

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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NHS!

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

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

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
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- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
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88% of the cuts to come, says thinktank

By Rhodri Evans

"By [April] 2012, only 12% of the planned cuts to welfare spending and only 12% of the planned cuts to spending on public services (comprising 34% of the cuts to investment spending and just 6% of the cuts to non-investment spending) are forecast to have been implemented..."

So estimates the Institute for Fiscal Studies, a right-wing thinktank whose former chief Robert Chote now heads the Government's Office for Budgetary Responsibility.

The scale of the 88% to come startles even the hard-hearted authors.

"Over the next few years, the UK currently has the fifth-largest planned reduction in public spending as a share of national income [among relatively well-off countries]. Only Iceland, Greece, Estonia and Ireland

are planning larger cuts..."

"If the current plans are delivered, spending on public services will (in real terms) be cut for seven years in a row. The UK has never previously cut this measure of spending for more than two years in a row... Over the seven years from April 2010 to March 2017, there would be a cumulative real-terms cut of 16.2%, which is considerably greater than the previous largest cut (8.7%)... from April 1975 to March 1982".

They can find no figures for any well-off country previously attempting such big and prolonged cuts. "None of these countries has, for the periods for which we have data, cut this measure of public service spending for five consecutive years".

In previous reports, the IFS, right-wing but free of compulsion to dress things up, has shown that the

Government's "tax and benefit changes are regressive rather than progressive across most of the income distribution". It has estimated that the median income in the UK will drop by 7% between 2009 and 2012, with child poverty on the rise.

Continued cuts from 2012 to 2017 will mean even worse regression, while bosses' and bankers' salaries and bonuses continue to soar.

The report raises no questions about social justice, only about whether the cuts are workable.

The authors are far from sympathy with the anti-cuts movement. They go out of their way to pan even the Labour leaders' "too far, too fast" criticism of the cuts. Without rapid and deep cuts, they argue, "the interest rate that foreign investors charge the UK government for financing its borrowing would

have risen and most likely risen so sharply that a fiscal tightening would in fact have been forced on the UK government".

Whether that is true is another question. Yet more questionable is whether governments should really be shredding their social provision for fear of each others' "investors", or whether on the contrary working classes across the world should be uniting to tackle those "investors".

Even the IFS blinks, seeing a case now for "a short-term fiscal stimulus package to boost the economy" [i.e. more public spending], albeit public spending which would flow more directly into profits.

"A cut to the main rate of VAT, a reduction in employer National Insurance contributions and a boost to investment spending plans all seem sensible choices".

David Miliband weighs in

David Miliband, the more right-wing candidate preferred for Labour leader in 2010 by most Shadow Cabinet members and Labour MPs, has weighed in on the obscure machinations at the top of the Labour Party with a piece in the *New Statesman* of 2 February, puffed on the front page of the *Daily Telegraph*.

The *Telegraph's* summary catches the gist: "Labour risks moving too far to the Left... is in danger of alienating business... [danger of] a return to old Labour".

Press speculation is that diehard-Blairites are working in cahoots with Ed Balls and Yvette Cooper:

- first, to undercut Ed Miliband by pushing him into a diehard-Blairite stance of opposing Tory cuts only in detail (Ed Miliband seems not to need much pushing; but is his recent call for a campaign to save the NHS an attempt to "re-balance"?);
- second, to replace Ed Miliband by Yvette Cooper as leader;
- third, after the next general election, which the diehard-Blairites assume Labour will lose, to replace Cooper by David Miliband.

UAF: why I'm standing

South London anti-fascist and socialist Justin Baidoo is standing in a Unite Against Fascism election as Assistant Secretary. The AWL is glad Justin is standing and will support his campaign. From his (much longer) statement:

"While the UAF are good at mobilising people out for demonstrations, it appears as if UAF parachutes into a community for a counter-demo and leaves once it has ended. I know there are good local groups that do work throughout the year. But for the number of activists that are affiliated to the national organisation, those groups are too few

and far between. We have not enabled strong local groups to share their skills with new members who are interested in developing local groups.

I believe this is because UAF has suffered from a lack of internal democracy and grassroots led decision making. I believe if we are to be effective in stamping out racism and hatred in all its forms, we need to strengthen our base and change tactics that don't work. By developing active participation through democratic structures we can learn and share good examples and experiences."

• Full statement at www.tmponline.org

Workers and students resist mass sackings at London Met

London Metropolitan University has historically had one of the most diverse student populations in the UK, in terms of class and ethnic background. It has been the target for some of the most savage cuts in higher education. Despite a management re-shuffle in 2009/2010, the cuts are continuing.

Claire Locke, president of London Met Students Union, spoke to *Solidarity*:

"We've had 226 redundancies announced, mainly of academic workers.

That's particularly shocking given that the university has over-recruited this term and most services are over-subscribed, so it's impossible for management to financially justify those cuts.

"Foundation year students promised direct entry to courses beginning in February are now being denied access.

"The university also wants to outsource a lot of services to a separate company through something called the Shared Services Initiative. This would be owned by London Met but not structurally part of the university, which means that other companies could buy in.

They're looking for a 50% reduction in staffing costs of five years for the delivery of existing services

which would be outsourced. That has terrible implications; staff would be sacked, or transferred onto inferior contracts once TUPE protection expired.

"Bursaries have also been abolished, and replaced with fee waivers. The Students Union is opposed to this change, as it only benefits students paying their fees upfront. And, as it's means-tested to only apply to the very poorest (and therefore the people least likely to be able to pay their fees upfront anyway), the number of students it actually helps is very small.

"Campus trade unions are in consultation about the cut, and the SU wants to be involved in that consultation too. There are a whole variety of concerns, including various potential conflicts of interest of members of university management within the outsourcing proposals. We feel like we're being attacked on all fronts."

A January meeting of Unison members at London Met, which unanimously passed policy opposing the cuts, and asserts industrial action will almost certainly be necessary to defeat the cuts.

Unison chair Max Watson said: "Any goodwill towards the new management who came in two years ago has virtually disappeared."

Eyewitness in Cairo

Pete Radcliff reports from Cairo

Yesterday (6 February) the atmosphere in Tahrir Square was more relaxed and somewhat confident. News of the general strike called by CTUWS for 11 February had got round.

Some hadn't heard of it and didn't understand the significance.

They are young and probably unemployed, and as they see it, they will stay there until they win or die. They are very brave young men, and women. There seemed to be more women

this time.

The people in Tahrir Square are mainly poor and not students, I would guess. This time there were fewer football flags, and no-one particularly identified themselves as an ultra or even an Ahly fan.

Some responded to my questions about how they believe they can win in a more calculated way.

Everyone despises the Muslim Brotherhood and recognise that they are part of the enemy alongside the Armed Forces. Most are keen to point out that this is not an Islamist revolt and they aren't Islamists; but there are some Islamic slo-

gans visible.

One or two were disappointed that they were being ignored by the international media. "All they care about is Syria now", one guy said, with some understandable distress. I was a little surprised at the lack of solidarity with Syria of the demonstrators.

Quite a lot of equations are being drawn between Egypt's military regime and Israel, however. They believe the virulent teargas that is being used against them is the same as that used by Israel on Palestinians.

I fear both the lack of solidarity with Syria and

the exclusive equation of oppressive forces with Israel are results of as yet unchallenged Arab nationalism.

• *Egyptian activists have called for civil disobedience to take place on 11 February. This marks the one-year anniversary of when President Hosni Mubarak stepped down as president. The military have not quit, and Egyptians have returned to the streets to host them from power.*

A strike has also been called for the same day.

At least seven people have been killed in Cairo and Suez in street battles after the killing of 75 people at a football match in Port Said.

A long way to go on gay rights

By Dan Katz

According to the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) seven majority Muslim countries still maintain the death penalty for homosexual activity.

They are Afghanistan, Iran, Mauritania, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen.

In northern Nigeria, where some states use Sharia law, homosexuality is also punishable by death.

In Iran gay men are normally arrested under other trumped up charges. But in September 2011 three men were executed for homosexuality.

And when execution is not used other brutality can

be. In 2010 a Saudi man was sentenced to 500 lashes and five years in jail for having sex with a man.

A Saudi Ministry of education textbook reads, "Homosexuality is one of the most disgusting sins and greatest crimes.... It is a vile perversion that goes against sound nature, and is one of the most corrupt-

ing and hideous sins.... The punishment for homosexuality is death. Both the active and passive participants are to be killed whether or not they have previously had sexual intercourse in the context of a legal marriage.... Some of the companions of the Prophet stated that [the perpetrator] is to be burned with fire. It has also been said that he should be stoned, or thrown from a high place."

In other Muslim-majority states, where there are no specific laws against lesbians and gay men – such as Egypt and Iraq – other repressive methods are used. Ali Hili from Iraqi LGBT says that since 2003 700 Iraqis have been killed because of their sexuality.

There is however a debate on lesbian and gay rights which is growing – often via the internet and led by lesbians and gay men based in countries with more liberal legislation.

prison.

Yet another Executive member of the Free Union of Workers, Sediq Karimi, was forced to return to the prison for his participation in a May Day event in 2007. He had spent two months in jail, along with other activists; their sentences were subsequently waived by the head of the judiciary at the time but were reactivated in recent months by a special court in Sanandaj.

• www.workers-iran.org

Trade-unionists arrested in Iran

From the International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran

Two well-known labour activists in Tabriz, Shahrokh Zamani and Mohammad Jarahi, have been rearrested and transferred to Tabriz prison.

Shahrokh Zamani is facing 10 year imprisonment and Mohammad Jarahi is facing five years.

Sharif Saaed-panah and Mozafar Saleh-nia, both Executive members of the Free Union of Workers were arrested and held in custody for two weeks and released on bail on 19 January.

Sheis Amani, another Executive member of the Free Union of Workers, was arrested on 16 January while inquiring about his detained colleagues at the Sanandaj Justice Department. He has been transferred to Sanandaj central

SDL threat for 25 February

Around 80 people turned up to a city-centre protest staged by Unite Against Fascism (UAF) in Glasgow on 4 February.

The protest was in response to an incident the previous week when fascists surrounded the Communist Party of Britain's city-centre stall, spat on it, and gave Nazi salutes. One of the fascists also filmed the event.

This incident followed an attack on the Glasgow Palestine Human Rights Campaign city-centre stall last November, when a group of 30 or so masked thugs from the Scottish Defence League (SDL) attacked it and tipped it over.

The SDL has now lodged an application with the city

council for a demonstration in Glasgow city centre on 25 February. UAF has put in its own application for a demonstration the same day, commencing an hour earlier from a different venue in the city centre.

Beyond doubt, the SDL's application will be refused by Glasgow City Council. The SDL – which claims that the "Northern Infidels", a breakaway from the EDL, will be turning up to support it – will organise a static protest (for which no council permission is required).

At last Saturday's protest rally UAF speakers promised that they would be mobilising to stop the SDL. But going on their past performances, they cannot

Scotland By Dale Street



be trusted to do so.

In Glasgow in November of 2009, and then in Edinburgh in February of 2010, the UAF led protesters away from confronting the SDL.

And in Edinburgh in September 2011 the UAF hailed as a great victory ("Victory! Victory! Edinburgh is Nazi-free"), the fact that the UAF were able to march a hundred yards along Princes Street and than stand around for an hour and a half.

In the past, militant opposition to the SDL has been organised by the Glasgow Anti-Fascist Al-

liance (GAFA) and the Scottish Anti-Fascist Alliance (SAFA).

Neither has been active in recent months. The forces which made up GAFA and SAFA in the past need to come together again between now and 25 February in order to prepare an organised intervention on the day.

If that does not happen, then anti-SDL activists should turn up at the UAF's assembly point (George Square) and seek to take as many people as possible with them to confront the SDL.

Back our enemies' enemies?

By Mark Osborn

We need a new Marxist left. The one we have is largely degenerate.

What other conclusion can we draw from the following:

At the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts conference on 28-29 January, members of the SWP, Counterfire and Socialist Action voted against a motion opposing war and sanctions on Iran – originally proposed by Counterfire members – because their motion had been amended to include the words:

"The war waged by the tyrannical, misogynist, homophobic, anti-working class regime against Iranian student activists and trade unionists, women and LGBT people."

And, "To make links with left-wing Iranian student organisations and Iranian trade unionist and socialist groups, and reaffirm our solidarity with them against both war and the regime led by Ahmadinejad."

In other words the motion was opposed because it now contained criticism of the Iranian regime.

The mover, a member of the AWL, made it plain that the AWL opposed war and sanctions and the amended motion included all of that opposition! So why did these "Marxists" vote against this amendment?

These socialist groups are not simple opponents of war. No, in any conflict between the Western powers – or the specially hated Israel – and a state such as Iran, Libya or Syria, they are supporters of those fighting the West. But they are never brave enough to say so, explicitly and clearly.

These "Marxists" back regional imperialisms like Iran, which not only oppresses Kurds, Baluchis, and Azerbaijanis within Iran itself, but also has its mucky hands in Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, Iraq and western Afghanistan. They feel unable to allow criticism of the states they support.

So the British 'Marxists' support for ultra-reactionary Iran seeps out – in this case in an opposition to an amendment criticising Iran.

It doesn't matter how reactionary the state is. How much worse can a regime get than the Syrian state which bombs its own cities with mortars and tank fire? Or the Iranian state which hangs opponents from cranes in public squares? The British "left" lines up with

Lindsey German: what does she stand for?

any opponent of the West.

Nor does it matter what the conflict is about. In the case of Iran the British left is, not just opposing the big power military threats of the US and its allies. It is in fact, weighing in for the right of the fascist Iranian state to develop nuclear weapons.

Now the former SWP leader, Counterfire member, and Stop the War convenor, Lindsey German has backed the "right" of (non-Western) Russia and China to oppose a UN resolution opposing the repression in Syria. Quoted in the *Morning Star* she said they "had been absolutely within their rights to veto the resolution."

At the same time Russia was using its veto the Syrian regime was massacring scores of its own people in Homs.

And German adds: "The question of what goes on in Syria must be for the Syrian people." The problem, of course, is that the Syrian people are not free to choose. They are fighting for the right to choose – and we should back them!

The *Star* continues to explain away: "The reason the resolution was vetoed is because of the previous resolution regarding Libya which was not supposed to be about regime change but turned out to be exactly that." As if Russia and China are champions of democratic transparency!

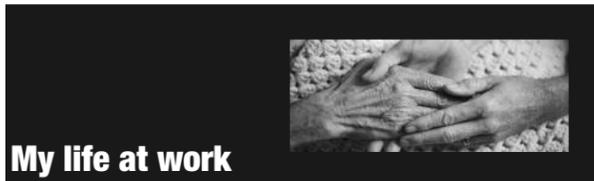
German continued: "Every Western intervention in the Middle East has been disastrous and Syria would be no different."

Still avoiding any criticism of the Syrian murderers, German ignores the concrete progress that has been made in Libya – the ousting of a murderous regime – as a result of an anti-regime uprising aided by Western bombing.

The root of the problem is that these "leftists" have lost any sense of what they are for.

We must return liberty and freedom to the heart and soul of the Marxist project.

Working 70 hours, paid 45



My life at work

By Kieran West

I work for a private company that provides care in the home for the elderly. The organisation is one of many in my town which provides the care that once would have been provided by the council. Because most care has been privatised there is now a highly diminished council care structure.

There is a stark difference between conditions for council workers and privatised workers. Council workers will even say that they're not working too late in the evening "thanks to you guys".

Working conditions at a private company defy belief. I work on average 45-50 payable hours per week, despite not opting out of the 48 hour working week when I signed my contract. However these are also only contact hours.

Work is given on an almost "self-employed" basis. I only get paid for the time I am in a client's house, not travel time, or gaps in my rota. Taking all that into account I probably work up to 70-75 hours per week. Recently a lot of my work days have been from 7am to 9 or 10pm.

Due to me technically only being "on work time" during the time I am in a client's house, the company gets around legal issues about providing breaks and maximum working hours. I am also not given a petrol allowance for most areas I cover.

These long shifts take place one day after another, with no thought to how much break I get in between.

These conditions are the direct product of privatisation, as the council only pays the contracted company for time spent with the client. It also allows the company to keep us on casual zero hours contracts, and not as salaried workers.

Dividing up the needs of clients into 10, 15 or 30 minute blocks means that clients often don't get the care they need. For example, I could arrive at a client's house to find an issue has arisen since the last carer visited (fall, become ill, soiled themselves etc.), I will have to deal with this issue and will not left time to do the basic things I was meant to be there for (washing up, making their dinner).

ROTAS

Calls are packed in so tightly that often I have been given impossible rotas that assume I can be across town (at least a 10 minute drive) in five minutes.

That's if I get a rota at all! Recently rotas that are meant to arrive on Thursday to start the following Monday (too short notice as it is) have not been arriving until Monday or Tuesday of the week they are for. There is a complete lack of freedom to plan a personal life, or challenge issues such as overload of work.

There are big issues over sickness. As the company is chronically understaffed it seems that even one person being ill overstretches resources.

The company has a mass text messaging system, notionally to let carers know medication details for clients, or changes to rotas. However this messaging system is mostly used to bully carers. We often get messages threatening us about the number of people off sick. The most hilarious message I've ever had said: "Carers, you do not work at Morrisons, you work with vulnerable adults, being sick and handing back shifts at short notice will not be tolerated". How I'm meant to be sick at long notice, I'm not entirely sure!

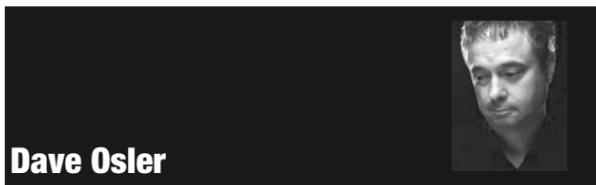
Over the Christmas period we were informed that they would not accept even one day's sick leave without a doctor's note, and that they were going to do "welfare visits". When they were challenged on this they demurred, but we can only assume it was a threat to turn up at our homes to make sure we really were sick.

Clearly all sense of their legal responsibilities has left them. But the lack of trade union organisation has allowed them to get away with it.

As a socialist I have been agitating for colleagues to join a union. Several have, however the staffing turn over is so high that many have left. It is incredibly hard organising in the private care sector, I rarely see other carers and our work is atomised.

We need to be organised in these workplaces but we also need to have a wider campaign to bring care back into the public sector so that it can be better organised.

No Quislings on the left



Dave Osler

I live in a part of London where streets of identical Victorian houses are sporadically punctuated by uglier buildings of visibly 1940s or 1950s design. The architectural incongruity stems from the extensive pounding the area took from the Luftwaffe during the blitz.

Indeed, just a few minutes' walk away, a block of industrial dwellings-style flats carries a blue plaque commemorating the 154 people who died after a direct hit on its shelter one night in October 1940. Some 26 corpses were charred beyond recognition.

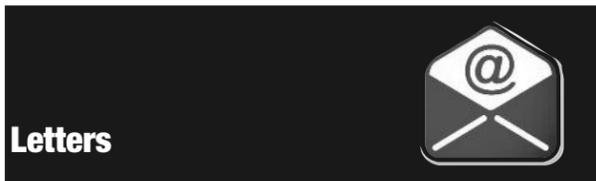
Yet the biggest Trotskyist group in Britain at that time, the Revolutionary Socialist League, started World War Two with a position of opposition to Air Raid Precautions, the government organisation that worked to protect civilians from the bombers. It stood condemned as simply one aspect of imperialist war preparations. The RSL pledged to "tell the workers that their only effective defence lies in the prevention of imperialist war by class struggle against capitalism", and that therefore they should boycott the blackout.

I'm always wary about judging the actions of socialist groups in other times and places from the standpoint of the present. Maybe you had to be there for the line to make sense, as the saying goes. But this must have been a hard line to sell in the East End, and would most likely have seen some comrades get their faces filled in.

The issue of what Britain's 200 or so Trots did or did not do all those years ago is likely to be revived shortly, when Professor Colin Shindler publishes his book *Israel and the European Left: Between Solidarity and Delegitimisation* at some point in February.

The academic has already trailed some of what he plans to say with an article in the *Jewish Chronicle*, in which he questions what the Marxist left would have done had Hitler conquered the United Kingdom. bit.ly/A1x1Uz.

Shindler doesn't quite have the guts to state outright that it would have collaborated with the occupiers, but drops heavy hints to that effect.



Letters

Scotland: please explain!

The editorial in *Solidarity* 231 seems to say:

1) We are against independence for Scotland because we favour larger units, etc.

2) However we are also in favour of breaking up the existing larger unit of the UK into three separate units (Scotland, Wales and England: a "democratic federal republic");

3) Having broken the larger unit of the UK into the smaller units of Scotland, England and Wales, we then move the latter units back to a closer unity as fast as is compatible with the wishes of the population.

But the general principle enunciated in (1) is inconsistent with what is advocated in (2). And what is the point of (2) if the end goal is (3)? Leaving aside the issue of the monarchy, (3) basically exists already.

Please clarify.

Chris Stanley, Glasgow

No instant uniformity

We want a unified, stateless, socialist world, with social rights and conditions levelled up globally (as far as possible: as Frederick Engels once wrote, people who live in the mountains will always have different conditions from plains-dwellers).

But socialists do not advocate the immediate amalgamation of all nations into a single, uniform political unit. In current conditions, and probably for a large period even after the victory of workers' governments world-wide, that amalgamation would mean the domination of the better-equipped, larger nations over others. For now and for some time to come, we support independence for oppressed nations or nations at risk of oppression.

On the same principle, even when the disparity of resources and wealth between nations is small enough that we

He makes much of the fact that the Comintern and its sections opposed the war effort, with the Communist Party of Great Britain calling for peace with Berlin right up until the day Hitler turned on his erstwhile allies in the Kremlin.

All Trotskyist outfits analysed the war as an inter-imperialist conflict. As far as I can make out from the standard works on British Trotskyism in this period, the RSL called for the defeat of "their own side". Presumably they did not bring this point to the fore in their agitation, as otherwise they would have been shut down by the state as fifth columnists.

Obviously no-one can assess Shindler's book properly until it comes out, but I suspect that the object of the exercise will be to "read back" from the postures today adopted by parts of the far left in the name of anti-Zionism, and so pin charges of anti-semitism on their political forebears.

A successful Nazi invasion of Britain is a counterfactual, of course, but we can probably judge what would have happened from the experience of countries that did fall under German control.

FROM THE RIGHT

The Quislings would have emerged from the political right, as they did everywhere else.

I'd buttress that contention with the evidence in Richard Griffiths' sizeable 1980 study *Fellow Travellers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-39*, which amply documents the outright sympathy fascism enjoyed in some Conservative circles. One entirely plausible scenario would have seen the reinstallation of Edward VIII in Buckingham Palace as a puppet king.

And the left? Yes, doubtless there would have been a period of utter confusion, possibly even some initial attempts at accommodation by the Stalinists. But history does show that Marxists of all varieties acquitted themselves bravely in Nazi Europe, frequently emerging to lead the resistance movements. The heroism of the Trotskyist movement — from its publication of leftwing newspapers aimed at rank and file German soldiers to its participation in the Warsaw Uprising — is beyond dispute.

There is no reason to think that Britain would have been an exception to either of the two above rules, and no need to make that case unless one's prime concern is a rather simple-minded desire to score points in the here and now.

can back merger into a single state as an immediate move, we favour regional autonomy for distinct nationalities (i.e. a federal form of government), so as to reduce the risk not only of outright oppression but also even of friction and annoyance. Although none of the big nations of Europe is in broad historic terms oppressed, or at short-term risk of full-blown national oppression, we favour a federal union of those nations, not their immediate full amalgamation ("united states of Europe").

The same applies for England and Scotland. For centuries Scotland has had a distinct legal and education system from England. We want a common system better than both the present English and the present Scottish system. But to translate our general historic aim of levelling up into an immediate demand for uniformity between Scotland and England would be quixotic. Now, and in the near future, because England is so much more populous than Scotland, it would mean putting Scotland under English rules, and doing that when on issues like university fees Scottish rules are less bad than English rules.

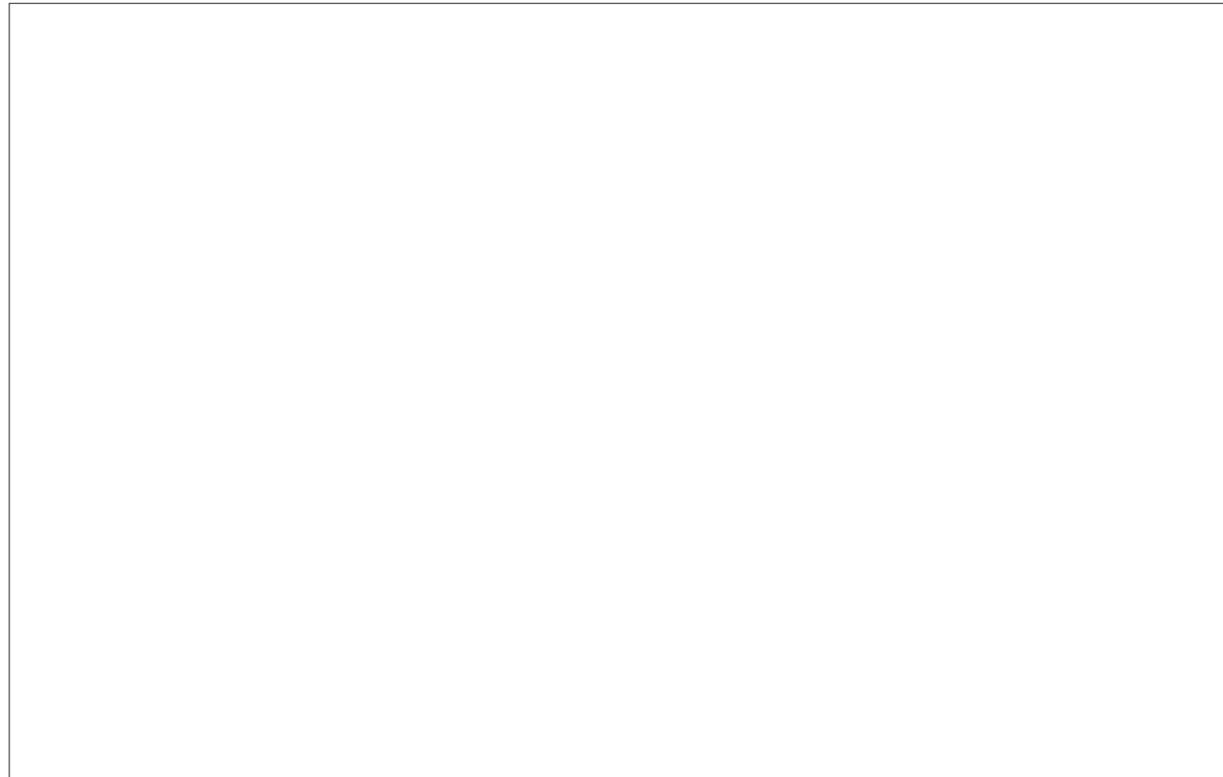
We don't want to increase the differentiations and barriers between Scotland and England. But we do want a rational, democratic way of dealing with the differentiations which exist, and which it would be quixotic to try to abolish by immediate decree.

The old system where Scotland had separate rules, but they were all set by the same Westminster government which also set rules for England, was anomalous. So is the current system where separate Scottish rules are set by the Scottish parliament, but there is no broad federal framework. Better to have a federal framework. There would be overhead costs (federal institutions for England, or maybe for some chosen large regions of England), but the merits of regulating things according to general democratic principle rather than patched-up, anomaly-ridden makeshift outweigh them.

When advocating a reorganisation, obviously we advocate that it be democratic and republican: thus, democratic federal republic.

Within a democratic federal republic, we advocate "levelling-up". We want fuller amalgamation as soon as the friction and annoyance that would be caused to the smaller nations by such amalgamation has been reduced by successive "levelling-up" to trivial proportions.

Martin Thomas



UK Uncut demonstration against the Health Bill

There's still time to save NHS

On 1 February, the first National Health Service hospital to be handed to private management, Hinchingbrooke Hospital in Cambridgeshire, went over to its new bosses.

The Government's Health and Social Care Bill will push the NHS into radically more privatisation and marketisation. Health minister Lord Howe told a conference of private healthcare operators in London, in September 2011, that they would have "huge opportunities" once the Bill was through.

The next several weeks are crucial. The Government has taken the Bill to its last stages in the House of Lords, after which it will have to return to the House of Commons to harmonise amendments. But as the Bill reaches those last parliamentary stages, opposition is rising.

The Government hastily drafted 137 amendments at the start of February to try to stave off the opposition. But the next day Royal College of General Practitioners joined the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nurses, the Royal College of Midwives, and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists, in calling for the Bill to be withdrawn.

The *British Medical Journal*, *Nursing Times*, and the *Health Service Journal* have published a joint editorial denouncing the Bill as an "unholy mess".

On 5 February Labour Party leader Ed Miliband called for a campaign against the Bill, saying that we have "three months to save the NHS". The TUC has called a rally to oppose the Bill at Central Hall, Westminster, for 7 March. *We should organise to demand that Labour and the unions mobilise a full-scale storm of protest.*

BUBBLING

Opposition and discontent has been bubbling ever since the Government published the White Paper outlining the Bill in July 2010.

The labour movement, preoccupied with the public-sector pension changes and direct service and job cuts, has done only a fraction of the mobilisation it should have done. But dissent from the public and from health specialists has been strong enough to push the Government into a three-month "pause" on the proposals, last year, and now its 137 last-minute amendments.

The health specialists, the sort of people who would instinctively seek to nudge the Government rather than flatly to oppose it, have become increasingly convinced that the Bill threatens the very basics of the NHS.

The Bill abolishes the NHS as a coordinated public service, and replaces it by a health market. For now the main purchasing-power for the market will come from Government funds channelled through GP clinical commissioning groups, but the ground is prepared for a switch to private purchasing-power with, as in many countries, a "social insurance" back-up.

The GP commissioning groups will mostly, in practice, be run by private contractors with whom the GPs cut commercial bargains. Those contractors, in turn, will cut commercial bargains with hospitals and other treatment centres. NHS hospitals will all be transformed into businesses operating independently in the market, where they are not put under

private bosses outright, as at Hinchingbrooke. They will compete against new private-profit health-care outfits for "business" (treating patients).

The Bill abolishes strategic health authorities and Primary Care Trusts, and sets up an almost-independent quango to dispense the NHS budget.

The "private patient cap" which now limits the proportion of income which NHS hospitals can draw from private patients will be abolished. NHS hospitals will be able to treat any number of private patients they like, even if that is to the detriment of NHS patients. And, of course, if the private patients pay well, they will have an incentive to take more.

The National Health Service replaced a system where health care depended on the ability to pay, with a backstop of chancy charity provision. For the first time it recognised health care as a human right. To adapt Karl Marx's words for a different measure, it signified that in one important though partial domain, "the blind rule of the supply and demand laws which form the political economy of the middle class" succumbed to "social provision controlled by social foresight, which forms the political economy of the working class".

ATTACK

The NHS has been under constant attack since the end of the 1970s, with the rise of neo-liberalism and its re-assertion of those "supply and demand laws which form the political economy of the middle class". Multi-national private profiteers have grabbed at "the health-care market".

Grievous blows have been struck. Also at the start of February, even this government felt obliged to put together a £1.5 billion "emergency fund" to bail out seven NHS trusts which would otherwise go bust because of extortionate payments to private contractors who financed rebuilding under the New Labour government's "Private Finance Initiative" (PFI) scheme.

But the NHS is still there, damaged but still a public service. Maybe some activists have been stunned by the years into thinking that attacks on the NHS always go through, and yet, somehow, whatever happens, the NHS will always be there.

Both resignation and complacency are out of place. The Government can be forced into abandoning the Bill. But if it isn't, then we lurch a vast distance towards the future sketched by Government adviser Mark Britnell: "In the future, the NHS will be a state insurance provider, not a state deliverer... The NHS will be shown no mercy and the best time to take advantage of this will be in the next couple of years".

The labour movement should mobilise. As well as withdrawal of the Bill, we should demand:

- **Reversal of the coalition Government's cuts to the NHS (nominally \$20 billion "savings", in fact more);**
- **A complete end to the drain of PFI payments from the NHS;**
- **Reversing the partial privatisation already carried out in the NHS, and its reintegration into a single comprehensive public service.**

Help the AWL to raise £20,000

The AWL is growing. We now publish *Solidarity* weekly, setting up new branches and expanding all areas of our activity. If we are going to continue this, we also need to expand our sources of funds. That's why we've launched an appeal to raise £20,000 by the end of August. A donation from you, or a regular standing order, will help.

- We need money to:
1. Continue publishing *Solidarity* as a weekly;
 2. Establish a fund for publishing high quality books and pamphlets;
 3. Improve our website;
 4. Organise events such as our New Unionism dayschool and our Ideas for Freedom summer school;
 5. Organise study courses;
 6. Build on our work as one of the main forces fighting for rank-and-file democracy and control in the labour movement;
 7. Build on our work in developing a broad, democratic student movement against fees and cuts;
 8. Pay the rent on and finance the staffing of our office to make all of the above and more possible.

We have no big money backers. We rely on contributions from workers and students like you! So please consider:

- Taking out a monthly standing order to the AWL. There is a form at www.workersliberty.org/resources and on this page. (Even a few pounds a month really does help.)

- Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to "AWL") or do it online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

- Organising a fundraising event.
- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.
- Getting in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

For more information on any of the above, contact us: tel. 07796 690 874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, SE1 3DG.

**Total raised so far:
£7,336.**



We raised £221 this week from a booksale by Sheffield AWL and two new standing orders (thanks to Sarah, Laura and E Powell).

We are on track to make our total but only if we make sustained effort to ask for donations and put into action other fundraising plans.

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)
..... (its address in full)

Account name:
..... (your name)

Account no.
Sort code:

**Please make payments to the debit of my account:
Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no.
20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley
Place, Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)**

**Amount: £ to be paid on the day of
..... (month) 20 (year) and there-
after monthly until this order is cancelled by me in
writing. This order cancels any previous orders to
the same payee.**

Date

Signature

Greek ultra-cuts spark new

By Theodora Polenta

A 24-hour general strike of Greek workers has been called for Tuesday 7 February by the GSEE (private sector) and ADEDY (public sector) unions in response to the three-party coalition government's agreement to make yet further cuts as demanded by the EU/ ECB/ IMF Troika as conditions for the second bailout fund and "private sector involvement" (PSI) in reorganising Greece's debt.

Under the pressure from the base, GSEE and ADEDY have been forced away from the negotiating tables and into reminding themselves of some of their trade-union vocabulary.

"What is happening right now is not negotiations. The Troika is demanding the death of Greece. The Troika is cynically blackmailing a whole nation.

"They are threatening us with bankruptcy one way or another. Either Greece will be bankrupt or our wages will be bankrupted.

"The Troika wants to dismantle all pro-worker legislation, and to reduce private-sector wages up to 30%", said GSEE leader Panagopoulos.

ADEDY leader Hliopoulos added: "We have a duty to stop these attacks on the Greek people and Greek society. Political agreements have been reached by politicians who previously warned us that these measures will lead us to disaster and the Greek economy to a further crisis and negative growth. The Troika and government will have the whole of the Greek society against them".

With the slogan "All united to overthrow barbarism", the large though diehard-Stalinist Greek Communist Party, KKE, and its trade-union front PAME, are calling "every worker in

every workplace to organise collectively through strike action to resist any attempt to further reduce wages and pensions in a direct or indirect way".

The tone of the strike will be set by the workers and workplaces that have been in continuous strikes and occupations in recent months.

The workers of Greek Steel (on strike since 31 October), of Loukisa (two months of occupation), of 3E, of Alter and Eleytherotypia (media workers on occupation since autumn), and of Intracom, are leading by example.

In the public sector, all transport workers (trams, trains, buses, tubes), teachers, seafarers and dockers, bank workers, lawyers, and court workers will join the strike. From 7 February the train workers of OSE (the Hellenic Railways Organisation) are starting a continuous occupation, demanding that the government re-hire the workers put in "reserve" (effectively sacked), pay wage arrears, and stop the privatisation of the railway service. They ask all Greek workers to support them in their fight for a public railway system under workers' control and with cheap affordable railway tickets for all.

Workers at the ministry of agriculture are occupying their ministry office on Tuesday to protest against redundancies and the closing down of public sector organisations and departments.

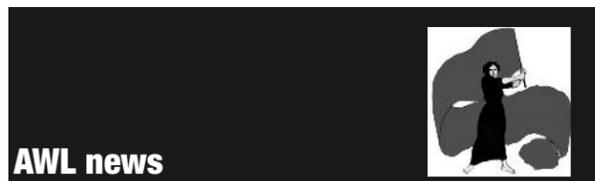
A 24 hour strike falls short of what is needed. Twelve 24 hour general strikes and two 48 hour strikes have been already called in the last two years.

We need a comprehensive plan of rolling three and five day strikes in every workplace that would paralyse the economy and the state and that would overthrow the government.

The revolutionary left should put forward the demand for a continuous general strike and call on people to occupy Syntagma square and barricade the parliament until the Troika representatives go and the government is overthrown.

The revolutionary left should take this initiative alongside the neighbourhood non-payment movements which have organised mass refusal to pay the new regressive property tax.

Class-struggle trade unionism



By Cathy Nugent

In 1888 a great upsurge of unskilled workers in Britain began when workers at Bryant and May match factory in Bow went on strike after one of them — a known "troublemaker" — was sacked by the sweatshop bosses.

Like the thousands of workers who participated in the strikes and union organising which followed the Bryant and May "spark", the largely female matchworkers wanted to end all the injustices they, their mothers, fathers and all the people of their community had suffered at work.

What does New Unionism tell us about being a "troublemaker" at work today? The basic lessons are superficially at least quite simple — ignore the "reasoning" and "compromising" of the trade union establishment; fight the class struggle.

As Unison leader Dave Prentis today preaches "prudence", "respectability" and steady growth, so too did the main leaders of the "craft unions" of the nineteenth century. The new unionists fought those leaders and sought to impose a class struggle policy. Campaigns like that for the eight hour day was a way to unite and mobilise across broad layers and something to win against the "compromisers".

The new unionists saw unions as organisations which could "lift up" the worker, expand horizons beyond the grind of daily life. They believed, as the saying goes, that all workers should "rise as one". They would have been appalled by the separate negotiations and settlements made by the unions in the current public sector pension dispute.

Simple enough principles but are they relevant today? That will be a key subject of a discussion at the AWL's dayschool on New Unionism on Saturday 18 February. AWL and guest speakers will address both historical and contemporary issues of class struggle trade unionism.

But it is not our idea that all working-class experiences in history can be replicated. Rather that the lessons can enrich our understanding of the tasks we face today.

The period of "new unionism" — which arguably lasted right through to a resurgence in 1910 — is full of many "nitty gritty" relevant "lessons".

- The value of "industrial unionism";
- How to build solidarity and defeat strikebreaking;
- How trade unions can be centres for educating workers in class struggle;
- How trade unions should connect with communities facing hardship;
- Building a defences against aggressive tactics by the bosses' — casual work, petty rules, bullying, cuts in pay;
- International solidarity;
- Why workers need a political voice;
- Recruiting to the union by making forceful and political arguments;
- Aiming for 100% membership;
- Responding aggressively to capitalist reorganisation;
- Transforming existing unions, making them fight!

This is a school that no really serious socialist or militant trade unionist can afford to miss!

The gasworkers' union was a new and general union

New Unionism: how workers can fight back

Saturday 18 February, 11.30-5.30 at Highgate Newtown Community Centre, London N19 5DQ

Book tickets (£15/£8/£4) online: workersliberty.org/newunionism

Speakers and sessions:

- **Louise Raw** (author of "Striking A Light") and **Jill Mountford**: How women organised
 - **Colin Waugh** (Editorial Board, "Post-16 Educator", and author of a pamphlet on the Plebs League): The movement for working-class self-education
 - * What came next — The Great Unrest 1911-1914 with **Edd Mustill**
 - Reading "The Troublemakers' Handbook": the *Labor Notes* guide to organising at work today, with *Labor Notes* founder **Kim Moody**
 - **Sam Greenwood** and **Martin Thomas** (Workers' Liberty): Finding a political voice
 - **Charlie MacDonald** and **Cathy Nugent** (Workers' Liberty): How socialists organised: the life of Tom Mann
 - **Plenary: New Unionism 2012?** Speakers include Eamonn Lynch (Bakerloo Line tube driver victimised for union activity and reinstated following an RMT campaign), Jean Lane (Tower Hamlets Unison, pc, and Workers' Liberty) and an activist from the Industrial Workers of the World Cleaners' Branch.
- Creche • cheap food • bookstalls**

w strikes

We need a united workers' front in both the private and public sector alongside the unemployed, the refugees, and the civil disobedience neighbourhood movements.

We should put forward the demand for another society, which has our needs as its priority, a socialist, radically-democratic society. The content and the form of struggles should match the level and aggressiveness of their attacks.

Despite its revolutionary lingo and the militancy of its members, KKE cannot be trusted to lead the struggle. Its "the party knows it all" attitude can only lead the most militant of workers to disappointment and defeat.

Its refusal to back the rank and file left wing media workers' proposal for indefinite strike action led to the defeat of the ballot for strike action by media workers. In general if KKE does not control a strike or occupation, then it does not support it or even openly acts as a strike breaker.

KKE characterised last summer's movement of "the indignant" in the city squares as a movement of the ruling class. During the September occupations in universities, KKE voted in general meetings against the continuation of the struggle. In the transport union, KKE voted against the escalation of the struggle and against indefinite strike action, characterising them as ultra-left.

On the other hand in Greek Steel, where PAME dominates, KKE supports the indefinite strike action and demands the rest of the working class solidarise with the Greek Steel workers.

Meanwhile KKE's printing company, "TypoEkdotiki", has declared itself bankrupt, which will lead to redundancies, and has used legal loopholes to avoid its legal obligations to their employees as regards payment of their wages etc. So KKE's empty revolutionary lingo leads to the ownership of a capitalist company that places profit at its first priority!

A general strike called and organized from below cannot rely on the union bureaucracy, which tries to paralyse the trade union struggles and lead the workers to defeat through the negotiating table. Only a couple of weeks ago GSEE was participating in "talks" with the employers' federation, discussing ways of reducing labour costs.

STRATEGIC

Amidst the continuous crisis and destruction of our lives brought by the decaying Greek capitalist system, we should aggressively state our anti-capitalist manifesto

Our program of transitional demands which should be linked to our strategic struggle for revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism.

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

Demonstration against welfare cuts, December 2011

EU leaders blackmail Greece

By Theodora Polenta

The push for new cuts in Greece is backed up by ever-increasing "carefully" leaked scenarios of a disorderly Greek bankruptcy as early as March and the expulsion of Greece from the eurozone.

Merkel and Sarkozy are exercising severe pressure on the Greek government to reduce Greek labour costs further towards the levels of Portugal and Bulgaria.

The Greek media were jubilant that Papademos has forced the Troika to withdraw its demand for the abolition of the 13th and 14th months' wages traditionally paid to Greek workers. But what Papademos has agreed with the Troika will take from Greek workers almost *half* their annual wages.

The have agreed to cut the private sector minimum wage by 20%, from €750 to €600 per month. After taxation, the net monthly minimum wage will be reduced to €490. Younger workers, under 25, who receive 80% of the minimum wage, will have their monthly wage will be reduced to €480, or below €400 net. All private sector workers who have their wages are determined by national collective bargaining agreements will have their wages reduced by 20%.

They have also agreed to abolish the legal enforceability of the collective bargaining agreements which cover 85% of the private sector workers. The Troika has been very persistent on abolishing "metenegeia", a pro-working-class law which guarantees that wages and conditions set in a collective bargaining agreement are valid until the next agreed collective bargaining agreement. They cannot be altered by the employer without agreement, and employers are obliged to hire workers under the terms and conditions of the previously collective bargaining agreement.

The abolition of "metenegeia" would remove the safety net for workers and gives the green light to employers to run their workplaces under only the national minimum wage restrictions. It could cut private sector wages a further 20%.

The have also agreed to:

- Abolition of secure permanent eight-hours-a-day employment. Abolition of overtime pay. Power for employers to control their workers' working hours, unrestricted by any legislation.
- Drastic reductions in the so-called "privileges" of Judges, doctors, lecturers, and the armed forces.
- 15,000 public sector redundancies within 2012, as part of the 150,000 job cuts demanded by the Troika before 2015
- 15% to 20% reductions in auxiliary pensions ("epikourikes"). 30% reduction in the lump sum on retirement).
- A further €3.3 billion cut in public spending.
- Discussions of further cuts in pensions to counteract the effects of the crisis caused for pension funds by the wage

cuts and job cuts reducing workers' contributions.

20% cuts in private-sector wages, on top of the previously imposed reductions on the private sector wages by 26% since 2009, are equivalent to 45% reduction of private sector wages since 2009.

The cuts in private sector wages will affect directly and indirectly the living conditions of the whole working class. If the minimum wage is to be reduced to a meagre €490 per month for 8 hours a day employment, then the current unemployment benefit of €454 per month is likely to be further reduced. This round of measures would amount to a final dismantling of the post World War Two consensus.

The leaders of the three parties in the coalition (Pasok, Laos, and New Democracy), have all been making a show of fighting against the demands of the "big foreign powers" of the Troika, and especially ND leader Antonis Samaras, who hopes to become the new prime minister after elections.

But few Greek workers were convinced. When Samaras was given the chance to overthrow the PASOK government last October and call for elections, he decided instead to join the Papademos government in order to "rescue" the country.

Even when starting his opposition to the abolition of the 13th and 14th months' wages, Samaras emphasised that he would support their abolition above a certain income threshold. Similarly, Samaras supported a cap of €300 on auxiliary pensions and a cap of €1200 on pensions.

Samaras's proposal to hire one public sector worker for every 10 that get dismissed or pushed into retirement, and to reduce the hiring of temporary public sector workers by 20%, will destroy the public sector.

If this is what the tough talk of ND amounts to when it is in opposition, one can only imagine the anti-working-class politics that ND would implement if Samaras became the prime minister. In Portugal and Spain, the conservative parties, equivalents of ND, waited for the social democratic parties to be voted down, and when in government they escalated their attacks against the working class. ND's sister party in Hungary, when in opposition, pretended to fight against the IMF. Now, in government, it is implementing all the IMF-imposed policies and trying to direct the Hungarian working class's anger against the Roma and other minorities.

Although one more meeting of Papademos and the leaders of the three parties is planned for Tuesday 7th, they have already agreed to the main measures. All the party leaders have also agreed to recapitalise Greece's banks, making a state contribution of €40 billion without changing the banks' decision making processes (the shares owed by the state will have limited voting rights).

In other words, all the party leaders have agreed for the state to hand over €40 billion to the bankers.

Left-of-Labour party leads Netherlands polls

By Colin Foster

January polls in the Netherlands show a left-of-Labour party, the Socialist Party, ahead of all other parties.

If an election were to be held now, the SP would be the biggest party in the 150-seat proportional-representation parliament, with 32 seats, way ahead of Labour with 17. Among low-income voters, the SP got 32% of preferences in a poll taken on 22 January, ahead of Labour with 14%.

The governing right-wing parties, VVD and CDA, and the PVV which supports their coalition, would still have 62 seats, down from their current 82, and the remaining seats would be shared among smaller parties.

Peter Drucker, a US socialist long active in the Netherlands, told *Solidarity*: "I would caution against reading too much into the SP's very high standing in the polls right now. It could win a great electoral success if elections came at a lucky moment, but electorates have been extremely volatile across Europe for years now".

For all that, the SP's result is a startling contrast with the results of left-of-Labour parties in Europe for many years now.

A look at the SP's history makes it even more startling. It is not a splinter from Labour or from a big old official "Communist Party", like Die Linke in Germany or Rifondazione in Italy. It is a linear descendant of a Maoist group of the 1970s which has evolved slowly into a relatively large left social-democratic party (50,000 members, equivalent of about 180,000 in Britain). It formally declared itself no longer "Marxist-Leninist" in 1991.

CORE

Peter Drucker told *Solidarity*: "The SP has a solid core electorate of about 8% due to its years of party-building in working-class neighbourhoods.

"This is the key thing left from its Maoist past, which is not reflected in its politics today or even in all of its core leadership group".

The record, therefore, is a warning against the illusion common on the British left, that appearing at each election with a newly cooked-up "coalition" or "front", and a new permutation of populist or leftist slogans, is a way to win mass support which bypasses the need for solid "party-building" activity.

Drucker continues: "The lower scores of genuine anti-capitalist parties (not just the Scottish Socialist Party and Nou-

First hundred days in Denmark

In January 2012 Helle Thorning-Schmidt, the Social-Democrat leader of the leftist coalition government which took office in Denmark after the general election of 15 September 2011, reported on her first 100 days in office; and Denmark took the presidency of the European Union.

The Danish government is unusual in Europe because it took office with promises to increase (some) social spending, to ease off immigration restrictions, and to reduce deportations. On that basis, the Red Green Alliance in Denmark, a coalition including most of Denmark's revolutionary left groups, declared "unconditional support to the new government" (bit.ly/xwUE71). The government depends for its majority on RGA votes in Parliament.

The RGA has managed to change some government policies. Unemployed people whose benefits were due to run out after a time limit have received a temporary reprieve. A standing requirement for local authorities to privatise a minimum proportion of their services has been suspended.

But overall, Thorning-Schmidt said in her summary of her first 100 days: "Many will be asked to pull extra load. And yes, we will experience job cuts and scalebacks". Denmark's public sector lost 36,000 jobs between autumn 2009 and the start of 2012 — equivalent to 360,000 job cuts in Britain — and the *Copenhagen Post* reports that the job loss will rise by another 4,000 (equivalent of 40,000) over 2012.

Meanwhile, the government continues to spend money to keep Danish troops in Afghanistan.

Dutch party political posters. The SP slogan, more nationalist than socialist: "Netherlands wants less Brussels"

veau Parti Anti-capitaliste [in France] but the Portuguese Left Bloc and Danish Red-Greens) reflect, I think, objective difficulties in this period for full-fledged anti-capitalist parties, which the SP is not.

"Of course the SP's base is a very different kind of launchpad [from the one which, for example, Die Linke has from its base in the old ruling party in East Germany and a large splinter from the Social-Democratic party in West Germany], but it is a serious launchpad. The SP has for years had tens of thousands of members (mostly inactive, but at least a few thousand active). Although it subordinates extraparliamentary activism to its parliamentary strategy and tactics, it has consistently taken extraparliamentary work seriously.

"Another factor is the exceptionally class collaborationist course of the Dutch trade unions since the Wassenaar agreement for wage restraint in 1982, the Labour Party's coalition government with the VVD (the most right-wing of the major bourgeois parties) from 1994 to 2002 [which made Labour a pioneer of neo-liberal government policy in the Netherlands: Labour had also been in coalition government with a more moderate bourgeois party in 1989-94], and the virtually total absence of a class-struggle opposition inside the unions until only a couple of years ago (or a significant Labour Party left wing in recent decades).

"Despite the SP's failure to do serious trade-union work, this situation made it the reference point for a substantial and growing layer of union activists fed up with social democracy.

"One more important factor is the rapid secularisation of the Catholic southern Netherlands, which was a virtual one-party state until the 1960s; the well-known affinity of Maoists with lapsed Catholicism (SP leader Jan Marijnissen had a Jesuit education) positioned the SP for its initial breakthrough in southern cities like Oss and Nijmegen.

"Finally the role of the electoral system should not be underestimated; a party needs only two-thirds of one per cent of the national vote to get into parliament here, so that the SP could get into parliament with two seats in 1998 with a vote that would have shut it out in virtually every other European country (except Denmark)".

The Dutch Labour Party, with the complicity of the main trade-union leaders, seems to have hacked away at its traditional connection to a working-class base almost to the point

of cutting it completely, radically more so even than other labour parties which have pioneered neo-liberal policies in government in their countries (New Zealand, Australia).

The SP's rise has been gradual, but not inexorable. In the 2006 elections it won 25 seats in parliament, almost as many as it could win now, but in 2010 it lost heavily, going down to 15 seats.

It cannot be assumed that the SP has found a magic recipe which could ensure victory for left-wing politics in other countries too. The obverse of the SP's electoral rise has been political accommodation, and it may be that with further electoral successes will come an evolution like that of the German Greens, once dominated by "Third-Worldist" radicals, now a thinly leftist party of government.

Back in 2007, SP left-winger Leo de Kleijn argued: "The problem is that in the SP the weight of the parliamentary group and the groups in city councils have become much greater in comparison with the weight of militants outside of such institutions".

RHINELAND

SP left-wingers are worried about "a more moderate view on the monarchy, on NATO and on socio-economic questions... supposed to create an image of a 'reasonable party'..."

These are "explained by arguing that 'we should only make demands that we can make happen in four years, in other words until the next elections'", and by the leadership's declaration "that the SP has to prepare for government responsibility".

SP left-wingers blamed the 2010 setback on a softening of the SP's social message. The SP had responded to the global crisis by advocating nationalisation of banks that were in danger of going bankrupt, a parliamentary inquiry into the causes of the crisis, and more supervision over the financial sector. "The manifesto ended with a plea for a return to the so-called 'Rhineland model' [of social-market capitalism], without asking if such a return was even possible".

The SP has expelled some Trotskyist groupings which have tried to organise inside it, but other Trotskyists remain active within it.

• For views by SP left-wingers see bit.ly/spneth1 and bit.ly/spneth2.



"The Treason of the Intellectuals, and other political verse" by Sean Matgamna

A collection including items previously published in *Solidarity* and forerunner publications over the last 25 years.

Available at bit.ly/wLM5jD or at £9.99 post free from AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3DG (order at www.workersliberty.org/donate)

ALL PROCEEDS GO TO THE AWL FUNDRAISING DRIVE

Lessons of Kronstadt

Part two of an article by the Bolshevik revolutionary Karl Radek about the 1921 Kronstadt sailors' uprising. First published in *Bulletin Communiste*, 1 April 1921. Translated by Ed Maltby.

Once the Russian counter-revolutionaries received news of the uprising, they forgot about the [political] abyss separating them from Kronstadt.

Savinkov, aide to Kerensky, who had had 10,000 peasants shot on the Galician front when they refused to take part in the murderous June offensive of 1917, Savinkov, who in his Warsaw newspaper *Svoboda*, printed on Polish government money, boasts (24 February) "I fight against the Bolsheviks, I fight alongside those who have already struggled with Kolchak, Denikin, Wrangel and even Petlioura, strange as that may seem", Savinkov, friend of Balakhovitch, the hero of the anti-Jewish pogroms of White Russia, wrote in his paper that the sailors of Kronstadt had absolved their sins thanks to their latest rising.

"When the cruiser Aurora fired on Petrograd [an imaginary event] it was an expression of repentance for the sin committed on 25 October 1917 with the bombardment of the Winter Palace, the seat of Kerensky's ministry."

The organ of the right wing of the Cadet Party, wrote "The uprising of Kronstadt is sacred, because it is an uprising against the idea of the November revolution".

The Society of Russian Industrialists and Financiers of Paris, when they heard the news from Kronstadt, decided to not worry about the extremist demands or the primitive cause of the mutiny ["les revendications extrémistes... cause primitive de la mutinerie"] because its essential point was that "the sailors were for the overthrow of the Communist government" [*Dernières Nouvelles de Paris*, 8 March].

The Russian banks, with the former Tsarist minister of finance Kokovtsev at their head, began to collect money for Kronstadt. Goutchkov, the head of the Russian imperialist party, got in contact with the English and American governments to obtain food supplies.

PROVISION

The American and French governments immediately asked their agents in Helsingfors and Estonia to do all they could to provision the rioters of Kronstadt.

The counter-revolutionaries understood with an extraordinary clarity and breadth of mind the deeper significance of the events of Kronstadt.

Milyukov's paper *Dernières Nouvelles* as well as Bourtzev's *Cause Commune* did not stop at offering immediate and categorical support for the sailors at Kronstadt, they also elaborated a tactical plan regarding the adoption of the demands of Kronstadt.

This tactic was based on the recognition that every counter-revolutionary attack was doomed to failure as soon as it began to operate openly with the forces of the Entente and the old regime and had representatives of large landowners and capitalism at its head.

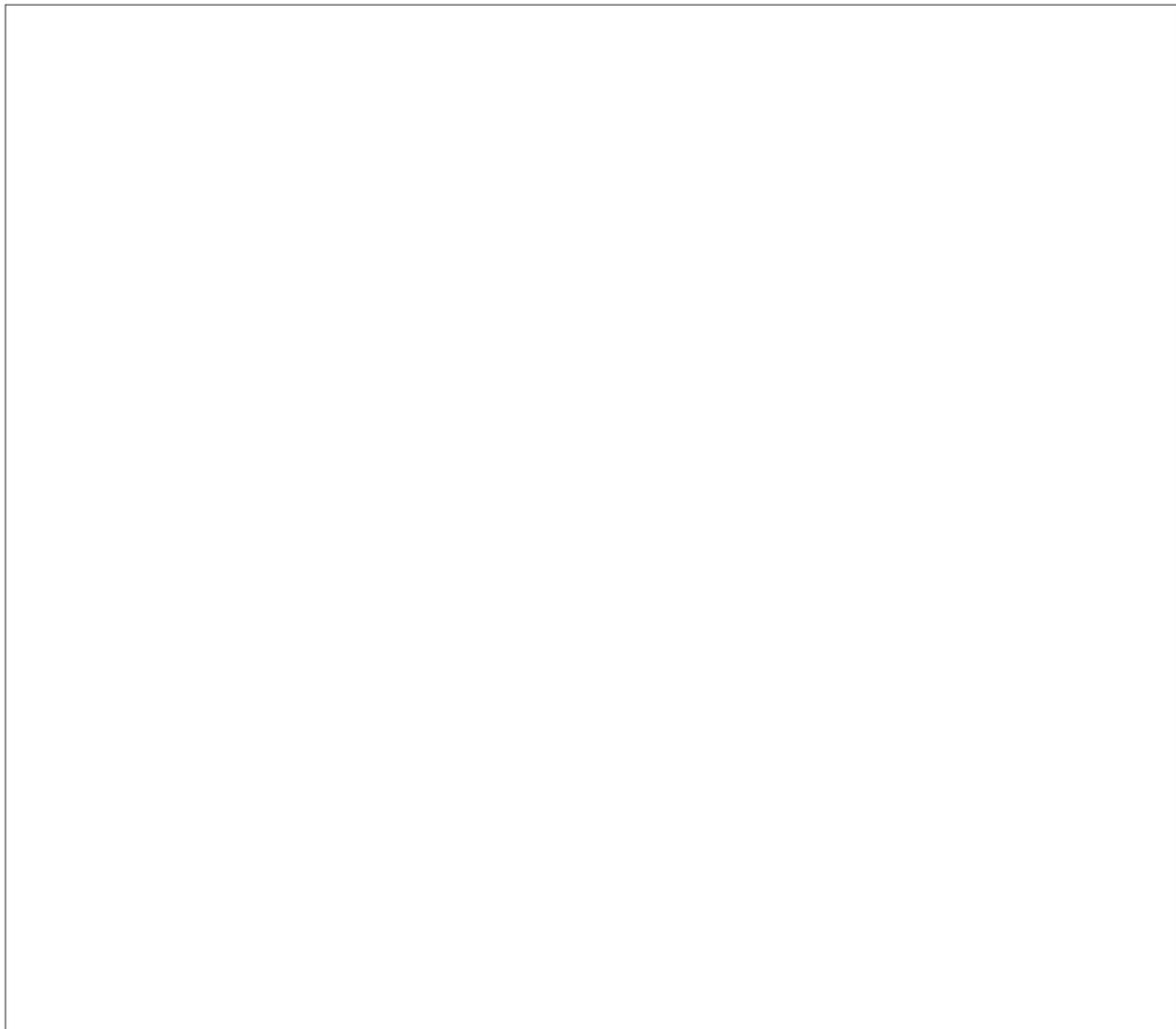
The popular masses would not believe in the pure and disinterested intentions of the allies; they know very well that when these allies march against Soviet Russia it is with the intention of making her into a colony.

The reason for the defeat of Denikin, Kolchak, etc., consisted, according to Milyukov, above all in that as representatives of the nobility they disgusted the peasants. The first conclusion that Milyukov draws from this fact is that the counter-revolutionary movement in Russia would only be able to win if it came from within and if it was purged (in appearance at least) of any feudal tendency.

But, based on the events at Kronstadt, Milyukov has made a second theoretical step: he recognises that for neither the peasants, nor the workers, nor the soldiers of the Red Army, is the demand for a Constituent Assembly attractive. The sailors had risen up in the name of real Soviet power, but at the same time they cried: Down with the Communists! This "Down with the Communists!" was the reason Milyukov accepted "real Soviet power".

When the Communist government falls, so will the only force which supports Soviet Russia in the fight against global capitalism, the only force capable, at present above all because it has won peace, of reconstructing normal life, the only force capable, as the most mature party of the revolutionary peasants and workers, of steering a course between all the rocks and guaranteeing the achievements of the revolution.

Soviets without Communists would represent nothing more than masses of hesitant workers, tired and dispersed; and they would be obliged to allow freedom of operations to all those bourgeois forces and organisations which were severely controlled under the government of Communist Soviets.



Conditions in Russia: famine (caused by disruption of the civil war and drought) started in spring 1921 and lasted until 1922

The counter-revolutionary diaspora would begin to flow back into Russia, it would flood the organisations of the partyless Soviets with its own people, and would effectively take power. And so the moment would have arrived when real power was handed over to the juridical forms of the counter-revolution, when it judged this necessary.

Milyukov's organ is even engaged in polemic with a doctrinaire SR, defending the Soviets not merely as administrative organs, but as governmental power: "The Soviets are not just consultative or legislative organs, they are the organs of state power in its entirety. And it is not the case that they could replace the Bolshevik state and form the base of a more normal organisation of provinces without breaking with the population. It goes without saying that they will be unable to fulfil this role reliably until after their re-election" (8 March 1921).

Milyukov, founder and ideological leader of the liberal Cadet Party, who appeared to be a blind and doctrinaire supporter of European parliamentarism, has understood that the destruction of the Communist Party would have been the destruction of the only force which allows Russia to persist as a major world-revolutionary force. Soviet Russia without the dictatorship of the Communists would be prey to the counter-revolution. He thus shows the annihilation of the Communist Party to be a decisive goal of the counter-revolution, while saying "Do not repel the masses of peasants and workers by raising demands for a return to bourgeois state forms. The form doesn't matter — only the content does."

In peasant Russia, after the annihilation of the Communist Party, the workers in the countryside would consolidate their power under the Soviet form as a conservative and bourgeois force, and the rest would follow on its own.

The tactic of the Russian counter-revolution which aims to break the power of Soviet Russia and overthrow the Communist Party, which seeks to lead the petty-bourgeois, semi-proletarian and peasant masses into struggle against the Communist Party, this plan of the Russian counter-revolution which is rushing to triumph in the name of a truly Soviet government and a "third revolution" will not succeed.

The Communist Party is sufficiently supple and prudent, it is sufficiently in contact with the masses that it can thwart this tactic. In profiting from respite from war, to diminish the size of the Red Army and reduce the demands upon the peasant, in contenting him at the same time with the produce of industry and foreign trade, the Party will re-forge

links with the peasant.

It will excite the initiative of the proletarian masses, to improve their material situation and to bring up to the front, into the Party, the most backward layers.

From the present moment, several weeks after the Congress of the Communist Party, before all the consequences of its new policy can be seen, we can already feel a new wind blowing which is animating the popular masses, we can really feel that the Soviet government has ruined the counter-revolutionary plan to return on the back of the petty-bourgeoisie.

USE THE DEMAND

But the fact that the Russian counter-revolution, in its struggle for power, has managed to use the demand for soviets, soviets under which it was earlier crushed, against the Communist Party, that is a fact of universal historic significance.

It is an expression of the revolutionary instinct of the western proletariat that, in solidarity with Soviet Russia, which is seen to be the centre of the world revolution, it cried, "My country, right or wrong!", without allowing itself to be influenced by any idle gossip about the Communist Party's "terrorism", or its "opportunism".

It has understood that the question was not to what degree communism could be realised in Russia — because communism cannot be established either promptly or in isolation in an agrarian country — but that the only important thing is that Russia was taken out of the hands of the counter-revolution, and that 100 million peasants and the economic forces of the largest country in Europe can no longer be used to economically or militarily support capitalism as it fights for its life. On the contrary, they are being put to use in supporting the world proletariat fighting for a new social order.

The global proletariat has thus understood that insofar as this is the case, the Communist Party will always be in the right so long as it retains power.

All of its acts must be judged from this point of view, including when, in order to win out against the counter-revolution's military assaults, the Party implacably rallies all of the resources of the country, including making certain

Continued on page 10

The USSR's bans on Jews

Mark Osborn reviews *Perfect Rigour*, by Masha Green (Icon, £8.99)

In November 2002 the Russian mathematician Grigori Perelman posted his proof of the Poincaré conjecture on the internet. The conjecture had been formulated in 1904 by the French mathematician Henri Poincaré and is no abstract, dusty problem, but deals with the possible shape of our universe.

By 2006 Grigori Perelman's solution had become widely accepted. He was awarded the Fields Medal (the maths version of the Nobel Prize), had jobs offers from leading universities, and was awarded \$1 million (the Clay Institute prize for solving one of the seven "Millennium" maths problems).

Perelman refused the Fields Medal and the million dollars, declined the university positions, and retreated into the St Petersburg apartment shared with his mother. Although this is a story of a great achievement it has no happy ending — Perelman, Green believes, has Asperger's, and he seems to have found the whole process so disturbing he has now given up mathematics.

Masha Green's book (like Simon Singh's book on the solving of Fermat's "Last Theorem") contains almost none of the maths (despite the fact that Green is, apparently, herself an accomplished mathematician). If the mathematics interests you, perhaps you would do better to read *The Poincaré conjecture* by maths professor Donal O'Shea.

None of this would necessarily find its way into a political paper except for the fact that Perelman is Jewish. And as a Jewish maths prodigy growing up in the USSR in the 1970s he faced a staggering series of anti-semitic obstacles. The details are shocking even for someone who thought himself familiar with the main themes of Soviet anti-semitism.

Leningrad University's maths department had a quota of two Jews per year among 350 students. Its Moscow equivalent was more zealous and actively investigated all candidates for traces of a Jewish background. Students with Jewish sounding names were refused entry, just in case.

The quotas were not formally stated, but were nevertheless enforced stringently.

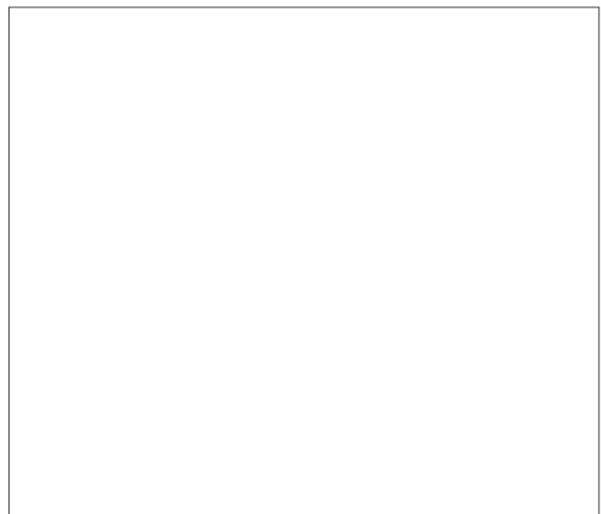
When Perelman was thirteen the Leningrad maths olympiad was won by Alterman, Levin, Perelman and Tsemekhman. Green writes, "This was worse than just four Jewish boys; this was four obviously Jewish boys... The university professor who chaired the city jury that year, himself a Jew, looked at the list and sighed, 'We ought to have fewer of these sorts of winners'."

Perelman's academic progress had to be finessed by a number of mathematicians who were convinced of his talent. Post-graduate work was almost off-limits for Jews at the prestigious Leningrad Steklov Maths Institute. In 1978 a group of American mathematicians circulated an open letter complaining that its director had kept the institution "free of Jews" for thirty years.

It was only the death of this director, some clever footwork from his supporters, and Perelman's ability, that got him through.

Later Perelman was lucky again as Gorbachev's reforms opened up the possibility of international collaboration.

The shock is how open the anti-semitic practice was — not even disguised with anti-Zionism. Nevertheless it seems that Perelman was oblivious to all this. The boy with Asperger's did not think anti-semitism was possible, because it was not logical.



Grigori Perelman

From page 9

concessions to petty-bourgeois elements, in order to break them from landlords and capitalists, agents of counter-revolution.

The advanced sections of the proletariat, with their revolutionary instinct, have understood all this and they can now see how right those were who said "it is impossible to simultaneously support the Russian Revolution and fight the Communist Party". What Hilferding, Dittmann, Longuet, Bauer, have tried to do, i.e. to adopt one attitude towards the Communist Party and a different one towards the Russian Revolution — this in the context of the tactic adopted by the Russian counter-revolution during the Kronstadt events — appears like a deception, or, seen in the most favourable light, a self-deception.

"Long live the Russian Revolution! Long live Soviet Russia! Down with the Russian Communists! Down with the dictators of Moscow!", cried Hilferding and Bauer, Longuet and Grimm. "Down with the dictators of Moscow!", replied the Tsarist finance minister Kokovsev, Milyukov the hero of the Dardanelles, the Paris stock exchange and General Wrangel.

And they add: "Once the Russian Communist Party is beaten, the counter-revolution will, for a while at least, be able to dress itself up in the clothing of the Soviets". It's not the clothing that counts, but the person who wears it, and "Paris is worth a mass" [i.e. one should be prepared to cynically take part in a ritual in order to benefit politically].

The Hilferdings and Dittmanns, the Adlers, the Bauers, the Longuets and all these heroes of the two-and-a-half international appear here not as the right wing of the workers' revolution, but as the left wing of the global capitalist counter-revolution.

The future historian of this great struggle to free the global proletariat will not omit to underline this fact, that when the Russian Communists filled with their bodies the breach made in the walls of Petrograd by the Kronstadt sailors, *Freiheit* wrote "Zinoviev, the corrupter of the Russian proletariat"; that Longuet and Bauer expressed their sympathies not with the Communists who were making a new rampart around Petrograd with their bodies on the ice of the Gulf of Finland — but with the unthinking tools of the world counter-revolution at Kronstadt.

The events of Kronstadt obliged the western proletariat to draw other conclusions as well. They drew to a conclusion our discussions with that section of Communists who wished to oppose the Russian dictatorship, the dictatorship of the Communist Party, and the idea of the proletarian dictatorship altogether.

The Laufenbergs and the Wolfheims who thought in 1919 that they could counterpose the dictatorship of the masses to the dictatorship of the Communist Party have explicitly passed over into the camp of counter-revolution. In their last brochure, *Moscow and the German Revolution*, they openly declare themselves to be enemies not only of the Communist Party but of Soviet Russia, denouncing the Soviet government before the German working masses, as a bad new version of Tsarism.

The Ruhles and company have taken their hatred of the idea of a revolutionary party so far as to ally with Dittmann and Co to fight against the so-called "despotism" of the Russian Communist Party. They have even been denounced by the German Communist elements who had previously been morally in agreement with them, as counter-revolutionaries. But this evolution could only be led to a full conclusion if the Communist International, in all of its sections, could grasp the universally valid lessons of Kronstadt and of the new tactic of the Russian counter-revolution.

ROLE OF THE PARTY

That which is specifically Russian in these events is that, firstly, the proletarian layer is much thinner in Russia than in the west; secondly, the petty-bourgeois layers are much more powerful in Russia than in England or Germany, and consequently their influence on the working class is stronger than it would be elsewhere, and for this reason, the petty-bourgeois oscillations of the working class are much greater in Russia than in Europe.

In the west, the struggle will be more difficult because the bourgeoisie is better organised than in Russia. Logistical difficulties will be ten times greater than in Russia, and there will arise situations where large masses of workers hesitate, and even consider capitulating before the bourgeoisie, or where the dictatorship of the proletariat will only be able to be sustained as the steel-hard dictatorship of its Communist vanguard.

For, as with the declaration of the centrists that they are for the proletarian dictatorship but against terrorism, which simply shows that these elements are not prepared to use all possible methods of struggle for the victory of the working masses and that they are ready to flee or betray; so in all difficult situations the cry of "For the dictatorship of the entire working class, against the dictatorship of the Communist Party!" is an indication that these elements are not ready to fight until even the most backward layers of the working class are already joining battle, i.e. when the struggle is already easy, when it is not necessary to spill blood or

suffer hunger and cold. In our pamphlet, *Dictatorship of the Working Class and the Dictatorship of the Communist Party*, published in the summer of 1919, in response to Laufenberg and Wolfheim, we wrote,

"The Communist Party will not renounce, after the conquest of power, its combat organs. It will strictly concentrate its members, the best representatives of the dictatorship; it will always consult them on the question of which measures the organs of power must take.

"The Communist Party will always march at the head of the masses and their organisations in order to guarantee the dictatorship. For the dictatorship of the proletariat will not be conquered once and for all: until the definitive victory, it will have to be conquered and reconquered every day.

"The working mass, today divided into layers of unequal ability to struggle, must be animated with the firm intention of fighting, in the course of the progress of the revolution, to make the dictatorship possible. But this combative spirit is very relative in its generality.

"Certain parts of the proletariat will always have, during the organisation of the proletarian dictatorship, a hostile or indifferent attitude. And the mass, which will celebrate on the day of victory, may well hesitate in the days of great difficulties, defeats, and it may even despair of victory and long to capitulate.

"The proletarian revolution does not bring with it an immediate relief of poverty, and in certain circumstances, it may even temporarily worsen the situation of the proletariat. The adversaries of the proletariat will take advantage of this opportunity to demand the government of the workers themselves; it is for this reason that it will be necessary to have a centralised Communist Party, powerful, armed with the means of the proletarian government and determined to conserve power for a certain time, even only as the Party of the revolutionary minority, while waiting for the conditions of the struggle to improve and for the morale of the masses to rise.

MAJORITY

"Naturally, if the majority of the working class is taken in by illusions that it would be better off even in the chains of capitalist slavery than in fighting for its freedom, and if this majority becomes active in a difficult situation, in fighting against the dictatorship of the proletariat which the Communist Party is upholding, then the latter will be incapable of retaining its position.

"But for as long as an improvement in the situation can be hoped for, the Party must steadfastly defend its position.

"When conditions improve, the working class will once again back the Communist Party and it will be able to fight on and achieve its decisive victory. The liberation of the working class can only be won by the workers themselves, by the fighting majority of the working class; but, in its struggle for liberation, there can arise situations where the revolutionary minority of the working class must shoulder the full weight of the struggle and where the dictatorship of the proletariat can only be maintained, provisionally at least, as the dictatorship of the Communist Party. And this situation has arisen more than once in Russia."

We are convinced that in the light of the events at Kronstadt, the Communist elements which have so far not understood the role of the Party during the revolution, will at last learn the true value of these explanations, as well as the resolution of the 2nd Congress of the Communist International on the subject of the role of the party. We will not draw the full benefit of this lesson — that the Party of the proletariat has been able to preserve power in its hands in the face of a petty-bourgeois counter-revolutionary uprising, even when that uprising bases itself on working-class discontent — if it is only understood in Russia. It must be realised that, if the Communist Party can only triumph when it has the support of the mass of workers, there will nevertheless arise situations in the West where it will have to, for a certain period, keep power using solely the forces of the vanguard.

It must be understood at all times that the Communist Party is the soul of the revolution and the keystone of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The struggle which the Communist Party of Russia is currently fighting to strengthen its influence over the working masses who are not yet communists, for the awakening of initiative in these masses, is the complement of its firm decision to retain power by all possible means. And this decision must serve as an example to Communists in all other countries.

That is the greatest lesson of the Kronstadt events, the international lesson.

More on Kronstadt

Full article:

www.workersliberty.org/node/14434

Recent AWL debate: What does Kronstadt mean?

www.workersliberty.org/node/18208

PCS: another pension strike in late March?

By a civil servant

It looks as if the civil service union PCS may move for a further strike on public-sector pensions around 28 March.

Since PCS was the only big union to reject the Government's December "final offer" on pensions clearly and immediately, a continuing campaign for public-sector pensions hangs heavily on PCS initiative.

The lecturers' union UCU set a strike for 1 March, but PCS has not

come in on that date. The UCU Executive on 10 February is likely to debate whether UCU goes for a later date which PCS might back, or UCU general secretary Sally Hunt succeeds in her efforts to reverse the strike decision altogether.

To their members in general PCS leaders have not gone beyond quiet hints about further action on pensions being possible, but PCS insiders suggest that the PCS leaders in fact have a plan for a further strike in late March.

The scenario, so the insiders say, is this:

The government will produce "finalised" proposals around mid-February. (One estimate is 13 February; another is 20 February; the schedule may of course slip further).

PCS leaders will then "consult" their members (probably electronically) on whether to reject the "finalised" terms and take further action. They expect a positive response by early or mid-March.

They will then call a

strike in late March, timed to be late enough that deductions from pay for strikers are felt not in end-of-March pay but in end-of-April pay.

About what PCS leaders plan after that there are not even rumours yet. It is also not clear whether the PCS leaders — who called their 30 June and 30 November strikes not just "about" pensions, pay, and jobs — will quietly reshape the campaign to be "about" pay, jobs, and pensions (with

pensions as the minor theme).

Late March is late. For teachers, for example, it means that a one-day strike is followed by a pause, until all schools have finished Easter holidays and started the summer term, before any follow-up. It will mean workers have had four months of pause, with only rumours about further action, since the last strike on November, while the Government presses ahead on its "final" terms, and workers will start pay-

ing increased pension contributions (for worse pensions) from April.

From where we are now, though, the task for activists will be to build on a late-March strike call and argue for an energetic and rapid campaign of rolling and selective action to follow on from it.

• PCS Young Members Forum (3-5 February) discussed the pension dispute. www.workersliberty.org/node/18250

UCU suspends pension action in older unis

By a UCU activist

The conference on 31 January of representatives of University and College Union (UCU) branches in "pre-92" ("redbrick") institutions voted 66 to 41 in favour of suspending industrial action over the Universities Superannuation Scheme.

USS is the pensions scheme for academic workers in pre-92 institutions.

Michael MacNeil — the National Head of Higher Education — gave a

lengthy background to the dispute, slanted towards the negotiators' recommendations.

He told the conference that it would be difficult to escalate action because the employers are ready to make 100% deductions from pay in response to any strong action. MacNeil concluded that evidence from branches is that members are not willing to settle but equally not willing to escalate.

He favoured taking what is on "offer" with the ability to step up action if there is no progress, although he

thought escalation looks "unlikely" from low attendance at branch meetings and "dangerous" without proposals to deal with the threat of 100% deductions from pay.

Upon discovering that there might have to be a re-ballot before the resumption of industrial action delegates became infuriated. One delegate from an institution from North London called the proposals a scandal, causing the 15 or so UCU employees present to leave until he apologised and withdrew the comment.

The conference voted on temporary suspension for talks with the employers. All other proposals fell.

Amendment were then voted on. These included noting the "very limited progress made in negotiations"; preparing for early escalation if the employers are evasive or offer few concessions; urging negotiators not to accept an accrual rate for USS below that of TPS; and mandating negotiators not to compromise on the rejection of an inflation cap to revaluation.

More action at Balfour Beatty

By Darren Bedford

Unite members working for Balfour Beatty Engineering Services have voted by a 66% majority to take strike action to stop their bosses unilaterally imposing a new agreement for electrical and mechanical construction workers' terms and conditions.

They also voted by a 70% majority to take action short of a strike.

BBES workers last voted to strike in De-

cember but were forced to take action unofficially after Unite caved in the face of BBES legal threats.

BBES bosses will again challenge the ballot result and will seek a High Court injunction on Tuesday 7 February.

The union says that it will begin ballot procedures at Spie Matthews and NG Baileys, two of the group of seven contractors who, along with BBES, plan to rip up the existing collective agreement.

Thompson

Reuters strike

National Union of Journalists members at Thompson Reuters will strike for two days from Monday 9 February after they voted by 83% for action in a dispute over pay.

Bosses have offered a below-inflation increase of 1.75%. NUJ deputy general secretary Barry Fitzpatrick said: "The management is proposing a below-inflation pay deal, while holding back money for a merit scheme. This is just not on."

Thompson Reuters, whose headquarters are in Canary Wharf in London, has also come under scrutiny for its relationship with cleaning contractor Lancaster, which has been accused of intimidating and hyper-exploitative practices towards its employees.

Essex journalists gear up for action

By an NUJ member
Journalists in Essex are gearing up for strike action next week.

National Union of Journalist (NUJ) members at Newsquest Essex are in dispute with management over pay.

The NUJ chapel in the south of the county is currently doing work to rule and holding mandatory union meetings, and will strike from Monday to Wednesday next week (13-15 February).

The north Essex chapel will hold a one day strike

on 15 February.

Management want to freeze pay until June with no guarantee of a rise then. This follows a below-inflation rise of 2% last year and a pay freeze for two years before this.

Workers' pay review date is being moved until 1 June — a six month delay for south Essex staff. For north Essex workers currently awarded a pay rise in the second half of the year they have to wait until June 2013 to even be considered for a rise under management plans.

Tanker drivers extend strike

Fuel tanker drivers employed by logistics company Wincanton supplying Jet petrol station forecourts across the UK will extend their strike action to Thursday 16 February.

Depots at Immingham (near Hull), Kingsbury (in Staffordshire) and Stockton-on-Tees will be picketed as workers take on their bosses over a number of terms and conditions grievances.

The extension of the strike to 16 February will take the action into a third week. Unite officer Matt Draper said: "Wincanton's failure to offer these highly skilled drivers security over their futures and their pay and conditions means that the supply of fuel to Jet forecourts is once again under threat".

24-hour, 7-day-a-week pickets will be mounted for the duration of the strike at the following locations:

- ABP Immingham Docks, Immingham, Ocean Terminal, North East Lincolnshire DN40
- Kingsbury oil terminal, Warwickshire Trinity Road, Kingsbury, Tamworth, Staffordshire B78 2EH
- Stockton-on-Tees in the north east: Boeing Way, Preston Farm Industrial Estate, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 3TE.

McCluskey (left) and Serwotka want a merger driven by business logic

Unite and PCS to merge?

By a civil servant
Over the past months there have been persistent rumours that a merger between the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) and Unite, Britain's largest union.

Nothing has been said to members about this possibility, yet the rumours persist. Possibly one reason for the persistence is the realisation that PCS will be broke in the next few years if nothing fundamentally changes. PCS currently has a "cost structure" (i.e. the number of full-time officers [FTOs] and officials and their salary levels) for a union of 320,000 members when it has closer to 250,000 members. The recent national strikes on pensions have boosted membership but the union's core sector, the civil service, is shrinking.

The union has had some successes in recruiting in areas of outsourced work, but those gains are outweighed by losses.

Instead of reducing the full-time officer salary bill, having much more aggressive recruitment in core

and outsourced work areas, and changing the way the union is organised, the bureaucracy wants a "rescuer" that will allow it to maintain FTO salaries and perks.

PCS and Unite have signed a concordat at general secretary level, and rumours also abound that Unite leader Len McCluskey (marginally more leftist than, for example, Unison's Dave Prentis or the GMB's Paul Kenny) wants the PCS's Mark Serwotka (who also has a background in the socialist left) to succeed him as the leader of the most powerful bloc in the British labour movement.

Socialists are not partisans for any particular union, and where union mergers make industrial sense (i.e. reducing the number of "competing" unions in a given workplace, sector or industry) we favour them. But this merger is driven by business logic, rather than industrial logic.

It has more to do with the self-preservation instincts of the bloated PCS bureaucracy than with uniting workers.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Teachers must plan rolling campaign on pensions

By Patrick Murphy (National Union of Teachers executive member, in personal capacity)

On 2 February over 100 National Union of Teachers branch secretaries met for a national briefing at the union's HQ in London to discuss the next steps in the pension campaign and to consider resistance to new performance management and capability arrangements which are likely to increase workload and monitoring.

The main business was pensions. The mood was as positive and determined as could be expected given the outright surrender by many unions on public-sector pensions, and the lack of action since 30 November by others.

Most agreed that the current "offer" is absolutely unacceptable and that the NUT is right to refuse to sign up to it. On the next steps in the campaign, there was no hiding from the challenges and no suggestion from anyone that we should shy away from the need for further action.

Deputy General Secretary Kevin Courtney indicated that a specific date for action — in March — would be proposed to the National Executive's special meeting on 9 February. A survey of union members has confirmed what

most people know, which is that they are far more likely to feel confident about action when other unions are also involved.

However, most people at the briefing thought that we have no choice but to provide a lead while still encouraging others to work with us.

The most encouraging signal from the union leadership was a statement by Kevin Courtney that a further national strike must not be a one-off isolated protest, but instead part of a planned and escalating programme of action to force the government to reopen negotiations.

It is vital that the NUT develop and publicise such a programme soon, as a signal to teachers and the government that this campaign is very much alive.

Rather than very occasional national strike days with no action in between, it should be possible to build a more sustained campaign which reminds the government regularly and frequently that the pension dispute is far from settled.

We need rolling, selective action alongside national strikes, with strike funds and a levy on members.

Specifically a programme for the first half of the summer term could include the following:

- Strike action by members in secondary schools on a regional basis on a fortnightly rota starting in the week beginning 16 April

- Strike action co-ordinated with PCS and UCU in divisions with large higher and further education colleges with members

in the Teachers' Pension Scheme and/or large civil service departments on a fortnightly rota. This action to be sustained via the sustentation fund and to alternate with the regional secondary action.

- A strike levy of members in non-secondary settings to support the sustentation of action by secondary members.

- Urgent consideration of an appropriate level of sustentation for secondary members involved in regional rolling action with a preference for 50% sustentation.

- **Further national strike action in April and May co-ordinated with as many other unions as are prepared to participate.**

- PCS may move to strike in late March, see page 11.

Barak threatens to bomb Iran

By Martin Thomas

On Thursday 2 February, Israeli defence minister Ehud Barak threatened an Israeli missile attack on Iran soon.

He said he believed that Iran's nuclear programme would soon be so far shifted to heavily-shielded underground centres that bombing could not hinder it.

Washington Post journalist David Ignatius followed up by reporting that US defence secretary Leon Panetta believed there was a "strong likelihood" that Israel would attack Iran's nuclear program within the next six months — as early as April.

Panetta responded: "Israel indicated they're considering this [a strike], we've indicated our concerns".

According to Ignatius, Panetta and president Obama have told Israeli that "the United States opposes an attack". As the *Washington Post* further reports: "US officials fear that an attack by Israel could trigger Iranian retaliation not only against the Jewish state but also against American interests around the world".

Panetta said that in the event of an attack, the US's prime concern would be to protect its own facilities and citizens.

There is serious cause to fear an Iranian nuclear bomb. Iranian government claims that their nuclear programme is only for peaceful purposes are not to be trusted. And Iran would not be just another nuclear-armed state: it has a clerical-fascist regime vocally committed to making "the Zionist entity" (Israel) "disappear" and "go to hell".

The Iranian regime is bullish about the Israeli threats. "We have our own threats to impose at the right time", said Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran, he said, would respond by

aiding groups like Hamas and Hezbollah to attack Israel. In the event of war, "the west's hegemony and threats will be discredited... The hegemony of Iran will be promoted. In fact, this will be in our service".

Many working people in Iran will disagree. They will fear war, and attacks which will probably not be as "surgical" as claimed.

And many Israelis are scared about their leaders' plans.

"If one is to believe the threats that are ramping up at warp speed, Israel will strike Iran's nuclear facilities before spring. If the assessments are accurate, hundreds or even thousands of Israelis will die in the retaliatory missile attacks that are sure to come". (Gideon Levy, *Haaretz*, 5 February).

SCENARIO

The Philadelphia Inquirer succinctly summarises the scenarios.

"One: There is broad agreement among top US and Israeli security experts that an Israeli strike would not destroy Iran's nuclear program, which is scattered in several locations, some underground. At best, it might delay it one or two years.

"Two: Despite such a small reward, the negative consequences could be enormous. Israel may be willing to risk rocket and missile attacks from Hamas and Hezbollah. But a strike would probably boomerang by increasing Iran's determination to build a weapon, while increasing support for the regime at home.

"Even if Iran didn't, or couldn't, close the Strait of Hormuz, oil prices would spike... The entire Mideast region would be further destabilised. And for what, if Iran's nuclear program was only temporarily set back?"

• No to war! • No to the Islamic Republic! • Solidarity with Iranian workers!

Syria moves closer to civil war

By Dan Katz

The Syrian army has used mortars, tanks and heavy machine guns against Khaldiyeh, an area of Homs, in an effort to re-take an area which had become a no-go zone.

The state killed nearly 200 people on Friday 3 February as tank shells destroyed private homes. The bombardment of Homs continued over the weekend, killing many more.

Friday's killings took place after Syrians came onto the streets to mark the 30th anniversary of a terrible massacre carried

out under the direction of Bashar Assad's father, Hafez. At the beginning of February 1982 perhaps 20,000 people were slaughtered as the regime ended a rising of the Muslim Brothers in Hama.

Bashar Assad's one party state's aim is to terrorise the local Sunni Muslim population and defeat the more lightly armed opposition Free Syrian Army (FSA).

Locally the population appears to have retreated into ethnic-religious groupings, each based in their own areas of town and frightened to leave their own neighbourhoods.

Homs bombarded

The state itself is a sectarian entity, constructed around members of the Alawite sect, a strand of Shia Islam.

There is now a fear that the pro-democracy uprising will descend into sectarian civil war.

Human Rights Watch

has reported a rapid increase in killings in recent months as oppositionists become better armed and the state responds with increasing brutality.

- Disgrace on China and Russia veto of UN resolution on Syria, see page 3.

Ehud Barak