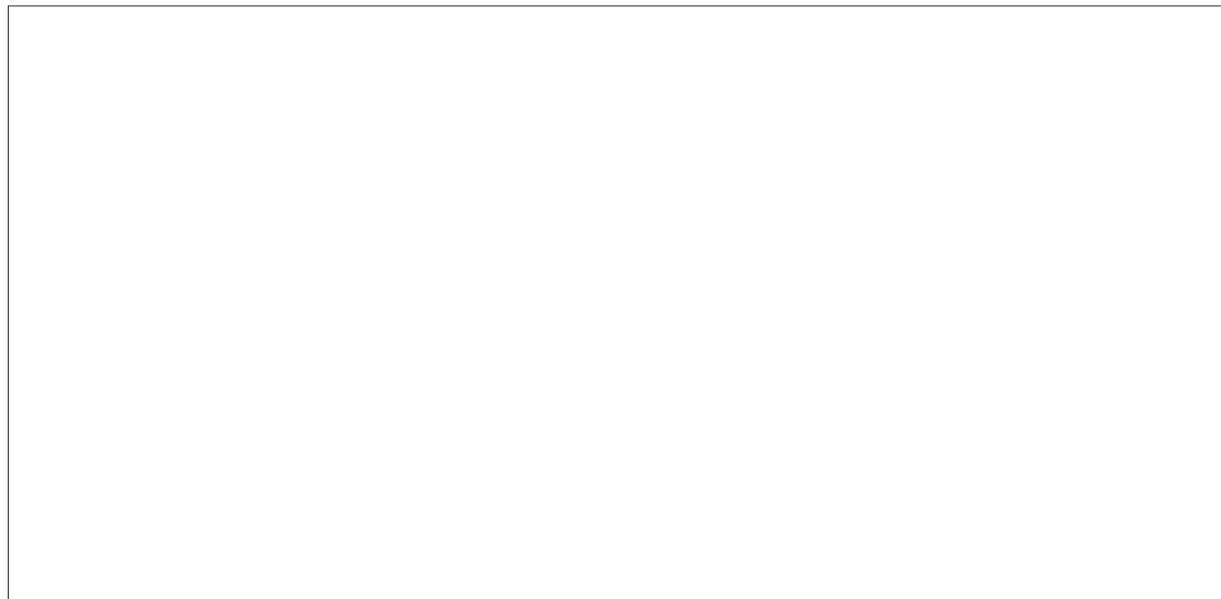
Karl Marx argues: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature...It is the opium of the people. To abolish religion as the illusory happiness of the people is to demand their real happiness." Faith here is strong, but not as a way of knowing.

When people go to their church (or to their synagogue, temple, mosque or shrine), when they read their religious text, and when they pray, they feel the influence or presence of a religious figure. Feeling is where their faith lies, not in any reason or evidence. Two friends of my family attended the same Catholic school. One has rejected the church while one has stayed loyal. For one, the covering up of sex scandals and standing in the progress of science has destroyed

Their reason and ours

And what is reason but sums, cold calculation
About fixed things? Be reasonable! Don't doubt;
Sums are sure, strait as strangulation:
Know life is flat and static. Don't shout
Against good sums, or kick against computers.
If Freedom is necessity, bow down!
The sum sets mind-ruled man in gear, neuters
Fond hope, desire, fine fantasy, brands clown
The heretic who says, "This is insane,
This tyranny of the bourgeoisie's abacus!"
Life's richer than the counting houses of Cain,
Or Kepler's mind, stronger than Spartacus:
Be brave against the odds, pace subtler drums
And hold your course: subvert, augment their sums!

Sean Matgamna



Many religious people try to redefine their personal feelings as social knowledge. They build public institutions to force others to accept their beliefs

her religious belief. The other sees her knowledge of the actions of the Church as having no effect on her belief because it is between her and God.

This personal aspect of faith makes it impossible to disprove as a way of *feeling that one knows*. As the Battle Hymn of the Republic says: "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord". This perception is no more questionable than me feeling a pain in my leg. No doctor can prove or disprove that I feel pain. I can know that God exists in the same way I know that I feel a pain in my leg.

However, people can feel pain in their leg even after it has been amputated. It is perfectly admissible to experience pain that cannot be corroborated and indeed may not be rational (as with the amputated leg). However, with faith, many try to redefine their personal feelings as social knowledge. The only way they can do that is by forcing everyone to accept their way of feeling and persecuting those who reject it. The weakness of faith as a way of knowing is that either it is imposed or that it will become solely personal feelings.

Many people find the absence of a god in their life "intellectually demanding and emotionally unsatisfying". Lewis Wolpert argues that evolution has hard-wired the human brain to want to believe that everything happens for a purpose, though we now know that evolution, for example, does not happen through purpose-seeking processes. That explains the hard-wired bias towards feeling that faith gives knowledge, regardless of whether it is a way of knowing at all.

Wolpert says: "[M]any people would find it very hard to live without religion. But there is no meaning [of life]... [W]hy should there be a meaning? ... [W]e want a cause as to why we're here, but...there isn't one..."

I understand why it may be depressing to contemplate the meaninglessness of processes like evolution, but I do not think that embracing an idea to make myself feel better is a valid way of knowing.

ORACLE

As Hegel puts it: the person who "appeals to his feeling, to an oracle within his breast [as the way of knowing]... is done with anyone who does not agree.

"He has just to explain that he has no more to say to anyone who does not find and feel the same as himself... [H]umanity ..lies simply in the explicit realisation of a community of conscious life. What is anti-human, the condition of mere animals, consists in keeping within the sphere of feeling pure and simple, and in being able to communicate only by way of feeling-states". Hegel himself was religious and attempted a scientific proof of the truth of (Lutheran) religion, a heroic but unsuccessful effort.

In a valid way of knowing, every truth is open to revision. Newton's laws of physics had been corroborated thousands of times, but then Einstein showed that they must be revised.

Faith is invalid as a way of knowing not despite its certainty, but because of its certainty; not despite the fact that some of its tenets cannot be disproved, but because it relies on vague assertions which cannot be tested or disproved.

Science brings progress in knowledge from its proviso that tests must be repeated and authenticated. That may make it less emotionally appealing than faith. But as Hegel put it: "The man who only seeks edification, who wants to envelop in mist the manifold diversity of his earthly existence and thought, and craves after the vague enjoyment of

this vague and indeterminate Divinity — he may look where he likes to find this: he will easily find for himself the means to procure something he can rave over and puff himself up withal. But philosophy must beware of wishing to be edifying".

There are no laboratory experiments that we can do to separate good from evil as we might separate the hydrogen and oxygen contained in water. It does not follow that morals, ethics, and politics are beyond science.

Medicine is not an exact science, either; but we take it forward by reason and evidence, not by faith. Since Socrates and Aristotle at least there have been investigations of ethics and politics by way of reason and evidence, not faith; in fact, all investigations of ethics, rather than sets of arbitrary commandments, moral tales, and aphorisms, have been by reason and evidence, not faith.

Knowledge is antagonistic to faith. Suppose I experienced a convincing miracle; that I was ill and cured by holy water at Lourdes. The response of others would be to demand evidence. If the miracle were really established, then Lourdes holy water would become a prescription drug, and not a miracle.

EVIDENCE

Suppose we came to know (by research) that some superhuman being (or god) existed elsewhere in the universe. Then people would defer to that god because of the evidence, not because of faith.

Suppose we found that the Bible was all literally true. Instead of exploring the allegorical power of the Biblical stories, we would accept them as history. The Bible would no longer be a guide for people to follow but rather the anecdotes of people who lived thousands of years ago. Religion would cease to be the mystical construct it is today and would become a subsection of science. The personal element of faith, its true strength, would be degraded. People would believe in the god's existence in the same manner that they believe in germs, vitamins, and DNA.

Ludwig Wittgenstein came to a similar conclusion. He was not religious, but had sympathy for religious feeling. He argued that: "These controversies [about religion] look quite different from any normal controversies. Reasons look entirely different from normal reasons. They are, in a way, quite inconclusive. The point is that if there were evidence, this would in fact destroy the whole business. Anything that I normally call evidence wouldn't in the slightest influence me..." "A religious symbol does not rest on any opinion. If there is no opinion, there there is no false opinion". Equally, there is no *true* opinion; therefore *no knowledge*.

Some tenets of religious faith cannot be disproved. But doubt is essential in gaining knowledge. Wittgenstein showed that, because of the lack of doubt, faith may be a way to belief, but it is not a way of knowing.

Faith is invalid as a way of knowing, and unsound as a basis for belief, because of its desire for exclusivity. In history, people have been forced to accept a specific religion or face incredible attacks. Even today the Pope declares: "if the certainty of faith were dependent upon scientific-historical verification alone, it would always remain open to revision".

He is conceding to the "two magisteria" view in a way previous Popes would not have done, but for religion he wants faith to establish truths closed to revision, which cannot be questioned. Such "truths" are not knowledge, even in religion, and even less so in science.

Sparks' strike defies bosses and the law

By Darren Bedford

Electricians working for Balfour Beatty Engineering Services struck on Wednesday 7 December, the date on which new contracts which could mean a 35% pay cut for many workers were introduced by seven of the construction industry's biggest contractors.

Thousands of workers across the UK took action, shutting down or disrupt-

ing work on BBES sites across the country. The strike was reported 100% solid on flagship sites like the Blackfriars station redevelopment in London.

The strike was all the more significant because the workers' union, Unite, had postponed the official action following a legal challenge from BBES bosses. An 81% vote for strikes had been overturned following an action by bosses questioning the legality of the ballot.

Union lawyers said that, had the case gone to court, Unite would have lost. The union promised a re-ballot "before Christmas", but workers took matters into

their own hands by going ahead with the strike anyway.

An AWL member who visited the Blackfriars picket lines said: "Most if not all of the sparks were out today. Numbers on the picket line this evening were around 40. People were still reeling from police violence in the morning. There was a strong City of London police presence. Some other trades [non-electricians] went to work but were

loudly heckled by pickets. The picket succeeded in turning away a refuse truck and two minibus-loads from other sites."

Workers also protested at Balfour Beatty's London headquarters and at offices and sites of some of the other contractors involved in the attack.

Workers walked off a Gratte Brothers site in Victoria, London, and occupied a construction site in Cambuslang, near Glasgow.

"Bosses are charming, polite, and utterly ruthless"



My Life At Work

Michael Given is a support worker for homeless people in Glasgow.

Tell us a little bit about the work you do.

I am a homeless support worker based in the Community in the East End of Glasgow.

I support people classed as "Homeless" to move on from Temporary Furnished Flats (TFF'S) to Permanent Tenancies. The work involves a package of support — assistance with obtaining Community Care Grants, accessing second hand furniture, state benefit checks and advice, referring and accompanying people to addiction services etc.

Do you and your work-mates get the pay and conditions you deserve?

Absolutely not! The Council tenders the work out to a private company called Aspire.

Support workers have been on £13,750 per annum for the last 5 years. Pay is indefinitely frozen.

The starting salary is £13,000 for the first nine months, but often the pay increment of £750 is delayed months, sometimes years. Some workers are now borrowing money for food from relatives. Most have to do second jobs, or have other sources of income such as tax credits.

Last winter, workers across the company in Resettlement, Emergency and Community services were

made redundant following a cut by the Labour-controlled Council in funding. Letters we received on Christmas Eve emphasised that no managers would have to re-apply for their own jobs — only workers.

What are the attitudes to the pensions dispute in your workplace?

We don't have a pension and could not afford one on the wages we are on in any case.

Some have been sucked in by the divide and rule propaganda of the Coalition and the press. However I also think people are hopeful that it will lead to change for the better for all workers. The strike ought to be seen as an opportunity to achieve our own goals and turn the balance of power around in the workplace.

What do people talk about in your workplace? How easy is it to "talk politics on the job"?

Being kicked out of our old office into the Scottish weather, false promises about sickness bonuses, non-payment of increments, mobile phones that are blocked and so are virtually useless, ongoing casualisation, constant negative changes, poverty pay and getting out. Recent years have looked like a sequel to "The Great Escape". It has got harder to talk about politics or workplace grievances recently as a result of more pres-

sure to come back to a recently re-designed open plan office. Workers can't speak in confidence there and this is a problem we really need to address.

What are your bosses like? Is there are problem with bullying and harassment by bosses?

The senior bosses are based in the old head office and remote. They are charming, polite and utterly ruthless. Most managers at service or team-leader level are pushed out the door every couple of years. No ideas from workers are ever accepted. High turnover of both workers and middle-management suits the bosses as it means they retain control.

Is there a union in your workplace, and does it do a good job?

No. But some workers have joined Unison and there have been some meetings with Unison reps in attendance. The redundancies last Christmas and a period of relative calm afterwards saw momentum lost. But union recognition is the only way forward in circumstances where there are fewer and fewer jobs and greater attacks on every workplace.

If you could change one thing about your work, what would it be?

That an important service that does good work begins to be run in-house by the Council and a democratically-elected Management Committee operates the day to day running of it.

Unilever strike over pensions

with losing their jobs, particularly construction workers with contracts agreed through the Manpower employment agency. Unions have filed a grievance over intimidation.

USDAW national officer Davy Johnson said that company had not approached unions for further negotiations, and that more action was planned for the new year.

Workers are fighting management attempts to transfer their pensions to a career-average scheme rather than existing final salary arrangement, a measure Unilever bosses claim they need to take to cut costs despite making over €5 billion profits last year. The pension reforms would only save €200 million.

John Storey from Unite said that these figures showed that Unilever's motivation was not cost-cutting, but smashing collective agreements and breaking union strength.

Members of the Unite, GMB and USDAW unions took action, with the strike being reported solid in most Unilever facilities.

Unite said that no engineer had gone to work at Unilever's Burton site, and USDAW reported the strike 100% solid at the Port Sunlight research and development facility.

According to workers, management had been bullying and intimidating people into going to work, including by holding meetings threatening people

By a Tubeworker supporter

Workers on the London Overground, connected to the Tube network but operated separately, have secured a 25% pay increase for shifts worked during the Olympic and Paralympic games in summer 2012.

This means that all workers will be guaranteed an additional payment of at least £650 for Olympic and Paralympic working.

Bob Crow, general secretary of the Tube union RMT which represents the

workers, said: "This deal recognises the value placed on transport workers in delivering an effective Olympics and is a good deal for RMT members, the travelling public and Olympic visitors alike. It's a common sense approach in planning ahead for the Games".

The deal is particularly significant because of the precedent it sets.

Workers employed elsewhere in the London transport network will feel more confident to fight for better Olympics working deals after the London Overground workers' success.

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London Overground Olympics win

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East London teachers fight union busting

By Todd Hamer

Teachers at Langdon School in Newham, East London are involved in a bitter industrial dispute over management bullying and the sacking of six members of the senior management team.

Around 70 teachers are on strike three days a week until the end of term.

The local authority has responded to this strike by giving temporary contracts to around 40 scab teachers. In order to get round the law on agencies supplying strike breakers, the hired supplies have been given local authority contracts.

Teachers on the picket lines report that this aggressive strike-breaking operation has caused some embarrassment for the school. Already one scab had to be escorted from the premises for smelling of alcohol during morning break. Another scab is reportedly being investigated for inappropriate conduct involving a year 11 girl. Parents are rallying behind the strike and putting pressure on local politicians to intervene.

School students have also shown their support for the strike. On 11 November over 200 students boycotted morning lessons. They protested against their mock exams being scheduled on strike days and the introduction of a one-year GCSE.

The response of the headteacher to this act of solidarity was reminiscent of Stalin's show trials. She hauled the student organisers of the walk-out into her office and forced them to issue a public apology for their actions and to recant their views in the local press!

Striking teachers on the picket line were resolute about winning this dispute. Some of the teachers had been at the school for decades and are not going to be bullied out by this new headteacher.

In the new year there is talk of all-out, continuous action and also calling out the rest of the schools against the scab-herding local authority.

• Solidarity messages: nutlangdon@aol.co.uk

AWL industrial bulletins

- Red Pill (health workers)
- Public Disorder (local government workers)
- Tower Hamlets Class(room) Struggle (Tower Hamlets education workers)
- School Worker (education workers)

All online at www.workersliberty.org/bulletins

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Pensions fight: plan now for New Year

By Ira Berkovic

The government has dramatically raised the stakes in its class war assault against public sector trade unions.

George Osborne wants to see national pay rates for public sector workers abolished, and has written to the heads of pay review boards for teachers, nurses, civil servants and prison officers giving them until April 2013 to find ways of cutting workers' pay.

The government claims it will achieve the cuts by slowing down pay increases rather than directly cutting wages, but the plans amount to a massive attack on workers in poorer areas as Osborne wants localised pay reviews to be tied to the cost of living. Workers in areas where the cost of living is lower could see their pay reduced by up to 10%.

It confirms what we already know government plans have nothing to do with cutting costs or getting Britain out of its deficit, and everything to do with their ideological project to smash the last significant bastion of organised labour in Britain.

The government has raised its game. We need to raise ours in response.

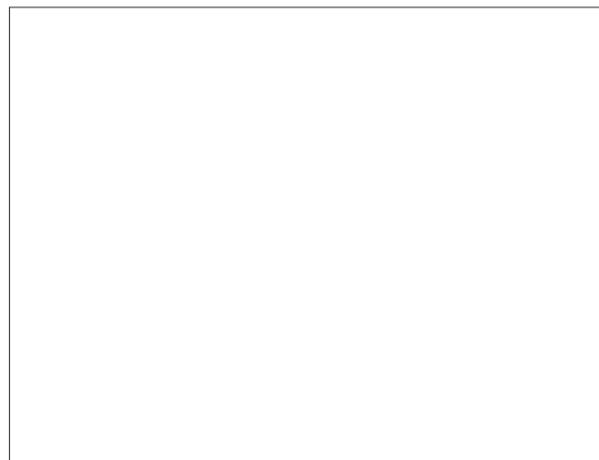
NOISES

Some national figures are making very militant noises indeed.

In a speech at the 1 December Equalities Conference of the Southern region of his union, GMB leader Paul Kenny told delegates he was committed to a strategy of rolling, selective and escalating action that took out key groups of workers and levied strike funds to keep them out for as long as possible. He said that defending the existing pension schemes was an absolute bottom line and that he would fight for whatever strategy was necessary to win.

But he was clear that these were his personal views. The GMB's right wing national secretary for public services, Brian Stratton, who is leading the negotiations for the union, has privately expressed his eagerness to secure a deal as soon as possible.

The University and Col-



lege Union (UCU) has passed policy saying "the next day of nationally coordinated action [should] be called as early as possible in the spring term" and should be "immediately followed by coordinated regional action" with "a Mexican wave effect acting as a bridge to the next day of nationally coordinated strike action." UCU's commitment is positive; rolling action is more likely to apply consistent pressure to government than one-day "spectaculars".

But there is no fixed timetable for UCU's plan, nor indeed for Paul Kenny's militant posturing.

A National Union of Teachers (NUT) Executive decision of Thursday 8 December also wants another national day of action "early in the new year", and proposes to survey its members to assess their preparedness to take rolling and selective action as well as action short of a strike.

PUBLIC

Importantly, the NUT will also investigate levying a national strike fund to help finance sustained action.

It will approach other unions and the National Pensioners' Convention to turn the "Fair Pensions for All" campaign (which currently exists only on paper) into a high-profile national campaign with a public face. This would give the dispute a real political dimension.

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) wants action in January. Interestingly, a motion to the conference of the Left Unity grouping (which effectively runs the union in a permanent alliance with

the soft-right) advocates selective action, and is backed by the Socialist Party (dominant in LU), making it likely to pass.

That would be a minor step forwards in terms of leverage to win wider support for such action.

The Executive of public sector union Unison also met on Thursday 8 December and discussed the prospects for rolling and selective action, which some activists — particularly in the NHS — feel may be difficult to organise. Again, its pace is slow; it is unlikely to make any firm decision about the way forward until the 11 January 2012 meeting of its Service Group Liaison Committee.

NEXT STEPS

The different union positions indicate a clear consensus for another national action in early 2012.

But the line to union members is still: well done on 30 November, now wait for a new plan for one-off action will descend from on high.

As most union leaders want to postpone a firm decision to meetings in early 2012 it could be February or March before we have any further movement.

Individual unions should pass policy that allows them to coordinate locally with any other unions that are prepared to take action immediately. This is essential if the dispute is not to be shackled to the pace of the slowest.

There is also an ongoing debate about what form the next national action should take. Some, including the UCU, believe it should be a 48-hour strike. It is cer-

tainly true that an indefinite series of one-day actions will have increasingly diminishing returns and ultimately a demoralising effect. But a 48-hour national strike costs members twice as much as a 24-hour one, yet fails to have twice the impact. Action should escalate, but there's no principle that states this escalation must take place on a mechanical basis. Those who propose 48 hours do not really have an ongoing plan to for escalation beyond that.

A two-day, three-day, or four-day strike by school caretakers, or by key revenue staff in the civil service, would probably have more impact and exert more pressure than a 48-hour national strike. The guiding principle should be to create the strongest self-controlling momentum and apply the greatest pressure.

ROLLING

Workers' Liberty has produced a model motion for trade unionists to submit to their branches and Trades Councils setting out what we think the next steps need to involve. In summary, these are:

- local cross-union strike committees to discuss and plan action
- nationally-levied strike funds to finance sustained action
- rolling and selective action coordinated with any and all unions ready to take part, to start as soon as possible

• escalating action in the new year, with groups of workers capable of applying the most pressure taking sustained action

- a high-profile, cross-union and community political campaign for decent pension provision for all

A strategy based on these ideas was proposed at the 8 December NUT Executive by AWL member Patrick Murphy, and some of the idea were incorporated into the NUT's policy.

With the government on a renewed offensive, there is no time to lose in developing the labour-movement counter-offensive. We must enter 2012 on a war footing.

- Model motion: tinyurl.com/aftern30

Having chemo? Get to work, says the government

By Jo Maxwell

In November, Macmillan Cancer Support launched a petition against a government proposal to axe benefits for chemotherapy patients who cannot prove they are unfit to work.

Existing legislation protects patients receiving intravenous chemotherapy from any such burden — the assumption being that the drugs render a person unable to function well enough to continue working through their treatment. There has until now been a fight to extend this protection to patients receiving oral chemotherapy and radiotherapy, as both treatments can also have a disabling affect on the recipient, often as serious an effect as the intravenous alternative.

The effects of chemotherapy on the human body are horrific: hair loss, anaemia, an increased openness to infection, breathlessness, bruising and bleeding more easily, risk of blood clots, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and constipation, mouth ulcers... the list goes on.

I had a three month course of oral chemotherapy and had to continue working to keep my flat. I wasn't entitled to any help because I chose to continue working, and as I didn't get sick pay I made a financial sacrifice every time I had a particularly bad day and had to take annual leave to have the surgery I needed.

I came off quite lightly with regards to the side effects, mainly suffering from intense nausea and back and muscle pain; but some days it would have been impossible for me to go to work.

LEVEL

The fight to extend the cover of (albeit meagre) benefit payouts to people like me is a more than worthy one, and a call for a "levelling up" of the system.

As usual, the Tory government chooses to level things out in their own way by saying that if some people can't have something, then nobody should.

Removing the financial safety net of many chemotherapy patients leaves them even more reliant on rare and "needs-based" charity handouts and loans to make ends meet when in many cases these people are fighting for their lives.

Being asked to face a back-to-work type interview when already battling against your own body will have devastating effects on the lives of these patients and their families. Where stress and illness already threaten lives, people are to be asked to compete against poverty and work literally until they drop.

There are no words for the personal anger I feel about this proposal. But this is not a personal issue, this is class war; a complete and utter disregard for those of us who must work for a living and do not have the luxury of being ill without risking losing everything for ourselves and our families.

This is a blatant attack and repeal of the rights we have fought hard to win as a class, and goes hand-in-hand with their plans to make us work harder for longer and with less reward.