Euro-solidarity can beat Euro-cuts

See pages 5-8
Irony knows no limits

By Vincent Jaques

Manchester University’s Free Speech and Secular Society were prevented from displaying Charlie Hebdo at their stall during a societies fair on 27 January.

Irony knows no limits. A representative of the group said they wanted to print copies of the cover following the massacre in order to show support for the murdered journalists’ right to free expression. They also stated that they did not necessarily agree with all the content of Charlie Hebdo, but wanted to defend the principle of freedom of publication.

Manchester Students’ Union censored the magazine on the grounds that the cover could be potentially offensive to Muslim students. The Union General Secretary, Charlie Cook, explained that the move was in line with their Safe Space policy, and defended it in terms of her responsibility to represent students of Muslim background.

The context here is a spilling culture of bans in response to political issues in Students’ Unions (various SU’s have banned the SWP and The Sun etc.). But bans are both inadequate and dangerous as a response: the ban approach undermines political freedoms; and are bureaucratic attempts to deal with issues which are inherently political.

Officers often cite the need to protect all students, especially vulnerable minorities. Their approach is inconsistent — what about the offence caused by UKIP or the Conservatives? And, more importantly, this does little to challenge the causes of racism and sexism.

We need to continue to develop a culture of militant feminist and anti-racist grassroots campaigning, while practicing political freedom on our campuses.

Fracking U-turn

By Rachael Barnes

Pressure from constituents, which had the potential to cause a rebellion in Tory and Lib Dem MPs, has forced the government to accept Labour’s amendments on fracking last week.

Protected areas, national parks and sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs) are now off-limits to fracking, but it is unclear to those in power how big an area of land that will include.

According to Greenpeace, only 3% of the 931 blocks of land licensed for fracking in the UK have no protected areas at all.

A Greenpeace spokesperson said, “Unless ministers can explain why fracking is too risky for the South Downs but perfectly safe in the Lancashire countryside, the next obvious step is to ban this controversial technique from the whole of the UK.”

A proposal for a moratorium on fracking was defeated in the Commons, despite concluding that fracking “isn’t in line with the UK’s climate change targets”.

It is reported that the future for fracking in the UK looks “bleak”.

Thousands took part in the March for Homes on Saturday 31 January. The two marches, from the East and South, converged on City Hall to call for rent controls, new council housing, a stop to social housing demolition and affordable secure housing for all.

£450K? No way!

By Beth Redmond

Over the past month, a wave of actions have sprung up on university campuses across the UK, highlighting the pay gap between the highest and lowest paid staff on each campus.

Groups of students worked out how many days into the year the highest paid (the vice chancellor) would earn the lowest paid (the lowest paid worker), and organised protests and mock-parties to celebrate on that day. In Birmingham, David Eastwood’s pay exceeds an annual sum of £450,000, taking only thirteen days to earn what the lowest paid worker does in a year, on top of which the university also pays for his house and all of his travel expenses.

The idea originally came from a group of students from the University of Bath, in a bid to embarrass their Vice Chancellor and create a positive protest atmosphere in which to attract new activists.

The pay disparity outlined by the now national protests was virtually unknown to the majority of people, and because of the outright lack of logic behind the difference in pay, students have been drawn in to the campaign.

On many of these campuses, the lowest paid workers (often migrant cleaners) are on zero-hour contracts and are not even earning the living wage, so the idea that VCs can pay themselves so much and be deserved of a bonus on top of that would be hysterical if it wasn’t so cruel.
The Pope, the Multitude, and the President

By Hugh Edwards

The crisis in Italy’s left and trade union forces has been revealed by the convention of the leader of the metalworkers’ union, Maurizio Landini to the ideas of Hardt and Negri. In an interview he calls into question the capacity of the workers’ movement and the traditional tactic of the strike to address the issues characterising contemporary capitalism. He claims unions need to embrace the perspective of the “social strike” as the instrument for the voluntaristic mobilisation of the vast archipelago of persons now constituted by the new form of capitalist dominion — the multitude. Of course, sadly, these ideas are not new in Italy, where they have long held sway among masses of the student movements and in social centres in all the major cities.

That Landini seems to share these ideas is a worrying indication of disintegrating support for class struggle organisation, on the heels of so many setbacks and failures.

That it is the likes of Landini bear almost complete responsibility for the debacle of the largely symbolic resistance to the government. Landini, a one time member of the Stalinist Italian Communist Party, has ever been much more than — at best, and for a period a militant trade union leader on issues of wages and conditions. Along with a scrum of worthy trade union activists and constitutionalists, he fronted the last year’s farcical campaign to, as he put it, “implement the only revolutionary document Italians need, namely the Italian constitution”.

In the same interview he mentions he is now reading the latest book by the Pope — “the most left-wing analysis in the country”. Given that the pontiff has a 2000 year head start in matters of mixing and offering to the masses pious abstractions, perhaps Landini can recruit him to the multitude.

With the stirring victory for Syria on the 25 January and the 100,000-strong anti-austerity demonstration in Madrid on 31 January, socialists might have hoped, for similar in Italy.

It is, after all, second only to Greece in the parlous state of its public finances and the battering inflicted on its working people by anti-austerity governments.

All the more so having witnessed the joyful “bella ciao” greeting of 500 or so of the Italian left present in Athens to greet Tsipras’s victory.

Alas, just as these events were taking place, the leaders of Italy’s left “progressive” forces, inside and outside parliament were voting for, or celebrating the success of, Sergio Mattarella (Matteo Renzi’s candidate), as the new president of the country. Sergio Mattarella is “a man noted for his love of social justice and the free-market”.

This is but the latest in the left’s shameful capitulation to Renzi. And they now find themselves the toast of the opposition makers for their sense of responsibility in ensuring the smooth transition to institutional stability of Renzi’s government. A government which, in its brief existence has, with the pass ing of the Jobs Act, inflicted the most profound political defeat on the trade union and working class movement.

Less than a fortnight ago, the same people, at the instigation of Nicky Vendola, governor of Puglia and leader of the Left, Ecology and Freedom party, had gathered in Milan for a convention titled The Human Factor. This was meant to “explore tentatively the possibility of creating a new subject”, i.e. a new party. Only the title distinguishes this three-day initiative from the countless other such exercises reconfiguring the forces that imploded after the defeat of the last Prodi-led government, in which leaders like Vendola or Paolo Ferrero of the now shriveled, faction-ridden Communist Refoundation held ministerial office.

This latest attempt at an opportunist lash-up had little to do with what was unfolding in Greece, apart from the rhetoric. The leaders and the outfits they preside over have long abandoned any perspective of mass working-class led struggle as the key to social and political change. They ignominiously failed to offer even token opposition to Renzi’s Jobs Act. Rather than risk a government defeat in the Senate, and thus the possibility of an election, they abandoned the building before the vote on the Act.

The Human Factor produced little and remains “work in progress” or another dead letter.

Solidarity with Kobane and Rojava

By Vicki Morris

More than 80 people attended the “Solidarity with Kobane and Rojava” dayschool in Nottingham on 31 January.

The event was organised by Nottingham Kurdish Solidarity Campaign and the Kurdish Society of Nottingham Trent University.

With the exception of a good contingent from the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, and Plan C and NC AFC members, the rest of the left was absent. Participants talked about the bad attitude that much of the left has to the Kurdish struggle. Too many think that the Kurds cease to deserve support if they accept, however critically, military support from the US or its allies.

Even worse is the belief of much of the left that to criticise ISIS is to shade into “Islamophobia” — hostility to Muslims per se. The conference was clear that the fight against ISIS is part of a broader and crucial fight against Islamist political movements.

Workshops covered: building solidarity and raising aid for the victims of ISIS; the origins of ISIS, and how to defeat it; Kurdish women’s struggle; and the significance of the new constitutional forms in Rojava.

While there is much positive aspects of Rojava’s “democratic federalist” constitution.

In particular its secularism, and recognition of the different nationalities and ethnic groups in the area, but also how it is hard to take this as a model given the unusual situation in Rojava.

AGRARIAN

It is an economically backward, primarily agrarian region, where the voluntarist impulse is peculiarly pronounced while its people face annihilation.

The drive to empower women is exemplary for this part of the world, and seems to be partially successful, not just a commitment on paper. Speaking about this, however, Beverley Baher said he didn’t think that there was much independent feminist activity as such, and noted that the drive for equality has come mainly from the PYD.

Questions raised included: how political control does the PYD have over institutions inside Rojava; whether the forms of rule represent a truly constitutive end of the state; what benefits accrue to office holders in Rojava and how do ordinary citizens control their representatives; is Rojava “post-capitalist” in any sense; who could defend the new democratic forms if the PYD/PKK turned its back on them (PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan is supposed to have taken his “democratic federalist” turn in jail after reading the work of American anarchist-lettist Murray Bookchin)?

The idea for the dayschool grew out of protests organised in Nottingham in solidarity with Kobane when it was besieged by ISIS last year.

It was a celebration of the liberation of Kobane; and a pledge to help Kurdish forces continue to push ISIS back further.

By Martin Thomas

On 27 January Argentine president, Cristina Fernandez, announced that she would disband the country’s intelligence agency, its equivalent of MI5 or the FBI.

With Fernandez, the move may be just because the agency had helped a prosecutor who accused Fernandez of covering up the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires that killed 85 people. She says she will set up a new agency.

The idea is good, though. We all want someone to keep an eye out for people who give signs that they may bomb or shoot up community centres, shops, or newspaper offices. But that doesn’t need to be done by a secretive agency outside democratic control.

In the 1970s Labour prime minister Harold Wilson suspected that MI5 was “bbugging” his office. A book by a former MI5 agent published in 1987 (in Australia, because MI5 got it banned in Britain) confirmed the story. MI5 denies it, but MI5’s official history admits that MI5 kept a file on Wilson. A 2013 book reported how MI5 has operated surreptitiously in literature and the arts, such as W H Auden, Ewan MacColl, Joan Littlewood, Arthur Koestler, George Orwell.

Since 2009 the Government has placed obligations on UK communication service providers to retain data from everyone — whom we phone, text and email and much more — for 12 months. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill, which has gone through its stages in the Commons and is now at an advanced stage in the House of Lords, will increase surveillance powers even further.

The secret state apparatus allows for torture and mistreatment as well as surveillance.

On 30 January, Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to US Secretary of State Colin Powell, became the latest of a string of US officials to confirm that the CIA used a base in British-ruled Diego Garcia (Indian Ocean islands from which Britain evicted the entire population in 1968-73) for rendition and torture.

Disband the spooks!
From the Lib-Dems to class politics

How I became a socialist
By Dan Rawnsley

My first political memory is of the 1997 general election, I was nine and didn’t understand what was going on. My dad was a vocal Tory supporter and all I knew was there had been a competition and “our” side had lost.

My early political education came from my parents and the Church of England. I still find it odd that I became a socialist! But I became aware of contradictions in the world views I was being inculcated with. The vicar put across a liberal “love and caring” interpretation of the Bible, but at home politics was more individualistic. My dad would often tell me and my brother “paddle your own canoe”. Years later I would tell him that in this society we were all stuck in one canoe and fighting over the paddles.

Meanwhile at church the ideas about everyone being equal didn’t square with the prayers about Christianity being the true faith. I stopped saying the bits I disagreed with and eventually got out of it altogether by playing rugby on Sundays. I felt bad about human suffering and wanted the world to be a better, happier place, but my views were largely directionless.

I went to gigs at an anarchist club in Bradford and started trying to read about anarchism online. I made friends with a group of people who read the newspapers and talked about the world. I didn’t like the Labour Party because of the war in Iraq; I didn’t like the Tories because they seemed mean. I liked the Liberal Democrats, who, at face value, seemed pleasant and left-wing.

I got involved in a youth organisation called the Woodcraft Folk and came into contact with a general left-wing culture, but our activity wasn’t aimed at doing a great deal apart from organising our own events and educating our own members. I thought I was intelligent (I did well at school) and left-wing. I thought I was an individual who read the newspapers and talked about the world. I didn’t like the Labour Party because of the war in Iraq; I didn’t like the Tories because they seemed mean. I didn’t think of a good reason not to. I agreed with everything I was learning; it made sense to act because of it.

I remained a socialist because of this ongoing education and the analysis of the world we share. Socialist education was giving me ideas that helped me to understand the world. No one had ever really talked to me about class politics before. With the AWL I was reading and discussing, which gave me something to focus on and talk about. Soon I was asked if I wanted to join. I said yes, I couldn’t think of a good reason not to. I agreed with everything I was learning; it made sense to act because of it.

Most of my political education has happened since joining the AWL. I would never have come across the struggles I’ve been involved in or the ideas I’ve read about without an organisation. I remain a socialist because of this ongoing education and the analysis of the world we share.

I’m still where I was when I first joined. I still agree, so why would I not act?

Which omission?

Letter

From Duncan Morrison’s previous letters, I can only guess at the omission which allegedly made Jon Lansman’s article “Solidarity #43” “right-wing”.

It was either (a) that it failed to say that we should back a Labour leader contest anyway; (b) that it failed to say that the push by Blairite MPs to oust Ed Miliband proved that nothing can be done in the Labour Party; or (c) that it failed to criticise Miliband sufficiently.

Criticism (c) has some force, as I detailed earlier in this exchange. I covered criticism (a) in another previous response. On (b): no-one here disputes that things in the Labour Party are bad, but the ability of a group of Blairite MPs to get media attention is not all-decisive.

Further: (1) revolutionary papers should sometimes “decode” machinations even within the ruling class, let alone among Labour MPs. Not every article has to be a call to get out into the streets. For example, we censured the parliamentarian couple which ousted Australian Labour leader Kevin Rudd in 2010 as a “right-wing shift”, despite disliking Rudd.

(2) I didn’t say that the MPs couldn’t topple a leader. They could do that even if the Labour Party were much more democratic than it has ever been. They can’t unilaterally decide the outcome of the ensuing leader election.

(3) Because of nomination thresholds, it is hard to run left leader challenges in the Labour Party. That is bad, but, again, not all-decisive. There have been few left challenges for leader in the whole history of the Labour Party, in lively times or in dull. Conversely, the reasonable showing of a left candidate in the recent Scottish Labour Party election does not undo the fact that the Scottish Labour Party is in worse condition than the British.

Duncan links insistence that the Labour Party and affiliated unions are hopeless with the idea that the problem can be bypassed by agitating for a workers’ government. If the mass labour movement is trammeled, then a workers’ government is more abstract and remote, not less so.

Colin Foster, north London

Hold the Socialist Party and Mark Serwotka to account!

The Left
By James Marine

The Socialist Party (SP) has defended the PCS civil service union’s decision to “suspend” national and Group elections for up to a year. (Groups are the major subparts of the union.)

The SP headlined its article: “PCS: Safeguarding its future in face of vicious Tory attacks”.

“Faced with a temporary but very sharp drop in income as a result of check-off ending, the PCS National Executive Committee (NEC) has had to make difficult decisions to cut expenditure, including suspending for one year the union’s annual elections”.

This is nonsense. Yes, the PCS is facing a financial tough time but not so bad that it cannot afford elections. (Even Greece can afford to vote).

The elections would cost about £650,000 to run yet the union’s magazine costs £700,000 a year to produce. Instead of putting that publication online for a year, the NEC choose to keep it whilst dumping elections.

Then there are full time officer wages. PCS is being colonised by SP members. If they lived up the SP’s policy of full time officers (FTOs) being paid a workers’ wage, then we could “afford” democracy.

The union is selling its headquarters for £25 million. A big chunk of that will plug the hole in one of the union’s pension schemes. Yet there will be more than enough left over to run several elections, let alone just one this year.

Our affiliation to the TUC costs nearly £650,000. In a choice between members having a vote on who represents them or paying hundreds of thousands to the TUC and subsidising Francis O’Grady’s lifestyle, having a vote wins hands down.

In other words there are plenty of ways to afford democracy but the SP doesn’t want them.

By suspending the elections the SP using a real crisis to avoid being judged by the members. There is a good chance this year that the SP would lose seats on the Executive. That could mean putting a proposed merger with Unite in danger.

The Socialist Party and PCS general secretary, Mark Serwotka, must be condemned across the labour movement. Their actions are disgraceful. If the right wing did this then there would be howls of indignation from the left; because it is Mark Serwotka, the criticism is muted at best. The SP, and Mark Serwotka, have crossed a fundamental line and must be held to account.

But course the best method of accounting, national elections, has been denied members for the time being. When the time comes, then the SP and Mark Serwotka must be driven out of office.
Euro-solidarity can stop euro-cuts

On hearing the first declarations from the ministers in Greece’s new Syriza-led government, elected on 25 January, the invisible hands of the markets reacted. The stock market lost 8%. The interest rate on Greek bonds went up.

Some EU and IMF leaders sent harder messages about the need for compliance — Angela Merkel, Christine Lagarde — and some tried to be more conciliatory (Barack Obama, Francois Hollande, Matteo Renzi). Cristobal Montoro, finance minister in Spain’s right-wing government, was agast that any government should be less compliant with Euro-austerity than his own. There could be no question of “changing the rules”, and if Syriza wants to ease suffering, “the question is, where will this money come from?”

The leadership of Syriza, seeing the international pressures, is trying to secure the support of a section of the Greek ruling class. This was largely the political logic that led to the government’s cooperation with ANEL, and now the unacceptable plan to propose Dimitris Avramopoulos, a political leader of the Right, for a new President of the Republic.

By way of international relations, economics minister Yanis Varoufakis and prime minister Alexis Tsipras, Syriza is trying to build an alliance for the American (“expansive”) model of capitalist crisis management against with the German (“restrictive”) model.

And a part of the Greek ruling class would like to use a “left-wing, intransigent” government as a means to extract more concessions from the Troika. This intention explains the friendlier attitude exhibited by some sections of the ruling class and press to Syriza.

But no “flirting” with bourgeois parties, bourgeois leaders and other capital factors are going to make the bourgeoisie really friendly and tolerant towards a Left government’s pro-working class measures.

The leaders of France and Italy, Francois Hollande and Matteo Renzi, both have reasons to use Greece as a lever against Angela Merkel for relaxation of austerity. Both of them are threatened by opposition within their countries.

In 2010, 70% of Greece’s debt, and 52% of all euro countries’ debt, was held outside the countries. Apart from some countries with large oil and gas exports (Venezuela, Bolivia...), and with some delays, pretty much all governments since then have accepted neo-liberal parametres to Euro solidarity. With Euro-austerity and Euro-austerity plus Euro-stabilisation and Euro-stabilisation plus Euro-austerity.

In 1984, New Zealand’s Labour government banned nuclear-armed US ships from its waters, and Australia’s Labor government reinstated social health insurance, while both ruthlessly geared their countries’ economies to world-market competition.

The parameters are enforced by the big, fast flows of the international financial markets. The UK in 1945 had relatively bigger debts than Greece has now. But only 17% of the debt was held outside Britain, and most of that by US lenders; the UK government could (with difficulty) deal with the US, and, with exchange controls, moneyed people in Britain could not and did not at will dump British debt to buy other debt.

In 2010, 70% of Greece’s debt, and 52% of all euro countries’ debt, was held outside the countries.

In the eurozone, Greece faces a central bank, and a European Commission, outside its control, determined to impose neo-liberal “structural reform”.

In August 1982 Mexico’s government had declared default on repayments of money borrowed since international credit deals had exploded after the big oil prices of 1973. Other defaults followed; countries got locked into “structural adjustment programmes” from the IMF and the World Bank.

Apart from some countries with large oil and gas exports (Venezuela, Bolivia...), and with some delays, pretty much all governments since then have accepted neo-liberal parametres to Euro solidarity. With Euro-austerity and Euro-austerity plus Euro-stabilisation and Euro-stabilisation plus Euro-austerity.

Thus, Syriza’s “Thessaloniki programme”, modest enough in itself, and its mild proposal to have an international debt conference for Greece as Germany had in 1953, become dramatic.

It is not exactly true that capitalism is so economically strained that even modest proposals become revolutionary. The eurozone has the size and weight to grant Greece’s demands even without breaching neo-liberal rules.

If workers across Europe can respond to Greece’s struggle and the euro-zone’s struggle against US imperialism: “Fate la rivoluzione in casa vostra!”, make the revolution in your own country.

If workers across Europe can respond to Greece’s struggle by making, not yet the revolution, but the militant anti-cuts struggle then made redundant, are asking the new government to punish the owners of Alter, to get their wages back, and to reopen the station under new ownership.

The 700 ERT media workers have published a manifesto, calling for: all of them to get their jobs back; an ERT run under workers’ control; an ERT open to society and directly linked with solidarity structures, the social movements, and the neighbourhood community movements.

Similar demands have been raised by the unions of Bank workers, transportation workers, and council workers, and of liquidity to Greek banks.

Even apart from pure economic calculations, the EU leaders do not want to allow the mushrooming of Syriza anti-austerity types of government in Europe. In Spain elections must be held before the end of 2015, and currently the new leftish anti-austerity party Podemos tops the polls.

If the Greek government demonstrates the necessary resistance, then we will probably see something like events of March 2013 in Cyprus. The banks’ liquidity will be blocked and one ultimatum will succeed another.

If the leadership of Syriza wants to stay true to its pro-working-class commitments, then the only realistic and effective response is:

- European and international working-class solidarity.
- The huge 300,000 demo against Angela Merkel for relaxation of austerity.
- The leaders of France and Italy, Francois Hollande and Matteo Renzi, both have reasons to use Greece as a lever against Angela Merkel for relaxation of austerity. Both of them are threatened by opposition within their countries.
- Support workers’ struggles in Greece: The 600 Alter media workers, unpaid for three years and then made redundant, are asking the new government to punish the owners of Alter, to get their wages back, and to reopen the station under new ownership.
- In the battle likely to open up between the Greek people and the EU leaders, Greece’s hopes depend on Europe-wide solidarity. If labour movements apply enough pressure, the EU leaders will be forced to ease the grip. And that will be a gain for other workers too.

To a certain extent it is true that we cannot assess the politics of a government that is just one week old. The defeat of the Samaras-Venizelos government has already created a breathing space for the working class. If another memorandum government had been elected, then the day after the election would have been another one with new pension cuts, new redundancies, new tax increases, and new working-class and defeats.

There is neither a “draçhma” road to socialism nor a Euro-expansionist road to socialism. There are no short cuts, but only the road of defiant struggle.

The roads we will traverse are unknown, but our compass will be steadily pointing to workers’ power and workers’ control of production and distribution.

Challenge to a whole era

By Martin Thomas

The Syriza-led government in Greece is hemmed in more tightly, by the flows of the international financial markets and by the economic negotiations of the EU, than left-reformist governments of earlier times. Simultaneously, its efforts have more chance to set going and feed into a Europe-wide revolt larger than its modest initial aims.

Two events in 1982-3 set up the current capitalist era. In March 1983 France’s coalition government of the Socialist Party and the Communist Party shifted to a more privatising, welfare-cutting, market-weaponising programme than the country’s right-wing governments of the years 1958-81. Previously, after its election in May 1981, it had nationalised 12 industrial firms, 36 banks and two financial corporations; extended union rights; substantially raised the minimum wage; and cut maximum working hours. But now financiers were selling off the franco.

In August 1982 Mexico’s government had declared default on repayments of money borrowed since international credit dealings had exploded after the big oil prices of 1973. Other defaults followed; countries got locked into “structural adjustment programmes” from the IMF and the World Bank.
To secure reforms, fight capitalist power

By Dora Polenta

On 30 January Jeroen Dijsselbloem, Dutch finance minister and chair of the Eurogroup of finance ministers, awkwardly shook hands with Greece’s new finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, at a press conference after they had met in Athens, and whispered... “you have just killed the [EU/ ECB/ IMF] Troika”. Varoufakis responded: “Wow!”

That felt good. It did not feel as good when Tsipras subsequently committed himself to the “fulfilling of our debt obligations towards the ECB and the IMF”. It did not feel as good when Yanis Varoufakis said on 1 February in Paris that the Greek government is willing to “pay both principal and interest to the creditors”. It did not feel as good when Varoufakis stated that “personally this [privatisation of the port of Piraeus] has my full support” (BBC Newsnight, 31 January).

It felt good that on Saturday 31 January, at the first anti-fascist demonstration under the Syriza-led government, the police were unarmed. It did not feel as good when Panousis, the Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection, characterised counter-terrorism as a wonderful service.

It felt good when Minister of Reconstruction Panayiotis Lafazanis stated that he is going to halt the further privatisation of DEPA and DEH. It did not feel as good when he did not commit to the full nationalisation of DEH.

It felt good when the government took symbolic actions such as a visit to the memorial for resistance fighters against the Nazis, refusing to take religious oaths, removing barriers to the Unknown Soldier, auctioning off the luxurious state car, and reinstating sacked ministry cleaners and school guards.

It did not feel as good when Draganasakis stated the government’s commitment to the “proper functioning of banks and an increase in their shareholder value”. It did not feel as good when Draganasakis stated that the government is preparing a “catalogue of opportunities for investors”. It did not feel as good when Syriza went for a coalition government with ANEL and indicated it would nominate a right-wing politician as President of the Republic.

It felt good when the New Democracy government reaffirmed that it would adhere to the Thessaloniki declaration: the restorations of the minimum wage and collective bargaining, an increase in pensions, the cancellation of privatisation, and an increase in their shareholder value. It did not feel as good when Dragasakis stated that the government is going to halt the further privatisation of DEPA and DEH.

However, the revolutionary left should warn that the at-risk economy’s capacity for recovery is nil. The only way to ensure that the money will not “fly”, that there is not going to be a bank run, is the nationalisation of banks—which have been “bailed out” and “recapitalised” repeatedly—under workers’ control. Workers in both the public and the private sector should now demand their jobs back. This imperative cannot wait for the approval of the “markets” or the Troika or the European Commission. The left should demand that any business that cannot or does not want to operate its factory be confiscated and placed under workers’ management and control.

Syriza’s commitments to change in the state, predominantly to combat corruption and the democratisation of the police, cannot be applied within the framework of Greece’s current organically authoritarian and corrupt state apparatus. No democratic minister, no matter how morally irreproachable, can convert the police force and the riot police into protectors of the citizens.

The current security forces are specifically structured and trained for the suppression of the people’s struggles. They must be dissolved and re-founded on a truly democratic basis, under the democratic control of the mass organisations.

Yanis Varoufakis

SYRIZA Syriza called for unity of the left against the ruling-class, capital and the austerity measures. That was different from the KKE and Antarsya.

In the current condition, the ruling class are trying not to give Syriza the majority of 151 seats, so they are supporting To Potami — a creation of the mass media. All the TV channels show their leader speaking, a journalist from one of the biggest channels.

The KKE attack Syriza and say they will not give their support. To Potami is using this to argue that people should vote for them as the reins to not give a majority to Syriza.

The left has a big tradition. We had the Civil War. We have 45 left organisations and a tradition of involvement in the workers’ movement.

After the rise of neoliberalism in Greece, the left had problems at the end of the 90s. It was fragmented in the face of attacks. The KKE policy was sectarian, as was that of many revolutionary organisations too.

The Syriza experiment began as a unity of the left in the beginning of the 2000s, and the first time it stood in elections as Syriza was 2004. Syriza is not like Podemos, Die Linke or the Left Bloc in Portugal; it is completely different. Syriza has 1,000 organisations, a mass membership, and has won the support of the Greek Orthodox Church under workers’ and social management and control, and urges solidarity with Euro-
they want to put a social democrat as head of the list in the municipal elections in Athens. We said that was not acceptable, and went outside and stood with the ex-Maoists. We got 2.4%, which was half of what Syriza got. There have been conflicts.

Syriza has been difficult to build. It’s not a model you can just take and apply anywhere. There have been lots of fights, back and forward.

After the success of the Syriza experiment, the NAR and others created Antarsya, basically in order to survive. The best of their results are in local elections. They got 0.36% in 2009 and 0.72% in the Euro-elections of 2014. This is very small compared with what is needed.

As for DEA: in 2000, we split from SEK [the Greek group linked with the SWP in Britain], mostly on questions about how we build organisations and our relationship with the rest of the left. We involved ourselves in the movement against European capitalist globalisation and we had a relationship with Synaspismos, who were then outside Parliament. Synaspismos, one KKE split, and one Eurocommunist split formed a committee for unity which involved DEA. For this we were denounced by the rest of the left, but in thirty years of building the revolutionary party to resist attacks, where did we get?

It wasn’t easy. We have big differences with Syriza. In the PT in Brazil, Trotskyists were involved because it was a workers’ party with links to the unions. PSTU [the Morenists] were sectarian, and the Fourth International section stayed in, but dissolved under pressure. When Lulu controlled the party and they left, they had less than when they stayed.

In Podemos, Pablo Iglesias said that the Trotskyists must dissolve. The Fourth International section had a congress and dissolved.

We have our independent organisation. On demonstrations, we sell our paper and have stalls. In neighbourhoods we sell our paper and have stalls. In neighbourhoods

The Left Platform of Syriza is the left-wing of Synaspismos and DEA, and it’s more than 30% of the Syriza congress. A third of that 30% is the Red Network [around DEA].

In the unity Congress, when the leadership slogan was for a “party of the members”, we said we couldn’t dissolve ourselves. We made an alliance on that with the Left Current and the left of the majority. They told Tsipras that he couldn’t wipe out DEA. Tsipras stepped back and made a compromise. He gave us “reasonable time” to make a decision but now they no longer even speak of it.

We have kept our independence and our newspaper ever two weeks. We sold more than 1200 of the last two issues through distribution by the members, and we also sell through the kiosk distribution network. We have two MPs, a mayor in the Philadelphia neighbourhood of Athens, and a lot of local councillors, as well as 25 members elected to leading bodies in the trades unions.

Which road now depends on what happens inside Syriza. The big bourgeois papers say that they cannot accept blackmail from the Left Platform. If you have 20 or 25 Left Platform MPs, it’s “blackmail from extremists.” They openly ask Tsipras to get rid of [Panagiotis] Lafazanis, leader of the Left Platform and expel our comrade who is on the Syriza Politbureau.

There is a battle over where Syriza will go. Maybe the Syriza leaders will succeed in controlling the left, but it’s a battle and all the hopes of the left now are focused in Syriza.

You can imagine if Tsipras makes a compromise with the ECJ and cuts wages, those 25 MPs could bring the government down. DEA is building a visible organisation with an audience in Syriza and in a small part of the working-class. All the other organisations in Syriza dissolved. The ex-Maoists who support the majority and are on the right. Even the autonomists dissolved; they are in the left-wing of the majority.

Our organisation is 80% workers. It is smaller amongst youth and has big successes against fascism. We’ve built Sunday schools for immigrants, with between three and four hundred volunteers, working with over a thousand migrants. We built the “Expel Racism” movement and recruited some immigrant members. Lots left during the crisis, back to Albania and other countries, but we have involved migrants in trade union demos as part of the same fight.

Sotiris: The youth is part of the majority. During the last democracy discussion and regarding coalitions, they moved towards us. But they never voted in the Central Committee with us. They are part of the left of the majority but they do not openly vote with the Left Platform. The Thessaloniki programme is an attempt to be more specific about Syriza’s initial measures. We did not vote for it because it leaned to the right. In theory, it is true that the rest of the programme is still there. In theory.

But to enact the Thessaloniki programme they will need to go into direct confrontation with the ruling-class. In the crisis, there will be a fight over wages and taxation. There will be a conflict from day number one even on this short-term programme. We will not have to wait very long to see what shape the government takes.

This will give people confidence to fight. We are not optimists for the intentions of Tsipras but for the new openings for the radical left in Greece and in Europe.
Don’t let Golden Dawn catch breath

By Dora Polenta

The anti-fascist counter-demonstration on 31 January was a good start. But was it a sufficient start, given the context of the situation in Greece? It was a good beginning, but it was not enough. The demonstration showed the need for a strong anti-fascist movement in Greece, which is why we need to support and strengthen our anti-fascist counter-movement.

What the new Greek government has done

By Dora Polenta

Minister of Productive Reconstruction Panagiotis Lafazanis has announced cancellation of the process of privatization of DEH (the state electricity utility). He also cancelled the previous government’s civil mobilisation orders and granted free electricity to 300,000 households from the most vulnerable social groups.

Predictably “Communist” China denounced the Syriza-led government, and called for support the agreement made by the right-wing previous Greek government for a deal over Piraeus port with Chinese company Cosco.

“We intend to ask the Greek government to protect the rights and legitimate interests of Chinese companies in Greece, among them Cosco” said Shen Niantang, spokesman of the Chinese Ministry of Commerce. The Syriza-led government should now go a step further and renationalise Piraeus port, which was practically given away to Cosco by the ND government in 2009. Port Employees Federation of Greece (OMALE) secretary member Anastasia Frazeszezaki said that returning control to the Piraeus Port Authority would mean immediate gains for dock and port workers.

“The day after the privatisation of Pier 3, a new situation emerged in the port, alienating labour relations. Something like 500 colleagues of mine were out of jobs the day after. At the same time Cosco was granted the right to use people in the area who were not categorised as dock workers, so they didn’t have a collective bargaining agreement or dockworkers’ rights.”

Working conditions at Pier 3 are abysmal, with health and safety measures neglected and workers on call 24/7. “They find out only an hour or two before that they are going to work a certain shift,” she explains, adding that shifts could end up being anything from two to 14 hours. A dockworker’s phone might go off any day of the week, regardless of whether they took the day off or not.

Syria’s commitment to revoke all unconstitutional dismissals was reiterated by the new Deputy Minister of Administrative Reform Giorgos Katrougalos. He stated that all public sector and council workers that have been unconstitutionally dismissed will be re-employed, he stated his commitment to get rid of “reserve employment” (lay-offs pending dismissal).

He committed himself to reinstate immediately the 594 cleaners of the ministry of finance, who persevered for 18 months in their defiant struggle to get their jobs back. (But not 18, I have a stable and permanent job, instead, under their previous terms, i.e. four hours and flexible employment). Furthermore, he committed to immediately reinstate the school guards and teachers in technical education.

In his first meeting with the public-sector trade union leadership workers, he stated that public sector wages, which have been reduced by up to 40% during the memoranda years, cannot be increased during 2015.

WAGE

The imminent resetting of the minimum wage to 751 euros was announced by the Minister of Labour and Social Solidarity, Panos Sourotselis.

“Within the first bills, there are those related to the reinstatement of the collective bargaining agreements, the law on banishing conscriptions and civil mobilisation orders [used to force strikers back to work by decreasing them as under military discipline] and those associated with the protection of workers against employers’ lock-outs and collective redundancies and the reintroduction of the minimum wage to 751 euros.”

The reintroduction of the “13th month” of pensions was announced by the Minister of Social Insurance, Dimitris Straatos. The new government will:

1. Restore the public, social and redistributive nature of the insurance system.
2. Scrap the memorandum commitments to reduce pensions and raise the age limit.
3. Abolish the death clause and zero deficit clause in supplementary pensions.
4. Gradually restore pensions.
5. The Deputy Minister of Finance, Nadia Valavani, has asked for the resignation of the chairman of the board and the CEO of Taiped (the official privatisation fund). She stated that the government’s intention is to stop the privatization process, at least in the form of Taiped.

The new government has prioritised cancellation of the tendering process for “selling off” the 14 regional airports.

The educational system will be restructured as announced by the Deputy Minister of Education, Tasos Courakis. The main measures will be:

1. The abolition of the nationwide type exams in the first and second grade.
2. More opportunities for students to study at their local universities, facilitation of university transfers.
3. Abolition of the law of expulsion of university students for exceeding the maximum allowed years of study. Every undergraduate and postgraduate student is free to study for as many years as she or he likes.
4. Reinstatement of the university administrative workers that were placed in reserve employment.
5. Reinstatement of all school teachers of technical colleges and all school guards that were fired.

When asked whether the police forces should be disarmed, the new interior minister, Nikos Voutsis, reiterated Syriza’s position that the 1996 legislative framework in place states that it is recommended that during demonstrations and sporting events the police should be unarmed.

Citizenship for all 200,000 children of immigrants born or raised in Greece has been announced by the Deputy Minister of Immigration Policy, Tasia Christodoulopoulou. Christodoulopoulou also stated that the government will end the refugee detention camps created by the memorandum government.

But the minister of National Defence, ANEL leader Panos Kammenos, stated: “Greece will respect European immigration policies. If the rules of the Dublin agreements are applicable throughout Europe, and therefore also in Greece, we should apply the principle that illegal immigrants should be repelled and return to their countries”.

New health minister Panagiotis Koumourlis said that his first priority would be the development of primary health care, aiming both to better serve the citizens and to decongest the hospitals.

The new Deputy Minister of Health, Andreas Xanthos, said that the payment of five euros for hospital outpatient appointments and one euro for each prescription would be eliminated.

They both stated that the government would guarantee full access for all uninsured citizens to public health services, tests, medications and hospitalisation in need.
Permanent revolution and the Irish left

By Micheál MacEoin

Workers’ Liberty has recently examined Trotskyist debates on Ireland (Trotskyists debate Ireland, WL3/45). There is another set of relevant debates worth looking over: how, and if, Trotsky’s theory of “permanent revolution” relates to Ireland.

The first debate took place in 1966-67 in the largely émigré Irish Workers’ Group (IWG). It was an attempt to clear away some of the confusions generated by a mechanical application of the theory to Irish reality.

In 1983, another debate took place in Socialist Organiser (forunner of Solidarity). That debate showed how confusion present in the 1960s had only deepened with the outbreak and ongoing violence of the Troubles.

The 1966-7 debate was launched by an editorial written by Gary Lawless in the Irish Militant arguing that the “major points of contention in the 1965 IWG debates centre on the national question and its relationship to the struggle for socialism,” and claiming that Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution showed the model Lawless’s motivation was to counter the Stalinist/Maoist theories being propagated by the Irish Communist Group led by Brendan Clifford, based on a mechanical and scholastic application of a “stages theory” to Ireland. The theory was that the bourgeoisie must first overthrow “feudalism”, heralding a prolonged stage of bourgeois capitalist rule, during which the working-class would grow and then proceed to overthrow capitalism.

The problem with Lawless’s editorial was, Matgamna argued, that he “confined [himself] to an abstract outline of the ‘Theory of Permanent Revolution’, merely intimating that it returns the Stalinist stages theory, i.e. ‘permanent revolution’. However in doing so, Lawless made a concession to the Stalinist-Menshevik methodology.

Just as the Menshevik theory was based on a Scholastic conception of an idealised French Revolution applied to Russia, and the Cliffondite approach borrowed Russian and Chinese Stalinist theories and applied them to Ireland, Lawless abstracted a theory developed by Trotsky from the circumstances for which Trotsky developed it, and tried to make it a template for Ireland.

PERMANENT REVOLUTION
What was Trotsky’s original formulation of permanent revolution?

Firstly, it was a development of Marx’s analysis of the failure of the 1848 revolution in Germany and the need for proletarian class independence in revolutionary situations.

In the first years of the twentieth century Trotsky argued that the revolution in Russia against the Tsar would be bourgeois. Though capitalist social relations had been penetrating Russia in the last decades of the nineteenth-century, it remained a semi-feudal social formation in its land structure.

Deny that the capitalists have direct power in Ireland, even if they in turn are not their own masters, would be absurd.”

permanent revolution theory

A variant of the theory had been used by the Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia in the last decades of the nineteenth-century, it remained a semi-feudal social formation in its land structure.

The revolution in Russia against the Tsar would be bourgeois. In the first years of the twentieth century Trotsky argued that the revolution in Russia against the Tsar would be bourgeois. In the first years of the twentieth century Trotsky argued that the revolution in Russia against the Tsar would be bourgeois. In the first years of the twentieth century Trotsky argued that the revolution in Russia against the Tsar would be bourgeois. In the first years of the twentieth century Trotsky argued that the revolution in Russia against the Tsar would be bourgeois.

Irish Militant to Bobby Sands

Republican mural to Bobby Sands

W 是否autoloaded on the political front, argued Matgamna, could not come without the labour movement advocating a democratic programme which met the realities of the “constitutional question” head-on.

A democratic programme, which Militant lacked, “has to be able to fill the void between trade union minimalism and the socialist revolution.” For Matgamna, its content should be a federalist one based with as much autonomy for the Protestant community as is compatible with the democratic rights of the majority of the Irish people.”

In response, Socialist Organiser supporter Tony Richardson (who is now with Socialist Resistance) wrote that “Northern Ireland is dominated economically and militarily by imperialism, so ‘socialism was the answer’.

THE TROUBLES
The movement for Catholic civil rights, the Protestant backlash, and breakdown of the sectarian six-county state led to British troops going onto the streets in the North in August 1969. These events restarted much discussion about Ireland on the British left.

After the Troubles intensified in 1971, most of the left backed the demand for “Troops Out”. But the slogan was disconnected from any wider political solution to Catholic-Protestant division. “Troops Out”, advocated as a cure-all, implied strongly that the only issue at stake was the involve the British Army in Ireland. The existence of one million Protestant Unionists in the north-east of the island was, if not ignored, then relegated to an epiphenomenal status. What role did “permanent revolution” play in this set of “anti-imperialist” politics?

As we saw earlier, Trotsky’s permanent revolution was a perspective for independent working-class action, and an independent working-class political party. But this emphasis was largely absent in post-Trotsky “orthodox Trotskyist” accounts of the theory. It was used, instead, to “explain” the Cuban and Chinese revolutions, in which the working-class played no decisive political role, and to rationalise adaptation to Stalinist and Third World national forces.

After the Stalinist social system expanded in the 1940s and 1950s to cover a third of the world, some “orthodox Trotskyists” saw this as an expansion of the “world revolution”, and conceived of this revolution as a process disconnected from working-class agency.

The Stalinist bureaucracy created states in its own image, in which the working-class was enslaved and enframed. For the “orthodox Trotskyists”, these states were, “degenerated and deformed workers’ states”, or “post-capitalist”, that is to say, in advance of capitalism, even in “transition to socialism.

In Ireland, this version of “permanent revolution” could mean two positions which, though seemingly opposed, in fact, both rejected a common denial of the need for a democratic programme for Ireland.

The first position involved a fantasy about the latent socialist potential of the Provisional IRA.

Matgamna spelled out the logic, writing in 2009 that: “For the duration of the Provo War ‘Permanent Revolution’ would serve to rationalise accommodation to the Provisional IRA: up to the Good Friday Agreement, there were always Trotsky’s Trotskyists, and not by any means only in Ireland, to argue that, any day now, the Provo war would ‘develop’ into the Irish workers’ revolution.”

This argument was a maximalist variant of “permanent revolution” which saw an unrealised national question in Ireland and asserted that it would be solved under socialism, so “socialism was the answer.

But these positions denied the need for a democratic programme aimed at uniting the working-class north and south, Catholic and Protestant and of bridging the gap between working-class and nationalist struggles and socialism.

The second position denied the identity of a separate community of Protestants in Ireland, seeing them as a passive function of imperialism; the second position denied the need for a democratic programme as part of the fight for socialism.

In the wake of hunger strikes by IRA prisoners, and before the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985), a debate on these issues took place in Socialist Organiser, it was provoked by an interview with Mick Duffy, a Belfast shop steward and supporter of the Militant (now Socialist Party), who argued that workers’ unity in a recent NHS pay dispute could lead to class unity on the political level.

An outraged response from the Nottingham Socialist Organiser group argued that the interview was “unacceptable propaganda for the national chauvinist politics of the Militant.” In his response to the letter, Matgamna asked the Militant’s politics on Northern Ireland and how they should be answered.

The Militant were economicist. Looking at the NHS strikes, for instance, they saw in temporary and episodic working-class unity on the economic or trade union level unrealistic potential for wider political unity within the sectarian structures of the Northern Ireland state. In the Militant’s view, national and democratic questions would simply dissolve in the solvent of trade union action.

Northern Ireland did have a history of impressive economic working-class struggles. Time after time, however, the “constitutional question” reared its head, and working-class unity foundered on the rocks of national division.

Broader class unity on the political front, argued Matgamna, could not come without the labour movement advocating a democratic programme which met the realities of the “constitutional question” head-on.

A democratic programme, which Militant lacked, “has to be a federalist one based with as much autonomy for the Protestant community as is compatible with the democratic rights of the majority of the Irish people.”

In response, Socialist Organiser supporter Tony Richardson (who is now with Socialist Resistance) wrote that “Northern Ireland is dominated economically and militarily by imperialism and “the starting point for us must be the struggle to end that.” The force he looked to? “The Republican movement as anti-imperialist, is as most of the Catholic population.”

Almost as an afterthought, he added: “Of course, within this struggle we attempt to give it a class content by fighting for ‘Permanent Revolution’ in the abstract, fighting the imperialist struggle with the need for the working-class to take power through a socialist programme.”

This approach typifies the blurring together of various
Irish nationalism with abstract socialist maximalism. Though it is thought that socialists need to “break down the pro-imperialism of the Protestant workers”, no democratic programme is advocated which could address this task. The concept of “two nations” has been rebranded as “pro-imperialism” and “anti-imperialist working-class” movement is referred to. This is the case with the SDLP, described as “anti-imperialist” and opposed to the permanent revolution, despite the fact that the permanent revolution is not necessarily anti-imperialist.

DEFINED

“Everything,” he wrote, “that has happened in Northern Ireland over the last century or so, is refusible if the Protestants are defined as a community only by ‘pro-imperialism.’ They are pro-British or define themselves simply as British, but that is not necessarily the same thing. And in history they have been ‘pro-British’ and supporters of the British state only on certain conditions. In the last decade the Protestant (mainly working-class) masses have broken out of this role and have organised powerful militias, and defeated the British government’s entire strategy for Northern Ireland with a general strike in 1974.”

By 1969 some attention was given to the Protestant identity outside of existence but, for Matgamna: “The attitude of the Protestants is the central problem, reflecting as it does the existence of a distinct community. Either the Protestants will be defined in such a way they must be subjugated, conquered and maybe driven out... Nothing conceivably progressive or ‘anti-imperialist’ could come from such a development.”

Permanent revolution was invoked at two other points in the debate.

Martin Collins wrote that “permanent revolution has never before been something in the revolutionary cookbook for which the peasantry was the main ingredient, but a means of looking at how to make a revolution in a country where capitalism had thoroughly distorted any ‘natural’ or ‘national’ economic development. This, he said, applies to the South, not the Northern Ireland, where the whole ‘two nations’ discourse is refusible.”

Bradley also cast a shadow of accommodation to Third World national developmentalist thinking in Collins’s approach, as if the purpose of permanent revolution was above all the development of the productive forces in a national economy: “Trotsky’s theory had nothing to do with the ‘natural’ or (worse) ‘national’ character of capitalist development in Russia but about how the combined and uneven development in Russia created a particular social dynamic that allowed the working-class to take the lead in the bourgeois revolution. The point is not to guarantee national development but along with revolution in other countries... to guarantee national development in Russia” but about how the combined and uneven development in Russia created a particular social dynamic that allowed the working-class to take the lead in the bourgeois revolution. The point is not to guarantee national development but along with revolution in other countries... to guarantee national development in Russia.”

Lurking behind these positions were wildly differing conception of how to categorise Ulster Protestants.

Some, like Lyons, thought that the Ulster Protestant originates as colored. Their consciousness is still a colon consciousness.” As Martin Thomas wrote in the debate, from this assessment of Protestants as “similar to the European settlers in another country,” the demand for Northern Ireland to become a Catholic worker/protestant unity on any mass scale is not just difficult to achieve but utopian.

If, as Thomas, Protestants were simply “colon”, why did Irish republicans such as James Connolly hope that “the pressure of a common exploitation can make enthusiastic rebels out of a Protestant working class, earnest champions of civil and religious liberty out of Catholics, and out of both a united social-democracy.”

It was “because they saw that the Protestants were not a mere clique of exploiters superimposed on the masses of Ireland – that neither Catholic nor Protestant working people could rise from the ashes of furious sectarian warfare. This means, argued Matgamna: “Any criticism of the permanent revolution of the Catholic workers against capitalism can indeed flourish…but only if Protestant sense of cultural separateness from the Catholic Irish nation is respected. Conversely, as long as socialists endorse the ‘irredentist’ republican campaign to subjugate into a nation they feel no part of, no working class unity will ever be possible.”

Matgamna, himself accused of being a “two nationist”, responded that this was a “two nationist”... to win the struggle, they will fight alongside us, but they will join us late and only as a result of a thirty-two county fight.” It is often associated with nationalism, irredentism and expansionism, such as Germany’s annexation of Austria in 1938. This is not what is behind the conflict in Ireland.

And what are the characteristics of a nation? “For Marxists a nation is a social complex embodying a common history, language, culture, economy and territory” whereas Northern Ireland Protestants are “interlaced and intertwined in the same community with the Catholics of Northern Ireland.” Instead, they are a “distinct community... a social formation with some of the features of a nation which has failed to develop fully into one, and for which autonomy of development becomes impossible because they cannot be enmeshed with another community, and with Britain.”

Even if they were a nation, the Six Counties would not be its “natural and authentic” community and with Britain.”

Matgamna’s approach still rings true today, though the sectarian war has been replaced by a sectarian peace and intractable political structures to manage it. “Concern for the Protestants must be integrated with the unresolved issue of national rights; concern for the Northern Ireland Catholics and Irish national independence must integrate with awareness of what the Protestants are and what the Protestant ‘problem’ is; concern for class unity must integrate with the building of a socialist movement concerned also for the just struggle of the Catholics; concern for Irish national independence against Britain must integrate with a proper and consistently democratic concern for the relations between different sections of the Irish people.”

Part of building such a socialist movement is understanding this history, including these debates. Most important is doing what so many Trotskyists have resisted: doing something about Ireland – thinking critically about how to apply these analyses to the situation in Ireland today.

OPPRESSED

This means, argued Matgamna: “Any criticism of elements of Catholic chauvinism in the Republican movement...must be put in that context, or you wind up with a sort of guarantee against a rightist deviation. Moreover, any federal arrangement would be a reactionary ‘insurance policy’ that would be rejected by the Protestants, for Lyons, “are a backward part of the all-Ireland workforce, kept backward by imperialist concessions,” a “laboratory of the international capitalist” that means the mobilisation of the Catholic community after Bloody Sunday and around the hunger strikes in 1981.

In other words, the nationalist-republican struggle will pass “uninterruptedly” into a united working-class struggle. The facts belie this perspective. In 1972, the death toll in Northern Ireland was 479, reflecting the high degree of sectarian polarisation. It was the highest death toll for any year of the Troubles before and since. In 1981 and 1982, the figures (113 and 110) for deaths would not be reached again during the conflict. For the “orthodox Trotskyist” Mandelites, then, the phoenix of united working-class struggle could not have come along sooner for the decapitation of the Protestant working-class, and lapsing into petty bourgeois nationalism... There need be no contradiction between being an ‘anti-imperialist supporting the Irish national democratic struggle’ and advocating measures constricting the Protestant working-class... The only people who see any contradiction are those who have given up any independent working-class view of the situation and opted instead for Catholic nationalism plus Trotskyist rhetoric.”

Denham also reminded Lysaght that “‘Militant’ do not deny Permanent Revolution’s validity to Ireland. In fact they insist on the opposite: the only way to end it is peacefully and with monotonous regularity... So much for the idea that allegiance to this particular view of the Irish struggle guarantees intransigent anti-imperialism.”

Provs, Protestants and working class politics: a dialogue
By Sean Matgamna
Download as a pdf, mobi or epub from bit.ly/pp-wcp
Teachers strike over pay blockage
By Gemma Short
Teachers at Merrill Academy, Derbyshire, have been on strike for six days through January in a dispute over unat-tainable appraisal targets and denial of pay progression.
Both teaching unions, the NUT and the NA-SUWT, are taking part in the strike and have been staging daily picket lines. However picket lines were suspended on January 29 after drivers, believed to be a non-striking members of staff, drove aggressively at pickets over several days, leading to a striker and a student being hit by a car.
School management have aggressively attacked the unions in the local press, and have run previ-ously unplanned trips for students as a way to break the strike.
The NUT has an-nounced that it will strike again next week and after the half-term holiday and will be hold-ing an information meet-ing for parents and members of the commu-nity on Thursday 5 Feb-ruary.
• Messages of support to: wayne.mcnaught@ntlworld.com

Health deal: vote no!
By a Healthworker
Strikes by health unions due to happen on 29 Janu-ary and 25 February were called off on Tuesday 27 Following a new offer from the government.
The unions will consult members over the next few weeks. Unison and Unite have stated strikes will be relaunched on March 13 if the offer is rejected.

Sacked because she was pregnant
By Charlotte Zalens
Nuvia Erazo Farias, an outsourced cleaner at the University of London, is taking cleaning contractor Connect to an employment tribunal on allegations of maternity discrimination.
Nuvia worked as a cleaner at Garden Halls stu-dent residence until June last year when the halls shut for refurbishments. Like many of her colleagues Nuvia applied for other vacancies within the Univer-sity to avoid redundancy. However Nuvia, who was six months pregnant at the time, was not given an invi-tation letter or advance warning for her interview, unlike other workers. Nuvia was not given an interview conducted with two managers as per stan-dard protocol. Instead the one manager present, Sharon Bracey, the Cleaning Services Manager, who dou-bles as Unison rep, would not talk about work but only of maternity pay and redundancy because of Nuvia’s “condition”. Nuvia was then made redundant.
After a series of legal threats, Connect backed down and gave Nuvia and permanent job. However in the in-terim Nuvia went through a period of extreme stress, culminating in her hospitali-sation, as she feared she would no longer have a source of income after her maternity leave.
A public hearing for the tribunal will begin on 3 Feb-ruary and continue on 4, 5, 6, and 9 February at Victory House, 30-34 Kingsway, Holborn.
The IWGB, Nuvia’s union, are asking for soli-darity at the hearing and letters to be sent to the University of London Vice-Chancellor.
• Model letter: bit.ly/Nuvia-letter

Tube drivers ballot for strikes
By Ollie Moore
Tube Union RMT is ballot-ing its driver members on London Underground for strikes against the unjust sacking of driver Alex McGuigan.
Alex failed a breathalyser test. According to London Underground’s Drug and Alcohol Policy, his urine sample should then also have been tested for alcohol.
The offer is cost neutral to the government. The slight increases will be funded by the pay freeze for those on 8c and above and an incre-ment freeze for all above band 7. Whilst no one will be that upset about senior management taking a hit, this sets a worrying prece-dent of freezing increments.
In reality many of these low paid jobs are out-sourced and are not even covered by the offer. The offer is cost neutral to the government. The slight increases will be funded by the pay freeze for those on 8c and above and an incre-ment freeze for all above band 7. Whilst no one will

M25 workers strike
By Charlotte Zalens
Maintenance and incident support workers on the M25 will strike on Monday 16 February.
The employer, Connect Plus Services, is composed of three major contractors, Balfour Beatty, Atkins and Egis. The Unite union is concerned that workers are on contracts with different pay and conditions depending on the contractor.
Some workers have no sick pay for the first three days of illness, and wage discrepancies exist.
The average wage across the workforce at present is £25,000. In October 2014, Balfour Beatty announced that its new CEO Leo Quinn would be paid a basic wage of £800,000, with pension contributions and bonuses on top of that, meaning that he earns at least 32 times more than the average CPS worker.
Unite is demanding a £30,000 basic wage, day one sick pay, and full recogni-tion of the union by the em-ployer.
Unite has announced it will take one 24 hour strike per week, with a work to rule in between.

National Gallery strike
By Peggy Carter
PCS union members at the National Gallery began a five-day strike on Tues-day 3 February.
Gallery bosses last year announced plans to out-source almost all staff, in-cluding visitor support staff. In what appears to be a trial run of this plan, private se-curity firm CIS have been given one whole wing of the museum to run until the end of this year, without any competitive tender or consultation.
Union members argue that the privatisation of after lying on live radio that Alex had been “drinking at work”. Union activists say the issue at the heart of the dispute is the company’s abuse of procedure: if LUL gets away with sacking Alex on the basis of an obvious dis-regard for their own agreed procedures, other workers could also face unjust sacking.
The ballot closes on 10 February.

With the background of an imminent general elec-tion, and with overwhelm-ing support from the public for an NHS facing crisis, we need to campaign hard against this deal.
Realistically the way to get a no vote will be with high profile rejection cam-paigns run by branches.
Within these campaigns we need to be talking about the sort of action we want relaunched on March 13 and how we can rebuild the unions to fight against future attacks.

• Sign the petition against the privatisation: bit.ly/Gallery-petition

Sacked because she was pregnant
By Charlotte Zalens
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Nuvia worked as a cleaner at Garden Halls stu-dent residence until June last year when the halls shut for refurbishments. Like many of her colleagues Nuvia applied for other vacancies within the Univer-sity to avoid redundancy. However Nuvia, who was six months pregnant at the time, was not given an invi-tation letter or advance warning for her interview, unlike other workers. Nuvia was not given an interview conducted with two managers as per stan-dard protocol. Instead the one manager present, Sharon Bracey, the Cleaning Services Manager, who dou-bles as Unison rep, would not talk about work but only of maternity pay and redundancy because of Nuvia’s “condition”. Nuvia was then made redundant.
After a series of legal threats, Connect backed down and gave Nuvia and permanent job. However in the in-terim Nuvia went through a period of extreme stress, culminating in her hospitali-sation, as she feared she would no longer have a source of income after her maternity leave.
A public hearing for the tribunal will begin on 3 Feb-ruary and continue on 4, 5, 6, and 9 February at Victory House, 30-34 Kingsway, Holborn.
The IWGB, Nuvia’s union, are asking for soli-darity at the hearing and letters to be sent to the University of London Vice-Chancellor.
• Model letter: bit.ly/Nuvia-letter

M25 workers strike
By Charlotte Zalens
Maintenance and incident support workers on the M25 will strike on Monday 16 February.
The employer, Connect Plus Services, is composed of three major contractors, Balfour Beatty, Atkins and Egis. The Unite union is concerned that workers are on contracts with different pay and conditions depending on the contractor.
Some workers have no sick pay for the first three days of illness, and wage discrepancies exist.
The average wage across the workforce at present is £25,000. In October 2014, Balfour Beatty announced that its new CEO Leo Quinn would be paid a basic wage of £800,000, with pension contributions and bonuses on top of that, meaning that he earns at least 32 times more than the average CPS worker.
Unite is demanding a £30,000 basic wage, day one sick pay, and full recogni-tion of the union by the em-ployer.
Unite has announced it will take one 24 hour strike per week, with a work to rule in between.

National Gallery strike
By Peggy Carter
PCS union members at the National Gallery began a five-day strike on Tues-day 3 February.
Gallery bosses last year announced plans to out-source almost all staff, in-cluding visitor support staff. In what appears to be a trial run of this plan, private se-curity firm CIS have been given one whole wing of the museum to run until the end of this year, without any competitive tender or consultation.
Union members argue that the privatisation of after lying on live radio that Alex had been “drinking at work”. Union activists say the issue at the heart of the dispute is the company’s abuse of procedure: if LUL gets away with sacking Alex on the basis of an obvious dis-regard for their own agreed procedures, other workers could also face unjust sacking.
The ballot closes on 10 February.

• Sign the petition against the privatisation: bit.ly/Gallery-petition
London bus drivers strike for fair pay

By Gemma Short

London bus drivers will strike again for 24 hours on Thursday 5 February in their dispute to level-up pay between bus companies.

Two further 24 hour strikes have been announced for Friday 13 February and Monday 16 February.

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.

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.

Last year the capital’s bus operators made a combined profit of £171.1 million, with directors’ pay totalling at least £7.24 million a year. Competition for contracts between private companies is creating a race to the bottom for bus drivers’ pay and conditions, whilst creaming off profits from a public service for company bosses.

On the first strike day on Tuesday 13 January picket lines on bus garages were big and lively. At many garages no or very few buses moved. However, as strikes continue, management will try harder to find ways to move buses. Pickets should find ways to prevent buses being moved.

On 13 January a survey of members of the public showed that over two thirds supported the campaign to end pay disparity.

Public political campaigning should be combined with industrial action to force bus companies and TfL to the negotiating table.

- Visit a picket line near you: bit.ly/bus-depots

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