

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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Osborne's "Plan B" — like Plan A, only worse

By Gerry Bates

"Our plan B", so some Treasury official was recently quoted, "is to do plan A, but for longer".

And maybe with even more destructive cuts.

The international economic organisation OECD reckons that the UK is already into a double-dip recession, at least for the end of 2011 and the start of

2012. The government's claims that its cuts would close the budget deficit are way off the mark.

In his autumn statement on 29 November, chancellor George Osborne responded with some feeble "growth" stunts, and renewed cuts;

- Public sector pay rises will be frozen at one per cent, amidst 5% inflation.
- The state pension age

will be raised quicker.

• Tax credits will be cut in real terms.

Back in 2010, Ed Balls was saying that "cutting billions of pounds from public services and taking billions of pounds out of family budgets" would kill jobs and growth, and that Labour should consider cuts "only once growth is fully secured". It was an argument within orthodox

capitalist economics, from the Keynesian rather than monetarist side, but it's turned out completely right as far as it went.

Labour and the unions should now be pressing the case for expanded public services, against cuts.

Instead, Balls limits himself to a piffling "five point growth plan", not much stronger than Osborne's "growth" stunts.

Loumamba Mohsni, 1963-2011

By Edward Maltby

At 1am on 24 November, Loumamba Mohsni — a long-time Tunisian Trotskyist activist — died of a heart attack following a long illness.

Loumamba spent years in exile, and suffered spells in jail, where he was tortured. Acting in secrecy, living the nocturnal life of an underground agitator, Loumamba made a great contribution to keeping Trotskyism alive in a country where the Marxist left was dominated by Stalinist and nationalist ideas.

After the long years of darkness, that organisation has burst out into the light as the Left Workers' League (LGO). The emergence of a visible Trotskyist current of any size in Tunisia would not have been possible without the long years of sacrifice of activists like Loumamba.

That work in conditions of great danger and demoralisation is now bearing fruit.

HISTORY

The history of the modern Trotskyist movement in Tunisia begins in 1985 with the emergence of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (OCR), launched by a group of students and workers.

In those days, the country was wracked by social and economic crisis. Habib Bourguiba's (limited) welfare state was dismantled by IMF diktat and an era of neoliberal policies was ushered in.

During these hunger riots Bourguiba's interior minister, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, made his name by marching into the middle of a demonstrating crowd in the working-class suburb of Ettadamen and personally shooting dead a ten-year-old boy named Otman. In 1987, Ben Ali ousted Bourguiba and assumed the presidency. He in turn became a hatchetman for neoliberal policies.

The OCR published a newspaper called *Al-Chararam* ("the Spark") and operated illegally. Lit-

Tunisian Trotskyist Loumamba Mohsni, who has died of a heart attack aged 48

erature was distributed by being slid anonymously under doors, at night. Militants would meet at night, and keep membership of the organisation secret, operating as trade union activists or supporters of more-or-less tolerated campaigns.

Loumamba was a student activist in this period. His exiled comrade Khal-faoui recalls: "Everyone remembers this intractable militant of the Tunis campuses, a well-known face of the far left".

The first major blow of repression from Ben Ali's Dakhilia or secret police came with mass arrests of 40 activists. Many long prison sentences were handed out and some leading comrades were forced into the underground or exile.

The OCR continued to function, but under a greater weight of repression, until around 2001, when Loumamba and other leading comrades launched the illegal journal *Kaws el-Karama* ("the Bow of Dignity"). A renewed campaign of repression met this initiative.

On 30 January 2002, as Loumamba waited for a taxi, two secret police agents pulled up on mopeds and beat him with iron bars before leaving him for dead.

Following the contested 2004 election, a new wave of repression saw Loumamba forced to seek asylum in France. Here he was persecuted by the French state! His house was raided in 2009.

Loumamba remained politically active as a

writer and activist, making contacts. It was through this work that Workers' Liberty activists came into contact with him. As the workers' movement in the Arab world takes momentous steps forward, the organisations and ideas fostered by activists of Loumamba's generation, many of whose names will never be known, will be invaluable in forging a movement for socialism in the region.

RALLY

Following his death, a rally was held in Tunis. Loumamba's comrade, Jalel Ben Brik, spoke:

"On this day we lost Loumamba — a man of great mind. Today dies the man {who} stood against the merchants and capitalists and their friends — America, Qatar, France. Gone is his intelligence and great spirit. Yesterday I was with him, a warrior on the way to hospital in his illness. He said to me — wait a week and we will go to Djendouba and we will demonstrate against those who oppress the people and we will make a great revolution against our enemy.

"I promise him that we will walk in his path, for the revolution against our enemies, and that revolution will be forever."

Islamist gains in Morocco's elections

By Clarke Benitez

The 25 November elections in Morocco were won by a soft-Islamist party, the Party for Justice and Development, which models itself on the ruling Turkish Islamist party.

The runner-up was Istiqlal, a conservative monarchist party.

The elections took place amidst intensifying protests. Much of the left participated in a boycott of the elections.

The Moroccan opposi-

tion movement has been split between a liberal right wing, regrouping social democrats, nationalists and Islamists, with its base in the centre of the country and the capital Rabat; a left wing of Marxist parties, trade unionists and Berber communities, in the south and north — with the main points of division being over social demands and the demand for a republic.

The government's strategy has been to isolate anti-monarchist elements by presenting a new con-

stitution, placing the monarchy within a system with marginally more power in the hands of parliament. However, there were unprecedentedly large demonstrations on 13 and 20 November.

These, combined with a very low voter registration (of those registered, according to the government's own, probably inflated figures, turnout was only 45%), indicate that the government's strategy hasn't been successful.

Justice for Joe Paraskeva

By Todd Hamer

Joe Paraskeva is in jail, on an indefinite sentence, essentially for being mentally ill.

In October 2010, he was admitted to psychiatric hospital under section 2 of the Mental Health Act. Joe had a diagnosis of bipolar affective disorder and had had several admissions to hospital whilst he was a teenager.

Joe attempted to escape from the ward by trying to burn down the locked entrance to the ward using a lighter and can of deodorant.

He was remanded to prison. On 5 April 2011, Joe was sentenced to an IPP (Indeterminate imprisonment for Public Protection) for arson. The controversial IPP is effectively a life sentence. For those who get out of prison there is a strict regime of state supervision.

The psychiatrist reported to the court that Joe was not suffering from a mental disorder and was culpable for his actions, yet 48 hours previously the same psy-

chiatrist had detained him under the Mental Health Act.

Joe now faces a life under the scrutiny of the probation and psychiatric services.

His mental health problems have since deteriorated whilst in prison. He has been transferred to a medium secure unit in East London, where he will receive treatment. But Joe remains a sentenced prisoner. Joe's family believe "that Joe needs proper care and treatment in a supportive hospital environment. He should not be being criminalised."

The case raises many issues about the interaction between psychiatric services and the criminal justice system.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the criminalisation of psychiatric patients is becoming more prevalent. As pressure builds on NHS funds, there is a tendency to offload patients onto other services. Increasingly non-clinical staff such as bed managers or accountants in "Referral Management Centres" override clinical decisions.



In primary care, referral management centres are increasingly blocking NHS patients from getting the care prescribed by their GP.

In psychiatric services, financial pressure may result in attempts to shift costs from the NHS to the criminal justice system, to redraw the boundary between the mad and the bad.

In Joe's case it is clear that there was a failure of the mental health system to contain the risks that he posed to himself and others at a time when he was particularly vulnerable. It also shows the enormous power given to psychiatrists to determine the fate of those in their care.

Linda Morgan, Joe's mother is leading the "Justice for Joe" campaign. Apart from immediate goal of appealing against Joe's sentence, she would like to see "a series of safeguards in place, at the hospital, at

all police stations, at all courts and in prisons, to ensure this cannot go on happening. I would like a full investigation and review of how the NHS and the criminal justice system interact when dealing with vulnerable people, such as those with mental health problems.

"In Scotland there are safeguards and I have been told this could not have happened there. There should be an independent advocate whom parent, carers and service users can call on, with power to assess and if necessary question and delay any move from a psychiatric service into the prison system."

The campaign has recently secured a small victory with the transfer of Joe's care from prison to a medium-secure hospital. But the IPP sentence remains and Joe is far from securing justice.

Socialists should support all moves for greater accountability in psychiatric services.

• For more information on how to support the campaign visit the www.justiceforjoe.org.uk

Stephen Yaxley Lennon

EDL electoral front

By Charlie Salmon

English Defence League leader Stephen Yaxley Lennon has announced an electoral pact with the British National Party splinter group, the British Freedom Party.

In a report carried on the BFP website on 19 November, Yaxley Lennon is quoted as saying "the EDL needs to move up a notch — they cannot go on forever staging street demonstrations".

This is a significant move for both organisations. The BFP emerged after the split from the British National Party immediately before the last general election. During this split, the BNP's webmaster pulled the plug on the party's internet presence and shut down communications. Along with other leading members, he went on to form the BFP citing financial irregularities within the BNP and opposition to Nick Griffin's leadership.

Since then, the BFP has had a fairly low key existence but behind the scenes much has changed. The recently elected leader is Paul Weston, a former UK Independence Party candidate. Whilst the party and the EDL may hope that Weston will represent a "clean break" with the BNP and its extremist associations, Weston is far from being a moderate.

True, he called the politically motivated mass murder carried out by Anders Behring Breivik an "atrocious". But he rationalised Breivik's actions, claiming that he "was driven to mass murder in his own mind because he felt he was no longer represented by the political process."

In fact — and by his own account — Breivik's actions were a calculated attempt to inspire similar actions by political sympathisers across Europe.

The BFP's website has links to the Dutch Freedom Party, headed by Geert Wilders, and the Austrian Freedom Party associated with the now deceased Jörg Haider. Together with similar groups in Switzerland, Germany and Finland, these organisations represent the vanguard of a new Europe-wide far-right.

The BFP and EDL must hope that they can replicate at least some of the successes of their Dutch and

Austrian "comrades" — who enjoy 42% support amongst the under 30s — and must surely have an eye on the French National Front's turn towards more "populist" politics.

In the run-up to next year's local elections and a final cementing of ties between the organisations, Yaxley Lennon has a lot of work to do. He has already announced a cessation of the "march and grow" tactic until next March when an anniversary demonstration is planned for Luton. His main problem will be in convincing large numbers of EDL supporters to join the BFP, something which he himself has not yet done.

The EDL has no formal membership structure and is organised in such a way as to maximise the potential for factionalism. It will not be possible to transfer all EDL support over to the BFP. The likely imminent demise of the BNP may make this process easier, however.

If the merger is even half-way successful, then the BFP will have a sizable network of street hardened and committed activists capable of carrying out the hard work of door-to-door electoral politics. They will also win the cache of political capital and recognition accumulated by the EDL's tapping into anti-Muslim racism and nationalist sentiment.

At the time of the next round of local elections, we can expect to see large scale dissatisfaction with the parties of government. The extent to which Labour can re-capture and mobilise higher levels of working class support and the extent to which the BFP can appeal to the hundreds of thousands who voted BNP in previous elections will be key factors.

Most important of all will be the leadership shown by the trade unions, labour movement and the left within the organisations of the working class.

A movement that consistently challenges this government, one that has a winning strategy to defend the interests of our class and which points the way politically will be vital in defeating the threats posed by right-wing populist racism on the streets and at the ballot box.

Labour and 30 November

By Rhodri Evans

"Shadow Chancellor backs strikers", headlined the *Independent* on 27 November, reporting an interview with Ed Balls.

The small print of Balls's comments about 30 November was more fudged. "I have huge sympathy with [the strikers]. The unions still need to give some ground, but I think what the Government is trying to impose is both unfair and very risky... The Government's been determined to have a confrontation".

In 2005-8 the Labour government negotiated with the public sector unions a deal on pensions which was supposed to settle the issue for decades ahead. *Solidarity* criticised the deal at the time as conceding too much. Why Balls thinks the unions should now concede even more, he does not explain.

Asked on TV on 25 November whether he backed the strike, Alan Johnson, a diehard Blairite who negotiated the basics of the 2005 deal, said flatly "yes".

On 29 November, dozens of Labour MPs and councillors wrote a letter to the Guardian backing the strike. John McDonnell, one of the pro-strike MPs,

said: "The public and Labour Party members especially are behind these strikes and expect Labour politicians to back our fellow trade unionists. There can be no ifs or buts on this one".

Greg Marshall, a Brompton Labour councillor and co-ordinator of the Labour Representation Committee councillors' network, said: "This government is attacking the terms and conditions of ordinary workers who deliver our public services, in order to finance the reckless behaviour of the bankers. We should be firmly standing in solidarity with those taking action against the Tory-led attacks on pensions".

TULO, the umbrella group for unions affiliated to the Labour Party, which usually limits itself to backroom operations, has written to every local Labour Party asking it to back the strike.

What Labour should really be doing is not just backing the strike, but complementing it with an active political campaign for fair pensions for all, including private sector workers and people dependent on the state pension. We are still far from that.

Ed Miliband has been silent on 30 November.

TV presenter Anne Diamond had pictures of her baby son's funeral printed

Village gossip in court

By Molly Thomas

Evidence to the Leveson Inquiry, currently underway, has exposed the unscrupulousness of the press as it tries to win circulation by debasing news to the level of malicious village gossip.

Even when the victims of phone-hacking and concocted revelations are rich and powerful, the debasement hurts us all, as pseudo-gossip drives out real news.

Does the press have a right to hack people's phones and print personal details about people? Should there be controls on what the press can print?

The question is whether controls motivated by privacy could then be used to suppress investigation of real scandals. The main check at present is super-injunctions, injunctions which prevent any confidential and private information about the applicant, or even the fact that the injunction exists, being published. If a paper ignores that, it can be prosecuted for contempt of

court.

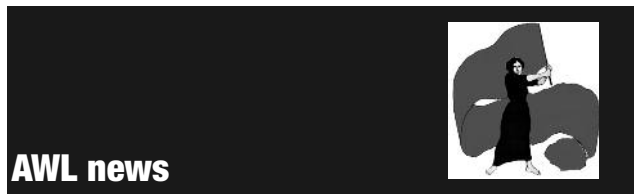
The Inquiry's stated aim is to maintain freedom of speech for the press but also try to improve the moral standard of the press.

Beyond its remit is the issue of the media being owned and controlled by profit-greedy billionaires, whose only concern is to get more circulation and advertising, and who suppress important investigations or inflate salacious tittle-tattle with that purpose.

They cultivate a dumbed-down readership anxious for tittle-tattle rather than a critical-minded readership anxious for information because tittle-tattle is cheaper to provide, and, bar the odd super-injunction, causes less trouble.

The media should be taken out of the hands of the billionaires and its printing presses and communication networks put under public ownership, with legal guarantees of the right of every body of opinion to use those assets to express itself.

How good was it?



By Cathy Nugent

There have been three events in the last month that have directly or indirectly raised the issue of how the cuts are disproportionately affecting women.

The best of these was the London demonstration for the 30 November strike over public sector pension cuts. It fully reflected the fact that two thirds of strikers were women. That demonstration felt like the labour movement was again "on the move". It could make you believe that given the right conditions, the class struggle will revive and create new militants, many new female militants.

Then a bunch of female bureaucrats came on at the rally and told us all to fight, fight, fight to the end; but did not tell us how to fight!

Then there was Fawcett Society's "No Turning Back" demonstration on 19 November. A march against cuts where formal equality was the main goal. But we were left wondering, would more cuts against men be okay, if it made us more equal?

And UK Feminista on 12 November, in which a recitation of how the cuts are bad for women was made by a long list of speakers sitting behind a gigantic top table. Yawn.

Assessing and discussing the alternatives to the political terrain underpinning "women and the cuts" was one of the central themes of Workers' Liberty's conference, "Is This As Good As It Gets" on 26 November.

Our focus was women as part of the working class, fighting the class struggle, and shaping it so that it also works for women.

Around 130 attended, both men and women, and beyond the usual left milieu. There must be a lot of interest in how class exploitation and sex oppression interact. That impression had already been given by attendances at meetings on class struggle feminism, held in the run up to the conference. We certainly feel there has been increased feminist interest since the time of our last national AWL feminist conference five years ago.

One woman involved in "Third Wave" feminist activism wondered whether we could be more thoughtful about feminism. Surely we should — and we want to kick start more self-education. We have put together a reading pack to help us do this. We also want to develop our paper, *Women's Fightback*, as a forum for writing, organising and discussion ... going beyond our own particular feminist preoccupations. We have started a Women's Fightback reading and discussion group in London to complement that work.

Our event heard a number of guest speakers. Marlene Jimenez from the IWW London Cleaners' Branch talked about the migrant workers' struggles. Laura Rogers and Laura Schwartz talked about Feminist Fightback's approach to class struggle feminism (looking at how "real life" for women intersects with "big politics"). A speaker from Education for Choice talked about threats to sex education.

Lucinda Lavelle and Houzan Mahmoud discussed the situation for women in the Arab world. Historian Louise Raw talked about lessons of New Unionism (a theme Workers' Liberty will discuss in depth at a future event). We want to continue to discuss and work with all these women!

The event also hosted a successful "planning forum" for student women, organised by the National Campaign for Fees and Cuts. The group discussed developing a Charter for Education aimed at women students. Watch this space.

Our day was rounded off by the fantastic Revolting Women's Cabaret.

A big thank you to everyone who drove equipment and food around London, organised, spoke, made bunting, and worked so hard to make the event a success.

• Women's Fightback Discussion and Reading Group: LGBT struggles and the politics of liberation. Friday 9 December, 7-9pm. Meet outside Saison Poetry Library, level 5, Royal Festival Hall, Waterloo. women@workersliberty.org

• Workers' Liberty London Forum: Objectification, sexual liberation and the new moralism. 7.30pm, Friday 16 December Exmouth Arms, Starcross Street, Euston

Overcoming the myths



Paul Hampton (*Solidarity* 225) seems to have me down as some kind of Cold Warrior or Nouveaux Philosophes attempting to find in Marxism some kind of logic which inexorably leads to the Stalinist death camps.

One does not have to abandon Marxism, in some kind of contemporary God that Failed attempt to conflate Marxism with dictatorship, in an effort to understand what actually happened and what the Bolsheviks could have done about the situation they were faced with. It just happens that I think the wrong choices were made in terrible circumstances and that the decisive break between Stalinism and Bolshevism is less easy to mark when one looks in detail at the record of the Bolsheviks up to 1924.

I am not an advocate of a "continuity thesis" as I have already stated — there were breaks and continuities — but certainly the road to despotism was made all the easier by the suspension of basic political liberties, the rise of the secret security services, and the eclipse of basic standards of working class democracy.

Paul makes an added existential point — the difficulty of remaining a revolutionary socialist if one accepts that Stalinism is born of Leninism. This simply doesn't add up. Many of those who fought on the "wrong" side at Kronstadt continued to be defenders of the October Revolution — many of them in exile worked for the very regime that had exiled them.

Many Mensheviks and anarchists continued as revolutionaries whilst doubting the particular revolutionary version of the Bolsheviks. One has to sympathise with the hunted and worn Martov, for instance, when we all start moaning about "circumstances" destroying the revolution. Many Mensheviks and Menshevik-Internationalists had made themselves hoarse in making the same point before, during and after the Bolshevik accession to power — that dictatorship would be inextricably linked to the revolution if the backward conditions could not be overcome. The Left Opposition and Stalin posed differing and often complementary routes out of the conundrum that the October adventure had led them to.

Of course Stalin developed the project of violence and intimidation to the nth degree, but it was a refinement and not something entirely new — except in scale. One has to recall the mass defections from the Left Opposition after 1928, and not for reasons of personal survival.

The Trotskyists, attempting to understand their revolution through the lens of the French, looked towards Bukharin and the Right opposition as the Thermidorians. The almost wholesale adoption of the Left Opposition's economic programme by Stalin (albeit in peculiarly brutal manner) caused this defection — most tragically of course in the case of the great Christian Rakovsky but also in the case of Karl Radek, Preobrazhensky (the economic genius behind the Left Opposition programme), and perhaps most tellingly Antonov-Ovseenko — Trotsky's erstwhile right hand man, who later became the butcher of the Barcelona uprising in charge of eliminating the POUM and the anarchists.

I don't want to take any great lesson from this — except for the fact that the Left Opposition did not understand what was happening to them, didn't understand Stalinism effectively as an amalgam of various programmes under the weight of a bureaucracy, and obfuscated Trotsky and the opposition's own role in sealing their own fate before the advent of the bureaucracy.

Paul points to Lenin and Trotsky's hope that the party cadres would be the catalyst to get the revolution back on track, angling at the same time for the extension of the revolution's gains to the west. Of course the objective circumstance of the failure of the German revolution was crucial — but its demise was again the product of putschist and undemocratic, unthinking strands within the KPD, the Comintern and the remnants of the German Social Democracy. All as Luxemburg had predicted.

Certainly within the party in the Soviet Union it was the party cadres aided by the Lenin levy that were the first to defect to the bureaucracy — as Zinoviev would point out later. By intimidation and stealth, the Stalinists took the party cells one by one.

What made this possible was the actions of Trotsky specifically and in general the distaste of the Old Bolsheviks for Trotsky and his clique — considered as ex-Menshevik upstarts and as Thermidorians — not least by those around the Workers' Opposition (who incidentally were among the first to be converted to the cause of Stalinism simply because they hated the dictatorial arrogance of Trotsky) and those left communists like Bukharin who would soon start to co-

alesce, in partnership with Stalin, as the pro-peasant wing of the party.

Bukharin's astounding revelation to Fyodor Dan on uncovering the nature of the monstrous Stalin is telling and displays more clarity than Trotsky ever achieved in his own analysis of Stalin. Faced with the reality of the bureaucratic clique, the Left Opposition had little chance to combat it when they found it hard to understand what it actually was.

I think Paul is correct when he says that he's "not convinced that forces outside the party were a real alternative". Me neither really. I think the struggle against dictatorship could have been won within the party itself if the party hadn't betrayed itself by abandoning working class democracy and political liberty before 1924. This would perhaps have galvanized the international movement rather than contaminated it.

There is a quantitative and qualitative difference between the early stages of Bolshevik rule and Stalinism, but we should not in 2011 still be firing our own metaphorical cannons into the garrison of Kronstadt. The Bolsheviks were wrong, understandably wrong, but wrong. Trotsky in his debates on this period with Serge should have admitted that and moved on.

Martyn Hudson, Teesside

The failings of fiat

I think Barry Finger (*Solidarity* 226) exaggerates "the democratic openings made possible by fiat money".

True, the current crisis reveals states held in hock to banks and other financial institutions permanently holding vast stocks of government IOUs (bonds). To release that stranglehold, we should call for the expropriation of the banks, insurance companies, pension funds, etc., and their replacement by a common publicly-owned service under democratic control. Coupon payments on most bonds could then be cancelled, or become only a matter of internal book-keeping within public finances.

However, Barry seems to counterpose an indefinite or almost indefinite expansion of fiat money (that is, cash in the form of bank notes, permanent and unrepayable IOUs from the government).

He sees a limit only "when demand expansion cannot induce any further capacity utilisation or increased output".

There is a first problem here which is discussed in current debates between "Keynesians" and "monetarists". Monetarists hold that pumping out enough cash is all that's necessary to keep production at full tilt. They support "quantitative easing" (a way to pump out more cash), and say that public works are unnecessary. Keynesians say that the extra cash may just sit in the cash piles of wealthy people unwilling to push it into production, and call for direct state activity.

Barry, I think, calls for the government spending more cash directly on public projects, and not just for more injection of cash.

Then there is a second problem, and one which the Bolsheviks after 1917 fell foul of. There is no tidy moment when the government printing off more cash and spending it will elicit no further activity. Meanwhile, every currency note printed remains in circulation indefinitely and stokes up inflation. The inflation comes with a delay, but after a while catches up with and overwhelms the printing of new cash.

Even before October 1917, the Tsarist and then the Provisional Government, struggling with war finance, had gone beyond the limit at which printing more notes devalued the existing stock in circulation faster than it enabled the government to generate more economic activity.

The workers' government at first saw no option but to continue the previous governments' policy, and covered its spending by printing even more notes. As the volume of notes in circulation ballooned, their value dwindled faster. On 1 November 1917, the total currency in circulation was worth 2200 million rubles at 1914 prices; by 1 July 1921, it was worth only 29 million rubles.

For a while, illusions of "war communism" allowed some Bolsheviks to think that the result, where in the cities mostly you could only get food and other supplies by getting on the list for direct allocation by some office or factory, was a progressive move towards the withering-away of money.

By 1923-4 those illusions were thoroughly dismissed. The Bolshevik government noted that economic planning required a stable currency. It introduced a new "gold ruble" and withdrew the old notes.

It had already restarted selling bonds (on a smaller scale than under the old regime, to mobilise small savings rather than to build up a vast wall of obligations), after at first cancelling all bonds held abroad and converting bonds held within Russia into currency.

Martin Thomas, Islington

Next steps after 30 November

The immediate impact of the mass public sector strike on 30 November was to demonstrate the potential social power of the working class to a generation of workers who had not experienced it before. It gave a glimpse of the mass labour movement as a vital social force.

But if the strike is to play a role in actually defeating the government, rank-and-file trade unionists need to fight for a different strategy from the one on offer from their leaders.

In meetings and conversations on 30 November, strikers were clear that one day is not enough, and that they want further action and a faster-paced campaign. But no union leader has indicated any hard plans for follow-up.

Mark Serwotka, leader of the PCS civil service union (in a speech at the “Unite the Resistance” event on Saturday 19 November), stated that his union executive wants a cross-union meeting “within two weeks” of N30, and another one-day strike “as early in 2012 as we can have it”.

The Executive of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) will “consider a programme of rolling strikes and other possible action, including at least one further national day of action in the Spring term” at its December and January meetings. It expects not to have plans defined or ready to announce until, at earliest, a meeting of the TUC’s Public Sector Liaison Group (PSLG) in January 2012.

POSITIVE

It is positive that the NUT will discuss rolling strikes. Many on the left refuse even to consider anything but all-out “spectaculars”.

If we were ready for a continuous, all-out strike, that refusal might make sense; in real life the refusal is a recipe for a campaign made up of long lulls and scattered one-offs scheduled from above.

The point of rolling and selective strikes is to make the campaign continuous, permanent and self-controlling. A decision to consider rolling strikes only at Executive level, and only after a fairly long gap, cuts against that.

NUT and PCS are the most avowedly left-wing and militant of the unions involved, and other union leaders are liable to be slower-moving. Union leaders will see the 15 December meetings of the TUC public sector group as a staging-post for discussion of further action. But in all likelihood that meeting will not definitively set a programme of ongoing joint action that N30 unions can begin building for.

Much of the far-left doesn’t have much more of a clue: a Socialist Workers’ Party leaflet on N30 itself proclaimed: “Now we need a strategy” (*Now?* What about before? And what kind of strategy?). The Socialist Party focused on calling on the TUC (Brendan Barber?) to name the next big date.

Crucial to taking the strike forward is anchoring it to clear, political demands. The bottom-line negotiating position for all unions must be opposition to any worsening whatsoever (that is, a defence of the existing pension schemes), tied to wider political campaigning for fair pensions for all. That bottom-line demand would give the strike a more obvious sense of purpose and give rank-and-file union members something against which to hold their leaders to account.

How can we force the Tories to back down? Workers’ Liberty believes union members should fight for:

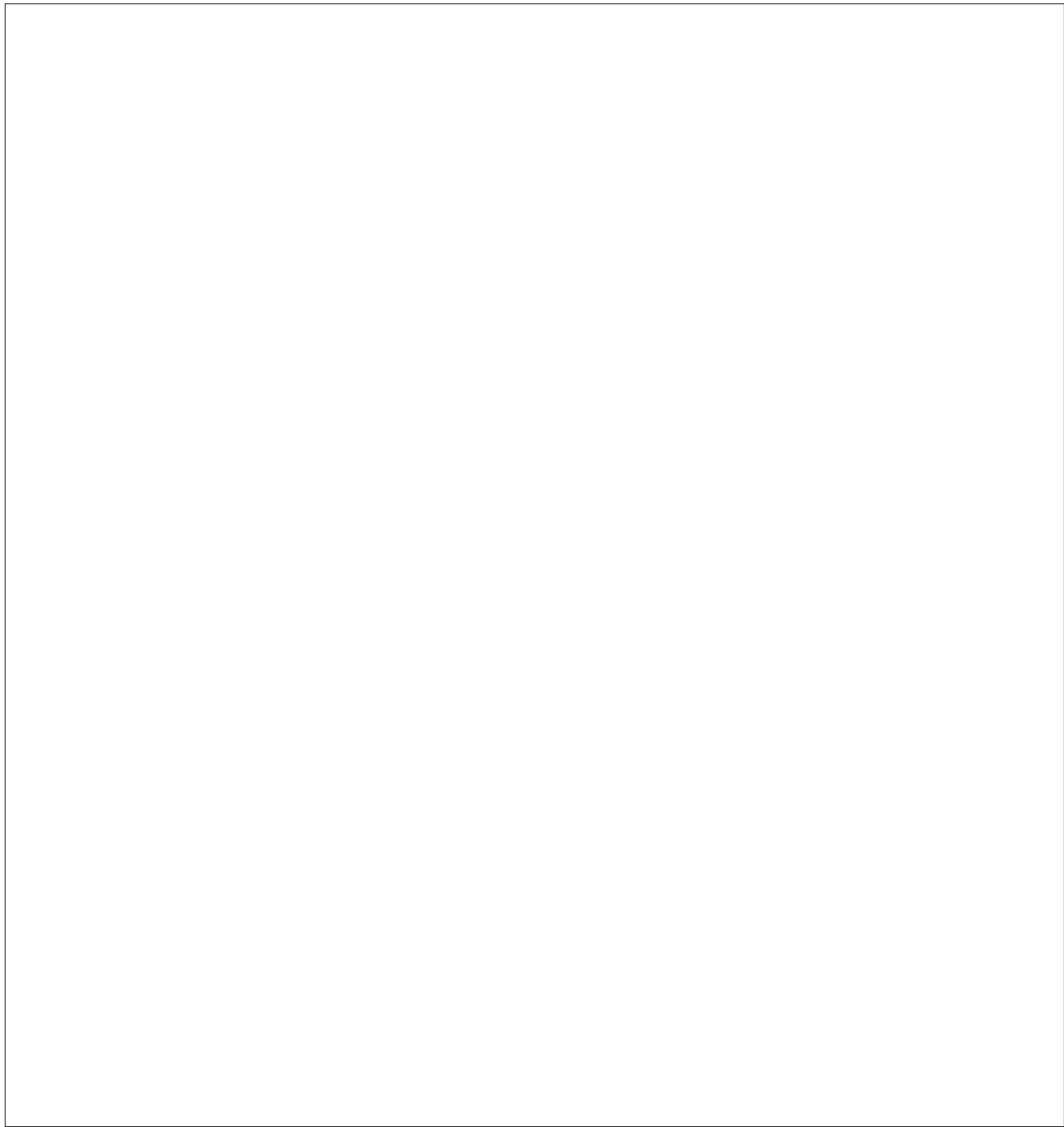
- local “where next?” meetings where strikers can discuss the next steps in genuine political discussions, not stage-managed affairs with an endless litany of top-table speakers
- a programme of action to be announced and built for *now*, not in the new year
- a strategy that includes rolling and selective action (bringing out different sections of the public sector workforce at different times) and escalating action (striking for more than one day at a time)
- strike funds, levied from union dues, to finance sustained action
- the establishment of cross-union strike committees, made up of rank-and-file delegates, in every town
- open up the negotiations: regularly inform union members about the content of ongoing negotiations and subject them to democratic scrutiny.

KEY IDEAS

This strategy is based on two key ideas — rank-and-file power, and fighting to win.

Rank-and-file power, because we believe striking workers should be in control of their own strikes (not unelected and unaccountable union officials), and fighting to win because we think that strikes should not merely be expressions of discontent but strategic actions designed to exercise sufficient pressure on bosses or government to force concessions.

We cannot afford to wait until some indefinite time in 2012 for the next set of action. Agreed, workers are not currently confident enough to take all-out strike action for an



London demonstration. Photo: Vicki Morris

indefinite period of time. But the effect of gearing up for scattered crescendos and then told to stand down and wait until the union leaders announce the next “big day” can only be demoralising in the long run.

Apart from the odd bit of soundbite rhetoric, no union leader has attempted to situate N30 within an ongoing strategy.

From the platform of the central London rally, there was much talk of further action — “if the government doesn’t negotiate with us, we’ll be back in the new year” one speaker announced. It’s hardly inspiring stuff; is the only aim, the only demand, for further negotiations (which are ongoing anyway)? And as for “we’ll be back in the new year” — when in the new year? And “back” for what — another single day of strike action, or something more?

As well as the risk that the dispute will continue to lurch from one “big day” to the other, there is a further risk of the entire campaign being limited to the pace of the slowest, most conservative unions.

The unity that has been developed is vitally important, but that does not mean unions should not act alone — or in small groups — if they are more ready to do so.

Union members should fight for their leaders to take a concrete proposal for ongoing action to the TUC public sector group meeting and fight to win as much support for it as possible. In the meantime, local cross-union strike committees should organise assemblies to discuss what action might be possible on a local level. The essential task is to maintain constant pressure on the government rather than relying on a disconnected series of single days of action. With even the more left-wing leaders of the PCS tied to the “big day” perspective, rank-and-file organisation is absolutely crucial.

POLITICS

The battle cannot be fought on the industrial front alone. A cross-union political campaign for decent pen-

sions for all, which presents a vision of society run for need rather than profit, is essential.

Unions affiliated to the Labour Party should use that affiliation to force the Labour Party to throw its political weight behind union campaigning.

The fight is not just about pensions, but about the austerity programme of a government determined to massacre public services and strengthen the supreme rule of the markets, so shaken by the economic crisis. Resisting that programme requires not just a defensive struggle against each new attack, but a fight for a different kind of government; a government by, of and for the working-class majority, based on and accountable to our organisations.

Posed as “socialism-is-the-answer” jargon, that perspective can seem alien — and alienating — to most workers. But posed as the simple reality that, to fight a millionaire government attempting to entrench the rule of millionaires, we need an equivalent fight to remake society and make it work for us, for working-class people, the perspective is less abstract.

Working-class social power — a workers’ government — is not a “demand” to be fought for in the same way that a wage increase or the defence of a pensions scheme is; it is a perspective that can link those kind of demand-centred fights into an overall political struggle for a different kind of society.

It is not one that can be won or even catalysed overnight. But after 30 November, a day when a generation of working-class people saw their own class take mass action for the first time, it is a struggle that seems a little less distant.

By taking steps to build rank-and-file power to reorganise and reinvigorate our movement, revolutionary socialists and other working-class militants can bring it closer still.

- For reports on N30 picket lines, demonstrations and other actions, see page 11 and workersliberty.org/n30reports

Eurozone on the brink

By Chris Reynolds

“The eurozone has ten days at most”, wrote Wolfgang Münchau, the sober, economically-orthodox commentator on European economics for the *Financial Times*, on 28 November.

“Unless something very drastic happens, the eurozone could break up very soon”. Already, he says, with the rise in the interest rates that governments have to offer to sell bonds [IOUs repayable after a fixed period of years], and the banks finding it increasingly difficult to raise funds, “important parts of the eurozone economy are cut off from credit”.

The European Summit deal of 27 October was no good. It was supposed to backstop eurozone governments’ credit-worthiness, but now Italy, Spain, and even France are struggling to raise funds.

Banks in Europe face a “funding crunch” (FT, 28 November), unable to sell enough bonds to pay off the old bonds which fall due this year.

The 27 October scheme envisaged the European Financial Stability Facility boosting itself mightily by borrowing on global markets, but it hasn’t been able to. The scheme’s specific plans for Greece could be unworkable because of social resistance, and in any case are unlikely to reverse the trend for previous “bail-out” plans to depress Greece’s economy and thus actually to *increase*, rather than reduce, the ratio of Greek government debt to Greek economic out-

put.

German chancellor Angela Merkel now recognises that the scheme was a flop, and on 14 November urged drastic new moves to stronger economic union and political union in Europe.

Even if Merkel’s plans were fully adequate to manage the crisis, which they are not, the mechanics of decision-making in the eurozone’s and the European Union’s patchwork semi-federalism are cumbersome and slow, and the global financial markets can be lightning-fast.

Banks and governments depend on raising fresh credit in the global markets every week. Once they lose creditworthiness, they can fall over the edge very fast. In the current climate, as soon as one weaker eurozone economy falls over the edge, saying that it can no longer pay back its bonds, then global financiers will rush away from lending anything, at any price, to other weaker economies. They will follow each other over the edge, with each fall making further economies weaker. (Thus, if Italy says it can no longer pay its bonds, many French banks will face ruin, and it will become a question whether France can pay its bonds).

BOLD DECISIONS

That, I guess, is why Münchau thinks that bold new decisions at the next European Summit, on 9 December, are the only hope for averting “violent collapse”.

The “violent collapse” would seize up the global credit markets through which capitalism feeds and breathes in the same way that the Lehman Brothers collapse did in September 2008, only on a much greater scale.

The fact that Britain is not in the eurozone would be secondary. A British economy already double-dipping would crash along with the rest of Europe.

For the labour movement and the left to rejoice at the collapse, because it is bad for capitalism, would be foolish. It would be equally foolish for the labour movement and the left to make ourselves humble helpers for one or another Euro-capitalist rescue scheme. All the capitalist rescue schemes involve harsh cuts and privatisations, and all may be hopeless anyway.

The specifically eurozone part of the global capitalist crisis stems in large part from the inbuilt inadequacy and clumsiness of a “unification of Europe” which is only a quarter-unification and is managed from above, bureaucratically, and within neo-liberal dogmas, by patchwork compromises between capitalist clusters which simultaneously, like all capitalists, compete viciously.

Eighty-eight years ago Leon Trotsky wrote: “To the toiling masses of Europe it is becoming ever clearer that the bourgeoisie is incapable of solving the basic problems of restoring Europe’s economic life. The slogan: ‘A Workers’ and Peasants’ Government’ is designed to meet the growing attempts of the workers to find a way out by, their own efforts. It has now become necessary to point out this avenue of salvation more concretely, namely, to assert that only in the closest economic co-operation of the peoples of Europe lies the avenue of salvation for our continent from economic decay...”

That is true today, too. The labour movement and the left should neither plaintively advise the Euro-bosses, nor foolishly rejoice at the prospect of the break-up of capitalist Europe into a bearpit of countries very closely intertwined economically, yet erecting walls between themselves and competing without restraint.

We, the labour movement and the left, need our own plan

for the reconstruction of Europe in the interests of the working class, based on social ownership and control of the great accumulations of productive wealth and in the first place of the banks, on workers’ control of economic life against the domination of the global markets, and on social levelling-up across the continent.

We are far from that. The European TUC calls only for “Eurobonds to facilitate investments for sustainable jobs”, “a financial transactions tax”, and “fair taxation”. The “Party of European Socialists”, the Europe-wide link-up of social-democratic and Labour Parties, held a special conference on 25-26 November in Brussels, but produced no better ideas. Several of the social-democratic leaders — in Greece, in Spain, and in Portugal, until very recently — have been in government pushing through the cuts-and-privatisation “answer” to the crisis, against working-class resistance.

And the more insular British labour movement has not even started a debate about the continent-wide dimensions of crisis.

We need a voice in the European labour movement calling for workers’ unity across Europe with a common programme to remake European unity.

What are “eurobonds”?

The French government and the European Commission propose “eurobonds”, but the German government is vetoing them. These would be bonds sold by national governments, but guaranteed by the entire financial might of the eurozone.

Buyers of such bonds would know they were sure to get their money back. If the Greek or some other government issuing them could not pay, then other eurozone powers would step in to honour their guarantees, and sort it out between themselves and Greece later.

All eurobonds, irrespective of the country that had issued them, would be equally solid assets. There would be a huge market in these eurobonds, making them attractive to governments and banks across the world who want assets which are safe and which can easily be exchanged for cash whenever they want.

A large eurobond programme would settle the immediate crisis caused by governments like Greece, Portugal, Ireland, and increasingly Spain and Italy, not being able to borrow on global markets.

Its downside, as capitalists in the stronger countries of the eurozone, especially Germany, see it, would be to lead to weaker economies constantly running into debt blow-outs. Either that, or it would have to be accompanied by strong control by central eurozone institutions over the budgets of those weaker economies, something difficult to legislate for and even more difficult to enforce without unmanageable odium.

German and other capitalists also think that a large eurobond programme would lead to a decline in the relative value of the euro as compared to the US dollar, the Japanese yen, etc., and thus to their exports having more difficulties in countries outside the eurozone.

The European Financial Stability Facility, set up in 2010, already issues a sort of eurobond, but in limited quantities. The European Central Bank, in the current crisis, has started buying up old bonds of the weaker countries, in an effort to stop them becoming unsaleable.

It is possible that, faced with a choice between cataclysmic collapse of the eurozone, and measures which store problems for the future but avert collapse today, the euro-leaders will go for some, probably limited and modified, new version of eurobonds. If they do, they are sure to link the move with attempts to impose even sharper cuts.

Euro-exit is no shortcut to left victory

The “Research on Money and Finance” group, centred at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, has produced a big new report: “Breaking up? A route out of the eurozone crisis”.

It seeks to present a left-wing case for Greece quitting the euro. Oddly, though the report collects valuable information and analysis on the eurozone crisis as a whole, it says almost nothing about policies in other countries.

“To keep the analysis manageable, it is assumed that only Greece defaults and exits, abstracting from [the possibility of] another country following suit”. The presumption, then, is that the eurozone continues, only minus Greece.

A workers’ government in Greece, which moved decisively against the bankers, the bosses, and the rich, would not submit quietly to eurozone and EU rules. It would make large demands for the cancellation of debt, and might well end up going for default on the debt and exit from the eurozone. It would need to stimulate solidarity across other countries in order to thrive.

Greece is a small country, which, as the report notes, “lacks foreign-exchange reserves”. It is dependent on imports for energy and many foodstuffs and medicine, as well as high technology. It imports much more than it exports (\$48 billion as against \$16 billion in 2010), and depends on tourism to make good much of the difference. It has no large export industries which could suddenly become super-competitive in world markets with a little extra investment.

A government dependent solely on the force and sharpness of Greece’s economic elbows in the global markets would be in trouble. Yet workers across Europe face cuts similar to those in Greece, and sometimes only a few degrees less severe, and could be inspired into common struggle by a Greek workers’ offensive raising Europe-wide demands.

The converse sequence, recommended by the report, that default and exit “could trigger a deep and progressive transformation of the Greek economy” or be “the preamble to a broad programme that would restructure Greek economy and society” (for the better), has less logic.

• www.researchonmoneyandfinance.org

Portugese general strike, 24 November

Euro is botched, but the root of the crisis is in global capital

By Rhodri Evans

The euro, as the new “Research on Money and Finance” (RMF) report shows, was mismanaged from the start because of political constraints. “The euro is not simply a common currency devised to facilitate trade and financial flows among member countries... it is an international reserve currency... a form of world money”.

It was shaped in the 1990s, amidst the wave of capitalist triumphalism which followed the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the USSR in 1989-91, and the subsequent strutting of the USA as hyperpower. The euro-leaders pushed it through fast, skating over difficulties and hoping they would dissolve over time, the better to create an integrated economic space which could draw in Eastern Europe.

The euro is the world’s second most important reserve currency, though way behind the US dollar. To uphold that status, the European Central Bank was given an odd shape.

Formally, its only mandate is to defend the value of the euro, keeping inflation low. It does not have the mandate which other central banks have, to be “the lender of last resort” in crisis. At the same time, it is less secure, because it does not have a unified state, with tax-raising powers, behind it.

The euro has also, so the RMF argues, been “a means of establishing a hierarchy among states and ultimately a weapon of imperial power”, essentially of German hegemony.

TREND

The ten-year trend behind the current crisis was one of growing trade surpluses for Germany and trade deficits for the “periphery” of Europe, matched by growing borrowing by governments and capitalists in the “periphery” from banks in northern Europe.

The imbalance was systematic and growing, because the competitiveness of capital in the “periphery” declined relative to German capital.

Productivity in each of Greece, Portugal, and Ireland rose faster between 1995 and 2009 than productivity in Germany; but wages grew much faster in the “periphery”, and thus unit labour costs there increased faster than in Germany. This led to a crunch where the countries of the “periphery” are crushed by debts to German and other north European banks, and face imperious German demands to beat down the living standards of their working classes as condition for “bail-outs” which are, in fact, bail-outs of northern Europe’s own banks.

Banks in the eurozone are “international when it comes to liquidity, but national when it comes to solvency”. They can get cash only from the European Central Bank.

But if they can’t pay their debts, then the ECB will not save from collapse. Their national government has to do that.

Thus the crisis since 2008 has led to banks being more closely linked with their national governments. Banks and governments are now locked in a sort of dance of death.

That is the picture painted by the report. It is true as far as it goes, but it seems to me one-sided, and one-sided in a way that gives the false impression that exit from the eurozone would release Greece (and presumably other smaller countries) into an altogether friendlier environment where they would have greater clout and autonomy.

DOG-EAT-DOG

Capitalism is dog-eat-dog both inside the eurozone and outside. Germany is hegemonic in the eurozone. But German capitalism, once it had managed the reunification of its country, was always going to be the leading force in Europe. The eurozone has given a particular shape to that hegemony, but it has not erected it out of previous evenness.

Greek, or other “peripheral”, capitalism would not have flourished better outside the eurozone. Other weaker European economies, not in the eurozone, such as Hungary, have suffered as much or worse in the crisis.

Between the introduction of the euro in 1999 and the onset of crisis in 2008, Greece’s income per head (on PPS calculations) increased from 68% of Germany’s to 80%. Spain’s in-

creased from 80% to 90%. Ireland’s increased from 105% to 115%. And, as the RMF report notes, productivity rose much faster in Greece and Ireland than in Germany.

The report presents the neo-liberal structures and rules of the eurozone as rigid, solid, and unbudgeable however well the labour movement mobilises, whereas it suggests that countries outside the eurozone would melt into what it calls “progressive” policies just by default and exit.

Oddly, it suggests that the structures of the EU could become more fluid and subject to partial reshaping under working-class pressure, but only if Greece first quits the eurozone. The report specifically does not recommend Greece quitting the European Union (as distinct from the eurozone), and thinks it “likely that progressive Greek default and exit would lead to rapid change in the EU” for the better.

No concessions will be won, from the EU, from the eurozone, or from a euro-exited Greek capitalist government, without labour movement mobilisation.

But once mobilisation is underway, and if it is focused and clear, there is probably more space for winning concessions from the eurozone leaders, who are both alarmed and rich enough to afford concessions, than from a euro-exited Greek capitalist government impoverished by a huge flight of capital and scrambling to hold its own in global markets.

Working-class policies before “exit” policies

The RMF report argues that default and exit by Greece are likely in any event. They could be “creditor-led”, i.e. forced on Greece by the banks which it owes money to and the states behind them.

Or they could be chaotic, leading to “social disintegration” in Greece. Or “conservative”, led by right-wing forces, and resulting in “an authoritarian polity atop an economy characterised by successive devaluations, poor growth outcomes, and worsening income distribution”.

“Yet”, the report says, “there could also be ‘progressive exit’.” It spends many pages on argument as to why default and exit could be less damaging (in terms of inflation, difficulties of getting the drachma accepted even within Greece, inability to import essentials, etc.) than other economists have reckoned, but it agrees that exit could fail to be “progressive”.

It is vague about the agency that would make exit “progressive” rather than “conservative”. “It would be necessary”, the report says, “to adopt a broad programme including, at the very least, public ownership and control over financial institutions... and total restructuring of the

state in a democratic direction... in essence... a transitional programme for the Greek economy... in the direction of labour ascendancy”. (This programme includes a comprehensive reform of the Greek tax system, which at present is full of exemptions disproportionately used by the rich, but, oddly, not a reduction in Greece’s military budget, proportionally the biggest in Europe).

It would be necessary... for *who* to adopt this “transitional programme”? The report never says. It appears to envisage “a progressive government” of some sort of leftish bourgeois forces “that drew strength from popular support, particularly from organised labour”.

The Greek left and labour movement should be directed towards establishing their own “transitional programme” and “labour ascendancy” first, as a precondition for default and exit being incidentals in a move forward, rather than towards pushing “default and exit” as their first priority, and hoping it will “trigger” some otherwise bourgeois government into “progressive transformation”.

Public and private sector workers unite in Greece

By Theodora Polenta

The paperwork has now been sent out and 16,000 Greek public sector workers within two years of retirement have been placed in "reserve" ("efedreia").

From 1 January 2012 an additional 12,000 workers will be placed on "reserve". During 2012, the government and the EU/ECB/IMF "Troika" aim to reduce the public sector by 30%: that is, a further 120,000 public sector workers will be losing their jobs. The Troika has set a target of 270,000 fewer public sector jobs by 2015.

Occupations and protests are starting to erupt in the public sector organisations. Transport workers staged two four-hour strikes in the week ending 26 November.

On Thursday 24 November, public sector workers staged a 24 hour strike and an occupation of management buildings in an attempt to blockade the processing of lists of public sector workers to be placed in "reserve". The occupations continued on Friday.

On Monday 28 November, workers in the air transport industry called a 24 hour strike and occupied their management offices as a response to the start of implementation of "reserve" in their workplaces.

The plans to put workers in "reserve" and cut jobs are linked with further privatisation of the public sector and the government's plan to sell off €50 billion worth by the end of 2015.

They are part of the overall attack by the government and the Troika on wages, pensions, unemployment, welfare...

Greek metal workers are on a one-month strike against the poverty, redundancies, flexibility, and casualisation

which the employer is imposing on them as a response to the crisis. They rejected the employer's proposal to reduce their working hours to five hours a day and their pay by 40%.

The employer sacked 34 metal workers in an attempt to spread fear and insecurity. 400 workmates have responded with a 30-day strike.

Greek Metal Ltd is the first private company to make use of all the recent anti-working-class legislation that has been passed in the last 18 months.

It is the first private company to try to impose a five hour working day with a 40% wage cut, flexible working hours dependent upon the company's needs, unpaid overtime, an hourly labour rate instead of a stable and secure monthly wage, and abolition of welfare and insurance benefits.

WAVE

If the struggle of the metal workers is defeated and the new regime is established then a wave of similar defeats will follow across the private sector. It is time for the rest of the workers to support the metal workers in action, through solidarity strikes and occupations in their workplaces.

University and school student unions, public and private sector workers' unions, and pensioners' unions have voted messages of solidarity and support to the metal workers. The public sector workers took their march past the metal workers' workplace, and school students ended their 17 November march there.

Representatives of workers' unions are arriving from all over Greece with food and money for the metal workers.

In late November police invaded the union and neighbourhood movement's occupation of the central offices where orders for electricity to be cut off from homes that have refused to pay or can not afford to pay the regressive property tax. 13 trade union activists were arrested. In response to the violent breaking-up of the occupation, masses of people gathered outside the occupied offices and demanded the immediate release of activists.

In Thessaloniki, left wing activists who participated in the protests on 28 October are being brought to court with the accusation that they were the instigators of the protests which forced the most prominent of Greece's military and religious leaders, and even the president, to run away, and led to the cancellation of the customary militarist and nationalist 28 October parades. A movement of solidarity has been built around the persecuted activists.

The union organisations GSEE and ADEDY have called a one day general strike for 1 December. It is the duty of the left-wing organisations and the workers' rank-and-file movements to ensure that the numbers on the 1 December general strike should be higher than on 19-20 October, but it is apparent that a one-day general strike falls far behind the required level of struggle.

Workers in every workplace should form workers' committees to organise and direct their struggle from below, and the workers' committees should establish ways of communications with the newly formed neighbourhood committees with the aim of organising the struggles to come and opening the door to the power of the working people and socialism.

• More: workersliberty.org/greece111129

Ireland: grassroots anger at cuts sell-out

A young activist from Dublin spoke to *Solidarity*. He is a member of the Irish Labour Party, which won 37 seats at the last general election and is a partner in the coalition government led by Fine Gael.

What is the attitude of grassroots activists to what the Labour Party is doing in government?

There's huge frustration among young activists, verging on despair. As each new story comes out about what's going to be in the [December] budget (student fees, cuts in social welfare, increase in VAT etc.) it just becomes harder and harder to have any faith in the party leadership, or to rationalise the role the party is playing in government. There's massive anger.

Labour Youth opposed going into government, but the vast majority of the rest of the party supported it. I think the majority still support the leadership, but dissatisfaction may be beginning to grow. At a recent local meeting a minister spoke defending cuts and was greeted by deafening silence. That was encouraging.

How is the Party leadership defending its actions? Do these defences hold weight with ordinary members?

They say there's no alternative to cuts because the deficit is out of control, that the IMF is making them do it, that they are compelled to continue socialisation of the banks' losses by the bailout deal made by last government. Even though even the IMF will tell you that's nonsense.

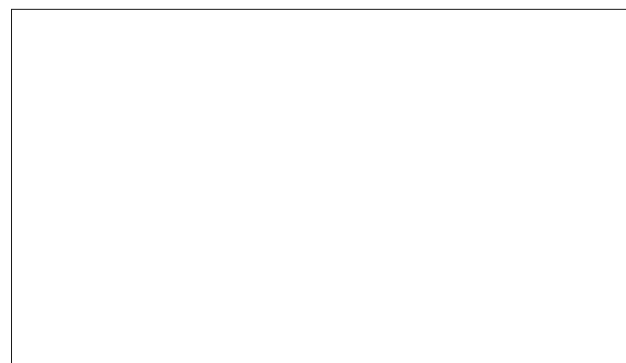
It does hold weight with a lot of ordinary party members, though not youth members. I look to the Greens in the last government, and the way the members stuck with the leadership's line to the very end, and I do fear the same thing may happen with us.

Trade unions fund the party and have 10% of the vote at conference. Is there any attempt by the rank-and-file of the unions to hold the Party to account?

There are eleven trade unions currently affiliated with the party. The biggest is the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU), which has about 200,000 members. Another important affiliate is the Irish wing of Unite.

The influence of unions on the Labour Party is much smaller than in Britain. Not only is their share of vote smaller, but the dues from trade unions only form a small proportion of the party's funding, which mainly comes from a government allowance.

The country's unions were effectively neutralised over the course of 20 years by an extremely ineffective form of social



partnership with business and governments. That only broke down a few years ago. The whole culture of the main trade unions isn't exactly militant.

Another problem is the Croke Park Agreement which the unions made with the last government, in which the previous government agreed not to impose public sector layoffs or further public sector pay cuts in exchange for cooperation with wide-scale public sector reform. There have been a lot of calls for this to be renegotiated, for public servants to take more pain. In a way that is something the government can hang over unions in case they get too vocal about its policies.

That said, there are encouraging signs. Unite is a very strong force of opposition, in fact they were one of the only organisations along with Labour Youth to oppose coalition, although unfortunately they're fairly small here. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has also published a very progressive alternative budget proposal, and is organising a march against cuts.

What alternative policy to the cuts do you think the Labour Party should follow?

The budget is supposed to make a fiscal correction of €3.6 billion according to the Memorandum of Understanding with the IMF and EU but it's open to negotiation as to where those savings are made.

Numerous budget proposals have shown that savings of well over €3 billion could be made in progressive taxation measures; for example introducing a third rate of tax on high incomes, a wealth tax and ending tax reliefs on property and pensions. A stimulus package could also be introduced without even affecting the deficit, using money from the pension reserve fund and European Investment Bank.

Then there's the question of the banks. The government is

set to repay €3 billion in bank debt every year for the next twenty-odd years. That's insane and should be renegotiated immediately. The government has a 99.6% share in Anglo-Irish Bank, one of the country's main banks. It's socialised the losses, but not the profits or strategy. That has to change as well.

Our political leaders are worried about upsetting Europe and the IMF, but that's an incredibly stupid attitude. If you compare Ireland and Greece, Ireland has received glowing praise from international leaders for being the "good student" among countries who have made debt deals with Europe. Meanwhile the Greeks have been the bad boys of the situation. But now Greece has a 50% write-down on its debt and we have nothing like that.

What do you think of the call from some on the left for Ireland to quit the euro and the EU?

I'm completely against this. The economic consequences of leaving the euro would be catastrophic. The EU needs more integration, not less. The only way global capital can be resisted is through international cooperation. It's true that the current EU system is incredibly undemocratic, but simply by its existence it gives the possibility of building something better in the future. Giving up on the EU project would, in the long run, amount to surrendering all our power of action to global capital.

What was Labour Left and do you see any prospects for creating something like it today? How should the left in the Party fight for an alternative policy to the leadership?

Labour Left was an organised group within the Irish Labour Party in the 1980s that was calling for the Labour Party to end its strategy of entering government as a minority party. It called for a much more radical form of industrial developmentalism and intervention in the economy than the more moderate stance of the party leadership. It was eventually neutralised by the leadership but it had a major longer-term impact on party strategy.

It'll be harder to organise now. In 1982 40% of the party membership voted against going into government, earlier this year it was less than 10%. But it is incumbent on us to do something to change the current dynamic.

I think in the period between the budget and party conference next spring there needs to be the development of a coherent and concerted opposition to leadership policy, and some sort of confrontation conference, even though we will still be a minority.

Anarchism without trade unions: fresh wave, or utopianism?

By Ira Berkovic

Yves Coleman's article in *Solidarity* 224 ("Five things Trotskyists Should Know About Today's Young 'Anarchists'") is a little difficult to get to grips with, much like the politics of the people — "today's young 'anarchists'" — whose corner Yves has chosen to fight. The mirroring of content and form is a neat trick, but it doesn't make a fruitful exchange particularly easy.

Yves objects to a recent series of articles (presumably Martin Thomas's review of Lucien Van Der Walt and Michael Schmidt's book *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*), which he found "too much centred on 'old-style' 19th-century anarchism and not on today's diverse, confused libertarian and anarchist currents."

As a point-of-departure, this is a little unfair; the series was a critical review of a recently-published book about the "anarchist tradition" which was recommended by an anarchist in debate with us as the best statement of anarchist views. The series did not pretend to be a comprehensive engagement with all of today's currents. If Yves's objection is that we have not devoted sufficient time to attempting such an engagement, I can only suggest that he takes another look at our recent work and written material. He might try, just for starters, Ed Maltby's "How to organise to change the world", Bob Sutton on the dissolution of Climate Camp or my own "Open letter to a direct-action militant" or "Can we build a revolutionary workers' movement?"

He should also note our working in and building up networks like No Sweat, Workers' Climate Action and Feminist Fightback — direct-action, activist coordinations that unite Trotskyists, anarchists and others to organise on the basis of shared class-struggle politics within wider anti-capitalist milieus. Perhaps Yves considers these efforts inadequate or politically misguided, but to suggest that we only engage with anarchists as if they were all nothing more than slavish acolytes of Bakunin and Proudhon is unreasonable.

Unlike other Trotskyist organisations (such as the SWP, whose dreadful recent series on "anarchism" used the term interchangeably with "autonomism"), we have attempted to engage critically with anarchism both in its form as a discrete theoretical tradition and in its more diffuse modern manifestation.

So Yves's ostensible starting point (merely to chivvy the AWL, without agenda, into an engagement with a different expression of "anarchist" ideas) is at the very least, misplaced. What's the article's purpose? In a correspondence reproduced on the anarchist-dominated website LibCom, Yves writes: "If you read my conclusion with accurate glasses it seems clear (at least to me) that if Trotskyists want to discuss with anarchists they should question ... their program and leave Trotskyism in the 'dustbins of history'". I have no problem with Yves attempting to persuade us to break with Trotskyism, but if this is his aim he should be upfront about it.

REAL

I know Yves is committed to real debate — non-sectarian but sharp and serious. Despite his warm words for young anarchists uninterested in old texts, he has given much of his own energy in recent years to digging out and publishing... old texts of anarchism and Marxism. He should write, therefore, so that we can debate the words on the page without "glasses" — "accurate" or otherwise.

I agree that there are specific politics and general ways-of-thinking that have become incorporated into "Trotskyist" common-sense (most of them inherited wholesale from Stalinism) that do belong in "the dustbin of history". But exactly what specific ideas Yves thinks we should throw out, and what ideas from anarchist traditions — if any — we should replace them with remains a mystery. He doesn't spell it out in his article (or maybe I'm just not wearing the right "glasses").

He is not even clear about whether he agrees with the politics of "today's young anarchists", whose defender and advocate he has apparently appointed himself. On "militancy at work", for example, Yves argues that "young anarchists" are more interested in "direct action in their community" rather than the workplace. The implication is that precariousness has shifted the nuclear core at which capitalism can be challenged away from struggles in workplaces and the organisations that grow out of them (that is, unions).

Yves describes a "Trotskyist" strategy of "infiltrating the

Not even looking for a coherent view?

trade union bureaucracy" (appearing to denote by this, not just activities oriented to positions in the official machine, like say the SP's in PCS, but any systematic engagement with trade-union organisation) and says some anarchists share it, but highlights the fact that many anarchists maintain an overt hostility to established labour movements. Certainly, some anarchists do think this. *But are they right to think it?*

Does the proliferation of precarious work (call centres, service and retail sector jobs etc.), particularly amongst young people, somehow alter the fundamental analysis that sees the wage relation, in workplaces, specifically (rather than what some anarchists mystically describe as "hierarchy" or "power relations", pervading diffusely throughout all of society and no more or less hegemonic in the workplace than in a classroom or on a housing estate) as the nuclear core of capitalism? We believe that it doesn't. Certainly, the "shape" of the working class has changed since the 60s, 70s and 80s but the essential DNA of capitalism has not.

On the question of "direct action", to give another example, the debate is not whether we should organise it "now" (which the anarchists want, apparently), or reject it until we achieve a "primitive accumulation of militants (or cadres) to build the party": we can all agree that "direct action now" is necessary. The questions are *what kind of direct action, by whom, and for what?* Yves's article doesn't scratch the surface of those fundamental questions, and is rather poorer for it.

Part of Yves's problem is that, in attempting to speak on behalf of a milieu that is, by definition and by his own admission, diffuse, contradictory and "confused", he can only deal in impressionistic brush-strokes. The politics of the people Yves is attempting to describe are not fixed. They are on a journey — some towards more theoretically-concrete "classical anarchism", some towards anarcho-syndicalism, some perhaps towards the revolutionary syndicalism which bears a great deal in common with our own politics, some away from working-class anti-capitalism altogether and towards individualist lifestyle utopianism.

When the AWL meets people at various stages of that political journey, we attempt to engage with them, and not by throwing critiques of Bakunin at them but by trying to identify shared politics to organise around. That common organisation sometimes involves us learning from them, but it also involves identifying where we think they're wrong and attempting to persuade them of our ideas.

It is on that terrain, on the terrain of which ideas are right and which are wrong, that the engagement between "Trotskyists" and "today's young 'anarchists'" must take place. The fact that, according to Yves, some "young anarchists [...] are not looking for a coherent, scientific point of view" doesn't change this; it simply means that that, too, is an idea which needs debating.

Many of the ideas Yves describes — a focus on building cooperatives or social centres, an emphasis on organising "non-traditional" groups of workers, a perspective that sees

squatting a building as equally anti-capitalist/revolutionary as organising a strike — are modern echoes of pre-Marxist utopian socialism. You can see them, alive and well, in the Occupy movement, many of whose activists see the establishment and maintenance of the protest camps as an end in itself rather than a symbolic act or an action designed to provide leverage to win political demands (as per the epigraph on Yves's article — "when I cook for the Occupy movement, I contribute to changing the world".)

21st century utopians (which would perhaps be a better label than "anarchists" for the people Yves is describing, although anarchism has always had utopian elements) start from an opposition to capitalism, but often without a clear analysis of what it is or how it works, and a vague idea of an alternative, but without an identifiable agency for achieving it.

CLASS

The AWL believes that capitalism is not simply an accumulation of its symptoms or bad effects, but a specific system predicated fundamentally on the exploitation of wage labour. It can only be disrupted and overthrown by subverting that exploitative relationship.

This means that workers' self-organisation, at the point of exploitation, is "privileged" as a form of organisation. It means that strikes, sit-ins and other forms of class-struggle direct action are "privileged" as forms of action. It means that the organisations organically generated from capitalist class relations (trade unions) are key sites of struggle, no matter how bureaucratic or badly-led they may be. And it means that only workers' self-organisation and struggle can provide a basis for building a new society.

"Today's young 'anarchists'" — our 21st century utopians — don't agree, Yves tells us. Fine. But, to be perhaps a little blunter than Yves would like, they are wrong. The Marxist critique of such perspectives is as valid now as it was in 1848, and is one aspect of our tradition that we are not prepared to junk.

If Yves wants to contribute more productively to a continuing engagement between the AWL and anarchists of whatever stripe and school, he would do better to say precisely which ideas he believes are right and which wrong, rather than setting himself up as an ostensibly-neutral (but in fact partisan) conduit for the constantly-shifting ideas of a layer of activists with which we already have a long experience of engaging.

Enough with the glasses, Yves; let's have the debate in plain view.

- Coleman article: www.workersliberty.org/yves
- Libcom exchange: bit.ly/vZIFXv
- Maltby: bit.ly/f4BVZB
- Sutton: bit.ly/vJ94hW
- Berkovic: bit.ly/h0IHYN and bit.ly/jc97HE

Varieties of dialectics

By Martin Thomas

In one of the crazy autobiographical fragments he wrote in his last years, the famous French Stalinist philosopher Louis Althusser claimed that his father, a bank manager, ran his branch on the following lines:

"It was his custom not to say anything, or to make absolutely unintelligible remarks. His subordinates dared not admit they had understood nothing, but went off and usually managed very well on their own, though they still wondered if they might not be mistaken and this kept them on their toes".

"Karl Marx, the philosopher" is presented by many exegetists as posthumously running the Marxist movement in the same way as Althusser senior ran the bank. Marx himself explicitly said that he had moved on from philosophy, and scarcely ever made "philosophical" statements: yet, according to the exegetists, a philosophy which can somehow be cooked up from scattered and often cryptic remarks by Marx is the basic stuff of Marxism.

Marx made two, and only two, considered statements, polished and prepared for publication, on his "method of work". The major one is in the postface to the second edition of *Capital*.

Marx noted that various reviewers had criticised the book for "metaphysics" and "Hegelian sophistry". He countered that by citing other reviewers who (more accurately, in Marx's view) saw him as using "deductive method" and "analytical" reasoning, and being "severely realistic".

To describe his own "dialectical method", Marx quoted a Russian reviewer, who saw these main features:

- a focus on "the law of variation... transition from one form into another, from one series of connections into a different one";
- the priority being "that the facts be investigated as accurately as possible", in order to enable "a precise analysis of the series of successions, of the sequences and links within which the different stages of development present themselves";
- to prove "both the necessity of the present order of things, and the necessity of another order into which the first must inevitably pass over".

FORERUNNER

Marx also cited his own preface to his 1859 book which had been a forerunner to *Capital*. There he had argued that "the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life".

That mode of production, however, changes from one historical epoch to another, and each of the modes of production in history is torn and spurred on by "antagonism that emanates from the individuals' social conditions of existence".

Further (in the *Capital* postface) Marx claimed that "the dialectic", as he used it, "includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction... regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well... [is] in its very essence critical and revolutionary".

Marx proposed one kind of "dialectical method"

Marx is analysing society with a view to the antagonisms within it, and the flux both of society as a whole and of elements within it. He is challenging naive or common-sense views which take the elements of present-day society as fixed and as given by nature rather than by history. The contrast with orthodox bourgeois economics, which starts from a calculus of given individual preferences, takes the market framework in which they interact as given, and focuses on investigating the conditions for general equilibrium and harmony, is also clear.

Despite Marx's loose use of the term "the dialectic", his text makes clear that there is no such thing as "the" dialectic. "My dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it".

The point here is not, and cannot be, as cod-Marxists have it, that Hegel invented a whizz-bang method, called "the dialectic", but stupidly applied it only to the progressive development of "the Idea", so that the world had to wait for Marx to apply it to material reality. Dialectical methods go back at least to Socrates, 2,200 years before Hegel; and Hegel was not stupid.

IDEALISM

The special thing about Hegel's dialectics is that for him dialectics was idealism, idealism was dialectics, and idealism and dialectics were science.

"By Dialectic is meant the indwelling tendency outwards by which the one-sidedness and limitation of the predicates of understanding is seen in its true light, and shown to be the negation of them. For anything to be finite is just to sup-

press itself and put itself aside. Thus understood the Dialectical principle constitutes the life and soul of scientific progress, the dynamic which alone gives immanent connection and necessity to the body of science; and, in a word, is seen to constitute the real and true, as opposed to the external, exaltation above the finite".

"The real and true, as opposed to the external"; "exaltation above the finite"; a method which produced real truth, i.e. "the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind" — that was dialectics for Hegel.

The dialectical dialogue was between the Idea and itself; and that dialogue, the self-development of the Idea, was not just "about" reality. It was reality; it was truth, as opposed to the flim-flam of ephemeral fact.

Ludwig Feuerbach, as Marx would recognise, showed that Hegel's philosophy was "nothing but religion conceptualised and rationally developed".

He proposed a different dialectical dialogue. Feuerbach: "The true dialectic is not a monologue of the solitary thinker with himself [notionally of the Idea with itself; in fact of the philosopher with himself]. It is a dialogue between 'I' and 'You'." It is therefore a process of constant approximation and reconsideration, not a once-and-for-all revelation.

APOLOGETICS

Marx recognised that "Feuerbach's dialectic" had "overcome" "the Hegelian dialectic" and showed that Hegelian dialectic to be a system of reconciliation and apologetics in which "reason finds itself at home in unreason as such", a "false positivism or merely apparent criticism".

It was not that Hegel had compromised a radical philosophy in order to keep his academic post. The "falseness" is the falseness of his very principle".

Marx proposed yet a new dialectical dialogue, experimental, practical, and revolutionary, in place of Hegel and of Feuerbach's more contemplative model.

"Feuerbach, not satisfied with abstract thinking, wants contemplation; but... Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking, in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question".

In Marx's early writings, "Hegelian" is an adjective of condemnation. ("It is Hegelian trash, it is not history", he exclaims against Proudhon's account of times past). Later, when Marx wrote his postface to *Capital*, he seems to have become more "Hegelian". He denounces those who dismiss Hegel as a "dead dog": "I openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker".

He is hostile to the myopic empiricism of writers like Leopold von Ranke ("merely tell how it really was"). But pupils can and do move on from their teachers.

Marx was scrupulous about acknowledging every idea which he took from another writer. Many writers appear in the footnotes of *Capital*. Hegel, too, sometimes; but never as source of a serious argument.

Many of the footnoted references to Hegel are obviously jokes. I would argue that all of them are literary flourishes.

As Engels emphasises again and again in *Anti-Dühring* (a polemic against a writer, Dühring, who had developed his own version of dialectics), Marx never in *Capital* cites a Hegelian trope as a substantive argument for a conclusion. Marx only invokes phrases from Hegel (and Hegel was a brilliant author of mind-jolting phrases) to decorate conclusions derived from sober factual reasoning.

Dave Osler (*Solidarity* 219) is wrong to dismiss dialectics out of hand on the basis of the work of the cod-Marxists (and a perversely unfriendly reading of Trotsky). I also think Bruce Robinson (*Solidarity* 220) is wrong when he claims that "the real world of nature and society is dialectical", and thus claims "being dialectical" as a known-in-advance property of all things whether physical or social. If Bruce means only that we should look out for the fluidity, changeability, and conflictedness of much in physical reality as well as in society, I have no argument. But he claims more.

He claims a sort of knowledge before the knowledge, a method that lets us know straight off that any object in a black box, whether it be an electron, a bowl of soup, a parallelogram, or a capitalist society, is "dialectical", whereas investigating inside the box is necessary to know its other traits.

I could easily "prove" that a parallelogram is "dialectical". (Opposite angles are equal! Unity of opposites! What did I tell you?)

But since, by definition, being "dialectical" does not differentiate the parallelogram from an electron, a bowl of soup, or a capitalist society, the talk about it being dialectical tells you only about my glibness, not about reality.

Cameron "answers" his critics

By Molly Thomas

David Cameron seems to think that child poverty is something one might act against only in order to keep Polly Toynbee happy.

In the *Guardian* magazine on 26 November, he answered questions from selected celebrities, and was asked about child poverty by Polly Toynbee. His response concluded: "There are many things I can do in life, but making Polly happy is not one of them...", mocking her for making a fuss about the issue.

On another question, he said: "Once students are paying the bills [for their university educations], they will be keener on really good courses...". By that rationale, primary school students should be paying so that they can appreciate their teachers.

Asked by Richard Dawkins why the government promotes faith schools, he sneered that "Richard Dawkins just doesn't really get it", suggesting that Dawkins is of inferior intelligence because he isn't religious.

Asked about deep water oil drilling in the Arctic, Cameron responded: "But we don't own any of the Arc-

tic" — as if the destruction of the environment doesn't matter as long as it happens outside the United Kingdom!

The superior attitude used in the response to Toynbee crops up again in a response when Tony Benn asks him when he would use British nuclear weapons. Cameron states that "as Tony Benn well knows, the point of... nuclear weapons is to deter... not to use them", calling Benn "splendidly wrong".

But not only is this evasive — Cameron says that the point isn't to use them but doesn't say that he won't — it's also extremely offensive.

Hard of thinking

Our class shows its strength

The 30 November public sector strike was the biggest single piece of industrial action in Britain for a generation.

Millions of workers from 25 different trade unions took part, organising lively picket lines, marches, and rallies across the UK. Despite Prime Minister David Cameron characterizing the strike as “a damp

squib”, the government’s own figures admit that the strike shut or partially closed over 16,000 schools (nearly 75% of all state schools in the country) and led to the cancellation of 7,000 routine (non-emergency) NHS procedures. In Scotland, only 30 schools out of thousands opened and 80% of Welsh schools were shut. On page 5, we

give our views on how the strike movement can develop.

Here, we collate reports from across the country.

- More: workersliberty.org/n30reports
- Next steps after N30: see page 5

Lively pickets at Edgware Hospital

By Vicki Morris, Barnet TUC (pc)

There was a lively, ebullient picket of Edgware Community Hospital in Barnet.

Pickets representing Unison, the Chartered Society of Physiotherapists and the Society of Podiatrists were on one gate. There was another picket at the rear entrance to the hospital staffed largely by podiatrists. The branches represented had also organised a picket at Finchley Memorial Hospital.

I spoke to the branch secretary and chair of the Unison Barnet PCT and Mental Health branch, Rena Nunes and Sylvia Salter.

They were happy with the level of emergency

cover they had negotiated with management. They told me that some clinic appointments had been cancelled, but said the wards, district nurse service and walk-in centre were still open. I said that seemed a rather high level of service and asked whether they were confident their action was effective; wasn’t it more of a protest than a strike?

They seemed confident that the action was worthwhile in spite of this. I asked them what they thought should be done next to win their dispute. They were confident with the Unison strategy, calling it a “rolling programme”. I’m not sure whether this is what Unison is planning. Given that the increased pensions contributions are due to

start in April, I asked whether they would expect to see more action early in the New Year. Yes, they thought another one-day strike was likely.

They thought that the Royal College of Nursing might be balloting for action in January, and that it had been losing members to Unison.

They said nursing is an ageing profession.

They were particularly concerned about the impact on women workers of the pensions changes. Sylvia said: “The change to career average pensions will particularly hit women, who have periods off work to have children.”

The strikers had been buoyed by public support, including drinks brought by the local pharmacy and residents.

Hull

Around 2,000 people rallied. It was the largest rally in Hull in 80 years.

Despite TUC-selected speakers making long and predictable speeches, the march was large and noisy.

After the march there was an open mic for rank-and-file trade unionists to speak.

Overall, a large and impressive demo but more discussion on “what next?” needed.

Sam Greenwood

Middlesborough

Around 2,000 people attended the town centre demo, with the local PCS branches very solid.

At the tax office where over 300 work, only 7 workers (non-union members) scabbed. The local college was less strong.

A lot of ire at the demo was directed towards Stuart Bell, the local Labour MP, who does absolutely nothing in the town.

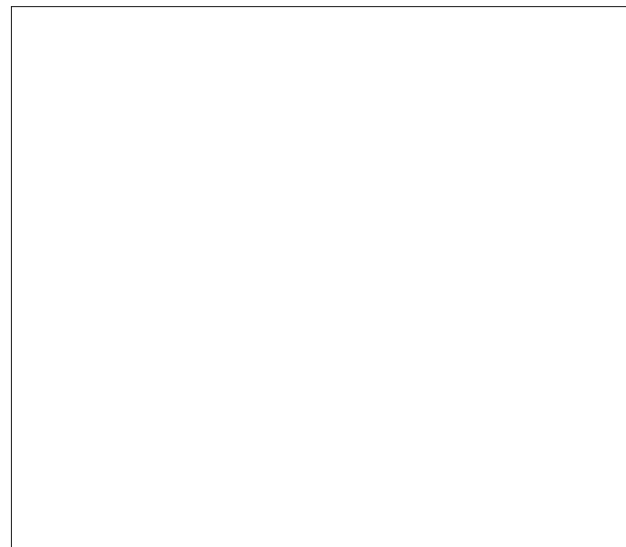
Martyn Hudson

Norfolk

A small group of workers marched through the town with flags and banners to rally in the precinct in Dereham (the first political demonstration in the decade I’ve lived here).

Across the county over half of schools are shut. Similar marches and rallies have taken place in Kings Lynn and Lowestoft, with up to 2,000 marching in Norwich.

Patrick Yarker



Thousands march in Cambridge

By Liam McNulty, Cambridge Defend Education (pc)

Cambridge Evening News estimated 2,000 people at the noon rally on 30 November.

Speeches were of variable quality but were overwhelmingly by local trade unionists active in the workplace rather than imported bureaucrats.

The Cambridge Occupation worked with local trade unionists to produce a leaflet inviting striking workers to join them at 4pm to discuss student-

worker unity and how to take the dispute forward beyond today’s strike. Occupiers sent a fleet of bikes around all the picket lines nearby in the morning to offer solidarity, discuss the strike and publicise the meeting. They also handed out leaflets at the rally.

Around 50 people attended and issues of rank-and-file control, the importance of trade union and student union democracy, and linking together trades council, student and town anti-cuts structures were debated.

We won’t be thrown on the scrapheap

Rita Ash, a Unison activist in Tower Hamlets, spoke to *Solidarity*:

“We can’t do anything until the government start talking.

“The situation’s hard for us; dinner ladies were only allowed into the pension scheme in 1994. I work 35 hours a week, but only in term time, so it counts as part-time, meaning that even though I’ve been in the scheme 17 years, only

14 are recognised.

“Dinner ladies are constantly carrying heavy loads, getting in ovens... people often can’t physically work even up to 60, and they get dismissed. They give the best years of their lives to local government and then they’re thrown on the scrapheap.

“I think we need selective action, taking out school workers, cleaners. Let low-paid workers have a chance.”

Teachers fight strike-breaking

By Stewart Ward

Management at an East London school have turned to old-fashioned strike-breaking tactics as teachers continue their battle against excessive workloads.

Teachers at the Langdon School in Newham, who are members of the National Union of Teachers, struck for the fourth time on Thursday 24 November and plan to strike again on Tuesday 29 November and Thursday 1 December, as well as on Wednesday 30 November as part of the pension strike. 70 teachers

took part in the last round of strike action, but the school’s intransigent head-teacher insisted on keeping the school open despite the low staffing levels.

In a new turn, the school has hired new staff to break the strike. To avoid the legal restriction on employers using agency staff to do the work of striking employees, the school has negotiated direct Local Authority contracts for the strikebreakers. The local NUT believes this gives them grounds for a dispute with the Authority as a whole, as well as Langdon School specifically.

In a message to supporters, NUT reps at the school said: “This is a very tough dispute — and one we’re amazed has got this far. We are proud of our members’ resilience and solidarity. We also need all the support we can get. We know from your messages that many of you face the same issues of workload and oppressive management that we face.

“We thought from the start that this was a fight for all teachers. Now we know it is.”

• Messages of support can be sent to nutlangdon@aol.co.uk.

Sparks vote to strike

By Darren Bedford

Electricians working for Balfour Beatty Engineering Services have voted by 81% to take strike action in their battle against their employer’s attempt to unilaterally withdraw from the Joint Industry Board (JIB), the body which oversees union-negotiated pay and conditions.

Balfour Beatty, along with six other major mechanical and electrical construction contractors, are proposing to replace the JIB with a new agreement, the “Building Engineering Services National Agree-

ment” (BESNA), which is not union-negotiated.

Workers currently employed by the seven contractors have been told they have until 7 December to sign up to BESNA, or risk losing their jobs. The new contracts would mean a 35% pay cut for some workers.

A London-based rank-and-file committee, around the Siteworker bulletin, has kept up a weekly programme of “flashmob”-style direct actions, including a lighting occupation of the head offices of the Gratte Brothers contractor on Wednesday 23 November.

Unilever workers take pensions fight to private sector

By Darren Bedford

A strike by thousands of workers at Unilever (which manufactures well-known food products including Marmite and other household goods) could be the first major set-piece pensions battle in the private sector, after Unite, GMB and USDAW all returned massive majorities for strike action.

Workers are attempting to prevent the abolition of their final-salary pension schemes, for both new and existing members. Existing scheme members will retain accrued benefits, but will not receive their full final-salary pensions and will instead be transferred onto career-average pensions on 1 January 2012. This could mean enormous losses for many workers; according to Unite, one member has already calculated that it represents a loss of £150,000 if he lives for just 15 years after retirement!

A company statement said: “Our pensions arrangements in the UK have to reflect today’s realities if they are going to be sustainable into the future and this means making tough choices, including an acceptance that final salary pensions are no longer a viable option for the company.”

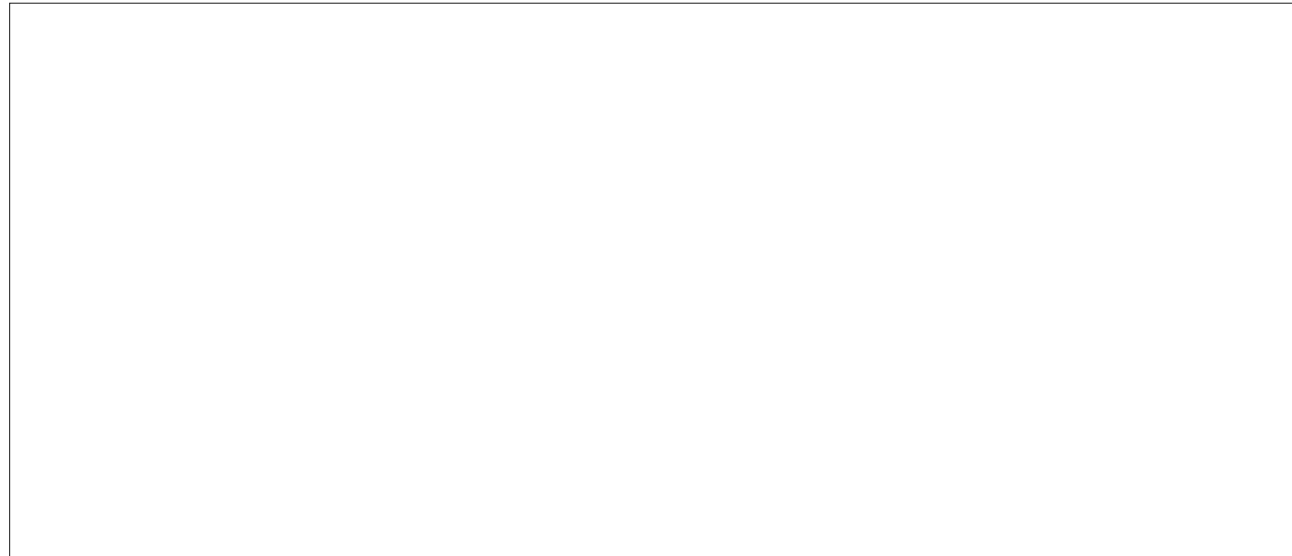
The GMB’s Allan Black said: “This strike vote demonstrates that pensions are not just a matter of concern for public sector workers as the concerns are shared by workers in the private sector too. The vote also shows that ordinary workers will not stand idly by to watch profitable employers like Unilever jumping on the pension’s robbery bandwagon.”

While no strike dates have been formally announced yet, union officials will meet in the next few days to draw up a programme of action, with the GMB guaranteeing a first strike “before Christmas”.

Around 2,500 of Unilever’s 7,000 UK workforce were balloted. There are currently 5,000 members of the company’s pension scheme.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Egypt: protest continue as election begins



Above: Egyptian protesters flee tear gas. On 29 November, Suez Port workers refused to unload a shipment of 479 barrels of tear gas arriving from the USA.

By Clive Bradley

Voting has started — in a process which will take four months — in Egyptian elections, the first since the fall of Hosni Mubarak in February.

Polling stations in some areas had to stay open late to accommodate the huge numbers of Egyptians wanting to cast their vote.

This is despite a call for a boycott from some of the protestors who have reoccupied Cairo's Tahrir Square and the centres of other cities. Does this reveal a gulf between the protestors and the mass of Egyptians?

A distance, but probably not a gulf. The protests have been spurred by continued repression meted out from the government of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) which removed Mubarak.

The military has not only kept hated "emer-

gency" legislation in place, it has added new repressive laws. And in the months since February perhaps 12,000 activists have been arrested, most of them tried by military rather than civilian courts. The arrest and imprisonment of well-known bloggers was a particular spur to the recent resurgence in popular protest.

KILLED
Over forty people have been killed by the army in the last week, and thousands injured.

A popular symbol of the new demonstrations in the eye-patch — representing those who have lost eyes due to rubber bullets and other weapons used to disperse protestors. But the mass demonstrations continue.

A notable absence from these protests as an organised force has been the Muslim Brotherhood, expected to emerge from the

elections as the biggest single party. (That is to say, in the shape of their official Freedom and Justice Party). The Brotherhood has chosen to stay away from the protests for fear, they say, of inflaming the situation: their presence would make the protests a declaration of war on the government. For sure also their ears are closer to the ground in the suburbs and villages, where people have been anxious to vote.

One factor behind the popular liberal demand that the army "go now" — before, and indeed cancelling elections — and hand over power to a civilian government (the dominant version of this seems to be a government headed by Mohammed al Baradei) is fear of Muslim Brotherhood domination of the new parliament. A consistent liberal and leftist concern has been that the Brotherhood is better organised — it has had

years to prepare itself, where secular and leftist groups have only had, for the most part, a few months.

Even more conservative "salafist" Islamist groups are expected to do well in the elections also (perhaps especially in the rural areas).

TAHRIR

For sure, however, the anger with the military government expressed by the tens of thousands of activists in Tahrir Square and elsewhere is shared by the majority of Egyptians.

Reports suggest that although voters disagree with the boycott call — anxious to take part in what they see as the first real elections in their lives — they identify with the revolution and want to see it go further.

Military rule has done nothing to improve the situation of most Egyptians, struggling to earn a living in an impoverished country hard-hit by world recession and years of privatisation and government corruption.

The militant independent trade union movement which has emerged since the beginning of this year has begun to address these issues.

But for the moment the best organised political groups are the Brotherhood on the one hand and the moderate liberal secularists on the other — neither of which offer a way out of social and economic crisis for the mass of Egyptians.

Riots backlash shows racism and class hatred

By James Bloodworth

A YouGov poll for the Sun showed 33% apparently favouring the use of live ammunition against rioters in defence of their property rights.

In the same poll, three-quarters said troops should be called in, curfews were backed by 82 per cent, using tear gas got 78 per cent and Tasers 72 per cent.

The longer-term response to the rioting has also seen a number of authoritarian measures introduced, with a large number of draconian sentences handed down to those whose involvement in the trouble in many cases involved only minor infractions of the law.

Danielle Corns was sentenced to 10 months in prison for momentarily stealing two left-footed trainers during riots in Wolverhampton. Two young men who set up a Facebook page encouraging a riot (which they never attended and which never took place) were sentenced to four years in prison, and a young mother of two — who herself slept through the riots — was sentenced to five months for accepting a pair of shorts, looted by a friend (although she was later freed on appeal).

In justifying the severity of the sentences handed down to those involved in the August trouble, David Cameron said at the time that it was important that judges send out a "tough message".

Lord Chief Justice Lord Judge defended some of the most severe decisions, remarking, "Given the overall ghastliness of what was going on in the country, these sentences had to be significantly higher." Judges concluded that the sentences should reflect the mood of public indignation.

The attempt by the media and the establishment to portray what took place in August as "sheer criminality" motivated by greed — the justification used by the Government for its draconian sentencing policy — has not, however, been borne out by the facts. Of the 1,984 people who had appeared before courts for these offences by 12 October, 53% were under 20, according to an analysis of Ministry of Justice figures carried out by the Howard League for Penal Reform, and they came disproportionately from areas with high levels of

deprivation; 42% of the young people seen by the courts received free school meals (compared with 16% of all pupils) and 66% of them had some special educational need (compared with 21% of all pupils).

Even before the latest flurry of authoritarian sentencing, justice was already skewed against those from poor and ethnic minority backgrounds. A recent study carried out by the *Guardian* found that black offenders were 44% more likely than white offenders to be sentenced to prison for driving offences, 38% more likely to be imprisoned for public disorder or possession of a weapon and 27% more likely for drugs possession. Asian offenders were 41% more likely to be sent to prison for drugs offences than their white counterparts and 19% more likely to go to jail for shoplifting.

The rioting gave the establishment the pretext to offer simplistic yet satisfying solutions to more complex problems of widespread poverty and the resulting hopelessness.

"Bang 'em up" has been the dominant long-term response to what happened in August, and the "bang 'em up" mentality guarantees what took place will reoccur at some point.

But the draconian response does shed some light on a much bigger question: what would be the establishment reaction in the face of social unrest on a much larger scale?

As Hari Kunzru pointed out a few months back in the *Guardian*:

"The smug sense of disconnection (this is nothing to do with me, or my comfortable middle-class life — it is an affair of the poor, in places I choose not to go) was soon replaced by panic. 'Where is the army?' Screw civil liberties, time to declare martial law.

"How easy it would be to install fascism in this creaky little country! No need to torch the Reichstag — all you'd have to do would be to burn a few more sports shops."

New assault on workers' rights

By Gerry Bates

On 23 November the Tory-Lib-Dem government announced an assault on employment rights.

- You won't be able to claim unfair dismissal until you've been in a job two years (present limit: one year)
- You'll have to pay to go to an employment tribunal
- The law may allow workers to be sacked

Tories are making it easier to throw you on the dole

without redress in places with fewer than ten employees, and everywhere allow employers to threaten workers, and push them halfway out of the door, in a "protected

conversation", without any comeback.

- The compulsory consultation time for redundancies may be reduced from 90 days to 30 days.

The Government is working on the "never waste a crisis" philosophy.

It thinks that now, when many workers find it hard to look beyond keeping their jobs and getting by, is a good time to bring in changes which will stick during any subsequent economic recovery.

Bang 'em up Britain