Solidarity
& Workers' Liberty

No 224 9 November 2011 30p/80p www.workersliberty.org For a workers' government

Strike votes for 30 November
page 11

Crisis in the Eurozone
pages 6-7

Does nuclear have a future?
page 8

Greek crisis

See page 5

"The 'lower classes' do not want to live in the old way and the 'upper classes' cannot carry on in the old way." Lenin

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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 £ .....

"Business as usual is not an option"

By Jayne Edwards

In a recent *Observer* article, and in interviews and conference speeches, Labour leader Ed Miliband has been making statements that make it seem like the Labour Party is beginning to side with protest movements and is supporting the demands of public sector unions on pensions and job cuts.

Miliband says the Occupy London protests raise deep issues that society can' t ignore; that the Tories are in touch with the richest 1% but not the other 99; that we must tackle the "irresponsible predator capitalists"; that

we can' t allow high levels of youth unemployment to continue; that we shouldn' t be afraid of taking on the vested interests like we did in 1945 when the NHS was set up; and that the NHS is too important to be left to the market.

Yet what does he propose as the alternative? So far we have tuition fees of £6,000 instead of £9,000, and a five point plan which all Labour Party members have been told to remember.

This is his plan to take on the predator capitalists. Judge for yourself:

1. A £2 billion tax on bank bonuses to fund 100,000 jobs for young people and build 25,000 affordable homes.
2. Bring forward long-term investment projects, like new school buildings.
3. Temporarily reverse the VAT rise — a £450 boost for families with children
4. A one year cut in VAT to 5% for home improvements and repairs to help small businesses.
5. A tax break for every small firm which takes on extra workers.

The trade union movement needs to be demanding that Labour makes much more concrete and radical commitments and not just for a future government but for now. They should include support for the public sector strikes, repeal of the anti-trade union laws, reverse privatisation and for publically funded and democratically run public services. Labour should say tax the rich and expropriate the banks.

We need a workers' plan for the crisis.

Open the banks' books!

Bankers have again shown their contempt for democracy by avoiding an estimated £10 million in tax.

Lawyers and top civil servants at Revenue and Customs have been questioned by MPs over a tax repayment agreement made with Goldman Sachs.

The Wall Street investment banking firm fought a five year battle to avoid national insurance payments on bankers' bonuses, which were paid from offshore tax havens.

They eventually settled with HMRC, but tax officials allowed Goldman Sachs to avoid paying an additional £8-10 million in interest.

Top tax chiefs say that they didn't understand they could charge interest (why not?), and that an official has lost his bonus because of the error.

Phone giant Vodafone has also been subject to government scrutiny after they were not asked to pay interest on a £1.25 billion tax settlement.

A key transitional demand for socialists has to be that banks open their books and stop evading tax.

Workers lose out as bosses rake it in

By Gerry Bates

While workers face wage freezes or real-terms pay cuts, those who top the market food chain are enjoying ever-bigger payouts.

Bosses of the FTSE 100 companies saw their pay rise by an average of 49% in the last financial year.

According to a report from Income Data Services the bulk of the increase is down to a sharp rise in bonuses, which leapt from an average of £737,624 in 2010 to £906,044 this year.

Workers' real wages meanwhile dropped by 2.7%, according to the *Daily Telegraph* (13 July 2011).

Free market capitalism is to blame; economist Nouriel Roubini said: "[it is] a deeper truth that unfettered free markets… have not benefited all and some of their pernicious consequences are associated with… rising inequality."

The cause is the greed of capital, using the economic crisis as an excuse to trim costs and slam workers rather than taking a hit on profit margins.

We need to abolish profit altogether and improve conditions for the working class — which can only be achieved by smashing capitalism from within.

New traveller solidarity network

By Bill Holmes

A new traveller solidarity network has been set up to support families who are being evicted from their homes despite the huge questions raised by the Dale Farm eviction last month.

The Traveller Solidarity Movement met in London on 5 November to discuss strategy after Dale Farm.

The meeting resolved to set up the network, linking local supporter and activist groups, including anti-fascist and anti-racist organisations, with regional travellers.

A website and mailing list is being set up, but to get involved now subscribe to the Dale Farm mailing list.

Travellers themselves will lead the network.

At the meeting travellers reported on continuing battles against forced homelessness.

A gypsy settlement in Brighton was evicted on 25 October, with some families leaving voluntarily while others were dragged off the land.

Meanwhile travellers in Beausale, near Warwick, face eviction from land they have occupied since May 2009.

Bailiffs have finished clearing Dale Farm following the decision by families to walk off en masse, and Basildon Council had an injunction to block travellers returning to the site granted by a court on 7 November.

Many of the families are living with relatives on the legal part of the site, but are still at risk of eviction from their temporary accommodation.

Until the travellers have the right... to live as travellers and enough "authorised" plots are set up, families will continue to face homelessness and be deprived of healthcare and education.

• More: dalefarm.wordpress.com

Blood Service win

Health workers have won a small victory against privatisation of the NHS after it was announced the Blood and Transplant Service will not be privatised.

The Industrial Workers of the World and Unison unions had led the campaign to stop the service being put into the hands of companies such as DHL and Capita, who had shown an interest in running the service.

A commercial review of the service reported on 18 October that it should remain nationalised.

Activists must now build momentum from this to stop the wholesale selling-off of the rest of the NHS to companies interested not in saving lives, but making profit.

Decent benefits for all!

By Lena Williams

Liam Byrne, Labour' s Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, has told chancellor George Osborne that he should not include pensions in a Tory plan to not increase benefits in line with the 5.2% inflation rate recorded in September.

The plan will save £10.4 billion for the government.

But Byrne stayed silent on other benefits! Does he think that some of the most vulnerable in society could be receiving even less cash in real terms?

Labour should not be calling for only pensioners to be spared the axe — everyone should see their benefits increase, and financial support should be scaled up not down.

Libyans' new struggle

By Martyn Hudson

Two weeks after the death of Qaddafi and the wholesale rout of the last remnants of pro-regime fighters in Sirte there are major debates in Libya about the post-war resolution and how Libyan civil society can implement a new policy and practice on human rights.

The apparent mass murder of Qaddafi loyalists in one of the main hotels in Sirte points to violations which are not just about mopping up the remnants of fighting forces. The dead were prisoners or injured. A mass grave just outside of Qaddafi' s compound in Tripoli indicates a mass execution of regime soldiers, many of whom had their hands tied behind their backs and had been subject to a single shot to the back of the head.

Other graves in the Gargur district and other parts of Tripoli point to the widespread use of mass murder by pro-regime forces. The dreaded Khamis brigade, led by Qaddafi' s son, instituted a massacre of prisoners by burning down a compound and shooting into the camp. Certainly the regime' s form on massacres, going back to the mass executions in the

Sirte: where Qaddafi loyalists have been executed

Abu Salim prison in the early 90s, and the public hangings of students in the 80s, point to the reality that Libya was on the verge of genocide before NATO intervention.

But the reprisal attacks by rebel (now government supporters) against the pro-regime town of Tawergha, many of whose citizens were involved in atrocities against the civilians of Misrata, are particularly unsavoury. Tawergha has been levelled and its population of 30,000 kicked into the desert and hunted by the Misrata brigades.

The National Transitional Council (NTC) has sent a pro-government force into the town of Hun 250 miles into the desert to protect the people of Tawergha from the potentially genocidal vengeance of the Misratans.

The NTC has released hundreds of regime loyalists from its prisons in celebration of Eid over the past few days but it is clearly worried about forces like the Misratan brigades who are not yet fully under their control and are prosecuting their own war supported by vast arms dumps left behind by Qaddafi' s forces.

However, suspected mercenaries from Mali, Chad and Niger have not been released and there is a suspicion that they will go on trial in order to publicly cohere a new Libyan civil society against the old pro-Qaddafi foreigners. this might be an issue also for the Tawerghas, many of whom are the descendants of African slaves. This would be a hugely costly process for Libya' s vast migrant and external workforce who were allowed no rights under the old regime.

The dismantling of the old official "trade union bureaucracy which did not offer rights to the migrant workforce should open the way for the representation of all workers and not just Libyan nationals. The rebels' original stand against communalism and tribalism has to gain some substance if the minority populations of Libya are not to continue to be persecuted. A free media, the extensions of women' s and workers' rights, and the consolidation of the judiciary and civil society more generally make social justice for the persecuted minorities of Libya more possible.

The continuation of revenge and hostilities is what we would expect from the ebbing of a brutal civil war but it has to stop.

The united working class, of all peoples, sexualities and genders has to fight back against a Libya where tribalism and ultimately Islamism could one day be victorious.

Human rights abuses, the extension of Sharia law, extra-judicial killings and the persecution of minorities are an affront to a liberation movement which wanted to overthrow the trappings of despotism, not replicate them.

General strike in Israel

By Ira Berkovic

A four-hour general strike in Israel caused what the Ha' aretz paper called "near paralysis" on the morning of Monday 7 November as workers took action in a dispute about public sector contracts.

Schools, transport hubs (including Ben Gurion International Airport) and the Tel Aviv Stock Exchanged were shut down as hundreds of thousands of workers took action.

The Histadrut union federation is demanding that the government hires 250,000 public sector workers currently employed through agencies on a temporary or semi-casual basis on permanent contracts and levels up their conditions to those of other permanent employees.

The strike was limited to four hours by a ruling from the Israeli Labour Court. In advance of the strike, Histadrut leader Ofer Eini said that the Court was "the only thing that can stop us".

This is the first significant industrial confrontation since the explosion of social protest in the summer. Many commentators believe Histadrut has been significantly emboldened by the protest movement, with some suggesting that the protest movement had acted directly as catalyst for the strikes.

The movement itself is slowly beginning to revive after a two-month lull, with 50,000 demonstrating in Tel Aviv on 29 October. The demonstration' s main demand was for the government to cancel the planned 2012 budget and re-launch a "social budget" instead.

Support the Bedouin!

By Dan Katz

Israel' s right-wing government continues to persecute Israel' s Bedouin population. Plans are underway for the mass resettlement of tens of thousands in cities. But the Bedouin are refusing to go.

Israel has 200,000 Bedouin, with a further 40,000 in the West Bank and millions beyond, in Jordan, Sinai and Gaza.

Nearly half the Negev' s Bedouin live in un-registered villages. Many settlements predate the state, but are unrecognised and so are refused road, public transport, water and electricity.

In the Israeli-occupied West Bank 2,000 Bedouin are to be shifted to the edge of a rubbish dump to make way for Jewish settlers.

Many of these herders have now abandoned their camels and goats, and those that survive find themselves harassed by settlers and Israeli soldiers.

Syrian blood still running

Syrian activists were sceptical when the Arab League announced a plan agreed with Syrian officials to end the violence against the opposition.

Now the League has announced a meeting in Cairo on Saturday 12 November to discuss the Syrian state' s failure to take steps to resolve the crisis and stop the crackdown inside the country.

The Turkey-based opposition group, the Syrian National Council, called on Arab and other international observers to be sent to Homs, which they describe as a "humanitarian disaster area".

Fighting in the Baba Amr neighbourhood of Homs has continued for days, with dozens of deaths.

"Whole buildings have been gutted by tank fire," a local activist, told Reuters. "Bread has run out and people who get hit in the streets are dying from their wounds on the spot because no one can reach them," he said.

Significantly, armed forces defectors killed four pro-government militiamen near the border with Turkey. The armed attacks by anti-government former-military fighters are continuing.

Occupy London

By Bill Holmes

The London Occupation continues and at its General Assembly on Monday 7 November occupiers discussed a draft press statement which contained good demands calling on the City of London Corporation to open the books.

Some of the occupiers thought this was too conciliatory. There were also announcements about a temporary pause in politics on 11 and 13 November to allow Armistice Day and Remembrance Day services to continue uninterrupted, with a debate on how activists relate to such events planned for Saturday 12 November.

Workers' Liberty activist Ed Maltby ran a workshop on Socialism and Democracy at the Occupy LSX camp at St Paul' s Cathedral on Monday.

Ed explained the problems with bourgeois democracy and the institutional filters that exist to prevent a reformist change to socialism at a well-attended session at the Tent City University.

A second session was due to be held on Tuesday at the Finsbury Square site as Solidarity went to press.

Attendance at Monday evening' s General Assembly seemed lower than usual, but this could have been due to the weather.

AWL members sold about 10 papers during the evening.

It is important that activists continue to intervene in the Occupy movement to give it a specifically class-based focus rather than a simplistic anti-capitalist campaign with no direction.

Occupy Sydney

Activists in Sydney successfully re-occupied part of the city centre following a forced eviction from Martin Place by police last week.

Following a march on Saturday 5 November from the Town Hall the movement then entered Hyde Park for a rally, before occupying the space.

There were some scuffles with the police during the re-occupation.

Keeping the occupation going for as long as possible in Sydney — and elsewhere — allows activists to keep up pressure on the capitalist ruling class.

Israel and US punish Palestinians for UN bid

By Sacha Ismail

The Palestinian bid for recognition of an independent state at the United Nations will hit the headlines again soon, when the UN Security Council publishes an initial report on the application.

Already Israel and the US are punishing the Palestinians for their campaign.

Following the overwhelming vote at Unesco, to admit Palestine as a full member, the US cut off all funding to the organisation, removing more than a fifth of its budget. If the Palestinians seek membership of other UN bodies – for instance the International Atomic Energy Agency – this issue could become even bigger.

The US has also temporarily frozen its funding for the Palestinian Authority.

Meanwhile Israel has announced plans to accelerate the building of 2,000 housing units for Jewish settlers in the Occupied Territories, and has suspended the transfer of the tax and customs revenue it collects on behalf of the PA. Together with the US funding freeze, this is potentially disastrous for the PA.

So while the Palestinian campaign is putting their opponents under massive pressure, the results so far are also harming them.

On the other hand, what is this oppressed nation, cut off from every avenue of liberation, supposed to do?

The Palestinian struggle demands the support of all socialists, and all democrats; the response from Israel and the US demands condemnation.

From social networks to social revolution

Eric Lee

In mid-November trade unionists from more than 30 countries will gather in Istanbul for the second annual Global Solidarity Conference organised by LabourStart. The theme of this year's conference is "From social networks to social revolution" and the timing is exquisite.

The 2011 LabourStart conference was due to be held in Australia. But we had organisational problems at that end, and urgently needed to come up with a venue, and comrades in Istanbul said "sure, why not here?"

And all that happened only days before a workers' general strike brought down the Mubarak regime and the Middle East and North Africa suddenly became very interesting places for the trade union movement.

A highlight of this year's conference is the presence of representatives of independent trade unions from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, Iran and Iraq. In some cases divided trade union movements are represented by more than one organisation (this is true in Israel and Palestine where no fewer than four organisations are attending). As you can imagine, one has to be exceedingly diplomatic to pull this sort of thing off.

But we are also living through interesting times, and people who would not normally agree to be in the same room as others are suddenly showing a little bit of flexibility.

The conference programme is at the moment fairly fluid, but will probably open with a visit to a picket line — and this is, apparently, never much of a problem in Turkey. Turkey's militant trade unions are often engaged in interesting struggles which is one of the reasons why it's so great to be working with them on this conference. Unions where independent, militant trade unionism is a new idea will have much to learn from their Turkish colleagues.

This will be followed by a walking tour of the Taksim square area — Taksim square being not just the centre of town where all the hotels are, but also the square where following a massacre in the 1970s, May Day protests were banned for decades. Unions were only allowed to resume May Day protests last year.

WORKSHOPS

In the evening, the conference formally opens at the headquarters of the oil and gas workers' union, PetrolIs, which has had a long relationship with LabourStart built upon a number of online campaigns waged in support of their members.

The opening session will feature a video address by Sharan Burrow, the general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation, who will tell participants about the strong links forged between the ITUC and LabourStart over recent years. Under Burrow's leadership, the ITUC has shown a much greater openness to this sort of thing, which is to be welcomed.

Speakers from Turkish unions and global union federations will also address the plenary.

The real work of the conference begins the following morning with a series of 24 workshops on a wide range of themes. About half of them are country-focused — so there will be workshops dealing with Palestine, Bahrain and Iran, for example. There will also be country and regional focuses for workshops on East Asia, Pakistan and sub-Saharan Africa. And other workshops will focus on specific issues such as young workers, women in the unions, the fight against precarious employment, labour video, the use of social networks, and how to do an online campaign.

The conference ends with the annual meeting of LabourStart correspondents — the volunteers who post all the news stories to LabourStart throughout the year.

The day after the conference ends, the delegates from the Middle East and North Africa will stay on a bit as they get to meet separately at an invitation-only event where they can frankly discuss the lessons learned from the Arab Spring — and where we go next.

The involvement of a dedicated group of young Turkish trade unionists and socialists has been critical to the success of organising the event so far. As has been the support of the global union federations and the ITUC. Fingers crossed, this promises to be an amazing weekend.

I'm very excited about the whole thing (you can tell, right?) and look forward to reporting here in another couple of weeks on how it all turned out.

Dictatorial measures: the Bolsheviks had other options

Letters

Mark Osborn (*Solidarity* 223) correctly raises issues about the intentions of the Bolsheviks, the struggle of Lenin and Trotsky against the bureaucracy, the decisive or not so decisive break between October and Stalinism and, I think, critically the question of what the Bolsheviks did as they were struggling for their existence.

The usual take of Leninists on this is the following: Bolshevik intentions were good (agreed), Lenin and Trotsky did as much as they could in the struggle (well, this wasn't what Adolph Joffe and Serge felt but there you go), that there was a decisive break or river of blood between the traditions, and finally that the Bolsheviks made some mistakes in the heat of the struggle but these were justified and in any case they had no option to do anything else in the context of the Bolshevik party ruling in the name of a working class that no longer existed (I dispute this entirely).

The recent work of Simon Pirani (*The Russian Revolution in Retreat 1920-24*) persuasively argues against the myth of working class "pulverisation" — that proletarian numbers did fall, but that the workers' movement, inside and outside the Bolshevik party, was extremely active. Much of this was hostile to Bolshevik control but much of it recognised the difficulties in the context of famine, war, and the hostility of external powers. 25% of representatives elected to the Moscow soviet in 1921 were non-partyist. In the Kronstadt uprising Trotsky himself pointed to 30% of Communist Party members supporting the rebellion, 40% remaining neutral, and only 30% supporting the government. Entwined with this was the resurgent socialism outside the Communist party amongst the Mensheviks and internal to the party in the Workers' Opposition and the Dem Cens.

There was also a large rump of oppositionists expelled from the party who were liquidated in mass arrests in September 1923. Pirani points to Bolshevik repression as eliminating whole swathes of socialists who to a large extent were committed to the gains of October but were now postulating a different route out of Bolshevik "dictatorship". And let's be clear that this was a dictatorship of the Bolshevik party and not the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin was clear that he was for party dictatorship. As Hal Draper notes Lenin never surrendered the idea that "the scientific term 'dictatorship' means nothing more nor less than authority untrammelled by any laws, absolutely unrestricted by any rules whatever, and based directly on force," (*Marx to Lenin*). The Soviet working class were the recipients of this despotism.

If the Bolsheviks were compelled to take this route then, yes, we would be in the position of accepting that historical fact and moving on. But this is not just about hindsight — there were many voices documented internally and externally of the Party postulating other routes. Worse, the dictatorship clearly made it more possible for a nascent Stalinist despotic bureaucracy to emerge. Sam Farber expresses this different route well: "This would have involved the legalization of all parties and political groups willing to accept, and pledge loyalty to, the Soviet system of government. The government would have also immediately closed all punitive labour camps, placed the secret police under strict judicial control and declared an immediate amnesty for all people imprisoned for nonviolent political offences. The alternative was the steady bureaucratic degeneration of the revolution, and the increasing alienation of the state's political leadership from the mass of the population," (*Against the Current* 2011).

Lenin: political choices

For Farber (in his great book *Before Stalinism* and elsewhere), even though there are clear differences (breaks and continuities as I have already noted) between Stalinism and Bolshevism, this dictatorship politically disarmed the Soviet working class and destroyed their capacity to resist the rising bureaucracy. For Farber there was absolutely no Marxist justification for Bolshevik dictatorship. The banning of factions in the context of the Kronstadt rebellion in March 1921 dealt the revolution "a definitive and maiming blow" that the proletarian cause would never recover from — not in 1921 or even in 2011. Even worse is the contemporary Leninist abasement to the idea that these dictatorial measures were necessary or even virtues!

There were other options, there were other routes and other voices — roads to the future liquidated by Bolshevik dictatorship.

Martyn Hudson, Teesside

Radical bookselling

Radical bookselling in Britain has a long history.

The second hand labour history book dealer Left on the Shelf (www.leftontheshelfbooks.co.uk) has an incomplete listing of radical bookshops on its website, together with a listing of mentions of such shops in fiction and in non-fiction. Dave Cope — who runs Left on the Shelf — and I are trying now to make the listing as complete as possible. We would be grateful for any corrections and omissions.

I'm currently working on a booklet about radical bookshops that is less list-based and will cover bookshops from Marxist, libertarian and other traditions, as well as feminist, peace and other issue based radical shops. I'd be pleased to hear from anybody who has worked in radical bookselling, or customers who have interesting stories to tell.

I can be contacted at info@fiveleaves.co.uk or at Five Leaves Publications, PO Box 8786, Nottingham NG1 9AW.

Ross Bradshaw, www.fiveleavespublications.blogspot.com

Socialist feminist tour

AWL news

By Rosalind Robson

In the run-up to the AWL's conference "Is This As Good As It Gets?" on 26 November (see back page) we organised a speaking tour, putting the case for socialist feminism. The six AWL women who have spoken at 10 meetings so far have reported, by and large, a very positive experience.

Some of the meetings were at colleges, organised with student feminist societies. Others were organised in towns where we have AWL branch meetings.

The discussions have been enormously wide-ranging.

At Liverpool Hope University participants wanted to discuss the very basic ideas about why feminism remains a necessary political ideology, despite the formal equality that women now have in large parts of the world, but not everywhere. In Sheffield the discussion touched on why young women today might say "I'm not a feminist but…".

On the whole the discussions have tried to get to grips with why there is a link between the struggle for female equality and against capitalism. Why does the working-class matter? How are the cuts affecting working-class women?

In Northampton the meeting had a discussion about what the women's movement of the 1970s and 80s had managed to achieve. What kind of women's movement do we want to see now, and in the future, and what would be its relationship to the labour movement? These meetings have touched on political ideas that do not always get talked about in the labour and other movements.

After 26 November we would like to organise meetings in more towns, colleges and union branches. To help us please email women@workersliberty.org.

Greece: the "old ways" fail. What new ways?

The Greek revolutionary socialist group OKDE is calling for the creation of "structures and organs of workers' control" in districts and industries, and "popular assemblies in neighbourhoods", "with all bodies elected and recallable".

These would be something like the "neighbourhood commissions" which emerged in Portugal in 1974-5, after the fall of the military regime, or in Chile in 1972-3, in the ferment before the military coup.

Building on the strikes and demonstrations of recent weeks, such bodies could challenge all the factions of the Greek capitalist class, and the deal imposed on Greece by the "Troika", the European Central Bank, the European Union, and the IMF

In the first place, they could force concessions, and by doing so could encourage and boost working-class struggles in all the other countries of Europe hit by cuts.

Greece is in a pre-revolutionary situation, a situation where the first conditions for social revolution have developed. "The 'lower classes' do not want to live in the old way; and the 'upper classes' cannot carry on in the old way...", as Lenin defined those conditions, writing a few years after the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Lenin added: "for a revolution to take place, it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking, and politically active workers) should fully realise that revolution is necessary, and that they should be prepared to die for it..."

That doesn't happen unless an organised revolutionary party has won majority support among the working class, or at least among the politically-active workers. Greece is as yet far from that.

As Lenin also wrote in those years, "there is no such thing as a situation that offers no way out for the bourgeoisie". The Pasok government in office in Greece since October 2009 has now "opted out" by going for a coalition with New Democracy (Greece's Tory party). This coalition, or some new coalition, will find "ways out for the bourgeoisie" unless those rank-and-file working-class coordinations can be formed in Greece.

Pasok, the Greek equivalent of the Labour Party, is discredited and compromised by having accepted and pushed all the cuts plans. The main Greek union federations have called protest strikes, but are very bureaucratic, with leaderships politically aligned to Pasok. New organisation is needed at rank-and-file level.

CONCESSIONS

Although the situation is pre-revolutionary, that does not mean that the Greek working class can win nothing short of revolution.

By fighting for a workers' government, and in the course of fighting for a workers' government, the Greek working class can win concessions.

The big powers of the eurozone have vast financial resources, quite sufficient to afford some concessions to Greece. However much Greece annoys them, they have a strong motive to make sure it remains able to pay its debts; and that motive gives Greek workers great leverage.

With the Italian government already having to pay unsustainable interest rates to get its IOUs (bonds) accepted by global financiers, a Greek default could collapse the euro. That would bring huge economic damage to German capital.

As Merryn Somerset Webb points out in the *Financial Times* (5 November): "The really big winner [from the euro] has been Germany... It gets to sell its goods outside the zone at a discount to the pre-euro price... [And] the introduction of the euro made borrowing very cheap".

Pasok leader Papandreou has sidestepped into a coalition with Greece's Tories

Webb, writing from a pro-capitalist viewpoint, recommends that "the euro should survive intact a bit longer. European politicians might start being a little kinder to Greece — softening their deal bit by bit".

The deal decided by the Euro-summit on 27 October will need to be revised anyway. It has failed in its main aim, to save Italy from "contagion". Much in its terms has been left vague, and can be adjusted one way or another.

On 28 October, all over Greece, official parades on a usually-revered national anniversary were disrupted by vast protests against the plan. On 31 October Greek prime minister George Papandreou announced a referendum on the plan.

That infuriated the eurozone leaders and had financial markets plunging. For Papandreou, however, facing a situation where only 13% of the people of Greece said they would favour a vote of confidence for his Pasok government, it was a canny move. It put the opposition parties on the back foot.

On 2 November, Papandreou's defence minister replaced the leaders of the three armed forces. Greece spends more on its military, as a percentage of GDP, than any other country in Europe, and has much greater numbers in its armed forces, in proportion to population; and the military is set to suffer relatively little from the country's vast spending cuts. Greece was under military dictatorship from 1967 to 1974.

A week or so before, a writer in the *Daily Telegraph* had reported talk among financiers "only half in jest ... that a better use for Germany's money than pouring it down the drain of further bail-outs would be to sponsor a Greek military coup". The coup would enable the European Union to evict Greece on purely political grounds, and tool up the Greek ruling class to make Greek workers pay for the ensuing chaos.

The Greek government, however, said that the replacement of the military chiefs was a routine matter of their terms of office being ended; and the left in Greece has raised no alarms about a possible coup.

On 3 November, Papandreou dropped his referendum plan. He had successfully bluffed the opposition New Democracy (equivalent of the Tory party) into backing the 27 October plan and agreeing to a coalition government. As of 7 November, Papandreou and ND leader Antonis Samaras were planning to form a coalition government, headed (they hoped) by a "technocrat", "within a week"; and call new elections on 19 February.

Opinion polls reflect the utter discredit of Greece's whole political establishment. New Democracy and Pasok got 78% of the vote between them in October 2009, but now New Democracy scores about 22%, Pasok about 15%. The biggest leftish opposition party, the diehard-Stalinist KKE, has improved on its 8% in the 2009 general election, but only to 14%. A very large number of voters are disgusted with the whole range of parties.

Papandreou hopes that the coalition with the Tory ND will shelter the Pasok leadership from pressure from Pasok's working-class base; both main parties hope that the short reprieve given to them by the formation of a new coalition will enable them to nail down the cuts flowing from the 27 October plan. In February, even if they lose much ground, Pasok and ND between them can still hope to have a parliamentary majority, and then to improvise.

The "upper classes" of Greece are fumbling and groping for new ways to carry on. And the "lower classes" are sick of it.

The KKE (the diehard-Stalinist Greek Communist Party) is calling for a "social popular front for the overthrow of the power of the monopolies and to free Greece from the EU and NATO". In practice its focus is on demanding quicker new elections, in which it plausibly hopes to do well.

Despite anti-capitalist bluster, the KKE's immediate policies are weak ("taxation of profits of big business at a rate of 45%", and so on), and are tainted by its nationalist emphasis on "freeing Greece from the EU".

Synaspismos, the former Eurocommunists and now the core of the Syriza coalition, the biggest leftish force after the KKE, also focuses on demanding quicker elections.

BANKS

It calls for "nationalisation and socialisation of the banking sector for the benefit of society, and the immediate return to public ownership, with workers' and social control, of the public enterprises and organisations which have been or are being sold off."

It protests at the "suzerainty" demanded over Greece by Merkel and Sarkozy. It counterposes not Greek exit from the EU but "new ways for people across Europe" to fight "neoliberal austerity".

Antarsya, a more radical left-wing electoral coalition, calls for "exit from the euro and the EU, the nationalisation of banks and large enterprises under workers' control and a radical redistribution of wealth in favour of workers".

The focus on exit from the euro is diversionary. Almost certainly a workers' government in Greece — which would refuse to pay the debts run up by Greek plutocrats who have salted away 600 billion euros in Swiss banks — would end up being evicted from the eurozone and the EU. That would be an episode in the fight by that government to inspire similar workers' mobilisations across Europe and recreate a united Europe on working-class and socialist lines.

The other way round doesn't work. Exit from the euro would not automatically, or even probably, push Greece to the left, or make it easier for Greek workers to win concessions. It would deepen Greece's economic crisis, and set the scene for the exiting government to use nationalist bluster to force workers to pay the cost of that crisis.

The cuts are Europe-wide, and should be fought on the basis of working-class unity across Europe, with a Europe-wide programme, without of course suggesting that the most mobilised working-class movements, as in Greece, should wait for the slower movements.

The truth about China

A top Chinese government official has blamed Europe's economic problems on welfare provision and labour laws.

Jin Liqun, chair of China's sovereign wealth fund (the body which manages the Chinese government's overseas investment of its spare loot) told Al Jazeera: "If you look at the troubles which happened in European countries, this is purely because of the accumulated troubles of the worn-out welfare society. I think the labour laws are outdated. The labour laws induce sloth, indolence, rather than hard work. The incentive system is totally out of whack.

"Why should, for instance, within [the] eurozone, some member-states' people have to work to 65, even longer, whereas in some other countries they are happily retiring at 55, languishing on the beach? This is unfair. The welfare system is good for any society to reduce the gap, to help those who happen to have disadvantages, to enjoy a good life, but a welfare society should not induce people not to work hard."

Welfare provision, and laws which give workers some protection from unfair dismissal or unsafe work conditions, exist in Europe thanks to two hundred years' struggle by labour movements across the continent. Eroded in recent decades, they still exist.

China has never had a free labour movement. Since the victory of Mao Zedong's Stalinists in 1949, all working-class organisation outside the official state-run trade unions (fake "trade unions") has been suppressed.

In recent years, strikes have become common in China, with the growth of a vast urban working class facing enormous social inequality and corruption. The government, nervous about unrest, is sometimes subtle about dealing with them: but they all happen, at best, in a legal grey area. Chinese workers have no rights.

Welfare provision is minimal. Health care has to be paid for (though some prices are subsidised). People complain that they have to bribe teachers if they want their children to get a decent education.

The Chinese state puts more people to death than all the rest of the world put together. It publishes no information on its use of capital punishment, but Amnesty International reckons that executions in China run into thousands a year, maybe ten times as many as in the next-worst country, Iran.

Jin Liqun's statement shows what the Chinese bureaucrats think about this. To them, the oppression in China seems normal, and the still relatively civilised conditions of European workers look like an outrageous departure from what is normal and right.

Would-be leftists in Europe who still regard China as "communist" or "socialist" or left-wing should learn the lesson. "Communism" which relies on such oppression of the working class that Merkel, Sarkozy, and Cameron look outrageously "soft" by comparison is not "communism" at all, but a system of exploitation by a bureaucratically-organised ruling class.

- aje.me/jinliqun
- https://chinastrikes.crowdmap.com

"No" Day, Thessaloniki, 28 October: 10,000 people joined an alternative demonstration to the official military parade that is held each year. "No" Day parades were cancelled or hijacked by protestors in several places.

Greece: coup with a parliamentary disguise

A militant from the Greek revolutionary socialist group OKDE in Athens spoke to Ed Maltby from *Solidarity*:

Ed: You call for the creation of "structures and organs of workers' control in workplaces and neighbourhoods". Are these things coming into being?

OKDE: At the industrial level this has not gone further than simple propaganda or agitation. At the level of neighbourhoods there are a lot of popular assemblies. The number of people participating is fluctuating a lot, both for people in general and people from the left. In general the Communist Party does not participate in any of this.

These general assemblies are dealing with local problems like people not having the money to pay for electricity; as the new taxes are being applied through electricity taxes, these committees are a good front for organising resistance.

People are looking at these assemblies as a new way of expressing themselves.

For the majority of the forces participating, the assemblies are seen as strictly connected with purely social issues. They do not have a view of how to connect these struggles to the central political problems of the country. There is no governmental slogan. The attempt from us to start discussing the central political problem is being dismissed by anarchists and so on, or from the reformist left like Syriza, who are looking to solve the problem through making gains in electoral terms.

These assemblies are taking place in squares — the weather is still helpful for that — or in municipality offices.

And in workplaces?

Recently it seemed the strongest unions were being revitalised in the public sector. All the people working in the public sector were experiencing a lot of cuts, threats of layoffs, and this created strong mobilisations, to occupy the ministries and so on. But it remains weak. The control of the struggle remains in the hands of the administrative bodies — we do not have the means for control from below. It is still at the level of the first push.

There is a problem of how the overall social climate of disobedience and rebellion is translated into the workplaces.

The expression of the movement is to follow political ways rather than social ones — that is through trade unions and workplaces. There are struggles in workplaces but they do not set the tone of events.

The occupations of the ministries may be sowing something for the future — forms of struggle closer to what we would describe as workers' control or self-management. But it would be an exaggeration to say that we are there already.

The overall feeling of the people is a general disappointment with the political situation — a lack of confidence that anyone can manage the situation. I don't think that people have risen to the bait, despite the media propaganda, about our destruction if we leave the euro and stuff like that. The handling-from-above by the European Union is not a way out of the crisis.

We think the political crisis will grow even more acute in the next weeks. New Democracy has played its political cards and now, in coalition government, they are being asked to vote for all the emergency measures. The crisis is growing. Bonapartism is growing.

Is a military coup possible?

It is difficult to imagine that the bourgeois apparatuses, from the EU down to the military apparatus, are ready to impose such a solution. On the other hand, one must be wary of this. It is in the political logic of things.

You could say that this new coalition government is a coup with a parliamentary disguise. It makes no difference what the people want and what the people vote for. The ruling class will somehow impose this or that coalition. So it is an end for a type of bourgeois democracy even if it does not take the form of an open coup.

Are you growing?

OKDE is growing. It has not got further than the primary accumulation of forces; we are not able to play a large-scale role, and this is the key problem in which all other weaknesses of the workers' movement converge.

There is still not a visible revolutionary tendency or a centre around which to organise. So all the rebel energy of the Greek movement, although it is creating huge political results, is undirected. The reformist left only begs for elections. We feel that the basic tendency of the far left is to start looking for "popular front solutions" with the reformist parties. But this also is not clear.

The process of the creation of the revolutionary tendency is underway. But you cannot say you are happy with this until you have managed to do it. It is an opportunity you cannot afford to miss.

• More on Greece: No to the Unity Government by Theodora Polenta.

The end

By Michel Husson

The decision by Greek prime minister Georges Papandreou to put the Eurosummit agreement to a referendum marks a new step in the European crisis. To understand the causes and what is at stake in this crisis, we must first situate it in the broad sweep of events.

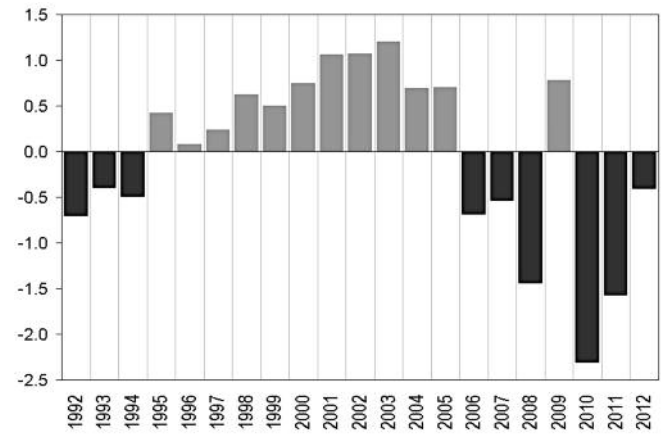
It is not just a sovereign debt crisis. It is also, and more fundamentally, a crisis of the European construction. Today it is obvious that neo-liberal-style Europe was botched.

The single currency was supposed to serve as a wage-control instrument, since it became impossible for governments to devalue. But that constraint was in part evaded circumvented by over-indebtedness, boosted by low real interest rates and growing external deficits.

For a decade, 1995-2005, the countries of Europe's "South" (Spain, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal) had a growth rates almost one per cent higher than the countries of the "North" (Germany, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Netherlands).

That could not last, and the situation reversed from 2006. Since the crisis, and except in 2009, the growth of the countries of the "South" has been clearly lower than that of the "North". The crisis has thus exposed the incoherences of the European model and deepened the divergence between the trajectories of the different countries.

Growth gap between countries of the South* and the North of Europe**



* South: Spain, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal.
** North: Germany, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Netherlands.

The growth of public debts itself has three causes: the mechanical effect of the recession, the costs of bailing out the banks, and also the poisoned fruit of the policies carried through for many years of reducing the taxes paid by business and the richest households. The brutal shift to budgetary austerity thus sets a vicious circle going: by cutting expenditure, they slow down economic activity, and that cuts tax receipts and so the deficit is not cut.

A priori there were several possible scenarios. The austerity scenario meant getting into a long period of social regression to bring down the debt bit by bit at the expense of the living standards of the majority of the population. But it was known that a certain number of countries, in the first place Greece, could not meet their debt payments. Thus the risk of contagion to other countries, leading to a scenario of the breakup of the eurozone.

The scenario of federalisation would have meant taking responsibility for the totality of the European debts in a pooled way by various methods of which the main one is the monetarisation of the European debts by the European Central Bank. That is in fact the only way to avoid exposing the financing of the states to speculation on the financial markets.

Finally, the radical scenario would, since the sovereign debts are in large part held by the European banks, mean nationalising those banks and organising default for the most exposed countries.

For almost two years the governments of Europe have been feeling their way between several pitfalls. The first is what economists called moral hazard: looking after a Greek default could be a signal encouraging other countries to evade austerity measures. The cost of the default would fall back on the "virtuous" countries, especially Germany, and the financial

less bailout of Europe

Georges Papandreou at the G20 summit

markets would put the debt of numerous other countries under the rule of speculation. But a break-up of the eurozone is also seen as a major risk, including by Germany, which through such a break-up would lose its advantages in world competition.

The 27 October 2011 agreement was, like the previous ones, a provisional and cobbled-together solution which confirmed Germany's refusal to accept a change in the statutes of the European Central Bank which would allow it directly to finance states. The Greek debt was theoretically cut by half, but at the cost of a veritable placing under supervision, sharpened austerity, and a massive programme of privatisation.

Technically, the weak points of this agreement, which was probably stillborn, were obvious. The debt cutback is voluntary, as the text of the agreement explains [1]: "We invite Greece, private investors and all parties concerned to develop a voluntary bond exchange with a nominal discount of 50%". Indeed, they wanted to avoid declaring a Greek default which would unleash the diabolical mechanism of the CDS (Credit Default Swaps), whose owners would then come to demand their dues.

To avoid contagion for other countries, appeal was made to the European Financial Stability Facility. This fund, created in May 2010, had been endowed with 440 billion euros, but after the bail-out plans for Greece, Ireland and Portugal, it had only about 200 to 250 billion left.

For it to serve as a firewall, it had to be able theoretically to command 1000 billion euros. But the states do not want to pay, and this sum was to be got by the same methods which led to the financial crisis: leveraging and a "Special Purpose Vehicle", with an appeal to the emerging powers and especially to China.

The banks were also to be recapitalised, but not too soon, so that they should not be obliged to cut back their profits and their dividend distributions. As one of the negotiators of the agreement puts it: "You don't have to be paranoid to be terrified" (see: "The euro deal: no big bazooka", *The Economist*, 29 October 2011 [2]). The most terrifying thing, however, is the drive of the ruling classes to make the peoples of Europe pay the cost of the crisis.

QUIT THE EURO?

Quitting the euro is presented as a miracle solution. It would allow the country involved, Greece for example, to devalue and re-establish its competitiveness. This claim is based on the observation that the European construction was flawed from the start in so far as it it did not take account of the divergent trajectories of the different countries of the eurozone.

The serious response would be to introduce mechanisms of harmonisation: a large European budget, a unified system of taxation of capital, funds for social harmonisation, a European minimum wage. That solution may seem out of range. Quitting the euro is not however a better solution: to think that would be to put the cart before the horse and to make a strategic error.

The debt would indeed be increased in proportion to the devaluation rate, and the new currency would be exposed, without defence, to speculative attacks. Those pressures would then serve to justify an even harsher austerity policy.

In France supporters of "deglobalisation" do not all advocate quitting the euro, but their preoccupations are similar. Since they make free trade the source of all ills, they mainly propose fiscal protectionism, or in other words taxes on imports. There, too, the aim is to re-establish competitiveness.

It is hard to see how such measures could, as if by magic, re-establish a fairer distribution of income: it is not a border tax that will make the profiteers give up their privileges. In any case, competitiveness depends on many other factors besides commodity prices.

And, above all, this approach would mean getting into a doubly perverse logic. First into the logic of competition: but a country can improve its situation by better competitiveness only by taking market share (and thus jobs) from neighbouring countries. And then into the logic of productivism, which sees no way to create jobs other than more economic growth.

QUITTING EUROPEAN NEOLIBERALISM

The preconditions for a way out are to establish a balance of forces favourable to the working class and to wipe out at least a portion of the debt.

A feasible strategy is thus composed of unilateral measures which clash with the rules of neo-liberal Europe but which would aim at the extension of progressive measures across Europe.

The technical responses exist and are based on this coherent triangle:

1. Monetarisation of the debts by the European Central Bank;
2. Nationalisation of the banks;
3. Cancellation of the illegitimate portion of the debts.

This combination of measures would allow for settling the crisis by way of making those who profited from the frenzies of financialised capitalism pay.

But the issues at stake are above all social, and the situation is in the last analysis simple to sum up: thanks to deregulation, financialisation, etc., a small minority grabs the wealth produced, as the rise of inequality shows.

It goes further: that minority organises economic and social life in line with its interests, and has the power to decide social priorities and deprive the peoples of any say in their fate. That minority will not give up those privileges without a powerful social intervention which must combine a global point of view with local or sectoral initiatives.

In any case, capitalism is in an impasse: the neo-liberal model can no longer function, and return to capitalism of the "golden age" of 1945-75 is impossible.

A progressive solution must therefore involve a radical questioning of this system: the redistribution of wealth is the immediate point of leverage, but the approach must include a total inversion of the capitalist logic.

We must make the satisfaction of social needs the decisive priority, and from that work out what are the necessary and useful jobs, and prioritise non-market public services and the development of free time above the search for profit and individual consumption. Those are, besides, basic preconditions if we want to meet aims for the reduction of greenhouse-gas emissions.

Since such a project puts the very logic of capitalism in question, a very broad alliance is necessary, between the social movements defined in the broad sense.

2 November 2011

[1] http://gesd.free.fr/esummit.pdf

[2] http://gesd.free.fr/nobigbaz.pdf

[3] See "Exit or voice? A European strategy of rupture", Socialist Register 2012, http://hussonet.free.fr/sreg122.pdf

All change in Italy and Spain?

Italy's billionaire "playboy" prime minister Silvio Berlusconi is coming under increasing pressure to step aside as his country slips ever-closer towards economic crisis.

Berlusconi's opinion rating dropped to a record low of 22% after a rally on 6 November.

Italian left party Rifondazione called last week for immediate elections, to act as a referendum on the economic policy forced on the country by the EU and carried out by Berlusconi.

Even Berlusconi's Northern League coalition partner leader Umberto Bossi called on him to resign before a crucial budget debate as the interest rate on Italy's borrowing reached 6.74%.

Italy currently has a debt worth €1.9 trillion, 120% of its GDP.

The economic crisis in Italy is the most compelling reason yet for Berlusconi to go. But the left and labour movement has to map out a serious socialist alternative to challenge the austerity cuts which will follow whatever the political shape of Italy's government.

SPAIN

The conservative Popular Party (PP) is favourite to win in Spain's general election on 20 November.

The main plank of the PP's campaign has been to criticise the ruling Socialist Party for a 21% unemployment rate. To counter that they propose mild as milk policies for growth (encouraging small businesses, etc).

In practice the PP will stick to a strict austerity programme — just as they have done in local government, where they are now the biggest party.

Socialists and nuclear power

We continue our debate on the future of nuclear power with this article by Les Hearn. Les argues that technological developments, such as using thorium instead of uranium, can create a vastly more ecologically-friendly nuclear industry acceptable to socialists. In our next issue we will print an opposing view.

Why I support nuclear power as one of a range of alternatives to fossil fuels

Back in the 70s, like many on the left, I was alarmed by what seemed to be the cover-up of the risks of nuclear power in the 50s and 60s. The indiscriminate power of nuclear weapons to kill in large numbers also marked many on the left with a fear of nuclear energy. But, as Maynard Keynes put it, "when the facts change, I change my mind".

We only have one planet and it is overwhelmingly likely that "we" (or greedy capitalists, if you like) are altering its climate for the worse by returning carbon dioxide to the atmosphere a million times faster than it was originally locked away in fossil fuels. And, despite attempts to reduce carbon emissions, these are actually rising … by over 5% last year, from 29.0 to 30.6 gigatonnes (Gt or billion tonnes).

And, of the 13.7 Gt released by electricity generation, 11.2 Gt is "fixed" for the foreseeable future, since it will come from existing or planned fossil fuel power stations that will be operating in 2020.

The closure or cancellation of nuclear power stations makes this much worse, since these are the main proven alternative source of electricity. Countries which have reacted to recent scares, rather than evidence, include Japan, Germany, Malaysia, Thailand, Italy and Switzerland.

Truthfully, the potential risks of radiation are massively exaggerated by anti-nuclear groups in comparison with the actual risks of the fossil fuel industry to workers and the public. In particular, the environmental risks of radiation are minimal — wildlife is flourishing in the exclusion zone round Chernobyl and, as James Lovelock has pointed out, in the atom bomb test sites in the Pacific.

Furthermore, the difficulties of replacing nuclear power, let alone the whole fossil fuel industry, with renewables are minimised (see my article in *Solidarity* 203, 11 May — http://bit.ly/qffeKv).

CONTROL

It is said (by Theo Simon, Letters, *Solidarity* 204, 18 May —http://bit.ly/k8WOD9) that "nuclear power demands high security and central control", as if these were necessarily bad.

Central control would anyway be needed to construct tens of thousands of wind turbines, on- and offshore, and the new supergrid of thousands of kilometres which would be needed to get the electricity to the cities. Already, proposals to introduce new systems of pylons have provoked mass protests in Wales, Scotland, Somerset and the West Midlands. And putting cables underground would be ten times more expensive.

Apparently, I fail "to question the projected 'energy gap' which is being used to justify nuclear power expansion". The argument goes that, if the most wide-ranging programme of insulation and energy conservation is undertaken world-wide (the like of which has never been seen), then the electricity generated by nuclear power would not be needed. As the Spartans once said in a different context, if!

Once again, let's look at the reality of nuclear power. The worst accident of all time, Chernobyl, has killed 43 people. This was due to the criminal negligence of the USSR police state. 28 workers were fatally irradiated while bringing the reactor under control. 15 young people died of thyroid cancer, entirely avoidable had the bureaucrats issued potassium iodide tablets (as was done promptly in Japan recently). Other estimates of potential deaths range from 9,000 to 900,000 but even the lowest of these seems to be way too high. So far, no other deaths have been proved to be due to the Chernobyl disaster.

As Wade Allison (author of *Radiation and Reason*) states, the ability of living tissue to repair radiation damage has been wildly underestimated. In radiation treatment of cancers, healthy tissues receive up to five times the fatal dose of radiation but spread over several weeks, during which time they efficiently repair the damage.

Many accidents have occurred in nuclear power plants. In those resulting in radiation leaks, there have been … no deaths or even injuries among the public. A few workers have died, usually because they were close to the incident. Otherwise, nuclear workers are healthier than the general population. A 2% increased risk of cancers linked to radiation is dwarfed by a 24% decreased risk of death from other cancers, according to a Canadian study. It also found that nuclear workers lived longer than average. And this under capitalism!

I am accused of listing the objections to nuclear power but not attempting to answer many of them. In particular, in the areas of waste disposal, plant safety and cost, I fail to "see the reality of nuclear power within the context of a global capitalist economy". Trading content-free accusations, I might accuse others of failing to see the reality of renewable energy within the context etc. etc.

Of course, I did deal with plant safety and waste disposal. A recent *Physics World* (May 2011) shows that more modern designs would have survived both the Japanese earthquake and tsunami. These include better back-up generators and containment for molten fuel in case of a meltdown, and passive (i.e. not depending on a power supply) emergency cooling operated by gas pressure or gravity. In fact, modifications to the Fukushima model to reduce radiation leaks in case of an accident were proposed by scientists 30 years ago but rejected as too expensive. Meanwhile, other similar power plants survived the earthquake and tsunami undamaged.

On radioactive waste, I said that deep storage in stable strata was perfectly plausible. Reprocessing would reduce the amount and feed back fuel to nuclear plants. The relevance of the "global capitalist economy" to this is not clear, except that they won't pay for it. In any case, the danger of waste has been greatly overstated. Five metres of concrete would absorb all the radiation from anything. Wade Allison "would be perfectly happy" to have high-level waste buried 100 metres below his house, while James Lovelock has "offered to take the full output of a nuclear power station in my back yard."

ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives to fossil fuels consist of two proven technologies, nuclear and hydroelectric power (HEP), a host of promising but unproven ones, and the mirage (at present) of a vast reduction in energy demand.

All have environmental and/or health implications. HEP requires vast dams flooding arable land and wildlife habitats, disrupting river ecosystems, destroying estuarine fisheries, reducing the fertility of flood plains, and endangering lives in case of collapse.

The Three Gorges dam in China necessitated flooding 1000 towns and villages, and "removing" 1.4 million people. Since completion in 2006, the reservoir has been plagued by pollution and algae. The dam is silting up, while the extra weight of water is causing geological problems. Downstream, the reduction in flow has led to a drought affecting 300,000 people, with drinking water reservoirs containing only "dead water". Shipping can no longer use large stretches of the river. It is worrying that Switzerland is phasing out the nuclear power that provides 40% of its electricity, replacing it with HEP.

It is also worrying that Germany, the sixth biggest emitter of carbon dioxide, is phasing out nuclear power, increasing carbon emissions by 3%. If it can afford to do without the electricity from its nuclear plants, it should keep them open while closing down an equivalent number of fossil fuel plants, cutting CO2 emissions proportionately.

In Japan, phasing out nuclear power will cause massive shortfalls in energy. The optimistic scenarios of Energy-Rich Japan (ERJ — www.energyrichjapan.info) all involve substantial reductions in demand (so far untested), while some involve reductions in population — by up to 20%! Since an increase will be needed in order to care for the ageing population, this seems particularly unrealistic.

In particular, ERJ claims that transport energy can be reduced by 70% with hydrogen-powered vehicles. They don't mention the following problems. Hydrogen is inefficiently produced from fossil fuels; solar-powered electrolysis of water is even more expensive. Highly flammable hydrogen must be stored in pressurised tanks, no doubt to be released in traffic accidents. A new infra-structure for hydrogen supply would have to be built, "a matter for policy decisions and market forces" (ERJ) (!?). Fuel cells to "burn" the hydrogen use costly platinum catalysts which can be poisoned by impurities in the hydrogen or air, which is also needed; their reliability over long periods is unknown; they would easily freeze in cold weather; they would be a magnet for thieves. Incidentally, ERJ assumes that much of the hydrogen would be imported (from where?).

VAGUE

Other aspects of ERJ's schemes are equally vague. Much geothermal energy would be needed, though this technology is notoriously unreliable. Curiously, nowhere in 250-plus pages is there a mention of earthquakes or tsunamis!

It is difficult to avoid James Lovelock's conclusion that "only nuclear power can now [my emphasis] halt global warming" — but this is not to accept nuclear power as it is. The possibility of fail-safe thorium-powered reactors is ignored not only by the (capitalist) industry which will not or cannot afford the research costs but by the Left and environmentalists. Supported by eminent scientists such as Carlo Rubbia of CERN, thorium reactors do not have a chain reaction to go out of control. They rely on a stream of neutrons from a particle accelerator which could be instantly switched off. Using plentiful thorium, they can also "burn" other radioactive materials, including surplus bombs … and high level radioactive waste. Radioactive material decays into stable isotopes, usually lead. Plutonium takes about 100,000 years to reduce to 1/20 of its original amount. Thorium reactors accelerate this process greatly (Accelerated Transmutation of Waste), reducing the volume of waste and the time for which it would have to be kept safe.

A final point: Theo accuses me of ignoring the "proliferation argument", which he seems to equate with the simple possession of nuclear power. There are many difficult steps to building nuclear weapons and it is clear that these have not proliferated anything like as fast as civil nuclear power. More of a problem is terrorism and here too it is not clear that nuclear power plants are uniquely vulnerable and dangerous targets. More importantly, many conflicts are, and will be increasingly, over resources, particularly as the climate changes. Nuclear bombs won't be much use in these!

Yet more deaths in the UK fossil fuel industry (four workers killed in a Welsh oil refinery explosion in March; five coal miners killed in Wales and Yorkshire in September) should help put the supposed dangers of nuclear power in perspective. Multiply these figures by at least 1,000 worldwide. According to Environmentalists for Nuclear Energy (www.ecolo.org), environmental opposition to nuclear energy is the "greatest misunderstanding and mistake of the century". We should be demanding that nuclear power be expanded and improved, rather than phased out.

But let's demand the safest forms of nuclear power, as well as support for renewable energy research.

Is nuclear power safe?

What Trotskyists should know about today's young anarchists

Yves Coleman is a French revolutionary who helps publish the journal *Ni patrie ni frontières*. This is an extended version of an address he gave at the AWL's 2011 conference in which he criticised our recent polemics against anarchism.

"When I cook for the Occupy movement in London, I contribute to changing the world. " (An interviewee on RFI Radio)

As far as I know, the AWL is the only organisation in the European far-left which is trying to seriously debate with other reformist or revolutionary currents.

I don't share the AWL's dogmatic reverence toward Leninism and Trotskyism, but we have something important in common: the belief that discussions can be useful and fruitful as long as they are not led along sectarian and slanderous lines. I acknowledge your effort to deal with other currents of thought, even when I disagree totally with you.

Anarchist comrades should remember the virtues of political debates, particularly as Emma Goldman and Voltairine de Cleyre — to quote only two famous examples — participated in debates with socialists (Marxists) and were won over to anarchism through such debates!

So the question of debate is not where our disagreement regarding today's "anarchism" lies. It seems to me that your articles in *Solidarity* were too much centred on "old-style"19th-century anarchism and not on today's diverse, confused, libertarian and anarchist currents.

Through my work publishing the journal *Ni patrie ni frontières* (which, for almost 10 years, has published many anarchist and Marxist texts together in the same issue and on the same theme to stimulate debate and political reflection), I have had the occasion of meeting many young "anarchists" in book fairs, conferences, etc. What struck me is how much (generally) they ignore "their" classics: Proudhon, Bakunin, Stirner or Kropotkin. There are certainly many more points to be discussed, but I would like in this article to underline only five.

TRAINING

When Trotskyists discuss with young "anarchists", they should realise that they did not receive, and don't value, the same "training".

Trotskyists are generally trained in "party" "schools" where they learn about the history of the workers' movement and the basic laws of Marxist "science". That was the tradition until the 70s and 80s in France in Trotskyist groups. In general the Trotskyist press still puts the stress on the importance of a historical culture. That has also happened in the Spanish CNT before World War II, or in some traditional anarchist groups before the 1960s, but is no longer true as far as I know in Europe.

Young European "anarchists'" political culture is much more diverse : it derives from all sorts of radical or marginal films or documentaries, semi-political zines and music, from the anti-globalisation movement and from all sorts of tiny booklets reproduced in "infokiosks", etc.

I must also say that for those anarchists with a solid background in revolutionary history, there is absolutely no forgetting (nor is there is the slightest wish to minimise) the deeds and thoughts of the historical figure known as Leon Trotsky. You are not going to persuade these anarchists about anything concerning Kronstadt 1921 or Nestor Makhno, because the role of Trotsky in suppressing these revolutionary movements is both well known and well documented. The Trotskyists' lies, slanders, and distortions about these historical episodes mean that anarchists with a grasp of the historical record will be immune to your overtures, and with good reason. They see classical Trotskyism as part of the problem, and in no way part of the solution.

DIRECT ACTION NOW

Trotskyists should realize that young "anarchists" today want action *now*. And by "action now" they don't mean a long "primitive accumulation" of militants (or cadres) to build the party (a process traditional Trotskyists enjoy so much).

The most "physical" (and sometimes "macho") anarchists want to confront physically the cops, to throw Molotov cocktails, to smash the face of fascists, to destroy the headquarters of some bourgeois party, etc. The more "peaceful" ones (but sometimes people who are also in the first group) want to build new human relationships here and now. That means organising squats or communes; questioning gender relationships now and not in a distant future under communism; cultivating vegetables to have healthy food; "skipping" good food from supermarket dustbins to distribute it or cook it; cooking food for homeless or poor people; supporting illegal workers' struggles concretely; occupying unemployment agencies; organising unemployed or precarious workers; creating cooperatives; discussing all sorts of ways of changing their daily life here and now.

NO "THEORY OF EVERYTHING"

Trotskyists should realise that young "anarchists" are not looking for an all-explaining science as Trotskyists are.

They have a spontaneous distrust of "Marxist-Leninist" Stalinism (which is a rather good thing), but they also think Marx, Lenin and Trotsky are boring guys who lived 70, 100 or 150 years ago and can't deal with today's realities. They obviously hate Lenin and Trotsky for Kronstadt, the repression of anarchists in Russia, etc., but more than everything they are not, unlike Trotskyists, looking for a coherent, scientific point of view. They are inspired by different, heterogeneous, ideas, which seem to Marxists totally incoherent and sometimes even reactionary.

They can be inspired by postmodern or confused multiculturalist intellectuals, as well as by obscure vegan or pre-ecologist thinkers. But you can often be fooled because when they write about "economy" (which every Marxist knows is not a separate reality but interlinked with human social relations), they often use a vague Marxist vocabulary which may lead you to think they are easy to "win" to your beloved Marxist "science". This is a total illusion.

Generally, the anarchist press places much more value on "anecdotes" about daily life and small-scale experiences than most Trotskyist newspapers. Young anarchists value more creative forms of propaganda: street theater, videos on the internet, and large cultural events, which they think are as effective as traditional meetings, newspapers, or leaflets. This is linked with the tradition of the "ateneos" (sorts of cultural centers/libraries, etc.) in the Spanish CNT.

CONCRETE RESULTS

Trotskyists should realise young "anarchists" want to be active in their own milieu — their own community, their own housing estate, their own workplace — and see concrete results of their action now.

That means they don't give a damn about selling papers or distributing leaflets if it is not linked to a concrete change in people's lives. It means that they don't fancy going miles away from their home to distribute leaflets to people they have never met. Or if they do go far away, it's much more to learn about unknown realities than to propagate a specific ideology to supposedly ignorant workers, peasants or oppressed people.

What they do and propose, even on the basis of confused slogans and politics, resonates among young precarious workers or students, influenced by the anti-globalisation movement ideology (the "indignados" is a good example) and they are like a fish in water in these social movements because they don't want to impose an ideology.

MILITANCY AT WORK?

Trotskyists should also know that young anarchists have a different view of militancy at work.

Trotskyists have traditionally tried to get jobs in big factories or other large workplaces, and they have occasionally succeeded in getting positions inside the trade union bureaucracy in the public sector (or, less often, in the private sector).

Young anarchists are often very precarious (as all the members of their generation), working in call centres and temporary jobs. That may explain why they are not interested in long-term strategies for building tendencies inside trade unions or in trade union routine, and are much more in direct action in their community more than at their workplace, which is always changing. There also some anarchists (not all of them of course, because some anarchists share Trotskyist tactics of infiltrating the trade union bureaucracy) who think that trade unions represent barriers and brakes on forms of self-organisation among workers, and in many cases are overtly hostile to any autonomous currents that have emerged among radical workers.

This little article may give you the impression that young "anarchists " are hot-blooded, hyper-sensitive, empathetic and funny individuals, while Trotskyists are cold-blooded, insensitive, indifferent and boring persons. There is a bit of truth in both of these mutually shared clichés.

So if Trotskyists want to discuss seriously with today's young anarchists they (as well as their organisations) should start by questioning themselves, along the lines I have just described. Who knows — something interesting may happen.

Searchlight splits from Hope not Hate

By Jack Yates

The anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* announces in its October issue that "Nick Lowles, the prime creator of the very successful Hope Not Hate [HnH] campaign, decided to stand down as editor." Lowles has been replaced by former (and founding) editor Gerry Gable.

All fair enough, you'd think. However, not only has Lowles stood down, he has completely disappeared from the pages of the magazine. Also notable by their absence are Matthew Collins and Graeme Atkinson, both prominent *Searchlight* associates. The only British contributors to October's *Searchlight* are Gerry and Sonia Gable. Add to this the absence of any links from the magazine's website to HnH and it looks like more than an amicable parting of ways has occurred.

Why is this important? Gable and Lowles, through *Searchlight* and HnH, represent one of the two distinct trends of "official" anti-fascism (the other being the SWP-run UAF). Together, these groups benefit from the vast bulk of trade union funding and support. They represent "anti-fascism" per se in the imagination of most activists.

If there has been a sharp political disagreement at the top of the organisation, then the unions which put up large amounts of money and the activists who pound the streets with leaflets deserve to know about it. Carefully-worded editorials and suggestion by omission do not add up to political accountability.

Although *Searchlight* provides useful information and intelligence, it has always been a factional publication, representing and promoting a particular brand of anti-fascism. Real debate and discussion on tactics and strategy for the anti-fascist movement rarely grace its pages and unlike UAF — which at least goes through the motions of holding annual "conferences" and maintaining a steering committee — *Searchlight*'s campaigning arm appears to have no structure at all.

At a time when the fortunes of the British National Party look grim, and when the English Defence League's support seems to be plateauing out, we need a serious discussion about what is to come and how to counteract it. The present social, economic and political conditions are just as favourable for far-right/fascist regroupment as they are for building the labour movement and socialist organisation.

Neither of the official anti-fascist campaigns are up to the task of seriously assessing, mobilising the working class against and combating the rise threats to come.

A weakened and divided *Searchlight*/HnH that continues to benefit from trade union and activist support can only be a block on the road to effective, working-class anti-fascism.

It is good that Qaddafi's gone!

By Martin Thomas

On Sunday 6 November we got a small down-payment towards the debate on Libya between AWL and the Socialist Party which we have been demanding, and the SP has been evading, since SP leader Peter Taaffe put his pen to work on the first of two long (and inaccurate!) polemics against us on the subject back in April.

At a session on Libya at the SP's annual weekend event, on 5-6 November, Mark Osborn and I intervened from the floor, for AWL.

Bear in mind that the SP's annual weekend event is not like AWL's "Ideas for Freedom" event. Sessions are almost never set up as debates, and guest speakers of any sort are rare. Almost all sessions are long lectures from members of the SP leadership, followed by a few questions.

Lectures are sometimes very valuable, but only if they give listeners facts and ideas they hadn't come across before. That is rarely the case with SP speakers, and wasn't the case with Niall Mulholland, the speaker on Libya.

Peter Taaffe was at the weekend event, and not speaking in another session at the time, but chose not to come to the session. Asked, as he arrived at the event, whether SP would debate AWL, he muttered: "We have debated...", and quickly made off.

OVERTHROW

Mulholland conceded that the overthrow of Qaddafi has created openings for the working class in Libya. He was enthusiastic about the initial anti-Qaddafi protests in Benghazi in February. But he pointedly did not support the actual overthrow.

The overthrow of Qaddafi, he claimed, was much less worthy of support than the overthrow of Ben Ali in Tunisia, or of Mubarak in Egypt.

The new regime in Libya, the National Transitional Council, is bourgeois. (That is true, of course, also of the military-run regimes in Tunisia and Egypt since their dictators fled). Decisively, Mulholland claimed that the NATO bombing of Qaddafi's forces had spoiled the revolution.

We argued it was wrong to fail to take a position independent of the big powers — to be cornered by NATO into saying no whenever they said yes — and so to let your inclination to support the people of Libya be overwhelmed by your anxiety to have an uncomplicated blanket "no" to NATO.

We do not support or endorse the cops when, on occasion, finding themselves between anti-fascists and a more numerous fascist crowd, they turn against the fascists rather than the anti-fascists. But we also do not "call on" the cops to stop fighting the fascists. It was similarly false to "call on" the NATO powers to stop bombing Qaddafi, and to let that "call" overwhelm support for the people of Libya.

Several SPers replied from the floor, and Niall Mulholland from the platform. Their points included:

- *The outcome has left imperialism stronger. Imperialism now has a bridgehead in the troubled Middle East.* (The Egyptian army, receiving more aid from the USA than any other army in the world except Israel's, is a more reliable "bridgehead" for the USA! We do not yet know which of the European powers vying for influence in Tripoli will come out best. In any case "imperialism" cannot be equated with one rival big power or another. And our criterion should not be what is worst for vaguely-defined "imperialism" in general, but what is best for the working people).
- *The bourgeois press said that Qaddafi would have carried through a massacre in Benghazi if NATO had not bombed. That is doubtful; and in any case a massacre followed, with over 30,000 dying between March and the eventual fall of Qaddafi.* (Of course it would have been better if Qaddafi had gone quietly. He didn't. So? You submit? Civil wars cost lives. The evidence from Libyans who were in Benghazi at the time, and from Qaddafi's own declarations, was that Qaddafi would have slaughtered great numbers. If somehow the rebellion had survived that bloodletting, and managed to win through without NATO help, the civil war would certainly have been longer and cost even more lives. If 30,000 died, the vast majority were civil-war deaths between the factions in Libya. Even Qaddafi's gang, who would almost certainly exaggerate, blame no more than 2,000 on NATO).
- *NATO's intervention is in no way analogous to cops clashing with fascists because it is the normal job of the police to deal with thugs, and even a workers' government would have police (of a different sort).* (A workers' government would also, if it could, give military aid — again, of a different sort — to revolutions in other countries).
- *Counter-revolution has already happened in Libya, with the NATO intervention.* (As if the initial rebellion in Benghazi were a pure independent workers' movement. Actually, Qaddafi's dictatorship was such that no workers' movement of any sort existed at the time of the initial rebellion. Only now can an organised workers' movement emerge. It may be overwhelmed, in the end, by the Islamist forces in the NTC — who assuredly are Islamists for some other reason than that NATO wants them to be Islamist! — but the openings now exist).

The SP should respond to our demands for a properly organised debate — speakers from both sides, an agreed chair, and so on.

Debating Israel/Palestine

By Liam McNulty

On Tuesday 1 November the Alliance for Workers' Liberty debated Socialist Appeal at the Marxist Discussion Group at Cambridge on "Which way forward for Israel and Palestine?"

Such debates are the sign of a healthy socialist movement and contribute towards the collective sharpening of political ideas. It is a pity that similar debates are not more common on a left often characterised by sectarian sniping and hysteria.

On a superficial level, the positions of the AWL and Socialist Appeal on Israel/Palestine appear quite similar. Both organisations take a class-based approach to the issue and are critical of the politics of boycott on the left. Both stress the need to link up the struggles of Israeli and Palestinian workers and reject the idea that Israelis should be lumped together and branded as uniquely evil.

However, during the course of the debate fundamental differences emerged. John Pickard from Socialist Appeal opened with a lucid description of the oppression facing Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and the discrimination suffered by Arabs living in Israel — very little of which we would disagree with.

However, he gave the impression that Palestinian national oppression will dissolve automatically in the course of class-struggle on economic issues. Socialist Appeal has nothing to say about the immediate problems — the lack of a Palestinian state — and offers only one solution: socialism!

As the AWL speaker, Paul Hampton, pointed out, as much as we all want socialism, we need to say more than "'jam tomorrow". If national differences could be solved by day-to-day struggles over economic issues, national conflicts such as Northern Ireland would have been settled several times over with strikes over outdoor relief, the postal service and the NHS.

The issue of national self-determination requires democratic demands which deal with the root of the problem and provide a basis on which to unite workers on a political level. Otherwise, national differences risk shattering the movement when the issue of self-determination inevitably arises.

That is why the AWL advocates "two nations, two states" as a basis to unite the Israeli and Palestinian working classes. This demand recognises that the fundamental issue facing the Palestinians is the denial of their right to self-determination. It also recognises the right of Israelis to their own state, which exists and has existed for 63 years. Only on the basis of these mutual rights can workers in both nations be united.

Socialist Appeal's objection to the AWL was the argument that a Palestinian state under capitalism will not solve the problems of capitalist exploitation. But as Lenin pointed out in *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, substituting the issue of economic independence of nations under capitalism for the political question of self-determination "is just as intelligent as if someone, in discussing the programmatic demand for the supremacy of parliament...were to expound the perfectly correct conviction that big capital dominates in a bourgeois country, whatever the regime in it."

DRAINING

No-one in the AWL argues that political self-determination for Palestinians will be the end of the matter. It will, however, be a qualitative step forward and brings with it the possibility of draining the poison of national oppression and uniting the working-class from a position of relative formal equality.

Socialist Appeal also used Leon Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution to argue that "there is no solution under capitalism" because democratic tasks can only be solved if the struggle of the working class immediately leads to socialism.

But Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution was based on a concrete examination of the relations between classes in Russia (and later in China). On this basis Trotsky established that the bourgeoisie in those countries could not solve questions of political democracy because they were socially and numerically weak. Notwithstanding the fact that Trotsky said little about the issue of national self-determination in relation to this theory, and that the AWL argues that it is the working class who can solve the Israel/Palestine question, the Socialist Appeal line is "Trotsky frozen", ignoring his warning that permanent revolution is not a suprahistorical master-key, applicable in all situations.

In response to Paul Hampton's arguments, John Pickard was left with little option but to mischaracterise the AWL position as one of pessimism regarding the possibilities of socialism. This was rhetorical bluster to disguise the fact that the Socialist Appeal line did not deal comprehensively with the necessity of transitional democratic demands to address the immediate issues facing Palestinian workers.

But the differences between AWL and Socialist Appeal were thrashed out in a serious but comradely fashion, both by the platform speakers and by members of the audience. It is a credit to the organisers of the Cambridge Marxist Discussion Group that such open discussion can take place, and we hope that it will continue well into the future.

Unison: massive vote for strikes

By Ira Berkovic

Members of Unison, the country's biggest public sector trade union, have overwhelmingly voted in favour of strike action on 30 November.

78% of those voting in the union's local government section voted for strikes, while 82% of health workers voted for the walkout. As well as being a decisive result in general, the figures explode the myth that NHS workers are automatically less militant and more reluctant to take action than their local government counterparts.

Scottish teachers' union EIS has also returned its ballot result, registering an 82% vote in favour of strikes on a 54% turnout.

The turnouts in Unison's ballots were low (30% in local government and 25% in the NHS), but no lower than is usual for ballots in a union of Unison's size (and higher as a proportion than the number of people who voted for the Tories at the last general election). Part of the reason for the low turnout is the anti-union laws, which force unions to conduct their ballots through the post rather than in workplaces. Postal ballots atomise the voting process and abstract it from day-to-day experiences at work. The low turnout is also, in part, down to the union itself. Wherever good work was done to build the vote, it was driven at branch or workplace level with little or no support from the union nationally. Branches relied on neighbouring branches for resources and materials rather than the national union.

The decisive ballot result by no means suggests that we can just buckle up and wait for 30 November. There is still a fight to be had in Unison over what form the action will take, with the union's right-wing suggesting that NHS workers should take a token two hours of strike action rather than a full day's walkout.

A revised offer from the government, floated on 3 November, looks unlikely to prevent the action. The offer involved the protection of existing terms and conditions for anyone within 10 years of retirement and a slight change to the "accrual rates" — the rate at which pensions benefits are built up – meaning the new career-average schemes would be slightly more generous. It is positive that the mere threat of strike action has forced the government into these token concessions; it is a glimpse of what might be achieved with more sustained action. Union officials like the GMB's Brian Strutton called the new offer "a step in the right direction"; if that's the case, the step is tiny. Defending the status quo should be the bottom-line negotiation position for unions.

Union leaders don't share that bottom-line. The rush into scheme-by-scheme negotiations (rather than across-the-board talks) where unions are much more susceptible to "divide-and-rule" tactics from the government, was mainly led by Unison's Dave Prentis and strongly suggests that he is willing to accept some of government's premises.

Rank-and-file activists must strengthen branch organisation and continue building independent strike committees to provide a counterweight to people who will, at best, mislead the dispute and, at worse, derail it entirely.

"Our aim is to close every building"

By Ed Whitby, Newcastle Unison (pc)

Newcastle Unison stewards met on Monday 7 November to form plans for 30 November.

The mood was upbeat. There was discussion about getting a clearer message to members to counter the press reports that the strikes are not necessary.

We agreed to set up a strike committee involving ordinary stewards rather than just senior branch officers or those on full-time release.

On the day we want to close every building and every service. By putting out a strong message that we will picket every building, we hope that even in the academies, where the unions may feel less confident, we can pressure head-teachers into closing the school. The message is if management don't close it, we'll picket it.

The TUC is organising a march on the strike day across the iconic Tyne Bridge. Unfortunately the propose to assemble at 10.30am (which doesn't leave very long for picketing) and the rally is somewhat out-of-the-way. We wil lobby the TUC for a later start, and a city-centre location for the rally.

The branch agreed to work with other unions through the Public Service Alliance to build a day of action in the city centre on Saturday 19 November. Our want to get 10 reps from each union branch in the town centre with stalls across the city centre, explaining the strike, making links with cuts and other attacks. We can't rely on TUC or union full-timers to make this happen.

We'll be calling on all activists — including from the anti-cuts networks, the Free Education Network, and Occupy Newcastle folk — to unite with us.

Marciano Flora must stay!

By a *Tubeworker* supporter

John Laing, a cleaning contractor hired by London Overground, recently tricked nearly 30 of its employees — including an RMT union rep — into reporting for fake overtime, and subsequently handed them over to the UK Borders Agency.

The workers, who were told to report to a meeting in a school hall on 25 October, were arrested by UKBA cops. They were detained and told they had to produce papers to verify their immigration status. Most workers had valid papers, and were later released. However, one worker — Marciano Flora — now faces deportation.

Marciano has lived in the UK for five years and has a family here. Although his current work visa had expired, he had already applied for leave to remain and explained to UKBA officers that he had a letter from the Home Office verifying that his application was being processed. Despite this, he was arrested, taken to a detention centre in Dover and told he must leave the country by 9 November.

The RMT is mounting a campaign against John Laing, who say they will not rehire even those workers who the UKBA released. The move is typical of cleaning contractors who routinely use immigration law as a tool for union-busting. As well as organising to defend these members, the RMT and other unions must campaign for Britain's racist and anti-working class immigration controls to be scrapped.

Workers should have the same freedom to travel the globe as the wealth we create currently enjoys.

• Online petition: marciano.epetitions.net
• Protest: John Laing's Allington House building, 150 Victoria Street (opposite Victoria station), Wednesday 16 November, 8am

Carlisle cleaners strike

350 RMT members working for Carlisle Cleaning and Support Services will take 48 hours of strike action from 12.01am on Friday 11 November as they fight for living wages.

There will be picket lines at major stations along the Virgin West Coast Mainline. The workers held a solid 24-hour strike two weeks ago.

Unite stewards oppose Southampton deal

By Darren Bedford

Unite and Unison members at Southampton council are currently voting on an offer from management that could end the long-running dispute over pay cuts.

The deal, which contains some reductions in the scale of cuts for each grade of workers, also involves the unions calling off an ongoing legal challenge to the council's cuts package.

While Unison, the majority union at the council, is not putting out a recommendation to its members on how to vote on the deal, Unison branch secretary Mike Tucker told the *Southampton Daily Echo* that, while not formal votes were taken at recent members' meetings to discuss the deal, "the mood at the meeting was overwhelmingly to reject the council proposal."

If the deal is rejected, strikes — suspended since mid-October — could resume.

Unite's shop stewards voted to recommend rejection. Unite regional organiser Ian Woodland told *Solidarity*:

"Like Unison, our negotiating team came out of the last round of talks not planning to make a recommendation one way or another on the deal. But when we took it back to our stewards they were clear that there hadn't been enough movement from management. They were also particularly opposed to the condition the council was putting on us that we had to drop our legal claims, and for those reasons felt we had to recommend rejection of the deal to our membership.

"I think that was a very strong and principled position that our stewards took."

• A longer interview with Ian Woodland will appear in *Solidarity* 225

Sparks fight to maintain rank-and-file control

By Darren Bedford

Over 1,000 Unite members at Balfour Beatty Engineering Services, the construction industry contractor leading the charge to rip up the collective agreement, could strike on 7 December.

The strike is part of a campaign to defend the Joint Industry Board, the union-negotiated agreement governing pay, terms and conditions for electricians in the construction industry.

Unite's ballot, forced from the union by months of rank-and-file pressure, closes on 28 November.

Many rank-and-file activists are frustrated by how long the union has taken to move; 7 December is the day on which BBES plans to unilaterally impose its new contracts, prompting some to argue that the strike will be too little too late.

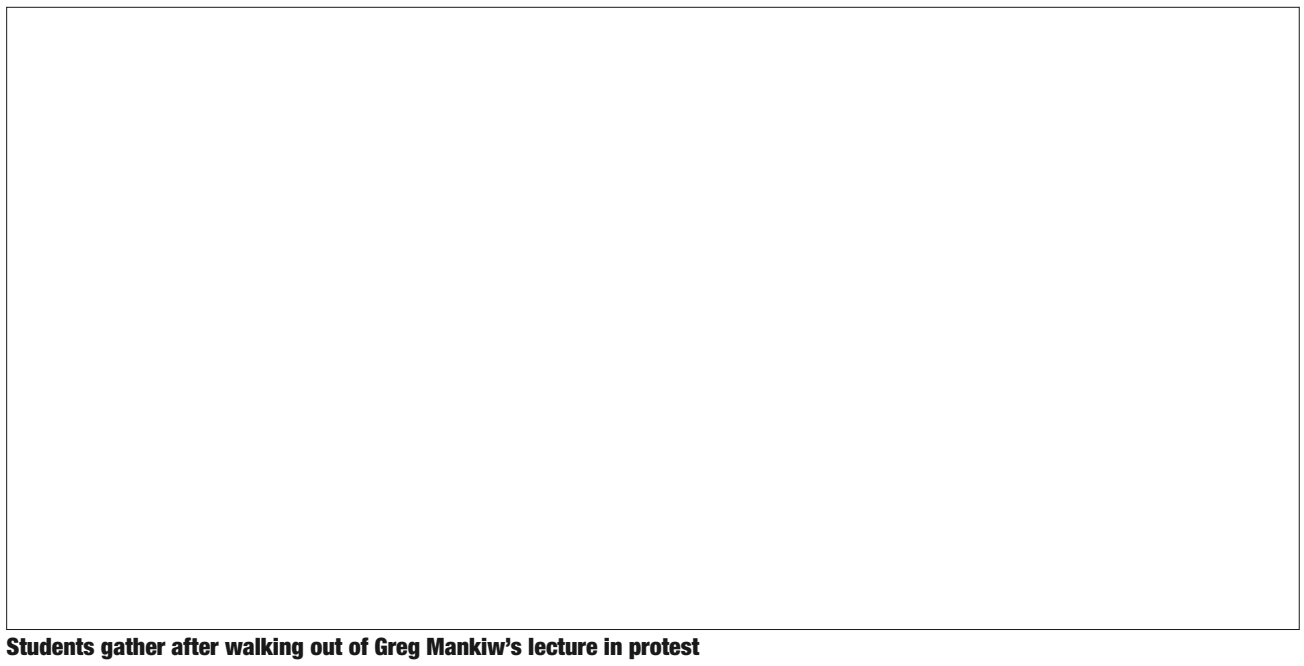
In the run-up to the construction workers' national demonstration on 9 November there was further wrangling over what tactics the campaign should employ. Unite officials wanted the demonstration to conclude in a lobby of parliament, with the sparks' rank-and-file committee arguing for a more direct-action oriented approach. A rank-and-file campaign newsletter argued: "This dispute will be won by stopping production on the big jobs — not by appealing to the good nature of politicians. If we have got thousands of angry sparks in the middle of the City on 9 November, we should do more than just listen to speeches; we should physically close down the sites: The Pinnacle, The Shard, Blackfriars Station, Crossrail.

"This dispute has been led by the rank and file from the beginning, and we will run it on 9 November as well."

AWL industrial bulletins

***Pensions Fightback* (30 Nov strike bulletin)** tinyurl.com/novemberstrikebulletin
***Public Disorder* (local government workers)** tinyurl.com/publicdisorderbulletin
***Germ's Eye View* (health workers)** tinyurl.com/germseyeview
Lambeth *Council Worker* (local government workers in Lambeth) workersliberty.org/lambethcouncilworker
***Tubeworker* (London Underground)** workersliberty.org/tubeworker

Solidarity
& Workers' Liberty



Students gather after walking out of Greg Mankiw's lecture in protest

Harvard students take on neo-liberal economics

By Gabriel Bayard and Rachel Sandalow-Ash

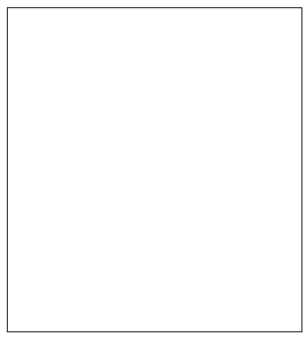
On Wednesday 2 November there was a citywide education walkout in Boston against rising costs of education.

Student debt has just exceeded $1 trillion in the US, which is more than credit card debt.

We walked out of our course (Economics 10) because we found it was emblematic of the ideology that has created the economic collapse. Our tutor, Gregory Mankiw, was an advisor to Bush Junior and now advises Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

Republican administrations are known for cutting taxes on the wealthy while not doing anything for the poor, and the financial crisis took place at the end of the Bush administration. It was a result of 30 years of deregulation of the financial markets and rising income inequality with cuts to social services and tax breaks for the very rich, starting with Reagan.

On 2 November 70 students at Harvard University (near Boston, USA) students walked out of a lecture by prominent right-wing economist Greg Mankiw in protest at his "bias" and in solidarity with the "Occupy" movement.



Greg Mankiw

Harvard has historically been a training ground for people who go on to be the elite. Harvard grads become very important people who go on to do very bad things to our financial system.

Mankiw teaches us from his own textbook and doesn' t use other journal articles. So we don' t see other perspectives or rigorous debate. It would be good to bring in a greater diversity of reading and views.

We wanted to walk out and raise the debate, to communicate to students that instead of taking what our professor says for granted we should think critically.

We' re not opposed to Mankiw teaching his point of view at Harvard. But he teaches only his point of view to introductory economics classes of over 700 students a year.

We plan an Occupy Harvard rally and march around Harvard yard. We will be stopping in front of the Economics department and doing a protest there.

We are pushing against the corporatization of Harvard as a whole. We are pushing for Harvard to treat its workers and use its $32 billion endowment in a socially responsible way.

Harvard has a responsibility to use its money to create a university for the 99% and not a corporation for the 1%. They outsource their money to hedge funds, one of which has been grabbing up land in Africa in the hope of gaining natural resources. It' s a non-transparent process. There is another venture capital firm that purchases hotels around the US, with a proven track record of mistreating staff, several of their hotels have gone on strike.

CRITICAL

A "university for the 99%" would be transparent in its endowment, invest in a responsible manner, be fair with its unions.

It would teach its courses in a way that promotes critical thinking and doesn' t just teach people to accept the way that financial systems and the world is currently run; it would encourage access to education for students of any background; it would not lobby against the Higher Education Transparency Act which would oblige them to disclose what they do with their money.

The student movement has been active in the occupy movement.

The main issues in the student movement are cuts to public universities around the country which have resulted in increased cost of living and health and decreased financial aid. It' s tied in with issues of equality.

There has a march in solidarity with Occupy Oakland.

Is the occupy movement' s vagueness a weakness or a strength? We think it' s both. If we were to set up a list of demands, we would headline socialisation of our healthcare system. We think that regulation of the financial markets is necessary to prevent speculation on people' s homes and lives; and we think that taxes should be raised on the 1% and we should be investing more money in education and less money in wars.

Corporate influence is a major problem in the US and there should be steps taken to limit that.

Politicians talk about cutting taxes because that sounds good and then they' ll say, "oh no we have a budget crisis, we have to cut social services". They create budget crises and resolve them by cutting social services for the elderly and the poor.

There should be more investment in green jobs, education, socialised healthcare; raising the capital gains taxed which is only at 15% which is significantly lower than the tax on a lot of other people; we should create jobs.

We would like to see politicians start reacting more concretely to the occupy movement.

Occupy movement activists support the labour movements and student movements in the UK. We need to bridge the gaps between countries.

• Abridged from: bit.ly/virgF4

Oakland general strike: "a sense of the possible"

By Isaac Steiner (Solidarity USA)

On 2 November, tens of thousands of people responded to a call for a "general strike" from the General Assembly of Occupy Oakland in California. Tens of thousands of protesters marched on the city' s port, forming flying pickets which were respected by members of the International Longshore Workers' Union (ILWU), some using a contractual loophole that allows them to refuse to cross picket lines and others using health and safety loopholes to refuse to work.

The general strike and national solidarity actions, built in under a week and with the severe deficit of practical knowledge in the tactic that' s to be expected after a drought of over sixty years, has to be judged a success.

In raw numbers, it didn't' t match the giant "Immigrant Spring" of 2006, but the impact of this day on political consciousness and sense of the possible, in the United States and internationally, is enormous. Two months ago, it was unthinkable that there would be an open-ended protest encamped in downtown Oakland. One month ago, it was unthinkable that the infant Occupation would muster a General Assembly of 2,000 — much less overwhelmingly pass an ambitious call for a general strike. One week ago, it was unthinkable that this call would be met with success.

The strike was about the right to assemble and practice the novel form of organization used at this stage of the movement — securing and defending the democratic right upon which greater rights can be won. That right has been secured. It would seem that the failure of New York City to clear Zucotti Park and the failure of Oakland to prevent the retaking of Oscar Grant Plaza are two major tactical blunders on the part of the ruling class. The potential to crush and demoralise the Occupations while they were in a relatively immature phase was lost.

The Occupy movement as a whole has won a tremendous victory in reframing politics in the United States. The Oakland general strike has introduced a new element — acting on the special *social power* of the working class to stop production, rather than just our numerical strength.

It was also the most successful example yet of bridging the physical occupation site with a mobilisation of its widespread support in the city. The general strike balanced this dynamic — recognizing the irreplaceable political role of the occupation (at this point) while not sucking all activity into maintaining the occupation.

STRATEGIC

As a strategic orientation begins to develop, political differences will become more clear.

These differences may initially sprout from tactics-elevated-to-strategy (like "pacifists" vs "anti-pacifists" — which both treat the use, or abstention from using, physical force as some kind of holy principle). A broad movement will have both present, will be led by neither, and would make tactical choices that include "property destruction" as a means to an end (for example, mass squatting or workplace occupation).

Occupy Oakland is also, by far, the most multiracial and multinational Occupy I' ve seen yet (although not representative of the working class of the city). There are surely lessons in how to advance beyond "representational" and symbolic approaches to building an anti-racist movement into truly linking with, incorporating and strengthening movements that are already taking up issues of institutional racism.

In the short term, the main task for Oakland will be evaluating the successes and weaknesses of the strike effort, bringing in new leaders, and identifying a medium-term strategy for expanding the Occupation movement in the city. For the time being, Oakland make take a leadership role nationally, in the way that New York has provided.

Whatever happens, the terrain is much more favourable for our side than it was just a week ago.

• Abridged from the Solidarity US website: bit.ly/sK10gY