Racist exit campaign begins

NO UK WITHDRAWAL FROM EUROPE!

Working-class solidarity across Europe
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 capitalist class, 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 picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers’ movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have a workers’ movement that fights all forms of oppression.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — and join us!

Contact us:
- 020 7394 8923
- solidarity@workersliberty.org

The editor (Cathy Nugent), 20 e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

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NEWS

464 shot by US cops this year

By Gemma Short

36 year old African American man Kevin Alien was shot dead by police in Lyndhurst, New Jersey on Friday 29 May.

Kevin was shot in a public library after apparently resisting arrest for violating his probation and pulling out a knife. Police have released a report claiming that officers had “no choice” but to shoot Kevin after “pepper spray and officers’ batons had failed to subdue him”. But nobody is likely to lie still and calm after being pepper sprayed.

The idea that the police, with all the force at their disposal, could not “subdue” a man in a small library room, housed in the same building as the police station, is absurd. Yet we hear the same story as with so many other murders of black people at the hands of the police — they had a weapon, they ran away, they resisted arrest. So we shot them.

According to a Guardian investigation 464 people have been killed by police in America so far this year.

102 of those were unarmed. 31.9% were black and 25.4% were Hispanic/Latino.

The report also highlights several more recent killings. With Nehemiah Fischer, a 35-year-old pastor from Tulsa, Oklahoma, and William Chapman, a 18-year-old man from Virginia being the most recent.

William was shot dead by Stephen Rankin, a white police officer who had been suspending from street patrols for three years after fatally shooting another unarmed man, and had been disciplined for posting violent remarks and Nazi images online.

So many of the 464 deaths or have permission to be there, refusing to leave”. The video shows an officer chasing young people, loosing his torch, which is then returned by some other attenders at the party before the first officer shouts “on the ground! I told you to stay! Get your asses on the ground. I told you to stay!” at those returning his torch.

A Texas police officer has been suspended after a video emerged online showing him breaking up a pool party aggressively and drawing his gun.

Officers were called to the party after reports of a fight. They claim the incident involved “multiple juveniles at the location, who do not live in the area have permission to be there, refusing to leave”. The video shows an officer chasing young people, loosing his torch, which is then returned by some other attenders at the party before the first officer shouts “on the ground! I told you to stay! Get your asses on the ground. I told you to stay!” at those returning his torch.

Ukraine: LGBT activists march

By Dale Street

300 LGBT activists and their supporters took part in a March for Equality in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev on Saturday 6 June despite threats by the "Right Sector" organisation to drive them off the streets.

It was the fourth attempt in successive years to stage such a demonstration. The 2012 March for Equality was abandoned when 3,000 protestors turned up to prevent it from going ahead. (Ukraine was one of the first post-Soviet countries to decriminalise homosexuality, in 1991. But popular anti-LGBT prejudices remain widespread.)

In 2013 over a hundred LGBT activists defied a police ban, for any LGBT orga...
Back Corbyn for Labour Leader!

On Tuesday 9 June the week-long nomination period in the election for the next leader of the Labour Party opens.

After a month of pre-election campaign—in which four candidates are declaring and all promising to make Labour a pale shadow of the Tory Party, Jeremy Corbyn has said he will try to get the required 35 nominations from Labour MPs.

Corbyn is the left candidate who needs and deserves to get on the ballot paper. While Solidarity has political differences with Corbyn on many international issues (where he is close to the Morning Star, CPB), he has always been solid on class struggle issues.

Activists in the labour movement are campaigning now to press MPs to nominate Corbyn so there can be a proper debate about the direction of the Labour Party, the trade unions and the broader opposition to the Tories. We print below an extract from an article by Corbyn.

The Labour Party was founded by the trade unions and later developed into a federal structure of local constituency parties, trades and Labour councils, and socialist societies. For instance, they stuck by their programme that is absolutely central to their programme. For instance, they stuck by their programme that is absolutely central to their programme. For instance, they stuck by their programme that is absolutely central to their programme. For instance, they stuck by their programme that is absolutely central to their programme.

In the new parliament the Tories have launched themselves with a flourish, attacking in the Queen’s speech trade unions’ rights, the supply of council housing and reducing the benefit cap even further which will have a devastating effect on high rent costs in inner city areas.

The idea that anyone renting in London can afford to pay more than they already do is unhittable.

This parliament will also be expected to vote on the replacement of the Trident nuclear missile system in 2016 thus committing £100bn of public money on our very own WMD. The government’s austerity march and demonstration on June 20 is expected to be huge. Many on that march will not necessarily have voted Labour in the election, but certainly would not have wished to see the Tories in action, nor a continuation of the economic strategy of the last five years.

Much is made in the analysis of the election of “aspiration” and this is usually defined by the armchair commentators as being an individual rather than a collective phenomenon.

Maybe it’s time that we dedicated ourselves much more to ending the gross inequality in Britain, the homeless and housing crisis, and the need for a million people to use foodbanks just to survive. We should never be ashamed or afraid to stand up for the poorest and most marginalised. That, after all, is what brought socialists and trade unionists together.

Let us dispense with inappropriate words like “handouts” in this debate. Welfare is a right that is about each and everyone one of us being housed, educated and kept in good health — the hallmarks of a civilised society.

This article previously appeared in the Morning Star • Join the campaign: JeremyforLabour.com

Turkey: defeat for Erdoğan

By Turkish socialist Cagatay Cengiz

The parliamentary election in Turkey on 7 June was a victory for the Peoples’ Democracy Party (HDP) that passed the 10% election threshold which was imposed after the 1980 coup.

According to preliminary results, the party more than doubled its votes from 2.8 million (6.5%) in the 2011 elections to slightly more than 6 million (13%) in the 2015 elections. The AKP’s votes decreased from nearly 50% in 2011 to 40.9% in 2015, even though the party still came first. No party has the mandate to form the government alone.

Several factors played a role in this victory. First, the HDP leadership prepared a party programme that is attractive to all masses. The party encompasses a broad mass of Kurds, feminists, LGBT people, Alevis, and all the oppressed.

More importantly, they showed that they are loyal to their programme. For instance, they stuck by their support for the abolishment of the state-run Presidency of Religious Affairs, which imposes Sunni Islam.

The AKP has seen its share of the country’s power undermined by the HDP. The strategy of the last five years has failed to make Labour a pale shadow of the Tory Party.

Lewisham academies victory stings Morgan

By Charlotte Zalens

Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, has vowed to “sweep away bureaucratic and legal loopholes” created by those put ideological objections above the best interests of children in order to force through the rapid academisation of local authority schools.

In words, Morgan wants to clear away even the limited say that parents, teachers, students and the local community have in the conversion of schools to academies. Morgan, clearly stung by the recent victory against the academisation of three schools in Lewisham, wants to ensure that trade union and community campaigns against academies do not best her again.

Morgan made the announcement as part of the Education and Adoption bill on Wednesday 3 June. The bill places a new “duty” on councils and governing bodies to “actively assist” the academisation process — seemingly this means parent, teacher or other opposing governors will be prevented from campaigning to prevent academisation.

Up to a 1,000 schools deemed as “failing” may be targeted in the coming months for rapid academisation conversion. Yet despite Morgan’s claims to have students’ interests at heart, there is no evidence becoming an academy is beneficial for students — even within the narrow hoop-jumping exams system the government uses to measure students’ success. The academy commission, chaired by Tory Graham Stuart, found no evidence of improved educational success from academy conversion. In its “review of academies and free schools” the committee concluded that “academisation is not always successful nor is it the only proven alternative for a ‘stuggling school’” and that “the government should stop exaggerating the success of academies”.

Analysis by the Local Schools Network showed that in last year’s GCSE figures, the results of sponsored academies fell more than the results of non-academies. 8% of primary sponsored academies and 14% of secondaries are currently rated “inadequate” — yet Morgan has nothing to say about students in these schools.

The victory in Lewisham has diminished, in the immediate future, the chances that other Lewisham schools will go for academy status and improved the chances of maintaining Sedghehill (another school in the borough currently under a Interim Executive Body and threatened with academisation) under LEA control. However, given the change in the law there is a significant possibility that Leathersellers will come back and have another go.

The NUT have stated that unless or until the Governors withdraw their academy plans altogether, then the dispute continues. Given the recent success, students, parents and teachers will be ready to return to fight if necessary.
Behind the rise of IS

From a discussion article by Dashty Jamal, Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan

Behind the rise of IS... are the following things:
1. The failure of US strategy in the Middle East.
   The fall of the Soviet bloc opened the way for the USA to reorganise the one-pole world under its “New World Order”.
   It used two Gulf wars against Saddam as a starting point for its strategy in Iraq and the Middle East.
   Its aim was to establish a wider Middle East under its new order for labour and capital order, something that can be compatible with the foreign policy of the USA and can tie European countries, Russia and China into it...
2. The change of balance between state powers in the east (Turkey and Iran).
   The situation of Iraq paved the way for the interference of Turkey and Iran in Iraq. It also gave a chance to these two countries to try to fill in for the state in Iraq, it was necessary for the security of the Middle East.
   Iran widened the scope of its hegemony in Iraq by using Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, Bashar Al-Assad in Syria and the Shiite groups in Iraq.
3. The war in Syria.
   This war was first meant to suppress revolution. But the USA, NATO and the Western states couldn’t repeat the same scenario of Libya in the Middle East through a military solution because Syria is a pro-Russian country. So the Syrian society became the victim in resolving the conflict between the imperialist blocs, the USA and its Western allies on one side and Russia and China on the other.
4. The role of Kurdish nationalist parties.
   The Kurdish nationalist parties... always tried to widen the areas under their power. They extract the so-called “disputed areas” and Kirkuk, gaining more revenues from the oil industry and being independent in economy...
   When ISIS came to Iraq, the Kurdish nationalist parties proclaimed that they would not fight ISIS and just defend Kurdistan. However, they began controlling other areas with oil and filling the arm and arming the Iraqi army. Then ISIS started to attack Kurdish cities, but the Kurdish nationalist parties fled the areas saying that they do not have enough arms to fight ISIS. Their withdrawal caused the displacement of people in Shingal and other places around Mosul.
   These parties are now in a pseudo-war as a means to get support from the USA and Europe.
   They also use it as a tool against Abadi’s government to accept the terms of “Kurds”. Thus they preserved ISIS in the areas where they held territory with them.
5. The failure of the post-colonial powers.
   These states have embedded political Islam in the laws and social relations of people.
   Political Islam is an inseparable part of the power in this region. It is used in every social aspect, in education, law-making, social culture and so on.
   Some points worth fighting for
1. Mass resistance against ISIS, follow the example of Kobane.
2. Establishing a secular and progressive government to guarantee the influence of the mass of people.
3. Changing the laws, all over the world, in favour of freedom and prosperity for all the humanity (wherever they are)
4. The universal support for freedom, secularism and mass resistance in the Middle East.
5. Immediately help all who have been displaced disregard from their religion or race.
6. To ask France and European countries to grant asylum or the alleged death of social democracy, convinces me that the foundations of our approach are no longer applicable.
   We think these periods have much in common with our own, including in many of the ways John emphasises (the proliferation of precarious forms of work involving workers marginalised or ignored by the old labour movement). We do not see our politics as what some in the history of Marxism have called an “invariant doctrine”. No perspective or theory should be sacred or beyond rejection or change if it no longer measures up to reality. In a sense we should be in a permanent state of “radical rethink”, constantly testing our ideas against real-world class struggle, refining and reshaping them.
   But nothing John says about our allegedly “post-industrial” world, the proliferation of zero-hours contracts, or the alleged death of social democracy, convinces me that the foundations of our approach are no longer applicable.
Daniel Randall, London
No withdrawal from EU

As the second reading of the EU referendum bill went through parliament on 9 June, the right-wing campaign to exit Europe began in earnest. Unfortunately it is likely to be mirrored on the left.

More than 50 Tory MPs have formed “Conservatives for Britain”, ostensibly to support Cameron’s push for large changes to the UK’s relationship to the EU, in current negotiations with Brussels. It is clearly posed to lead the campaign for Britain to leave the EU, whatever reforms are achieved as these are unlikely to satisfy the Tories Eurosceptics. The campaign has apparently met twice since the election and already has an impressive media profile.

Meanwhile Cameron has not gone public on whether he will allow such MPs to campaign for an exit in the referendum. Boris Johnson, newly returned to parliament, is pushing for Tory MPs to be allowed to campaign for an exit. And UKIP’s Nigel Farage says he wants to lead the “ground game” of the no campaign.

At the same time the reactionary tenor of government policy takes further shape. Home Secretary Theresa May and Justice Secretary Michael Gove are pushing for a break with the European Court of Human Rights. Theresa May insists she will not agree to Britain being part of a resettlement deal for migrants rescued from the Mediterranean.

In the Europe talks Cameron is pushing for a deal that allows the government to further restrict migrants access to welfare. Cameron wants a four-year moratorium on migrants getting in work or out of work benefits. He might just win that in Europe. Any deal will allow Britain to impose at least some further restrictions on migration and migrants rights in the UK.

But despite the nationalist window-dressing, Cameron is also fighting on behalf of the British capitalist class, for their right to ignore European laws and regulations on workers’ rights, laws that interfere with their profits. Much of the EU legislation the political right in Britain would like to see abolished.

The Socialist Party goes as far as to proclaim that “The alleged benefits of the ‘free movement of labour’ are in reality a device for the bosses to exploit a vast pool of cheap labour, which can then be used to cut overall wage levels and living standards.”

Our response to bosses exploitation of workers is not to advocate that workers are kept in their respective countries to be exploited by their own bosses. It is to do what construction workers on Teesside are currently doing and demand that bosses “pay the rate” for migrant workers.

We advocate the left forms a united campaign with the following aims:

• To defend migrants’ rights and oppose racism
• To vote against British withdrawal from the EU
• To fight for a workers’ Europe, based on working class solidarity

We advocate that the left unite to fight for these aims and campaign for these ideas inside the workers’ movement, and welcome the fact that some on the left have already started discussing a campaign for workers’ Europe. The labour movement must learn the lesson from the Scottish referendum and not join a cross-class alliance with pro-EU Tories and others. Such a bloc discredited the labour movement during the Scottish campaign.

For working-class solidarity across Europe!

And neither group clearly differentiates itself from the right wing. Neither advances the slogan “open the borders!” in their editorials on the issue.

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The abolition of serfdom also allowed the emerging bourgeoisie to exploit a vast pool of cheap labour, Marxist socialists do not fight capitalism by advocating historical regression; we fight for the socialisation and democratisation of the economy, for labour to take control!

In the referendum, where there will be a choice between in or out of the EU, Workers’ Liberty will vote to keep the UK in the EU. We will do so for reasons similar to those that motivated our call to Scottish workers to vote against independence. In general, we are in favour of fewer and weaker borders and barriers between peoples.

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For working-class solidarity across Europe!

Help us raise £15,000

In the office this week we have been busy organising our summer school, Ideas for Freedom, taking place on the 2-5 July.

This has involved designing leaflets, posters and stickers, ringing people who have attended our events before or who we know might be interested, confirming speakers and writing the agenda.

This year’s event has the theme “Imagining the Future”, and we will be discussing visions of and ideas about a post-capitalist, egalitarian, liberated future — and how to fight for it.

In the post-election despair it could be easy for even seasoned activists to lose sight of what we are fighting for. Ideas for Freedom is an important way not only of politically reviving ourselves but of convincing others to join the fight.

Putting on such an event as Ideas for Freedom requires significant amounts of money. We must pay for rooms, printing, and a creche.

One immediate way you can help us put on an event that is as good as, and better than, last year’s is to buy your ticket if you haven’t already. Just as importantly, you can encourage friends and comrades to come and sell them tickets.

In addition please consider:

• Getting a subscription to our weekly newspaper, Solidarity — workersliberty.org/subscribe
• Taking out a monthly standing order.
• Making a one-off donation.
• Organising a fundraising event in your local area.
• Committing to do a sponsored activity and asking others to sponsor you.
• Buying some of our books, posters, autocollants or pamphlets.

For information on standing orders or how to donate visit workersliberty.org/donate.

Thanks this week to Boyd, Mike, Kieran and Bob. So far we have raised £4610.
On a recent trip to Athens, Solidarity visited a “solidarity health clinic” run by volunteers to provide healthcare for those unable to access it. We spoke to Constantine Kokkos who volunteers at the clinic in Omonia, central Athens.

Solidarity for All, a fund set up five years ago using the money from Syriza MPs, helped set up clinics like this one. This clinic has been working for three years, providing primary care to everyone in need.

Our clinic is a communal one with everybody providing services for free. The idea of solidarity is our inspiration. We have a staff of about 80. There is a group of doctors, generalists like myself, but also dentists, pharmacists and so on.

About 90% of what we have is donations from foreign colleagues and like-minded people — from France, Austria, Germany. We have an entire room fitted with gynaecology equipment donated by like-minded people in Germany. We also get donations to pay the rent on the apartments we have the clinics in. For medicines we rely on donations from people who have a prescription but don’t need them any more, or who have relatives who have died and left over medicines. We buy a small amount of what we need that we can’t gather from donations — for example dental fillings.

This clinic is open from 11am to 6pm, we get 30–40 patients a day. Physicians, dentists, and pharmacists come once, twice or three times a week. There is no differentiation, no discrimination between Greeks and foreigners. We also don’t mind whether or not a foreigner has papers. If they are illegal, that is no crime as far as we are concerned. We just want a name and a mobile number.

The composition of our patients is half Greeks, half foreigners. There is an ever-increasing number of both. The Greeks are usually working in the black market, without social security and medical cover, in which case they cannot afford to buy medicines, have tests, and so on. For foreigners, the situation is much more simple, and tragic. They are people who either work in the black market, or they do not have papers of any kind, for anything.

We are dealing with people who have been suffering for a long period of time, often in the late stages of an illness. So when they come here, they are already deteriorated. This is not only the case with dental complaints, but also with cancer, chronic illnesses, blood diseases, and so on. We ask them, why didn’t you get this dealt with sooner? They say, “I couldn’t, I had no money, I couldn’t afford treatment, but now the pain is unbearable, so now I have decided to come”.

If you have two or three people in a family with no job, this is serious. People come with children who have not had the vitamins they need for a long time. We get children who have not been vaccinated. This is a time-bomb for society. Before the crisis, the state vaccinated all children. But after the crisis, the state has decided that everyone, Greek or foreigner, will have free access to all areas of the health system.

The government has decided that everyone, Greek or foreigner, will have free access to all areas of the health system. But this must take reality into account. You may have to wait for 3–5 days to get an appointment, your complaint then becomes severe, so you have to go to the emergency department. But emergency departments are full. So how will the existing infrastructure, which is terribly under-staffed, cope with the influx of people since the lifting of the €5 fee? You can’t have 100 X-rays a day — at best you could do 20.

Because of all the shuffling and reshuffling of the health system, there are certain parts of it which do not exist. The GP system is over-loaded, all sorts of specialist clinics have disappeared. Therefore people resort to going straight to the hospitals. So the hospitals are over-subscribed.

That’s why there was an appeal by the government to the solidarity clinics, to say, please don’t close down, we need your supplementary services.

What is encouraging is that people have now heard about us, and they bring us plastic bags full of medicines. But we always have shortages. Some drugs get used up very fast. In particular, drugs for diabetics, which have to be taken several times a day, every day.

The biggest problem we have, in spite of our Mediterranean reputation, is stress. Many stress-related illnesses at first appear to be skin conditions, infections, eczema and so on. But then we find that they are actually caused by people scratching themselves as a nervous habit.

The decision by the previous government was to cut many mental health wards, keeping as in-patients only the most severe cases. But if you stroll in the city, you will see many people who have been pushed out of the mental health in-patient units to reduce numbers. Local and regional authorities have closed these organisations.

People who have lost their jobs and homes are asking for psychological support — in most cases, talking therapy. In some cases we arrange their referral to the psychiatric units.

The wholesale restructuring of economic life is a major cause of stress. The more jobless people who exist, the more people have the feeling that they have failed.

We have been proud of the welfare state, public services and so on. But in the last few decades all these things have been demolished. To be sure there were holes in the previous system. But now in the street there are people who just have nothing. Nothing is of any use if the economic situation does not change. The Minister of X, Y or Z must find the money. Without extraordinary measures, it will be hard to cover all the deficits of the health system.

It is very hopeful and very promising that the government has made this commitment to say, “we are not going to leave anyone behind, even foreigners”.

I think the government are trying hard to fulfil their promises. For me, there is a problem that because of this delay in finding a solution in the overall situation, there is a delay at the lower levels, including health. For example, if the Troika, “institutions”, whatever they are called, block funding, then you can say that you will give cover to everyone but you have a problem of achieving it. How will it work? There is a problem if you promise to abide by the commitments that you give to these institutions.

If the institutions call for you to make a payment, then you should say, OK, first I will pay the salaries and the pensions. I think that tax evasion has created a deficit. This has created a social deficit. But the whole system allowed tax evasion to happen.

I was reading the words of an old economics professor, I think his name is Schneider. He said, there are at least €100 billion in assets, in offshore companies, bank accounts and so on. And this is untaxed. The rich say, the money will leave the country. But it has already left the country. You’ll hear threats of the rich Greeks withdrawing their money. But lots of that money is not out of the country, it is just under their mattresses.

The government must say that their first priority is society. It is impossible for us to go on with austerity. My pay was decreased by 33%; last month. If you get a pension or a salary, let’s say, €1,000, how much less can you do with?

 Tighten your belt — but how far can it be tightened? We are skeletons.

* www.solidarity4all.gr

STRESS

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Greece: an economic crisis that must be answered

By Theodora Polenta

As we go to press the Greek government and its EU lenders are still crossing swords over the terms on which Greece will get further bailout funds from its IMF-EU lenders.

The details of the reform wanted by the lenders and what the Greek government is saying it will concede are more or less clear. Whatever version of reform is agreed, the character of previous memorandums between Greece and its lenders, with strict commitments to deficit reduction etc., will remain intact.

The EU lenders want the following: higher government budget surpluses; cuts in public spending; water-down or withdrawal of the commitment to reinstate sacked public sector workers; dramatic restrictions on collective labour agreements; privatisation of public organisations; the regressive property tax (ENFIA) to stay; increases in indirect taxation even on water, electricity and food; pension cuts; massive debt repayments (since 25 January €7.5 billion have been paid to the creditors without the Greek government receiving a penny from the pending bailout instalments); abandonment of the €12,000 taxation threshold; abandonment/freezing of the increase of the minimum wage.

While both sides have verbally upped the ante at each stage of the negotiations, especially after Tsipras took a direct role in them, each time there has been another decision to extend the Syriza government and a further back tracking on the commitments made in the Thessaloniki declaration. Each
opposed

BUDGET SURPLUS

What do the lenders want?

Lenders want a primary government budget surplus equivalent to 1% of GDP in 2015, 2% of GDP in 2016, 3% of GDP in 2017 and 3.5% of GDP in 2018. Although lower than the previous memorandum targets these are higher than those proposed by Athens (0.6% of GDP this year, 1.5% of GDP in 2016). Further cuts of €3 billion are required for this year.

Lenders want two rates of indirect taxes — of 11% and 23%. 11% will cover drugs, food and hotels, while 23% all other products including the tariffs on the utilities (electricity, telephone-water). The government will be asked to choose which categories of food will fall under the 23%. The “partners” have demanded changes in VAT which would increase revenues by €1.8 billion.

The lenders want the government to maintain a zero deficit on the pension pot and the abolition of EKAS (a social security supplement for poorer pensioners). They also want pension spending to be cut by 0.5% of GDP (up from 0.25% of GDP). A further reduction of 1% of GDP (€1.8 billion) would be made in 2016.

The lenders want to stop an increase in the minimum wage back to the pre-memorandum levels as promised by Syriza. The lenders want the privatisation of ADMIE (Independent Operator of Transmission of Electrical Energy), and the privatisation of 14 regional airports and the ports.

Finally it appears as if the lenders will not tolerate any proposal on the restructuring or reduction of the debt. The intentions of the “institutions” are clear: the annulment of the popular electoral mandate and Greece’s sovereignty, and to punish the Greek people who chose a government of the left (not a “proper” political party in the view of Jean-Claude Junker, President of the European Commission). They want to erase the Greek rebellion, a spark that could light a fire against austerity policies around Europe (especially Podemos).

The Greek working class movement could deal with the “institutions” in the way it has been doing for the last five years — with strikes etc. But the “complication” is the stance of the Syriza government.

A leaked government proposal is not at all painless for the Greek working class people and the popular strata. Proposals include VAT increases, solidarity taxes (on luxury goods). There are also detailed plans for privatisations, from regional airports to ports, with projected revenues, not only for this year but for years to come. Included are details on increasing the retirement age, detailed measures on the “liberalisation” of the market in the transport sector, pharmacies etc.

The measures demanded by the lenders are far more vicious than the working class but the government proposals will not comfort Syriza’s supporters. The final agreement, at best, will be located somewhere between the two texts. The political shift is staggering — the popular mandate was clear and uncompromising: abolition of memoranda and all its relevant laws.

The Greek government’s decision not to pay the €298 million installment due to the IMF on Friday 5 June appeared to be a threat or an act of “rupture” with the lenders and an escalation of the conflict. They said they would consolidate these installments into one and repay this on 19 June with the hope that a new agreement would have been reached and Greece’s lack of cash would have been resolved.

The truth is this move was not a unilateral action by the government, made without informing and consulting the lenders; despite statements by the IMF’s head Christine Lagarde that this had been talked about. The ECB President Mario Draghi had already signalled that the ECB has no problem with such “initiative”. It was an administrative–technical act that has been done in the past.

Draghi’s assurance was deliberate, designed to avoid new turmoil in the international markets — timed especially for the meeting of the G7 in Elmau Vavarias and to avoid misunderstanding about whether Greece’s “decision” not to repay the first tranche to the IMF was a rupture with the creditors and signalled defaulting on servicing the debt.

It is blatantly obvious that the “partners” and lenders do not even want an honourable compromise and seek to lead us into complete submission. But such an agreement should not even be a basis for discussion.

We all remember (the anything but “maximalist”) Thessaloniki declarations and the 100 day implementation program, which would be carried out regardless of the progress of the negotiations. We have not yet forgotten the policy statements, let alone the decisions of the founding congress of Syriza.

The “irrational” demands of the institutions, are a great opportunity for the Greek government not to “step back” from its electoral commitments. The Syriza government needs to speak the language of truth to prepare the Greek working class and popular strata for default and conflict with the lenders who are requesting the renewal of the popular mandate through the elections and mobilisations; on a road that leads out of the memorandum of austerity, unemployment, and servitude.

Whether or not a rotten “compromise” can be reached between the Greek government and the international loan sharks, it is clear that the “final or bridge” agreement cannot be a viable solution from the perspective of the working class. It cannot take Greece out from the vicious cycle of continuous borrowing to pay the debt or the recession and sustained crisis that has destroyed small property and had condemned workers, youth and pensioners to poverty and destitution.

The Syriza government should not accept a new, third memorandum straightjacket.

An agreement on current terms is not politically manageable from a government that is supported by Syriza. In both of the scenarios — subjugation to the lenders’ ultimatum or Syriza’s austerity-lite version — the government will very soon be confronted by the rank-and-file of Syriza, its electoral base and supporters as well as the revolutionary left in and outside Syriza, the unionised workers, the unemployed, the battered middle class, the movements against privatisation.

A possible agreement cannot be approved by the Syriza party, especially under current internal dynamics, with the Left Platform inside Syriza gaining momentum.

The Syriza leadership’s “threat” of “party discipline” if its MP’s refuse to vote for the government’s negotiation document, is aimed directly at the Left Platform, testing its “loyalty”. The possibility of an agreement, which would seal “a strategic and tactical defeat” for the government should not cow the left and lead it to act in a way which seeks postponement and confrontation with the bourgeois and imperialist powers.

The Greek ruling class and their political representatives are now looking to the formation of a “national salvation” government, formed to implement a new memorandum agreement, a government which excludes Syriza’s Left Platform. But a call for new elections does not serve ruling class interests given the state of the two main parties, PASOK and New Democracy. There is no mainstream political alternative for the ruling class.

The choice of defaulting on repayment installments while demanding an abolition of most of the debt, linked with a pro-working class redistribution policy, is urgently required. This can turn the possibility of a moratorium default and the threat of GREXIT from being a bogeyman for the majority in Greece, into a weapon against the blackmail of the creditors; it can become an alternative perspective.

Despite the mistakes and failures of the Syriza government, the road for developing the left alternative remains open. Syriza should not be afraid of political developments but should speed up and be the initiator of political developments. The negotiations and the payments of installments should stop immediately, the government should make no concessions to the “institutions” and speak clearly to the people on the following basis.

Let the country to elections with more “maximalist expectations”:

Fight once more for a transitional “government of the Left”. It is time to concretise, via the bitter experience Syriza’s forgotten slogan of “No sacrifice for the Euro”. Syriza must declare inside and outside the country that the left will not be subordinated to neoliberal dogmas, does not implement austerity policies or sign memorandum.

Syriza is fighting for the direct redistribution of wealth and power in favour of the workers, the unemployed, the popular strata and all marginalised sections of society.

Syriza is prepared to collide and confront through rupture the Greek ruling class and its institutions, while claiming its independence from all sorts of imperialist impositions, either inside or outside the Eurozone.

This message can activate and embolden the only “revolutionary subject” and agent of change: the working class and the social movements in Greece and throughout Europe. It can shape the conditions for the left throughout Europe.

Only a revolutionary workers’ government can see through such a course of action, with a programme of transitional demands, nationalisation of the banking system and large enterprises of strategic importance, without compensation and under workers’ control and management.

Simultaneously we need a battle for a pan-European working-class mobilisation to overthrow all governments, to fight for workers’ government and a unification of Europe on new socialist basis.
Two visions of Podemos

By Stuart Jordan

“I don’t want to be a “hinge”. I want to win. And in a context of complete ideological defeat in which they have insulted and criminalised us, where they control all of the media, to win, the left needs to stop being a religion and become a tool in the hands of the people. It needs to become the people … I know that this pisses off people on the left.” Pablo Iglesias, General Secretary of Podemos

Last month broad grassroots political platforms supported by Spain’s left anti-austerity party, Podemos, won municipal election in Barcelona (Guanyem Barcelona) and came close to winning in Madrid (Ahora Madrid). The right-wing governing Peoples’ Party shrank to 27% of the vote. The possibility of Podemos and PSOE being in coalition at a local or national level in the future is the prediction by many in the media. They’ve come a long way in just over a year.

Podemos was founded in January 2014 by a group of left-wing academics in the University of Madrid, including TV pundit Pablo Iglesias, and the Spanish section of the Fourth International, Izquierda Anticapitalista (IA). The 30 or so people at the founding conference committed to finding 50,000 supporters as a precondition to standing a slate in the national elections. Their website collapsed under the weight of people attempting to sign up and they achieved their target within 24 hours.

Podemos won five seats in the European parliament, taking 8% of the votes (1.25 million). By November 2014 they boasted over 200,000 members and had topped an El Pais opinion poll, beating both the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and old social-democratic Socialist Workers Party (PSOE). Podemos now has 350,000 members.

Podemos found its base in among people involved in the 15-M Indignados movement, the protest movement that occupied squares in towns across Spain in 2011, part of the global anti-austerity “squares movement” that spread from New York to Cairo. In Spain it fed into a diverse array of social struggles including the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca, which organises civil disobedience against evictions and for housing rights, has stopped over 1000 evictions; the White Tide of healthworkers has occupied hospitals and stopped health privatisations and demonstrations of over a million against unemployment.

Unlike Syriza in Greece which grew from a left unity project, Podemos rejects much of the traditional left and their approaches. They refer to both the traditional parties of the left and the unions with the derogatory label “las siglas” (literally “the abbreviations”). In fact, Podemos do not accept the traditional distinction between the left and right of politics. Instead they argue (along with Italian right wing populist Beppe Grillo) the world is split “La Casta vs Pueblo”.

For Podemos, la Casta is not just the political elites and their hangers-on but also the economic elites that stand behind capitalist class rule. They argue that democracy has been gutted of all content and is a means for the 1% to rule over the 99%. Podemos offers a way out of this dilemma by being a “tool for citizen’s empowerment”, a conduit by which the mass movements on the street can compete for hegemony.

To this end, Podemos emphasises participatory democracy. On paper, its formal democracy is very impressive. Members are organised into over 1000 circles which have the power to submit policy to the national bodies, elect delegates, elect candidates to stand in elections etc. There are term limits and earnings caps on elected officials.

Over 7,000 people attended the inaugural National Assembly in October 2014 and 112,000 people voted online for various “ethical”, “political” and “organisational” policy documents. However, already there are two competing visions of Podemos — one view expounded by the leadership faction around Pablo Iglesias and the other by Marxists and other radicals around the now dissolved IA.

At the October conference the organisational proposals of Trotskyist Teresa Rodriguez and her fellow MEP Pablo Echenique which sought to extend democratic accountability within Podemos were voted down by a large majority and Iglesias’ document won the day. This has allowed Iglesias to consolidate his power as national secretary. Rival tendencies have been excluded from the leadership and there has been some back-pedalling on the more radical policies passed at the conference. Iglesias justifies this by saying that the party needs to “grow up” and show itself capable of “governmental responsibility”.

The leadership faction around Iglesias concentrate their efforts on winning elections and perfecting their media message. They argue that the post-Franco regime left much of the old fascist state intact. They campaign for a Constituent Assembly that will fully democratisie society and set in train a new anti-neo-liberal social order. They see mobilisation and agitation as secondary to furthering their electoral success.

The more radical wing sees the process of winning elections and opposition positions within the state as a complementary part of building struggles in the workplaces and streets. It is more explicitly anti-capitalist.

The economic position of the party has been moderated but they still argue for a massive expansion of state funded investment and redistribution of wealth. Other policies include 35 hour working week with no loss of pay, increased numbers of public sector employees from one in ten to one in four of the workforce, free nurseries, creation of publicly owned and controlled banks, tax on financial speculation, a constitutional right to housing. However, more radical policies have been dropped, specifically a proposal for a citizens’ audit into Spain’s debt with a view to refusing to repay “illegitimate debt”.

Yet, as the Greek situation reveals, the leaders of capitalist Europe cannot tolerate any dissent from neoliberal norms. The space for social reform has almost disappeared and the leadership of Syriza can only delay the moment where they have to choose between ultimate betrayal or a bold application of their policy.

But the fact that this problem is posed, and there is a real struggle over the future of Syriza, Greece and ultimately all of our futures is to be welcomed. The emergence of Podemos should be similarly welcomed.
US docks: automation versus union power

By Barry Docherty

Members of the American International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) have just agreed a five-year deal with the employers federation, the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA). The deal covers 20,000 dockworkers at 29 US west coast ports.

The nine-month-long war of attrition by the PMA which preceded the deal was largely waged as an employers’ offensive against US dockers stretching back to the early 1960s. Before then, working conditions on the docks had been dictated by the ILWU’s victory in the 1934 US west coast dockers’ strike.

The 1934 strike saw the ILWU effectively win control over hiring and firing. Work was allocated by the ILWU-run central dispatch halls. ILWU members could be sacked only if a union grievance committee (on which employers were not represented) agreed.

The strike victory also saw the ILWU establish on-the-job controls, including overall staffing levels, gang sizes for all individual cargoes, and maximum weights for cargoes being loaded into or unloaded from a hold.

But from the mid-1960s onwards ports in the US, and around the world, began to be transformed by containerisation. By 1975 more than two thirds of all dry goods shipped through US ports were containerised. Under the leadership of veteran Socialist Harry Bridges, the ILWU response to containerisation was to trade away jobs and union controls over the whole process in exchange for higher pay and bonuses for the remaining dockworkers.

In 1961 Bridges negotiated the first five-year Mechanisation and Modernisation Agreement (MMA) with the PMA. In exchange for one-off bonus payments of $7,900 (payable on retirement, provided the employee had 25 years service), Bridges surrendered all on-the-job controls.

Opposition to the deal among dockworkers was isolated and unorganised. Many dockers were unhappy with the deal, but still placed their trust in Bridges. The latter argued that it was better to sell away workplace controls now, while it was possible to get “a good price” for them, rather than surrender them for nothing in future years.

The first MMA was ratified by a two to one majority. The second one (1966) was ratified by a much narrower majority of seven to five. Again, Bridges had been able to persuade a majority that higher bonus payments (increased to $13,600 in exchange for allowing the PMA to select “steady men” (i.e. permanent employees) was a good deal.

RANK-AND-FILE

The third MMA (1971) provoked the longest dockers’ strike in US history, lasting a total of 134 days (interrupted by an injunction served under the US equivalent of the Tory anti-union legislation).

On returning at rank-and-file levels in the different ports, it was the first organised opposition to the ILWU bureaucracy in the union’s history. But it went down to defeat.

Outmanoeuvred by the bureaucracy — which did not even set up a strike fund, exempted military cargoes from strike action, and demoralised members by warning of the inevitability of modernisation — the dockers were driven back to work by economic hardship.

Still demoralised by the defeat of 1971, there was no strike action in opposition to the fourth MMA (1976). But three referendums of ILWU members had to be held before the ILWU leadership were able to set up the separate strike fund.

The employer’s offensive over containerisation was equally successful on the US east coast, where the dockers’ union is the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA). In those years the ILA was run by the Genovese crime family (i.e. the mafia): “When your port branch chair is found floating in the Hackensack River with two bullet holes in his head, you don’t ask too many questions. When the man who takes your branch threatens to settle disputes with a blowtorch to the crotch, you don’t go to the union office to voice your concerns.”

As one ILA activist recalled: “Every once in a while you’d find out somebody got assassinated. The only copy of the contract was kept in the union office, and you didn’t want to ask for a copy.

Another ILA activist who attended an ILWU congress after US anti-racketeering laws were used to undermine mafia control summed up the difference between the two unions: “You mean it’s possible to not get pistol-whipped when you go to the microphone at a meeting?”

In the early 2000s a further wave of technological change began to spread around the world’s ports: automation.

Automation involves the application of modern IT to port operations. As one port employer put it: “The way I see it, we’re not really in the transportation business anymore. We’re in the information business.”

Automation does away with crane-driver jobs (multiple cranes are run automatically by one individual in a control room) and operators in the receiving and dispatch halls. Work is now done around on automated cars or “chassis”, again controlled by one individual in a control room.

Automation also speeds up the loading and unloading of ships, allows a greater number of containers to be stacked in a smaller space (because they can be stacked higher) and has facilitated the outsourcing of a range of functions (such as chassis maintenance).

The potential benefits of automation for employers are obvious: job losses; increased productivity; lower costs; increased control over the labour process; outsourcing from the better-paid to the lower-paid, and weaker trade union organisation. All of which adds up to bigger profits. Pioneered in Asian and European ports, automation has spread only relatively recently to US west and east coast ports.

Despite the setbacks suffered by the ILWU and the ILA during the years of containerisation, both remain a formidable force which employers need to take on to achieve automation on their terms. But even before automation began to spread through US ports the ILWU had started to concede control over crucial areas to the employers.

Following a ten-day lockout the ILWU agreed to the PMA to set up contractual arrangements to introduce IT in the 2002 “master contract” (the national-level ILWU-PMA agreement covering a period of five or six years).

When the port of Longview automated in 2007 ILWU members lost out on every front. Almost a hundred jobs disappeared. A shortage of work enabled break-bulk (i.e. non-containerised cargoes) operators to cut pay by 36%. Less experienced, lower-paid and lower rates of pay hit the pension fund, leading trustees to cut pension accrual by 39%.

In 2011/12 the EGT (a multinational grain conglomerate) operated a unit at Longview port which opened a fully automated grain terminal which needed 40% fewer workers to operate it.

EGT recruited through a subcontractor that hired from a local branch of the Operating Engineers Union, expelled from the local Trades Council for previous acts of scabbing.

ILWU members responded by forming human barricades on railway tracks to stop grain trains, dumping 10,000 tons of grain on railway tracks to block trains, occupying the new terminal, defying court injunctions which banned picketing, staging solidarity strikes by ILWU members in other ports, and organising mass protests in alliance with the Occupy movement.

The police and the state hit back with physical attacks on protestors, 80-strong riot police escorts for grain trains, $300,000 worth of fines, and mass arrests.

The ILWU secured recognition rights in the new terminal. But to do so it made major concessions including console operation opened to non-union staff, lower staffing levels and a major ILU-hour per day.

Employers in other ports quickly pounced on the ILWU-EGT agreement as a new benchmark for working practices. The nine-month-long war of attrition by the Pacific North-West Grain Handling Association (PNGHA) demanded the same concessions from the ILWU in the ports where they operated.

After an 18-month lockout by the PNGHA — during which union leaders opposed rank-and-file efforts to repeat the militant which had characterised the Longview dispute — the ILWU settled for a deal indistinguishable from the EGT deal.

In place of a rank-and-file campaign of industrial action, the union leaders looked to appeals to the courts and a nationalising Foreign Agreements (PMA) bill. In the meantime, the scabs had carried on working.

While the PNGHA lockout was underway 600 ILWU clerical workers walked off the job at Los Angeles and Long Beach ports in protest at job losses and outsourcing (to low-pay, non-union workplaces). Within eight days ten container terminals had been shut down by their picket lines, which 10,000 workers had refused to cross.

But when the deal negotiated by ILWU officials was put to ballot two months later (February, 2013), it was rejected by all 16 bargaining units covering the clerical workers. The deal included provisions for job cuts — defended by ILWU officials as a necessary concession to prevent outsourcing!

“MASTER CONTRACT”

Against this background of repeated concessions the ILWU entered into negotiations with the PMA in May 2014 about a new five-year “master contract” to replace the ILWU’s lockout in June.

From the outset the PMA took a hardline in negotiations, backed up by periodically eliminating late shifts, night shifts and holiday and weekend working — effectively a partial lockout of 20,000 dockers — in an attempt to break the resistance of ILWU members by slashing their earnings.

The PMA blamed the ILWU for its own lockout tactic, claiming that the ILWU was operating an unofficial go-slow which meant that there was no space in ports to unload ships. The ILWU countered by releasing aerial photographs showing plenty of space.

The PMA also argued that the ILWU’s supposed go-slow should not be “rewarded” by allowing its members to work shifts which attracted higher rates of pay.

To strengthen its anti-ILWU campaign in the media, the PMA brought in the Burson-Marsteller PR company, whose previous clients include United Caribbe (India for responsible for the Bihar disaster), the American legionary militia, and Blackwater Security of Iraq War fame.

The media campaign focused on the image of the overpaid docker, spoiling off ordinary citizens who paid inflated prices for imported goods to cover the costs of dockers’ pay.

While the PMA went on the offensive in the workplace and in the media, as well as trying to provoke the government into issuing an eighty-day injunction banning the ILWU from all forms of industrial action, the ILWU failed to develop any kind of counter-strategy.

During nine months of negotiation (May 2014 to February 2015) the ILWU kept its members in the dark about the negotiations, allowed them no participation or consultation, and kept the community against the PMA’s co-ordinated offensive.

In a break with past practice, the “master contract” is not being voted on in union meetings but by postal ballot. The ILWU appears to have again made serious concessions.

For example, erw arbitration panels are to be created, consisting of one ILUU nominee, one PMA nominee, and a nominee from the American equivalent of ACAS — far removed from the control of hiring and firing which the ILWU once enjoyed.

The latest “master contract” bears the hallmarks of the ILWU’s tradition since the 1960s: negotiate pay and benefits for employers and let the militancy which had characterised the Longview dispute fade away.

What is needed instead is: exploiting the tremendous power which dockers can exercise because of their pivotal position in the economy; militant industrial action, organised and co-ordinated at rank-and-file level; mobilising support from local communities and other trade unions; and regular reports back from negotiators, subject to lay-member accountability.

And above all: recognising that making concessions today will lead to making even greater concessions tomorrow.
**Class struggle and Marxism in Russia**

Viktoria and Sergei, activists in the Workers’ Platform a Russian Marxist group based in Perm and Kaluga, talked to **Solidarity**.

**Solidarity:** What are the conditions like for activists?  
**Viktoria:** In Russia, in the economy, there has been a problem with neo-liberalism. There is a lack of work. There are thousands of closed factories, like Peugeot-Citroën, Volkswagen, Samson, and other transnational corporations. In Perm there are few transnational corporations, but there is Nestea. In some of these enterprises the workers are organised in independent trade unions. The trade unions and the political movement, Workers’ Platform work together.  

There are lots of pseudo-left organisations — the Communist Party is socialist parties — they have nothing to do with the workers’ movement. The strongest sectors of independent unions is probably car production: Ford, VW, Citroën. And also food factories, like Nestea in Omsk and Innmarco, an international ice cream manufacturer.

**S: How are economic conditions?**  
**V:** The percentage of our GNP spent on education, health and science was small in the 1990s and the start of this century, but now it is increasing.  

In Moscow, they are trying to close a lot of hospitals, and 8,000 medical staff are to lose their jobs. 2,000 people attended a meeting about this. In healthcare, there is a union called “Deystviya” or “Action” with branches in different cities including Moscow and St Petersburg, and they have been fighting for the last two years.

Reforms in education are trying to introduce fees for school education. People need to pay for learning languages, art, history and so on. Students may get two hours of chemistry and pay extra for more lessons. They are trying to close many universities.

There is a trade union called Uchitel, “the teacher”. It is very small, and is trying to unite university teachers in Moscow. But 20 years of neoliberal reforms have made people very individualistic. It is the most difficult sphere to organise in.

**S: Do the independent unions have any political activity?**  
**V:** They are just starting out. I was invited as a professor at Perm University to talk about the union in Kaluga tabout dialectical and historical materialism, and to run a short course on Marx’s Capital. So there is a strong wish to learn, but it is only the first steps. I teach a course on Marx’s Capital at Perm University. I need to teach from the perspective of pluralism. I read Hayek with students for philosophy courses. But I say, if you want to read Hayek, read Marx also. This is not strictly prohibited, but it of course the head of my university doesn’t like it at all.

**S: In the UK, such a trade union would be pretty rare. Is there a tradition of working-class education?**  
**V:** Yes, I work in a Polytechnic University. My students normally work in small firms and enterprises, doing manual work. They are interested in materialist philosophy. I was asked to organise a study circle in my flat. It ran on the weekends, and students would come and read Marx and Lenin, and we celebrated the anniversary of the Paris Commune. In Perm University to talk to the union in Kaluga tabout dialectical and historical materialism.

**S: Do you encounter pro-Stalin nostalgics much?**  
**V:** Most people don’t want to relive the Stalinist era, and they understand that Stalin was an imperialist. Unfortunately, young people know very little about Trotsky, the Old Bolsheviks. They don’t know that the Old Bolsheviks had different ideas and that Lenin was trying to convince, and not to impose his point of view as the only one.

**YOUTH**

**S: In Albania some young people see it as fashionable to be religious — particularly, to be Catholic. This is seen as an expression of rebellion. In Poland, after 1988, it was very common among young people, to say, “I want to become a small capitalist and start my own business.” So, if you are young, energetic, you want to change your life, this is how you do it. What do you have in Russia?**  
**V:** In Russia, there is also a common idea of getting your own business. But in the last two or three years, millions of small businesses have closed. So people are thinking hard about such things, and young people more often say, “I want to be a manager”, or “I want to be an administrator”. If they are from villages or small cities, they tend to understand the situation better. This is because they have no jobs, no healthcare. But if students or young workers have a more comfortable background they are not very attentive to communist ideas or the idea that there is something wrong.

Those who are from these small cities, whom to the big city, almost all of them are atheists. In Russia, religious propagation is very strong. But people see a lot of money goes to build churches, to fund religious projects and so on and workers don’t like it.

**S: In the general historical impression you are given at school, is the revolution good or bad?**  
**V:** Bad. Firstly, it was not a revolution, but a band that took the power; the power was laying on the floor and could be picked up by anyone. This is a completely abnormal way of explaining the events of 1917! We are taught that our modern reliance on commodities from the west, and all other major problems, are the fault of the Bolsheviks.

**S: What is your activity on the question of the Ukraine?**  
**V:** The left in Russia is very strongly divided on this. Some think this is Ukraine’s problem, and Russia has the Crimea, and that is a good thing. That is the line of the Russian Communist Party. Others think that Russia is an imperialist force and that Ukraine has become an arena for two imperialist forces: the USA and Europe on the one hand, and Russia on the other. That is our position as well. We think that the problem is that the workers in Ukraine and in Novorossiya do not have experience of organisation in trade unions, political movements, and that is why they could not understand the situation, and that is why the nationalist movement was able to do more than the left.

There is a huge amount of government propaganda saying that the Ukrainian government is controlled by Nazis, that Novorossiya represents freedom and so on.

**S: The Russian government has used the anniversary of the two world wars to incite xenophobia.**  
**V:** They turned this date into a nationalist event. Under the Soviet Union, there were a lot of problems, of course, but it was an internationalist war against the Nazis. All the nationalities were fighting for a common cause, and it was a victory. They have even changed the symbol of victory from the red flag to the St George’s Cross, orange and black, which has nothing to do with World War Two.

**Solidarity:** But actually, Stalin fought the Second World War as a Russian nationalist war, with suppression of minority nations in the USSR such as was done nowhere else.

**V:** Yes, that was a problem of course, a big one. But at the same time, they would not have been possible to have won without the nations all uniting.

**Solidarity:** But they didn’t all unite...

**V:** Yes, I agree.

**S: How did you become a socialist?**  
**V:** I had a very liberal (right-wing) upbringing and school. I was always taught things about the Soviet Union that were even more negative than is normal, and I was always wondering, why is the Soviet Union only depicted negatively? But when I studied the Russian Revolution, I saw that there was Trotsky as well as Lenin and Stalin, so I decided to learn what he stood for. I started with Revolution Betrayed. It was shocking! Another view on history and the modern situation. He predicted the coming of capitalism with the bureaucracy, if things did not change and if there was no world revolution to link up with the Russian revolution. And I thought, if he was a Marxist, then I need to read Marx. And then I need to read Lenin. And then theirroots, Hegel, Feuerbach, and so on and so on. Sergei had a very similar story. He had family problems, and needed to understand the situation properly. He started with anarcho-communism, but soon came to more serious ideas, and read Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.

**S: Does the Workers’ Platform have a publication?**  
**V:** We produce a newspaper in Kaluga, called Prometheus. It is produced with our friends in trade unions. We have no newspaper in Perm yet, but we are working on it. With the internet, we can spread the Kaluga paper everywhere. It is distributed at certain workplaces, for free.

**S: How do you find new members?**  
**V:** We produce a newspaper in Kaluga, called Prometheus. It is produced with our friends in trade unions. We have no newspaper in Perm yet, but we are working on it. With the internet, we can spread the Kaluga paper everywhere. It is distributed at certain workplaces, for free.

**S: How ethnically and nationally diverse is your group and its periphery?**  
**V:** Of course. It is difficult to say. We have an internationalist union. We are Ukrainian, Russian, Czech, and German. But unfortunately we can’t recruit migrants, like Kazakhs, Uzbeks.

It is complicated. In Russia, people come to work for a week, then they send money back to their family and leave again. So they often do not want to co-operate with trade unions.

2012 car workers’ strike at the Benteler Automotive plant in Kaluga. Organised by the independent inter-regional Trade Union of Autoworkers. Car workers’ trade unionists fighting layoffs have been recently arrested by state anti-terror police.
Fight benefit sanctions!

By a Left Oppositionist on the DWP Group Executive Committee

Action within civil service union PCS over benefit sanctions has increased in the past year. The leadership of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) group in the union has provided ro- bust evidence to the Work and Pensions Parliamen- tary Select Committee on sanctions and published joint material with claimant groups and Unite Community expressing solidarity with claimants. We have also seen an in- crease in PCS branches, supported by the leadership, engaging positively in actions taken by welfare rights groups opposing the Tory welfare agenda.

However, a continued resistance to pursuing in- dustrial opposition to the sanction regime is disap- pointing and does not match the rhetoric — or in- deed, the democratically agreed position — of the DWP group in PCS. In 2014 the conference passed for the first time a motion that demanded in- dustrial as well as political opposition to the current mendacious welfare reform agenda. For the first time there was an admittance that any opposition has to be coupled with a political conversation with mem- bers about why the current sanction regime is wrong and why we should be willing to take political ac- tion and break the law — not to defend our own terms and conditions, but to show solidarity with the wider working class.

There is currently lim- ited appetite for the above. In branches where we op- erate have been central to organising political meet- ings with members to dis- cuss the effect of sanctions on claimants. The act of re- fusing to sanction can and should be one of the many tools workers in the DWP have to bring leverage to the negotiating table as part of a trade dispute. Opposition to sanctions don’t have to be couched only as political opposition. For Jobcentre workers increases in sanctions lead to increases in violent in- cidents. As far as we’re concerned a health and safety issue for our mem- bership is just as important.

A member of the left-op- position faction within PCS, Independent Left, submitted a motion to the last Executive Committee before the national confer- ence outlining an indus- trial strategy to oppose any increase in sanctions through the prism of a le- gitimate trade-dispute as opposed to political oppo- sition. Asking that the Group Executive Commit- tee (GEC) call a ballot in the case of the government mov- ing to increase the sanctioning regime.

Left Unity (the leader- ship faction of the union with significant Socialist Party influence) who control all but one seat on the DWP GEC voted whole- sale against the proposal. This included the SWP.

In the course of the de- bate opposition members relied on inaccurate statements in the motion (the sort of which can be fixed by the GEC at any meeting) and on the idea that the motion didn’t go far enough. A consensus was to be had to accept if they had any in- tention of supporting any of the actions proposed. In opposing this motion the Left Unity-led leadership of the union not only re- fused to back up their words with action but also gave up the chance to fire the opening salvo against the government’s increase in sanctions.

We’ll continue to argue against sanctions in the rank-and-file of the union. Welfare rights groups should equally continue to engage posi- tively with PCS nationally but also ask why these modest proposals weren’t supported.

LeSoCo strike builds confidence

By a UCU member

Following a one day strike on 4 June, union members report a different atmos- phere in the college.

The dispute has now bro- ken out of the world of com- mittee meetings and into the classrooms and corridors, canteens and staff rooms. Everybody now has to have a position on the strike, everybody has to think about taking a side.

For many staff and stu- dents, this is a further politi- cal and educational crisis leading to the kind of trade union struggle. Managers walk around smiling, trying to convince themselves things are back to normal, that is, closing sites, sacking staff and dis- mantling further education. Things will not go back to normal. Lessons are being learnt, links are being made, that are going to change the political landscape in further education.

Lesson: we can’t win these disputes on our own. We need to unite all the colleges in the region and all the unions in the colleges. Those links are already being built through pickets, joint meet- ings and rallies.

Lesson: union members need to inspire the very gen- eration of work- ing class youth that the Tories are trying to right-off by their own examples of militarisation, vulnera- bility and rank and file organi- sation. Lesson: colleges are not here to serve employers but to equip young minds with the courage and confidence to civilise the world of work, to make it fit for human be- ings.

Probation pay strike

Unison members in the National Probation Ser- vice will strike on Thursday 11 June over a 0% pay offer for 2014.

Members voted by 73% in favour of strikes against the pay freeze. After an earlier indicative ballot showed 96% voting to reject the pay freeze the employer offered a one-off, non-pensionable lump sum for those at the top of their pay band and confirmed that all staff due an increment would have it paid. However they did not budge on the pay freeze. Unison members will also take part in action short of strikes from the 12 June until 17 July.

Unison represents 4,300 probation workers in Eng- land and Wales. The other probation workers union, NAPO, has voted to re- ject the deal but has not yet ballotted members for strikes.

Rejoin Network rail deal

The RMT union is recom- mending Network Rail members accept the company’s latest pay offer.

The offer is for a two-year deal, with a 2% pay increase in year one followed by an increase at the rate of the Retail Price Index in year two. Network Rail also want to impose efficiency savings and restructures; much debate focuses on whether the pay offer is conditional on the union agreeing to these.

It is clear that, with the overwhelming rejection of both the company’s first and second offers, plus the huge vote for strikes, Net- work Rail members were up for a fight. By suspend- ing talks for offers that only slightly improved on the previous ones, RMT may have missed an opportu- nity to win more from Network Rail.

Workers’ Liberty mem- bers working on Network Rail advocate that the union rejects the deal, and fights on to win more.

No cuts at London Met!

Unison and UCU members struck together on Thurs- day 4 June in a dispute over 165 job cuts. The strike followed an earlier one taken by Unison members alone on 21 May. The strike had a large im- pact on university services, with management being forced to tweet that their student enquiries line was not functioning due to “technical difficulties” — also known as their staff being on strike!

Strikers held picket lines at all university sites and a lunch time protest and rally which saw sup- porters come from other union branches.

• ucldonlondonmet. com
• bbspress.com
• losvounionunion.org.uk

Other industrial news

Barking and Dagenham bin strike suspended — bit.ly/BDSSuspended

Glasgow homelessness workers reject “insulting” offer — bit.ly/GlasgowStrike
UK poverty worst in western Europe

By Gerry Bates

A new study has found that poor people in Britain have it worse than anywhere else in western Europe.

The report, published by the High Pay Centre, finds that the poorest 20% of households have some of the smallest disposable incomes in the whole continent, and are much poorer than their equivalents in developed western European countries.

The study also demonstrates that Britain is a deeply unequal society. The wealthiest fifth of the population are doing very nicely by European standards. Only in Germany and France have the top 20% got richer, while in Britain, the poorest fifth have to get by on incomes more akin to the smallest disposable incomes in the whole continent.

The richest 20% of the population — amounts to 15% of the pre-crisis volume — is getting through.

The fact that the rich are richer in the UK than many other countries hides the fact that the poor are poorer,” said Deborah Greaves, the director of the High Pay Centre. “Most people think our living standards in the UK are similar to economies like France and Germany, but being poor in the UK is more like being poor in the former Soviet bloc than in Western Europe.”

While depressing, these figures are hardly surprising in light of the Tories’ austerity programme of wage cuts, slashed services and sackings. To reverse inequality and poverty, the huge wealth which exists in society should be used to improve the lives of everyone.

That means taxing the rich and taking the banks into collective, democratic control.

End Austerity Now!
Join the national demonstration

Saturday 20 June
London
Assemble 12pm Bank of England to march to Parliament.
bit.ly/EndAusterityNow