

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

**Strikes in
Burma**
page 3



**Fighting the
Tories: what next?**
pages 6-7

**Tower Hamlets
school strike**
page 11



Hollande: France will “amend” EU cuts plan

Fight to reverse

“They are reassuring the markets, but what about us?” French protest against austerity measures

Euro-cuts!

See
page
5

Rally the European left to defeat far-right nationalists

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

We stand for:

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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.
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- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
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Missed chances in 3 May polls?

By Colin Foster

Tory MP Nadine Dorries said it: the Government is led by "two arrogant posh boys who show no remorse, no contrition, and no passion to want to understand the lives of others".

As council elections and referenda on whether cities want elected mayors approach on 3 May, Labour has at last begun to pull ahead in the polls, leading the Tories by a margin variously estimated between 7% and 13%.

It would be much more if Labour's leaders campaigned properly against the Tory cuts and against those whom Ed Miliband rightly calls "the predators". But for 3 May Labour council candidates are saying they will comply with Government cuts, only softening them.

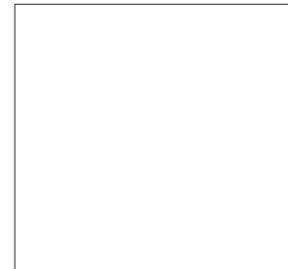
As a result, Glasgow City Council, long a

Labour stronghold, looks in danger of being captured by the Scottish National Party, which for many has more credibility as a representative of "old-Labour"-type reformism than Labour currently has.

In October 2011 an anxious Labour Party hierarchy sent officials to manipulate the selection of council candidates, and the officials deselected 16 councillors with a total of 190 years on the council.

Deselected Labour councillors have formed a group called "Glasgow First", which will stand 22 candidates on 3 May, probably taking votes from Labour, and two other deselected Labour representatives will stand as independents.

For the Greater London Assembly election, Labour has an opinion-poll lead of 9% in the constituency section and 11% in the list section. The individual quirks



Livingstone is losing the charisma battle

of mayoral candidate Ken Livingstone have become a handicap rather than an electoral asset: he lags behind the Tories' Boris Johnson in polls, by a margin varying from 6% to 2%.

Although only 14% of people polled think Johnson is "in touch with the concerns of ordinary people", he has outdone Livingstone in the "colourful maverick" act. 50% say Johnson has "charisma", and only 15% will say the same for Livingstone. 38% judge Livingstone's may-

oral campaign "poor" or "awful".

George Galloway's Respect group has been boosted by his Bradford West by-election victory on 29 March. It was previously on the verge of shutting up shop, but will now hold a national conference in June. At short notice it has been able to muster 12 candidates for the 30 council wards in Bradford, but in Birmingham, where it once had a number of councillors, it proposes a vote for the Greens.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (a group run by the Socialist Party with some leaders of the RMT rail union) is running in the list section in London (not the constituency section, and not the mayoral contest).

A YouGov poll shows it scoring 0%, but such polls may be very inaccurate for smaller parties.



Stop anti-choice harassment!

On Saturday 21 April Feminist Fightback and other pro-choice activists tried to prevent anti-abortion extremists from marching to a Marie Stopes clinic in

Woodford, Essex.

A group calling themselves the "Helpers of God's Precious Infants" attempted to stop women from attending their appointment at the clinic. They held up images of fetuses and blocked one side of the road, handing out flyers which claimed that abortion will "damage your maternal instinct and ... bonding process with any other children you have" and can lead to "alcohol, drug abuse and eating disorders."

When feminist activists attempted to intervene to stop this harassment they were met with aggression. One pro-choice activist was head butted by a particularly zealous "pro-lifer."

Soon after reaching the clinic Feminist Fightback decided to leave in order to reduce disruption for service users.

Such extremist tactics, imported from the United States, have been on the rise in the UK in recent months. Another abortion clinic in Bloomsbury, London was targeted throughout the whole of March by the 40 Days for Life campaign, which used similar tactics of intimidation and harassment.

Feminists and the pro-choice movement are now stepping up to take on this kind of harassment. One of these activists, Katie Cruz from Feminist Fightback, comments that "these extremists are not simply expressing their opinion. They are preventing women from accessing health services and spreading dangerous misinformation. It is a woman's right to choose whether or not to continue

with a pregnancy. We need to remember why women fought for the legalisation of abortion.

"Before the 1967 Abortion Act women were forced to resort to dangerous methods of termination. Today 1 in 8 women die undergoing unsafe backstreet abortions in places where it is still illegal."

Feminist Fightback
www.feministfightback.org.uk

blocked the rush hour traffic.

Many of those on the protest were workers at the centres; some were scared of being seen on the protest but all had been collecting petitions and joining with parents to oppose the cuts to jobs and services.

Many of the workers said they were Unison members and that there had been no meetings to let them know what was happening.

Consultation meetings will take place at each centre — parents and workers will attend all of those meetings making their opposition clear.

We now need union meetings to organise ballots for action and a co-ordinated ongoing community campaign.

Merseyside Women Against the Cuts and Liverpool Against the Cuts will be helping with that co-ordination.

Jayne Edwards

Alfie Meadows

On 18 April a jury failed to reach a verdict on whether Alfie Meadows, the student activist nearly beaten to death by a policeman on a demonstration in 2010, was in fact guilty of violent disorder.

Colin Goff, Vishnu Wood and Jack Locke were found not guilty of violent disorder, but Locke was found guilty of arson. The jury also failed to reach a verdict on Zac King.

Alfie's retrial is unlikely to take place before October 2012.

Myanmar: workers begin to move

By Rhodri Evans

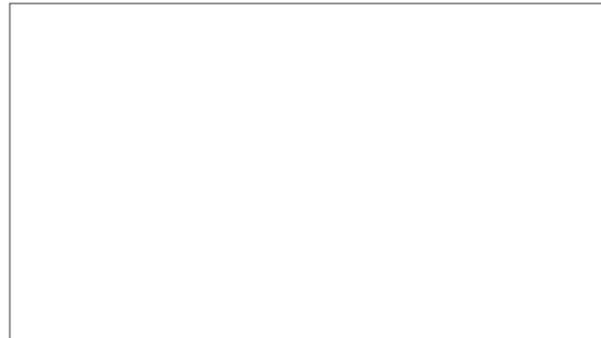
“What the West must realize is that in today’s geopolitical situation, particularly given the rise of China, it needs Myanmar”, declared a top official of Myanmar’s (Burma’s) military dictatorship in a recent article for the *Washington Post*.

The military regime has been rebalancing away from its long-time ally, China, and trying to draw in Western aid and investment — in the first place, to get EU and US sanctions lifted.

It has been spurred on by prospects of revenues from offshore gas fields and clothing exports. In January 2011, the Indian-based Burmese newsletter *Mizzima* reported that the number of clothing factories in Burma had increased from 120 to more than 200 over the previous six months.

To help Western investors think they can deal with a minimally predictable and open regime, the military dictatorship has been easing up. On 1 April it called a by-election for 45 vacant seats in the Parliament, and let Aung Suu Kyi’s opposition National League for Democracy win 43 of them.

On 23 April the new NLD MPs refused to take their seats in Parliament unless the parliamentary oath was redrafted and the government signalled that it would probably concede. The military still controls a huge majority in Parliament, and decisive power



Strike at Tai-Yi footwear factory in Rangoon

still rests with the military’s 11-member National Defence and Security Council.

Deeper down in Burmese society, however, the working class is beginning to move. Strikes and unions had been banned since the 1962 military coup; but in February 2012 workers at the Chinese-owned Tai Yi slipper factory struck for higher pay, and eventually won gains through an arbitration court decision.

The military government has announced a new labour law legalising unions and (conditional on notice to the bosses, and outside “essential services”) strikes. Pro-worker lawyer Phoe Phyu told *The Irrawaddy* magazine that the law is inadequate even compared to old British colonial labour law, because it gave no protection to workers against being sacked for union activities, and that a clause which says that strikes must have prior approval from a yet-to-be-established “Labour Federation” would “make sure that future labour unions will be boss-representative, rather than actu-

ally representing the workers”.

Yet the hold of the military is weakening.

HISTORY

It took power through a coup by nationalist army officers in 1962, fourteen years after Burma won independence from Britain.

The officers established a more-or-less complete “Stalinist” structure from above, by purely military methods.

They outlawed all political opposition, banned unions, took over the direct management of most educational and cultural organisations, and established an official single governing party with ancillary mass organisations. They nationalised external and internal trade, and large sectors of manufacturing.

Private capitalists were forced out, not so much because they were capitalists as because they were almost all Indian or Pakistani. All sizeable industrial and commercial enterprises became military-run. Prices were set by

the government. Public works were done by forced labour, a system which continues despite being officially abolished in 2000.

Agriculture remained in private hands, but the state became the sole buyer of agricultural produce; those small industrial and commercial farms which remained were under strict government control and regulation.

More than 50% of the public budget is still spent on the military, the country’s public health services are reckoned the second-worst in the world, and only half Burma’s children complete even primary school.

The Militant tendency in Britain, forerunner of today’s Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal, was so thrilled by the nationalisations that it declared Burma to have become a “workers’ state”, albeit “deformed”.

The military turned Burma’s economy inwards, limiting trade. From being one of the less poor ex-colonies, Burma declined by the late 1990s to one-eighth of the average income per head of neighbouring Thailand.

In 1988, the people of Burma rose up, led by students and Buddhist monks.

The military eventually quelled the revolt and staged a coup-within-the-coup, reshaping military rule but, in the following years, gradually unwinding Stalinist rigours and opening up the economy to the world market.

Billionaires out of media! Tories out of office!

By Gerry Bates

Evidence on 24 April at the Leveson Inquiry has shown Tory Culture Minister Jeremy Hunt as acting almost as a Murdoch employee.

This, while he was supposedly in charge of impartial government scrutiny of the Murdoch empire’s bid to take full ownership of BSkyB, and whether it was admissible under the laws about media ownership.

Labour has called for Hunt to resign; the Tory *Daily Telegraph* tips him as “the next minister to go”, ahead now of Health Minister Andrew Lansley.

Emails produced in evidence showed a Murdoch aide reporting that he had information, “although absolutely illegal”, on what Hunt would tell Parliament the next day; that Hunt wanted the Murdoch aide to work with civil servants on an official statement on the bid; and that Hunt and Murdoch’s people had a common “plan” which would lead to “game over for the opposition”.

David Cameron put Hunt in charge of the scrutiny in December 2010, taking the job away from Lib-Dem minister Vince Cable, who was reported to be hostile to Murdoch.

James Murdoch, son of Rupert Murdoch and chair until November 2011 of the holding company for the Murdoch papers in Britain,

could excuse the emails only by saying that he was “not sure they were accurate”.

In December 2011, also at the Inquiry, he dealt with evidence of an email to him which had detailed the phone-hacking which he said he had been unaware of by claiming that he hadn’t read the email — though he had replied to it!

The Murdoch empire eventually dropped its BSkyB bid, because in the meantime the *News of the World* phone-hacking scandal had exploded. It continues to explode.

Much has come out about close links between the Murdochs and top Tories, including David Cameron. News International has made out-of-court payments to settle 50 claims of phone-hacking so far; 46 new ones are underway; another 200 in the months ahead; and the Metropolitan Police now estimates there may be 4,791 victims. The Met itself has been tainted by evidence of being in cahoots with Murdoch.

Billionaires like the Murdochs are not fit people to control public information.

The labour movement should campaign to remove Cameron and Hunt from office, and to take the assets of the big media chains into public ownership, allocating the resources democratically with guarantees of access and right of reply for minorities.

Greece: the threat from the far right

By Theodora Polenta

Citizen Protection minister Michalis Chrysochoidis claims that by being “tough” on “illegal” immigrants he will marginalise the far-right Xrisi Aygi (Golden Dawn).

The results are the exact opposite. In 12 polls between 18 and 20 April, Xrisi Aygi averaged 5.4%, way up on its 0.29% in 2009.

If Xrisi Aygi wins seats in the 6 May election it will get a wider audience and significantly improve their finances.

For over 15 years Xrisi Aygi has been regarded as a marginal Nazi gang of criminals. Today they are playing the card of “anti-memorandum patriotism”.

Xrisi Aygi members have said they “will be utilising their experience so that they can enforce law and order when the police is failing to do so, such as during the student movement of December 2008 or more recently during the 12

February 2012 protests” (against the government voting for the second cuts memorandum).

Nikos Michaloliakos, leader of Xrisi Aygi, was imprisoned in 1976 for violently attacking journalists who covered the funeral of a military junta torturer. In 1978 Michaloliakos was convicted for placing bombs at cinemas. In January 2011, as an elected member of a council, he gave a Nazi salute during a council meeting.

Yet now Xrisi Aygi is attracting votes of discontent against so-called “mainstream politics and corrupt politicians”.

It uses slogans like “Xrisi Aygi will cleanse the dirt from Greece” and “Greece belongs to the Greeks”. It hides in some so-called neighbourhood committees and offers “concrete help” to the elderly, “protecting them” against the “threat” from immigrants.

It states: “Xrisi Aygi does not divide Greeks between

left-wingers and right-wingers, between supporters of democracy and fascists, between bosses and workers, between neo-liberals and socialists, between progressives and conservatives, between capitalists and proletarians...Xrisi Aygi draws the line between Greek citizens, who are our social body, and the others, the foreigners”.

It calls for an escalation of militarisation of Greece... “Massively increase defence spending”, “Liberate the North of Epirus [i.e. southern Albania] and unify it with mother Greece”, “Liberate Occupied Cyprus” — and other ultra-nationalist Big Ideas that end up as Big Catastrophes.

No worker, young person, or unemployed person should be fooled. Whatever the neo-Nazis of Xrisi Aygi say, their enemy is not the capitalists and the “corrupt MPs”. Their enemies are all of us.

They are attacking refugees and immigrants as the most vulnerable and unprotected sections of the working class. But their main enemy is the workers, the students, and the neighbourhood community movement that has been fighting the government and the Troika.

LEFT RESPONSE

Both of the two main left-wing parties seemed until recently to be distracted by the increase of their electoral percentages.

KKE [the diehard-Stalinist Greek Communist Party] was dreaming of further building up the party in isolation from other left-wing movements, and Syriza [a coalition centred on the former Euro-communists], of a progressive government with the left at its centre.

In 12 polls between 18 and 20 April, KKE has averaged 9.6%, Syriza 10.6%, and the Democratic Left 8.0%. Pasok averaged

15.5%, and New Democracy, 21.6%.

It will be bad if KKE and Syriza do not act in time against the fascist and racist threat. Just recently KKE has started to open up a front against Xrisi Aygi their newspaper. The political consequences are yet to be drawn by KKE.

A robust and combative working class movement that leads the struggle against austerity can strengthen the unity of the working class and thus has the potential to defeat the fascists. But it absolutely necessary to also building up a specific political front against the fascist and racist threat.

The anti-capitalist revolutionary left should take the initiative to organise against the fascists. In the struggle against the re-emergence of fascism, numbers matter.

The heroic teams of anarchists who regard it as their personal and ethical responsibility to deal with

the fascists of Xrisi Aygi in isolated “military-type” actions detached from the majority of the Greek society are ineffective and counter-productive.

In the early 30s a lot of heroic members of the German Communist Party were killed in fights with the Nazis. But because of the refusal of their leadership to cooperate and unify with the majority of the German working class, the German communists’ heroic actions did not stop the strengthening of fascism.

The fight against fascism and racism is not a private affair of the anti-capitalist left. It can only become effective with the broadest and most massive appeal. It should involve the whole of the working class.

We can only defeat fascism if we form a robust united front of all working class organisations, all left parties, of all trade unions and organisations and youth movements.

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Would you like to build support for your dispute or campaign? Why not send a message to trade union and socialist activists by placing a May Day message in *Solidarity*?

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- Organising a fundraising event

- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.

- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

More information: 07796 690 874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Rd, SE1 3DG.



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Mail revives its murky past



The *Daily Mail*, like the Tory Party, has been trying for years to rebrand itself on the issue of race. It professes to be at the very least liberal and tolerant and, in better moments, a champion of racial equality.

Maverick editor Paul Dacre invested considerable energy in pursuing the murderers of Stephen Lawrence, in large part to demonstrate the *Mail's* modern identity. Given the consistently right-wing attitudes promoted in the paper and its peculiar obsession with an outdated and mythical pre-1960s Britain of all-white, monarchy-respecting, nuclear families this is slightly odd.

In part the desire to parade its equal opportunities credentials has a commercial logic — the paper competes in a diverse market which includes a sizeable black middle class.

But for the *Mail* there is also a matter of "living down" its history, its promotion of British fascism in the 1930s. The paper's most infamous front page was published on 8 July 1934. The headline "Hurrah for the Blackshirts" accompanied a piece on Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists (BUF) that read: "If the Blackshirts movement had any need of justification, the Red Hooligans who savagely and systematically tried to wreck Sir Oswald Mosley's huge and magnificently successful meeting at Olympia... would have supplied it."

On 15 January 1934 the BUF was described as "a well organised party of the right ready to take over responsibility for national affairs with the same directness of purpose and energy of method as Hitler and Mussolini have displayed". The Nazis were described as "Europe's guardians against the Communist danger".

On 10 July 1933, the paper's proprietor Lord Rothermere wrote:

"I urge all British young men and women to study closely the progress of the Nazi regime in Germany. They must not be misled by the misrepresentations of its opponents. They have started a clamorous campaign of denunciation against what they call 'Nazi atrocities' which, as anyone who visits Germany quickly discovers for himself, consists merely of a few isolated acts of violence such as are inevitable among a nation half as big again as ours, but which have been generalised, multiplied and exaggerated to give the impression that Nazi rule is a bloodthirsty tyranny."

The *Mail's* support was much appreciated by Hitler, who wrote to Rothermere in 1933 to thank him.

The paper is much less likely to go in for the nostalgic reporting of historic editions than many others. It is a history they would rather we all forgot. Which makes the paper's 20 April edition an interesting read.

On the last day before the first round of the French presidential election the *Mail* ran a commentary piece on the choices facing the electorate. The headline was unambiguous: "Despite her flaws, the only responsible vote in France next Sunday is one for Marine Le Pen".

So the *Daily Mail* has returned to the business of supporting the rise of fascism in Europe. The author of this piece, Richard Waghorne, promotes the French National Front on the basis that it is the only party "advancing the case for an exit from the Euro" and for Le Pen's "defence of French national identity in the country with Europe's most numerous Muslim minority".

As Waghorne sets the tone for the *Mail's* attitude to European fascism the same paper was fighting unsuccessfully to control its rage about the failure of Theresa May to deport religious fascist Abu Qatada.

As ever with this rag, it's the colour of the fascist's skin that seems to matter, not the poisonous and reactionary nature of their politics.



Uses of religion

While it was good to read the interview with Andrew Copson of the British Humanist Association (*Solidarity* 242), it was disappointing to see Ira Berkovic falling into the trap of a formulaic denunciation of Richard Dawkins' supposed views on religion.

Dawkins does not "conceive of religious belief as merely a stupid, wrong idea". As he explains in *The God Delusion*, the ubiquity of religion strongly suggests that it either has survival value or, his preferred theory, it is linked to psychological propensities that have survival value. In other words, religious beliefs are a by-product of things that have survival value.

He gives as an example of such a by-product the tendency of moths to fly into a flame. Moths have evolved in a world where for hundreds of millions of years the only light at night has been the Moon, by which they can navigate. Candle flames, a recent phenomenon, are brighter and nearer, overwhelming the moth's navigational sense.

Dawkins thinks that religions may have spread through the valuable tendency of children to obey their parents and elders, thus avoiding many dangerous situations. Why the elders would believe many untrue things about the world also needs explanation, and Dawkins and others have come up with some plausible suggestions.

Nowhere, however, does Dawkins suggest that religious beliefs are "merely a stupid, wrong idea". The criticism of Dawkins and other high-profile atheists on these incorrect grounds suggests that many religious leaders are rattled by his actual arguments.

Les Hearn

Front de Gauche's programme

[*Solidarity* 242 discussed] the impact the rise of the Front de gauche and Jean-Luc Mélenchon's electoral campaign has had on the French far-left.

[Martin Thomas writes] "Look at what has happened to the previous (smaller) minority which quit the NPA in 2009, the Gauche Unitaire led by Christian Picquet. Picquet now chairs Mélenchon's campaign staff. The GU are not intervening in the Mélenchon campaign to advance revolutionary socialist politics. The Mélenchon campaign has

'intervened' in and absorbed them."

This "has led to junking the 'old' programme, and replacing it by no programme at all, beyond a vocal and militant tone on 'left' causes as defined by broad public opinion, rather than by a carefully-analysed revision in light of new conditions."

Now Martin Thomas is careful in weighing his words, but others are no doubt much less inclined.

We know what this means: liquidation of the programme! Capitulation to Stalinism! Pabloism!

In reality the Gauche Unitaire has undergone an evolution followed by important sections of the European far-left, democratic socialists, and parts of the remaining Communist Parties.

This is towards a deeply democratic social republicanism — the political vehicle of a renewed socialist programme.

The Gauche Unitaire has no programme? Read the magnificent Front de gauche's "L'Humain d'abord". It is one of the most advanced programmes on the European left.

Read the Gauche Unitaire's E-Mail newsletter. No programme? Please...

Andrew Coates, from tendancecoatesy.wordpress.com

Blaming EU and Germany

We need to tackle those with economic power, but that is not the intention of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Left Front.

At most its economists (some of them coming from the Socialist Party) adopt the language of the alternative-globalisation movement and denounce "financial" capitalism, "neo-liberal globalisation", and stock-market speculation.

It's the same old story of imagining a fair capitalism, a benign alternative capitalism, a capitalism that will simultaneously exhaust fewer resources and submit to capital's laws of reproduction, a kinder capitalism...

It is a nationalist and protectionist perspective which the Left Front proposes (and the Communist Party too, but that is not new):

- Denunciation of the European Union, blamed for all the workers' woes... and supposed to have produced "a new totalitarianism" headed by "Lady Ashton and her 5,000 bureaucrats of the European foreign office"...

- Denunciation of Germany. In his programmatic book, *They should all go!*, Mélenchon recycles some old prejudices: "The relations of the Germans with their neighbours are not definitively harmonised... It was a mistake to agree that the Germans should be more numerous in the European Parliament than the French..."

No doubt this language pleases some sections of the CP, long nourished on the poison of nationalism. It remains a fact that to suggest to workers that they could have national interests rather than class interests is to sustain a demagogy also used by the far right...

www.quilemportera.net

Hollande set to win French Presidency: fight to reverse Euro-cuts!

François Hollande — the Socialist Party [PS]'s candidate for French president — has made policy commitments with implications for the future of economic policy throughout the Eurozone and Europe more widely.

They have helped him to do better than the PS candidates in 2002 and 2007 and to beat the incumbent, President Sarkozy, into second place in the first round of the 2012 election.

Hollande wants to renegotiate the Fiscal Treaty decided by the EU in December and signed by all the EU states except the UK and the Czech Republic.

The Treaty — which still requires ratification by 12 states to come into force, and faces a referendum in Ireland — requires states to limit their “structural” budget deficits to

0.5% of GDP. For 2010 the *average* deficit of the EU 27 was 4.7%. How much of that is “structural” is guesswork. Only Estonia and Sweden were below 0.5%.

Hollande’s policy commitment of taxing incomes over one million euros at 75% is popular with voters, as is his promise to create more jobs in education, and spend more on housing.

Hollande says austerity is threatening economic growth and prosperity rather than nurturing it, in France and throughout Europe. Many people, even in the ruling classes, know that, and so a Hollande victory could shift the economic approach of Europe and particularly of the Eurozone as a whole away from right-wing fiscal austerity.

The collapse on 23 April of the strongly pro-cuts Dutch government, unable even to meet a target of cutting its budget deficit to 3%, strengthens that possibility.

But his approach is not intended to challenge the rule of capital, not even slightly! It offers a more social-democratic management of capitalism and maybe some Keynesian attempts to limit the slump.

The response of socialists in France, the UK, Spain, Italy and everywhere in Europe should be to work for unity of the labour movement across Europe. Unity around a common programme, not of tinkering with the institutions of European austerity but of making the bankers and bosses pay for their crisis.

A programme that gives a clear answer to the far-right nationalist demagogues feeding on the crisis, like Le Pen in France and Xrisi Aygi in Greece, and Wilders in the Netherlands. A programme that aims instead to reshape a united and more democratic Europe.

The French left and the election

François Hollande scored 28.6% in the first round of the French Presidential election. The second round, on 6 May, will be a run-off between Hollande and the right-wing outgoing president, Nicolas Sarkozy.

Marine Le Pen, of the neo-fascist, anti-immigrant National Front, scored an alarming 18.0%.

On the left, Jean-Luc Mélenchon got 11.1% on the first round — less than the 17% he got on some opinion polls, but way ahead of the 5% which polls gave him at the start of the campaign.

Philippe Poutou of the NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party) got 1.2%, and Nathalie Arthaud of Lutte Ouvrière (LO), 0.6%. These are poor results compared to the scores of the revolutionary left in 2002 and 2007.

Almost all of Mélenchon’s voters will go for Hollande in the second round. According to polls, most of Le Pen’s voters will back Sarkozy in the second round, but many will abstain; the 9% who voted for the centre-right candidate François Bayrou will divide fairly evenly. These transfers look like giving Hollande victory on 6 May.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon is a former Socialist Party left-winger, a minister in the last SP-led government, who split away from the SP in 2009 to form his own splinter group, the Parti de Gauche (PdG, Left Party).

The PdG is small, but Mélenchon was the candidate not just of the PdG but of the Front de Gauche, or Left Front, an alliance of the PdG and smaller groups with the reduced but still large French Communist Party.

In the last presidential election, the CP got a dismal vote (1.9%) for the perfunctory candidature of a CP apparatchik, Marie-George Buffet. This time not only CP members but the still-large periphery of people influenced by or sympathetic to the CP were mobilised for Mélenchon.

Mélenchon’s 11.1% seems to have included many young voters. It signifies that a large chunk of the electorate voted for full reimbursement (rather than partial, under France’s “social insurance” system) of health charges, renationalisation of public services, a return to full pension rights at age 60, an increase in the minimum wage, etc., all summed up under the slogans of “a citizens’ revolution” and “a Sixth Republic”. This represents a constituency of great importance for the left

DOWNSIDE

There is a downside, however. The total vote to the left of the Socialist Party seems to be up a bit compared to 2007 (total 9%), but down on 2002 (13.9%) and 1995 (14%).

It’s difficult to be precise on this, for example because it’s difficult to tell whether we should count Green votes (low in 2012 and 2007, but 5.3% in 2002) as to the left of the SP. But the gist is that the increased vote for Mélenchon, compared to recent CP candidates, had as flipside a decreased vote for clearly revolutionary socialist candidates.

This probably doesn’t mean that *the same people* who voted LO or NPA in 2007 and 2002 voted Mélenchon this time. Research has shown that a lot of the “far left” vote in France is fairly unstable — many people vote “far left” as a one-off protest — and many Mélenchon voters were young. However, the “far left” dropped back and Mélenchon/CP advanced.

The drop in LO and LCR/NPA votes cannot plausibly be attributed to them running new people this time in place of their candidates in 2002 and 2007, Arlette Laguiller from LO and Olivier Besancenot from LCR. Besancenot at the start of his 2002 campaign, when he did a bit better than in 2007,

Mélenchon called for “citizens’ revolution”

was as unknown as Poutou this time. LO has worked hard since 2007 to establish Natalie Arthaud as the successor to Laguiller, and on the face of it Arthaud should be better able to gather votes than the 72-year-old Laguiller.

There is a big risk of a very destructive split in the NPA, successor to the LCR (Revolutionary Communist League), with a big minority splitting off into the Mélenchon camp, maybe joining the PdG.

LO is better geared to resist adversity. It has been telling its members at least since the 2007 election that they should face up to the fact that France is going through a period of working-class depression and they must buckle down and defend unpopular principles through times of adversity. Arthaud based her campaign not on current political agitation but on being “the only communist candidate”, a pitch which LO will have known to be unlikely to draw support except from a declining constituency of diehard CP sympathisers. Still, the 0.6% score certainly won’t help LO grow.

In ongoing political activity, the main product of Mélenchon’s score looks like being a small revival of the Communist Party and a boost for the PdG. The CP is still a shadow of what it was at the end of the 1970s (600,000 members), but it has stabilised at around 130,000 since the referendum in 2005 on the draft EU constitution, when the CP was able to play a big part in the “no” campaign.

The CP has grown, though not spectacularly, from the Mélenchon campaign, signing up 2,500 new members since 1 January as against 1,200 in the same period last year.

Mélenchon’s PdG, whose members had a high profile in his campaign while the CP prudently remained relatively back-stage, has grown from 6,500 members in autumn 2011 to 10,000 today. Although it is a left social-democratic party (and, of course, an electoral party, rather than an activist one like NPA or LO), a number of revolutionary Marxist groupings operate (and are allowed to operate) within it.

It may have been inevitable that, in conditions generally still marked by working-class defeats, the revolutionary socialist left could not solidify more than a fraction of the large protest vote it got in 1995, 2002, and 2007. It may have been inevitable that as soon as a plausible candidate from the CP-ish spectrum emerged, they would take most of the protest vote.

In any case the blame for the disarray of the revolutionary socialist left cannot reasonably be put on Mélenchon. That LO has responded to the difficulties by sullen retrenchment, and the NPA by flaking apart, is down to them.

The future depends on how the revolutionary socialist left manages to deal with its current setbacks, regroup, and win over sizeable numbers of those who voted for Mélenchon.

The danger from the far right

The National Front/FN vote, though not as high as some opinion polls suggested, was high: 6.4 million people, 17.9% of the vote — the fascist party’s highest score in a presidential election. They seem to have done well among working-class and among young voters.

In 2002 the former leader Jean-Marie Le Pen caused shock waves when he won through to the second round with 16.9% of the vote. 2002 saw a relatively low turnout for the first round of 79.1%: 4.8 million people voted for him in the first round, 5.5 million in the second round where he was trounced by Jacques Chirac winning the votes of almost everyone else on the political spectrum.

The FN was knocked back after that, although in the 2007 election they still managed to win 3.8 million votes (10.4%).

One thing that has changed since then is the character of the main right-wing party, the UMP (the party is itself a merger of predecessor parties). Chirac, particularly in the second round in 2002, standing as Rassemblement pour la République/Rally for the Republic, presented himself as a president for all French people. Sarkozy is a far more abrasive politician, showily patriotic, anti-immigration and anti-immigrant, hostile to “les banlieues” (poorer suburbs), and rude about the people who live there.

Against this general hardening of the stance of the right in France, the 2012 vote represents an advance for the FN. During the election campaign they posed as the true choice of right-wing voters.

Their election promises and themes included:

- Leaving the euro
- Scrapping the Common Agricultural Policy
- Leaving the Schengen zone and reducing legal immigration to just 10,000 people a year
- Protecting and re-building industry and privileging “native-born” [white French] people for new jobs created

A poll suggests that Le Pen’s voters will split in the second round roughly half to Sarkozy and 25% to Hollande.

Going into the second round, Sarkozy will have to win a large proportion of those who voted for the National Front/FN. He set out his stall the day after the first round, declaring on Monday 23 April that he would organise a festival for “real work” in central Paris on 1 May, to rival the traditional trade union celebrations of workers’ day. This throwing down the gauntlet to the workers’ movement should be countered vigorously.

Some of the FN’s increased vote may be attributed to a more presentable candidate. Marine Le Pen, replacing her father Jean-Marie Le Pen, gave her campaign a smoother, less visibly fascist, tone.

As with the rise of the far-right Xrisi Aygi (Golden Dawn) in Greece, the FN score shows that popular anger against the crisis can be channelled in far-right and nationalist as well as left-wing and internationalist directions.

The far-right can be undercut and defeated only by an effective left.

Fighting the Tor

By Daniel Randall and Martin Thomas

Bankers' and bosses' pay and bonuses, share prices, and profits have recovered nicely since the sudden crash of 2008-9.

This semi-recovery for the bourgeoisie does not come with any economic recovery for the working class. Real wages are going down, and set to go down further. Unemployment is high and not falling. The Government plans even heavier cuts for the next few years than it has made in 2010-2.

The economic picture globally (with a slowdown in China and high oil prices) and in Europe determines that the prospect is at best for a long period of economic depression, or possibly for fresh shocks which will crash even the superficial semi-recovery (for the bourgeoisie only) and the limited revival of private-sector jobs.

Capitalist slumps coming after a period of relatively low working-class activity and confidence usually, in the first place, push down activity and confidence further. The militant working-class expression of the anger, disillusionment, and enforced rethinking generated by the slump usually comes not in the midst of the slump, but in the subsequent economic recovery or general semi-recovery.

That is the general (though not invariable) rule, and it is no surprise that things have, broadly, worked that way so far in this crisis.

Even so, it matters a great deal whether the setbacks in living standards, working conditions, organisation, confidence, and class cohesion suffered in the slump are limited or large. It matters whether partial victories, and limited initiatives to rebuild, can be established in the slump, or not. It matters whether the socialists can recruit the individuals pushed by slump times into re-thinking, and educate them, train them, integrate them.

The 30 June and 30 November strikes made the organised working class a visible social force in a way not seen in a generation. The great many young workers who struck for the first time on 30 June or 30 November will have learned about the power of organised labour.

PROBLEM

The problem with the pensions dispute has not been that workers were unwilling to move.

The 30 June and 30 November strikes, and even the 28 March strike (confined to London, and called as a "sop" by union leaders who had already overruled union membership surveys calling for a national strike), got good responses. The demonstrations on those strike days brought out large numbers of workers, especially young workers.

There is every reason to suppose that if the union leaders had allowed more honest and open communications, and real debate, then large suppressed resources of creativity, imagination, criticism, and militancy among the rank and file would have been released.

But the pensions dispute is now ailing, on life support with the 10 May day of action and vague talk of something more in late June. This is a significant setback. The union leaders have been found wanting; and, in certain ways, the movement as a whole has been found wanting too.

UK unemployment ILO measure (million)

Percent

The rate of profit in the UK between 2005 and 2011

The pensions dispute, paradoxically, has encouraged decline for the local anti-cuts committees which mushroomed from late 2010. Committees were swivelled towards focusing on "the next big thing" (26 March, 30 June, 30 November), and then left limp after the "big thing"; or undercut by the focusing of activist energies on the pensions issue, on which, given the unions' complete lack in practice of a political campaign to accompany their industrial action, the anti-cuts committees had little traction. In most though not all areas those local anti-cuts committees are significantly reduced.

LESSONS

We must learn lessons from the shortcomings of the pensions campaign:

- Almost total lack of debate in the unions about strategy; indeed almost total lack of honest communication from union leaders to their members during the campaign.

- Bad effects of a trade-union approach which, amidst a vast welter of attacks by government and bosses on workers' conditions, handed down from above a focus on one hoped-for "making-a-breach" issue (pensions) and a series of one-off protests on that issue.

- Lack of a public political campaign, linking the issues of public-sector pensions with those of private-sector pensions and the state pension.

- Bad effects of a trade-union culture which has come to see strikes as one-off protests to strengthen union officials' hands in subsequent negotiations, rather than as continuous action to force concessions. There has been a habit of seeing strikes, when they happened, as "about" pensions, rather than for specific demands.

This culture also sees ballots on strikes more as gambits in negotiations than as instructions by the members to union leaders.

- The paralysing effect of a doctrine, proclaimed most vocally by the PCS leaders, that unions cannot hope to achieve anything *even on the details of their own members' pay, jobs, and conditions*, unless they get other unions to strike alongside them.

- Weakness of the major "left" or "rank and file" groups in all the unions involved — STA and CDFU in the NUT, Left Unity in PCS, Unison United Left, Unite United Left — which failed to suggest strategies different from the top leaders' and to promote debate.

- Even hard-core ac-

tivist left groups such as SWP and SP expressed a distinct view chiefly through proposing that the actions promised or planned by the leaders (30 June, 30 November, etc.) be *thought of* in more radical terms (as a "one-day public sector general strike"), or *thought of* as leading straight into more radical action ("two-day general strike" or "all out, stay out"), or *thought of* as likely to bring down the government.

The major outcome to build on now is the beginnings of a rank-and-file network of school workers, with the conference on 16 June called by the Local Associations for Action on Pensions as follow-up to their large fringe meetings at the Easter conference of the National Union of Teachers.

For AWL, building on the modest recent increase in our number of workplace and industrial-sector bulletins is a priority. Such bulletins are an indispensable tool if information and debate about strategy are to reach beyond the limits of earshot of key activists.

Over the next years and decades, we should conceptualise our work in the unions not just as mobilising the rank and file against the top leaders. It is also a matter of helping to develop, and working with, a new generation of younger union activists, with the aid of the best of the experienced older activists.

The average age of a workplace rep in the British trade union movement was in the late 40s on the most recent comprehensive figures (2004) and will be older now. In other words, the average union rep is someone who probably came into activity around the time of the 1984-5 miners' strike.

The number of workplace reps across the economy has, according to best guesses, dwindled from 335,000 in 1984 to maybe 150,000 in 2004-9 — faster than union membership has declined. On the best guesses available, the proportion of paid union full-time officials to members has increased somewhat, though the total number of paid full-time officials remains small, perhaps 3,000 across the whole movement. On the latest available figures, 81% of paid union full-time officials are over 40.

Today's older union reps who started activity in the 1980s are, in many ways, the best of their generation. They stuck with the movement while others fell away.

Yet many of them — on the evidence of the pensions dispute, a majority of them — have suffered an erosion of spirit, even if they are still nominally left-wing or revolutionary-minded. For twenty or thirty years they have been trained in union activity as damage-limitation — as primarily an effort by assiduous union negotiators to get a passable outcome on individual grievances or on redeployments following job cuts. The predominance of older reps often means that younger reps are hegemonised by, and take their model of union activity from, the older ones.

ies: what next?

UK real wages: annual rate of increase — or, since 2008, decrease

The winning of union facility time, from the 1970s onwards, was a trade-union gain, linked with legal guarantees of rights of union representation to workers with grievances. We should defend facility time against the attacks being made by employers and government.

DOUBLE-EDGED

However, we should also recognise that facility time has been a double-edged gain, providing a basis for a sort of “bureaucratisation at rank-and-file level”. We must drill down below the layer of long-standing facility-time trade-unionists to a wider range of workers.

We should strive constantly to draw newer, younger workers into facility-time activity, and to combat assumptions that once older workers get facility-time posts, they more-or-less automatically keep them until retirement.

We should work wherever possible to generalise individual grievances into collective ones, rather than letting workplace union activity become an aggregate of atomised individual casework. We should insist on accurate, speedy, and full communication by facility-time reps to the members they represent, and well-organised and democratic meetings to decide policy and monitor their work.

That “trade union activist” usually connotes someone at least middle-aged is not iron law.

The French union movement collects statistics which give us a picture. At the Amiens congress of the CGT in 1906, the average age of delegates was 36. Victor Griffuelhes became general secretary of the whole union confederation at the age of 27; Léon Jouhaux succeeded him at the age of 30; even after World War Two, the crusty Stalinist Georges Séguéy became secretary of the CGT railworkers at 22, and secretary of the whole confederation at the age of 40. Around 1961 the average age of CGT congress delegates was 38. The average became markedly *younger* from 1968 through to 1978, and then rose again. By 2006 it was 48.

A rejuvenation of the corps of union activists is not only possible in the coming years, but necessary. The current generation will move on whatever we do. More and more of the existing activists will move into retirement, early retirement, or ill-health

RADICALISATION

So far, new young activists roused up by the “new anti-capitalism”, by environmental activism, or by the big anti-war mobilisations have not flowed on into union activism in anything like the way the student and youth radicalisation of the late 1960s and early 70s flowed on.

Some activists have moved into the NGO world, and others straight or almost straight from university into being full-time union officials.

Some have remained active in miscellaneous campaigns while relying for income on casual and short-term jobs where they don't do union organising. Yet there must be a larger potential for developing new young union activists than has been realised so far.

The defeat over pensions does not at all wipe out the

prospects for working-class struggle in the next year or so. In working-class history it has often happened that what looked in advance like the “main” issue passed with relatively little action; and then an issue which seems secondary or off-centre sparked revolt.

There are plenty of issues coming up: service cuts, pay freezes, radical marketisation of the Health Service, benefit cuts, “new standards” in schools... And there is plenty of discontent to supply the raw material for mobilisation.

The Tories are already following up on the pensions dispute with further attacks:

- the continuing social cuts, as detailed above;
- continued cuts in real wages in the public sector. The current two-year pay freeze will be followed by a one per cent limit on pay rises from 2013-4;
- plans to “regionalise” public sector pay;
- privatisation and marketisation in the health service and in education;
- possible moves in the public sector to cut union facility time, or even in some places to de-recognise unions.

The threat of new anti-union laws also remains on their desk, though currently dormant.

Regional pay will be hard to push through on a large scale. If the average public-sector pay rise is to be limited to one per cent, then it will be hard to open up large differentials between regions without actually cutting nominal wages in the regions destined for lower pay, and historically workers resist cuts in nominal wages much more fiercely than cuts in real wages brought about by price inflation.

Economist Richard Disney, a former IMF adviser who has been called in as an adviser by the Government and who says that regional pay is in general “a good idea”, declares: “If you were to do it, you should do it when people are getting 3 or 4 per cent increases and someone should have had the courage to recommend it a few years ago. I don't really know how you do it now”.

**Employment
Cumulative change in employment since
2008 Q1 (000)**

**Excluding effect of transferring
financial corporations from private to
public ownership in 2007-08**

Even modest union mobilisations (and political mobilisations by a Labour Party demagogically using the regional-pay plan to try to regain support in areas like Wales) have a good chance of defeating any large extensions of regional pay. In PCS, the Government's regional-pay plans could be used as a spur to relaunch a rank and file based campaign for national pay, uniting pay rates not only between regions but between the civil service's different negotiating units (currently about 200 in number).

We should look out for two dangers.

First, union leaders may claim a regional pay system with only tiny differentials between regions as pretty much a victory, when in fact the Government has no serious plans for

more than tiny differentials in the short run, and is happy to establish the principle and then have the differentials widen gradually over time.

Second, in some sectors localised pay may be a bigger danger than regional pay.

In health, different foundation trusts could pay different rates. In further education, many colleges already vary the national wage rates. In schools, basic national pay rates could be held down, and teachers could be pushed into having to look to bonuses paid by academies (in exchange for worse conditions and longer hours) as the way to improve pay.

As of 1 April 2012 there are 1,776 academies open in England. The total of state schools is about 3,000 secondary and 17,000 primary. Since most academies are secondary schools, this means that around half of all secondary schools are now academies. There were 203 academies in September 2010.

School workers' unions should turn towards organising within academies; developing structures which allow rank-and-file control over union activity across academy chains (like combine committees); and pattern-bargaining-type approaches to defending and improving terms and conditions in academies.

How far from that we are as yet is indicated by the fact that the National Union of Teachers does not even have a reliable count of how many academies it has union recognition in.

The Health and Social Care Act opens the door to full marketisation of health care, and opens a path to the imposition of charges for health care with the government only providing subsidies to limit those charges. (The Spanish government is already moving towards such charges).

OPPORTUNITIES

However, from opening the door to the process to completing it is a long and cumbersome process, and one in which there will be many opportunities for resistance.

One of the reasons why many Tories seriously proposed dropping the Health and Social Care Bill was that they feared such wildfire resistance, and thought it better to damage the Health Service more stealthily and piecemeal, without a high-profile focus for resistance.

Hospitals will close “unprofitable” sections — *or be forced not to close them*. Hospitals will divert resources to pulling in more private patients — *or be forced not to*. Hospitals and other NHS operations will be taken over by the likes of Serco or Virgin — *or kept by popular protest within public administration*. GPs will hand over commissioning to Serco-type companies, *or agree to be accountable to their patients*.

Politically, Ed Miliband's talk against “predators” remains unsubstantiated by any more-than-piffling content, and there is as yet no union pressure to make him substantiate it.

Ed Balls and Ed Miliband quickly followed the unions' December 2011 climbdown on pensions by shifting Labour's stance on cuts from an already-weak “opposing these cuts, though we concede there should be slower and smaller cuts” to “accepting the broad sweep of the cuts, but criticising the details and the scale”.

Miliband has sought to “rebalance” slightly by declaiming against the Health and Social Care Bill and having health spokesperson Andy Burnham promise to reverse the Tories' damage in the NHS (while Labour has studiously refused to commit to reversing Tory damage in any other social sphere). But the die-hard Blairites have been gathering vigour and influence.

Although the 2011 Labour Party conference had more spirit and dissent on the floor than any other conference for a long time, the organised Labour left remains very weak.

Labour is now much more dependent on trade-union money than in the Blair years. We must fight for consistent political self-assertion by the unions — against diplomacy with the Labour leaders as a substitute for confrontation — and against the idea that progress can be better made by breaking the Labour-union link, and thus dodging a fight with the Labour leaders, than by tackling them.

Blairite party-within-a-party is a structural obstacle to Labour's revival

By Jon Lansman

In the face of defeat in Bradford, Ed Miliband has recognised that Labour needs "real, deep, genuine change" to reconnect with the five million voters lost under New Labour.

At the same time, Labour right-wingers like Luke Akehurst express "disgust" that other Labour members can put aside loyalty to their party to express solidarity not only with the voters of Bradford West who rejected Labour but even with Respect leader Salma Yaqoob. They fail to recognise that what prevents others feeling the tribal loyalty they espouse is the very same barrier that is preventing Labour breaking through to regain the support of its lost core voters. And it is Blairism.

At the heart of the ideology which is the legacy of Blair (and underpins the party-within-a-party, Progress, which he created to sustain it) is a rejection of the politics of class and equality, and of the organisations of labour that created Labour to promote them. Blairism has no interest in the redistribution of wealth and power; the removal of reference to redistribution in Clause IV was not symbolic. Its loyalty is to those who own and manage business, and its practice is managerial.

The only equality to which Blairism pays lipservice is equality of opportunity, that false hope that cannot be delivered without a much deeper equality. Blairism offers the politics of the American dream, the politics of "I want to be a Millionaire".

This is not true of the traditional Labour right. They share the centre-left's understanding of class inequality. They support the redistribution of wealth and power. They understand the need for trade unions and solidarity, for collective decision-making and action.

The division between the traditional Labour right and the Blairites is roughly the division between Labour First and Progress, though many individuals operate in denial of the underlying differences. New Labour habits die hard. And many traditional right-wingers undoubtedly see the alliance of Labour First and Progress as necessary to restrain the party from a shift to the left.

What all those who share social democratic values, left and right, should understand is that demonstrating a commitment to class equality and to solidarity, and to making a total break with Blairism, is absolutely essential to winning back those five million voters. It may be hard for those who remain grateful to Blair for the victories over which he presided as leader, or who suffer the cognitive dissonance resulting from their own involvement in his government. But unless we make that break, we will not breakthrough to win.

And they should also understand that the reason so many of those who have social democratic values are so unsympathetic towards Progress is not so much the money and the influence bought, not the lack of openness, internal democracy and transparency — we have grown used to these things under New Labour — it is that they see the values of Blairism, and Blair himself, as alien to social democracy.

• From leftfutures.org

The wearin' of the green, the courtin' of the Queen

By Ruben Lomas

Sinn Féin members on Belfast City Council will be supporting celebrations for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee due to take place in the city in June.

Quoted in the local paper *News Letter* in February, Sinn Féin councillor Conor Maskey said: "We took this decision not just as an act of generosity but to show that we are conscious of how important the Jubilee is to the unionist community."

The anti-sectarian sentiment is indeed admirable and, as a bourgeois party entirely within the framework of "ordinary" bourgeois politics, why wouldn't Sinn Féin support the celebrations?

But naïve "socialists" who think Sinn Féin are some kind of genuinely radical or progressive force have had another illusion shattered.

Discontent in Irish Labour

By Neil Warner

The annual conference of the Irish Labour Party, (13-15 April) was the party's first conference as a party of government in fifteen years, and the conference of a party founded exactly one hundred years ago by, among others, the two great heroes of Irish socialism; James Connolly and James Larkin.

Some of us on the left, or even simply the cynical, wing of the party noted what an ignominious marker this really was, highlighting both how mundane the party's accomplishments have been and how far it has drifted from the principles of its founders.

Last February Labour achieved its best result ever and became Ireland's second largest party. This followed the collapse of the dominant conservative-nationalist and populist Fianna Fáil. Labour's leadership subsequently agreed a grand coalition with the conservative Fine Gael. That was approved by about 90% of the party membership in a show of hands after a heavily manipulated debate.

In light of Labour's success and genuinely excellent election of the party candidate Michael D Higgins to the largely symbolic position of President of Ireland last October, much of the media reported on the conference with headlines of "triumphant Labour", outlining how "all is rosy" in the party.

For a hint of the real and very different context beyond the self-adulation of the main speeches at conference there was need only to look outside the front door of the venue. Protesters on a sundry range of issues broke through barricades and surrounded the conference. As delegates found themselves trapped inside the hall for a number of hours, outside police were using pepper spray against protesters for the first time at an Irish political event (unquestioned by most of the party).

AUSTERITY

Labour has overseen a policy of fiscal austerity and ultra-conservative economics that led devastatingly regressive first budget in December 2011. This budget was just as regressive as those of this government's predecessor, or even more so.

It included a raft of cuts — reductions in support in areas varying from education allowances to benefits for part-time workers. Tax increases in the budget were also very regressive while still including some tax reliefs for multinational executives. Yet aside from acknowledging this as a failure, the party leadership has boasted about maintaining Ireland's comparatively low income tax, even for higher earners.

In the meantime the government has shown little interest in political or constitutional reform. It has engaged in lacklustre negotiation with the ECB-EFSF-IMF "Troika" from which Ireland began to receive funds following the sovereign debt crisis of November 2010.

Labour's defence is that the "Troika" is forcing them to do everything they do, that Fine Gael is the larger party and will get its way on most issues and that there is no viable alternative to compliance with the dictates of Frankfurt and fiscal austerity that hits the poor hardest and.

But there is a good degree more possible leeway with the "Troika", and the way to get more is not to be a "good boy" that does what they are told without objection. A good place to start for Labour would be to actually disagree with Fine Gael's general approach. Countless economists and commentators have outlined alternatives to current government policies.

The party's position has become increasingly difficult to defend, at least to progressive elements in society. A poll on the Friday after the conference was the latest in a series to show Labour Party placed fifth nationally, behind Fine Gael, Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil and "independents/others".

The intriguing aspects of the weekend for me, as a participant, were matters internal to the conference itself in which much of the media showed little interest: the cynical manipulation of the democratic processes of the conference to favour the government and, on a more encouraging note, brewing discontent among the party grassroots.

The primary tactic employed by the leadership was to recommend that any motion slightly critical of government policy be "referred back" to the party's central council — a mechanism for putting it to sleep rather than killing it, and for this leadership of an ostensibly left-wing party to avoid the embarrassment of having to oppose.

In a structure designed to stifle excessive debate, a series of motions within a certain category were proposed before respondents would speak in series. A government minister with responsibility for the area in question then gave his or her personal recommendation on each motion followed by voting, again in series.

The structure made coherent debate much more difficult and most references back were passed with an overwhelming majority, even where they contradicted traditional

Michael D Higgins

Labour principles.

On the Friday evening, a suggestion from the standing orders committee to move motions relating to internal party matters to the end of Sunday afternoon was quietly slipped through. On Sunday afternoon it was announced that there was no more time for the remainder of motions, including one to reconsider the party's place in government at a special delegate conference next year. They were all "referred back".

Discontent was seen on two issues. The first was over the election of the anti-establishment figure of Colm Keaveney as party chair. Keaveney has been one of the more critical voices in the parliamentary party and his candidacy was generally opposed by the party establishment. Keaveney's election got the support of the unions, and others who dissent from the party's current approach. The unions are a much smaller proportion of the conference vote in the Irish Labour Party than in the UK Labour Party. But their block vote makes them a powerful voice when united with other groups. It is hoped that in his position Keaveney will be less amenable to manipulation of conference than outgoing chair Brian O'Shea.

DISCONTENT

More significant was the discontent shown over voting on motions and resistance to the clear attempts by the party leadership to override internal democracy. This culminated at one stage in a predominantly spontaneous revolt from the floor during economic motions.

Brendan Howlin, Minister for Public Spending and Reform, proposed that a series of progressive motions be referred back. A recommendation to refer back a motion from Unite, rejecting austerity and calling for expansionary fiscal policy, resulted in an extremely close vote. Brian O'Shea refused to count the vote and declared the reference back passed. Uproar followed — a wave of booing, shouting and jeers from the floor as people interrupted the voting on subsequent motions to condemn the process of references back. Members made impromptu speeches from their seats while others made them from the lectern in defiance of the chair.

When the next reference back was proposed — on a motion opposing all privatisation of semi-state assets — tellers were finally called to count the vote and the reference back was defeated by six votes. The announcement was greeted with enormous cheers.

Yet more farce followed when the substantive motion needed to be voted on. Briefly consulting a visibly frustrated Howlin, O'Shea declared "motion falls" to a disbelieving conference, without even putting it to a vote. In the wake of more outrage, O'Shea decided to be generous enough to put to the motion to vote. In the face of overwhelming support for the motion, O'Shea again declared that the motion fell, before further roars of objection led him to retake the vote and admit that it had passed!

Membership resistance to the leadership position should not be exaggerated. But the elements of resistance were encouraging considering that no particularly strong or organised opposition to government policies had developed within the party in the lead-up to conference.

In spite of a well-attended Labour members' forum in January organised around dissatisfaction with the the government, and worthy examples of opposition to government policy from TDs (MPs) such as Patrick Nulty and Tommy Broughan, such opposition remains disorganised. Few coherent groups have joined Unite and Labour Youth, the only two major organisations to oppose Labour going into government.

Unite is a smaller union in Ireland than in the UK. With larger affiliated unions such as IMPACT and SIPTU, potential for open opposition is mitigated by a government agreement not to impose further public sector pay cuts or lay-offs. They have not yet come out strongly against government policy.

Economists debate Europe

By Martin Thomas

Current European Union policies will produce “Great Depression conditions for a decade” in southern Europe, predicts economist Engelbert Stockhammer.

Stockhammer was the opening speaker in an economists’ conference about the crisis in Europe on 19 April at Kingston University, in London. Many of the other speakers were, like Stockhammer, members of the “Euro-memo” network of leftist economists from across Europe.

Euro-memo produces briefings each year arguing against the neo-liberal direction of EU policy and (on a broadly Keynesian basis, though some Euro-memo members are Marxists) for alternative policies.

Trevor Evans from the Berlin School of Economics summarised the current Euro-memo proposals: the European Central Bank should backstop bond issues by eurozone states, so they can use the collective creditworthiness of the whole eurozone; a coordinated fiscal policy across the eurozone, focused on expanding market demand in the richer EU states rather than on shrinking expenditure in the poorer states; an audit of the government debt of hard-hit states like Greece, and cancellation of layers of it; a wealth tax and a wage policy aimed at “levelling up”...

John Grahl from Middlesex University described the current EU policy as “surveillance without coordination” and “a frontal assault on the social models”. He explained how, as from 2011, each year the EU runs a cycle (“the European Semester”) under which each member state submits its budget and economic “reform” plans and has them approved (i.e. declared neo-liberal enough) or disapproved by the European Commission. A state which sticks to plans reckoned not neo-liberal enough faces a fine by the EU, though this punishment procedure has yet to be tested.

Grahl, however, argued that even EU leaders are aware they are floundering. Especially “if Hollande wins” the French presidency, “the fiscal pact will change... There will be an effort to retreat”.

The Euro-memo group’s focus on seeking shifts in EU policy contrasts with the arguments made by Costas Lapavistas and the “Research on Money and Finance” (RMF) group of economists, who say that there is no scope for budgeting policy EU-wide, and the only way to get ameliorations (again, of a broadly Keynesian type) is for Greece, and presumably other hard-hit states, to quit the eurozone.

They point to the example of Argentina after its default in December 2001 as showing that there would be more scope for beneficial economic change outside the eurozone.

Lamentably, I think, most of the revolutionary socialist left has ignored this debate, focusing only on country-by-country tactics to resist country-by-country cuts. AWL has argued that the activist left across Europe should advance transitional demands on a European scale — expropriation of the banks, social levelling-up. We should also examine whether it is in fact true that euro-exit would allow more scope for limited workers’ struggles to win limited gains and thus to have better chances of escalating, or whether even limited struggles have better chances of forcing concessions and of escalating if focused on the European level.

STRATEGIC

Although some members of the RMF group were at the 19 April conference, Costas Lapavistas was not, and there was no open debate on the strategic issue. Trevor Evans declared that “leaving the euro would be catastrophic for Greece”, and the statement went unchallenged.

There was, however, debate about whether the current EU policies are simply “stupid” or express substantial if destructive capitalist interests, and that is relevant.

Several economists at the conference thought the policies simply stupid. It is not necessary to go that far. If the policies are, as John Weeks (SOAS) put it, “a conspiracy carried out stupidly” — shaped by class interests, but shaped blunderingly and short-sightedly, and with elements in the rul-

ing classes half-aware of that — then that implies that strong workers’ struggles, even initially without much coordination, even initially in only a few countries, could shift the options.

Some findings reported at the conference point to class interests behind the EU policy. An increase in German wage costs would hurt German exports. Germany sells a smaller proportion of its exports within the eurozone, and a much bigger proportion of exports to China, than other central eurozone states; and it is much more dependent on exports than other large eurozone states.

That helps explain why Germany takes the lead on neo-liberal policies. The core interest, not specifically German, may be best explained by a comment in December 2011 by German chancellor Angela Merkel. The priority, she said, is “to show Europe is a safe place to invest”, i.e. to attune public policy to the interests of footloose global capital.

That means using the crisis to smash wage and social-overhead costs and to restructure labour markets; and keeping up the euro’s exchange-rate.

Yet the ruling classes want to keep the euro; and are not committed by iron law to any precise level of cost-cutting in the crisis.

The working classes of the worst-hit countries have *more* scope within the eurozone to begin to claw back ground, not less, and euro-exit should therefore *not* be a first-line policy.

Labour movements in the worst-hit countries cannot, of course, accept the conditions currently imposed by the EU. They must therefore defy the blackmail and stand firm if EU leaders force default and euro-exit rather than by conceding on demands for EU-wide change.

That is a different matter from setting euro-exit as the left’s own first objective, and correspondingly posing immediate demands in terms primarily of national policy.

Both principle and realistic assessment indicate a focus on Europe-wide demands and Europe-wide working-class solidarity.

• More: euromemo.eu, researchonmoneyandfinance.org

Italy’s Northern League implodes

By Hugh Edwards

In 1992 Italy was engulfed by the corruption scandal “Tangentopoli” (bribesville). That, Italy’s most serious post-war political crisis, saw the end of the First Republic and all its major political parties.

Leading the mass protests outside and inside parliament was the Lega Nord, led by the populist figure of Umberto Bossi. He encapsulated the radical mood and spirit of his party’s programme by waving a noose and bellowing “Roma ladrona” at the ranks of cowering politicians who were only too aware that their game was up.

Twenty years later the party that defined itself as “anti system” has revealed itself a model of that most characteristic feature of Italian bourgeois politics — the so pious and venerated Italian “family” on the take on a massive scale.

From the odious Bossi — ex Minister of Institutional Reform! — his wife and even more cretinous sons, a picture has emerged of a vast squalid network of nepotism and cronyism, involving billions of public funds. Not only funds paid to the political parties by the state but widespread involvement in money-laundering, recycling and illegal investment in a series of dodgy schemes both in Italy and abroad.

It could not have been otherwise, as this party has been a decisive constituent part of bourgeois political rule in the Second Republic. Without its support Berlusconi would have been unable to form any of his three governments in the last 20 years. Notwithstanding its never-ending lying, populist self-references as “radical”, voicing and championing the grievances of the “people of Padania” (a pure figment), Bossi and co. have voted for and sustained every anti-working-class measure demanded by the bosses.

For example in 1992/3, in “opposition”, it supported the destruction of la Scala mobile — a rising scale of wages to protect against inflation — won by the mass struggles of the late 60s and 70s.

As part of a centre left coalition in 1995 it supported the first reactionary reform of the welfare and pension system.

With Berlusconi it has been central to the emergence of flexible labour — more than 40 types of contracts! — agreed to by the very confederal unions who now claim to be so concerned about the welfare of the victims of those conditions.

And with Berlusconi and his Economics Minister,

On the way out?

Tremonti — a sympathiser of the League — it has presided over the the systematic and wholesale devastation of the public school system, health and welfare, as billions are sucked from the local state coffers to pay interest to banks and finance houses. It has overseen billions being funnelled to the schools and colleges of the Catholic Church and other unscrupulous tin-pot outfits.

Ironically, at the point of its maximum success with the victory of the last Berlusconi government, when it extended its power to the regions of Piedmont and Veneto, the onset of the financial and economic crisis signalled the beginning of the League’s decline.

INDUSTRIAL

The north and northeast industrial base had suffered as Italy lost out to the ruthless competitive dynamic of globalisation.

Unemployment began to rise in the heartlands of the League. Berlusconi and Bossi continued to deny there was a crisis, as they sought to protect their bases of support by channeling resources their way.

The arrival of the technocrat Monti and his government further deepened the problems for the party. Monti’s emergency budgets have savagely diminished the redistribution of resources from the centre to the regions and communities, where the effective political and administrative control of the League had orchestrated a gigantic machine of patronage, especially among the small business world.

So, the last of Bossi and Maroni’s stunts to keep their support happy — fiscal federalism — has gone up in smoke. The internal contradictions, everywhere present in the organisation of cliques grouped around the authoritarian “cell” of the political parliamentary leadership, have im-

ploded.

The revelations of systematic and massive corruption have unmasked this gang of ruthless, lying and murderous charlatans. The millions who voted for them, bought into their cynically manufactured fantasies, echoed their homophobic and sexist ravings, saluted their racist laws, cheered along with them as boatloads of immigrants littered the bed of the Mediterranean, are now deserting them.

The coming administrative elections may give the first indications. Meanwhile former Minister of the Interior Maroni has taken over the reins of power in the League. Maroni is as guilty as all the others, and the crazed Bossi supporters are gunning for him, as, too other local chiefs in other regions seek to save their neck and their power.

BALKANISATION

A process of “Balkanisation” might ensue, especially if Bossi is forced out — though without him it may be impossible to maintain the integral topographical sense of the “unity” of “Padania” that has defined the party’s reactionary essence.

Maroni knows that if it survives, other alliances with the left-centre parties may be on the agenda, while the former fascist Tosi in Verona is already stoking the fires of more extreme racism and chauvinism to hold on to the poisonous base of that region, especially among the young.

The dynamic at work is impossible to predict but what is absolutely clear is that the crisis of the League is a precious opportunity to expose, before the masses and young hegemonesed by it, its fundamentally anti-working class, racist nature and its role as a criminal accomplice to the putrescent capitalist order of contemporary Italy.

The rise to power of the League reflected its capacity to exploit, in the most poisonously mystificatory way, genuine anger and suffering among the masses of the north. That it could do that underscores the complete bankruptcy of the left-wing parties and movements, along with the trade union movement, whose leadership is today the instrument embracing and advocating class collaboration among the working masses.

To revolutionaries falls the task of turning anger against real enemies, those whose system must be challenged politically and practically at every point, to be finally overthrown if we are to be rid of creatures like Bossi and his party forever.

The tragedy of Spanish Trotskyism

Liam McNulty concludes his article on the Trotskyists in the Spanish revolution of 1936/7. The first part appeared in *Solidarity* 242.

In December 1936 the POUM was ejected from the Catalan Generalitat (provincial government) on the orders of the Soviet consul in Barcelona, Vladimir Antonov-Ovseyenko (the man who led the Bolsheviks' assault on the Winter Palace in 1917).

At a party conference in February 1937 the POUM belatedly drew some of the same conclusions as Trotsky on the Popular Front. The POUM resolved to call for the formation of revolutionary workers' democracy to consolidate the revolution and argued that to "maintain the bourgeois parliament is an anachronism that could be fatal."

However, they underestimated the extent to which revolutionary democracy had already been destroyed and held illusions in a "peaceful" transfer of power.

Moreover, there was no change in their relationship with the Bolshevik-Leninists. According to Bortenstein, Trotskyist militants in the POUM's militias were expelled from the ranks before the conference was convened.

Less than three months later the revolution was dealt a final death blow. During the "May Days", the PSUC (Stalinist)-controlled Assault Guards seized the Telephone Exchange in the centre of Barcelona from the anarchists. This sparked the final act of revolutionary drama; barricades went up and the most militant workers in Barcelona fought a doomed rearguard action to save what was left of the previous summer's conquests.

As the CNT and POUM leaderships hesitated, many of their militants fought bravely on the barricades, joined by the Bolshevik-Leninists and the Friends of Durruti (a group on the left of the CNT, named after the martyred anarchist leader Buenaventura Durruti). With the Friends of Durruti, the Bolshevik-Leninists drew up a programme for insurrection which called for a revolutionary front of the POUM-CNT-FAI. Their collective defeat brought down the curtain on the revolution.

THE FATE OF ANDRÉS NIN

On 16 June 1937 the POUM's executive met in Barcelona to discuss the upcoming party conference. After the meeting, a comrade from the party headquarters warned the group that the police had orders to arrest the party executive.

Minutes later, at one in the afternoon and in the full light of day, a car filled with police arrived and arrested Nin.

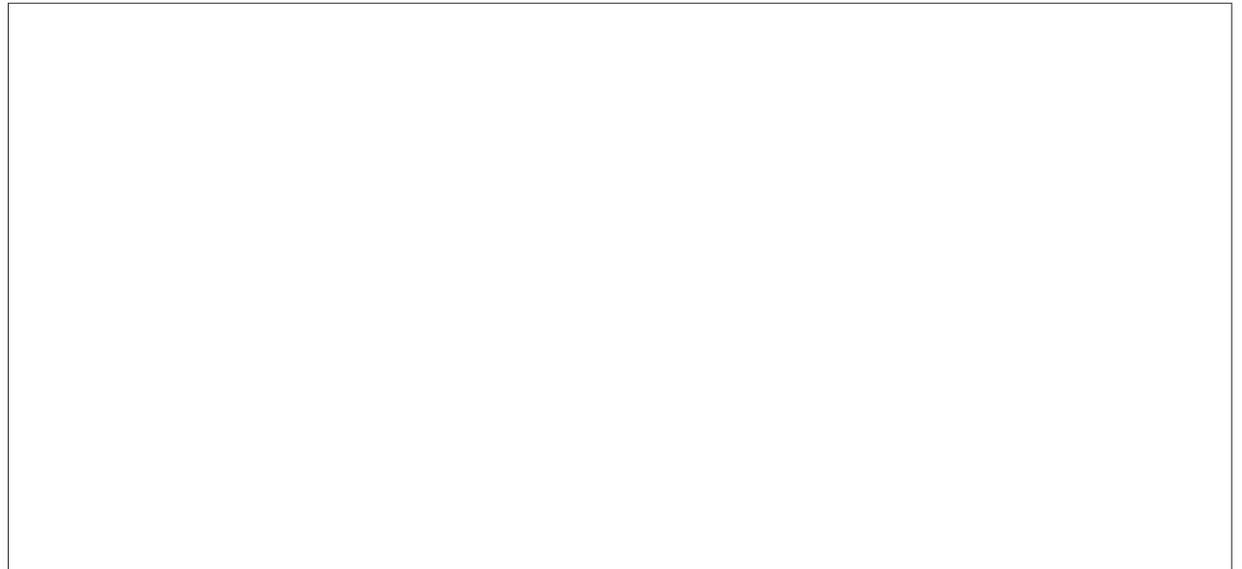
More arrests of senior POUM members followed, carried out by the Stalinist-controlled Madrid secret police.

By now the Stalinists, in collaboration with Juan Negrín, were suppressing all genuine revolutionaries. They used slander, denouncing revolutionaries as "traitors", "fascists" and "spies", torture, and even murder in a network of underground prisons.

Nin was slandered as a fascist collaborator. Graffiti in Barcelona asked "Where is Nin?", to which the Stalinists replied, "In Salamanca or Berlin". Nin was in fact being held in Alcalá de Henares, outside Madrid, where he suffered beatings and torture at the hands of the Stalinist thugs.

According to former Communist Jesús Hernández: "Nin did not capitulate. He resisted, to their dismay. His torturers grew impatient. They decided to abandon the 'dry' method. Now came the living blood, the rended flesh, the twisted muscles, which would put to the test the man's integrity and capacity for physical resistance."

Nin bore up under the cruelty of the torment and the pain of refined torture. At the end of a few days his human shape had been turned into a formless mass of swollen



Leaders of the POUM. Nin is second from the right.

flesh."

On the night of 22 June, an armed group of German International Brigadiers posing as "Nazi agents" sought to "rescue" Nin and took him away. The rescuers had been selected by Alexander Orlov, the Stalinist secret police, NKVD's man in Spain, and led by Stalinist gangster Vittorio Vidali, who was later involved in the failed assassination attempt on Trotsky in May 1940 in Mexico City. Nin died at the hands of these Stalinist thugs without once betraying his comrades.

Trotsky wrote of his old comrade: "When Andrés Nin, the leader of the the POUM, was arrested in Barcelona, there could not be the slightest doubt that the agents of the GPU would not let him out alive... The members of the POUM fought heroically against the fascists on all fronts in Spain. Nin is an old and incorruptible revolutionary. He defended the interests of the Soviet and Catalan peoples against the agents of the Soviet bureaucracy. That was why the GPU got rid of him..."

At the same time Trotsky had words for comrades who uncritically supported in the POUM. It was, he wrote in the aftermath of the May Days, "at this crucial moment that the Vereeckens, the Sneevliets, the Victor Serges have placed their cudgels between the spokes... The CNT and the POUM have done just about everything to assure the victory of the Stalinists, that is, of the counter-revolution. And Vereecken, Sneevliet, and Victor Serge have done everything to support the POUM on the road to ruin."

BETRAYED

Now the Stalinists came after the remaining Bolshevik-Leninists. Munis, Carlini and others were betrayed by a Stalinist double-agent, a German political commissar in the International Brigades who operated under the pseudonym "Max Joan".

They were accused of murdering International Brigade captain León Narvitch and put on trial for terrorism. The trial was eventually scheduled for 26 January 1939, but with tragic irony, this was the date Franco's forces entered Barcelona and the trial never took place.

Carlini escaped to France and later became a member of the Italian Trotskyist movement. Munis fled to Mexico, where he met with Trotsky, before getting involved with the international Trotskyist movement. He later became disillusioned with "orthodox" Trotskyism.

Like the German Revolution of 1918-23, the Spanish Revolution shows a combination of very favourable objective conditions with a monumental failure to construct a revolutionary Marxist party capable of leading the working-class to victory.

The revolutionaries in the POUM and the small Trotskyist movement had to deal with immense issues: they had to compete with other ideological currents with much deeper roots in the Spanish labour movement; the conditions of the Civil War made conducting political work incredibly difficult; the Stalinists were particularly efficient and ruthless cadres of the counter-revolution.

The "subjective" factor, the role of the revolutionary party, is remains a vitally important discussion.

Speaking of the revolutionary party, Antonio Gramsci's wrote: "The decisive element in every situation is the permanently organised and long-prepared force which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favourable (and it can be favourable only in so far as such a force exists, and is full of fighting spirit)."

Such a decisive force was lacking in the Spanish Revolution. The POUM did not subscribe to the principles of or-

ganisation worked out by Marxist socialists. People like Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky and many others had shaped and clarified these principles in the course of momentous revolutionary struggles. Unity in action, freedom in political debate and absolute commitment to clarifying political ideas and testing those ideas in struggle was the basis of those principles.

Because it lacked such a political "background" the POUM consistently denied genuine factional rights to Trotskyists groups. Because it could not see the point of working at political clarification it cut off all real contact with the Trotskyists abroad.

INSULARITY

Some of this can be traced back to the insularity of the Nin's group criticised by Trotsky in the early years; the rest is due to the peculiar centrist character of Maurin's BOC.

Without the freedom to debate and criticise, and for minority opinions to be allowed to work towards becoming the majority, differences of opinion become entrenched and push towards organisational splits. In Spain many talented militants found themselves isolated, outside any substantial revolutionary organisation. Their advice and experience was ignored; that had disastrous and preventable consequences.

Yet the proper mechanisms for debate are especially important in a revolutionary situation, when discussions about tactics and strategy are literally a matter of life and death. As Trotsky wrote in *Lessons of October*: "No better test of viewpoints concerning revolution exists than the verification of how they worked out during the revolution itself..."

Tragically, brave and talented militants were to be found within all the revolutionary organisations but they never found the "unity in action and openness in debate" necessary to develop stronger Marxist ideas, still less to reach out and win a mass following. That course was a possibility (the extent of which we will never know), but it blocked, in part, by the substitution of bureaucratic methods for political debate.

The selfless heroism of the Spanish Revolution is an example of the best traditions of our class but the ceaseless squabbles about the tone of inter-party criticism, while big issues of policy were at stake, should stand as a lesson for today.

More than anything Spain demonstrated the dead weight of Stalinism on the working-class movement. It contrasts sharply with the rational, principled and revolutionary Marxism which faces outwardly towards the whole class in order to fight the battle for socialism.

Selected reading

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- Al Richardson (ed.), *The Spanish Civil War: The View From the Left* (Merlin Press).
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- *Workers' Liberty* No. 26, "The Spanish Revolution"
- Pierre Broué and Emile Temime, *The Revolution and the Civil War in Spain*

Working-class politics and anarchism



How do the revolutionary anti-capitalist traditions of Marxism and anarchism relate to each other? What are the differences, and where are the commonalities?

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East London school workers strike against cuts

By a Tower Hamlets education worker

Teachers and support staff at Central Foundation Girls School in East London will strike on Wednesday 25 April as part of a battle to resist redundancies and pay cuts.

The school's management announced a restructure in January 2012 that involves job losses and pay cuts of up to 10% for some support staff, and an increase in teachers' workload. Current National Union of Teachers policy recommends an 80-20 balance between contact time and non-contact time, but CFGS management wants to reduce the time teachers have to do marking and admin work. The pay cuts for support staff will have a knock-on effect on pensions.

Bosses claim they have to make these cuts because the school's budget is in deficit. The deficit is because the school is a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) school; every year it has to pay huge bills to private companies for running the PFI scheme

PRIVATISATION
The scheme itself is in deficit, so the school has to make it up.

Staff are paying with their jobs and wages for mismanagement and financial incompetence of private companies.

The cuts are also about taking on the unions, which are relatively well-organised at CFGS. Management feel that if they can beat the unions now, they will be able to carry out future cuts with little opposition.

A recent letter from the

Chair of the Board of Governors also argued that the cuts were necessary to allow the school to "compete in the context of a deregulated education system". That gives the strike a much wider significance. As Tory plans to increase the number of Academies, Trust Schools and Free Schools continue, the CFGS cuts show how all education workers – even those working at schools that remain within community or Local Education Authority control – suffer from deregulation and marketisation.

The CFGS strike also shows the effect fighting back can have on working-class confidence. A few weeks ago morale in the school was absolutely rock-bottom; now it's sky high. There have been mass meetings to discuss the strike with up to 100

members of staff attending. By taking a stand, and running a campaign that's allowed workers to get active, CFGS unions have galvanised workers and brought them together. When industrial disputes are run actively, democratically, and led by members they can foster enormous solidarity and unity.

PICKETS

A mass meeting will follow Wednesday's pickets, which will set the next strike date.

The strike is being led and controlled by those involved in it, not by unaccountable officials from Unison or the National Union of Teachers. Workers plan to take a series of one-day strikes in the exam period, and all-out action once exams are over.

During the exam period,

unions will exercise a level of workers' control over the running of revision classes and exams themselves. Teachers are discussing with union reps how to run essential revision classes without undermining industrial action, and union reps are helping some teachers make arrangements to run revision classes off premises in order to avoid breaking the strike.

If the cuts at CFGS go ahead, it will give the green light to similar cuts at other schools across Tower Hamlets. But if the workers win, it will inspire enormous confidence for other education workers facing similar struggles.

The workplace solidarity and channels of grassroots control that have already begun to develop at CFGS will be essential if that victory is to be achieved.

Pressure for strikes mounts in tanker drivers' battle

By Darren Bedford

A conference of oil tanker driver trade union reps has overwhelmingly voted to reject the deal offered by fuel haulage bosses in an attempt to avert a potential strike over safety and minimum standards.

Although the drivers' union, Unite, resumed talks at conciliation service ACAS, the decision piled pressure on the union to name strike days,

something it had been reluctant to do since drivers voted for action. In a nervy anticipation of a legal challenge, it has even begun re-balloting drivers at one company (Hoyer), meaning those workers cannot take part in any strike action until their second ballot is completed.

As *Solidarity* went to press, Unite's strike ballot mandate was due to expire, with no announcement of strike dates as yet

forthcoming from the union.

Unite officials claim "some progress" has been made in talks. The details of the offer have not been made public.

Workers are demanding cross-industry minimum standards on pay and health and safety, and the creation of a cross-industry forum to guarantee union oversight of whether standards are being enforced.

Make 10 May strike real. Make it big!

By Stewart Ward

The precise extent of the public sector pensions strike on 10 May remains unclear, as some unions are pushing the day as a mere "day of action", while others emphasise walkouts and pickets.

Unite promises "rallies and demos" as well as "pickets" by its members in NHS, while the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) promises a strike. According to a report to the Unison Executive by Unison general secretary Dave Prentis, at the TUC Public Services

Liaison Group National Union of Teachers officials said NUT members would not be taking action on 10 May, and Unite officials were unclear on what their 10 May action will be.

The broader and more solid the action on 10 May, the more positive a role it can play in galvanising working-class confidence for ongoing industrial con-

frontation with the Tories. Trade union members, particularly in Unite and PCS, should push for more open and public communication from their unions to make the strike real, accessible and owned by the membership.

Members of unions not taking part should discuss how to deliver effective solidarity.

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550 jobs on the line at British Gas

By Padraig O'Brien

550 workers could lose their jobs as British Gas plans to close its Southampton centre.

The company says it needs to "reduce costs" and than an increase in on-line custom means fewer call-centre workers are needed.

Rather than committing to oppose the plans, the trade union Unison – which organises some British Gas workers – has said only that it will "examine the company's business case" for the closures,

"with a view to avoiding compulsory redundancies", and has lamely pointed out that workers "will need significant assistance from the company given the dire state of the economy if this plan goes ahead."

The union should immediately state its opposition to any job losses, demand that the workers are retrained if it is genuinely the case that there is insufficient demand for their current roles, and organise a strategy to resist the closure and impose their demands.

Train drivers' pensions strike

By Darren Bedford

Members of the train drivers' union ASLEF working for East Midlands Trains have voted by 76.4% to take strike action in defence of

their pensions.

EMT bosses want to reduce employer contribution to the scheme.

ASLEF has scheduled strikes a series of one-day strikes through May, on the 1st, 3rd, 8th, 10th, 15th and 17th.

Union busting in the new NHS

By Ira Berkovic

Private contracting giant Serco has unilaterally broken off relations with the GMB union at Plymouth's Derriford hospital.

GMB members employed by Serco have been campaigning for nearly a year against the threat of cuts to terms and conditions. Now their employer is refusing to talk to their

union, amounting to an effective de-recognition.

Serco has run help desk services, ward housekeeping, patient and staff catering, portering, and cleaning at the hospital since 1999.

Companies like Serco will have much greater opportunity to bid for service contracts in the Tories' new NHS. The struggle in Plymouth shows that privatisation leads to union busting.

One would not be pleased

BBC strike could hit jubilee coverage

By Clarke Benitez

Trade unions organising at the BBC have announced they will ballot members for strike action to win a pay increase in line with inflation.

A joint statement from the National Union of Journalists, Unite and the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) on Thursday 19 April described BBC bosses' current pay offer – a 1% increase – as "derisory".

Unions also criticised the BBC management decision to write to workers individually announcing an intention to introduce the pay rise two months earlier than first planned. Unions believe this is a deliberate ploy to bribe workers not to take strike action by putting extra money in their pockets sooner than expected.

If BBC workers strike, coverage of the Queen's diamond jubilee celebrations will be severely disrupted, as would coverage of the Euro 2012 football tournament and the London Olympic games. BECTU general secretary Gerry Morrissey said unions would "wipe out as much of [the jubilee coverage] as possible" in order to win a decent pay deal.

Unions are demanding an increase of 2% above inflation, with a minimum increase of £1,000 for every employee.

Balloting will be on 30 April, and the result will be announced on 21 May.

An orgy of pro-monarchist sycophancy being disrupted by strike action really would be something to celebrate.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Immigrants attacked in run up to Greek elections

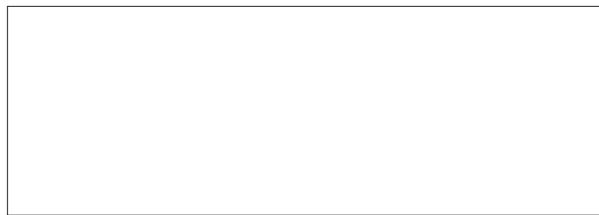
By Theodora Polenta

Citizen Protection minister Michalis Chrysochoidis, a member of Pasok (rough equivalent of the Labour Party), is leading an anti-refugee drive in the run-up to Greece's parliamentary election on 6 May.

The last act of the Papademos coalition government was to pass legislation for the construction of 31 concentration camps (in former military facilities) for illegal immigrants, identified in the election campaign as threat number 1.

Health minister Andreas Loverdos, also Pasok, says that illegal immigrants should be put in separate units in the hospitals and kept in isolation because they pose a health threat. All immigrants from countries where certain diseases are rife should be put in quarantine.

Giorgos Kaminis, mayor of Athens, with the blessing of Papademos, has starting a drive to "rein-



Foreground: racist poster from far-right group Xrisi Aygi (Golden Dawn)

vigorate and reconstruct" the centre of Athens, which translates to police stormings into immigrant areas with the aim of deporting the maximum number of refugees before election day. Antonis Samaras and New Democracy have also emphasised their commitment to a drive against "illegal immigrants".

This is a concentrated effort by Pasok and ND to shift the political agenda from the uncomfortable economic sphere, where there is no positive narrative on offer and everything has been signed and agreed before hand with the EU/ ECB/ IMF Troika, towards the scapegoating of immigrants.

As German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble has said, bondholders are worried that "the Greek politicians are incapable of governing and the Greek people do not wish to be governed".

REDIRECT
The capitalists' answer? Redirect people's anger against the weakest, most vulnerable, and most deprived layers of Greek society.

By diverting popular anger towards illegal immigrants, the capitalists hope the parties supporting the EU/ ECB/ IMF memorandum will get through at this election and the movement of re-

sistance will be split and weakened.

Local councils are being economically strangled and cutting down on services. The government is bribing them with money if they accept the building of refugee concentration camps, and trying to persuade citizens who, for various contradictory reasons, resist the building the refugee camps in their areas by promising them jobs.

Anti-racists will demonstrate in Athens against the refugee concentration camps and police racism on Tuesday 24 April.

The demonstration is supported by the Network in Defence of Political and Social Rights, the Union of African Women, the Union of Refugee and Immigrant Workers, the Movement against Racism and Fascism, the Pakistani community movement, the Iranian political refugees, Antarsya, Syriza, and many other organisations.

Tube Lines strike for equality!

By Ira Berkovic

Tube Lines workers, who do maintenance on London Underground lines, are striking on 24-27 April.

Their demand for pensions equality has a more "offensive" character than other disputes on the Tube (or indeed in other industries or sectors).

Workers are striking to win a positive demand (pensions equality and parity of travel privileges for Tube Lines workers, to bring them in line with other Transport for London employees) rather than taking token action to express displeasure at some imminent or already-passed action of the bosses. And they are taking 72 hours of strike action, rather than the more common 24-hour protest strike. They will begin by downing tools and walking out mid-shift, not just by not booking on.

Without Tube Lines workers on the job, essential maintenance and repair work will go undone, and the Emergency Response Unit – which deals with, amongst other things, platform suicides – will be out of action. It will therefore be unsafe for other grades of workers to do their jobs, and Tube union RMT will support its members in stations and trains grades who refuse to work on safety grounds. This, along with the length of the strike, means that Tube Lines can maximise the pressure they apply to bosses.

The course of this dispute could set the tone for the other ongoing and up-

coming fights across London's underground network. Cleaners employed by contractors Initial and ISS are already in dispute over pay, conditions and Olympic payments.

London Underground Service Control staff are balloting for strike action over long-standing issues, including potential restructuring and job losses. Telent and MJ Quinns workers, who maintain the fire equipment on stations, have balloted for strike action over inadequate pay, bullying by management and being denied annual leave over the Olympics.

STRATEGIC
And Travel Information Centre workers are in dispute because TfL have ordered no annual leave during the Olympics.

Tube activists must fight for strategic coordination of these disputes; this may not necessarily mean bringing all workers out at once, but planning rolling and ongoing strike action to apply the maximum possible pressure over the longest possible period.

If the Tube Lines workers win, and if their relative industrial strength can be wielded in coordination with other Tube workers, it will be a massive boost.

In the coming months, all transport workers in London face a common struggle not to have their hard-won rights torn up as the capital's bosses seek the maximum possible profit out of the Olympic Games.

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Weekend tickets are £22 waged, £14 low-waged/HE students, £6 unwaged/FE/school students, before the end of April, then £24/ £16/ £6. Day tickets also available. Send cheques payable to "AWL" to 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London SE1 3DG. More: awl@workersliberty.org or 07796 690 874

NHS cuts: "much more than closing the odd ward"

The official NHS regulatory body, Monitor, has sent a letter to NHS hospital managers (17 April), saying that they need to cut budgets by 7 per cent a year from 2013-4 onwards.

A typical NHS hospital with an annual turnover of £300 million will need to cut £21 million.

Health care costs generally increase faster than costs generally, because of an ageing population, longer survival by sick elderly people, and a

greater number of expensive treatments; so these cuts are huge.

The Department of Health wants the NHS to cut about £50 billion over the next decade.

Mike Farrar, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, said that "the hospital sector should be helped to downsize, and it would be more than "closing the odd ward".

He called for a shift to (cheaper) "primary and community care".

• More: healthalarm1159.wordpress.com