Against 1% who own half world’s wealth, fight for:

ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

See page 5
What is the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

● Independent working-class representation in politics.
● A workers’ government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
● A workers’ charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or union to the whole of society.
● Workers’ solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all.
● Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — for Workers’ Liberty?

An interview with unaffiliated socialist Hattie Craig, who is standing for NUS Vice President Higher Education.

I’m standing to promote a student movement and national union that helps students fight and win.

What are your key demands?

We are fighting for the following:

● End to fees and cuts:
  - Free education, living grants for all, we have a wider conception of necessary resources.
  - We need to build solidarity with campus workers and fight for democracy in our institutions.

What can student activists do about this?

Get delegated to conference, put motions through your SU, come along and caucus with us. Even if you’re not a delegate help out.

But it’s also about building the campaign for free education, joining NCAF, building up local organisation and activism. It’s about making political arguments on your campus. It’s partly about doing things we should all be doing anyway, but we hope the NUS campaign will help with that as well as being helped by it.

What’s the measure of success?

The most important thing is to come away with a stronger movement, make new links, win new activists for NCAF and get more people involved in campaigns.

Obviously we want to win free education again, hopefully by a bigger margin, but there are other things to fight for too. Living grants is a big deal.

We don’t just want bur- saries or a promise to bring back EMA, but a decent income for all students.

“Class-struggle arguments for a different movement”

An interview with Workers’ Liberty member Beth Redmond, who is standing for NUS President.

I’m coming into this NUS candidacy in a different way from the majority of candidates, even candidates the left has stood.

I have never been a saba- tical officer, but have been heavily involved in grass-roots organising over the past two years. The disconnect between the National Union of Students and actual activists on the ground is worth highlighting over and over.

I played a big role in organis- ing the national demonstration last term alongside other women in NCAF, and I experienced first hand just how cynical some of the NUS leadership are. I never fully understood just how much electioneer- ing and posturing these people do. Some of them backed the demo for electoral reasons; some of them backed out of supporting it because of elections next year. It’s hard to know what these people actually think about anything except their own importance. It’s difficult to trust what these people are doing with our national union when all they seem to care about is their own career. My candidacy is the opposite of that: grass-roots organising and clear socialist politics.

I’m going to be talking about free education, living grants, opposing cuts, student housing, as well as wider political questions like the General Election, migrants’ rights, international solidarity and building links with workers’ in struggle. I’m going to argue to transform the NUS and student unions into militant, political, campaigning organisations, and aim to build student struggle on campuses and on the streets.

I will make anti-capitalist, class-struggle arguments for a different student movement as an essential part of the fight for a different society.

Isn’t NUS a waste of time?

The chance to speak to that many students about my politics and ideas is too good to pass up.

No one can deny that NUS has major reach and influence in sections of the student movement, and if we trace back the steps of this new free education movement we can see that it initially came from NUS. I’ve met very good activists because of it, who stayed involved when NUS turned its back on us.

We capitalise on the sab- tatical officers we have in NCAF because they have things we so desperately need: money, space and time to organise.

If I won, I could carry on organising but be expon- entially more effective by having access to a wealth of necessary resources.

Left slate challenges NUS leaders

The left-wing National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts network (NCAF) has initiated a left slate of candidates to stand for NUS President and the five Vice President positions in the National Union of Students (NUS).

Workers’ Liberty member Beth Redmond from City & Islington College is standing for President, and RS21 member Barnaby Raine of Oxford University for Vice President Union Development. Both are also standing for the part-time Block of 15 section of NUS National Executive. Unaffiliated socialist Hattie Craig, former Birmingham Guild of Students Vice President, is standing for VP (Higher Education).

For the VP (Society & Citizenship) position, NCAF has said it will support left incumbent Piers Telemanque (former President at Bradford College), who is supporting the rest of the slate, if he makes a strong statement over NUS’s betrayal of the free education demo.

The NUS leadership’s candidate is likely to be Megan Dunn, the current VP (Higher Education) who was key to NUS withdrawing its support from demo in November.

NUS conference takes place in Liverpool, 21-23 April.

“A movement that helps people fight and win”

Hattie Craig, Beth Redmond and Deborah Hermanns telling you they are marching for free education

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100,000 against Pegida

By Colin Foster

On the Monday following the massacres at Charlie Hebdo and a Jewish supermarket in Paris, tens of thousands marched in German cities against Germany’s new right-wing anti-Muslim movement, Pegida (“Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West”, or, more precisely, “of the Occident”).

In Pegida’s stronghold, Dresden, 35,000 turned out against them. In Munich, 20,000. In Hanover, 17,000. In Leipzig, 30,000.

In most places, Pegida demonstrations (which are always on Mondays) were much smaller. Pegida’s turnout in Dresden was big — 25,000 — but still smaller than the counter-demonstration.

The counter-demonstrations were conservative in tone, sponsored by state governments, city councils, and mainstream politicians, and the threat still remains that Pegida will gain ground if people disillusioned for good reasons with the status quo.

The far right in France appear to be recent terrorist attacks as political currency to attack both the government and the EU on immigration.

France’s Front National tries to exploit Charlie Hebdo attack

By Bill Holmes

The far right in France appear to be recent terrorist attacks as political currency to attack both the government and the EU on immigration.

The Front National has said the attacks on Charlie Hebdo magazine and an assault on a Jewish supermarket are the final proof that open borders and poor efforts to tackle immigration in France have led to an “enemy within.”

Party leader Marine Le Pen described terrorism as a tool of Islamic fundamentalism which had been allowed to develop in France’s cities because people did not want to talk about the issue for fear of being politically incorrect. To some extent she is right. Racism — whether it comes in the form of extreme Islamism, or from the Front National or the British National Party — breeds on discontent among worse-off people.

The role we have as socialists is not to condone or encourage this as a way of gaining votes. We must continue to fight against racism, fascism and anti-semitism. The two differing models of community relations, the one in France and the other in Britain, are the result of the differences in the political policies of the two countries.

The Sun “drops” page 3

By Rachel Barnes

Supporters of the No More Page 3 campaign celebrated a victory on Monday 19 January as The Sun “drops” page 3 of its newspaper.

The newspaper has given its head of PR (who told followers that page 3 is the only place in magazines and newspapers where bare breasts are shown) a victory on Monday after it announced it would no longer publish any pictures of celebrity women in bikinis.

“A new day has dawned,” said a statement released by the campaign.

The Sun “drops” page 3

The Sun, which was launched in 1964, is one of the UK’s best-selling newspapers with a circulation of over 2 million copies.

The newspaper’s deputy editor, Steve Solloway, said: “The Sun is a newspaper for the people and we take our responsibilities seriously.

“We will continue to support women’s bodies and their right to objectify them.

“Women’s bodies aren’t being shamed for the way they look.

“The problems with claiming this as a victory lie in the objectification of women and the lack of respect given to the women themselves.”

The Sun “drops” page 3

The Sun will continue to write articles perpetuating the image of women as objects, of immigrant as criminals and of working-class people as scroungers. Liberal MPs’ putting themselves back for wearing a t-shirt (which surely must have contributed to this win”) pull back the cover of the paper.

The problem hasn’t gone away; it’s just been hidden from your immediate view.

The Sun “drops” page 3

The Sun’s “drops” page 3 campaign has been working for 28 months under the banner “Boobs Aren’t News”, and some newspapers have also objectified women in what they call a “family newspaper”. They would like the readers to be presented with respect in the newspaper, rather like men are.

Kalpana Chawla, the first Indian woman in space, was featured in the Sun in 1999. She was shown on their website in 2005, but was not shown in print.

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**Cameroon versus the Pope**

**Press**

By Harry Davies

The Pope’s response to the murderous attack on the journalists and workers at Charlie Hebdo was essentially “the wife beater’s defence”.

“If my good friend Dr Caspary says a curse word against my mother, he can expect a punch. It’s normal... You cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others. You cannot make fun of the faith of others.”

David Cameron made an uncharacteristically robust and perhaps slightly controversial response to the Pope. In a widely reported interview he said: “I think in a free society, there is a right to cause offence about someone’s religion.

“I’m a Christian; if someone says something offensive about Jesus, I might find that offensive, but in a free society I don’t have a right to wreak vengeance on them.

That put the papers in a bit of a quandary. Which side should they take?

The Mail reported Cameron’s comments but went onto say “many people have defended the satirical magazine”. Such a neutral tone on an issue it is nearly impossible to be neutral about is open to question.

It’s possible to interpret it as an attempt to keep as distant as possible from religious controversy of any sort. It’s also possible the paper is trying hard not to hang too closely onto Cameron’s words, just in case he falls out of favour with the core Mail readership, or starts looking bad in the pre-election opinion polls.

The Express largely played down or ignored Cameron’s response, preferring to focus on the Pope’s comment though using a noticeably wider range of emotive language regarding the massacre than the Mail’s rather clinical and down-played description.

**An attempt at clarification**

**Letters**

Colin Foster (Solidarity 349) still seems to be struggling to understand what I am driving at in my “stream of letters of complaint about Jon Lansman’s article in Solidarity 343”. I am sorry if I am being unclear. Let me try and clarify.

I objected to the article not because it was wrong (it wasn’t) or because it was right wing (which it was by dint of what it didn’t say) but because it was pointless.

It was not a programme for action, it didn’t raise any points that would be contentious or even interesting to Solidarity readers and it didn’t inform. So why am I concerned by it? Because it seems to me to mark a further drift towards a right wing Labourite focus by the AWL.

Having comment pieces on the machinations of the parliamentary Labour Party, which is surely all it was, is not something a revolutionary paper should do. I have asked repeatedly for an example of where we have done this before. I haven’t been offered any examples. We didn’t run articles defending Brown against the Blairite coups. We didn’t run an attempt to clarify. The struggle Labour Party, which is surely all it was, is not something appropriate in this case too.

In our correspondence, Colin and I have touched on two issues, which I think require further comment.

I asserted in my original letter that it would be a coup in the Parliamentary Party, which would remove Miliband. Colin argued that the MP’s couldn’t topple a leader. Yet, now he recognises that “a right-wing surge to make Miliband resign and... install a more right-wing leader” is what we are talking about.

Secondly, there has been a discussion about whether a left campaign for the leadership of the British Labour Party is possible. I would simply point out that there hasn’t been a genuine left candidate on the ballot paper for Labour leader since Benn stood against Kinnock in 1988.

You could make a case that Diane Abbott was a left candidate in 2010, but she didn’t stand for a working-class alternative to New Labour but rather a kind of identity politics. The focus of her campaign was her personality rather than her policies and she made no attempt to create a movement around her. She also relied on the nomination of Harriet Harman amongst others to get on the paper, and then received only 7% of the vote.

This suggests that Colin’s view that there is a better situation for left challenges in the British Party than in the Scottish Party, where the recent genuinely left-wing campaign for the leadership garnered one-third of the vote, is simply wrong.

Duncan Morrison, Deptford

**A poet for our times**

**Songs of Liberty & Rebellion**

Percy Bysshe Shelley is known as a romantic poet. He was also a radical, militant atheist and a campaigner for women’s rights and Catholic emancipation in Ireland.

His first poem, Queen MAb, written when he was only 20 years old, was used by the Chartists as an educational text. In Queen MAb, Shelley uses the literary device of a fantasy fairy taking a child away from Earth to gain a perspective upon it. It looks at how seemingly permanent and strong systems from the beginning of time have collapsed and fallen. It looks at tyranny and injustice, hunger and war. Many of these topics are touched upon in this short extract (the poem itself is long).

The Vectran

Whence, thickest thou, kings and parasites arose? Whence that unnatural line of drones who heap Toil and unvanquishable penury

On those who build their palaces and bring Their daily bread? — From vice, black loathsome vice: From rapine, madness, treachery, and wrong; From all that genders misery, and makes Of earth this horrid wilderness; from lust, Revenge, and murder. — And when reason’s voice, Loud as the voice of Nature, shall have waked The nations; and mankind perceive that vice Is discord, war and misery; that virtue Is peace and happiness and harmony; When man’s maturer nature shall disdain The playthings of its childhood; — kingly glare Will lose its power to dazzle; its authority Will silently pass by; the gorgeous throne Shall stand unnoticed in the regal hall, Fast falling to decay; whilst falsehood’s trade Shall be as hateful and unprofitable As that of truth is now.

**Issue number 337 (24 Sept. 2014) of Solidarity included a review (by myself) of Guy Standing’s book A Precariat Charter, which stated that the French writer Andre Gorz was opposed to the idea of the Basic Income (a regular payment made by the state to everyone regardless of their work situation) and one of the central planks of Standing’s Charter.

In fact, although Gorz was opposed to the Basic Income and wrote a number of articles criticising it, towards the end of his life he changed his mind and declared himself in favour. Unfortunately, he does not appear to have elaborated on his change of position before his suicide in 2007.

Readers who wish to know more about the notion of the Basic Income are advised to have a look at the BIEN (Basic Income Earth Network) website.

John Cunningham

**AUTOCOLLANTS: the public face of the activist**

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On 19 January Oxfam reported that the richest one per cent own 48% of the whole world’s wealth.

Their super-domination has increased in the economic depression, from 44 per cent in 2009. At this rate it will be more than 50 per cent in 2016. The top one per cent had an average wealth of US$2.7m per adult in 2014.

The bottom 80% have, between them, just 5.5% of global wealth, an average US$3,851 per adult. Just 80 ultra-billionaires have the same wealth as the poorest 50 per cent.

This economic inequality is a different thing from a few having much more musical or scientific talent than the many. Ultra-wealth also means ultra-power over others, and the ability, indeed the compulsion, to exploit.

The super-wealthy own the giant corporations which dominate the world’s economy, their factories, their offices, their transport and communication networks. They monopolise the world’s economy, their factories, their offices, their transport and communication networks. They monopolise

control over the most advanced technologies.

The rest of us can live only by selling our labour-power, our capacity to produce, to those super-wealthy. They buy our labour-power — i.e., pay us wages — only on the basis that we produce value for them which outstrips those wages.

The super-wealthy stay super-wealthy only by competing with each other to squeeze more profits out of their workers. They squeeze more profits by constantly increasing the insecurity and stress of working life, even for better-paid workers.

At the other end of the scale, even in relatively well-off Britain, nearly four out of ten households with children, or 8.1 million, are below a “minimum income threshold” calculated by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as the income necessary not just to avoid starvation or homelessness but to participate normally in society.

The number below that minimum threshold has increased by more a third since 2008/9, over the same period that the super-wealth of the super-wealthy has soared.

We are supposed to have one vote each, in political democracy. But in the economic affairs which decide so much in our lives, a tiny minority “vote” with vastly more pounds, euros, or dollars, than the majority.

Solidarity campaigns for economic democracy. The factories, offices, transport and communication networks, and technologies should be put under common ownership and democratic control.

As a start, we demand that the rich be taxed to reverse the cuts and organise reasonable, well-paid jobs for all.

For economic democracy!
What will a Syriza victory mean?

“Activists from past years will make the difference in next stage”

Ioanna Gaitani, from the Greek socialist group Internation-alist Workers’ Left (DEA), spoke to Solidarity.

The people tried to overthrow the memoranda between 2010-13, but they couldn’t overcome the state’s reaction, the brutality of the police and legal system, the betrayals or lack of planning from their own trade-union leaders. It was natural that they started moving away from their political and trade-union leaders (from the neo-liberal par-ties) and place their hopes on Syriza. Their interest was ele-vated towards the question of power, even in a “distorted” parliamentary way, as a next means of tackling the crisis.

Increasingly, since 2012, it has been up to Syriza to direct the people’s attention towards a reconstruction of the move-ment on a higher basis, with a friendly government on its side. A Syriza victory and the implementation of some of its urgent measures could encourage the workers to fight for all they have been deprived of.

There are struggles still going on, such as the laid-off pub-lic servants (teachers, janitors, school guardians). Nevertheless, demonstrations and strikes have weakened and people in struggle are also are waiting for the elections, at least tem-porarily. Yet all these struggles (and the recent victorious one, against the lay-offs in the public sector, against the “re-deployment” process) have created a mood of public exas-peration. That hindered the next memorandum planned by the former government and forced them to resign in the hope that a “left-break” would be short-lived.

If Syriza wins then, the urgent measures for the first 100 days will, as set out in the Thessaloniki declaration, consist of some measures that we, as DEA, find useful or critical to give confidence to the labour movement. These are:

- Restoration of the minimum wage (up to 751 euros, a 30% raise)
- Restoration of all the labour laws and the collective labour contracts
- A €12,000 tax threshold
- Free health care for all the uninsured
- Abolition of socially unjust taxing
- Free electricity for 300,000 households
- A program for 300,000 new jobs in the public and private sector.

Not every issue is fully addressed. The questions of unem-ployment and of the evaporated pension funds need more immediate and determined attention. We hope that the movement will push for the most radical solutions, the ones that a “left-break” would be short-lived.

Syriza’s electoral victory will involve rejecting all the anti-Greek propaganda and not allowing any country to be isolated, economically or politi-cally. We also want to underline resistance against racism, Is-lamophobia and imperialism, as this seems to us that these are intensifying.

It would be rather hard for the Troika to expel Syriza-led Greece from the Euro. But nevertheless they can put financial or political pressure on Syriza with other means, as they did with Cyprus. All kinds of such pressure should be answered with equal determination. We want extra burdens and difficul-ties to be loaded on the capitalists, not the people. “Enough sacrifices”, as Tsipras recently said, or “no sacrifice for the Euro”, as our Congress had exclaimed.

Nothing is to be taken for granted, for Syriza, or for our class adversaries. It is going to be a period of strife, class struggle, abrupt and frequent political manoeuvring from all sides. Whether it’s going to be a short period or a pro-longed one, and be followed by a rise of the far-right or the beginning of a workers’ counter-offensive, nobody really knows. We can only fight for the best.

Greece 2012-2014: views and reports from the Greek left is a new Workers’ Liberty pamphlet presenting interviews and discussions with many different groups in the Greek left and labour movement, plus an article from 7 January 2015, by Greek socialist Theodora Polenta, explaining the new political crisis there.

60 pages (A4). £4 bit.ly/greece-pamphlet
Memorandum policies as the political forces in the unions and government. And we, Syriza, had told the mass movement that they did not co-operate. This was not Syriza's fault. The KKE and DEA overthrew the first two governments [after 2010], but not the Memorandum. The mass movement for sure exactly what will happen. We have seen how bosses react with us, but obviously no-one knows what is going to happen. All the possibilities are open. The first reaction to a Syriza victory will be great joy from the working people and poor who have suffered from Memorandum policies. We will see a great wave of expectation of change.

We already have some sign of how the right wing and the capitalists will react. There are two types of reaction against the possibility of a Syriza win. Part of the capitalist class wants a hard line; but another part wants to negotiate. This is because the crisis is very deep, and they are not sure if Greece was forced out of the Euro, what result that would have. They will have a huge fear of what our message will mean to the people of Europe.

The capitalists will wait to see what Syriza does; they will not immediately react against the government. But if Syriza’s policies deepen, and holds to what it has promised, we can see many different reactions. People in Syriza are discussing the possibility that the organs of the state will not co-operate with us, but obviously no-one knows what is going to happen. We in DEA think that a large scale victory will block any possibility of action against the government for a period, but that period will not last long. We have seen how bosses react to class struggles — lock-outs and so on. But no-one knows for sure exactly what will happen.

The class struggle is lower now than it was in 2010-2. I think the reason is that the labour movement and the unions, which were controlled by Pasok and ND, did not want to overthrow the Pasok-ND government. The mass movement overthrew the first two governments [after 2010], but not the Memorandum policies as the political forces in the unions did not want to, and Syriza was not strong enough. That contributed to demoralisation. Another reason is that the left, Syriza, KKE and Antarsya, did not co-operate. This was not Syriza’s fault. The KKE and Antarsya were resistant to the discussions about a left government. And we, Syriza, had told the mass movement that the government would collapse from its own difficulties, but this also did not happen immediately. But this was a lesser problem. The people got tired, they believed that they could not overturn the Memorandum, and they waited for the elections. Now we have elections, and people will vote for Syriza, but this is not enough.

We can see a current among the people which is pro-Syriza, but this does not mean that there are strikes or things like that. It is not that there have been no fights since 2012. There were many small but hard-fought struggles. For example the sacked teachers, the school guardians, the women who cleaned the Ministry of Finance, the Coca Cola factory workers who are still in dispute. People are realistic, they want a way to change things and see that in the elections. The mood is calm right now. There are no demonstrations or fights. But there is clearly a left wing current, and that has to do with all the fights that have happened over the last three years. There has been no change in Syriza policy. We have never said that we would re-negotiate the Memorandum. Some Syriza candidates said that, maybe, but our conference decision is that we will dismantle the Memorandum. As for nationalising the banks, there is a discussion. We will have to react in a certain way, depending upon how the capitalists react. If people try to move money out of the country, we would have to respond. But we want a radical policy.

There is a majority and minority in Syriza. The majority has come from a reformist party (a part of it at least), Synaspismos. But Syriza is moving. Even the majority is not fixed. Political tendencies who are against some left ideas in the party may change their views. There is not a majority that can do everything and a minority which can do nothing. This is part of the dynamics behind Syriza’s success.

Kokkino and DEA are now one organisation, and we believe that this unification has strengthened revolutionary left ideas within the party and this will help us to face the difficulties which changes in policy from the majority of Syriza will produce. There were many candidates that the majority leaders wanted to be Syriza candidate, but the party did not like it, so they were not included. For example, a comedian in Thessaloniki was wanted on the list by the leadership, but they could not do that because the party reacted. Not only left platform members reacted, majority members also reacted. So nothing is fixed. The reaction from the party rank-and-file was the reason for the collapse of recent co-operation talks between Syriza and Dimar [Democratic Left]. I don’t know if Omar will even be in the next parliament.

DEA have five candidates, including in Thessaloniki. We want to have a presence in the parliament. We also want to help Syriza to have a large-scale victory. We try to contribute to every action of Syriza in the electoral campaign. Apart from that, we try to win people to revolutionary ideas. All the people who work with us in the elections are people who we will discuss with about continuing to work with us; we will be part of the struggles and fights for the next period. The most important question under discussion in Syriza is whether we will have a majority in the parliament. If we do, we will not be obliged to go to a second round of elections or look at something like a “Government of National Salvation”, which some in Syriza leadership want. Some in Syriza think that this could be an answer to the problem we will face if we do not have 151 MPs. This is an open debate.

KKE have said that they will not support a minority government of Syriza. But I do not believe that this will be easy for them.

If we go to a second round in the elections, KKE will suffer and lose a lot of votes to us. They will not want to face this problem. Rank-and-file members of KKE have had a change in mood. They think they want Syriza to form a government. They won’t be easy allies, but most of them will give Syriza a chance. The leaders of KKE have no intention of co-operating with Syriza at all, however.

Golden Dawn, including their youth support, have fallen back. They may still get a lot of votes. It will be nothing like when they participated before, but they do have a base of support and we do not ignore the danger. They have fallen back because most of the leadership is in jail, and they have a lot of difficulty in doing what they do – killing innocent immigrants, destroying left-wing gatherings and so on. Also there is an anti-fascist movement in Greece which has stopped them from doing these things. That movement is the reason why the ND government sent them to jail.

The European dimension is something that bothers us. The victory of Syriza will have an impact on the left throughout Europe. Hundreds of comrades will be coming to Greece from all over Europe to see what happens. Comrades must send the message throughout Europe that the left alternative to neo-liberalism is something that can happen. There are two pictures: France, with Le Pen and the army on the streets; and the other picture is that of Greece and the left hope which comes with the victory of Syriza.

All possibilities are open, including revolution, and we must work together for a left alternative, for socialism. This is what we must go on fighting for.

Greece: Is workers’ power on the agenda?

28 January, 7pm, Bentham House, Seminar Room 1, Endsleigh Gardens, London WC1E 6BT.

With Greek socialist Theodora Polenta and report from delegation visiting Greece 23-26 January.
The Greek left needs our solidarity

By Theodora Polenta

The epilogue of the election campaign for 25 January of Greece’s main right-wing party, New Democracy, is ND candidate Makis Voridis — former member of a neo-fascist youth organisation, minister of health in the conservative government, using language from the Greek civil war of the 1940s and asking people to defend the values of “Country, Religion, and Family” against Syriza’s “communist threat.”

ND leader and outgoing prime minister Antonis Samaras escalates this argument with statements in defence of Orthodox Christianity and getting himself photographed next to the fence and barred wire on the border in Evros (the area of Greece next to the border with Turkey).

Samaras and his party and their median parrots present Syriza as the carrier of seven plagues which will take us out the euro and into an “Asiа Minor catastrophе”; lead to a flight of bank deposits and a stock market crash; make farmers will lose their European subsidies; destroy pensions; diminish the barrier in Evros and flood us with immigrants; disarm the police so that criminals and terrorists will invade our homes and kidnap our kids...

The ruling class-memorandum system, having long lost the ability to convince the people and achieve the general consensus that the interests of the bourgeoisie represents the general social interest, has reversed its strategy: it identifies Syriza with the general social disaster!

While Samaras intensifies his strategy of fear, the European chancelleries and IMF leaders have already ceased to be unanimous, with a sizeable proportion of conservative leaders saying that they will respect the verdict of the Greek people. Ruling-class voices are asking for respect for the verdict of the Greek people and of the right for Syriza to demand measures to stimulate growth and to writeoff the non-viable debt.

The US administration is tired of the way the EU has handled the financial crisis from 2009; fears that slowing global growth will have a negative effect for the US economy; and wants change in economic policy both from the “strong” Eurozone countries and from the ECB itself.

TWO REACTIONS

Mainstream economist Willem Buiter says: “It would be a huge disaster if Greece abandoned the Eurozone. The markets would begin to ask what country would be the next candidate for a Eurozone..."

“The German government knows that if Greece is out of the euro the whole Eurozone will be exposed...” “If Germany continues to insist on maintaining the existing monetary and financial policy in the euro zone, the euro cannot survive politically. The situation is extremely serious. Never before was I as worried as I am today.”

The main German weekly Die Zeit reports (7 January) that: “In Berlin and Brussels discussions are going on about how a possible compromise with Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras might look... for example... extending the maturity of the outstanding loans” [i.e. postponing when they have to be repaid].

There are different reactions within Syriza and within the left. Some express an understandable confidence that the Eurozone will almost definitely tolerate the write-off of the debt and the reversal of the austerity in Greece. This assessment sees only one side of reality: the crisis of the system that makes it vulnerable and infantile.

In contrast, much of the left outside Syriza declares that the Syriza government is condemned to surrender to the austerity agenda and there is no scope for manoeuvre. This under-estimates the depth of this crisis of the system and the Eurozone and the potential to break the weak links within it.

The Greek bourgeoisie wants to “encircle” and undermine and suppress mutiny against memoranda and austerity, even this relatively timid electoral mutiny. At the same time, because of its own crisis and the destruction of many political reserves, the Greek bourgeoisie cannot have a single strategy and a centre to implement this strategy.

The only thing definite is conflict and confrontation. The outcome of the conflict is not fixed in advance. Austerity will not be reversed without confronting the system, but this will be a confrontation against a capitalist system and a eurozone in deep crisis, which makes them non-omnipotent.

It will be objectively impossible, however, in the not-so-long term, for Syriza to reconcile both sides, the markets and the radical left.

The leaders of Syriza so far base everything on the belief that the EU leaders will backtrack when they start negotiations. They have so far presented no Plan B in the case that the negotiations are unsuccessful. They perceive the threats of the lenders that they will cut off any financial aid to any government that refuses to extend their austerity policies as a bluff.

However, one leader of the majority, John Draganadis, admitted in a recent debate that if by July no solution has been found, then Greece will not be able to pay the €6 billion due to the ECB then.

The Syriza leaders’ optimistic perspective is not shared by everyone in the party, and especially by the Left Platform, who argue that there will be conflict, but under certain conditions the government of the Left.

The ruling class side is definitely preparing. It would be tragic for our side not to prepare with the corresponding seriousness and determination, and to cultivate illusions that everything can be done with a tough but still civilised “dialogue”. We should have four axes.

First of all the strict application of Syriza’s “Thessaloniki programme” and its conference decisions: repealing the Memoranda and austerity, restoring workers’ rights, wages and conditions, and removing most of the debt.

Secondly, the awareness of the asymmetry of the correlation of forces. Even after a Syriza election victory, the main centres of powers, economically, socially, and within the state, will be controlled by the enemy. The re-invigoration of Syriza’s rank and file and a new wave of radicalisation are the only way to confront the enemy.

Thirdly, persisting in our argument for a United Front of the Left, despite the refusal of the leadership of the KKE (Communist Party) to promise support for Syriza against the right. We should not forget that there is a decisive difference between electoral power and links with the organised labour movement, and in the organised labour movement, outside-Syriza left forces retain a big role.

Fourthly, the weapon of Syriza and the Greek working class is going to be working class internationalism and solidarity. The prospect of a Syriza generation has generated a wave of solidarity and hope for all the political and social forces that are suffocating within the present neoliberal framework in Europe and all over the world.
How can we undercut Islamists?

By Clive Bradley

Two books about Islamism, Ed Husain’s *The Islamist and Maajid Nawaz’s Radical, have an obvious relevance after Charlie Hebdo.

There’s some crossover: the two writers knew each other in Hub ut-Tahrir (HT) (indeed Nawaz, who’s a bit younger, was Husain’s protege), and then, a decade later, set up the Quilliam Foundation together. Interestingly, at the time Husain wrote *The Islamist, Nawaz was yet to leave HT, and he figures in the book as a possibly-dissident yet still-loyal member.

Husain’s book is more informative on how Islamist movements more generally operate in “Muslim communities” (that is, in particular mosques — East London, in the first place — and among Muslim students in Tower Hamlets and Newham). Husain was involved in the youth wing of the Jamaat Islami, which is quite similar to the Muslim Brotherhood except Pakistan, so he underwent an evolution through more “moderate” Islamism to HT — though that, in turn, falls short of out-and-out jihadism on the al Qaeda/IS model.

Nawaz was a hip hop kid in Southend who was drawn more or less directly into HT at college. But his subsequent evolution is more interesting, or certainly more colourful. Husain was actually quite quickly disillusioned with Islamism, and sought out a more spiritual version of Islam; a big part of the book is about his realisation that radical Islamists often know very little about the religion (don’t, for instance, even know how to pray).

Nawaz was sent overseas by HT to build the organisation — in Pakistan, in Denmark, and then in Egypt, where he was arrested, tortured (or almost, though even the psychological stuff is pretty horrific), and spent five years in jail.

Husain gives, I think, much more of a sense of how the Islamists groups, or HT at least, operate locally and at colleges, and of the nuances in Islamist ideologies (stuff about how you can tell different types of Islamist, more traditional Salafists compared to more radical HT-types, by how they dress, etc.). Before he was drawn in Islamism he was already quite religious, learnt how to recite the Quran, etc. His evolution was more to do with the role and activities of organised groups within the community of which he was part. (That’s oversimplifying a bit, but it’s the gist).

NOT RELIGIOUS

Nawaz, on the other hand, wasn’t religious at all. He gives a much stronger sense of how it was racism that drove him towards Islamism.

In Southend as a youth he faced constant racism from violent skinheads. He describes a very powerful moment when he and his brother were confronted and outnumbered by local racists; his brother warned the racists he had a bomb in his rucksack and he wasn’t afraid to die. For the first time, the racists were afraid of them, and after that left them alone. Islamism, in the broadest sense, had given him a power he had never experienced before over the racists.

Both books give a strong sense of how Islamism forms a hermetically sealed ideology, a kind of “meta-narrative” which enables you to explain everything, and of how this has easy appeal to Muslim youth (and not just youth) who experience different kinds of racism, who oppose US foreign policy and so forth, and who have a religious bedrock culture.

The Husain book is especially clear on how far the Islamists see nonbelievers — kuffar — as inferior non-people (that is, in particular mosques — East London, in the first place) as part of a wider secular politics.

The trouble with bourgeois liberalism is that it’s never going to win over the mass of disenfranchised “Muslim” (assuming this is how they self-identify) youth in the French banlieues or wherever. It doesn’t have enough social weight, especially in times of economic crisis. But we are very far indeed from having a movement which can be counterposed to the Islamists.

The Quilliam bourgeois approach might be wrong, but who is going to compete with the Islamists in those communities? This is not simply a question of political will. Even if part of the left decided tomorrow to prioritise building support in, say, the Bengali community in East London (and assuming we could agree the political basis for it), we are tiny, we have no powerful movement to point to. Of course that’s not a reason not to try; and maybe if you could win one or two impressive individuals to revolutionary socialism quite a lot would change as a result. But the objective obstacles are immense.

Of course the weakness of the left is a more general problem in the world today. It’s not just a problem among Muslims. But the difference is that in “Muslim communities” (a problematic term, but I use it for shorthand) there are these forces which are, in a certain sense, “like us” — organised, grass-roots movements which are proposing radical political solutions. But these forces are immensely more powerful and with stronger roots.

People like Husain and Nawaz would, I am sure, be tremendous assets to a socialist group. But they didn’t gravitate in that direction. You can understand the attraction of straightforward liberalisation as an alternative to Islamism (indeed, it must be said, I would understand if someone like that was suspicious of what they saw as another “totalising” ideology, or “meta-narrative”). But in any case, bourgeois liberalism has a social weight. Revolutionary socialism does not (yet).

The problem with bourgeois liberalism is that it’s never going to win over the mass of disenfranchised “Muslim” (assuming this is how they self-identify) youth in the French banlieues or wherever. It doesn’t have enough social weight, especially in times of economic crisis. But we are very far indeed from having a movement which can be counterposed to the Islamists.

There are groups we could build stronger links with (Southall Black Sisters for instance), as part of a wider secular, grass-roots united front of sorts reaching out into those communities but independent of the Quilliam types.

I think the work some comrades have done around Kobane is very important in this regard. Is it conceivable that these kinds of struggles could be amplified into a general challenge to Islamism?

One of the strongest appeals of Islamism, clearly, is that it claims to be about belief, principle, passion. It’s about certainty, and quite rightly the left, or at least very properly democratic and rational left, is much less “certain” in this simple sense. There’s something in the Kobane conflict which cuts through all that.
How ruling class sees the last 50 years

By a school teacher

The Tories are threatening the NHS. But they register that people are bothered about the issue, and they must step carefully. And some people in the ruling class have “internalised” the pressure on them from the labour movement enough that they themselves cherish the NHS.

How do the ruling class explain themselves, and what do they think they must look out for? I was given some insight on this recently when a business “grandee”, chair of many companies and member of many official committees and working groups, visited our school for an “inspirational address” to years 12 and 13.

He framed his talk round comparisons between today and when he was the students’ age, in the mid-60s. His overview of the social changes wrought by himself and his friends, the ruling class of recent decades, was...that they’ve made things work hard and to take chances to travel.

Generally, he said, teenagers face a more difficult world than in the mid-60s.

He said that in the mid-60s people could be confident of a “job for life” and a good pension. In fact, that’s just true. Greater working-class insecurity today than in the 60s comes not because jobs were then “for life”, but because then you could get another job easily. Unemployment was 1.5% in 1965, but has been over 5%, and often much higher, since 1976. I suppose what he had in mind is that managers, “professional”, and such had a “job for life” in the 1960s, and don’t now. That registers as a “problem” in the ruling class.

He didn’t mention the soaring level of economic inequality since the late 1970s, or the shaming of trade-union rights in the 1980s.

In an odd way, he depicted capitalist development as worse than it has really been. It’s a way of deleting from view the fact that, despite all our setbacks, labour movements and democratic struggles have retained some capacity to win improvements and limit deteriorations.

A grandee speaking in a non-selective school in the mid-60s would see only a few older students (in the 60s most students left at 15), and probably only white-British and Afro-Caribbean students (with, if my impressions from them are reliable, the white and the Afro-Caribbean students choosing to sit separately). In 1964 a Tory MP won his constituency with the slogan “if you want a neighbour, vote Labour”.

Better

In 1965 Risinghill school, in London, was shut down by the education authority because the head teacher and staff refused to hit the students. Something has changed for the better there.

The 60s were the “rediscovery” of poverty. Poor people then always knew they were poor, but late-60s official discourse had been that “you never had it so good” (Tory election campaign, 1959) and we were in “the affluent society” (J K Galbraith’s book, 1968). Then books like The Other America (Michael Harrington, 1962), The poor and the poorest (Tendens and Abel-Smith, 1965), and St Ann’s (Coates and Silburn, 1967) — and a slightly renascent left — restored poverty as a “problem” which the ruling class had to say at least something about.

In 1962 only 35% of households in the UK had a fridge; in 1970 only 30% had central heating, only 35% a phone, and 64% a washing machine. There were no laws to stop pay or job discrimination against women, and before 1967 male homosexuality was legally illegal. We’ve made some gains.

Popular struggles have overthrown Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe, military dictatorships in Latin America, and apartheid in South Africa.

The government has tried to annex the gains since the 60s as credits for capitalism. My guess about why he didn’t is that, not quite consciously, he shied away from highlighting the threat to many of those gains from the new rise of the far right.

That rise figured in his discourse only very selectively and sandbaggy transects. He said that the great insecurity of the 60s was the threat of nuclear war, and the equivalent today is...what we have just seen in Paris". So today’s equivalent of nuclear disarmament is...suppression of civil liberties as “anti-terrorist”?

In spring 1962 the OAS set off about 120 bombs per day, and killed dozens per day, in a last-ditch terror campaign against Algerian independence. There was terrorism in the 60s, too! True, that could be and was terminated by Algerian independence, and there is no similar straightforward answer to terrorism by Daesh, Al Qaeda, and Boko Haram.

But there is no proportion between Islamist violence, even in Nigeria or Raqqa, and the threat of nuclear annihilation — or the threat of ecological catastrophe. The grandee’s implied message? Life is insecure, but at least you have smartphones and cheap flights, and the worst threat can be warded off by more powers for the police.

The ruling class has no vision for the future, and a blurred vision of the present. Older socialists need to explain to young people both what has been won and urgently needs defending: how the next generations can build a much better world; and, immediately, we can make more issues into those on which the ruling class knows it has to be defensive and cautious.

How I became a socialist

By Kieran Miles

I had been interested in politics from a young age, but I thought being political meant watching the news and paying attention in history lessons. It wasn’t until the Tories were elected in summer 2010 that I began to think about politics in a serious way. I was horrified by the cuts.

When I started uni I had been interested in politics from a young age, but I still held lots of reactionary ideas, in contradiction to what I was seeing on the news and paying attention to. I started reading Marx and Proudhon and others. My experience at the big tuition fees demo in December 2010 was a big influence and I was convinced that the cause was worth fighting for.

In spring 2012 I was at a NSSN conference where the SP decided to set up a working group, and I joined that group. We discussed what we could do to help the campaign. The group agreed to create a collective of socialist students who would set up a socialist study class to follow the NSSN organise the campaign.

I started reading Marx and Proudhon and others.

Thought

I knew what I was against. I knew what the root cause of society’s ills were, if in a raw way. I knew this was a fight I wanted to be a part of. But what was I actually for? What kind of society did I want?

The big 26 March 2011 TUC demo was another thought-provoking day for me. Seeing half a million people was inspiring.

I started to square up the ideas I had about society, with the boss and the politicians and the landlords having a good laugh at me. I started to think how poverty is made that thing work hard and to take chances to travel.

 windows. They spoke openly about workers’ control of production, about democracy permeating every aspect of society, about socialism.

I bought Solidarity, went to the odd day school, and met up with my friends, discussing big ideas.

In our anti-cuts group there was a good Socialist Party trade union activist who impressed me enough to meet up with him, but the SP’s ideas were terrible. Whether it was the big trade unions or the small, I could see that they had no vision for the future, and a blurred vision of the present. Older socialists need to explain to young people both what has been won and urgently needs defending: how the next generations can build a much better world; and, immediately, we can make more issues into those on which the ruling class knows it has to be defensive and cautious.

This, combined with the group’s distinctive third camp socialist ideas, meant I soon joined the AWL. Perhaps it was a little premature, I could have done more reading and discussion about what they were thinking, but I was interested in what you had to say. They tried to win support, not by hiding their ideas, or trying to smash up a group, but by arguing for their politics.

Every paper sale, every demo, every union branch, campaign meeting, or picket line, is an opportunity to do just that.

Working through the contradictions

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Every paper sale, every demo, every union branch, campaign meeting, or picket line, is an opportunity to do just that.
Bus drivers fight for fair pay

George Michael, a Unite rep at the Wood Green bus garage, spoke to Solidarity about the London bus dispute.

“Bus drivers in this country spend longer stints behind the wheel than drivers in any other European country.

“The EU maximum driving time is 4.5 hours without a break. In the UK, we do 5.5 hours. Every hour you spend behind the wheel, you’re responsible for people’s lives. And it’s not like working in an office or something where you can switch off now and then. It’s a fast environment – stop, ping pulling out, dealing with passengers, watching the road. You’re constantly alert. And the volume of passengers in London has gone up, but there has been no increase in the service to match it. “Drivers are being pushed to the extreme. Every day at work is a difficult day. It’s getting to the point where we are now worried about safety. You only have to look in the papers to see the accidents that are happening. It’s so bad we’re worse than we were five years ago. It’s the increase in volume in those five years.

“Money is a big issue for our drivers, too. If you’re not earning enough, you’ll do extra hours. That can take it out of you. After a week of getting up at 3 am to do a nine-hour shift, you’re not alert. Your body can’t keep up with shift changes, and that has implications for safety.

“Our timetables are not adequate to the task in hand and don’t allow us to do the job safely. Drivers won’t rush to keep up to a timetable if that means compromising passenger safety, but then we get harassed by managers and supervisors.

“Engineers have a difficult job to do. They’re under enormous pressure: there aren’t enough of them, the fleet is made up of outdated vehicles, and companies don’t often stock the right parts for these older models. So, where they’re unable to get the parts, engineers are obliged to perform short-term fixes to get the buses ready to go out on the road but they can’t solve the problems permanently, and the buses keep on coming back for repairs. Engineers can feel very frustrated in their work because it feels like they’re never finishing the jobs they start.

“Most engineers are in the union. Engineers tend to be paid better than drivers — but new engineers are now being put on a contract which will give them worse pay and different shift patterns. They also don’t have pay equality across the companies.

“I don’t think it’s likely that engineers will join the drivers’ dispute straight away — but this attack on new engineers’ conditions is going to store up trouble for the future, and we will likely see joint action further down the line.

“Strike action is always the last resort, and asking our members to strike is hard. They are so badly paid, striking makes a big dent in their incomes. We started on 13 January, and there isn’t a timetable for the next actions yet. We are waiting for updates from the union on how the situation has changed, and then we’ll see what will happen next.

“We want to talk to the company — all they have to do is to pick up the phone.”

As of 2015, new drivers with Arriva — the lowest payer for starter drivers — get £9.69 an hour. The previous starting rate with Arriva, before 2015, was £9.30 an hour. After eight years, a driver is on £12.89 an hour.

For Stagecoach drivers — the highest payer for starter drivers — the rate is £11.46. After two years, they reach the top rate of £15.63 an hour.

There are 80 different pay scales for drivers in London, across 18 different companies. They vary based on the company and the year that a driver started. TFL gives drivers a pass that works on public transport — buses, the tube and the Overground line. The pass does not cover national rail trains, and many of your commute from outside of London.

Fight for rank and file control in Unison!

By Simon Nelson

The defeat of the Local Government pay dispute and the current union campaign against the NHS strikes over the current pay claim have shown the current weakness of branch and workplace organisation in both health and local government.

Sections of the left in Unison have taken the defeat as a basis to direct their energy into the upcoming elections for the National Executive and General Secretary, as a way to build confidence. Calls for the left to unite around agreed candidates are of course welcome, but they don’t allow discussion of ways to transform the union or to build power in individual workplaces. Rather than they are electoral upsets that break apart as soon as the ballots close, formed on the basis of who shouts the loudest, avoiding discussion of disagreements and preferring sectarian manoeuvres over honest and sharp debate.

The Unison local government special conference in March gives us an opportunity to connect a movement against the rotten pay deal with a positive plan to ensure we cannot be sold out again. The process of reforming the structures and behaviour of the national union has to be backed up with stronger branches, livelier and bigger branches, representative of the workers in the workplace. Where action is taken it should be won, not as a token demonstration of anger.

Our starting point must always be supporting workers in struggle against their bosses. To build a movement capable of winning and popularising socialist ideas we have to work for (not just those who are currently active).

Control at the workplace level will require fighting for such policies regionally and nationally, if we can connect branches across the country and cross-union local disputes will be much better placed to win, create new activists and break down the divide between union members’ local and national union structures.

• More information: lgworkers.blogspot.co.uk

Where next for Unison democracy and local government pay?

Fringe meeting at Unison Special Conference called by Lambeth local government Unison Monday 23 March, 6pm

Archaeology G6, UCL, Gower St, London WC1E 6BT

Health unions meet government

By Peggy Carter

As Solidarity went to press on 20 January, health unions were meeting with Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt.

The NHS pay dispute is escalating. It started timidly with two days of four-hour strikes. But now there will be a 12 hour strike on 29 January, followed by a 24 hour strike on 25 February involving most of the unions in the NHS.

There were problems with the two four hour strikes. In some areas unions scuppered their own action by granting lavish “exemptions”, encouraging many members to go to work.

However there has been large public support for strikes, and picket lines have been lively.

Health workers should have a say in negotiations with the government. Union full timers should not be able to make deals to call off strikes without members’ knowledge and consent.

New offer at Lambeth

By Gemma Short

As Solidarity went to press on 20 January, UCU members at Lambeth College were hearing of an improved offer from college management.

On Monday 19 January workers were beginning an indefinite strike, having already struck for five days this month and six in December, in the dispute over contract changes.

Brighton hospital workers balloted

By Charlotte Zalens

Union GMB is balloting outsourced cleaners, caterers, housekeepers and porters at Brighton and Haywards Heath Hospitals.

The workers, employed by Sodexo, are calling for Sodexo to pay at least the minimum wage and to end the two-tier workforce at the hospitals resulting from the outsourcing of contracts.

Gary Palmer, GMB Regional Officer, said: “GMB would not support a concession that decreased profits for Sodexo shareholders is a rationale for not taking this step towards ending the two tier workforce for staff at the Trust.

“Any such argument will hold little weight in light of the financial detriments and struggles our members have to deal with on a daily basis.”

Care workers to strike

Union members at Your Choice Barnet (YCB) will strike on January 22 and 23.

These are the workers’ fifth and sixth days on strike in a dispute over a 9.5% pay cut. YCB says staff in the supported living and autism service rejected an offer to reduce the pay cut to 7.9% in October, but delayed strike action until the new year in order to save the service over Christmas.

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

Strikers will have picket lines at Flower Lane Day Centre, Houseman Street 7 UN and Rosa Morrison Day Centre, ENS 1NA.
Let Greece breathe!

By Colin Foster

Syriza is set to win Greece’s general election on 25 January. A strong left wing within Syriza wants a left-wing Syriza government to confront the EU leaders and the banks which stand behind them; tackle the shipping magnates, church hierarchy, military machine, and business oligarchs who siphon off Greece’s wealth; and empower the working class.

The majority leadership of Syriza is more cautious. They reckon instead to form a “government of national salvation”, a coalition with this or that centrist group, or even to form a “government of national salvation”, a coalition with this or that centrist group, or even to form a “government of national salvation”, a coalition with this or that centrist group, or even to form a “government of national salvation”, a coalition with this or that centrist group.

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Syriza is set to win Greece’s general election on 25 January. A strong left wing within Syriza wants a left-wing Syriza government to confront the EU leaders and the banks which stand behind them; tackle the shipping magnates, church hierarchy, military machine, and business oligarchs who siphon off Greece’s wealth; and empower the working class.

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Solidarity with the Greek working class!