

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



No 230 18 January 2012 30p/80p

www.workersliberty.org

For a workers' government

**Socialists and
Scottish
independence** page 3



**Class struggles
in Greece** pages 6-7

**La Senza:
workers occupy**
page 8



Union leader McCluskey

is right:

See page 5

LABOUR

MUST

FIGHT

THE

CUTS!

Back anti-cuts protests and strikes!

Organise for a workers' government

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

020 7394 8923 solidarity@workersliberty.org
20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road,
London, SE1 3DG.

GET SOLIDARITY EVERY WEEK!

Special offers

- Trial sub, 6 issues £5
- 22 issues (six months). £18 waged £9 unwaged
- 44 issues (year). £35 waged £17 unwaged
- European rate: 28 euros (22 issues) or 50 euros (44 issues)

Tick as appropriate above and send your money to:
20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG
Cheques (£) to "AWL".

Or make £ and euro payments at workersliberty.org/sub.

Name

Address

I enclose £



Eurozone: 9 December solved nothing

By Colin Foster

Four developments in mid-January confirm that the 9 December Euro-summit came nowhere near staving off the twin credit crises plaguing European states and banks.

France and Austria have been downgraded from their top-rank credit rating, and so, in consequence, has the European Financial Stability Facility, the eurozone's back-up "mini-IMF".

Seven other eurozone states were downgraded at the same time. Italy, Spain, and Portugal, which had already been removed from the top ranks, were sent down two more notches.

Negotiations over the private-sector share in restructuring Greece's debt are so badly stalled that Greece may default — become unable to make promised payments — by late March. The deal was supposed to be that a chunk of Greek bonds held by banks and financiers — currently trading way below face-value — would be swapped for new (and hopefully more reliable) bonds of lower face-value, thus reducing a chunk of Greece's notional debt total by 50%.

But the details weren't specified. The value of the replacement bonds depends on the "coupon" on them (the interest rate paid, as a percentage on the face-value) as much as on the face-value. The German government is now pressing for a relatively low coupon.

But the swap was supposed to be voluntary, and many bondholders are not volunteering.

TREATY

Backroom work on the new treaty planned by the 9 December summit is proceeding feverishly, and eurozone leaders hope to have the treaty finalised by the end of January.

The European Central Bank has written an official letter politely declaring the draft worthless. The treaty, a souped-up version of the Maastricht accord of 1992, is supposed to tie eurozone states to more-or-less balanced budgets.

The ECB complains that the loopholes in the treaty (it has to have them: even Germany deliberately ran large budget deficits in 2009-10) are too big, and the plans for penalties against

governments which run deficits are too weak.

Despite ECB dogma, stricter balanced-budget rules would not help. Spain and Ireland, for example, were not running large deficits before 2007, and have been brought down by the collapse of property bubbles rather than any sort of excess in government spending.

However, the rumoured hope of euro-leaders was that the treaty, even if in itself worthless or counter-productive, might induce the ECB to stem the crisis by buying or guaranteeing the debt of stricken countries. That looks even less likely now.

The credit-rating agencies which have downgraded the ratings of the EFSF, France, Austria, and others are as unreliable as economic guides as the ECB is. As Aditya Chakraborty notes in the Guardian (17 January), they "failed to warn investors about the Asian financial crisis, Enron, the subprime crisis, Lehman Brothers — and Greece...."

"Of the corporate debt rated by [one of the two dominant agencies] as AAA, 32% has been down-

graded within just three years, 57% within seven years...."

As with the ECB, the credit-rating agencies are important not because they are astute but because they have power. Pension funds and insurance companies often have rules obliging them to keep their wealth, or a large chunk of it, in top-credit-rated assets.

The EFSF downgrade means that its lending power is reduced, and the downgrades of other states mean that financiers are likely to demand even higher interest payments in return for buying their bonds (IOUs).

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2012:

What is capitalism? How long can it go on?

Friday 29 June - Sunday 1 July
Highgate Newtown
Community Centre, Bertram
Street, London N19 5DQ

- Weekend tickets: £22 waged, £14 low-waged/students, £8 unwaged/school students.
- Book tickets and more information at www.workersliberty.org/ideas

Planning the next steps in the pension fight

AWL news
By Darren Bedford

Members of Workers' Liberty who work in the public sector met on Saturday 14 January to discuss organising against a sell-out in the pensions campaign, and to develop our efforts to build rank-and-file power in workplaces and unions.

AWL members organise in "fractions" — our school workers' fraction, for instance, brings together National Union of Teachers (NUT) activists with teaching assistants and other education workers.

The school workers heard a report from NUT Executive member Patrick Murphy, whose motion to the 12 January Executive meeting would have committed the NUT to organise further action on pensions but was defeated.

The fraction agreed to fight in NUT branches and associations for motions for the next Executive meeting calling for further action before the February half-term. We will also seek to initiate a conference of delegates from union branches and school groups to discuss campaigning on workload issues and draw lessons from the pensions

battle.

John Moloney (PCS) said that although the pensions dispute is in serious danger of being sold out, the battle isn't over yet. PCS activists discussed how they could win their union to organising more action, both on pensions and on issues like jobs and pay. Comrades said that while the PCS's commitment to unity with other unions was positive, it was sometimes used as a cover for inaction on issues where the union could, and if necessary should, fight alone.

Unison members discussed how they could build the campaigns in Unison for emergency sector conferences to revive the pensions campaign. They also discussed how to build on the good work of AWL members and others in Lambeth Local Government Unison, who have been successful in building workplace-level organisation, developing new reps and involvement in the branch.

Unison comrades also discussed with PCS comrades the potential impact of further action in the pensions battle from the PCS.

More strike action as an established "fact on the ground", rather than just something Mark Serwotka thinks would be a good idea, would give activists in more conservative unions something to organise around.

With the more "rejectionist" unions due to meet on Thursday 19 January, the meeting discussed what could be done to push for a continued and rolling campaign.

A further one-day strike by the PCS, or perhaps PCS and NUT, cannot in-and-of-itself defeat the government's pensions plans. But it could act as a catalyst for wider and further action, including rolling and selective strikes.

DEFICIT

The meeting agreed that the central obstacle in the pensions battle has been the democratic deficit.

The campaign has been run entirely by the bureaucracy, calling members out on big "spectacular" actions with nothing in between and no mechanism for workers to direct the dispute from workplace level.

Existing "broad left" grouping in unions have played a less than helpful role, frequently tailing union bureaucracies or reducing themselves to ginger groups for union leaders rather than building forums where workers can assert an independent

voice and attempt to take control of their dispute and their unions.

AWL public sector workers will attempt to contribute to doing that through initiatives like the rank-and-file conference in NUT, a branches-based campaign on pay in PCS and the campaign for special conferences in Unison, as well as intervening in existing union lefts for a real rank-and-file strategy.

Commenting on the meeting, PCS activist and AWL Sheffield member Rosie Huzzard said:

"Being able to share experiences and tactics with trade union comrades from across the country and over a wide number of sectors is an invaluable experience; discussion around radical political education, training and bringing on new activists, and perspectives on the definition of a 'rank and file campaign' were all useful.

"Working in a large government workplace with a comparatively left wing union, it can often be hard to visualise the internal struggle for those in less transparent or democratic unions, or those without recognition agreements or facility time.

"Having regular cross-union meetings is creating a common understanding and improves how we can help each other, through practical solidarity."

The unions and Scottish independence

By Dale Street

“There are two different forms of nationalism in the referendum. The British nationalism of a ‘No’ vote. The Scottish nationalism of a ‘Yes’ vote. And Scottish nationalism is better for the workers.”

So John McAllion (former Labour MP and MSP, and now a member of the Scottish Socialist Party) concluded his pro-independence speech at a conference in Glasgow on 14 January, organised by the United Left (Scotland) of the Unite trade union.

The Tories and the Scottish National Party (SNP) have clashed over the timing of a referendum, how many questions should be on the voting paper, who should be entitled to vote, what would be the status of the referendum result, and what body should have overall responsibility for the conduct of the referendum.

Both have been motivated more by self-serving calculation than by principle.

The SNP can genuinely argue that it has a mandate for staging a referendum in late 2014. But the real reason why the SNP wants to hold it then is that it calculates (correctly) that it would have a better chance of winning then: around the 700th anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn, after the second “Scottish Homecoming” celebrations and a succession of international sporting events in Scotland, and shortly before a UK general election which could see the Tories returned to power.

According to McAllion,

there has been a “genius” element in the British state which allowed it to “mould and change threats, to see off threats to the establishment”.

The Labour Party has been “moulded and changed” by the British state. There is no time to spend another 100 years trying to build a new workers’ Labour Party. But an independent Scotland will open up space for the progressive political change previously stifled by the British state.

Independence for Scotland will also be “a golden opportunity” for the British trade union movement to show how trade unions can operate across national boundaries.

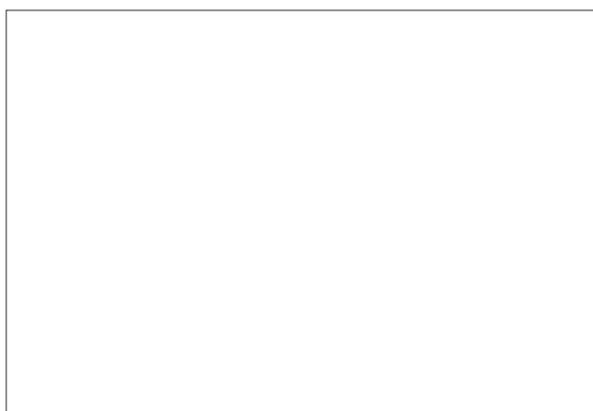
In truth it is not the “genius” of the British state which holds back progressive social change, but the idiocy of the Labour and trade union leaders who fail to fight for it.

The weakness of the British labour movement comes from its own political limitations, not from the quirks of British governance (monarchy, House of Lords, etc), which the movement would have changed long ago if its leaders were combative enough.

Independence would not be “a golden opportunity” for the trade union movement.

Right now, despite the changes and political differences resulting from devolution, there is a single British trade union movement. The EIS teachers’ union is the only union of any size which is purely Scottish.

What is the point in that unified trade union movement campaigning for the



Pensions demo, Aberdeen, 30 November. Photo: Unite Scotland

creation of an obstacle to that unity — another national border — so that it can then show how well equipped it is to overcome it?

Other speakers at the conference claimed virtues for nationalism.

Jackson Cullinane, the political officer of Unite in Scotland, argued: “Nationalism can be reactionary or progressive. Examples of the latter are Cuba, Venezuela, and James Connolly and Ireland... There is no conflict between the ideology of nationalism and the ideology of socialism.”

Specific Scottish examples of this supposed lack of conflict between socialism and nationalism were Keir Hardie (who called for Home Rule when he stood as the first independent labour candidate in 1888) and John Maclean (who advocated a Scottish Communist Republic).

But when Keir Hardie advocated Home Rule in the mid-Lanark by-election in 1888 it was an expression of his continuing Liberal political baggage. Until shortly before the by-election Hardie had been a member of the Liberals,

and his election slogan was: “A vote for Hardie is a vote for Gladstone.”

There clearly is a conflict between nationalism and socialism. Nationalism is about organising and mobilising people on the basis of their national identity. Socialism is about organising and mobilising people on the basis of their class identity.

NATIONALISM
Nationalism is a particularising ideology: it divides people up according to their national identity.

Socialism is a “universalising” ideology: it unites the working class, the class which aspires to liberate all humanity, across the boundaries of national identity.

Sometimes socialist movements may pursue goals also sought by nationalist movements, such as freedom for the colonies of the imperialist powers in the 20th century.

Even then *nationalism* as an ideology conflicts with the ideology of socialism. And Scotland’s case is not analogous to the national liberation movements in

India or Algeria: hardly anyone argues that Scotland is subject to national oppression.

The third speaker at the 14 January conference was John Foster, for many years the Communist Party’s main theoretician in Scotland.

In the early 1970s, he recalled, the trade union movement in Scotland had begun to take up the question of a Scottish Parliament in response to the initiatives of CP members such as the miners’ leader Mick McGahey. It was the start of the road which eventually led to the creation of a Scottish Parliament some three decades later.

But, said Foster, the hopes of the early 1970s that the Scottish Parliament would be a “workers’ parliament” had been dashed by the political domination of neo-liberalism. What was needed now was a specifically labour movement form of “devo-max”, involving “redistribution-max” (i.e., redistribution of wealth) and “democracy-max”.

If the labour movement fails to shape the Scottish nation, he warned, then reactionary forces will do so.

Foster’s argument cannot be understood outside of the evolution of the CP’s politics.

From the 1930s onwards the CP in Scotland (and elsewhere) pursued “popular-frontist” politics, allying with and accommodating to non-working-class political forces.

In 1972 this “popular frontism”, which by then had come to be known as “building a broad democratic alliance”, led the Communist Party in Scot-

land to push the Scottish TUC to convene the first-ever Scottish Assembly in Edinburgh in 1972 — bringing together trade unions with... local authorities, the Scottish CBI, Chambers of Commerce, and Tory MPs.

“Devo-max” is the demand around which the CP hopes to reconstruct the “broad democratic alliance” which produced the Scottish Assembly of 1972.

Logically, after pro-independence and “devo-max” speakers, the final speaker at the conference should have been someone arguing for some version of retaining a larger political unit.

Instead, Lorraine Davidson (introduced as “a journalist” but better known as a former Labour Party spin-doctor) described herself as “a mere observer in this debate, not here to make any political point”.

The Scottish left, or much of it, is confused about the basic difference between nationalism and socialism, and so demoralised that the SNP is effectively to be entrusted to achieve what the labour movement has failed to achieve.

Despite the repeated invocations about the need for the labour movement to have its own distinctive agenda, the best on offer was really a latter-day “broad democratic alliance” of the Scottish people against neo-liberalism.

The 14 January conference was billed as the start of a debate. The debate must be continued — and shifted onto the grounds of class-struggle socialism.

• AWL on Scotland: see bit.ly/demfedrep

Vote Livingstone and make unions pressure him

By Tom Harris

With the London Mayoral elections coming up in May, many socialists will feel conflicted.

On the one hand, we have the opportunity to remove Boris Johnson, the Tory incumbent who has spent the last year hiking fares, cutting services and threatening to curtail the rights of trade unionists.

On the other hand, many will feel reluctant to call for a Labour vote. Yet, in the absence of solidly-based working-class and socialist candidates, the AWL is in favour of voting Labour.

Despite all the changes, Labour is still a bourgeois workers’ party, linked to the trade unions. This does

not mean we should have any illusions about the party’s record, nor about the spectacularly misnamed “Red Ed” Miliband.

The picture is complicated by the Labour candidate: Ken Livingstone. Even some generally reluctant to vote Labour feel greater sympathy toward Livingstone. Why?

Livingstone has a reputation for being a leftist rebel, a maverick among senior Labour politicians dissenting from the Blairite/Brownite orthodoxy. He has shown a willingness to speak his mind and that marks him out from his peers, the majority of them horrified at the thought of contradicting the party line, except per-

haps from the right.

Beyond this, however, Livingstone’s left-wing reputation is undeserved and hides a far less palatable reality.

It was this “left-wing” mayor that, in 2000, campaigned on a platform of resisting privatisation of London Underground, only to go ahead and privatise parts of it.

The same “left-winger” later appealed to Tube workers to cross picket lines, and snuggled up to big business.

Far from being a socialist dissenter, Livingstone is yet another politician for whom membership of Labour doesn’t entail support for the cause of the working class.

When he ran the Greater London Council in the 1980s, Livingstone had a better line in rhetoric, but he was not more radical.

He backed down in the confrontation with the Thatcher government and the courts, and sacked his left-wing deputy John McDonnell because McDonnell led those who wanted to fight.

In 2007, Livingstone not only backed Gordon Brown against John McDonnell for Labour leader, but argued there shouldn’t be an election at all. He got his wish!

If Livingstone is elected, he will continue in the same mould of capitulation and cynicism as before. But there are differences between having a Labour

mayor in City Hall and having Boris Johnson.

Johnson attacks the labour movement and the conditions of working people nakedly in the full knowledge that his backers in finance, government and the bourgeois media are full square behind him. This kind of class-warfare is his *raison d’être*, not something he lapses into when it’s the easiest way out or when he thinks no one is looking.

When he does it, he does what the Tories were set up to do and always have done. In contrast, Livingstone, even at his worst, is far more subject to the pressure that the organised working class can exert on him. The Labour Party he

represents relies on the wider labour movement for votes and financial sustenance; and organised workers have a say, however diminished, in the running of Labour in a way they will never have in the Tory Party.

In the end, though, a Labour mayor will only be as good as we can force them to be.

If Livingstone is to be any better than his predecessor, it will rely on our work in unions, among students, and in our communities to make our demands heard and the pressure of our organised power felt.

Vote Labour, don’t fall into illusions about Livingstone, and organise to fight.

How the “left” mourned Kim Jong Il



The Left

By Rosie Huzzard

The “legacy” of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il is a horrifying human rights record, widespread poverty, and one of the most repressive political regimes in the world.

A 2004 Human Rights Watch report described Kim Jong Il as ruling “with an iron fist and a bizarre cult of personality” in which “virtually every aspect of political, social, and economic life is controlled by the government”.

Education, healthcare and even food distribution are allocated based on three groupings related to political loyalty to the state — “core”, “wavering”, and “hostile”. Children of the core group — those closest to the ruling party — receive the best education.

In the early 1990s Kim Jong Il’s governance caused a famine which killed as many as two million people.

Hundreds of thousands are detained and tortured in political prisons, and crimes which are punishable include accessing non-state media, or attempting to leave the country without permission.

North Korea claims to be a “communist” state which promotes the rights of workers. This couldn’t be further from the truth. Trade unions and labour organisations in North Korea are controlled exclusively by the state, and strikes and collective bargaining are illegal. There is no free media, and no scope for political opposition.

Unfortunately, those “leftists” who still see North Korea as somehow progressive or socialist have come crawling out of the woodwork. One could have predicted how Stalinist sects such as the CPGB-ML — aka the “Stalin Society”, a group dedicated to the rehabilitation of Stalin’s reputation and its defence against “capitalist, opportunist, revisionist and Trotskyist propaganda” — would have reacted to this news. But their choice of phrases still turns the stomach:

“Comrade Kim Jong Il devoted his entire life to the freedom and happiness of the Korean people, to the building of a thriving and powerful socialist nation, and to the anti-imperialist, socialist and communist cause of mankind.”

The withered, rotten hand of Stalinism is also detectable in the “mainstream” of the far-left in their lack of criticism of Kim Jong Il.

An initial report in the *Morning Star*, largely run by the Communist Party of Britain, was akin to coverage of the death of a soap star or the prime minister of a bourgeois democracy. “The state has declared a ban on foreign visits during the mourning period”, it told — no mention, then, that this ban has been pretty much permanent for decades. No mention either that the truth about the state mourning period was, according to North Korean refugees who managed to get away and were interviewed on British television, that those crying in the streets all but had a gun to their back.

In a later analysis, the *Star* questioned western criticism of North Korea. The press doesn’t do the same for Israel and Pakistan, which also have nuclear weapons, it claimed. Phrases such as “Nonetheless, there are still major issues of particular concern on the left about North Korean society and its current trajectory” make one wonder whether the article was about the future of a murderous dictatorial regime, or the latest haircut of a reality TV star.

The *Star* also absurdly questioned whether the state-imposed collective grief was any different from that in the UK, nodding to the death of Princess Diana or other royals.

Socialist Worker was far more explicit on this: “The same columnists who snigger at North Korea celebrated mass weeping in the streets over Princess Diana and the Queen Mother.”

Yes, all state funerals have particular traditions, and the collective hysteria surrounding the deaths of British royals is rightly unseemly to socialists; but it is not the same as the enforced-at-gunpoint collective grieving demanded by a Stalinist bureaucracy.

The excuses from the *Morning Star* and SWP legitimise the existence of the North Korean state, and the oppression of its people. Leftists peddling a soft-Stalinist apology for

North Korea should ask themselves whether they would prefer to be a trade union militant in Pyongyang or New York. They should draw some conclusions from their answer.

This is not to “support” Western capitalism against North Korean Stalinism, and any sabre-rattling by capitalist-imperialist powers should obviously be opposed (although a war against North Korea is unlikely). But it is to remember that, for socialists, freedom for workers to self-organise is a more important measure than an abstract “anti-imperialism”, paid for with starvation and terroristic state oppression.

We are on the side of the international working class against all enemies. Solidarity with the working class of North Korea against their state oppressors!

Vicki Morris adds:

When Kim Jong Il died, a long list of foreign organisations sent condolences to the North Korean regime. Alongside the heads of state of some of the most brutal regimes in the world, many supposedly socialist organisations mourned Kim’s passing.

A list of these appeared on the English language website of the North Korean state publication the *Pyongyang Times*: alturl.com/ugdn5. The list includes the Greek Communist Party, one of the most Stalinised of the European communist parties... and the Socialist Workers’ Party of the United States, who publish *The Militant* newspaper and run Pathfinder Press.

The SWP-USA (no relation to the British SWP) devotes a lot of its activity to defending the Castro regime in Cuba. The Cuban regime held three days of national mourning for Kim Jong Il.

The SWP-USA was once the foremost Trotskyist organisation in the world, the party of James P Cannon. In 1979, five years after Cannon’s death and months after the death of another veteran, Joseph Hansen, younger members took over the leadership, instituted an “age purge” of older members, and soon transformed the SWP-USA into a Stalinist cult.

The canker was there in the notion of Stalinism being “progressive” held by the SWP long before 1979.



Letters

Victor Serge

Victor Serge is often held up as a libertarian revolutionary critic of the Bolsheviks’ suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion (“Victor Serge and the question of Kronstadt”, *Solidarity* 3-229).

However, which Victor Serge? In the aftermath of the revolt, Serge was a pretty uncritical supporter of the Bolshevik policy. In ‘The Tragic Face of Revolution’, published in *La Vie Ouvrière* on 21 March 1922 he said the Kronstadt rebellion was a “revolt of the peasant, petty bourgeois mentality” around the programme “freedom of small trading” and “for the soviets against the party” — slogans that were not actually raised by the sailors. (David Cotterill, *The Serge-Trotsky Papers*)

Serge set out the bottom line justification for the suppression of Kronstadt: “Let us suppose briefly that the Kronstadt mutiny had turned out to be victorious. Its results would have been immediate chaos, the terrible kindling of a civil war in which this time the party of the revolutionary proletariat and the broad peasant masses would have been locked in combat. Within a short time a handful of liberal lawyers and Tsarist generals, fortified by the sympathies of the whole bourgeois world, would have drenched their hands in the blood of the Russian people in order to pick up the abandoned power. Thermidor would have come.”

Serge was much more critical towards the end of his life. Then he was politically in retreat — for example, over the POUM, whose revolutionary credentials he exaggerated. His later views on Kronstadt were formed in that context. But he did not abandon his basic defence of the Bolshevik government’s action.

In ‘Fiction or Fact: Kronstadt’, published in *La Révolution Proletarienne* on 10 September 1937, Serge posed the issue starkly: “Once armed conflict between Red Kronstadt and the Bolshevik government had begun, the question became posed in these terms: which of the two contending forces better represented the higher interests of the toilers?”

His answer was unequivocal: “[The Kronstadt insurgents] wanted to release the elements of a purifying tempest, but all they could actually have done was to open the way to a counter-revolution, supported by peasants at the outset, which would have been promptly exploited by the Whites and the foreign intervention. (Pilsudski was getting his armies ready to launch on the Ukraine). Insurgent Kronstadt

was not counter-revolutionary, but its victory would have led — without any shadow of a doubt — to the counter-revolution.” (Cotterill)

In another article, ‘Ideas and Facts: Kronstadt 1921’, published in *La Révolution Proletarienne* on 25 October 1937, Serge posed the question: “Given the dictatorship of the proletariat, exercised by the Communist Party, was it right for it to use forcible repression against the protests, demands, propositions and demonstrations of workers stricken by famine?”

Although Serge regarded the suppression of Kronstadt as “an abuse of firmness”, in his article ‘Once More: Kronstadt’, published in the *New Internationalist*, July 1938, he answered in the affirmative: “Once Kronstadt rebelled, it had to be subdued, no doubt.” (Cotterill)

Serge returned to the subject of Kronstadt in his *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, written in 1942-43. These memoirs contain comments about his own personal involvement at the time of Kronstadt (he lived in nearby Petrograd) as well as making sharper criticisms of the Bolsheviks’ actions. However, he still justified the suppression of the revolt.

“If the Bolshevik dictatorship fell, it was only a short step to chaos, and through chaos to a peasant rising, the massacre of Communists, the return of the émigrés, and in the end, through the sheer force of events, another dictatorship, this time anti-proletarian.”

In one of his last articles before his death, ‘Thirty Years After’ (July-August 1947), Serge repeated many of his criticisms of the Bolshevik handling of Kronstadt. Nevertheless he concluded: “If in this situation, the Bolsheviks had let go the reins of power, who would have taken their place? Wasn’t it their duty to hold on? In fact they were right to hold on.” (Serge, 1996, *Russia Twenty Years After*)

No doubt there were big differences between Serge and the Trotskyist view of Kronstadt at the end and we could have a useful discussion on this matter and on other mistakes of the Bolsheviks.

But it would be better to do so on the basis of the facts about the events concerned, rather than through “authorities”, however important in our movement.

Paul Hampton, south London

Kronstadt: look at the context

The problem with Hannah Thompson’s criticisms of the Bolsheviks over Kronstadt (“Kronstadt demands were revolutionary”, *Solidarity* 3-229) is she abstracts the question of workers’ democracy from both the social conditions of Russia in 1921 and from the international context.

Privileged rations for Soviet bureaucrats? Suppression of left-wing political parties? Violent repression to maintain power? Aren’t these things which any socialist would object

to, asks Hannah. Shouldn’t disagreements within the revolutionary camp be settled by argument and persuasion? In general, yes and yes.

But in Russia during and immediately after the Civil War, things were not so simple. The “Soviet bureaucrats” receiving material privileges were not Bolshevik party or state leaders, but technical and military specialists engaged in order to win the war. The country’s economy and society had been devastated. Most of the socialist parties had gone over to the counter-revolution and the main one that hadn’t, the Left SRs, had attempted to assassinate government leaders and carry out a coup. In these circumstances it was very likely that the displacement of the Bolsheviks from power would have led quickly to the overthrow of the revolution and a far-right, terroristic capitalist regime.

Imagine a three and half years long, bitterly fought strike, led by revolutionaries. After so long most of the strikers are desperate and want to end it. But the revolutionaries leading the dispute know that doing so will mean the union being destroyed, and that there is very good reason to suppose that holding out slightly longer will mean victory. Would we necessarily, in all circumstances, raise the demand to hold a vote?

It’s true that even in a strike, the longer the leadership remained isolated from its members, the greater the risk of bureaucratisation. And, of course, the dangers are 1,000 times greater when what is involved is not just a trade union, but a workers’ state with an apparatus of coercion and repression. Nonetheless, I think the analogy holds. In Russia in 1921, the “union” still existed; workers’ power was dimmed and weakened but it had not yet “unraveled” as Hannah claims. All the danger signals were flashing, but it does not follow that the revolution was finished.

And there was very good reason to think holding out would change the situation. The Civil War unfolded as it did because, the Russian workers’ state remained isolated. Yet the German revolution had taken place in 1918-19; in 1920 a general strike smashed a right-wing military coup. 1919 saw a wave of revolutions across Europe, Soviet governments in Bavaria and Hungary and the Italian workers seizing the factories and land. Revolution would break out again in Germany 1923; it was defeated, partly due to bureaucratisation of the Soviet regime and the Communist International, but the international situation for the working class would have been far worse if revolutionary Russia had fallen.

None of this means that we shouldn’t criticise the Bolsheviks for their mistakes, including on questions of democracy and on their failure to replace “War Communism” with something like the New Economic Policy earlier. But it does mean we shouldn’t abstract workers’ democracy from the reality of the situation facing our comrades in dealing with the Kronstadt revolt.

Sacha Ismail, south London

Make Labour fight the cuts!

Len McCluskey, general secretary of Unite, on 17 January condemned the Labour Party leaders' move to endorse the Government's continued pay freeze (real-wage cut) for public sector workers, and to stress that they will not commit to reverse the coalition cuts, or indeed to make any social-spending promises at all for a new Labour government.

Paul Kenny, general secretary of another big union affiliated to Labour, has also condemned the move, and threatened talk of his union withdrawing support from Labour.

Union activists should make these statements by McCluskey and Kenny a signal for a concerted drive by the unions to reassert themselves in the Labour Party.

The unions have 50% of the vote at Labour Party conference. Despite all the anti-democratic changes in the Labour Party since the mid-90s, and despite the affiliated unions' subservience to the Labour Party leadership all those years, they still have 50%. On an issue like this, they will have a lot of support from local Labour Party members, including from the tens of thousands who have joined Labour since May 2010 wanting at least some resistance to the Tories.

The unions were able to get Ed Miliband, their preferred candidate, elected as Labour leader in 2010, although the more right-wing David Miliband had more support among Labour MPs and much more support among ex-ministers.

They were able to get Iain McNicol, their preferred candidate, elected as Labour Party general secretary, although Ed Miliband backed arch-Blairite hatchetman Chris Lennie for the post.

BROKEN

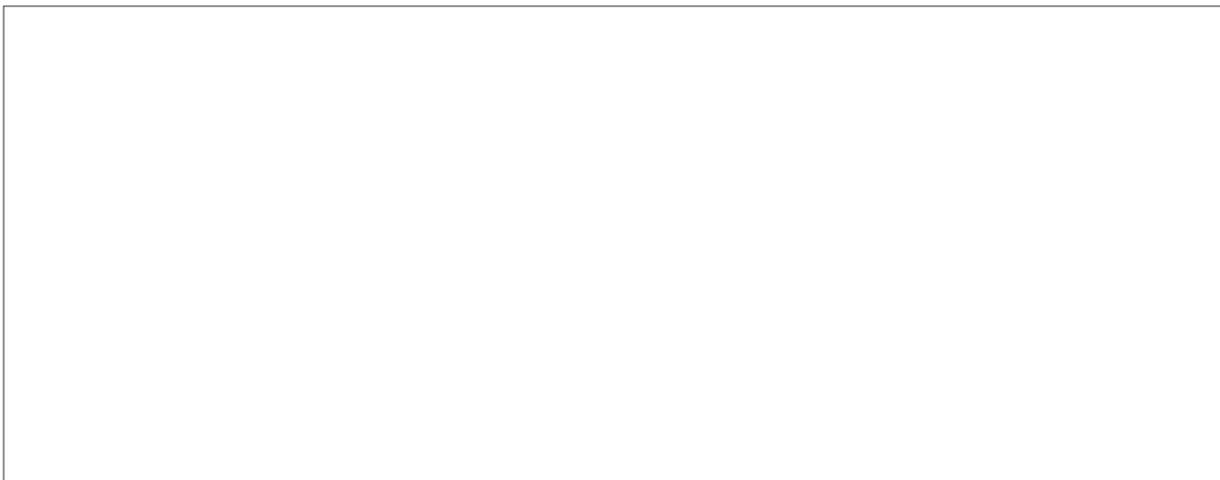
But so far the union leaders have not broken from the long years of subservience. They have been content to put preferred candidates into post and hope they'll do the right thing, or at least the not-too-wrong thing, with a bit of nudging.

At Labour Party conference 2011, despite more ferment than for years among rank-and-file delegates, the union leaders confined themselves to bland motions. They were complicit, through the union people on the Conference Arrangements Committee, in the ruling-out of most motions or rule-changes from local Labour Parties which had any bit.

They had written a submission to Ed Miliband's and Peter Hain's "Refounding Labour" exercise which advocated some democratic reforms, but they dropped those and quietly voted for Hain's stitch-up when it was dropped on the conference at the last minute and without debate.

Now the *Guardian* reports that "the unions and left are going to fight what they regard as a Blairite policy coup". Let's hope it's right. It has to be proved right, by the action of activists within the labour movement, if we are to save the fabric of the labour movement and the working class from the devastation planned by the Tories.

McCluskey says: "The view that deficit reduction through



Unions need to do more than try to nudge Miliband and Balls in a slightly different direction

spending cuts must be a priority to keep the financial speculators onside has been the road to ruin for Labour chancellors from Philip Snowden [who imposed cuts in 1929-31, and ended by breaking with Labour to go into coalition with the Tories] to Denis Healey [who imposed cuts in 1977-9, paving the way for Thatcher]...

"Even the ratings agencies acknowledge that austerity is damaging the economy in Europe..."

"No effort was made by Labour to consult with trade unions before making the shift... It is hard to imagine the City being treated in such a cavalier way..."

"Where does this leave the half-a-million people who joined the TUC's march for an alternative last year, and the half of the country at least who are against the cuts? Disenfranchised".

He is correct. The task is to make the union leaders go beyond press releases and columns in the *Guardian*. They must be made to use their leverage in the Labour Party, and to rally their activists to change things in the local Labour Parties.

They should put a stop now to "phase two" of the "Refounding Labour" exercise, for which "submissions" are due by 31 January, and in which the diehard Blairites are still pressing for a cut in the union vote at Labour conference. They should put a stop to the moves now afoot to side-step democratic selection procedures for Labour parliamentary candidates.

They should formulate now democratic rule changes and clear anti-cuts motions which they will insist on putting to Labour conference 2012. They should insist that they will no longer allow the wholesale ruling-out of critical motions and democratic rule changes submitted by local Labour Parties.

They should use their positions on Labour's national ex-

ecutive to challenge the "Blairite coup" publicly and loudly, within the labour movement.

They should mobilise activists to go into local Labour Parties, fight for democracy, and insist that Labour councils defy Tory cuts rather than administering them.

Effective mobilisation on those political fronts depends on the unions also mobilising industrially. The timing of the "Blairite coup" in Labour's top circles, and the ostentatious shift to the right by Ed Miliband and Ed Balls, is explained by the schedules of the public-sector pensions dispute.

PUSH

When the unions were still mobilising on pensions, the balance was different. As soon as key union leaders moved to shut down the dispute, on 19 December, the diehard Blairites felt confident to push the scarcely-resistant Miliband and Balls.

McCluskey is right that the half-million people who joined the TUC anti-cuts demonstration on 26 March last year have been disenfranchised politically; but they have also been disenfranchised industrially, by the failure of the unions, for the most part, to fight those cuts.

The fight against disenfranchisement must proceed on both fronts.

And activists should set a clear aim. The aim is not just to push back Ed Miliband to a slightly-leftish variant of New Labourism in place of the new line. It is to re-equip the labour movement politically.

It is to set the labour movement on the path of fighting for a workers' government, a government based on and accountable to the labour movement which serves the working class as loyally as the Tories and the Lib-Dems serve the capitalists.

Help the AWL to raise £20,000

The AWL is growing. We now publish *Solidarity* weekly, setting up new branches and expanding all areas of our activity. If we are going to continue this, we also need to expand our sources of funds. That's why we're launching an appeal to raise £20,000 by the end of August. A donation from you, or a regular standing order, will help.

We need money to:

1. Continue publishing *Solidarity* as a weekly;
2. Establish a fund for publishing high quality books and pamphlets, starting with a book on the politics of Antonio Gramsci;
3. Improve our website;
4. Organise events such as our socialist feminist conference last November, our New Unionism dayschool next month, and our Ideas for Freedom summer school;
5. Organise study courses to educate a new layer of Marxist thinkers and activists, particularly among young people;
6. Build on our work as one of the main forces fighting for rank-and-file democracy and control in the labour movement, and against the accommodation of much of the left to the trade union bureaucracy;
7. Build on the development of a broad, democratic student movement against fees and cuts, in which our role has been irreplaceable;
8. Pay the rent on and finance the staffing of our office to make all of the above and more possible.

We have no big money backers. We rely on contributions from workers and students like you! So please consider:

- Taking out a monthly standing order to the AWL. There

is a form at www.workersliberty.org/resources and on this page. (Even a few pounds a month really does help.)

- Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to "AWL") or do it online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

- Organising a fundraising event.
- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university / college or campaign group.
- Getting in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

For more information on any of the above, contact us: tel. 07796 690 874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Rileys Road, SE1 3DG.

Total raised so far: £4,590.



Money raised this week from increased and new standing orders plus £100 profit from our second hand book stall. Thanks to Tom, Gilaine and Rosie! Comrades are beginning to make fundraising plans; please send in reports.

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

..... (its address in full)

Account name:

..... (your name)

Account no.

Sort code:

Please make payments to the debit of my account:

Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)

Amount: £ to be paid on the day of (month) 20 (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date

Signature

CLASS STRUGGLE IN EUROPE

Greece

Rank-and-file strike call for 17 January

By Theodora Polenta

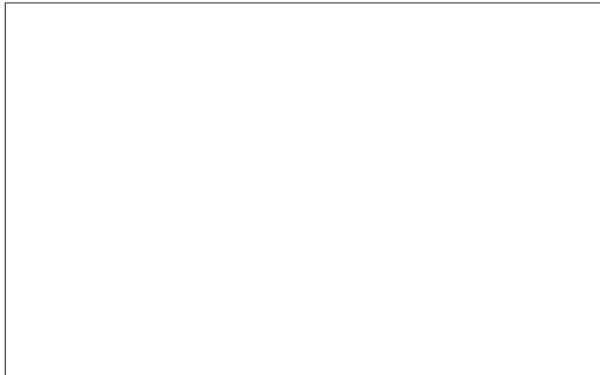
A strike has been called for 17 January across the Athens region by all the rank-and-file “ergatika kentra” (workers’ centres) of the region.

It could be the first step towards the political unification and coordination of the different struggles in Greece.

The 400 workers on continuous strike at the Elliniki Chalivourgia [Greek Steel] steel company have sent a message to 17 January strikers: “On 17 January you are not striking only in solidarity with the 400 workers of Elliniki Chalivourgia. Every one of us is striking for our class against our employer and against the class of employers. The victory of the steel workers will be a victory for all workers!”

The Greek Steel workers have been on strike since 31 October, when they rejected the employers’ plan to cut their hours to five a day and their wages by 40%. Employers have sacked 63 workers in an attempt to spread fear and insecurity to the rest of the metal workers and bully them into accepting the deal.

The 400 strikers have a clear message: “We are not returning to a dangerous job that places our lives at risk for the pit-



Steel workers’ strike

tance of 500 euros per month and without our sacked work colleagues being reinstated”.

Greek Steel bosses claim economic difficulties as an excuse. But in the last two years their production has increased from 196,000 tonnes to 266,000.

Greek Steel is the first private company to make use of all

the recent anti-working-class legislation imposed by the government and the EU/ ECB/ IMF Troika. It wants to impose flexible working hours according to the bosses’ needs, unpaid overtime, an hourly labour rate instead of a stable monthly wage, and abolition of welfare and insurance benefits.

Dozens of rank-and-file union organisations have passed motions of solidarity with the steel workers and an attempt is being made to coordinate the struggles of all the workplaces which have ongoing strikes.

Hundreds of people, including students and unemployed people, visit the steel workers’ picket lines to express their solidarity and to offer material and practical support (money, food). Theatre performances and concerts are being staged in support of the steel workers’ struggle.

There are also continuous strikes by journalists and media workers at the Greek TV station Alter; at the liberal newspaper Eleytherotypia, where over 1,500 workers have been sacked or have not been paid for months; at Gerolymatos Cosmetics; and others.

On 16 January there was a general strike of all media workers, in an industry where over 4,000 workers have lost their jobs or have not been paid for months.

New assault in private sector

The Greek government, in alliance with the EU/ ECB/ IMF Troika and the employers’ federation SEV, is now preparing the ground for drastic cuts in private sector wages.

The excuse here is not the country’s fiscal problems or the reduction of the deficit, used to justify the previously-imposed cuts in public sector wages. The government’s rationale for cuts is now to improve the competitive position of the Greek private sector in eurozone and world markets.

In his robotic, clinical voice, prime minister Lucas Papademos has asked workers to sacrifice their wages so that their unemployed colleagues will get a chance to re-enter employment.

But a recent study by “HR Pulse” of ICAP People Solutions has revealed that 70% of companies are planning to make redundancies within the next six months, and 30% of companies are planning wage cuts and change of working conditions within the next six months. The construction industry, which used to be one of the pillars of the Greek economy, has shrunk by 22% within the last year.

Many companies face cash-flow problems because the Greek banks refuse to provide them with cash.

Greek workers pushed into poverty

According to 2011 statistics, over three million Greeks, 28% of the population, live under the poverty line. The poverty line is defined as €7,000 annual income for an individual worker and €15,000 annual income for a family of four.

Real poverty figures are even higher, because the official statistics are based upon people’s wages at the end of 2009.

They also exclude the social categories “always” living below the poverty line: the homeless, the Roma, refugees and economic migrants.

63% of families are now having to cut back on basic daily needs, including food, in order to balance the family budget. 908,000 people are unemployed — 18% of the population, and it is over 20% in the north of Greece and 44% among young people (under 25).

Unemployment has been increased 50% in the course of a one year. In other words, the 300,000 jobs created by ten years of growth were destroyed by one year of austerity measures.

The threat of the unemployment has led a lot of workers to sign individual agreements with employers, rather than collective-bargaining agreements, and that has further reduced the wages of many from 760 euros per month to 560

euros.

The introduction and expansion of casualised employment has resulted to about 320,000 workers receiving a monthly income of 456 euros per month, less than the 460 euros per month of unemployment benefits.

Companies have declared themselves “bankrupt” so that they can avoid paying wages and redundancy pay to their workers while the company directors secure their wealth.

Workers’ conditions and legislative gains that reflected the victorious workers’ struggles of past decades have been re-defined to fit the needs of capital and the bankers.

Young people are emigrating massively for the first time since the Second World War. In Athens now over 25,000 people are recorded as homeless. Babies are being handed over to care homes and charities by families which cannot afford to look after them.

150,000 public sector workers are expected to lose their jobs by 2015. Wages and pensions have plummeted by 40% in the public sector and by 10% in the private sector. No collective-bargaining improvements are allowed at least until 2015.

400,000 shops have closed. One thousand schools have closed down. Hospitals are understaffed.

Italy’s corruption crisis needs workers’ solutions

By Hugh Edwards

The so-called “united campaign” of Italy’s three main trade union confederations against Prime Minister Mario Monti’s first austerity measures ended as quickly and as farcically as it began in mid-December.

A call for a four-hour strike did not signal determination to build all-out resistance to attacks on pensions and living standards. Rather, it was a pathetic call for “fair play”; a calculated and cynical gesture to allow Monti, the “neutral technocrat”, to make a propaganda exercise, showing the masses that “as we are all in this together, the rich will also be seen to suffer”.

But the turn-out for the strike was massive, indicating deep disquiet among large sections of workers. That was further incentive for Monti to move quickly. “Evasion, corruption, dishonesty is the modern plague of Italy”, he and his ministers declaimed, like a chorus of Savonarolas, as they launched a “new crusade” against those “who steal from all us”, with fraud squads and highly-publicised and selective stunts “uncovering” widespread tax evasion among the business and professional classes.

Long and hard experience of the last 25 years has taught

Italian workers that frothy, pious declarations like this have been part and parcel of centre-left and right administrations at the same time as tax evasion has quintupled!

The forced march and global expansion of financial capitalism, the diffusion of information technologies, the insidiously tenacious advance of various forms of flexible labour conditions, plus ever-more closer links between criminal and “legal” capital — all have multiplied enormously the capacity for evasion and corruption by the rich.

CAPITALIST LIMITS

The grotesque state of Italy’s finances has dangerously sharpened Europe’s debt crisis and pushed the Italian bourgeoisie to “put its house in order” financially speaking, but the very nature of the capitalist state limits how far they can seriously change things.

Since 2006 there has been a 200% cut in investigations into fiscal fraud and evasion. The uniquely baroque prison house of the Italian bureaucracy ensures a minimal range of investigatory avenues for any executive power. Moreover the state is the legal guarantor and protector of the “fraudulent” economic and financial system, the banks and businesses who get tax revenue as state protection against losses.

The uprooting of tax evasion and corruption would start

with the severest penalties for the employment and super-exploitation of irregular labour (massive in Italy!). It would include: the regularisation and sharing of work within a comprehensive plan of socially-necessary public projects; detailed and widespread worker-led control to uncover every form of evasion by business. It would mean nationalisation without compensation of businesses which are evading, the abolition of all commercial secrecy, the opening of the books to workers’ examination and control. Also the nationalisation of the banking system under workers’ control as a single democratically-operated public service where investment is guided by social need and not profit.

These are but the outline of perspectives needed in the battles yet to come. So far, with little sign of organised opposition from any section of the workers’ movement or the radical left, the bureaucratic trade union leaders remain in the driving seat, hoping to bluster and bluff their way to a criminal compliance with Monti, even when ironically from within the government evidence of widespread corruption is emerging. But workers’ struggles, strikes, occupations against closures, layoffs, attacks upon conditions continue up and down the country... angry, bitter but unbowed.

This, and this alone, in a bleak moment for millions in Italy, must give us hope.

Tasks of the Greek left

By Theodora Polenta

Class struggle is cutting through the whole of Greek society. The Winter of Discontent is not over; it is just starting.

It is the duty of the revolutionary left to place itself in the vanguard of struggles against the poverty and destitution of the working class, with a revolutionary anti-capitalist manifesto, and a united front logic and culture, in connection with the strategic aim of the revolutionary overthrow of the system.

Greece needs a revolutionary left which is going to reinvent politics not as a technique to manipulate the masses but as a medium for the self-liberation of the masses.

History has proven that revolutions cannot be ended in parliament and elections. The Greek working class is the potential agent of a solution which can end the rotten capitalist rotten system and open the doors to socialism from below, to a festival of the oppressed, to a truly democratic accountable radical socialist society.

Slogans like exit from the eurozone, or from the European Union, cannot offer an exit from the crisis. Such slogans cannot connect with the strategic aim of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

Both content and form of struggles should match the level and aggressiveness of the bosses' attacks. Rather than the reformist parties' timid calls for parliamentary elections (KKE and Syriza), we should organise and fight for a general continuous strike.

GENERAL STRIKE

Greek workers should aim at a continuous general strike alongside the poor peasants, the ruined small shop owners, the pensioners, the unemployed, the school and university students and the neighbourhood community movements resisting the degradation of services and quality of life in their communities.

In every workplace workers should form workers' committees to organize and direct the struggle from below.

A central organ should be formed that supports, organises, coordinates and defends every struggle. It is of crucial importance for the workers to create and empower their own organs and structures of struggle in order to safeguard themselves against the hesitancy and tendency to compromise of the union bureaucracy.

As the struggles evolve and escalate the workers are looking at solutions, to defend their lives and rights, outside the "whole system" and its laws and structures.

• Down with everyone responsible for the crisis: Troika, financial speculators, productive and unproductive capitalist asset-strippers and predators;

- Refuse to pay for the crisis, in euros or in drachmas
- No sacrifice for the Euro
- Abolish the debt. Not a penny to the creditors
- Freeze and abolish workers' debts
- Abolish VAT on basic necessities (food, drink etc.)
- Civil disobedience and refusal to pay the new government-imposed taxes
 - Increase the taxation of capital
 - Nationalisation under workers' control of the banks and the big business with no compensation
 - Abolish the political and legal protection of companies that are declared bankrupt. Demand that the workers get

paid all the wages that are owed to them. Expropriate the employers' wealth (both personal or in other companies) at every company that is declared "bankrupt", in order to compensate all workers

- Wage increases, reduction in working hours, work for all
- Pension increases in line with wages, reduction in the age of retirement
- Ban redundancies. Unemployment benefit in line with wages
- For a public sector in the service of the people's and society's needs, replacing today's public sector, which is inter-related with corporations, contractors and corruption
- For an extension of education, health, public-transport, and welfare state provision.

TREACHERY BY TOP UNION LEADERS

Both the big union federations, GSEE and ADEDY, have refused to back the 17 January strike in the Athens region called by rank and file committees in the private sector.

ADEDY is hiding behind the excuse that it represents the public sector workers. GSEE is currently participating in "talks" with the bosses' federation SEV (equivalent to CBI) within a framework exclusively defined by the government, the Troika, and the employers.

Under discussion, basically, is legislation to give employers right to violate and ignore collective bargaining agreements. And the government has made it clear that independent of whether or not the GSEE and the bosses arrive at an agreement to reduce labour costs, they will implement the changes demanded by the Troika by amending the Greek constitution.

In the words of the minister of labour, Koutroumanis: "Everything is at stake; all workers' gains should be brought on to the negotiation table".

The GSEE claims that it is only discussing cuts in the "non-

wage" part of labour costs. But the end product of the GSEE talks with the employers is sure to be more attacks on the working class.

GSEE is discussing cuts in employers' contributions to pensions and insurance funds — contributions which come from the workers' unpaid work and not from the bosses' generosity- and that threatens bankruptcy for those funds or in any case further reductions in pensions and social benefits.

GSEE has endorsed and reproduced capitalist axioms: "The workers do not produce all social wealth, via their work. The workers are cost-centres for the capitalists and our duty is to relieve the capitalists' burden by reducing indirect labour costs".

GSEE puts the clock back to 150 years ago, before Marx introduced the theory of surplus value, which ideologically arms the working class in struggle against the capitalist class.

A quick look at the numbers from the two decades of development in Greece between 1990 and 2007 dispel the myth that cutting workers' incomes will restore prosperity.

Between 1990 and 2007 the GDP grew 5.5 times. Business profits increased by 28 times. The minimum wage only doubled, from 15 euros per day to 30 euros per day.

All the talk about the "rescue of the country" having wage cuts as its starting point "seems to forget" the gross overcharges (up to 90%) by private contractors on public sector projects.

It is very hard to believe how the reduction of the minimum wage from €750 per month to €600 per month will save the country from bankruptcy. GSEE should have asked the employers and government to explain why Spain does not experience a "process of development and prosperity", but rather 25% unemployment, when Spain's minimum wage is 150 euros lower than Greece's.

Wages and pensions for Greek workers have been dramatically cut already, and so has welfare provision, but inflation is running over 5% and big companies and multinationals are making massive profits.

New Unionism: how workers can fight back

Saturday 18 February, 11.30-5.30 at Highgate Newtown Community Centre, London N19 5DQ
Book tickets (£15/£8/£4) online: workersliberty.org/newunionism



In the late 1880s, workers — often unskilled or semi-skilled, often migrants or working in casualised environments — organised militant industrial unions to fight their bosses. After 40 years of limited struggles, this movement put working-class power back onto the political agenda. **Can we build a New Unionism for the 21st century that transforms and revolutionises the modern labour movement?**

Speakers and sessions:

- **Louise Raw** (author of "Striking A Light") and **Jill Mountford**: From the Bryant & May matchwomen's strike to the Cradley Heath Chainmakers' strike — how women organised
- **Colin Waugh** (Editorial Board, "Post-16 Educator", and author of a pamphlet on the Plebs League): The movement for working-class self-education
- Reading "The Troublemakers' Handbook": the *Labor Notes* guide to organising at work today, with *Labor Notes* founder **Kim Moody**
- **Sam Greenwood** and **Martin Thomas** (Workers' Liberty): Finding a political voice: from New Unionism to Labour Representation
- **Charlie MacDonald** and **Cathy Nugent** (Workers' Liberty): How socialists organised: the life of Tom Mann
- What came next: The Great Unrest, with socialist activist and historian **Edd Mustill**
- **New Unionism 2012?** A panel discussion with working-class activists

Creche • cheap food • bookstalls

Building the revolution



Eric Lee

I bought tickets back in November for the “Building the revolution” show at the Royal Academy and was given a 10 am admission time. When I phoned to ask if it would be possible to come later, they told me not to worry — the show was not very popular and it wouldn’t be crowded at any time.

So the good news is, they were wrong. When I finally did get to see this exhibition, subtitled “Soviet Art and Architecture 1915-1935”, it was absolutely packed with people. Clearly many are interested in the subject.

On a cold Saturday afternoon in London, there were hundreds of people of all ages walking past an enormous model of Vladimir Tatlin’s Monument to the Third International and then wandering through a series of rooms showing everything from an industrial bakery to special housing constructed for the Cheka, the Bolshevik secret police.

And delighted as I am that so many people seem to be interested in one of the most revolutionary experiments ever undertaken, I left the exhibition feeling deeply disturbed. Let me explain why.

The idea that revolutionary politics, that changing the world, is somehow a part of the distant past, something that we modern people can look back at the same way we look at earlier civilizations, is somehow... wrong.

This exhibition with its cold, academic descriptions, was filled with people staring at photos of buildings — both as they were in the 1920s and as they are now — and then commenting on what they liked and didn’t, just as one would do with, say, Etruscan statues in the British Museum or medieval paintings of the infant Jesus.

“I like that one,” someone would say. “And that’s very ugly, isn’t it?” asked another.

But the ideas expressed — if one bothered to read the texts — were extraordinary, and deeply relevant to our time. This is not ancient history, and shouldn’t be presented as such.

For example, there was whole section devoted to early Bolshevik experiments with collective housing for workers. These massive structures included vast communal areas, common dining rooms, kitchens, laundries, libraries, kindergartens, wide hallways to allow social interaction, and relatively small sleeping areas. I was reminded of the Israeli kibbutzim, but on an urban scale.

It also struck me how so much of this architecture — like the kibbutz itself — seemed to define its vision of new society in terms of the liberation of women. Women living in such housing would not be expected to cook and clean, or even to be the primary carers of children. All of this was done collectively.

The involvement of revolutionary architects in the design of bakeries and garages and dams was also extraordinary. It expressed the idea that the places ordinary people spent their days — their work-places — should be designed thoughtfully, with some degree of respect for the people who work there.

The exhibition gave no indication of what preceded these buildings — we didn’t see what workers’ housing looked like under the tsarist regime, or what factories looked like before the 1917 revolution.

Without that context, and without any political understanding of the ideas of Marx and Lenin, the exhibition was like any other, showing any random country and period of history.

Nor does the decline of experimental art and architecture in the increasingly Stalinised Soviet Union get an explanation. We see Lenin’s absurdly grandiose tomb, the resting place of his mummified corpse to this day. And we’re shown details of housing built in Moscow for the party elite, the new ruling class. There is no sense that there is some kind of break here, that the revolution has been defeated, replaced by a new kind of class society.

If one knows something of the history of revolutionary Russia, the experience of seeing such works can be quite moving. There was a genuine sense of artistic and cultural liberation in the first years of Bolshevik rule.

But taken out of context, all one sees in this exhibit are objects, which one may judge according to individual tastes.

The great ideas that stood behind them — equality, freedom, social justice — have disappeared from view.



The Tatlin Tower was conceived by Vladimir Tatlin in 1919-20 as a 400 metre high tribute to the Bolshevik Revolution. The scale model features in the exhibition.

Workers’ Liberty and the politics of anarchism

A new AWL pamphlet

A symposium of articles, polemics and speeches exchanged between Workers’ Liberty and various anarchists in 2011.

Including articles by Ira Berkovic, Iain McKay (editor, Anarchist FAQ), North London Solidarity Federation, Ed Maltby and Yves Coleman. Also including “All feathered up: a new defence of anarchism”, Martin Thomas’s review of *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* by Lucien Van Der Walt and Michael Schmidt.



Available to read and download at <http://tinyurl.com/anarchismpamphlet>

To purchase a copy, visit the website or send a cheque for £2.50 (payable to ‘AWL’) to Workers’ Liberty, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.

History as twitter-feed



Chris Reynolds reviews “Why it’s kicking off everywhere”, by Paul Mason

Paul Mason is fascinated by the Facebooking, tweeting, text-messaging young activists he has met across the world in the revolts of the last two years.

He goes so far as to say that they are “the human archetypes that will shape the twenty-first century. They effortlessly multitask, they are ironic, androgynous sometimes,

seemingly engrossed in their bubble of music — but they are sometimes prepared to sacrifice their lives and freedom for the future”.

He speculates that with these young people it may be “possible to conceive of living [an] ‘emancipated life’ as a fully-connected ‘species-being’ on the terrain of capitalism itself... albeit in conflict with it”.

He takes issue with Malcolm Gladwell’s polemic, “Why the revolution will not be tweeted”, arguing that “Gladwell’s critique overlooks... the dimension of control”. “The network... can achieve those elements of instant community, solidarity, shared space and control that were at the heart of social revolutions in the early industrial age”, but achieved there only by face-to-face cooperation.

He recognises, though, that “youthful, socially networked, horizontalist movements” run into a problem “everywhere once things get serious: the absence of a strategy, the absence of a line of communication through which to speak to the union-organised workers”.

“There’s no coherent ideology driving this movement and no coherent vision of an alternative society”.

He sees the organised left as still decisive for converting social ferment into social change. The current weakness of the left, he thinks, “removes the danger [for the well-off] of social revolution — or even systematic social reform”.

“The weakness of the left has allowed the radical middle classes to maintain their radicalism — for now”; but it also makes him fear that the ferment of the last few years could lurch into crises where the right wing can take the initiative, and drag us into “austerity, nationalism, and religious fundamentalism” or into new wars.

As Mason notes, the book is written to “reflect the zeitgeist”, as a series of snippets, “reportage, essay, tweet, anecdote, and cyber-psychology”. “Don’t file it under ‘social science’ — it’s journalism”.

Good, interesting journalism, though. Mason does not pretend to offer any answers as to how to revitalise the left and connect it with the “networked” young activists, but he can help prompt us to think about it.

Sharp on technology, soft on capitalism

Paul Hampton reviews *The God Species* by Mark Lynas

Mark Lynas has written a provocative book that deserves to be read and discussed. Lynas is a long time green activist who has ditched many of his old taboos, including those against nuclear power, GM crops and organic farming. His change of heart on those issues is persuasive, although his accommodation with capitalism make his political judgments unsatisfactory.

The “god species” is a metaphor for how powerful humans are in terms of their impact on the Earth’s whole system. Lynas says we’ve entered a new geological era — the Anthropocene, which began late in the 18th century. Humanity now has to consciously manage the planet. This is similar the “production of nature” thesis put forward by Marxist geographer Neil Smith three decades ago.

The book is organised around the concept of planetary boundaries — biodiversity, climate change, nitrogen, land use, freshwater, toxics, aerosols, ocean acidification and the ozone layer. Expert scientist groups believes that the first three boundaries have already passed the planet’s limit, aerosols and toxic boundaries have yet to be quantified, while the remaining four have not yet been breached.

Lynas retains a core idea of environmentalism — that the Earth system has ecological limits; we live on a limited planet, which places constraints on human activity. However he diverges from earlier expositions of ecological limits, which focused on population, resources constraints and economic growth. This reframing of the nature-humanity nexus seems to me prescient and fertile.

Lynas makes a persuasive case for ramping up action on climate change.

While the Stern review urged a stabilisation target of 550 ppm CO₂e and the EU 450 ppm CO₂e, Lynas argues that “a fair reading of the science today points strongly towards a planetary boundary of 350 ppm CO₂e — a level that was passed back in 1988”. Evidence of recent average temperatures, simulation models and findings about past climates suggests that the threat of dangerous climate change is greater than scientists thought even a few years ago.

Humans currently release 10 billion tonnes of carbon per year — a million tonnes every hour. Since James Watt’s invention of the steam engine in 1784, humans have released more than half a trillion tonnes of carbon from geological safe storage underground into the atmosphere. Up to 85 per cent of this liberated carbon, somewhere between 340 and 420 billion tonnes, has soaked into the oceans. Ocean acidification “could represent an equal (or perhaps even greater) threat to the biology of our planet” than climate change alone. The world oceans are already more acidic than has probably been the case in at least 20 million years.

Failure to get an agreement at the climate talks in Copenhagen in 2009 has put the world on course for four degrees warming, perhaps more. Without conscious intervention this means “planetary-scale destruction and perhaps a mortal threat to civilisation.”

TECHNOLOGY

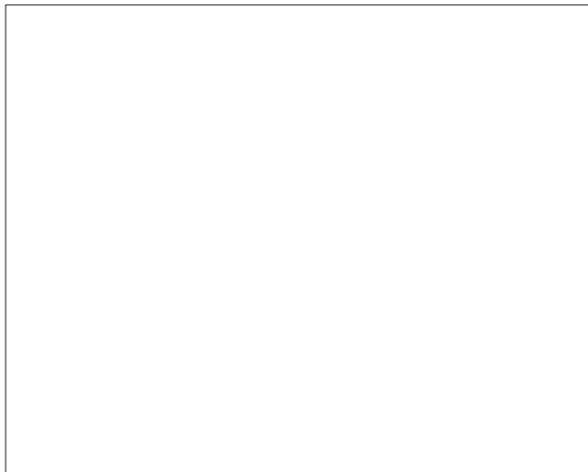
Lynas argues that the solution to climate change and the other planetary boundaries is technology — an answer that many environmentalists are wary of. He favours some existing technologies and rejects others.

Lynas quotes Stewart Brand in support of the genetic engineering of crops, but opposes biofuels, arguing that burning crops for power is the worst use of scarce land imaginable, and has already led to a situation where there is a direct conflict between food and energy. The only partial exceptions Lynas makes are for aircraft fuel and for second generation biofuels like algae that do not directly compete with food crops.

Lynas is supportive of solar power, especially in North Africa (as part of a European supergrid) and Australia, but not in the Mojave desert in California. He is in favour of desalination, but opposed to hydroelectric dams, given their impact on the freshwater boundary. Although some greenhouse gases are involved in the shipping of bulk commodities like wheat and beef, in water-use terms it makes sense for most food to be produced in well-watered areas with high rainfall rather than in arid regions where irrigation can devastate the local ecology. He thinks it is “premature” to reject geoengineering as a short term and limited climate mitigation option.

Lynas concedes that current technology will not suffice on its own. His new technological priorities are: a cost-effective way to store electricity at grid level; electric vehicles; carbon capture and storage (CCS); and next generation nuclear technology, including integral fast reactors and using thorium as fuel. He argues realistically and convincingly that this is preferable lifestyle and behavioural changes.

Perhaps the most striking departure in the book concerns nuclear power. Lynas is one of a number of environmentalists, including George Monbiot and Stephen Tindale, together with scientists Stewart Brand and James Hansen, who



“Nuclear energy equals dangerous energy”, says a demonstration in Indonesia. Mark Lynas disagrees.

have come out strongly for nuclear. The main driver for Lynas’ conversion is the danger of climate change.

Understood globally, it comes down to finding substitutes for fossil fuels commensurate with the energy demands of modern society. Lynas argues that the obvious substitute for coal as a centralised form of baseload generation is nuclear; “the anti-nuclear stance of many Greens does not stand up to rational, never mind scientific, examination, and the refusal by NGOs and political parties to reconsider their stance on nuclear harms both their credibility and the wider interests of the planet”.

Other planetary boundaries also lend weight to the nuclear case. Compared weight-by-weight, uranium 235 delivers a million times more energy than coal: even on the basis of a full life-cycle analysis, nuclear uses much less land than solar photovoltaics (PV) and wind. Biomass comes out worst of all, using more than a thousand times the land area of nuclear power. “In terms of the land use planetary boundary alone, my conclusion is that nuclear power is likely to be the most environmentally friendly technology of all, although appropriately sited wind, solar and other renewables are similarly benign and should be equally encouraged”.

Lynas recasts two of the main objections to nuclear: radiation and waste. On the radiation objection, he states that “the vast majority of studies have found no link between nuclear power stations and cancer incidence in the local populations of nearly a dozen countries from France to Sweden”. Specifically on Chernobyl (whose reactor design nobody is planning to copy), “exhaustive studies of affected populations, firemen who attended the blaze (many of whom received colossal radiation doses), and thousands of ‘liquidators’ who later cleaned up the site, yield an estimated death toll that currently stands at less than 50.

“Several thousand children did suffer from thyroid cancer as a result of radioactive iodine doses received after Chernobyl — but as thyroid cancer is relatively treatable, by 2002 thankful only 15 of the estimated 4,000 cases of childhood thyroid cancer had proved fatal”.

NUCLEAR

On nuclear waste Lynas states, “once spent fuel rods are removed from the reactor core, they are stored in cooling ponds until their radiation levels decline sufficiently for them to be stored in dry steel casks.

The level of radioactivity emitted decline by a thousand times in 40-50 years. In the longer term, geological disposal of waste that cannot be recycled or otherwise put to good use (which the vast majority can) is a straightforward engineering challenge that poses negligible risks in the longer term... the vast majority of waste will be no more radioactive than the natural uranium ore that it was originally derived from in just a few hundred years”.

I think Lynas is rather too blasé about some of the problems with nuclear, including the building the new reactors (he doesn’t discuss concerns with Olkiluoto III) and with geological storage (despite the Yucca mountains scheme being cancelled in 2009). These objections to nuclear are important, but they are not decisive in the face of the increased threat of dangerous climate change and other planetary boundaries. In the absence of viable alternatives to nuclear in the present and near future and given the limits of energy efficiency the case for nuclear, at least as a stop gap technology for the next few decades, does seem convincing.

Lynas’ book is a critique of the environment movement and unsurprisingly he has been criticised by Greens. However he acknowledges the debt to the Green movement making the philosophical case for the idea of a limited planet placing constraints on humanity strongly and persuasively.

Lynas provocatively tells environmentalists to “forget the ‘back to the land’ self-indulgence” and ridicules the Green

Party of England and Wales and New Economics Foundation launch in January 2011 of “the New Home Front”, advocating wartime policies such as rationing. In contrast to many environmentalists, he believes that there isn’t “any convincing ecological reason why everyone in the world should not be able to enjoy rich-country levels of prosperity over the half-century to come. None of the planetary boundaries rule out this leap forward in human development”.

The world’s population is about seven billion. On this Lynas says, “Seven billion people is an incredible number, but standing shoulder to shoulder we would all comfortably fit within the city of Los Angeles. City living is seldom lauded by environmentalists, but it may be our most environmentally friendly trait as a species, because urban dwelling is vastly more efficient than living in the countryside... the best way to reduce the growth in human populations is to encourage faster economic development, accelerated urbanisation, and therefore an earlier demographic transition to the lower birth rates already experienced in the most affluent societies”.

I think Lynas has made some very significant arguments. However, there is a deeper subtext to the book, essaying a capitulation to capitalism and its states, which is profoundly unsatisfactory. Lynas states that his planetary boundaries conception “need constrain neither humanity’s potential nor its ambition. Nor does it necessarily mean ditching capitalism, the profit principle, or the market, as many of today’s campaigners demand”.

He argues that global warming is “not about overconsumption, morality, ideology or capitalism. It is largely the result of human beings generating energy by burning hydrocarbons and coal. It is in other words, a technical problem, and it therefore amenable to a largely technical solution, albeit one driven by politics... we can completely deal with climate change within the prevailing economic system. In fact any other approach is likely to be doomed to failure”.

Stunningly, he favours water privatisation: “the provision of water must be... taken out of the inefficient and often corrupt hands of the state, and handed instead to the private sector”. He suggests that “it might be possible for the concept of carbon markets to be extended into the realm of water”. He even admits to sharing “some sympathies” with the political right and regrets the “capture of the Green movement by the political left”.

CAPITALISM

All this is simply dreadful. It is hardly coincidental that the development of capitalism has threatened and in some cases breached planetary boundaries. Yet Lynas simply avoids the conclusion that anything systemic has caused these problems, preferring more accidental explanations.

As a writer popularising science, Lynas is insightful and lucid. However his political theory is hopelessly underdeveloped and his political judgement woefully naïve or confused.

Thus while Lynas supports water privatisation, he believes that “a large portion of future energy infrastructure may need to be supported and directed by the public sector”. He says “Britain’s liberalised approach has led to a real danger of blackouts — and the missing of renewables targets — as investment has failed to materialise”, yet fails to see the same problems with the privatised water industry.

Lynas suggests apparent reforms without assessing their social consequences. He calls for a half a per cent added to VAT with the proceeds ring-fenced for safeguarding ecosystem and habitat restoration. But he ignores the regressive effects of such a tax, which would hit the lowest paid and most vulnerable.

The issue is not that he’s for reforms, while we’re for revolution.

Socialists are also for the working class fighting for reforms, which under bourgeois rule are generally reforms implemented by capitalist states. The Montreal protocol to protect the ozone layer from CFCs shows that it is possible to win some important environmental reforms under capitalism, even on an international scale. But the point is what sort of social force can be built, that can take on the planetary boundaries along with a host of other issues, from world poverty to racism to women’s liberation, as part of an overall programme of human emancipation. Lynas does not engage at all with this analysis.

As the bearer of impoverished politics Lynas’s statement that “there are plenty of substitutes for carbon, but there is no substitute for political leadership is incredible.

If the ecological movement were to accept and fight for any of these technological “solutions” we will need a coherent socialist one that challenges the capitalist system and its business and state actors that have caused the problems, with an understanding that the working class is the only force that can successfully struggle for an alternative human economy compatible with the biosphere on which we depend.

Walking through *Capital* with David Harvey

Martin Thomas reviews *A Companion to Marx's Capital*, by David Harvey (Verso)

David Harvey's *Companion to Marx's Capital* may become the most widely-used handbook for studying the great "critique of political economy" which Karl Marx published in 1867.

Harvey's book has a clear, brisk, and unpretentious style, in contrast to some other guides to *Capital* thick with lectures on how the author has detected some otherwise-unnoticed complexity in Marx's argument. It includes frequent, and often useful, comments on contemporary relevance.

It is a write-up from nearly 40 years of almost continuous conduct of study classes and reading groups on *Capital*; and, in effect, the written version of a popular series of video lectures, based on those 40 years, available online at <http://davidharvey.org>.

The book will also attract readers because of Harvey's fame as the best-known academic Marxist writer of our days (including on current issues, as in his *Brief history of neoliberalism*). He is, apparently, the world's most-cited academic geographer and one of the 20 most-cited authors across the whole field of the humanities.

In London, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty is using Harvey's video lectures as a basis for our current study class on *Capital*.

Harvey's exposition of most points in *Capital* is lucid and unpretentious, and he flags up where his interpretation is controversial without plunging readers into fevers of intra-Marxist debate and long supplementary reading lists. And he is emphatic about the main idea:

"Marx holds up a mirror to our reality in Volume 1 in such a way as to create an imperative to act, and he makes it clear that class politics, class struggle, has to centre what we do..."

"Over the past quarter century, many of us have lived in a world where we have been told again and again that class is irrelevant... Any serious reading of *Capital* shows irrefutably that we will get nowhere unless we write 'Class Struggle' on our political banners and march to its drumbeat".

And again: Marx's "introduction of class struggle marks a radical departure from the tenets of both classical and contemporary economic theory. It radically changes the language in which the economy is depicted and shifts the focus of concern..."

"Marx's value theory... leads directly into this central question [of class struggle]. This is so because value is socially necessary labour-time, which means that time is of the essence within capitalism... Control over time has to be collectively fought over..."

Harvey notes that, paradoxically, in *Capital* Marx discusses "class struggle" only relatively late on, for the first time in the tenth of the book's 33 chapters. (In the *Communist Manifesto*, by contrast, Marx declares straight off, on its first page, that history is the history of class struggles.)

With class struggle as with all other important concepts, in *Capital* Marx wants to get us to think about things critically and to take nothing for granted. Rather than cataloguing the salient facts of capitalist society straight off, he wants to dig down to its cell-forms, and trace all the connections forwards and backwards. In fact, it is not until chapter 25 that he has fully developed the argument which shows that capitalism *must* constantly create and recreate a division of society into classes.

As Karl Korsch put it in his introduction to *Capital* (1932),

"...time is of the essence within capitalism... Control over time has to be collectively fought over..." Eight hours day banner from 1856

Marx's "is a method which leaves nothing out of account, but which refuses to accept things uncritically on the strength of a superficial common-or-garden empiricism soaked in prejudice... The reader of *Capital* is not given a single moment for the restful contemplation of immediately given realities and connections; everywhere the Marxian mode of presentation points to the immanent unrest in all existing things..."

Capital study groups, as Harvey wryly notes in his introduction, have a chronic tendency to get mired in intricate line-by-line study of chapter 1. Sometimes they become exhausted through that effort before they get on to later chapters. Chapter 3, a lot of it dealing with Marx's dissection of other economists' views on money, is also often a hurdle.

But the reader cannot really understand the concepts in chapter 1, or understand what Marx is "getting at", without pressing on and seeing how those concepts are reworked and reconnected in the course of the analysis. To get stuck on trying to elucidate chapter 1 by sheer force of exegesis is a trap.

Marx himself, in a letter, suggested that students might read chapter 10 first, to "get into" the book, before attempting chapter 1. Korsch suggested starting with chapter 7 and then going back.

Harvey rejects such zig-zagging, and tackles the problem more straightforwardly by pushing through chapter 1 briskly and without fuss, then advising the reader: "Once you get to the end of [the book], it is a good idea to go back to the beginning and read the first chapter again... You should, by now, find it a lot easier to follow. When I went back the first time, I also found it much more interesting and even downright fun to read".

STALINISM

A steady understanding of class struggle, and of the fight for control of time and of life, as "the focus of concern" should allow the reader to understand that the Stalinist states which called themselves "Marxist" were in fact other systems of exploitation of the working class, and not embodiments, even aberrant ones, of Marx's ideas.

Harvey, however, is unclear on that point.

In chapter 14 of *Capital* Marx makes a sarcastic jibe: "It is very characteristic that the enthusiastic apologists of the factory system have nothing more damning to urge against a

general organisation of the labour of society, than that it would turn all society into one immense factory."

The context makes clear that Marx was not positively advocating the conversion of "all society into one immense factory"; in *Capital* he denounces the mutilating effects of the way capitalism shapes labour more than he denounces the chaotic and inefficient nature of market regulation, and he emphasises the battle for *free time*.

Yet the passage sets Harvey pondering as if he takes Marx to suggest that planning is sufficient for socialism, so long as it is unlinked from capitalist greed, and commenting censoriously on Lenin's advocacy, in the early years of the Russian revolution, of adapting the then-most-modern capitalist techniques and management methods for the workers' state.

The "acute failure", he says, "in the history of actually existing communisms" (or at least "one of the acute failures") has been to "take the technologies of a capitalist mode of production" uncritically.

If only. Stalinist Russia, and Mao's China, were characterised by *more primitive* technologies and modes of management than the advanced capitalist countries, put into operation on the basis of the autocratic state's ability to mobilise vast masses of labour under tight political control. Stalin had the White Sea Canal dug by hand; Mao forced millions of people to try to run "backyard steel furnaces", and shut down higher education entirely for a while.

In the 1980s, one of the factors in the collapse of Stalinism in Europe was its failure to develop computers and micro-electronics beyond limited use of clunky equipment produced in East Germany.

Lenin's argument in the early years of Bolshevik Russia was a different thing again. It was not based on uncritical acceptance of capitalist technology. Lenin knew well that socialism would develop its own technology, inevitably starting from what capitalism had already achieved, but moving in different directions and on different criteria.

Lenin also knew that a "proletarian" technology could not be created at will or by sketchy deduction from general socialist ideals, any more than a "proletarian" art or a "proletarian" military doctrine. Socialist technology requires a socialist society, and socialism cannot be built in a single country, let alone a country as poor and war-ruined as Russia was.

He advocated adapting the then-most-modern capitalist techniques and management methods at the same time as, putting the point as bluntly and angularly as he could, he declared that an efficient "state capitalism" would be a great step forward for the economic life of the poverty-stunted workers' state. His arguments did not mean equating capitalist technology with socialist, any more than they meant equating capitalism with socialism generally.

Possibly linked to this argument is an odd excursus in Harvey's *Companion* where, instead of following Marx's text unpretentiously as elsewhere, he writes an entire chapter of extrapolation from a tendentious reading of a single short footnote about technology in chapter 15. He develops the argument, expounded more lengthily in his book *The Enigma of Capital*, about social life being shaped by six or seven "spheres" of activity, and socialist transformation being a slow and diffuse process of pursuing various processes of change in the various "spheres".

Linked to that, again, is his over-emphasis on the importance for the working class of allies from other classes, which leads him at one point to cite Mao Zedong as an authority on how to form the necessary class alliances.

Other criticism of the *Companion* could be made, for example on its (not-too-heavy) schematising about "dialectics". But the conversational style makes it easy to learn from the *Companion* both by accepting its clear summaries of some of Marx's points, and by critically rejecting Harvey's extrapolations on others.

Read Marx's *Capital* with the AWL

Monday nights, 6.30-9.30pm. Chapters 1 and 2 on 23 Jan.

13 sessions following David Harvey's lecture series

All welcome. Details: 07527 064326



"The Treason of the Intellectuals, and other political verse" by Sean Matgamna

A collection including items previously published in *Solidarity* and forerunner publications over the last 25 years.

Available soon on www.amazon.co.uk or at £9.99 post free from AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Rd, London SE1 3DG (order at www.workersliberty.org/donate)

ALL PROCEEDS GO TO THE AWL FUNDRAISING DRIVE

Unilever workers launch rolling strikes

By Darren Bedford

Unilever workers are planning an 11-day series of rolling strikes across its 12 sites in England and Wales, beginning on Wednesday 18 January.

The company, which manufactures a wide range of leading food, cleaning and other domestic products, is closing its final-

salary pension scheme despite admitting that there is no financial imperative to do so. Unilever is the

third biggest consumer products company on earth, and its CEO is paid nearly 300 times that of its

average employee.

These attacks will see workers' pensions cut by an average of 20%, and could see them lose out by 40% in the worst cases.

Unilever workers took national strike action in December 2011. Unite national officer Jennie Formby said: "Last December these workers took the first ever strike action in Unilever's UK history. Instead of seeing that for

the profound expression of frustration that is was, Unilever spitefully cancelled the workers' Christmas celebrations. Now, across the country people are realising how the company treats its workforce."

The battle at Unilever is one of a number of burgeoning pensions fights in the private sector.

Workers at BMW and elsewhere could also take action soon.

Sparks to re-ballot

By Ira Berkovic

Unite will re-ballot its members at Balfour Beatty Engineering Services in attempt to defeat the Building Engineering Services National Agreement (BESNA), the new collective "agreement" being imposed on mechanical and electrical construction workers by Balfour Beatty and six other major construction contractors.

A previous strike ballot returned a majority for action, but electricians were

forced to strike unofficially after Unite cancelled the strike following legal threats from BBES.

The rank-and-file committee that has been the de facto leadership of the campaign against BESNA reports that many sparks have returned their new BESNA contracts to their contractors' offices unopened. 150 sparks returned contracts to BBES's headquarters in Hillington, Scotland, on Tuesday 10 January. But with the 9 January deadline set by contractors for workers to sign up to the new contracts

now passed, sparks are in a desperate situation. Only a comprehensive programme of action will give sparks the confidence to refuse to sign their contracts and the belief that the "big 7" can be beaten.

Following a recent meeting with rank-and-file activists, Unite leader Len McCluskey pledged to do more to support the sparks' campaign.

The new BBES ballot closes on Thursday 2 February, with ballots at two more of the seven contractors promised within the month.

La Senza workers occupy

By Stewart Ward

La Senza workers are occupying one of their company's stores in Dublin's Liffey Valley shopping centre as bosses attempt to make workers pay for a downturn in company fortunes.

Lingerie retailer La Senza went into administration in December and has sold off several of its outlets. Workers fear that they won't receive overtime payments for December, and occupiers have accused management of using administration as a "smokescreen" to restructure the company and make workers redundant.

Over 1,000 La Senza workers have already lost their jobs.

"At every stage in the process, workers have been misled and misinformed", occupiers said in

a statement. "Stores received closing-down notices, but were told not to worry and to continue to trade as normal.

"We worked through Christmas and New Year with the threat of store closures looming over us. In spite of this enormous worry, we continued to deliver customer service to the highest standard and take as much money as possible for the business. We're only asking for what we're entitled to; our wages and our overtime."

Occupiers include workers from stores across Dublin.

• For a video on the occupation, see <http://tinyurl.com/lasenzavid>

Stagecoach drivers strike again



By Padraig O'Brien

Stagecoach bus drivers in South Yorkshire struck again on Monday 16 January after overwhelmingly rejecting bosses' latest offer in a long-running pay battle.

Workers voted by 206 to 89 to reject the offer and continue fighting. Stagecoach are mounting a desperate strike-breaking operation, attempting to bribe Stagecoach workers from around the country (allegedly from as far afield as the Isle of Skye) to come to South Yorkshire to drive scab buses.

Workers are demanding an increase to £9.05 an hour, with back-pay. Management's latest offer met

the pay demand, but refused back-pay.

Messages of support should be emailed to Barnsley Unite branch secretary Tony Rushforth: a-rushforth@sky.com Financial donations are urgently needed to help the strikers' fight.

Cheques should be made payable to Unite, 8-9/9 Barnsley and sent to A Rushforth, 45 Tune Street, Wombwell, Barnsley S73 8PX

Reinstatement campaign gathers local support

By an NUT activist

Following a disciplinary hearing last week, Duston School National Union of Teachers rep Pat Markey, a humanities teacher with 18 years service, was told of his dismissal by phone from his area union office.

Management at Duston School clearly lacked the decency to inform Pat about his "summary dismissal" in person.

Pat is "guilty" only of opposing Duston School becoming a Foundation Trust School and now an academy, and guilty of trying his best to defend working conditions so that both staff and pupils can work and study in reasonable conditions.

Local activists are

mounting a defence campaign. Former student Gareth Eales (also former secretary of Northampton Communication Workers' Union, and current borough councillor for Spencer Ward) said: "I think Pat is being treated awfully and he needs to be permitted to return to work. Pat is a former teacher of mine; he was great and very supportive and is an asset to the school. Please support this campaign and tell The Duston School's bosses to reinstate Mr Markey."

Sign the petition to demand Pat's reinstatement at: <http://bit.ly/AzQ55p>. Join the campaign's Facebook group at: <http://on.fb.me/yvPeS1>. For more information, ring Rob on 07792605452.

Tube pay

The RMT union has rejected London Underground's offer on Olympics working. For more, see: <http://bit.lyxWrSi8>



More cuts at Doncaster council

By a Unison activist

Doncaster council has approved a 4% pay cut for all non-teaching staff, affecting 7,000 workers across the authority.

Unison, which organises local authority workers, is already planning a fight-back. Branch secretary Jim Board said: "These plans mean a large number of our members are going to suffer quite a severe pay cut on top of an already falling standard of living.

"We are preparing a ballot and are recommending our members do not accept the pay cut. If they reject it and the council goes ahead then there is a very real threat of industrial action."

Doncaster council workers' fight against similar

cuts last year was one of a number of high-profile disputes between cuts-happy local authorities and their employees. 1,000 workers at Doncaster council have already lost their jobs since the start of the recession.

Southampton council workers, facing a similar and bitterly-fought battle against pay cuts, are still in dispute with their bosses, who announced 143 redundancies in October and a raft of privatisation in November on top of the pay cut plans against which workers have been struggling since May 2011.

With the local authority budgeting cycle beginning again, more struggle against council bosses' attempts to slash pay and jobs is an inevitability for 2012.

Tower Hamlets education workers gear up for jobs fight

By Stewart Ward

Central Foundation Girls School (CFGs) in Tower Hamlets, East London, has triggered a significant confrontation with trade unions in the borough by announcing a restructure which could see 13 workers lose their jobs and large numbers of support staff face pay cuts.

Bosses claim that the school's budget is in a terrible condition, forcing them to make cuts. But unions at CFGS have taken the view that the restructure is less about a financial imperative at CFGS and more about the borough-wide education funding priorities of Tower Hamlets local authorities. Unions insist that attacks faced by CFGS workers today will be replicated across the borough if CFGS succeed in forcing cuts through.

Unison, which represents non-teaching staff in the school, has launched a speaker tour of CFGS worker-activists around other all other schools in the borough to warn workers of attacks they may soon face and build solidarity. Meetings of Unison and the National Union of Teachers at CFGS have returned near-unanimous votes in favour of strike action against the cuts. There is a firm belief that CFGS has been chosen as the first in line for cuts because it has the strongest NUT and Unison organisation across the borough. Bosses feel that if they can beat the unions at CFGS, they will be better placed to beat them elsewhere.

The local NUT and Unison groups are now appealing to their national unions to action strike ballots.

The conservative regime within Unison has meant that permission for strike ballots has been much harder to come by in that union than in NUT, another indication of the lack of democracy within the UK's biggest public sector union.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

House of Lords vote down disability benefit "reforms"

The sadistic logic of capitalist cuts

By Ed Maltby

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, millionaire Iain Duncan Smith, has pledged to cut the cost of benefits for disabled people by 20% — one of the "reforms" embedded in the Welfare Reform Bill.

The House of Lords recently voted down some of the measures relating to disability benefits on the grounds that they are arbitrary and gratuitously mean. Quite right!

None of the "reforms" in Welfare Reform Bill are about improving the benefit system for the people whose daily lives depend upon it but this reality is pushed into stark relief by the measures aimed at dis-

abled people.

The reforms will see Disability Living Allowance replaced by a different payment, a Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Different how? Less money — including less money for young children disabled from birth.

And PIP is part of a package of cuts across the board for disabled people, from new limits on the size of houses and flats, to stopping top-ups to child tax credit.

The government's main aim with PIP is to force disabled people to undergo more regular, more stringent, physical examinations to "prove" that they are disabled. The government claims to be interested in stopping fraud:

but its own figures show that only 0.5% of DLA payments are made fraudulently!

The government's current examinations procedure, run by big corporation ATOS, is already extremely severe and inaccurate.

Citizens Advice Scotland reported last year that "many clients are being found fit for work in their Work Capability Assessment despite often having severe illnesses and/or disabilities. Our evidence has highlighted the cases of many clients with serious health conditions who have been found fit for work, including those with Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, terminal cancer, bipolar disorder, heart

failure, strokes, severe depression, and agoraphobia".

The process for claiming DLA is already impenetrably bureaucratic: the application document is 40 pages long.

The government is tightening the screws on a system which is already skewed to force vulnerable people off benefits. It is further proof of the sadistic logic of the capitalist class's cuts agenda.

Now the injustice is compounded by the fact that the hopes of millions of disabled people now rest on a vote in an body of unelected worthies, aristocrats and the super-rich.

The labour movement should be leading the way in this fight!

Pensions fight in the balance

By Ira Berkovic

Trade union militants across the labour movement are fighting to rescue the pensions battle from sell-out.

Activists in Unite are fighting to hold their national leadership to account and demanding that they uphold the policies of the union's National Industrial Sector Committees (NISCs), which have voted to reject the government's offer and organise further action.

Unite health activist Gill George said in a statement to the union's United Left group: "The pensions fight is in the balance. A positive intervention by Unite — to implement the policy decision now coming from every single public sector NISC — could still be decisive in getting this back on track. Further delay will ensure the defeat of a fight that is of historic importance to our movement as a whole."

UCU

University and College Union activists in post-92 universities and Further Education colleges face a likely ballot on their pensions deal, following a meeting of the union's Executive on 20 January.

UCU members in the Universities Superannuation Scheme (post-92 universities) will attend a special branches' conference on 31 January to discuss their latest deal.

Unison activists in both health and local government have launched campaigns for special conferences in an attempt to overturn the decisions of their Service Group Executives to suspend an active fight against the government's latest offer.

Militants in the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS) are working to push their leadership, which has the most publicly "rejectionist" line, into organising further action rather than simply stating that further action would be a good idea.

The National Union of Teachers (NUT) Executive meets again on 26 January; an informal meeting of the more "rejectionist" unions is expected before then. Meanwhile NUT activists are pushing in branches

for further action.

A solid NUT action could shut schools nationwide, and a strike by PCS's members in areas such as revenue collection would have huge economic power. NUT and PCS picket lines on workplaces where other union members work would be a physical demand for solidarity from workers in unions whose leaderships have caved in.

That action will have to be fought for from below.

Many of the far left in the unions have preferred to flatter the left bureaucracies rather than exert real pressure on them. SWP member Gill George has done excellent work in Unite, and Socialist Workers' Party and Socialist Party members on the NUT Executive voted for a motion proposed by AWL member Patrick Murphy which would have committed the union to organising action in February.

It was defeated by 26 votes to 13 because several non-aligned "left" Executive members including East London Teachers' Association president and long-time SWP ally Alex Kenny voted against it. The SWP's general approach has been to tread softly with NUT and PCS leaders; and the SP are the PCS leaders.

At the SWP-organise "Unite the Resistance" conference on Saturday 14 January, SWP diluted their demands on PCS leader Mark Serwotka by countering criticism of left-led unions with pleas "not to open that can of worms". They voted down an AWL amendment for a specific programme of ongoing action (though some SWPers, including NUT Executive member Nick Grant, backed the proposal).

There is no time for niceties. Any potential means of resuscitating the dispute and fixing some concrete action to organise around must be exploited.

- More from Gill George: <http://bit.ly/AeI5YZ>
- Report from "Unite the Resistance" conference: <http://bit.ly/yrLKFq>
- Report from the 12 January NUT Executive: <http://bit.ly/AIHQVU>
- AWL activists make plans, see page 2.

Workers' organisation key to safety at sea

By Dave Kirk

The causes of the tragic capsizing of the cruise liner Costa Concordia will hopefully soon be found.

But seafarers and their unions around the world have been warning about the safety standards on board ships for years.

By those accounts ships at greatest risk are those that sail under a "flag of convenience" (the practice of registering a merchant ship in a sovereign state different from that of the ship's owners). This avoids complying with the more stringent safety

and training regulations imposed on ships registered in more economically developed countries.

However as Andrew Linington of the Nautilus International union pointed out (*Guardian* 16/01/12) there are also big safety questions about modern cruise liners.

The size of these vessels has doubled in the last 30 years whilst the lifeboats and evacuation procedures remain unchanged. Regulators have not forced ship owners to adopt the newest safety measures, and profit-hungry owners are not going to spend any more than

they have to. As with many industries it has been workers organising along with public outrage after accidents that has forced many of safety improvements.

In the last 40 years the globalisation of the shipping industry has intensified to a massive degree. Crews are multilingual and multinational. Unions need to respond by intensifying their international organisational work and campaigning.

Organising seafarers across the oceans of the world is not easy, but it's vital to ensure safety at sea.