

workers power 5

DOLE STREET 13



Social inequality grows - millions unemployed and counting p5



Capitalism versus democracy 8-9

AFTER TWO MILLION STRIKE



TIME TO ESCALATE

- **No sell out over pensions**
- **Link up all the struggles against all the cuts**
- **With the officials where possible, without them where necessary**
- **Forward to a general strike to bring down the Tories**

THE PUBLIC sector strike has put one question on everyone's lips: what next in the fight to stop the pensions robbery and beat the Tory cuts? The answer is clear. Escalate the action.

Every union branch should bombard head offices and the TUC with calls for another strike - and the next one should be two days or three days, stepping up the fight.

The Tories know that anger is growing. The Coalition is hoping our union leaders will agree to partial concessions and avoid future strikes. Concessions that could leave us working longer, paying more and getting less.

The government will try to break our unity by offering temporary concessions, simply to take some sections off the battlefield. And some leaders, like Dave Prentis of Unison, seem to be begging for this,

saying future talks and further strikes will be take place scheme-by-scheme.

Link up all the struggles

Instead we should unite the disputes and strike together until the entire pension "reform" is scrapped. Yes, this is against the Tory anti-union laws, but the laws would be unworkable if we all struck together.

We can do it - if we link the pensions fight to all the other struggles against the cuts: the 710,000 public sector job losses, the electricians' 35 per cent pay cut, young people occupying city centres.

That way we could stop not just the pensions robbery, but the whole dirty plan to make the working class pay for the bosses and bankers' crisis.

How can we do this if our union leaders are willing to settle for less? There's only one way. It means

building rank and file organisations - like the electricians have built - to prepare for more strikes, oppose sell-outs, and deliver action without them if necessary.

We should hold assemblies of workers, anticapitalists, the unemployed and young people to pledge united action. A vital next step is to organise a conference of the N30 strikers against any moves to sell us out or sell us short.

It means building for a general strike to bring down the government and bust the whole cuts programme.

The Tories and the ruling class are terrified because they know that all over the world people are rising up against austerity and cuts - from Greece to the USA. They know it can happen here. We should know it too - and what it will take to make it happen.

The editorial SIMON HARDY

N30 shows that the fight is on

THE MASS strike on N30 has the potential to change the political situation in Britain. It shows that if you want mass numbers then the unions are essential to filling the streets of every city and town with people who want to fight the government's cuts. The real sense of unity and collective strength in the face of the Tories and Liberals was inspirational, and something that we need a lot more of.

But the strategic question facing us now is how do we keep up the momentum? How do we make sure this is not the end of mass action but only the beginning?

The biggest danger now is of a sell out. The press is full of reports about a possible deal between the union leaders and the government, of its plans to divide the unions and buy some of them off. Already the union leaders are dragging their feet over more action, which might not happen until March. This is no way to win a fight!

The central issue is leadership and control over it. The top union officials, sitting on £100,000 a year salaries, have to be pressured for action by their members. They have to go through all the rigmarole of balloting as laid down by Thatcher's anti-union laws. But nothing stops the union leaders from making a rotten compromise. That is why the workers facing the cuts across the public sector have to organise to take control over the campaign now.

A great assistance in doing this is to really connect the anticapitalist radicalism, resulting from the occupy movement and the more vibrant local anticuts movement to millions of union members in the workplace?

The government is planning the destruction of our services (health, education, welfare, local government) and our jobs - as well as our pensions. If we don't get organised from below to take control of the resistance then we will find defeat staring us in the face.

Since this is a struggle not with this or that employer but with the government determined to impose a decade of savage austerity on us it will take more than single days of action every six months or so to defeat them - even with two million on strike. Experience in France and Greece proves this. We need escalating mass strikes culminating in a general strike the full power of over 6 million workers to bring the government down.

Without such a decisive battle, we will be ground down, defeated section by section, just as Thatcher did to us in the 1980s. We can defeat Cameron and Clegg's plans but only if we escalate the resistance, take the leadership of it into the hands of the rank and file, and organise around an anticapitalist political strategy.

Where is Labour?

The lack of support from Labour, with only 8 MPs and 30 councillors saying they would back the strikes, shows how weak the left is in the party. When Ed Miliband crossed the picket line on his way into parliament to say he didn't support the strike, few strikers will have been shocked. After all most of the leaders of our unions, which still pay 80 per cent of Labour's expenses, don't even dare demand that he does anything in return for it.

Alas it is no break with tradition that Miliband gained the leadership thanks to union votes and then betrayed them. He keeps bleating that strikes are a sign of failure and only justified when negotiations break down. As though this government was in the business of any compromise even minimally advantageous to public sector workers when it plans to sack hundreds of thousands of them as well as steal their pensions.

In fact even negotiations only make any progress when workers show their collective power to resist their employers or the government. That is what a strike is for and it an essential part of our class struggle. So when Miliband consistently opposes them he is showing on which side of this class struggle he, and his party, is fighting.

Join the campaign for a new organisation

As a response to our article in the last paper on a new anticapitalist alternative there a series of meetings being held across the country by activists from across the anticuts movement and various socialist organisations to discuss the way forward. With a whole new generation of fighters being created by today's struggles we think the left needs to see whether a basis for closer co-operation exists; with a view to building a united organisation that can make a real difference. If you are interested in getting involved then you can contact us through our website or email us at anticapitalistalternative@gmail.com

German capitalists push for fiscal powers as second credit crunch looms

None of the problems from 2008 have gone away; in fact many have become worse, argues *Richard Brenner*. What are the European leaders planning next?

AS WE go to press, the capitalist class is in a state of high anxiety. "Five days to save the Euro" run the headlines.

The German chancellor, Angela Merkel, has called openly for the transformation of the EU - or part of it - into a new Fiscal Union, in which unelected officials could impose tax and spending cuts on member states, and the European Court of Justice could overrule elected governments if they did not cut hard enough.

Why? Because "Europe is in the middle of its greatest test", she said on 2 December. The 1 percent - financiers, corporate owners and their governments - want urgent action because two crises are coming to a head at the same time and they want to force the working class to pay for them. "We really are up against the wall", one European diplomat told the *Financial Times*.

The first of the two crises is state debt. Several European countries ran up massive debts before the recession in 2008 and have seen revenues plunge and benefits soar since then. Unlike, for example, the USA, which has tried to stimulate growth by devaluing its currency and boosting exports, the weaker members of the Eurozone like Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy cannot alter the value of the euro. With no prospect of economic growth, they can only borrow on international money markets at impossibly high interest rates. Without new loans, they face the prospect being unable to repay existing debts.

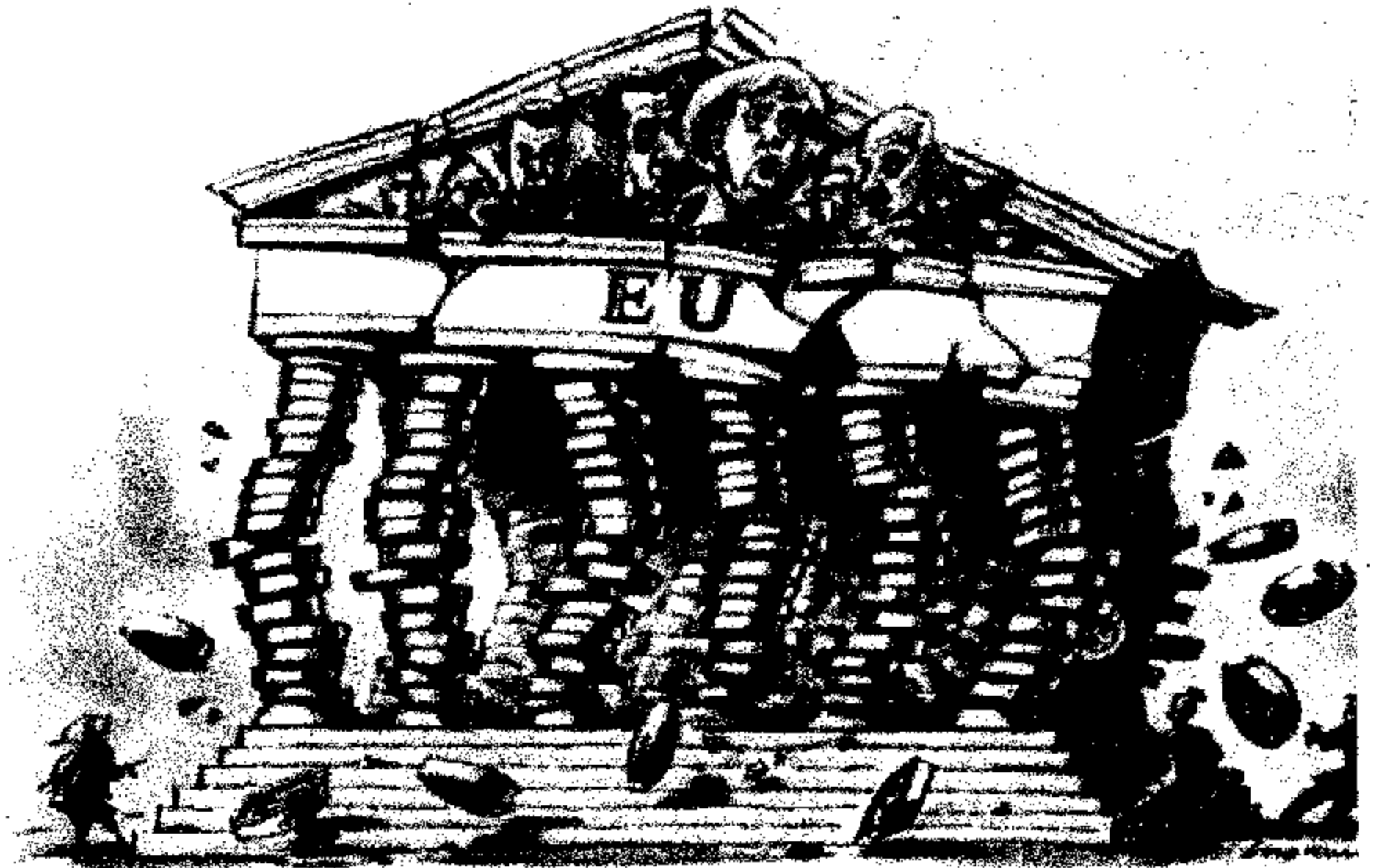
The second crisis centres on what the Governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, calls "early signs of a credit crunch", and what Bank of Japan deputy governor Kiyohiko Nishimura called a "widespread credit crunch".

Banks have stopped lending and are hoarding cash as the prospects of future returns look dim. If they lend to governments by buying bonds, they fear they may never be repaid. If they buy shares, they face losses through falling share values as a double dip recession looms.

On 1 December, Eurozone banks borrowed more than €8 billion overnight from the European Central Bank just to keep themselves afloat. At the same time, five central banks, led by the US Federal Reserve, announced "emergency action" to help banks get access to money. These unprecedented and dramatic interventions suggest the banks had ceased to lend to each other - meaning they feared that a major bank might be on the point of collapse and could not be trusted to repay even short term loans.

Another credit crunch?

Less than five years since the first signs of the last credit crunch emerged in early 2007, less than four years since the Great Recession of 2008-09, the *Wall Street Journal* fears "a repeat next year with a different cast of characters but an equally scary ending". US investment bank Goldman Sachs says these two crises will push much of the world back into recession. Last time, they say, it was sub-prime mortgages and the collapse of major banks and hedge funds that catalysed the crisis, this time it will be Europe, because



"the sovereign and banking crises have now taken on a systemic dimension, with investors increasingly questioning the survival of the euro and the euro area".

The risk of a banking crisis is not limited to the Eurozone. The Bank of England's *Financial Stability Report* warns that the four biggest UK banks have a net exposure to Ireland, Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal of £172.3 billion, which is 83 per cent of their total core capital.

The leading European capitalists in the German and French ruling classes are desperate to defend the Euro and their political and economic domination in Europe. If the euro collapsed, Germany would lose its built in exchange rate advantage, which has benefited its huge export industries in European markets.

A new period of geopolitical instability would see sharper rivalries between European states, protectionism hampering world trade and fuelling conflict, and world powers like China and the USA vying for influence over a patchwork of shifting European alliances.

The fiscal union

For Merkel, the solution is a new Fiscal Union. As we write, five critical days of negotiation are opening, but it is clear that the ruling classes of Europe face three choices:

- *Who will be in, or out, of a new fiscal union?* Greece could be dumped from the euro, if so, its new currency would plummet, middle class and small businesspeople and savers would be ruined, banks would collapse and so on.

- *How to boost the size of the EU's bailout fund?* At present, it has just €250 billion, nowhere near enough to bail out Italy and Spain, and far less than the €1 trillion promised in the last "urgent talks". The fund is essential to build a "firewall" around Greece, or stop the "contagion" spreading to Italy. Unless they find some cash, the new EU could be a lot smaller than the old one.

- *How to legitimise a fiscal union?* They may need to revise the EU Treaty but this could mean referendums in many states - and they won't all go the way Merkel wants. There is no lack of territories in Europe with historic grounds to dislike the prospect of German control. The "democratic deficit" is a major political obstacle to all such plans. The governments of Greece and Italy have

already been removed by the diktat of European and international finance. Can it be an accident that the new Italian government has no lack of bankers but not one elected politician?

Fiscal union would mean that democratically elected governments could be overruled by unelected European institutions. Some moderates in the working class movement will propose tepid reforms of the EU, the issuance of Euro bonds and so on, without noticing that fiscal union would represent a big step towards consolidation of a new European imperialist power, free of all democratic controls. Others in the movement will rightly demand that governments default on their national debts and cancel austerity programmes, but they will ignore the fact that a retreat back to national economies would guarantee a decline in the European economy as a whole. A patchwork quilt of 'independent' capitalist states, each ruled by a desperate class determined to cut harder than their rivals, is no solution for the working class.

At the same time the repeated capitalist crises show the system has no way out. In every country the bosses and their governments are slashing public sector pay, throwing people on the dole, making truly barbaric cuts to education, healthcare and benefits, stripping away pension rights and tearing up hard won agreements.

Across Europe, the working class movement needs to coordinate its resistance, raise the level of the strikes against austerity into indefinite stoppages designed to bring down the cutting governments, and aim to replace them with new governments based not on technocrats and bankers, but on the rule of councils of workers' delegates. Then we could cancel the debt to the bondholders, tear up the austerity plans, take over the banks and fund an urgent plan for jobs and redevelopment out of the wealth of the 1 percent.

There must be no illusions that solutions can be found within national borders. Capitalism has begun to integrate the European economy but the capitalists themselves are national classes who cannot complete the process. For that, we need a Socialist United States of Europe, based on the councils and other fighting organisations that must be built in the struggle against austerity

Now we can stop the pensions robbery

Two million strong strike shows unions have power to bring down the government – but, argues *Jeremy Dewar*, only if they escalate the action, broaden their aims and base themselves on action committees

“OBVIOUSLY IT was a big strike,” conceded David Cameron the day after the 30 November strike. Gone was the bluster that this was a “damp squib”, that nearly half our schools had opened or that airports and hospitals saw little disruption. Two million workers had spoken and Britain had listened.

The scale of the strike was impossible to deny; sooner or later, the Tories had to admit they had received a bloody nose. Still, they tried damage limitation. The Department of Education came out and said only 13 per cent of schools had opened, while the same number had taken in students only to hold assemblies or one class. An exercise in babysitting, one union rep told me.

While ministers grabbed on to the stat that only 6,000 out of 30,000 operations were cancelled, in fact thousands more had been rescheduled, while unions had agreed “life and limb” emergency cover during the strike. Unions said 400,000 healthworkers were on strike.

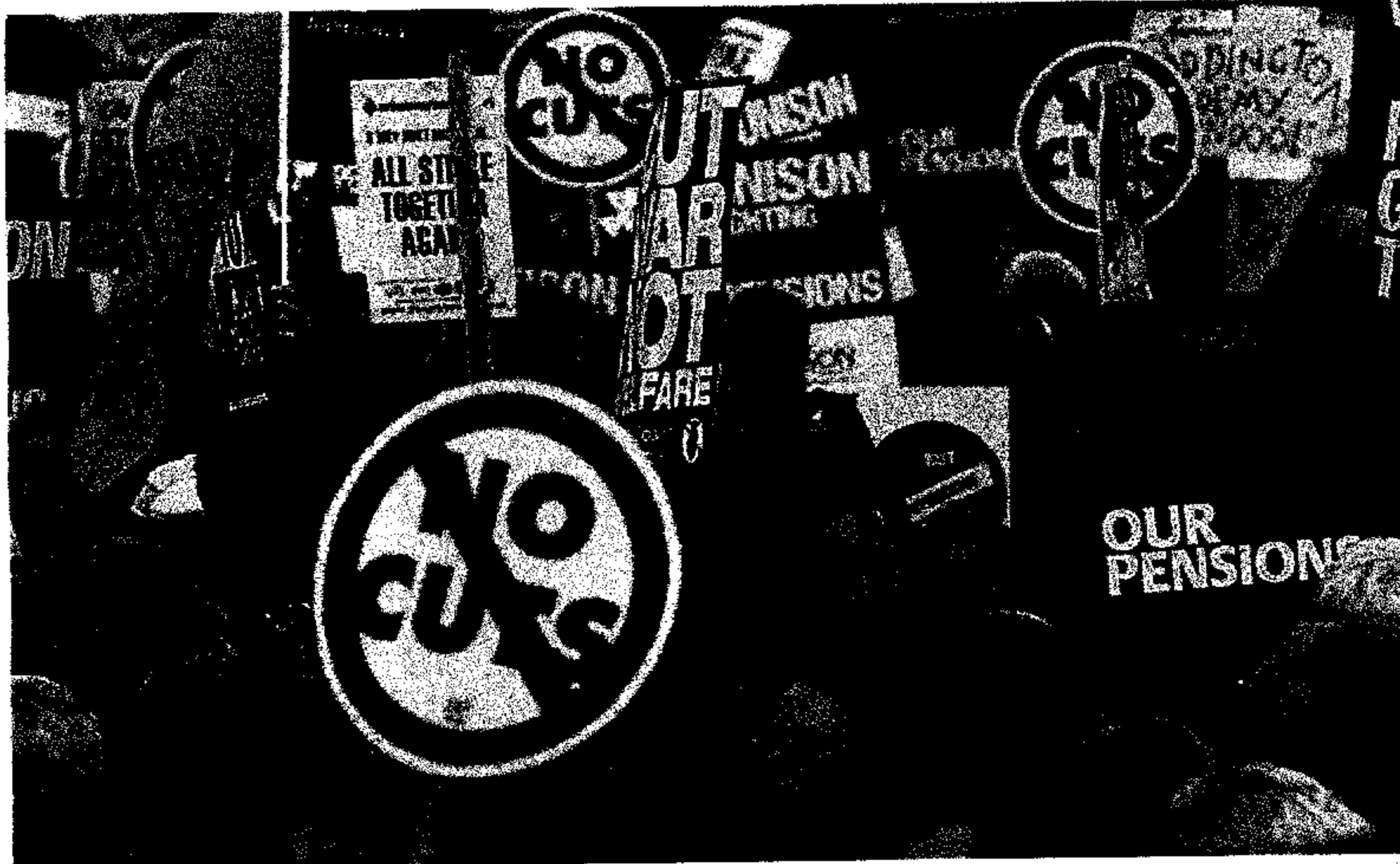
From first hand experience, I can say that local authorities were hit hard, with thousands joining Unison, Unite and the GMB in the days leading up to the strike, almost certainly outnumbering the few who crossed picket lines. These are new members who will stay with the unions in the battles over pay, jobs and services; they are permanent gains, workers who joined in order to fight.

Garbage trucks stood still in depots, while support staff strengthened school and college strikes. Town Halls across the country saw hundreds of picketers congregate in the late morning sun before “taking the road” on their way to official demos.

Tory grandee Francis Maude was keen to rubbish the civil service walk-out but was hampered by the fact that his own Cabinet Office suffered its biggest strike in history. The government took extraordinary steps to prevent Heathrow passengers piling up, even getting its press officer to check passports, but it only succeeded after a quarter of all flights were cancelled. Only 10 cargo staff turned up as more than 90 per cent – over 1,000 – union members struck at the airport.

In fact, civil servants were out like never before: 84 per cent of the country’s 290,000 PCS members walked off the job, closing down courts in Liverpool, St Helens, Nottingham and Stoke, all museums in Wales and Glasgow’s Student Loan Company. Although the Department for Works and Pensions claimed only 16 Job Centres closed, in fact 80-90 per cent of PCS members in the DWP were on strike. Rather like minister Iain Duncan Smith’s head, the lights were on but nobody was in.

This unprecedented strike by 29 different unions was bound to have a massive impact on the broader mass of workers and youth suffering



from austerity measures. It was, after all, the nearest we can get to a one day general strike in Britain without breaking the undemocratic anti-union laws, which forbid political strikes in response to the government’s political attack.

The day before the strike both these points were neatly illustrated.

A BBC poll showed, despite the rhetoric of the government, BBC and billionaire press, 61 per cent supported the strike, rising to 67 per cent among women (this was a strike with a majority of women on it as well) and an incredible 79 per cent among the youth. So much for the “apathetic” generation – when you deprive a million under 25s of employment, education and training, of course they will support a fightback.

When 2.6 million people are balloted, nearly everyone knows a friend, family member or service provider, who can explain the issues.

The second big generator of public support was Chancellor George Osborne himself. In his autumn statement, he announced a two-year 1 per cent pay cap to follow the two-year pay freeze for public sector workers. Then the Office for Budget Responsibility forecast 710,000 more public sector job cuts. A “lost decade” of spending cuts would break Britain public services.

Sympathy and solidarity

On the day this manifested itself in a number of ways, big and small. Hoots, waves and cheers greeted picket-lines throughout rush hour and tens of thousands swelled union ranks on local demos: London (50,000), Manchester (30,000), Glasgow (25,000), Bristol (20,000), Birmingham (15,000) and 10,000 in Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle and Brighton.

In London there was direct action and as 300 electricians and Occupy London activists hooked up at Liverpool Street and roved the City, supporting picket lines and avoiding police kettles. Late afternoon, UK

Uncut led an occupation of mining giant Xstrata, whose Mick Davies is the highest paid CEO in Britain. Police arrested around 25 people on that action. In Hackney, police arrested 37 protesters simply for approaching a picket line in solidarity.

To underscore the state’s fear that the strike would indeed strike a chord with wider discontent, the Metropolitan Police cordoned off the whole of Whitehall with a veritable “Iron Curtain” 10 foot tall. For the tens of thousands who marched past it, this is what democracy looks like today.

Tapping the potential

The class struggle in Britain is entering a new phase. The deepening economic crisis, a historic crisis of the whole system, has shaken up all the classes.

The bosses and bankers are demanding unprecedented levels of austerity: wage restraint, job cuts and the dismantling of the welfare state: selling off the profitable bits, shutting down the rest. After four years of cuts, public sector workers will have lost 20-25 per cent of their real income – or their entire job. Private company workers are caught in a new credit crunch and global slowdown: potentially a depression.

Picket after picket explained, “It’s not just about pensions – I’m against all the cuts.” The union tops may have wanted to fight this as a dispute over pensions, but it has already become a social movement against the “1 per cent”. For socialists, the task is to turn it into a political struggle for power.

Union leaders plans

And this is the problem the conservative layer of bureaucrats, who run our unions faces. After 30 November, how can they put the genie back in the bottle? Or as Treasury minister Danny Alexander put it:

“Striking will harden opinion on the union side and make it harder for them to sell a deal to their members.”

The government immediately reopened negotiations on 1 December. The most right wing leaders jumped at the new talks, saying they expected a deal to be forthcoming – notably the moderate teachers’ union ATL and the heads’ NAHT. Expect others, like the TUC’s Brendan Barber, Unison’s Dave Prentis and Unite’s Gail Cartmail, to mimic their coo.

As for the left wing of the TUC, they have a more difficult balancing act still. Unlike their right wing brothers and sisters, PCS leader Mark Serwotka and NUT left Kevin Courtney do not have the ear of Tory ministers. On the contrary, the Tories would like nothing more than to see their reputation among workers and their careers as leaders in tatters. This cannot be achieved overnight, but they’re working on it.

The problem (as Simon Hardy explains on page 7) is that these leaders do not have an active base of rank and file militants, who can educate, agitate and organise the members to up the ante and take the fight to the government. Therefore they are reliant on the centre-right not breaking ranks.

So, despite the PCS and NUT executives both agreeing, apparently unanimously, for further strike action in January, now their leaders are talking of the same industrial strategy as Prentis and Cartmail. Both unions “have not ruled out” so-called “smart” strikes as a supplement to all-out national action, but they have not even named a date yet.

Striking to win

However, sectional strikes and regional action, aimed at spreading the pain for members losing pay and waging a long, drawn-out war of attrition with the government, carry their own dangers. In Southampton, where this strategy was trialled, council workers’ have still not won any concessions despite some sections taking weeks of strike action since May. On the contrary, all council staff have

been forced to sign new contracts and accept a 3.6 per cent pay cut.

There is an alternative. Two million workers have shown that they can strike together and make a difference. Quite simply Britain is crippled without this vital workforce. We would be even stronger if another two million from the private sector joined us, if transport workers joined in and if we actively cultivated the support of students and youth, rather than simply let it to chance.

To develop this united front, we have to broaden the aims of the strike movement to encompass opposition to all the cuts and take on board some of the demands of the occupy movement. This means launching a general strike to bring down the government.

How can we do this? First by flooding union headquarters with demands for a two or three day strike in the New Year and for an all-out, stay-out strike if the Tories do not concede after that.

But more than this, we need to prepare to launch the action ourselves. How can this be done? By developing joint strike committees and anticuts groups, many of which have sprung up in order to organise 30 November from below. In addition we need to establish rank and file networks in the unions along the lines of the electricians on the building sites.

In Lambeth in South London, for example, the Save Our Services campaign and joint union reps drew up a statement, declaring solidarity with the global struggle against austerity and demanding “further, longer, broader strikes” in the New Year. An assembly of 500 strikers and supporters voted unanimously for the resolution.

Other assemblies, big and small, need to be established in the coming weeks and a national gathering of trade union militants, anticuts activists to discuss, agree and start implementing an action plan to bring down the Tories.

workers power

Monthly paper of
the British section
of the League for the
Fifth International

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Newsfax International Ltd.

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No to sanctions – hands off Iran!

The growing chorus from world leaders demanding action against Iran threatens another war in the Middle East. *Martin Suchanek* examines what is behind the latest international manoeuvres and states the case against sanctions

EVEN BEFORE the storming of the British Embassy in Tehran and the closure of the Iranian Embassy in London in revenge, Britain, the US and Israel were ramping up the campaign for sanctions against Iran. The Anglo-Saxon powers together with their Zionist regional policeman, have repeatedly threatened pre-emptive bombing raids - with the pretext that this is the only way to prevent Iran acquiring a nuclear bomb and in order to contain the regime's regional ambitions. To this end they have strong armed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) into claiming Iran has deceived the "international community" and is developing a bomb.

Their willing propagandists in the mainstream media have presented Iran as posing a real threat to the peoples of the Middle East, as if it is Iran who is preparing for a war. The complete opposite is the case. It is these powers and Israel who are the warmongers.

They are now using the occupation of the British embassy as "proof" of their argument and pressuring the less willing Western governments, like France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands to join them in increased sanctions and a near breaking off of diplomatic relations. So far they have only recalled their ambassadors for "consultations".

Despite being caught up in the Eurozone's biggest crisis ever the December European Union summit has on its agenda as a "top item" sanctions and war threats against Iran.

The IAEA claims that Iran has carried out tests related to the "development of a nuclear device". No one should be duped by this assertion: the "proof" that the agency provides is no more trustworthy than the "evidence" provided in Tony Blair's "dodgy dossier" claiming to prove that Iraq had weapons on mass destruction. The IAEA allegations are simply designed to justify a political objective.

However, the attack on the British embassy carried out by the Basij militia is no genuine anti-imperialist action. If anything it strengthens the West's campaign against Iran. The Basiji are reactionary thugs, more interested in imposing the rule of the dictatorial regime than mobilising opposition to imperialism in Iran and abroad.

This incident will make it much easier to push the EU to impose more severe sanctions, particularly against the financial and industrial/manufacturing sectors.

Why the war threat now?

The EU has expanded an Iranian blacklist and the US Senate passed a measure that could severely disrupt Iran's oil revenue. Whether the sanctions will be followed by aerial bombardment is still open to question - but it is clear that a wing of the US, British and Israeli state forces is



Iranian students storm the British embassy in Tehran

openly preparing the ground for such a strike.

Obama and his shield bearer Cameron want to undermine the relative independence which oil-rich Iran has shown since 1979. They designate any regime which obstructs their geostrategic interests as a "rogue states." However their professed concern for human rights in Iran is entirely bogus and any attack they launch on it will not serve the cause of democracy but of their regional domination.

Ironically Iran's regional strength is in part a product of the US regional aggression. The wars against neighbouring Iraq and Afghanistan removed regimes hostile to Iran. Indeed the present Iraqi regime - dominated by Shi'a parties is far closer to the Iranian regime than was Saddam Hussein. The US and its allies want to end the bad example of Iran's defiance in the Islamic world - and boost the role of Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states and Turkey. Part and parcel of this plan is to remove or at least weaken the Assad regime in Syria, since this would remove one of the few allies Iran has in the Arab world.

But our picture of the motives behind this drive to war would be incomplete without understanding the threats against Iran as part of the increased rivalry between the US and the emerging Chinese imperialism. Just as China tries to build up its influence, the US has launched a massive diplomatic offensive in the Far East - recently with a visit in Myanmar (Burma) to improve relations with a "Chinese ally". The threat against Iran is a part of this inter-imperialist conflict.

In the current period more aggressions against countries such as Iran are likely because of the struggle to re-divide the world. In the end, no diplomatic manoeuvres, no "peace missions" either by imperialist states or the UN will remove such threats. This can only be done by the action of millions - the workers, youth

and the masses mobilised in the democratic revolutions in the Arab world and the Occupy Movement.

Finally, it is not a coincidence that the US is entering an election year. With huge domestic problems at home, President Obama is keen to distract attention and focus it elsewhere. If all else fails a good dose of Iran-bashing could help him in the polls with right-wing voters, alongside the assassination of Osama Bin Laden as well as the interventions in Libya and Yemen.

No sanctions

Revolutionary communists call on the working class around the world to oppose any sanctions against Iran. They will only serve to install a more pro-imperialist regime.

Obama, Cameron and all the other leaders who back these sanctions will have blood on their hands, as millions of ordinary Iranian workers, peasants and poor people suffer as a result. There is no such thing as "smart" sanctions: the aim is to turn the people against their government for incurring the wrath of the imperialists.

Therefore we demand the immediate lifting of all sanctions against Iran.

We reject the right of the International Atomic Energy Agency and any other puppet institution to "investigate" and judge Iranian policy. As long as the US, UK and their gendarme in the Middle East, Israel, are armed to the teeth with weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear missiles, it is pure humbug to deny Iran's right to arm itself.

We oppose any war threats and we openly support Iran's right to defend itself against any strike by the US, Israel, Britain, NATO or other regional allies.

However the defence of Iran against the Western imperialist threats should not, for one moment, mean supporting other imperialist powers such as China or Russia. They are not "friends of the Iranian peo-

ple", but only want to make the country their semi-colonial ally, dominated by their finance capital, serving as their geo-strategic and economic ally in the region.

Nor does defence of Iran against imperialist threats mean for a minute that we give the slightest political support to the reactionary Islamist regime in Tehran. The different factions of the clerical caste only express different strategies to establish Iran as a regional capitalist power. But relatively independent as Iran may be when it comes to defying the US and its allies; in the final analysis its reliance on selling oil to one or another group of imperialist blocks dooms it to semi-colonial dependence.

At the same time, the clerical regime is based on the vicious

exploitation of the working class in the oilfields and the factories. Faced with a growing economic crisis, with massive inflation around 20 per cent, the workers, the poor, women, youth and peasants are being made to pay for the crisis - just like all the other countries.

Anti-imperialism

The Iranian regime, its official and secret police and its reactionary semi-fascist Basij hit squads are defending the despotic and corrupt regime, just as the army and police do in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria.

Of course, sections of the regime will play the "anti-imperialist" card to generate popular support.

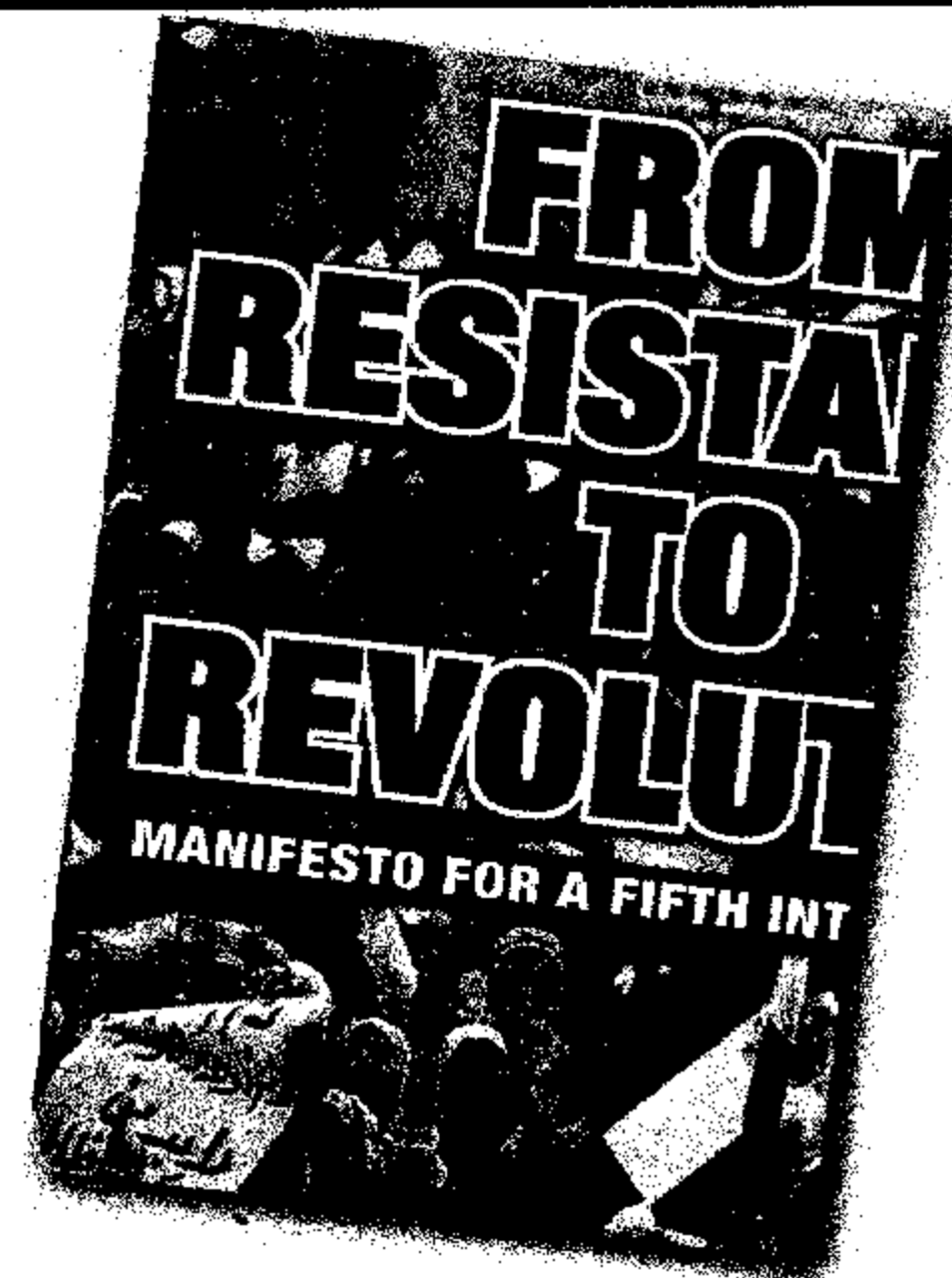
It has nothing to do with a real anti-imperialist policy designed to rally and organise the masses of workers and the poor, giving support to all the uprisings in the Arab world, etc, but is a political gamble by a faction of the regime in order to strengthen its own position.

All this lead to one conclusion: the defence of Iran against imperialist attack and the rejection of sanctions against the country must be a part of a broader political strategy aimed at the revolutionary overthrow of the Iranian regime, the struggle for a workers and peasant government to replace the Mullahs and to fulfil the democratic and social goals of the Iranian masses.

Only such a regime would be a reliable bulwark against imperialism and Zionism. It would support all the popular revolutions and workers struggles against the reactionary governments throughout the region. Their victories would lay the basis for a federation of workers and peasants' states - a United Socialist States of the Middle East.

A new manifesto for world revolution

OUT NOW £2



The working class movement urgently needs a new strategy. This manifesto outlines a programme to turn resistance into revolution - to unite the fight against austerity and social oppression into a direct challenge to the crisis-ridden system of capitalism itself.

The growing social crisis in Britain

John Bowman

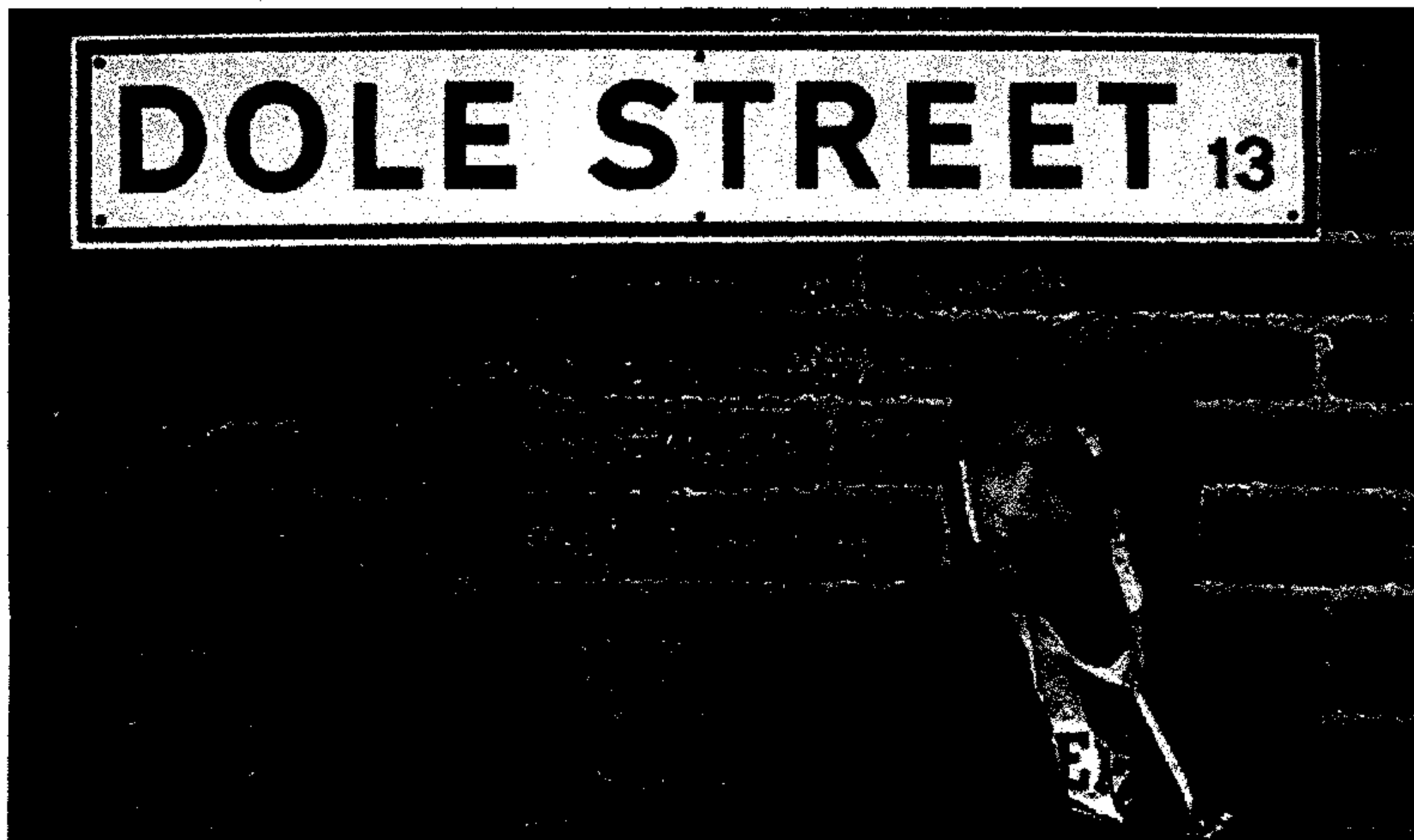
GEORGE OSBOURNE'S Autumn Statement on 29 November announced a whole raft of new attacks on living standards: capping public sector pay rises at one percent, slashing 710,000 jobs, confirming the rising of the pension age to 67, and much more besides.

But – and perhaps we should have come to expect this – the Institute for Fiscal Studies said that higher income families would receive a modest gain from the new government proposals overall, whilst the bottom 20 per cent of families would stand the most to lose.

For those who've suffered the worst of the cuts since the Tories got to power it is to state the obvious that the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer in today's Britain. But this doesn't make looking at the extent to which hardship and poverty has soared over the last 18 months any less shocking.

We discovered, thanks to the Office of Budget Responsibility, that supposed "scaremongering" from the trade unions and the TUC over the potential impact of cuts were in fact dramatic underestimates. The 400,000 public sector jobs that we were warned could be lost, is in fact likely to be almost double that. When the Local Government Association looked at the impact of job losses in local councils, Eric Pickles first said that they were drawn up "on the back of a fag packet". If only they had been – the truth is that 145,000 council jobs have already been axed as a result, devastating the workforce and the communities they serve.

And so whilst estimations from the OBR on the eve of the N30 strike – predicting unemployment at 8.6 per cent next year – made for pretty grim reading, it's worth bearing in mind



that the reality could be much worse. The Office cannot possibly predict the impact of an increasingly likely Eurozone crisis, or a crash in Chinese, Indian or Brazilian markets that may yet be on the cards. These are just a couple of examples of what could happen in such a turbulent world where an entire system is in crisis.

Youth Unemployment

Some of the most worrying and widely publicised statistics have been over youth unemployment, and the number of those not in employment, education or training, nicknamed 'NEETs' by the press.

The taking away of Education Maintenance Allowance, the university graduates adding to the job centre queues and those not sure where to turn after tuition fees were tripled is already having an enormous impact on young people.

Youth unemployment is now well

over 1 million, but this figure disguises the immense regional differences between different areas of the country, the north of Britain particularly hit by public sector and manufacturing job losses. In Leigh, Greater Manchester, there has been an 89 per cent rise in youth unemployment since the general election. In Birmingham, it has risen by 50 per cent, described as "drifting towards disaster" by Labour MP Liam Byrne – 4,775 have been unemployed for 6 months or more. In Leeds, the figure is around 60 per cent since January.

It's no exaggeration that this amounts to an unemployment crisis for young people – and whilst the government have unveiled a £1bn plan to get youth back to work, no scheme will be able help young people into jobs which simply don't exist. With the raising of the pension age to 67 denying job vacancies for the young, the situation doesn't look set to improve anytime soon – the opposite looks set to be the case.

Pension Poverty

Of course that's not to say that the aged have done well out of Tory

Britain. Rising fuel costs have pushed fuel poverty up by 25 per cent, whilst private sector pensions schemes changing their measures of inflation have left those expecting a modest £10,000 pension losing £20,000 over the course of their retirement.

With more than five million households now spending 10 per cent of their income on fuel to heat their homes after greedy energy giants such as British Gas raised prices by

18 per cent, this is no joke and lives will be lost. Last year that figure was 25,700. This year it's likely to be much worse.

The rich

Contrast this with the vastly increasing wealth of the rich – the average annual salary of the top 100 company bosses in London was £4.2 million according to a year long study by the High Pay Commission.

The study also tracked how many times chief executives got paid compared to their workers. Barclays Bank CEO receives 75 times the company average, and the head of BP, 63 times.

The pattern is quite easy to see. Those lobbying hardest for "deficit reduction", cuts in pensions, pay, jobs and public services and increasing the cost of living are those who have gained and are gaining most from increasing inequality in Britain over the last ten years.

With Tory ministers considering abolishing the 50p tax rate, no wonder protesters have been camping in financial zones to demonstrate against the "1%" and calling for a redistribution of wealth.

The truth is that wealth has been redistributed significantly over the last ten years, accelerating over the last eighteen months. The problem is that it's been in the wrong direction.

Death by poverty: The story of Mark and Helen

After leaving the army, Mark Mullins found it difficult to adjust to civilian life and find a new job. His wife Helen, suffering from learning difficulties was going through reassessment after reassessment to try and claim disability benefits, Mark unable to claim carers allowance until the assessment was approved.

The Job Centre felt that Helen's

disabilities meant she was not a 'job seeker' and turned her away. The result was dire and absolute poverty for the couple. Unable to heat their home or use electricity, they kept the food they obtained from a soup kitchen (a twelve mile walk) in a shed.

Tragically, after filming a short documentary explaining their plight, the couple died in a suicide pact at the beginning of last month.

From the Tories' mouth...

Edwina Currie on 'heating versus eating': "I don't believe people in this country go hungry"

Philip Davies MP on pay for those with learning difficulties: "My view is that for some people the minimum wage might be more of a hindrance than a help"

Greg Barker MP on the cuts: "We are making cuts that Margaret Thatcher, back in the 1980s, could only have dreamed of... this is an unprecedented piece of good housekeeping"

Lord Young: "For the vast majority of people in the country today, they have never had it so good ever since this recession – this so-called recession – started"

Motormouth's sinister joke

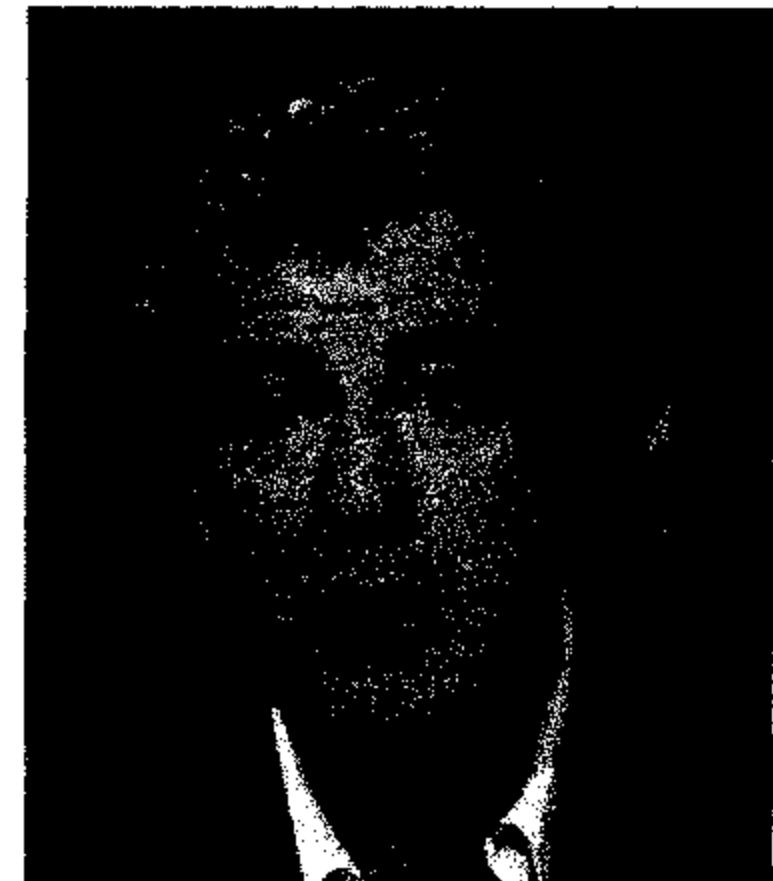
ON THE evening of the public sector strike Jeremy Clarkson, presenter from BBC's Top Gear programme said he wanted to see all strikers shot in front of their families. The BBC received over 21,000 complaints from members of the public, no doubt many of whom had been on strike and were paying Clarkson's wages through the TV license.

Whilst many on the right rushed to defend Clarkson's comments as a joke – it revealed a sinister undercurrent in society. No one should imagine that Clarkson is alone in holding extreme anti-working class views (just as he holds strongly racist, sexist and anti-environmentalists views), and they should certainly not be dismissed as merely 'silly', as Prime Minister Cameron did the day after.

They come from a hatred of work-

ing class people fighting back that right wing prats like Clarkson thrive on – the malicious details of being shot "in front of their families" showed a desire to seriously terrorise people, the kind of actions we saw in Chile when Pinochet took power and slaughtered trade unionists and the left. The 'joke' is even more reprehensible in that there are many trade unionists around the world who lose their lives every year for standing up to corporations, gangsters and pro-market governments. International labour organisations report that 101 were killed in 2009 and 90 in 2010.

The BBC is reticent to take action because of the kind of profits that Top Gear generates for them – one of their most popular shows which is shown in around 100 countries with an alleged audience of 350 million people – it regularly uses crude racist



humour and has an overt climate change denial message which is in clear breach of the BBC's guidelines. But with it generating so much money, the BBC will find any excuse to brush the controversies under the carpet.

Is European social democracy in irreversible decline?

After the defeat of the Spanish Social Democrats - almost every country in western Europe is now ruled by a conservative government, writes *Dave Stockton*. In a time of capitalist crisis, why are the mainstream 'centre left' parties doing so badly?

TEN YEARS ago the social democrats were in office in 15 European Union countries. One-by-one most have lost power.

Since June three of Europe's remaining "centre-left" governments have been ousted: two (Portugal and Spain) in elections by right wing parties, while in Greece the Papandreou government was forced out by the bond markets and the Troika (the EU Commission, European Central Bank and IMF). Only in Slovenia, Norway and Denmark are there still governments headed by social democrats, while in a few countries, such as Austria, they serve as junior partners in coalitions.

Journalists are puzzled as to why the biggest capitalist crisis for 80 years, with rising popular anger at the resulting poverty, unemployment and cuts, has seen the relentless retreat of "the left". Marxists understand however, that it is not at all the case that capitalist crises - particularly periods of mass unemployment - automatically produce upsurges in the class struggle, let alone election victories for reformist parties.

The trough of the Great Depression in the 1930s almost universally saw right wing governments in power in Europe and North America. Also the severe recession at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s saw Thatcher and Reagan come to power and begin the "neoliberal revolution". Why is this?

The Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, in his analysis of crisis-torn Europe in the 1920-30s, pointed out that when capitalism enters a major period of crises this upsets the social equilibrium of the classes, radicalising the working class and the middle class (the latter to the right as well as to the left) and finding its expression in the struggles between political parties. The resulting defeats or victories of these struggles in turn affect what will be the response to the next challenge.

If the radicalised working class is led by a party not just unready to lead the necessary struggle but prepared also to impose the costs of the crisis on the workers and defend capitalism, then workers' resistance can be hampered and they may suffer defeat.

In the present crisis the "centre left" parties have implemented austerity, hitting their traditional voters - the poor, public sector employees, precarious workers and pensioners - leading to a drop in support and fall from office. For nearly a hundred years, social democracy, "the party that leans upon the workers but serves the bourgeoisie" (Trotsky), has gone through this process.

Europe's ruling classes recognise they need to put their workers on



Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) - the latest social democratic party to be thrown out of office

rations if they are to escape from the state debt crisis and go on to compete with the USA and China. Only in Germany and France has the last two years' limited economic recovery allowed them to avoid confronting their strong working classes, but this is coming to an end.

End of an era

Social democracy no longer even dreams of a return to the happy days of the long boom of the 1950-60s when the rising tide of capitalist production and wide profit margins allowed all boats to rise, with concessions to the skilled and stable workforces of Northern Europe: the "European social model".

This era did indeed see a massive expansion of social housing, health, welfare and education systems, and greater opportunities for the unions to negotiate steadily rising wages. But by the 1970-80s this began to be eroded under renewed crisis conditions for capitalism.

The relatively weak recovery of the globalisation years (1992-2006), based on a financially fuelled boom, meant Social Democracy experienced an Indian Summer in many countries. But its reformism was markedly different from the post-1945 era.

The Third Way ideology adopted by Tony Blair in the mid-1990s or the Neue Mitte of Gerhard Schröder represented major concessions to neoliberal economics. For Blair this meant sustaining education, health and social services not by taxes on

the corporations or the rich, but a huge expansion of credit. "Reforms" now meant "freeing up the labour market", i.e. cutting workers' rights, marketisation and privatisation of public services and utilities, tax reductions for business and the deregulation of finance. In Europe this also meant accepting the neoliberal orthodoxies of Maastricht Treaty, and the "strong" euro policy imposed by the Bundesbank on the European Central Bank (ECB).

Social democracy was able - as long as the financial boom lasted - to preserve, to a degree, the historic gains of its core electorate (in Germany industrial workers in the big enterprises, in Britain the public services). However it unloaded the burdens onto the low paid, casual, young or migrant workers. This led to repeated outbursts of mass working class resistance on the streets in France, Germany and Italy, as union leaders bowed to pressure from below to act.

Take Germany as an example. Schröder became Chancellor in 1998 in coalition with the Greens. Hopes that the SPD, out of power for 16 years, would restart the process of reforms were shattered. Instead a series of attacks led in 2003 to "Agenda 2010": tax cuts, lowering of pension entitlement and unemployment benefit, and freeing up the labour market. There had been were four million unemployed when Schröder entered office - when he left in 2005 there were five million. Real wages stagnated.

After losing the federal elections in September 2005 the SPD continued in coalition with Angela Merkel's centre right Christian Democrats. In 2009 it was finally ejected from government with its lowest vote for nearly a hundred years, 23 per cent. Social democracy rendered great services to German capitalism but at the expense of its losing power.

Paying the price

The years since the crisis first appeared in 2007 have seen defeat after defeat for the parties of the Socialist International in Europe.

In Italy in April 2008 the Democratic Party suffered a second humiliating defeat at the hands of corrupt media billionaire and buffoon Silvio Berlusconi. For the first time since the era of Mussolini there were no deputies in the Italian parliament who identified themselves as Communists.

Swedish social democracy, with its famous welfare state model, also succumbed, despite being the natural party of government from 1932 onwards. For the first time in history the conservatives won two consecutive terms in 2006 and, with an increased majority, in 2010.

In the last general election in 2006, the Dutch Labour Party lost a quarter of its core support and finished with just over 20 per cent.

In Hungary in April 2010 the neoliberal right wing party Fidesz won a landslide two-thirds majority, bundling out the Hungarian Social-

ist Party (MSZP). In 2006 the MSZP had gained 42 per cent of the votes and 190 MPs; in April 2010 this collapsed to 19.3 per cent and 58 seats, only a little ahead of the fascist Jobbik's 16.67 per cent and 47 MPs.

Sigmar Gabriel the present leader of the SPD claimed in a recent interview in *Der Spiegel* that:

"We, the Social Democrats, are convinced that capitalism needs to be tamed a second time. The first time we achieved that in Germany for many decades with the social market economy. That is no longer enough. Now we need to do it in Europe and even globally... This is not about reviving the pseudo-alternative of communism but about re-conquering the social market economy."

How he proposes to tame a global capitalist tiger - not in a period of a long boom but in a "decade of austerity" - he does not say.

In fact there is no sign that François Hollande in France, Sigmar Gabriel in Germany or Ed Miliband in Britain will fundamentally reverse social democracy's subservience to capital or ideological decomposition that Lionel Jospin, Tony Blair, and Gerhard Schröder, carried on for so long.

The credit crunch, the banking crisis and then the sovereign debt crisis - the opening phases of a historic crisis for capitalism - have damaged the European social model beyond repair. It has undermined electoral support for social democratic parties and led to a disillusion with politics in general, expressed in falling voter turnout and cynicism. Among the youth in Greece and Italy this has led to a growth of anarchism and autonomism.

So can social democracy survive? Yes. It still has huge reserves of power stemming from its past hegemony and its material roots in the trades unions and local government - above all in the absence of a serious electoral alternative to it in most countries. But can it get back into government? Ironically this depends on something its leaders hate like sin: the militant class struggle.

If the rising tide of resistance to the demolition of the social gains of the last sixty years results in sustained general strikes, as happened in Tunisia and Egypt this year, Europe's conservative governments could be brought down. The parties that rest on the workers but serve the bourgeoisie would be summoned once more to perform their role of defending the system by diverting and frittering away the strength of their working class supporters.

If workers are to prevent another round of betrayals, they need to build an alternative, in the struggle, for the struggle - an anticapitalist revolutionary party.

Sparks: We must not let judges stop our actions

By Jeremy Dewar

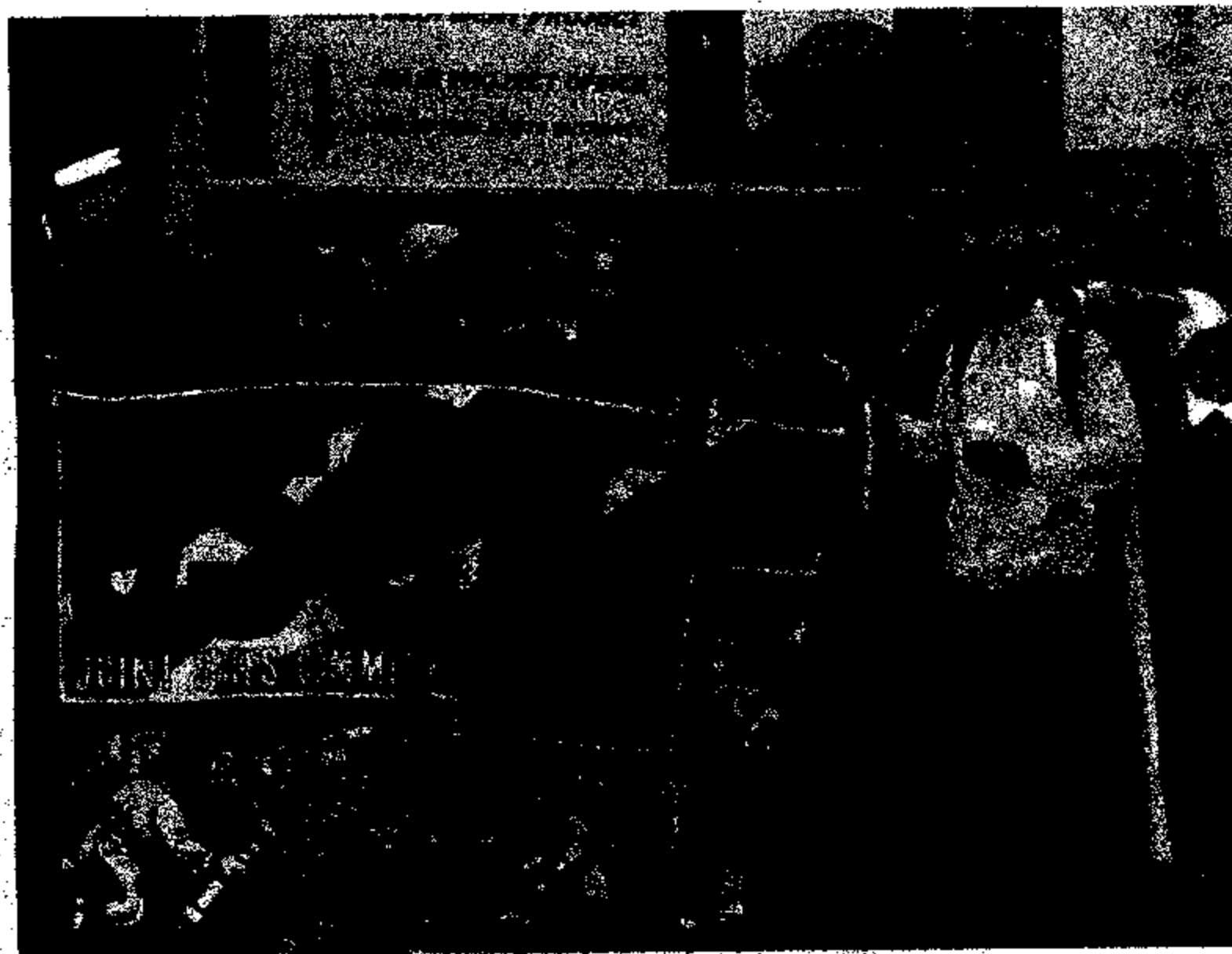
ELECTRICIANS IN Unite won an 82 per cent YES vote for strike action against Balfour Beatty Engineering Services. But within days of the result being announced, union officials called off the strike and agreed to re-ballot its members.

Balfour Beatty had threatened to go to a judge to ban the action. Unite officialdom, led in this instance by Bernard McAuley, did not even test a judge by having their day in court; they just caved in. This marks a new low in bowing before the anti-union laws.

To compound this unnecessary mistake, Unite has also offered to take the dispute to the arbitration service ACAS. This not only sends the wrong signals to electricians on the sites that a compromise can be reached (as opposed to the complete withdrawal of the new contracts), but it would mean having to stop any form of industrial action.

Rank and file campaign

But this conservative cowardice has been more than matched by the sparks' creativity and courage, which has been on display by shedloads in recent months. The campaign to



stop greedy employers imposing new contracts on the industry was launched when Steve Kelly and some other militants called a meeting in August; 500 workers turned up. They have now set up a Rank and File National Committee.

Since then a series of weekend day demonstrations have been held across the country, but they are limited to raising awareness and notoriety at the moment.

workers are divided by a system of subcontracting and self-employment and the employers operate a vicious blacklist to keep out known activists. But others have been more militant, involving wildcat strikes.

In Manchester, for example, the sparks only had a couple of contacts at a Balfour Beatty site, yet they put up a picket line. The bosses got wind and told all workers they'd be sacked if they crossed. Nevertheless,

with the help of some students, they succeeded in getting an unofficial walkout. When the bosses made an example of a couple of sparks and sacked them, the militants came back and picketed again. In the end, Balfour had to take all workers back on.

Dozens of similar walkouts have taken place.

Last month the campaign took on a new dimension. On 9 November, a national demonstration in London saw 2,000 sparks roving from site to site, letting the bosses know they weren't having the new contracts. Finally the state intervened, cops bludgeoned some of the men and kettled them for two hours.

But the sparks reignited their campaign on 30 November with more demos, this time linking up with civil servants on the Health & Safety Executive picket line.

Shut down Balfour

Now all eyes are on the greedy top contractor, Balfour Beatty. Rank and file meetings in London, Glasgow and Cardiff, originally organised in preparation for the official strike scheduled for 7 December, the day Balfour were going to impose new contracts, hastily organised an unofficial campaign.

The Glasgow meeting was the most successful and ended with 150 sparks occupying a Balfour site. But all three meetings agreed: the workers have spoken, with 81.6 per cent for action, so the strike is on!

As Ian Bradley of the Rank and File Committee told the London meeting:

"On 7 December... we need to get not just Blackfriars [Station site] out but every Balfour Beatty site out and any site of the seven [main contractors]. We're going to win this dispute by old school methods of building rank and file committees."

Ian is dead right - and the meeting agreed wholeheartedly. Leaflets are being prepared and a flyposting campaign organised in preparation for the action. A mass picket will be launched to try and shut down the Blackfriars rail station site.

The sparks have shown their solidarity with the students and public sector workers. They have built up a great relationship with Occupy London at nearby St Paul's. Now they need the support of the whole movement to protect their livelihoods, re-establish militant trade unionism on the sites and smash the anti-union laws. Let's give them everything we've got.

What's wrong with the union lefts today?

Simon Hardy and Jeremy Dewar take a critical look at the broad left strategy

MANY MILITANT trade unionists are active in left wing caucuses such as United Left (Unite), Left Unity (PCS) or the Socialist Teachers Alliance (NUT). These are known as broad lefts. They accept the existing union structure as it is, but organise lefts to replace the right wing in elections. Their strategy is to use elections to take over the union.

The Communist Party pioneered the broad left strategy in the 1960s. It is a radically different and counterposed to the rank and file movement.

The rank and file movement is built from below, organising union members workplace by workplace, with the goal of submitting all officials to regular elections, instant recall and the salary of the average worker they represent. It aims to transform the unions root and branch by arming workers with class struggle tactics to defeat the bosses and democratic structures to dissolve the bureaucracy.

Rather than mobilising the forces from below to transform the union, the broad left seeks to capture it through elections, leaving its structure the same as it is today. Rather than elections being a means to an end, they become an end in themselves.

The name broad left comes from

classical Stalinist popular frontist phraseology. It was a product of the rapid decline of the Communist Party in the 1950s and their desperate attempts to win support by creating alliances with the Labour Party initially to combat the growing influence of Trotskyist groups.

Labour Party member Hugh Scanlon was the first to benefit from the broad left strategy when the CP pulled its own candidate from the ballot and mobilised their members to support him. The agreement was to unite the lefts against the rights in the union.

The bitter fruit of this policy was reaped when Scanlon supported the Labour government's "social contract", accepting pay cuts in return for empty promises of jobs that never materialised. The militant rank and file were disoriented and the strategy led to an explosion of anger in the Winter of Discontent and the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979.

SWP's turn to the broad lefts

At the time the Socialist Workers Party (then called International Socialists) were intransigent opponents of the broad lefts, building rank and file formations around industrial bulletins to combat their influence. But today it is inconceivable they

would raise these kind of criticisms against the current broad lefts in Unite, the NUT or PCS.

For example, 1,000 union activists attended the recent Unite Resistance conference organised by the SWP. Both Kevin Courtney of the NUT executive and Mark Serwotka, General Secretary of the PCS, were given a platform to outline their strategy to stop the pensions robbery. They argued for another day of action in January. Full stop.

This is hopelessly inadequate and flows from these left bureaucrats' refusal to think outside the box: i.e. their refusal to break with their more conservative counterparts in Unison, the ATL, etc. Serwotka and Courtney are reformists; they argue that unity with the centre-right unions is necessary because they have no concept of mobilising the rank and file of these unions against their misleaders around a strategy that could win. But if the PCS and NUT did call for more action and the other unions refused to join in, their members would be seething with anger and ready to rebel.

The SWP leadership knows this. It argues in its paper against the dead-end strategy of one-day strikes staged months apart, confined to the narrow issue of pensions. But they shy away from criticism of these left

leaders for fear of "losing influence" with them. After all they need them to populate the platforms of whatever campaign is being set up next!

The record of failure

True, the SWP did criticise General Secretary Len McCluskey for selling out the Bassa dispute with British Airways in May, when they accepted an offer indistinguishable from BA's original proposal: fewer jobs, worse conditions, lower pay. This led to a massive row, in which the SWP was threatened with expulsion from UL.

While the SWP held their ground, the threat of expulsion shows just how dangerous these broad lefts are as they try to silence dissent against the left officials when they sell out.

The fate of the Socialist Party in the PCS is even more disastrous. With a large number of members on the executive, the SP makes great play about how much influence it has. But influence to do what? The PCS strategy of one-day strikes, which the SP supports, has seen thousands of civil servants lose their jobs.

In 2005 they accepted a pension deal that institutionalised a two-tier scheme which saw younger workers lose out massively. The SP had promised a strike to stop the government's plans. In the end their members on the leadership meekly accepted the

deal - despite having a mandate to strike.

Even the Alliance for Workers Liberty, which postures left on the unions, refused to vote for Jerry Hicks in the Unite general secretary elections, preferring the broad left candidate Len McCluskey. They were similarly humiliated when their supporter on the CWU executive, Pete Keenlyside, voted for the sell out deal in 2007. They quietly dropped his column from their paper, Solidarity.

These are the problems socialists face if they form long-term partnerships with leaders or take leading positions in a union which remains bureaucratic. Without building a substantial grassroots rank and file movement to provide an alternative point of pressure, then they are bound to be co-opted sooner or later.

The SWP argues: "We want a rank and file movement too, but we can't build one now. The left is too weak so it would be voluntaristic to try." In truth, however, broad leftism drags the militant rank and file further away from such a goal and ties them to a strategy that will betray them at the pivotal moment. That's why Workers Power fights for a rank and file movement now as a crucial part of the strategy to defeat the cuts.

Markets against the people

DEMOCRACY: 2011 has been dominated by the issue of democracy. In the Middle East, millions have fought for it, believing that it offers a route to a better life, a way to ensure that society's resources are used for the benefit of all. Thousands have died for it. Yet, in the West, where democratic rights have long been established, workers have found that democracy is no defence against unemployment and pay cuts. It cannot prevent the imposition of unelected governments or even guarantee the democratic rights of protest and assembly.

Does this mean that democracy is nothing more than an elaborate delusion, a way of fooling the great mass of the population, while the rich laugh all the way to their banks? Is democracy, in fact, not worth fighting for, or defending?

Socialists have always argued against this view. What the year has shown is the contradictory nature of democratic movements and of democracy itself. The fight to overthrow repressive regimes, to respect the equal rights of all citizens regardless of ethnicity, age, gender or beliefs is a hugely emancipatory fight. The achievement of basic rights such as assembly, organisation, freedom of speech and movement, access to health, education and housing as a right, this can transform the lives of millions and create the conditions for further progress.

Private property

At the same time, democracy, more precisely "liberal" democracy or what Marxists call *bourgeois* democracy, is also a barrier to that progress. Such democracy declares that all are equal in law and in their rights, but it ignores the reality of inequality of wealth. Indeed, it proclaims the right to private property to be one of its most basic rights. That is not just a question of personal property, cars, homes and so on. It means that the entire

economy, society's means of supporting itself, is also privately owned.

As a result, those who own the dominant sectors of the economy are more powerful than any government. The truth of this has been demonstrated very forcefully in recent months as "the markets", that is those who have the money, have removed and replaced governments in Greece and Italy.

Even in more tranquil times, the mass of the population have no control over the supposedly democratic governments. While it grants more or less equal voting rights, democracy then insists that, once elected, deputies or MP's have the right to make their own decisions, as they think best.

That was the mechanism that allowed the governments of Greece and Italy to be removed and replaced without any vote. The two parliaments voted to instal the governments that the international money markets wanted. It was also what allowed the formation of a coalition government at Westminster that then proceeded to implement a programme of austerity and privatisation that had never been presented to the voters.

As long as the mass of the population has no means of enforcing the redistribution of wealth, controlling the use of society's resources or removing governments, there can be no real "government of the people, by the people, for the people".

That is why socialists support the struggle to achieve and defend democratic rights but argue we need to go beyond merely formal equality to a society in which production and distribution are socially owned and democratically controlled by the producers and consumers themselves. This is why we can't just extend liberal democracy, we have to replace with a new kind of society – one based on genuine mass democracy which has the workers at the centre of decision making.

Who rules Europe?

TWENTY YEARS ago, Western leaders and propagandists used to argue that, if the peoples of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe wanted democracy, they had to reintroduce a market economy. Freedom, it was said, meant both free speech and free markets, the two things went together.

Today, it is clear that the only people who are free in a free market are those with money – what can you get in a market if you have no money? And the more money you have, the freer you are to have what you want.

The role of Goldman Sachs, one of the biggest investment banks in the world, in the developing eurocrisis reveals what this means in practice. It is now widely recognised that the origin of the crisis lay in the ability of the Greek government to amass huge debts that were not visible in the gov-

ernment's accounts between 1998 and 2009. The debts were systematically hidden via an accounting procedure developed by Goldman Sachs in conjunction with the Greek Central Bank whose head, for part of that time, was Lucas Papademos – that is the same man who was recently imposed on the Greek people as their prime minister.

At this time, the Managing Director of Goldman Sachs International was Mario Draghi, who went on to become the Governor of the Bank of Italy in 2006 before becoming the President of the European Central Bank in November 2011. To complete the picture, Mario Monti, now prime minister of Italy, as well as finance minister, was previously an international adviser to Goldman Sachs, while Petros Christodoulou, who is head of Greece's debt management agency, is also a former Goldman Sachs employee.

Capitalism democ

Not since 1989 has the demand for democracy police and governments are trying to repress capitalism and democracy compatible? By Nat

Police agains

LIEUTENANT JOHN Pike, the police officer who casually "pepper sprayed" a line of peaceful protesters at the University of California's Davis campus last month, rapidly became an internet phenomenon. His image was photoshopped into famous paintings and historical moments, pepper-spraying everything and everyone, from Socrates to Abraham Lincoln. Obviously a lot of people see Pike as a sign of the times, the state's refusal to tolerate the slightest challenge to its power. The nonchalance of the Pepper Spraying Cop reveals not only his own belief that he is above the law but also the extent to which the police are already a paramilitary force.

Nor is that a purely US development. Last year's student protests in Britain gave rise to a public debate on police brutality and the nature of violence. While media focused on the graffiti and broken windows of the Treasury, activists pointed out the terrifying images of dozens of mounted police, charging into unarmed teenagers; police medics using truncheons on demonstrators and the general assumption that the police have the right to use whatever force they like against protesters and media alike. Vic-

tims of police violence like Jody McIntyre, who was pulled from his wheelchair by a police snatch squad, and Alfie Meadows, beaten so hard he needed emergency brain surgery, became household names and spokespeople for a movement against increasingly heavy-handed policing of what had been peaceful demonstrations.

International clampdown

Popular outrage, however, has not been enough to stop police brutality as the automatic governmental response to the anti-austerity movement across the world. New York's mayor, Michael Bloomberg, went so far as to say that he had his "own army in the NYPD". This tells us a lot, perhaps more than was intended.

Generally, armies are trained to fight a foreign foe, their extreme violence is justified by their supposed defence of the "folks back home". The police are different, they are trained to defend the existing social order, basically, the rights of property owners. That is why, for them, the majority of citizens, especially those with no property, are all potential "criminals". For Mayor Bloomberg's army, the enemy can only be the poorer citizens



Officer John Pike takes on peaceful protes

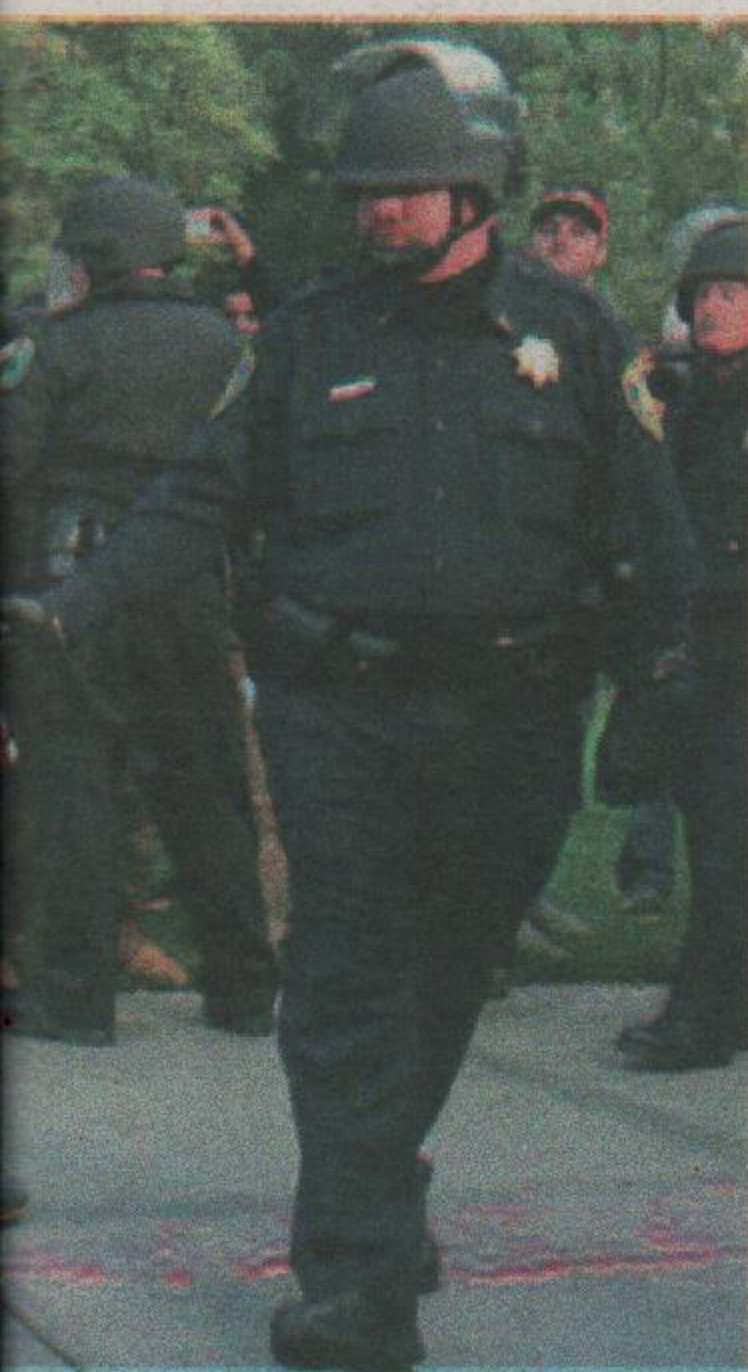
of New York.

The 'total policing' tactic introduced by the Met, with hundreds more officers mobilised and authorised to use rubber bullets, restrictions on the duration of public assemblies time and Home Secretary Theresa May's ban p

n against cracy

been so loud across the world. But everywhere
s our movements. The big question is, are
Silverstein, Joana Ramiro and Simon Hardy

st the people



Officers with painful pepper spray

demos in six London boroughs, are
part of the same pattern. They are
part of the bourgeoisie's pre-
emptive repression of those about to
resist. With the pay gap increasing
to Victorian levels and youth unem-
ployment breaching one million, it is

not surprising that the Coalition government has been quick to unleash such authoritarian measures. This summer's riots were a glimpse into a future in which government imposed poverty is virtually guaranteed to provoke resistance on the streets. So, while the Occupy pacifist movement grows, the police flex their muscles, practice their strategies and prepare to repress any threats to capitalism's survival.

Hypocrisy

The West is a place of double standards. Third World dictatorships are criticised for their despotic regimes but, in 'Western democracies', the use of 'undercover agents', who would be called secret police or agents provocateurs, anywhere else, is legitimate. If, for Cameron and Merkel, Obama and Papademos, "defence of democracy" means the criminalisation of those who oppose condemning millions to utter destitution, then peaceful dissent will not suffice.

Demonstrators who face attack by police using truncheons, pepper spray, CS gas, tasers and horses have every right to take steps to defend themselves whether with face masks, body armour or banner poles – but more is needed.

Above all, demonstrations, pickets and occupations need organised self-defence – and that requires collective organisation, in advance.

The lesson of the last 12 months, even in the "democratic" countries, is that all attempts to make use of democratic rights to oppose austerity programmes and increased exploitation will be met by state violence. All demonstrators need to recognise this but, above all, the leaderships of organisations which call and organise demonstrations and strikes have a responsibility to prepare their defence. This means training teams of stewards as well as educating rank and file members in the best means of protecting themselves and others.

All the economic indicators, even all the political commentators, point to a deepening crisis in the coming year. The state forces are already preparing for increasing protests and confrontations. Their goal is to defend the wealth of the wealthiest, to ensure the transfer of even more wealth to the wealthiest, in short, to maintain capitalism – the victims of that system, however, cannot limit themselves to defence of what they have, or had. The fight to defend jobs

The law against the people

THE CONDEM government and their friends in the police are stepping up their attacks on civil liberties and the right to protest. Before the 9 November student demonstration, activists were sent letters warning them of the "consequences" of going on the demo and the impact that criminal convictions could have on their futures. At the same time, the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Bernard Hogan-Howe, ensured wide publicity for his decision to authorise the use of plastic bullets on protesters. The message was clear: stay away from protests or face police brutality.

Even more extreme is the proposal to effectively ban protest during the London Olympics in 2012. A contract worth £100 million has been awarded to G4S to provide a force of 21,000 private security guards to keep everyone under constant surveillance. This is the same company that may face corporate manslaughter charges over the death of Angolan deportee Jimmy Mubenga, who collapsed on a flight after their security guards heavily restrained him.

Worse, powers have been granted to allow people's homes to be raided and materials confiscated during the Olympics. Supposedly this is to prevent "breaches of advertising rules", but the real purpose is shown by the inclusion of "non-commercial materials" – this is a licence to suppress all political protest, anyone raising political slogans could face raids on their homes and prosecution.

After the criticism levelled at the undemocratic attitude of the Chinese government at the last Olympic games this smacks of hypocrisy. Justifications for the proposed ban centre on fears of the continuation of "Occupy St Pauls" style protest – despite these having been overwhelmingly peaceful.

Meanwhile Occupy Wall Street in the US was violently closed down by the New York Police Department. The forcible evacuation was ordered by Mayor Bloomberg supposedly on "public health" grounds. Yet this directly contradicts the First Amendment of the US constitution, which enshrines the fundamental right to freedom of assembly.

Further attacks proposed

The Home Office is now consulting on even more attacks on our civil liberties. Police officers already have the power to demand the removal of any item they believe is worn "wholly or mainly" to conceal identity. At the moment, this only applies if a senior officer has given an authorisation across a locality. Freedom of Information requests have shown that these powers are already over-used in some urban areas, both for this purpose and for allowing stop and searches where there are no other grounds to suspect the individual. The new proposal, currently under consultation, would give any officer the power to demand the removal of a covering.

The supposed justification is that the current requirement for an authorisation "can cause bureaucratic delays and can hinder police

response to mass disorder."

What both the proposals and the existing powers ignore is that there are legitimate reasons for activists or others to cover their faces. This includes the filming of protesters by police surveillance operations such as the Forward Intelligence Team. These have no legal basis and are used to gather intelligence about protesters, including those with no criminal convictions. Even if police powers were removed, protesters would still face the threat of fascist and far right monitoring sites such as Red Watch, which publish photographs with a view to intimidating activists.

The Home Office is also considering introducing the power to impose curfews. Again, the police already have broad powers in this area, including the designation of localities as "dispersal zones" and the power to direct an individual aged 10 or over to leave any area and not return for up to 48 hours. Now, the supposedly "unprecedented" nature of the riots in August 2011 is being used to argue for an extension of these powers, up to and including full curfews over a given area, meaning no-one is allowed on the streets.

The riots were not caused by too few police powers but by police violence alienation and poverty – neither were they unprecedented. They should not be used as a reason to scrap the basic right of freedom of movement, or to make the streets of London look like Gaza.

The Tories have talked for years about opting out of the Human Rights Act (which brings the European Convention of Human Rights into UK law), but this is currently vetoed by their coalition partners. In response, the Justice Minister, Ken Clarke, is suggesting an "opt out" from those parts of Act that can be used to stop deportations on human rights grounds.

The HRA is constantly subject to attacks by politicians and right wing rags, most recently in Teresa May's ridiculous claims that an illegal immigrant "could not be deported" because he had a pet cat. While this has been revealed as untrue, the government still believes that people should not be able to oppose deportation on human rights grounds. Mr Clark proposes to drive through a new deal in 2012.

What the right wing lies wilfully ignore is the fact that, where individuals are convicted of a crime, they have already served time for it in prison before deportation is considered. They should not be punished twice merely because they did not happen to be born in the UK. What makes it worse is the Home Office's completely unrealistic views about countries that are "safe" for asylum seekers to return to. Together with a culture of disbelief in the UK Border Agency, this meant that in 2007, only 19 per cent of asylum applicants were successful.

Human rights grounds are one of the few gateways for vulnerable individuals to prevent deportation; the attacks on this most vulnerable section are attacks on us all.

Radicalising the US workers' movement

Extract from Workers Power US conference document
www.workerspower.net

BEGINNING IN late September with only a few dozen activists in New York City (NYC), the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement changed the mood dramatically. Tens of thousands demonstrated, marched, protested, and occupied public and private spaces against the bank bailouts, joblessness and worsening poverty for millions - taking its cue from the Arab Spring occupations.

One of the central popular slogans of OWS is "We are the 99 per cent". Like in other countries, the main US political parties of big capital were making the 99 per cent pay for the crisis, while the organised labour movement (such as the AFL-CIO) did not stand up to the gauntlet through, down by the capitalists. Because there was no mass political party ready at hand to take up their demands and fight for their needs, the masses had to mobilise in the form of spontaneous mass action to make their voices heard.

Occupations sprang up city after city. From NYC and Chicago to Los Angeles and beyond. The high point (so far) came on 15 October, when a global day of action rocked the world's capitals and lifted the fighting capacity and spirit of millions suffering at the hands of the 1 per cent. The strength and widespread nature of these actions and widespread character gives hope that a new global anti-capitalist movement is on the rise.

Despite the subsequent repression by the police, this new movement is a positive and progressive development, which can potentially radicalise a new layer of people and launch a generalised fight back against austerity. This is particularly the case if the dynamism of the youth and student struggles can fuse with the trade unionists and working class communities - as we saw in Wisconsin earlier in the year. This interaction could promote the radicalisation of the unions themselves. In this sense, if we can link the anti-capitalists with the rank and file of the unions have the potential to reinforce and develop the struggles of the other to a higher level.

US in the global economy

The G20's failure to agree plans to arrest the economic volatility plaguing Europe at its recent meeting in France and the relative irrelevance of the US's participation underscored the fact that the US is losing its primacy in world politics.

Since the beginning of 2011, dramatic changes in the world situation have put US imperialism on the defensive. In the Middle East and North Africa, regimes in the serv-



ice of US banks and multinationals have fallen one after another as a result of mass democratic revolutions and uprisings. In the oil-rich Gulf, long-standing clients of US imperialism's "War on Terror" - Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Bahrain - have also witnessed militant protests and demonstrations.

It was the size, intensity, growth, and spread of the mass revolutionary democratic movements that compelled the US to shift policy. Championing the revolutions and struggles, and supporting them materially and politically, became absolutely requisite in ensuring that whatever governmental entity emerged once the uprisings were over would be beholden to the US, seek out favourable trade deals, and continue the already established relationship.

In Central Asia, the US has damaged its relationship with Pakistan, one of its long-time strategic allies. The recent actions of the CIA - particularly in killing Osama Bin Laden without notifying the Pakistan government - have prompted Pakistan to move closer to China.

Afghanistan continues to remain a pressing concern. The military occupation to repress the Islamisted national resistance to US imperialism's puppet regime is forced to continue and shows no signs of ending, despite plans to withdraw US troops by 2014.

The US' sabre-rattling against Iran and its supposed nuclear-weapons programme has flared up again, and this time has received greater support from other Western nations. This appears to be nothing more than a devised distraction from the problems associated with the global economy.

Its foreign policy must be put in the context of the 2012 elections. Obama, the Democrats and Republicans are gearing up for the upcoming presidential campaign, which will have to address the realities of the American situation: economically, politically and militarily.

The US workers' movement

After the mass mobilisations, Wisconsin's recall election expressed the deeply divided character of the state and country: split almost 50-50 between support for the workers' organisations and for Governor Scott Walker's reactionary anti-union agenda. The results proved just how important it was to take the struggle forward to a general strike and to not rely on a passive election campaign to empower 'labour-friendly' Democrats.

The balance of class forces since then has shifted in the proletariat's favour with the advent and growth of the Occupy Movement. On the West Coast, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) joined up with Occupy Oakland in resistance to police violence, racism and the 1 per cent. Unions all across the US have expressed solidarity with the occupations, as rank and file members got involved.

Now there needs to be a militant, national working class response to the bosses' attacks, organised by the unions and in coordination with OWS and the masses of working people. We need to build a strong working class response to the 'bi-partisan' super-austerity committee's plans to slash \$1.5 trillion (additional) in social welfare over the next 10 years. This will likely include his-

torious attacks on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

The initial attacks from the bosses have, in reality, just begun. And the fact that they have already provoked such mass mobilisations, demonstrations, and economic strikes of workers and youth in over a generation is testament to the possibility that we've only just witnessed the beginnings of a new mass movement against capitalism.

Recent struggles have shown, however, the unwillingness of labour leaders to advance the courageous resistance to austerity. Wisconsin showed that when the door is shut to them, they are left with no choice but to fight - principally to defend their own caste privileges, power and prestige. The bureaucracy is, however, still fundamentally opposed to leading the unions and working class in a more sustained and militant defence of workers' needs and demands.

Nevertheless, these conditions present opportunities for revolutionaries. We need to exacerbate the political and economic antagonisms at work for the purposes of coalescing those forces that see the need for independent working class political representation.

Stagnation and the Elections

Aside from the fleeting success of some sectors - e.g. durable goods manufacturing - the US economy has been unable to pull itself out of a prolonged GDP slump. The housing market remains weak and unstable.

Millions remain out of work, are semi-employed but live below the poverty line, or have dropped entirely off the government's radar. Official government figures put the

unemployment rate at about 9 per cent, but only about 5 per cent of the unemployed are accounted for in these statistics. The real figure is probably 20-25 per cent, and much higher for African Americans and ethnic minorities.

Poverty levels have hit an all-time high - over 15.1 per cent. The US Census Bureau reported that there are roughly 46 million people in the US living in poverty. It is quite probable that, like unemployment, such statistics do not reflect the reality that confronts us.

Neither party has been able to resolve the economic impasse. The Republicans' plans come down to little more than sweeping spending cuts, tax breaks for the rich and fewer environmental and labour regulations. Yet, this staunch neoliberal agenda is woefully short sighted. By resorting to such measures to restore conditions for profitable accumulation, the most right-wing sections of the American political elite sow the seeds for harsher, long-lasting slowdowns in the future.

Due to their financial and political connections - and their reliance on winning the support of US finance capital in the forthcoming elections - the Democrats have been unable to come up with a programmatic alternative to the jobs and economic crisis beyond what is commonly referred to as "austerity lite" or "Republican junior". Hopes that the Obama administration would implement a new "New Deal" went out the window after his party's routing during the mid-terms. Recognising that his job was in jeopardy, Obama swung rightwards to appease and win over the middle ground and big businesses, which are both so crucial to winning elections in the US today.

It is apparent that the current situation cannot go on indefinitely. From the rise of the Tea Party to the previous mass working class and youth mobilisations in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan, to the emergence of the Occupy movement, the ground is beginning to quake.

For socialists in the US, it is a pivotal time to be arguing for our politics. We must reach out and win over those radicalised sections of the working class and youth who realise that there is no way out in the present circumstances other than class war and revolution. We need to provide battle tactics and a coherent strategy that can overcome the crisis of leadership and propel the working class movement forward by building, deepening, and connecting militant struggles. We need to found a revolutionary party that will lead the masses in social revolution, put an end to the crisis-ridden system of capitalism, and begin the construction of a new socialist world.

The dangers posed by foreign intervention

The future of Syria is being fought out town by town as the resistance grows against Assad's regime. *Marcus Halaby* looks at how imperialist governments are doing all they can to conservatise and control the Syrian revolution.

THE SYRIAN opposition, both domestic and abroad, remains deeply divided on the three issues that will decide the fate of Syria's revolution: on negotiations with the regime, the role of armed force, and the risk of foreign intervention.

Eight months of unremitting violence from President Bashar al-Assad's regime has killed around 4,000 people. November has proven the deadliest month with 950 killed as the Ba'ath regime viciously fights the growing revolt. As writer Amal Hanano puts it, only in Syria does someone go "to a funeral of a man who was killed at a funeral of a man who was killed at a funeral of a man who was a protester." Yet this violence has failed to subdue the revolution, and resulted in up to 20,000 soldiers deserting or defecting to the side of the people, protecting civilian protests with whatever arms they have, and taking shelter in the revolutionary districts of Homs, Rastan and other towns.

We should welcome this development. This is the stuff that revolutions are made of: the repressive apparatus of the state fracturing under the pressure of the masses, as its personnel turn their guns on their officers and, if need be, their own former comrades-in-arms.

The most visible wing of this movement, at least in the West, has been the emergence of the rebel "Free Syrian Army" (FSA), nominally led from exile in Turkey by the defected former air force colonel Riyad al-As'ad. Its members can be seen in numerous videos on the internet, publicly listing their names and civilian occupations, displaying their now-defunct military identity cards, declaring their dissidence from what they disparagingly call "[president Bashar] al-Assad's army", and threatening to put on trial after Assad's overthrow those who do not join them in rejecting his regime's crimes.

They claimed responsibility for an attack on the air force intelligence base in the Damascus suburb of Harasta on 16 November, although Riyad al-As'ad denied the FSA's involvement in an attack on the headquarters of the ruling Ba'ath party four days later.

It is not unusual for revolutionary movements to include lower and middle-ranking officers. The pressure of the masses on the men under their command will affect them also, and they can provide much needed military expertise to the struggle.

However, we must recognise that the defected officers' political leadership of this soldiers' movement also creates dangers for the revolu-



tion. The first is that their current strategy, of isolated hit-and-run attacks on regime targets, is largely at odds with that of the mass movement, which has preferred to maintain peaceful protests precisely in order to win over the mass of the army. One story that has passed into legend has it that demonstrators in Darayya, a small town in the Damascus countryside, threw empty plastic water bottles containing flowers and written messages at the army, prompting the shamefaced soldiers to retreat – although not the regime's unofficial thugs.

Indeed, it is the regime that has consciously militarised its conflict with the people, with the intention of frightening the Christian and Alawi minorities, and the Sunni Muslim middle class, with the prospect of Iraq-style sectarian chaos and civil war. The very scale of the military defections shows that this bloody self-sacrifice on the part of the revolutionary youth and urban poor has not been entirely in vain, although we have yet to see defections of whole units with their materiel and chain of command intact.

However, acting separately from

the mass movement, the FSA and similar guerillaist groups can only adopt tactics that provide the regime with an irritant, as well as with fuelling its long-standing propaganda that the revolution is really a conspiracy of foreign-backed "armed gangs". Worse still, barring a real split in the army, this leaves their military effectiveness hostage to Turkey, the conservative Arab Gulf states, and the Western imperialist powers. As in Libya, these cultures will want to exact a heavy price for any self-interested "support" that they provide to Syria's revolution, and they will be selective about who and what they support.

Almost as if to prove this point, Riyad al-As'ad has called on "the international community" to provide "protection" in the form of "a no-fly zone, a buffer zone and strikes on certain strategic targets considered as crucial by the regime".

At the time of writing, direct external military intervention remains unlikely, not least because Israel, US imperialism's most important regional ally, regards the downfall of its erstwhile Syrian Ba'athist enemy as an existential threat. Amos Gilad, an Israeli defence ministry official, has stated that Assad's downfall would be a "devastating crisis" for Israel, bringing with it the threat of an "Islamic Empire" taking in Egypt and Jordan. China and Russia also support the Assad regime and are uncooperative after their imperialist rivals' used the UN no fly zone in Libya to advance their own interests.

The Syrian opposition to Assad

Even so, French foreign minister Alain Juppe has described the Istanbul-based Syrian National Council (SNC), led by Paris-based academic Burhan Ghalioun, as a "legitimate interlocutor with which we will continue to work", and has echoed Riyad al-As'ad's call for a "secured zone to protect civilians". UK foreign minister William Hague has also met SNC representatives in London, and has sent Frances Guy, the former UK Ambassador to Lebanon, to meet Syrian exiles in Paris.

The "radical" SNC, mainly comprising exiled Islamists and bourgeois liberals, is formally opposed to foreign intervention. But Ghalioun appears happy to play the role of an interlocutor with Western and Arab diplomats and politicians, promising to cut Syria's ties to Iran and Hezbollah in the event of "regime change". Individual SNC figures like US-based academic Radwan Ziadeh, and SNC affiliates like the Muslim Brotherhood and the liberal "Damascus Declaration" grouping, have edged ever closer to open

calls for intervention, and now support calls for sanctions like those imposed by the Arab League on 27 November.

The SNC's principal rival, the "reformist" Damascus-based National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC), mainly comprises leftist and Kurdish parties. It has a much stronger stance against foreign intervention than the SNC, with its spokesman Hassan Abdel Azim rejecting both the suspension of Syria's membership of the Arab League on 17 November and the imposition of a no fly zone, on the grounds that "the people and not the deposed regime will pay the price" for it. The NCC has ruled out direct negotiations with the regime until its cessation of violence and the release of political prisoners. Azim has stated he "trusted" the Arab League's central role in negotiations and advocates an "Arab solution" – yet as sanctions show, democratic governments can play a front role for imperialism to achieve its goals.

The NCC is alarmed by the prospect of the "militarisation" of the struggle, instead looking to the example of Yemen, where the revolution continued for ten months "without the people using weapons", even though weapons are available in Yemen "in all houses and streets". But in Yemen the struggle has dragged on since January without conclusion.

In any case, both the SNC and the NCC lag behind the real forces on the ground, which are hostile both to intervention and to negotiations. The Local Coordination Committees in Syria (LCCS) – probably the body most representative of activists in Syria – have welcomed the sanctions but declared "the Syrian people do not want to substitute authoritarian rule by submission to foreign influence". This certainly reflects the voice of the Syrian street. The newly organised Syrian Leftist Revolutionary Current goes further, rejecting any military role for "NATO or other reactionary forces from the Arab States".

The very fact that Turkey, the conservative Arab regimes, the United States and the European imperialisms are now trying to influence events in Syria, after months of letting its people bleed, is a reflection of the courageous, sustained insurgency of the Syrian people. But the risk is that without a change in revolutionary strategy, exile groups like the JSA and SNC could broker a deal with imperialism above their heads and without their consent.

A peaceful revolution?

Advocates of an entirely "peaceful" revolution are looking to what they see as the model of the protests that brought down Egypt's dictator Mubarak. But it was mass strikes, not just mass protests, which forced the dictator from office, and they did do to preserve what remained of the system that he represented. The people in Tahrir square had to use force repeatedly to defend themselves from pro-government thugs and the police. Moreover the conditions in Egypt are not the same as Syria, which is more like Gaddafi's Libya in the regimes willingness to use the army to open fire on the people. To achieve victory, the Syrian revolution must therefore bring the working class into action. Class divisions have been visible in Syria's struggle from the outset. As Syrian writer Ammar Dayoub put it, the uprising "is about marginalized and impoverished sectors

of society" who have come together with various political forces against a tyrannical regime "which over decades has impoverished seven million Syrians and destroyed local agriculture and industry". If the Local Coordinating Committees called a general strike, it would bring into play the social and economic power of a working class that has already been drawn into a mass struggle on the streets for democratic rights. This would paralyse the state, precipitate a real split in the army, decisively tie the defected soldiers to the mass movement, and isolate the bourgeois forces advocating negotiations or intervention. The Syrian workers need their own revolutionary party and to control the local councils if they are to ensure that Assad's downfall is not merely the prelude to a new dictatorship in the making but see it through to a Socialist end.

The threat of counter-revolution grows as Islamists make gains

The magnificent Egyptian revolution is in danger of defeat, warns *Dave Stockton*

NOVEMBER HAS proved to be another crucial month for the Egyptian revolution. Once again hundreds of thousands packed Tahrir Square. Many more were mobilised in Alexandria, Suez, Mahalla al-Kubra and elsewhere. Once again bloody clashes left demonstrators dead, forcing the resignation of the Prime Minister and his cabinet.

But the demands of the demonstrators that Field Marshall Mohamed Hussein Tantawi resign and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) immediately make way for a civilian "government of national salvation" were not conceded. Instead another military appointed government, under Kamal al-Ganzouri, was imposed.

Despite the huge mobilisations no tangible gains have been won.

Far more ominous are the results of the first stage of parliamentary elections. According to Al Jazeera, there were huge gains for the counter-revolution. The Freedom and Justice Party – the political front for Muslim Brotherhood – has apparently won around 40 per cent of the vote, while the Nour Party, a coalition of Salafist organisations, took about 25 per cent. The Egyptian Bloc – an alliance of liberals – seems to have gained 15 per cent. In another litmus test of counter-revolution, no women are reported to have won seats in this round.

Since the ousting of Hosni Mubarak in February it has become ever clearer that a democratic revolution which leaves power in the hands of the generals of the old regime has not achieved its decisive goal. Even if the military appointed government were to be replaced by an Islamist dominated one or even a "national salvation front" comprising the Brotherhood, the liberals and maybe a few token representatives of the youth organisations that led the Tahrir Square mobilisations, this would not alter the fact that the demands of the democratic revolution that matter most to workers, youth and women would be sidelined if not completely abandoned. The limited democratic freedoms in Egypt have existed solely due to mass mobilisations and strikes.

The recent struggles

The latest wave of revolutionary action on the streets began on the weekend of 19 November when demonstrators were brutally attacked by riot police after they tried to set up camp in Tahrir Square. Thousands more arrived and eventually retook and occupied the square against the full might of the police.

Similar events took place in Suez, Alexandria, Mansoura and Mahalla al-Kubra, in the Delta and in the Sinai. In the Delta, in the town of Bahariya, the police used tear gas and live rounds to disperse the protesters.

in the fighting. Demonstrators wielded stones and Molotov cocktails against the plastic bullets, buckshot and live rounds of the police.

The repressive actions of the military and their blatant attempts to constitutionally entrench their power reignited the mass movement that made up the February revolution. More than 12,000 civilians have been dragged before military tribunals since the fall of Mubarak – more than the total who faced such tribunals during his entire 30-year dictatorship. Many are still languishing in prison camps.

A sinister development has been repeated attempts to foment religious hatred against Egypt's Coptic Christian community. There are good reasons to believe the military – not just the Salafists – are behind this.

On 9 October, during a mass demonstration by Copts against the burning of a church in Upper Egypt, security forces – using heavy armoured personnel carriers – crushed several people to death. Live bullets were also used. In the end 25 demonstrators were dead and 300 injured. State-run television organised a pogrom in support claiming Copts had attacked the army. As a result gangs armed themselves with clubs and knives, beating up and even killing protesters.

Then at the beginning of November the government released draft proposals for the new constitution, which would guarantee a supervisory role for the military whatever the outcome of elections. The armed forces and its budget would be completely exempted from civilian control.

However this was an inept move by Tantawi. It sparked protests not only from the labour movement and the left but also alienated the Muslim Brotherhood. A full-blown military counter-revolution might rob them of the influence and power they hope to win by elections. The Muslim Brotherhood does not rule out close collaboration with the SCAF – indeed they have sought it since February – but they cannot afford to be seen as, let alone be mere puppets of Tantawi and co.

The reaction to the SCAF proposals was particularly strong from the Islamist youth movements – a number of which have been expelled from the MB for daring to demand more youth candidates on the lists. This radicalisation of the Islamist youth – including some of the Salafists – around democratic slogans represents a development the left needs to take advantage of. Not of course by adapting to their anti-democratic demands for religious law but by winning them to a united front in defence of democratic rights for all (including women, Christians, etc.) and for the interests of workers and peasants.



Protesters in Tahrir square in November faced violence as tensions rose in the run up to the elections

The election result could give the Islamists renewed confidence to unleash a crackdown on the left and the militant vanguard of the workers.

Working class action needed

On 29 November the Revolutionary Association of Textile Workers addressed a proposal to the Tahrir Square occupiers, proposing they elect popular revolutionary councils and committees as a counterweight to the elections. They clearly recognise the danger that the Muslim Brotherhood and the Nour Salafists will use their "democratic" mandate, acquired via the elections to isolate the revolutionary youth of the squares and the workers in the new trade unions.

But there is great danger in fetishising any one tactic in a revolution. In a different political conjuncture the same tactic can isolate the vanguard from the masses rather than fuse them together. Both Mubarak in February and Tantawi and the SCAF in November had little legitimacy in the eyes of the masses for preserving their grip on power. Therefore the courageous actions of the occupiers, their willingness to die for their cause won over the millions. Today the "legitimacy" of the elections (however fraudulent in some respects) show that the Islamists have mass support. The danger now is that they use it to unleash a crackdown on the left and on the militant vanguard of the workers.

To elect councils in the squares as a form of popular democracy can have a certain validity in high tides of mobilisation, especially if they can reach out and stimulate the

creation of such bodies in the workplaces and popular quarters. But the failure to bring down Tantawi and SCAF at the end of November, and the fact that elections went forward have led numbers in the squares to dwindle to hundreds. To be true organs of mass struggle, let alone organs of power, councils will have to be rooted in the factories, in the poorest quarters of the cities, in the villages and barracks too if they are to outweigh a parliament or a constituent assembly. They will have to be created, as part of a mass movement for the social and economic demands, as well as for democratic demands.

This necessitates the working class launching a wave of strikes for such demands – creating the basis for an all-out general strike when the critical hour arrives. The 1.4 million strong Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions called on workers to join the protests in Tahrir Square in November. But many workers are still in the official unions or none. Union and revolutionary youth activists need to go to every major workplace, calling on workers to hold mass meetings, formulate their demands, organise demonstrations and elect factory councils.

Clearly this is just what the generals fear. In November a member of the SCAF, General Mohsen el-Fanagari, said on the popular al-Hayat TV channel: "What is the point of this strike, of the million marches?

... The aim of what is going on is to shake the backbone of the state, which is the armed forces."

Yes indeed: the aim must be to break the backbone of the dictatorship before it can break the back of the revolution. But this can only be done by winning over the rank and file soldiers so that, alongside the workers and peasants, they can democratically share in shaping a new Egypt and helping spread the revolution to the many remaining dictatorships.

A "second revolution" must call for a thoroughgoing clear-out – of not only the Field Marshall, his generals, a purging of the officer corp and police, but for the election of all officers by rank and file soldiers, for the election of recallable delegates to a sovereign constituent assembly, for satisfying the most burning economic and social needs of the working population.

A general strike, one growing into a mass popular insurrection, also requires the creation of the type of organisation that has historically proved capable of this: workers', soldiers' and farmers' councils. It requires a mass workers' and youth defence organisation.

Indeed only when the great mass of ordinary Egyptians experience the revolution as the means to solve their burning economic and social needs, as well as their political representation, will the revolution be truly unstoppable.

The revolutionary vanguard forces have to build this up into a programme for making the revolution permanent – ongoing – until the workers and poor themselves take power into their own hands. Only then will the revolution be safe from all sorts of counterrevolution: Liberal-capitalist, Islamist or a restored military dictatorship.

The hardest hit are fighting back

Joy Maccready

"THE PAST 12 months have seen a string of cuts that have hit disabled people the hardest, from benefits changes to local authorities slashing social care budgets and axing concessionary bus passes."

This comment by Jaspal Dhani, CEO of the UK Disabled People's Council, highlights the devastating effects the Con-Dem's cuts will have on people with impairments, both directly in the form of 40 specific cuts targeting disabled people and as a side effect of cuts in public services.

The Coalition government's cuts to the welfare system could set independent living back 30 years, according to UK Disabled People's Council (UKDPC). They could force many into poverty or residential care homes, which are also facing budgets cuts.

In addition, the proposed 300,000 additional jobs to be cut in the public sector – up from the original estimate of 410,000 – will also damage disabled workers' ability to find employment, as private sector businesses have a poor record in employing people with disabilities.

But it just gets worse – families and carers could be hit by more cuts when learning disability services are reviewed in the new year. For example, Kingston Council will try to find £1.2m of savings from day care, home



care and other projects when it begins its six-month review in January.

After widespread outrage, the Con-Dem government was forced to do a U-turn on plans to scrap mobility component of disability living allowance (DLA) for 80,000 people in care homes. It planned to save £160 million by removing the £50-a-week benefit.

However, what the Coalition has-

n't backed down on is the demeaning and dehumanising retesting of those on DLA by private contractor Atos Healthcare, despite doctors' challenging the medical legitimacy of these tests. According to DWP figures, the DLA has the lowest fraud rate (0.5%) of any benefit. Therefore, the government's determination to take 20% of people off DLA will mean that 19.5% of disabled people will have their benefits with-

drawn and pushed into abject poverty.

Atos, which is paid £100 million a year by the government to take benefits away from the sick, has been accused of altering forms – after the person tested had signed them – to falsely claim they were NOT disabled. With sickening irony, the company is a sponsor of the Paralympic Games.

But people with disabilities are

organising and taking action against the government and Atos Healthcare. In May, over 8,000 joined the Hardest Hit March on parliament to protest against the cuts. This was followed up on 22 October, one year after the government's comprehensive Spending Review, which saw mass protests in 14 cities across the UK.

As part of UK Disability History Month, a number of actions are planned across the country in December. In London, activists are planning to target Atos in a 'Festive Month of Action'. This began with a demonstration of disabled people, benefit claimants and supporters outside the Paralympic Goal Ball test event being held at the Olympic Park on Saturday 3 December, and ends with a 'Real Victorian Christmas Party and Picnic' in Triton Square NW1 outside Atos Healthcare's headquarters on 16 December at 2pm.

The government is making a fundamental attack on equality. Local and national anti-cuts organisations must link the fight against public sector cuts and the battle against private companies profiting off people's misery into a mass fight back. Only a mass mobilisation will stop these attacks. As a disability rights activist said: "I am not disabled – I live with an impairment. The term 'disabled' is defined by how society views and treats you."

EDL join forces with BNP splitters

Dan Edwards

THE FASCIST English Defence League (EDL) has joined forces with the British Freedom Party (BFP), a party headed by ex-UKIP member Paul Weston and mainly comprised of former BNP members who have jumped from Nick Griffin's sinking ship. This is the first time the EDL has endorsed electoral candidates and demonstrates both the strengths and weaknesses of the group.

EDL demo numbers have been falling over recent months. Only a few hundred bothered turning up to the last national protest in Birmingham. Apparently, fascist thugs, out for a day of beating Lefties and Muslims, don't take to being kettled by police in a car park. The more hardcore fascist members have drifted away from the organisation, or turned to splinter groups (North-East Infidels, North-West Infidels, Combined Ex-Forces, etc) and older fascist organisations such as the National Front, in an effort to build a new street army of the far right.

On the other hand, the EDL has also faced problems associated with portraying itself as a respectable and legitimate organisation. More moderate supporters have been put off by the violence of members (both during and outside of protests, and sometimes even directed against other EDL members), racist comments posted all over facebook pages



and the excessive drinking on demonstrations. The new alliance is a chance for the EDL leadership to prove its 'respectability' by showing that it can campaign in mainstream electoral politics, while trying to engage their members in new areas of activism that are less demoralising than being penned in with a bunch of pissed skinheads beating each other up.

The BFP are also gaining from this

union. Many of them are former members of the BNP (including notorious fascists such as Simon Bennett and Lee Barnes) that are unhappy at being in a group out of the media limelight. Partnering with the EDL has seen the BFP raise its profile, appearing in several newspapers and Weston was interviewed on TV. As well as being a publicity move, it is also an attempt to provide their new fascist project with elec-

toral foot soldiers and street fighters.

Not surprisingly, however, there seems to be problems with the merger already, as rank-and-file EDL members don't want to be manipulated by a few burnt-out ex-Griffinites with no chance of getting anywhere in the elections. A leaked online conversation between BFP leaders discussing how they could use the EDL's periphery to their advantage and should keep hold of contact details once they

registered to the party has intensified this mistrust.

However, no one should underestimate the potential of this new far-right political alliance. In the leaked conversation, BFP leader Peter Mullins talked about orienting towards the 'proletariat' (he immediately apologised for using 'communist words'), whose anger with the current system is growing, as a way of bolstering the group's support before trying to win over more of the middle class. He explicitly said that they need the EDL because of the numbers they can mobilise on the streets.

These are traditional fascist ways of organising that emerge during a prolonged economic crisis; a weak left and inability of the unions' leadership to launch a real fight back against the crisis compound the situation. With less workers being organised in the unions and more people being thrown onto the dole and into poverty, fascist groups could potentially grow off the back of attempts to blame foreign workers and trade unions for prolonging the crisis.

If we want to stop the fascists, we have to prevent their violence by mobilising on the streets and defending our communities, and we also need to provide a united left-wing political force that can organise against the government's attempts to make us – the working class – pay for the crisis.

Undead capitalism

Zombies are big business, with more games and movies coming out every year cashing in on the idea of the walking dead. *Will Walsh* looks at why our society is so zombified

AMC'S *THE Walking Dead* has taken the world by storm. Based on the graphic novel of the same name, the series follows a group of survivors as they have made their way across a desolate zombie filled wasteland. The second season has now come to a climatic end with the next season scheduled for next year. *The Walking Dead* is part of the recent obsession with all things zombie - from dressing up for the 'zombie apocalypse' to the large number of zombie themed computer games, what is the fascination with the living dead?

The Zombie economy

There has been a spate of articles and books talking about zombie capitalism, zombie corporations and zombie nations. The zombie theme refers to the living dead nature of capitalism, not only a system that refuses to die, but has in a sense already died, the life has come out of it and now it just feeds on the flesh of the living. It also specifically refers to the bail out of banks and companies around 2008 which saw them resurrected from the grave, but not to see



renewed life in the economy, simply to stop it from complete collapse.

Nouriel Roubini, a mainstream economist who was pretty accurate in his predictions of where the econ-

omy was going a few years ago - argued that high debt levels "have created zombie households, zombie banks, and zombie governments". This is how we live today - suspended between the old life and the new one, a world waiting for revolution that has not yet come.

Zombies in films

To really understand what the ideology behind zombies is I think we need to analyse what a zombie really is and what it culturally represents. Monsters throughout the years have always mirrored society's issues and most of all fears. From the beginning of film in the early part of the 20th century the fear was the 'outsider' (xenophobia) so we have films such as *Birth of a Nation*, a pro-KKK movie set in the US civil war. As movie developed horror films began to be made in the 30s and 40s with adaptations of classic gothic literature such as *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, the former being about the fear of technology and science and the latter being the fear again of the 'outsider' but also sexual awakening and homosexuality. Japan, with their own specific national trauma of the atomic bombings in 1945, invented *Godzilla*, which represents the fear of nuclear energy, weaponry and mutations. The list goes on.

Zombies are different. They have represented different fears over the many years they appeared in film. Of course it is easy to see zombies as a metaphor for sickness and disease - an epidemic, but what if there is something else? George A. Romero's *Night of the Living dead* (1969), released just after the civil rights movement, shows a clear metaphor for racial tension in the deep south of America - one scene has the police/establishment opening fire on an unarmed black man, an event that was not uncommon then - or today. In fact Romero often uses the police or the army as the 'survivors' in his films, although he often shows them being incompetent and overrun by the masses of zombies. It could be argued that Romero

is using this as an anti-establishment metaphor. In the 1970's Romero releases arguably his greatest work, *Dawn of the Dead*, which is an obvious analogy of consumerism in America. The undead return to the shopping mall and walk its halls with drooling abandon as the survivors hold up on the roof. "What are they doing, why do they come here?" asks one character. "Some kind of instinct, memory, what they used to do" is the reply; "This mall was an important place in their lives".

Zombie riot

A running theme through all zombie films though has always been social 'disorder'. One of the reasons why the zombie is the most popular monster of our time is that we are seeing real life uprisings and revolutions all over the world. It's arguable that zombies are the ultimate anti-capitalist monsters as they represent a punishment to us when the excesses of our society reach fever pitch. The fear of mass disorder by apparently mindless individuals mirrors the kind of response the establishment has had to the Occupy movement. In zombie films, the reaction of the survivors is often worse than the zombies themselves in these films (robbing the dead of their jewellery and killing each other to steal a car or food).

The Walking Dead shows the decay of the American dream along with capitalism. The first season showed the characters in an urban decaying sprawl, husks of tanks litter the streets, shops and buildings stand in disarray as the zombies shamble all around. "Zombies represent America hitting a very low bottom, as we witness the spectacle of consumer capitalism transforming itself into a feudalistic dance of death," said the cultural critic David J. Skal.

Zombies can be seen as the ultimate 'have-not's' and the survivors 'haves'. It's not hard to see zombies in the films *White Zombie* and *Plague of Zombies* as displaced workers, the latter is even set in a Cornish tin mine. We see clear parallels of the zombie-as-proletarian in Alfred Metraux's book *Voodoo*, set in Haiti. "The zombie is a beast of burden, which his master exploits without mercy, making him work in the fields, weighing him down with labour, whipping him freely and feeding him on meagre, tasteless food." Whilst vampires are synonymous with Aristocrats who suck the blood of the peasants, zombies are the 'beyond the grave' trade unionists marching collectively on the few.

Really the Zombies are about you and me, the united collective against the real evil (capitalism, corporations, and our government). They represent the fear of the mass, the multi-million, and express the fear of the capitalists that society might collapse into disorder.

To get past the undead capitalism and escape a zombified world, we need to rise from our acquiescent graves and unite - but we won't be mindlessly eating people - we will be striking, occupying and resisting.

Staging the riots

Joy Macready

The Riots at Tricycle Theatre 17 November - 10 December

THE RIOTS, written by Gillian Slovo, is a thought-provoking account of the UK riots that erupted in summer 2010. Based on more than 60 interviews, the play gives a voice to the many "actors" involved in the real-life drama: from the police, rioters and community activists that were out on the streets during those days and nights, to a father of two who was burnt out of his flat above the Allied Carpet shop in Tottenham, to the commentators, politicians, defence solicitors and the judges that passed down such punitive sentences.

The first act focused more on the physical location and movement of the riots: Mark Duggan's murder and subsequent community demonstration, the police deployment and the response on Tottenham's streets. Importantly, the second act addressed the political situation that led to the spread of the riots across the UK, linking the events to the current economic environment and the government's cuts to benefits and the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), which has left many working class youth with a bleak future.

In the play, one rioter said: "I thought wow, I need to take advantage of the situation 'cos this is never goin' ta happen again, there's no police the shopkeepers aren't there, so why not just go an' take what you want." Sounds remarkably like the bankers that walked off with millions in bonuses



while the government looked on.

The most poignant voice was Sadie King, a resident of the Pembury Estate in Hackney, who challenged MP Diane Abbott's dismissive attitude that the estate was rife with gangs. Sadie explained how the police have turned the public areas of the estate into a dispersal zone, so that youth have no place to hang out. She highlighted how the police terrorise and demonise the young people on the estate - just by living there they are labelled as delinquents and criminals. She voiced the pride of a community plagued by poverty but trying to do the best they could.

During the talkback session, Labour MP John McDonnell linked the MPs expenses scandal and the use of taxpayers' money to pay huge bankers' bonuses to a breakdown in societal mores. He pointed out the hypocrisy of MPs arguing for harsher prison sentences for rioters, when they had stolen thousands from the taxpayer. He agreed with an audi-

ence member that those sentenced - on average 12.5 months, with some getting as much as two years for stealing such incidentals as moisturiser - should be viewed as political prisoners, for the long sentences are politically motivated.

The audience in the talkback session reflected class divisions within UK society. Some argued that the punitive sentences meted out to the rioters were correct and others tried to de-politicise the events by saying that they were all just mindless thugs enjoying themselves. The majority, however, could see that the riots were part of a bigger political picture, a resistance movement that includes the pension strikes and the Occupy Movement. It is a class issue. As one audience member said: "If these riots had happened in Kensington, they would have been contained within an hour. They left the poor areas to burn. It is divide and rule - a way of pitting people within communities against each other." ■

What Christmas means for capitalism

Simon Hardy

EVERY YEAR Christmas seems to start earlier. No sooner are the Halloween costumes taken down from the displays than the fake plastic trees, chocolate calendars and snow-in-a-can decorations come out. Whilst Christmas is meant to be a 'magical time' it can often be incredibly stressful for many, and often sees family bust ups and rows as everyone is forced together to have a good time.

The time of year is a particular pressure on women. The adverts on television for women to go shopping, to be the ones who make sure that 'Christmas happens' are an ideological bombardment which is designed to reinforce deeply entrenched attitudes about the role of women – just take the Boots advert ("here come the girls"). It is because the Christmas season revolves around family, hospitality and cooking which are of course primarily associated with women.

The annual ritual of Christmas is an important one for capitalism – it is usually a highly profitable time for retail. People spend a lot at Christmas, usually much more than they can afford, not just on presents but on food and alcohol as well as on transport to and from family homes.

People are critical of how commercialised Christmas is. Having started life as the personification of the 'Christmas spirit' in the 16th century, Father Christmas subsequently merged with another folktale – St Nicholas, a Greek Bishop who was reputedly sent Nuns out to give gifts to the poor and provided sailors with cheap presents for their families.

Today Father Christmas is the greatest mascot the toy industry could have – a ritual of consumerism dressed up in feel-good sentimentality, deeply embedded in the cultural traditions of billions of people. We should also ponder why, despite Father Christmas only giving out presents to the good children, that it seems the richer ones always get the better presents.

Spend, spend, spend!

Many people on the left are critical of what they see as a consumerist culture which has left us apathetic and uncritical. Indeed, the idea that we have been co-opted into the capitalist system through the mass media or "mindless consumerism" is a popular one. The idea started with people like Daniel Bell and Theodor Adorno in the 1950s and 60s who argued that economic growth was creating a 'post-political' society where class contradictions and struggles were diminishing. It was a period of unprecedented economic growth, and the start of the idea that each generation would be better off than the last.

But all of the consumerist culture that we live in today is very much a product of the rising wages after the war and cheap consumer credit which the bosses used under globalisation to give their system a massive boost. Falling prices, and cheap credit encour-



The Christmas crush - an annual event

aged consumer spending, allowing millions to 'buy into' the system, and feel that they had a stake in capitalism.

Today wages are falling and credit is an albatross around our necks – many of us won't be able to have the standard of living that our parents had, or even our grandparents. In that sense even if it is true that people became less active in socialist politics this is not a result of consumerism. People are not less politically active because they have consumed more; they are less politically active because they feel their lives have improved somehow under the current system – why overthrow it? The increased consumption is a by-product of that, not the cause of it.

It was the German Marxist Walter Benjamin who examined the role of 'consumerism' in how the ruling elites try to shape and mould our outlook on life. But being awash with consumer commodities also creates a problem for ruling ideology, because it promises us a fulfilment that we can rarely achieve. We can never get all the things we are told we should want – that was the 'unpolitical' aspect of the summer riots, the desire to have the trainers and plasma screen TVs in the face of wage cuts, job losses and austerity.

This disappointment, the gap between what is promised and what is possible for most people opens up a space, one that can become radicalised if it is linked to an anti-capitalist critique – rather than just a feeling of apathy towards political action.

Christmas after capitalism

If you cut through the consumerist alienation and phony good will around Christmas time, there is a real sense of living in a world where the usual traumas of work and social alienation are gone – where we feel goodwill and a merry time together. It is not just the Christian message which lies, increasingly obscured, behind the Disneyfied season which we experience that provides the sense of compassion. We lavish each other with presents and gifts. Everyone has thought 'why can't

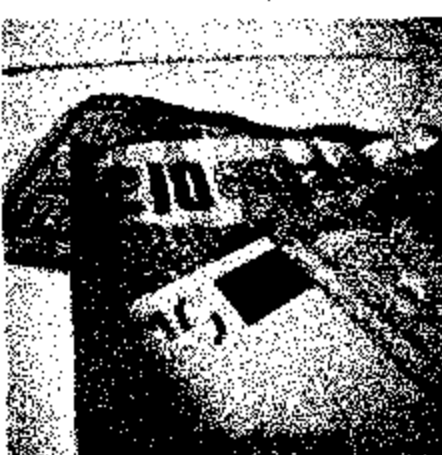
everyday be Christmas?' at some point in their lives – and why shouldn't it be?

The idea of goodwill on earth and peace to everyone, those feel-good movies that they show on TV, the classic Dickens Christmas Tale of Scrooge and his journey from horrible, gnarled old capitalist to a lovable philanthropic gent, are all part of an ideological message about human community, forgiveness and tolerance. Normally someone might shout at that guy for cutting in front of them in traffic or ignore homeless people – but in December... well everything is just different. Maybe your boss even lets you finish work a few hours early so you can spend more time with your family. It tacitly acknowledges that the rest of the year we are miserable, alienated and angry with each other – victims of an increasingly stressful work life which grinds us down. People have to ask themselves, why should we be nice to each other only at Christmas?

Christmas is a time of mixed emotions – it can be exhilarating and frustrating, a high point of the year and a low point. As part of the struggle for human emancipation we have to be critical of the way these holidays are manipulated by capitalists for their own benefit and reinforce a particular way of life.

There is no crystal ball which we can gaze into to get a picture of life after capitalism. But a society which replaces capitalism would necessarily be one founded on removing the exploitative basis of capitalism. Ending private ownership and removing the profit logic would reverse the trend towards poverty in the home and alienation in the workplace. It would be a society geared towards organising the productive efforts of humanity to solve our crises of housing, education and oppression, rather than generating massive wealth for a few individuals. It would be a world driven by solidarity, empathy and collective action rather than selfishness, individualism and greed. Better than all the Christmases put together!

WHERE WE STAND



Capitalism is an anarchic and crisis-ridden economic system based on production for profit. We are for the expropriation of the capitalist class and the abolition of capitalism. We are for its replacement by socialist production planned to satisfy human need. Only the socialist revolution and the smashing of the capitalist state can achieve this goal. Only the working class, led by a revolutionary vanguard party and organised into workers' councils and workers' militia can lead such a revolution to victory and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism.

The Labour Party is not a socialist party. It is a bourgeois workers' party – bourgeois in its politics and its practice, but it gets its support from the working class through the trade unions and is supported by the mass of workers at the polls. Socialists work alongside Labour Party members in the workers' movement and argue for our revolutionary positions within the struggles.



The Trade Unions must be transformed by a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the fight for workers' control of production. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class – factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.

The Russian revolution established a workers' state. But Stalin destroyed workers' democracy and set about the reactionary and utopian project of building "socialism in one country". In the USSR, and the other degenerate workers' states that were established from above, capitalism was destroyed but the bureaucracy excluded the working class from power, blocking the road to democratic planning and socialism. The parasitic bureaucratic caste led these states to crisis and eventual destruction. We were for the smashing of bureaucratic tyranny through political revolution and the establishment of workers' democracy. We opposed the restoration of capitalism and recognised that only workers' revolution can defend post-capitalist property relations. In times of war we unconditionally defend workers' states against imperialism.

Stalinism has consistently betrayed the working class. The Stalinist Communist Parties' strategy of alliances between workers and capitalists (in popular fronts) and their stages theory of revolution have inflicted terrible defeats on the working class world-wide. These parties are reformist.

Social Oppression is an integral feature of capitalism, systematically oppressing people on the basis of race, age, sex or sexual orientation. We are for the liberation of women and for the building of a working class women's movement, not an "all class" autonomous movement. We are for the liberation of all of the oppressed. We fight racism and fascism. We oppose all immigration controls. We fight for labour movement support for black self-defence against racist and state attacks. We are for no platform for fascists and for driving them out of the unions.



Imperialism is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. But against the politics of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution – working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of the imperialist army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We fight imperialist war not with pacifist pleas but with militant class struggle methods including the forcible disarmament of "our own" bosses.

Workers Power is a revolutionary communist organisation. We base our programme and policies on the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, on the revolutionary documents of the first four congresses of the Third International and the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International. Workers Power is the British Section of the League for the Fifth International. The last revolutionary International (the Fourth) collapsed in the years 1948-51. The LSI is fighting to refound a revolutionary International and build a new world party of socialist revolution. If you are a class conscious fighter against capitalism; if you are an internationalist – join us! ★

workers power 5

Why the Tories fear our strength

THE TORIES know that anger is growing and that the N30 strike could lead to more action. That's why Liberal Democrat minister Danny Alexander admitted "striking will harden opinion on the union side and make it harder for them to sell a deal to their members".

Alexander's statement reveals what the Coalition is hoping for – that our union leaders will agree to partial concessions and avoid future strikes. Concessions that could leave us working longer, paying more and getting less in old age.

And if we lose this great battle, it will weaken us on every other front of the Tory offensive. The fight to save the NHS. The campaign against the pay cap on public sector pay. The struggle against higher college fees and the scrapping of EMA. Resistance to the halving of subsidies for solar energy. The fight against 720,000 job losses in the public sector and another 500,000 in the private sector.

If we lose, we know what we have to look forward to. The Institute of Fiscal Studies – not exactly a bastion of socialism – reports that if the Tory Coalition gets its way most people in Britain will be worse off in 2015



than we were in 2002.

Now is not the time to feel defeated however - although we know the task before us is daunting.

We have only this to say – the other side fears us even more. They fear us because they know that they cannot live without us, but we can live without them. They will use their police, their courts and their laws against us, but we can win, if we are united and determined, if we know our own strength and we don't let the judges or the bureaucrats hold us back.

All resistance creates the possibility of victory - as long as we learn from the defeats and the set backs. Most importantly we need to get organised, to build the meetings in the local areas and at workplaces, to create networks of activists who can co-ordinate better, and we need to unite all the struggles together. That is why a general strike is so important - not because we think we can get it tomorrow, but because we need to campaign for it and build up support for the idea across all sectors. If you agree with that then contact Workers Power for some extra copies of our paper for people you know.

The campaign for an anticapitalist alternative

WE ARE facing a real offensive by the bankers and the capitalist class to make the workers pay for their crisis. We are not the only country to face this offensive, this is an international attack by the capitalist class against the working class.

Hikes in student fees, attacks on pensions, more privatisation of the NHS, reductions in welfare benefits, millions on the dole and a stagnating economy – this is what we face unless we can organise an anti capitalist force, rooted in the working class, that can break this government and open the road to a new socialist society.

Unity

But our own side is divided and at the moment unable to mount the resistance that is necessary. The anti-cuts struggle is a prime example where three competing campaigns – Unite the Resistance, Coalition of Resistance and the NSSN – have been set up, each ostensibly to coordinate the struggles. But they quickly reveal themselves to be fronts run behind the scenes by various political groups for their own benefit.

The seriousness of the crisis in Britain is forcing us to take a look at the left as well, to see if we are 'fit for purpose'. We cannot continue with business as normal. We have to build a leadership from below which can spread the resistance and

fight for an anticapitalist solution to the crisis.

There are a growing number of us who think that we need a realignment on the left, we need a new perspective and a new organisation. There are a number of organisations which have formed from uniting some of the left and bringing in new forces, like the NPA in France, the NAL in the Czech Republic or Antarsya in Greece is needed, one that unites people from different traditions and backgrounds in a common struggle against the government. These projects all have the good and bad sides, but all represent important developments on the international left.

We think it would be useful to come together to discuss ways of taking steps towards some framework of unity. In a respectful and comradely atmosphere we would be able to consider both the problems and the possible solutions that could advance our goal of renewing and strengthening the workers' movement, placing socialist ideas back on the agenda of millions of people and rebuilding organisations that have the strength and support necessary for us to begin to score decisive victories against the bosses.

Send an email to anticapitalistalternative@gmail.com to get involved

Socialist measures against the capitalist crisis

WITH BRITAIN predicted to go back into recession next year, and with a new credit crunch and the collapse of the Eurozone looming, what's the answer to a capitalist system in crisis?

The TUC is calling for alternative policies – on 25 October general secretary Brendan Barber called for fairer taxes, closing tax loopholes, investing in green jobs and infrastructure and a living wage. That's fine as far as it goes – which is nowhere near far or fast enough. None of that will stop the jobs massacre or prevent the banks from cutting off funds in the coming crunch. Nor does the TUC oppose all the cuts: instead Barber called for "a more realistic 10 year plan" for "reducing the deficit" instead of the Tories' four year plan. That means the same amount of cuts spread out over longer, not opposition to cuts.

But we didn't cause this crisis so we shouldn't pay for it – not over four years, 10 years or even for five minutes. Because it is a lie to say

there's no alternative to deficit reduction through cuts. Instead every country could simply cancel its debt to the billionaire bondholders – we could obliterate the deficit overnight if we tax the rich, seize corporate and banking profits and scrap armaments programmes. And we could stop the banks paying themselves massive bonuses and cutting off 'unprofitable' investment by taking them into state hands, merging them into a single not-for-profit state investment bank run by the people, and directing investment to where there is human need.

- Nationalise the banks without compensation under democratic workers' and consumers' control
- Decent pensions for all. A single state owned and guaranteed pension scheme for public and private sector workers
- End unemployment – cut the hours not the jobs, with no loss of pay
- Tax the rich to absorb the deficit and fund a huge programme of



- public works
- For a sliding scale of wages to keep in line with inflation
- Cancel the national debt: pay the workers, not the bondholders
- Cut the wars – troops out of

- Afghanistan now
- Fight for the nationalisation of the energy companies under workers control without compensation and draw up a renewable energy plan

- A democratic plan of production in place of the madness of the market
- A workers' government based on delegates elected by assemblies of working class people