

workers power 5

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

EUROPE RISES UP



We should do it here too!

Inside

- Outrage rises over vicious Tory attacks on the poor
- Ed Miliband - Red Ed or just another Labour leader?
- Europe shakes as millions strike against the cuts

ACTION!**Tories squabble over military spending cuts**

A FEUD has broken out between Liam Fox, Defence Minister and Cameron over the Strategic Defence and Security Review, which could see significant cuts to military spending. Fox sent an angry letter to Cameron, which was leaked to the press, outlining his worries about "draconian cuts".

In fact Fox wants more money for the military so he can buy new aircraft carriers. The project is worth £5.2 billion and could provide 10,000 jobs. Of course socialists want to see more jobs created, but not so the military can bomb other peoples' countries.

Fox says he is concerned that our troops will suffer if the cuts are made since they are at war, but the best way of helping these soldiers is to end the war and get them out of Afghanistan.

Not a single penny should be spent on the British military's brutal imperialist wars abroad.

Swedish racists face determined resistance

A MASS MOVEMENT is growing in Sweden in response to the shock election success of the racist Sweden Democrat party.

They gained 20 seats in recent parliamentary elections, doubling their 2006 result to 5.7 per cent with 340,000 votes.

A teenage woman called a protest on Facebook and there were also demonstrations in Malmö, Gothenburg and around the country. Tens of thousands attended, and there are many plans for more anti-racist protests and events this month.

The Sweden Democrats support tighter controls on immigration and the repatriation of refugees and migrants.

Although excluded from the ruling centre-right coalition, anti-racists say that the ruling 'Moderate Party' will rely on the Sweden Democrats to push through attacks on jobs, public services and migrant communities.

For more information on Sweden, go to fifthinternational.org

What about the Justice-Factor? Let Gamu stay!

X-FACTOR FANS and anti-racists have joined calls to stop the deportation of singer Gamu Nhengu to Zimbabwe.

The 19 year-old TV show contestant was rejected by judge Cheryl Cole despite faultless singing and poor performances from her rivals.

Cole – who was accused of assaulting and racially abusing a black toilet attendant in 2003 – is unpopular with fans who believe racism affected her judgment.

They also accuse X-Factor bosses of fixing the competition, because Gamu's visa was due to expire – although the show's management have denied the charges.

Over 240,000 joined a Facebook group in protest at Cole's decision to fail Gamu's audition.

Hundreds of supporters in her Scottish hometown joined protests for her to stay. One of Gamu's supporters, Melissa said: "She is only trying to make a better life for herself. If we can help then so be it."

ANTI CAPITALISM

RESISTING THE ATTACKS ON THE WORKING CLASS – BUILDING THE SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

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- UNITE THE RESISTANCE TO THE TORY CUTS
- BUILD A COALITION OF RESISTANCE
- THE FIGHT FOR WORLD REVOLUTION TODAY

WITH SPEAKERS INCLUDING:

- JERRY HICKS, UNITE LEADER CANDIDATE
- PAUL MACKNEY, COALITION OF RESISTANCE
- ROMAN BIRKE, AUSTRIAN STUDENT MOVEMENT

6-7 NOVEMBER 2010
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DEMONSTRATE

20th

OCTOBER

STOP THE CUTS

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Speakers include:

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March from Lincoln Inn's Fields WC2, 5pm
(Called by Camden Trades Council)

Rally outside Downing Street, 6pm
(Called by Coalition of Resistance)

ON THE DAY OF THE SPENDING REVIEW



EDITORIAL

We need an autumn of action against Tory cuts

All across Europe, working class people are angry. Angry at job losses. Angry at VAT hikes. Angry at cuts in benefits that throw the poorest on to the streets. Angry that the bankers and bosses who caused the crisis are still getting billions in bonuses and profits, while governments try to make us pay for their crisis.

No wonder millions took strike action and marched all over Europe.

Strikes

Ten million struck in Spain on 29 September. Three million marched in France on 2 October, with a general strike planned for the 12th.

Workers in Britain are angry too. This rotten Tory government, with a cabinet stuffed full of millionaires, backed all the way by the Lib Dem hypocrites, has announced a series of cuts that will push the poorest into misery. And there is worse to come on 20 October, when the "spending review" is announced.

Already Cameron and Osborne - whose smooth exteriors cannot quite conceal their deep seated Etonian arrogance - have announced a series of sickening measures.

A cap on benefits will axe over £90 per week from the income of 50,000 of the poorest families in Britain. A limit on housing benefit will leave landlords free to charge rack rents while poor tenants are kicked out of their homes.

And this is on top of cuts in public sector jobs which will throw 600,000 local and central government workers and 700,000 private sector workers straight on to the dole. No won-

der the Tories are also determined to restrict access to benefits.

Building work at 715 schools and on 1,300 playgrounds has been stopped. Higher education funding will be cut by 35 per cent.

An historic attack

This is just a taste of what's to come. Osborne's Comprehensive Spending Review will mark out where the axe will fall in £82 billion of cuts over the next four years. The programme will shrink most government departments by around 30 per cent.

This is historic. Since 1950 there have only been two periods when spending was cut for two successive years - the Con-Dems want to cut it for six years in a row. The young, the sick and the elderly will foot the bulk of another £4 billion of benefit cuts, to add to the £11 billion slashed in June.

All the more reason why the labour and trade union movement needs to respond with an historic wave of strikes, occupations and marches to stop these cuts and make it impossible for this government to go ahead. We need to start with a one-day general strike like in France and Spain.

TUC

But the leader of the TUC, Brendan Barber has even ruled out a march until the spring! And Derek Simpson, outgoing leader of Unite, our biggest union, has even insulted the fighting tradition of the British working class, from the miners' strike to the poll tax, by claiming that we are not capable of rebellion "like the French or the Greeks".

And Labour's new leader Ed

Miliband may have beaten his brother with the votes of ordinary trade unionists but he lost no time in denouncing strikes as "irresponsible".

Anti-cuts committees

Fortunately there is an alternative to this counsel of despair. We can take advantage of the TUC congress decision to coordinate action and, without waiting for Brendan Barber's say-so, set up anti-cuts committees all across Britain.

We should build these committees, drawing in delegates from every workplace and union, opening them up to the whole of the working class: youth and elderly, unemployed and working, black and white. As well as delivering solidarity to striking workers and organising protests, the committees can help workers overcome "moderate" union leaders when they drag their feet or sell us out.

Coordinate resistance

Backed by Tony Benn, and several militant union leaders, the Coalition of Resistance has called a conference on 27 November. It could be a great opportunity to unite on a national level. But it must be a working conference, where decisions for action are taken and a leadership elected to carry them out. While local and sectional disputes can defeat individual cuts, the government that is driving them forward can only be defeated nationally.

And that is our aim. This government has no mandate whatsoever for this onslaught. Neither Tories nor Lib-Dems told the voters of their cuts. We have every right to bring them down.

IN THIS ISSUE

Jerry Hicks:
"why I should lead Unite"



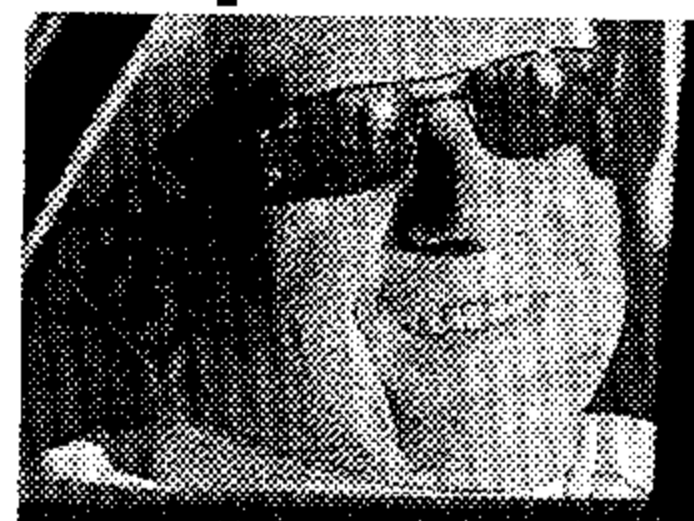
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Mass strikes sweep Europe



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The Pope and the protests



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70 years since Trotsky's death



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LABOUR

Trade unionists vote for Labour to shift left but... Which side is he on?

By Luke Cooper

More than 32,000 people have joined Labour since the general election. Thousands more are signing up since Ed Miliband, the favoured candidate of the trade unions, took leadership of the party by a narrow margin – just 1 per cent more than his brother David.

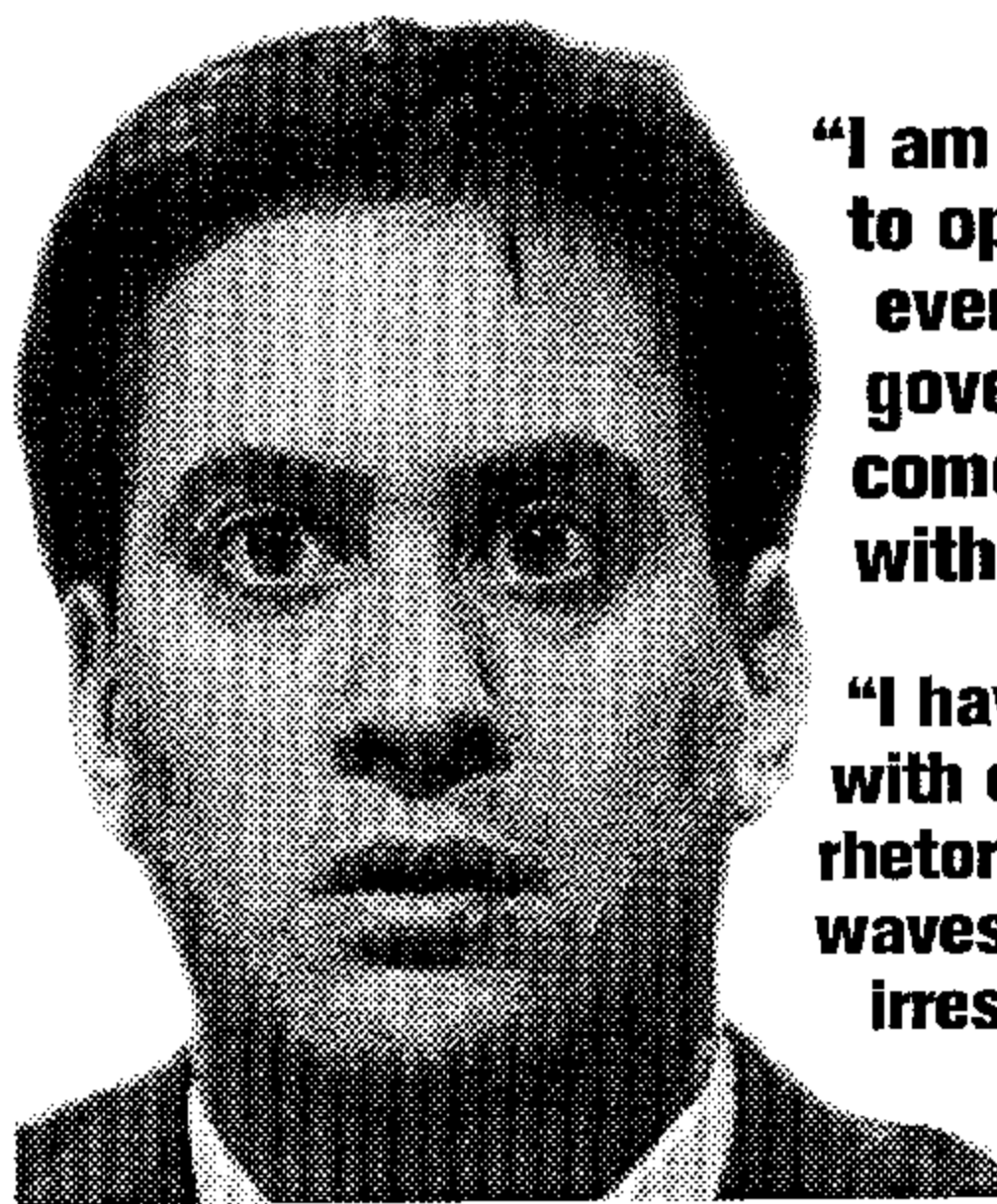
In Labour's rigged electoral college system which privileges careerist MPs over working class trade unionists and ordinary members, it was only among unions that Ed Miliband won a clear majority.

The Tories and right wing media have responded with howls of protest that Labour is "in hock to the unions". This is just hypocrisy. They don't complain that Lord Ashcroft spends millions on the Tories; they don't complain that David Miliband spent millions more than his rivals, with backing from the City of London and the newspapers. But when ordinary working people give up a proportion of our income to join unions and choose candidates, this is suddenly a scandal – we are "bringing class into politics"!

Olive branch to workers

Ed Miliband's would not have won this election without positioning himself to the left of his brother, and Blair and Brown.

At the centre of his campaign were calls for a £7 an hour living wage and more social housing to challenge concerns about immigration. He also voiced opposition to the "dogma" of labour market flexibility and a low wage, low skill, service sector-dependent econ-



"I am not going to oppose every cut the government comes up with"

"I have no truck with overblown rhetoric about waves of irresponsible strikes"

omy. These principles marked him out starkly from his brother and appealed to the working class base of Labour.

He also admitted that the Iraq war was "wrong", even though he voted against an official enquiry into it.

Ed's no Red

But anyone looking beyond the foolish headlines in the Tory tabloids will quickly realise that Ed's no red. And that is a bad thing.

Miliband lost no time in reassuring the bosses on the BBC radio and TV that he has no intention of leading a campaign of mass action to stop the Tory cuts. He denounced "irresponsible" strikes, distanced himself from Bob Crow and refused to support London tube strikers, and insisted strikes should only be used "as a last resort". You don't have to read between the lines to work out what he means. Workers facing the worst cuts since the 30s, hundreds of thousands of job losses, and the demolition of pub-

lic services are supposed to allow that to happen...in the hope that we'll win the next election.

But in five years it will be too late. Millions more will be in poverty and our welfare state will be in ruins. What is more, Cameron would have won in his war on welfare, looking like a winner, rallying the middle classes, Miliband's passive strategy, backed by the TUC, sounds clever to some, but in reality it is a strategy of defeat.

Force Labour to fight

As RMT union leader Bob Crow put it, if he doesn't support workers taking action against cuts he will be "slaughtered at the polls." He went on "Ed Miliband has to decide whose side he is on – the working class on the streets and on the picket lines or the Con-Dems and their corporate supporters.

The scores of thousands of union members who voted for Ed Miliband, the thousands of new party members, backed him because they rejected the old Blair policy of sucking up to

the rich, and because they want to stop the Tory cuts. So the call must now go out loud and clear: Ed Miliband, get off the fence! Stop renouncing completely legitimate and necessary strike action! Use your position to call for the broadest possible support and solidarity for every group of workers that take action against cuts.

Above all, why won't the union leaders demand he commit himself to scrapping the anti-trade union laws and Trident.

We must demand more than vocal opposition in parliament to the Con-Dem cuts. Labour councillors should refuse to make cuts and fight central government for extra funding.

A bosses' politician

When the chips are down Ed Miliband is a bosses' politician. He is to the left of his brother, and reflects Labour's need to win back working class support, but his programme and approach are typical of generations of Labour leaders before Blair. He rests on union backing, but does the bosses' bidding.

For example, he hasn't been prepared to oppose all the Con-Dem cuts, because he buys the bosses' lie that we have to pay off the deficit by reducing public expenditure – when the answer is to nationalise the banks' assets and confiscate the billions of the super-rich.

Putting demands on Miliband doesn't mean spreading illusions in him – it means proving *in practice* to the millions who back him today that he will sell us out tomorrow. When Labourite leaders like Miliband denounce workers' action, we must defy him – and create a new working class leadership.

Osborne's Evil Cuts

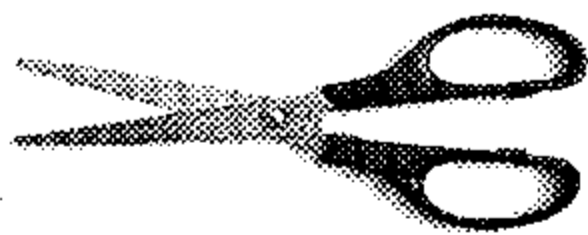
By John Bowman

Smirking Tory ministers queued up to announce one vicious attack after another at their party conference in Birmingham, gearing up the public for the hell to be faced in the coming Comprehensive Spending Review.

First to be brought to the guillotine were benefits providing the basic safety net of a roof over the heads of working class people. Osborne announced plans to cap housing benefit to a maximum of £400 per week for four-bedroom homes, driving families out of expensive inner-city areas, and, warned charity Shelter, putting 134,000 people at risk of homelessness.

This was doubled up with a cruel attack on those unable to find work. Those unemployed for more than one year are to have their housing benefit slashed by 10 per cent, whilst everyone else will have the benefit cut to below one third of the average cost of rental, cooking up a "recipe for destitution", said the British Property Federation.

This is no exaggeration – 77



per cent of landlords said they would evict tenants falling £10-20 short on their rent, forcing them to move to cheaper areas, a policy of "social cleansing" in the words of Ken Livingstone.

It doesn't stop there. In an email to Tory MPs, Chancellor George Osborne boasted of his attacks on Britain's poorest in the June budget, eager to continue the assault this month: "In the Budget I made £11 billion of savings...many of which affected people on lower



Millionaire Tories are slashing £90 from the poorest families

incomes."

Trojan horse for means test

So don't be fooled by plans to means test child benefit, they're doing it to hit the poorest, not the wealthiest families. Under proposals described as "tough but fair" by cabinet minister William Hague, parents earning over £44,000 per year would not receive the benefit. In fact, under the plans, a couple on up to £88,000 per year would still be able to claim it, whilst a single parent on £45,000 per year with expensive child care arrangements would not.

The Tories claim this only affects the rich. But that is not the reason for the cut – if it was they could just raise taxes. In fact it is designed to remove a universal benefit, usually paid to mothers, to stop children in the poorest families from becoming destitute in times of crisis.

The Tories well know that this attack on universal benefits opens the door to means testing further down the road. This means an army of snoopers driving down the number of claimants. It would reduce ben-

efit take-up rate dramatically among the poorest families. In the last financial year, £17.7 bil-



lion in means tested and tax credit benefits went unclaimed. Most of all it would stigmatise those who need extra to bring up children, no doubt suffering a barrage of "scrounger" accusations by the rich that do not and the right-wing tabloids.

And there's worse.

Total cap on benefits

They are implementing a total cap on all benefits of £500 per week for any family to take place next April. For a large family where parents earn a low wage, and live in expensive areas of the country the results will be devastating, forcing families to move away from friends, schools and communities, increasing travel times and costs – a nightmare for those with younger children in particular. 55,000 families will lose an average of £93 per week, some will lose £300 per week.

Universal rip-off

And in their most radical and expensive £7 million overhaul, "Welfare" Minister Iain Duncan-Smith wants to centralise control of all benefits in the hands of Westminster, by merging them into a "universal credit". The credit, planned to replace all benefits for working age people by 2013, will use taxes to prop up sub-standard wages by allowing unemployed workers to keep 65 per cent of their benefits when they find work.

But he plans to use central government control to savagely cut back on all benefits for



those unable to find work – and this at a time when public sector job cuts and the knock impact to private sector jobs could see unemployment rise by 1.3 million, according to leaked treasury documents.

The Tories' butchery of the welfare state make several things abundantly clear. They want to blame the unemployed for high unemployment, blame the poor for their own poverty and blame workers for appalling wages.



Removing the safety net from the welfare system, their cuts to services are not about "securing a future" for our economy, they are about purposefully driving up unemployment to drive down wages and conditions, and leaving those suffering worst from their crisis utterly destitute. They must be stopped.

Jeremy DRINKALL



Looking around on the European TUC's day of action on the streets of Brussels, I was struck by the immense energy of the 100,000 marchers against the cuts.

Giant red, green and blue balloons punctuated the march, while bright red flares lit the route, sending up plumes of smoke, and railworkers bounced 5cm-long green firecrackers on the road. Europe's workers were on the march, and how!

But despite some excellent efforts, 29 September never really took off as a day of action in Britain. Birmingham unions held a funeral procession for "public services". My own branch, Lambeth Union, lobbied the semi-privatised housing department.

But the UK's union *leaders* were pathetic. TUC chief Brendan Barber issued a press release and absurdly declared it impossible to organise a demo before March 2011!

What I saw in Brussels proved them wrong.

Unity, confidence, strength

The lasting impression from the day was of unity, confidence and strength. Vast blocs converged and dispersed, as workers marched in contingents, decked out in their union colours. The RMT were there – but why couldn't other British unions join the parade?

One Belgian banner read "Stop the communalist in-fighting" – referring to the failure of the Walloon (French-speaking) and Flemish parties to form a government. As the cuts bite, bosses will try to fuel ethnic tensions to divert anger away from their system. Yet here the unions are driving racism out of their movement.

Some young women mounted pairs of trousers on sticks. "They've taken everything we have – all we have left are our trousers," they explained. Another group that caught my eye were industrial workers from DAF Trucks, who marched behind a sound system, blaring out techno – that warmed my heart!

Alongside the Belgians, there were tens of thousands from France, such as the CGT unions with their red jackets and flags. French unions are organising fortnightly general strikes and President Sarkozy is on the ropes. Come on, Barber, shame on you.

I met some health workers from Lille, who wanted to form a cross-border rank and file network to coordinate resistance. Workers from Slovenia were worried about low pay. They were particularly impressive – just two days earlier they had a public sector general strike.

Internationalism

For them and everyone on the demo, there was no contradiction between effective action at home and active internationalism. Imagine if 20,000 British workers had joined the march: what inspiration they would have brought home.

But it will be down to rank and file union militants to bring about change. "International solidarity" for most of our union leaders means an all expenses paid junket with other bureaucrats.

For the rest of us, it is all about coordinating action to save jobs and services, pay and pensions.



A protester drove a cement mixer bearing the slogans "Toxic Banks" and "Sack all politicians" up to the gates of Dail Eireann, the Irish Parliament, on 29 September, blocking the entrance for several hours. Many people in Ireland are enraged at the bank bail out for Anglo-Irish which is plunging Ireland into a recession. The government agreed to increase the bail out to £39 billion whilst also cutting public sector spending.

All out action can stop Birmingham butchery

Bernie McAdam

Unite union official Steve Foster declared that Birmingham City Council "is handing out redundancy notices like confetti". This was after the Con-Dem coalition running the council issued 26,000 section 188 redundancy notices to workers.

Initial announcements by the government suggest Birmingham will have to cut £230 million from its core budget by 2014 and will also lose £100 million in Whitehall grants. The total £330 million represents about one third of the amount spent by the council each year.

Birmingham's entire non-schools staff, including refuse workers, clerks and cleaners, have been sent legal notices warning their contracts of

employment are to change and cuts in pay and conditions imposed. Failure to accept the new contracts will result in dismissal from their jobs without compensation. This drive to accept flexible working contracts is a massive assault on council workers.

Birmingham Connexions youth careers service is under grave threat with up to a 33 per cent cut and slashing 270 staff. Bin workers will also lose thousands of pounds per year. The scale of the cuts is huge and union leaders must move now from militant speeches and actually "take on" the council. A public sector alliance must be struck where unions call mass meetings to vote on strike action.

Read the full report here: tinyurl.com/34jx53f

INDUSTRIAL**Boris Johnson takes on tube workers**

Tube workers are set to strike as we go to press. The TSSA and RMT unions are defending jobs and safety standards for tube workers, while outsourced maintenance workers at Alstom will join them on the picket lines in protest at a derisory 2 per cent pay offer.

The strikes will start at 6.30pm on Sunday 3 October and last for 24 hours.

London Mayor Boris Johnson is demanding £5 billion of cuts to the Transport for London (TfL) budget, starting with the loss of 800 station staff and 500 maintenance workers.

This month's spending review is widely predicted to add further cuts to TfL's budget.

Johnson is also cutting back

on safety measures, for example by doubling the time between checks on train brakes, which Bob Crow says "will turn the tube into a death trap".

At the same time, the Mayor has announced a 40 per cent reduction in bus fare subsidies for the unemployed, elderly and children, and his henchman on the London Assembly, Richard Tracey, has directly called on Cameron to "introduce no strike legislation" for the Underground workers.

By any reasonable definition, this is a responsible strike – one that everyone from the daily passenger to Ed Miliband should support. In fact, we should encourage the capital's transport workers to unite and spread the strikes.

**WILL THEY BAN TUBE STRIKES?**

Boris Johnson is pushing the government for an outright ban on strikes in essential services – including on London's tube.

Tories cheered the proposal at their Birmingham conference.

The idea, which is in flagrant breach of democratic rights and international law must be condemned by the whole labour and trade union movement.

Boris knows full well that the RMT is one of the most militant unions in the country – but he's not confident he can break the union without this dictatorial ban.

If the Tories dare to bring it in, then we must dare to bring them down with an all-out general strike.

BBC strike off as staff vote on pension offer

A strike by BBC workers, that would have taken coverage of the Tory Party conference off the air, has been cancelled after a new offer was put on the table.

The latest offer will be put to the members of the three unions involved: NUJ, Bectu and Unite. If rejected there will be a strike on the 19 and 20 October.

The three unions have said that it is the best possible deal without taking strike action but are not recommending it.

The BBC's offer will still mean:

- Closing the final salary pension to new starters, and putting them on a defined contributions scheme.

- Keeping the 1 per cent a year cap on increases to the final

salary scheme.

- In the new scheme, the increase per year will now match inflation or 4 per cent "whichever is lowest".

- There are also commitments to revisit the deal in subsequent years and lower staff contributions from 7 per cent to 6.

This last-ditch offer by BBC management was a result of the members' determination, who overwhelmingly voted to strike. But this mood is now being frittered away on endless negotiations. Members of the three unions should vote "No" to the deal and build the biggest possible strike on the 19 and 20 October to show the BBC's top brass they mean business.

London firefighters ballot for strike action

Fire Brigades Union (FBU) members in London have voted overwhelmingly for industrial action short of a strike as part of an ongoing dispute with the London Fire Authority (LFA).

The authority wants to cut their wages by rearranging shift patterns and reducing night cover. The LFA plans to sack all 5,500 firefighters and then re-employ them on worse contracts.

There is a real mood to fight. Last month 2,500 firefighters participated in a uniformed march in London. There is an overtime ban in place and a ballot for strike action is under way. In solidarity, the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union

have said members will not drive tube trains if the firefighters are on strike, citing health and safety concerns.

The LFA is led by Tory Brian Coleman, who spent more than £18,000 on taxis for himself in the two years from April 2006. Coleman has made it clear that the LFA is intent on cutting costs and breaking the power of the FBU. An all-out strike by London firefighters would smash the Tory plans for cutting the fire service.

FBU members should vote "Yes" to strike action and join up with other striking workers, such as RMT and local government workers, to present a united front against the cuts.

UNITE LEADERSHIP ELECTION

Back militant challenge from Jerry Hicks in Unite election

Jerry Hicks is standing for general secretary of Unite – the largest union in Britain and Ireland. Workers Power has been hitting bus depots across the country with campaign material. Jerry is fighting for strikes and direct action against the cuts. *Billy McKean* spoke to Jerry

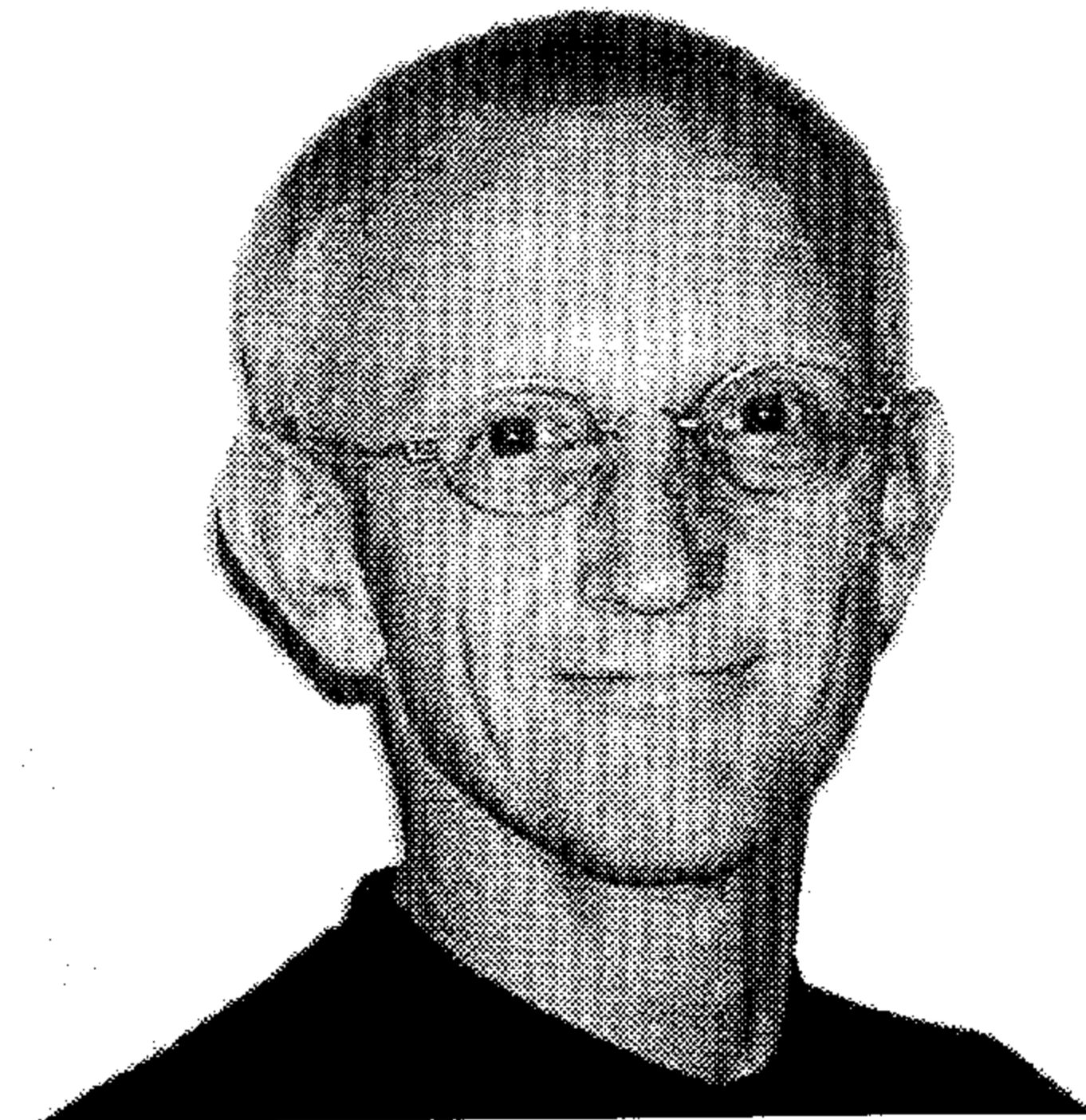
What are the key issues facing Unite and how do you intend to change the union if you win?

Unite should be exerting its power to fight back against the cuts and be at the heart of the resistance, coordinating with other unions and campaigns such as Right to Work, Youth Fight for Jobs, the National Shop Stewards Network, the Coalition of Resistance, etc. In this way we can improve and increase our terms and conditions and better the lives of our families and communities. And that relies upon us, as potential leaders, to be able to instil a confidence in others to be prepared to fight.

Unite joint general secretary Tony Woodley is thrilled about Ed Miliband's victory. What role do you think Britain's biggest union should play in politics?

It's not just Woodley – Derek Simpson, the other joint general secretary, is equally pleased, and it was Paul Kenny from the GMB who said: "At last we've got our party back!" But within minutes of being successful, Miliband said he's not in hoc to anyone and he doesn't believe in "frivolous strikes" – as if there have ever been frivolous strikes. He also said that although he may not like some of the coalition's cuts, he's going to back them.

I believe we should keep our members' money in a clenched fist until the Labour leaders prove to us by deed that they



Jerry Hicks: Campaign has helped build a network in the union

will carry out the policies of the union. The first test will come in a few short weeks when left-wing Labour MP, John McDonnell, has a Private Member's Bill that attempts to get rid of the challenges to union strike ballots based on technicalities [as seen earlier in the year with the British Airways strike and RMT ballot]. Any Labour MP who didn't vote for that would immediately lose all financial support if I became general secretary.

What do you think of your opponent Len McCluskey?

I have no axe to grind with Len, in fact I hardly know the man. I differ with him on major policies. My idea of a democratic union is where our members elect the officials, making

them accessible and accountable to the members – those that pay their wages. Meanwhile, McCluskey wants to continue the appointment system.

I believe that McCluskey is probably a hardworking official, but his pay package, including perks, is £98,000 a year. That's wrong. I would take home the average wage of our members.

McCluskey also believes in bobbing and weaving around the anti-union laws brought in by Thatcher, and unchanged by New Labour.

He tells our members that they have to abide by anti-union legislation, which has seen us being run ragged at BA, despite the bravery and brilliant workplace organisation of our members.

I believe that when the occasion is right and the circumstances demand it, we should confront these laws head on. It's only with that steely determination that we will stand a chance of stopping these cuts.

WP: Do you see any future for the campaign support groups after the election? Will you help to build a rank and file organisation in Unite after the campaign?

It has helped to build a rank and file organisation because we now have networks of groups and individuals across every region and sector.

And on that basis, we've already won in this election because immediately afterwards we'll be seeking to extend the network, broaden it, deepen it, putting people in touch with each other, and joining the dots.

And the most rewarding thing is that this election campaign has moved beyond the confines of Unite, and brought together activists of all unions.

Plus students and pensioners are helping in our campaign. It will be my duty and obligation to the class to ensure that these things continue to happen.

I owe it to everyone who's been involved, to the movement and to myself. And together we owe it to the working class as a whole to win.

For the full interview and more on the Jerry Hicks campaign, including info on how to help, go to www.workerspower.com

Coca Cola strike – it's the real thing

By Simon Hardy

Workers at the Coca Cola bottling factory in Edmonton, north London, walked out in three separate strike days fighting for a better pay deal. They were offered 2 per cent increase, which the Unite members rejected.

Jennie Formby, a Unite national officer, said: "We want to see a deal that reflects our members' hard work and the continuing rise in the cost of living in such an expensive city."

In July, Coca Cola announced profits of £1.56 billion in three months. Workers are angry that a company that is so rich offers its workers only 2 per cent,

when official inflation in the UK is 3.1 per cent. This is a pay cut.

But these one-day actions are not going to put enough pressure on Coca Cola, a company notorious for its unethical and environmentally destructive policies.

"We want to see a deal that reflects our members' hard work"

As many Coca Cola workers will be recognising, there's a need to escalate the strikes. And, Unite should call on Coca Cola workers abroad to take action in solidarity with Edmonton.

Royal Mail workers fight privatisation

By a CWU rep

It's back to the 1980s with the post, as the new Con-Dem government pushes for a quick sell-off of Royal Mail and postal bosses press on with downsizing plans, with sweeping office closures and job losses.

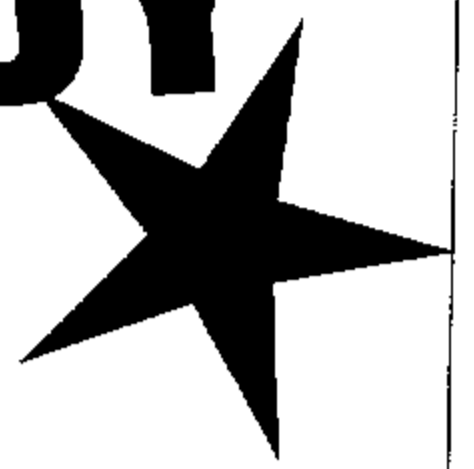
Government ministers argue that only the private sector can provide the capital Royal Mail needs to "modernise" its operations. In reality, their plans are to slash services for the public – including possibly Saturday deliveries – smash the union and hand the company over to private companies to profit from. To weaken opposition they are promising to keep Post Offices publicly owned and give Royal Mail staff shares, while selling 90 per cent on the stock market.

We need to fight!

So far the CWU union's leadership has fought neither privatisation nor downsizing. They cancelled the 9 October national demonstration and are just lobbying ConDem MPs in marginal seats – but by the time these are up for re-election, privatisation will be long over. Wedded to a strategy of negotiating cuts, they are blocking any strikes. This means any industrial action must start out and spread unofficially.

Stevenage CWU activists have organised a local march against their office closure. We need such campaigns up and down the country, linking local cuts to privatisation. Ultimately it will take a national strike to defeat downsizing and privatisation.

Jo CASSIDY



I bet I'm not the only *Workers Power* reader who has been secretly looking forward to the new series of *Strictly Come Dancing*. But love it as I do, I'll still be seething in front of the box about the sexism of the show's producers.

Last year, the BBC was accused of discrimination against older women as Arlene Phillips was booted off the judges' panel and replaced by the younger and less-experienced Alesha Dixon.

The Phillips saga is just one of many examples of older women in the media being thrown onto the scrapheap. In 2007, there was outrage as Moira Stewart was forced to resign after presenting BBC news for 30 years.

Sexism

This has been branded as ageism in the press, but let us be clear – it is also a case of sexism. There is no shortage of old white men on TV or radio. Presenters like John Humphreys and Jeremy Paxman continue their careers well in to their sixties, without needing a face lift or tummy tuck. Yet women, from newsreaders to dance contest judges, are required to fit a certain shape, size and age profile.

It seems to me that the objectification of women in media has intensified since the 1990s. This should come as no surprise. In the absence of a fighting women's movement, there has been a backlash against the advances made by previous generations. Narrow images of women in the media prescribe norms for women everywhere. And in advertising, women's bodies are used to sell everything from cars to chocolate bars.

It's high time for a revival of a militant working class women's movement, based in the trade unions. Women now make up about half the workforce in the media industry – many in lower paid, support roles – and the trade unions that represent media workers need to challenge sexism in the industry, taking such actions as "pulling the plug" on sexist programmes.

Miss World

The media constructs certain ideals of women, and anyone that deviate from these norms, whether that be single mums, sex workers, lesbians or just those that don't conform, are condemned or cast aside.

I've always admired the radical women back in the 70s who took matters into their own hands disrupted the Miss World competition, taking the fight against making women sex objects to millions on live TV.

We could do with reviving the best traditions of the women's liberation movement and linking the fight against sexism to the fight against the cuts which are going to ruin so many lives.

Through militancy and fighting for our rights, a new working class women's movement can create a different image of women – one that will inspire millions of people everywhere and make the bosses tremble.

EUROPE IN REVOLT

As mass strikes sweep France, Spain, Greece Indefinite general strikes

By Dave Stockton

A massive wave of strikes is shaking Europe, as millions of workers walk out of factories and offices and take to the streets against the most vicious set of cuts since the war.

A series of one-day general strikes paralysed France, Spain and Greece – a similar strike is planned for Portugal next month.

Weak capitalist governments – from right wing Sarkozy in Paris to ‘socialist’ Zapatero in Madrid – are desperate to press ahead with their huge cuts packages, to make workers pay the price for the trillion euro bailout of the banks in 2008. So they are trying to stand firm.

And so far these one-day strikes have not been enough to force the governments to back down. They need to go further.

An indefinite general strike in France, Spain or Greece could break the cuts programmes, bring down the bosses’ governments and open a fight for working class rule. And that is precisely why the leaders of Europe’s social-democrat, socialist and Communist parties and unions are dead set against it.

Workers show their strength

There can be no doubt that, given a lead, the organised European working class is ready and willing to strike hard and smash the bosses’ offensive.

On 29 September unions in Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, Romania and Spain held one day general strikes while the European Trades Union Congress summoned 100,000



from across Europe onto the streets of Brussels in a massive show of strength.

In Spain, where a terrifying 20 percent are already unemployed, more than 10 million workers took part in the first one-day general strike in eight years. The protest targeted new laws which make it easier to fire workers, increase the retirement age from 65 to 67 and slash public sector workers’ wages by 5 percent. This offensive is being masterminded by premier Luis Zapatero so-called Socialist Party (PSOE).

The strike was called by the General Union of Workers (UGT) members and the Workers’ Commissions (CCOO). The UGT, with 800,000 members, backs the PSOE and the CCOO, which has more than a million members, backs the Spanish Communist Party (PCE).

Strikers closed main roads, shops and markets. Transport systems ground to a halt. The main car factories were at a standstill. And in Barcelona and Madrid, street fights broke out between police and strikers.

In Portugal unions called a general strike for 24 November.

In France, three million workers marched on 2 October in all the main cities to protest against President Nicolas Sarkozy’s attack on pensions, which will force people to work an extra two years before they can retire. This is the third mass demonstration in a month. Another one day general strike is planned for 12 October.

Spain 20.3% unemployment

Marc Lassalle, a member of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste in France, told us: “It is far from certain that Sarkozy will win. The workers’ mobilisation is exceptionally long and deep. Polls say a record 72 percent are dissatisfied with him.”

But the greatest danger today is the compromising attitude of the trade union leaders.

The largest unions – the social-democratic CFDT, and the CGT which backs the Com-

munist Party – are hoping for minor concessions.

François Chérèque, leader of CFDT, calls for “appeasement gestures from the government to open dialogue and build true reform”. Bernard Thibault of the CGT threatens a harder line but is ready to accept a deal.

Only the union SUD-Solidaires calls for a “grève reconductible” – an unlimited strike.

In Eastern Europe very severe wage and spending cuts are rousing workers to struggle. In Poland on 29 September thousands of workers from both major union federations – Solidarnosc and OPZZ – demonstrated. In Romania and Slovenia there are public sector strikes against massive job cuts.

British and German unions

But in central and northern Europe, 29 September was a different story. The main union federations – Germany’s DGB, Britain’s TUC – took virtually no action at all. In Germany it was rank and file anti-cuts coalitions who organised protests.

The TUC and DGB leaders

can beat European cuts

accept that cuts are necessary to reduce the budget deficit and, in effect, just transmit the views of the ruling class and its experts that there is no alternative to cuts. This is also the message of the Socialist, Social Democratic, Left and Communist parties and their union federations: their 'alternative' to austerity is just to slow cuts programmes down.

France 10% unemployment

Why? Their number one priority is to avoid a major political clash. They would prefer to watch and wait as the governments demolish the welfare systems won by the last three generations of the Labour movement.

In Mediterranean countries like Spain, France and Greece, the social democratic and Communist party trade unionists are more outspoken in their opposition. They demand more public spending and investment to stimulate the economy, but fall short of calling for the confiscation of the property of the big banks and corporations. Similarly they are prepared to call repeated one day strikes to let off steam and keep control of the movement, but will not countenance an indefinite strike because they know it would open a fight for working class power. In short, they fear revolution. So they propose piecemeal solutions to the economic crisis, and actions that fall short of a general strike, to save the system.

General crisis – general strike
But what we face today, in Europe and beyond, is not just a crisis of the financial system, not only a crisis of free market neo-liberal policies, but a fundamental crisis of capitalism.

The credit crunch and the recession were not caused by 'too much lending' or 'too little lending' – they were caused by a decline in profitability which is intrinsic to the way capitalism works. Faced with this, there is only one way the capitalists can make it profitable to invest once more, and that is to slash their underlying costs and destroy capital that can't be invested profitably. That means much lower wages, pensions and welfare, mass unemployment and a huge transfer of



wealth to the rich.

So the answer isn't begging governments for more state spending to save the system – it's to mobilise resistance to the cuts and direct it into a general strike against the cuts. And this would pose the question point blank: who rules? In an unlimited general strike, whether it begins in France, Spain, or Greece, local and regional committees of strikers would need to spring up to coordinate action and supplies to the strikers and working class communities. With society paralysed and the workers organising from below, the stage would

be set for an uprising to take power into the hands of these committees and establish a working class state that could solve the capitalist crisis once and for all – by taking over the bosses' property and creating a democratically planned socialist economy in which production is for need, not profit.

Slovakia 15% unemployment

Then there would be no credit crises, no unemployment, and no austerity.

The present leadership of the workers in Europe – the social-democratic, labour and Communist parties – utterly reject this anticapitalist solution. And they are willing to allow the cuts to destroy our communities rather than risk revolution.

So the rank and file need to get organised in delegate based committees, like the coordinations that French workers built in their fight against the last round of government attacks, which can bring together all those who want to fight austerity and the governments who implement them. The German anti-cuts coalition that mobilised tens of thousands in July, despite the sabotage of most DGB leaders, also shows it can be done.

In every town and city, in every country, we need to set up anti-cuts committees. As the struggle develops we must turn them into fully fledged councils of action – made up of delegates from the workplaces, the unions, the schools and colleges, the organisations of migrants, women and youth.

Without for a moment letting the ETUC leaders off the hook or relaxing the pressure on them to act, we should build up a pan-European coordination from below involving the more militant unions like COBAS and FIOM in Italy, SUD-Solidaire in France, the RMT in Britain, with rank and file delegates linking up.

The aim is clear: fight for a general strike, action with the union leaders if possible, without them if necessary.

Conclusion

In summary, the basis is there to beat the austerity – but there is a crisis of working class leadership. The historic decision of the social democrats 90 years ago and the Communist parties in the 1930s to renounce revolution has a practical effect today: they will not fight for the level of action we need to beat the cuts in Europe because they fear it would bring down capitalism itself.

Ireland 13.6% unemployment

To get a general strike in any one of the key European countries, to maintain it until victory, to spread it to other countries, we need councils of action to both organise the struggle and fight for power – and we need new political parties committed to that revolutionary road. This historic crisis of the system is exactly the sort of period in which a fifth International – a new world party of the workers – can be built, opening the fight for a United Socialist States of Europe.

INTERNATIONAL

Latin America – heading for a crunch between right and left

By Keith Spencer

The impact of the economic crisis is Latin America is polarising politics. On the one hand right wing forces, backed behind the scenes by Washington, are attempting a comeback – whether by means of a coup attempts, as in Ecuador, or as in Venezuela via successes at the ballot box. On the other workers and indigenous peoples are mobilising to demand real measures to change their lives.

Ecuador: Masses back President

In Ecuador President Rafael Correa has survived an attempted coup on 30 September by police and sections of the armed forces.

Apparently in protest against reforms to their pay, police were joined by soldiers and paramilitaries and took over the National Assembly, whilst air force troops occupied the international airport outside the capital, Quito.

Correa went to a barracks to confront the police, who were chanting, "Long live civil war." He was doused in scalding water and tear-gassed but managed to escape to a hospital, where the police again besieged him.

Eventually loyal soldiers rescued Correa from hospital and addressed thousands of supporters in the main square.

Promises

Correa was elected in January 2007 on a left populist programme, promising to spend more of the country's petroleum revenues on the poor and the indigenous peoples of the country. Following the model of Hugo Chavez, he summoned a Constituent Assembly that in



Protests against the coup attempt in Ecuador

2008 enacted a new constitution giving greater rights to the poor and indigenous communities. When he was re-elected last year he pledged;

"We are going to continue the fight to eliminate all forms of workplace exploitation within our socialist conviction: the supremacy of human work over capital. Nobody is in any doubt that our preferential option is for the poorest people, we are here because of them."

He has suspended payment of the external debt, implemented a hydrocarbons law to take a greater percentage of the profits from the foreign oil multinationals and, on this basis, increased the minimum wage and social benefits, as well as making improvements in education, health and welfare for the masses.

Correa joined Venezuela in forming ALBA – an economic and political bloc of Latin American states under the banner of "Bolivarianism".

Anger grows against Correa

But public sector workers and the powerful indigenist organisation CONAIE have criticised the half-hearted nature of the reforms. CONAIE is actively resisting the handing over of their community lands to the

state and oil companies for increased exploitation.

Correa has repeatedly used the police and army to attack protestors. For example, in November 2007 in the Amazonian town of Dayuma, police attacked people demonstrating for more social investment paid for from the wealth of the local oilfield.

In addition, he has just launched an austerity programme that even his own party has rejected. In response, he threatened to abolish the National Assembly and rule by decree.

The radicalised trade unions and organisation of the poor need to break their reliance on Correa - whatever the personal courage he displayed during the coup.

The answer is an ever greater independent mobilisation of the workers, the poor, the indigenous people to demand, and indeed carry out, a break with the capitalist and landowning class, the winning over of the rank and file of the army, with the goal installing a revolutionary workers and peasants government. In the end this is the only barrier to right wing coups.

Venezuela: Opposition gains ground

In Venezuela right wing forces are celebrating, despite their

defeat in September's parliamentary elections.

Though Hugo Chávez's United Socialist Party (PSUV) won 96 seats as against the 64 seats of the United Opposition (MUD), in terms of actual votes cast the difference was far narrower: the PSUV had 48.2 per cent of the popular vote while the opposition MUD gained 47.17 per cent.

The result is not so much due to the greater popularity of the right as to the disillusion of a big section of Chávez's own supporters, expressed by not going to the polls. The reason is not that he has been too radical in his talk of "socialism within two years" but that his actions have not been radical enough in fulfilling the promises he has made.

Chávez himself still remains enormously popular with ratings of two-thirds approval in opinion polls but his ministers, governors and civil servants are obstructing reforms, siding with the bosses and attacking workers.

The economy remains 70 per cent in private hands and the bosses are hoarding and speculating while the working class suffers inflation and real wage cuts due to the world recession and high inflation.

The strong forces of the left in the unions, in the PSUV, in the other workers parties must fight – independently of Chávez and his governors and bureaucrats - for the nationalisation without compensation of industry, commerce and the land, under workers' control and for a democratic workers plan to meet the needs of the masses. To implement this they must also fight for their own power, based on workers' councils and a workers' militia to replace the capitalist state.

US POLITICS

The Tea Party – crazed reaction is on the march

By Stephen Davidson

Today, it is inevitability in American politics that you come across the Tea Party, a blanket name for a number of right-wing populist groups. They represent an increasingly crazed movement connected with a wing of the Republican party, made up of radical libertarians who hate any central government, to fundamentalist Christians and far right 'interest groups'. These people blame the economic crisis on everything from immigration to socialists to Obama, who they call either a Muslim, a communist or a fascist.

Right-wing populism has been encountered throughout American history, its purpose is to turn the grievances of the middle classes into a form that best suits the profits of corporations. Irrational movements like this can grow in times of deep economic crisis when confused middle class people need answers, however incoherent.

Billionaires David and Charles Koch, along with other well-heeled conservative groups, have provided much of the funding for this alleged grassroots movement. The Tea Party pays for buses, organisers and running political candidates - so it is hardly surprising that it has had an immediate ability to put forward a national presence, nor that its agenda has so closely aligned with the ruling elites of the United States. It is backed by right-wing political groups like Move America Forward, bankrolled and organized by



Tea Party protesters rally with slogans against socialism and taxes

right wing Public Relations firm Russo Marsh & Rogers. Capitalists like Sal Russo are using the Tea Party movement to frustrate progressive political action and hand the senate back to the Republicans.

So who is in the Tea Party? To some degree, they represent simply the traditional core of the Republican Party, the hardened 18% or so of the population that genuinely embraces far right politics. However, it has made itself a spectacle in the media, and proven quite capable of pushing the Republicans farther to the right. Even the feeble "public option" in the health care bill was considered beyond the pale in an American political scene beset by Tea Party protests.

What does the Tea Party stand for? These are the people that denounced Obama's healthcare reforms and in economic policy, they have nothing new to offer: complaints about the deficit are combined with a near-religious devotion to tax cuts, the same economic policies that failed under Bush. Any

spending other than on the war is hysterically labeled as "socialist". This movement is promoting the very agenda that creates the tremendous wealth gap that we see today. Claiming to stand against "special interests" they attack unions, particularly teachers' unions, which are the last bulwark of the American working class. They repeat the snake oil that giving tax cuts to corporations and the wealthy will create jobs.

In California they are spearheading a multi million dollar campaign against legislation designed to cut greenhouse gases.

Racism

Like much right-wing populism, the Tea Party has a strong element of racism, both open and hidden. Part of this is a simple reaction to the election of the first Black, seen most clearly by attempts to deny that he is a US citizen or claims he is a Muslim, believed by a disturbing 18 per cent of the population. Islamophobia, of course,

runs deeply throughout the American right wing and has recently been the center of the debate over the Park 51 community center near Ground Zero in Manhattan. And the Tea Party has also embraced the nativist opposition to Latino immigrants, which has found vicious expression in Arizona's Senate Bill 1070. Less blatant but still racist are the attacks on social services, much of which is motivated by a racial animus - the idea that has circulated in conservative circles for decades that most social programs are for the benefit of people of color.

Sexism, likewise, finds welcome expression in the Tea Party. Senate candidates associated with the movement such as Rand Paul and Christine O'Donnell support banning abortion even in cases of rape, incest and risks to the health or life of the mother. The sexism of the modern American right is in its deep-seated opposition to women's rights, and conservatives like Sarah Palin are spearheading this attack.

Crazy middle class movements like the Tea Party feed on human misery. They are being used by the Republicans to oust the Democrats from power, but the people involved can easily be drawn into violent and fascist forces. The Tea Party movement is growing because of the crisis of American capitalism. Workers and youth need a revolutionary party of their own to combat not only the Tea Party's increasingly insane political ideas but to fight against the social crisis and the system which is breeding it.

RELIGION

The Pope, the protests and the sins of Socialist Worker

Dave Stockton

Fifteen thousand people marched against Pope Benedict XVI's state visit to Britain, attacking the Pope for his opposition to contraception, for the Church's stance that homosexuality is a sin, and for opposing equal rights for homosexuals.

Women protested his opposition to abortion rights, while hundreds called for the Pope to stop covering up child abuse and open the Vatican's files on the crimes of rapist clergy. Others objected to the state spending £12 million on the visit.

Clearly, this was a protest that all socialists, democrats, and supporters of lesbian and gay and women's equality should support. Some believers say we should not have marched because it offended them. But the Pope's views and his influence "offend" us – and we have the right to march against them, whatever his church says. It's called freedom of speech and no religion should be immune from it.

The Pope goes on the offensive

The Pope's attacks on atheism and a secular society were given massive publicity. In a widely condemned statement, he linked atheism to fascism, claiming: "As we reflect on the sobering lessons of the atheist extremism of the 20th century, let us never forget how the exclusion of God, religion and virtue from public life leads ultimately to a truncated vision of man and of society, and thus to a reductive vision of the person and his destiny."

The hypocrisy here is incredible. After all, if the Holocaust were a consequence of atheism, then why did Benedict's predecessor, Pope Pius XII, never speak out against the Nazis? Why did he never threaten Hitler with excommunication? After all, the Führer was a baptised Catholic, who avowed his faith in Mein Kampf and in many speeches, and who pointed to the Church's centuries-long record of anti-Semitism as justification for his own persecution of the Jews.

The excuse used – that silence was

**Protests in London against the Pope's visit.**

necessary to protect the Church from Nazi persecution – is a blank cheque for submission to tyranny in general. But then, why did the Church actively collaborate with General Franco's fascist revolt in Spain? Always close to the rich, and itself a huge landowner, the Church sought the European far-right's protection against the threat represented by the working class movement to its property and doctrine.

The claim that the Church had to protect itself from persecution is also used to justify its suppression of evidence of clerical child abuse and its protection of abusers from the law.

Today the Pope and his propagandists try to claim that he didn't know about the abuse, and that the Church never covered it up. But a secret order of the Holy Office, dating back to 1962, imposed a code of silence, backed by the penalty of excommunication, not only for investigators and the

accused, but also witnesses and victims.

And it was this Pope, in his former role as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who oversaw this policy's implementation for nearly a quarter of a century. He is an accessory to these crimes, and will remain so unless and until he hands over all the Church's files to the police.

No wonder he pre-emptively presented the Church on arrival as the victim of persecution by "aggressive atheists and secularists", clearly referring to the tiny number of openly atheist or anticlerical British writers like Professor Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens. But they cannot credibly be said to present any threat of persecution to the Roman Catholic Church, the modern world's most powerful non-state institution.

Protesters were right to challenge Pope
As Dawkins said to the 15,000-strong

demonstration in London on 18 September, this was all too obviously a diversionary attack by the Vatican's spin doctors. As Cardinal from 1980 onwards, this Pope used all the dictatorial powers of the Vatican to crush liberation theology, which he saw as Marxism incarnate, and did all he could to cover up child abuse scandals throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

The Church has even tried to divert the anger at this cover up by slandering gay people, claiming that the problem is homosexuality among a small number of priests. This ignores the obvious real causes: not just enforced clerical celibacy but above all the dictatorial power of the priesthood within its institutions and communities.

Benedict has also condemned gay marriage for "undermining society", mobilising the Church to oppose it wherever governments have attempted to legalise it. He claimed that the UK Equalities Act, which came into force this year, imposed "unjust restrictions on freedom of religion" because it prevents the Church from discriminating against gay lay people in its employment.

Socialist Worker attacks... the protesters

So it is very strange that an article should appear in *Socialist Worker* ("Is Religion the Cause of the World's Ills?" by Simon Basketter), which criticised not the Pope, but the critics of the Pope.

Referring to a placard which said "Religion is Stupid", as if it were symptomatic of the entire protest, it tried to link the protests against the Pope to the racist campaigns against Islam in Europe today, saying that "simply denouncing religion without thinking of its social context can fuel the vicious Islamophobia that Muslims face."

Of course, middle class atheists often suggest that the reason religions have mass support is that working class people are stupid, when the real reason is that religion thrives on suffering. But that is why socialists criticise religion in its social context.

Some liberal atheists, like Martin Amis or the ex-leftist author and literary critic Christopher Hitchens, may well use "secularism" as a cover for Islamophobic views. Dawkins too, although not nearly as Islamophobic on the question of the racist Danish cartoons, failed to see beyond the question of freedom of anti-religious expression to identify the racist persecution of Muslims as a key theme in the debate.

But is perverse to conclude from this that we should not join with Dawkins and thou-

sands of others in opposing the Church's political programme on the streets. And for Basketter to call the atheist Dawkins "the thinking man's Ian Paisley", is a shameful slur, which Socialist Worker supporters should force him to withdraw.

In fact, Dawkins' speech at the rally – without going beyond liberal secularism – could be endorsed by any Marxist so far as its criticisms of the Pope went. But the *Socialist Worker* article then goes further and condemned militant secularism itself for diverting from the "real" class struggle. Basketter even appeals to Marx to back this utterly un-Marxist argument, quoting his view that having a secular state was "nowhere near enough, because it wouldn't get rid of religion" and that "religious faith was an effect, not a cause, of general oppression", concluding that "focusing on the religious question diverted energy away from real social struggle and into purely sterile debate."

Tell the victims of abuse that the churches (not religious belief per se) are not a cause of oppression, 'general' or otherwise. A Church which denies the right to divorce, abortion, the use of condoms to protect against AIDS, marriage or civil partnerships between gay people, which encourages Catholics in state employment to refuse to implement rights granted by law, deserves to be criticised and demonstrated against.

A 'socialist' who refuses to do so and who slanders those who do is not even a consistent democrat let alone a revolutionary. And to quote Marx's view that having a secular state was "not enough" as though this proved that strong criticism of religion was a sterile diversion is a shameful sleight of hand.

Unlike republics such as the US and France that are constitutionally committed to the separation of church and state, Britain has a Church of England "established by law", with 26 bishops sitting in the House of Lords.

The Church of England is as integrated into the state as any church could be. The leaders of other churches, synagogues, temples and now mosques have also been drawn into state functions. Yet religious practice is a minority phenomenon in Britain. Less than a million people regularly attend Catholic or Anglican church services.

Given this, it is quite remarkable how much influence organised religion has in modern Britain. Blair and Brown encouraged churches to take over state schools. The present government has pledged to

increase the role of religious bodies in its "Big Society" plans, to downsize the welfare state and hand over whole swathes of it to charities.

Tasks of Marxists

Religions are always ultimately on the side of the governments of the rich and powerful. In every serious social upheaval, the religious authorities will intervene: offering to mediate, pretending to be neutral, but always condemning those who want to fight for their rights.

The task of Marxists is to expose the role of religion and of the churches, mosques, etc whenever they try to reinforce their power and influence. In this way we can undermine the illusions which otherwise could play a disastrous role at critical junctures in the class struggle.

Any actual persecution of religious believers will play into the clergy's hands, reinforcing religious prejudices and the clergy's authority. But we are far from indifferent to religion's fundamental message: that fighting to change the world is an illusion, and a sin.

This is why we have always demanded the separation of the church from the state, and from the provision of education, childcare, and medical care. Our message is that the misery and suffering of this world are not due to sin, or to disobedience to God's will, and we challenge priests and imams when they speak in the name of this imaginary being of their own creation.

The churches rightly sense in Marxism their irreconcilable opponent. This is not because, as they claim, we propose to deprive priests and believers of the right to propagate their doctrines. On the contrary, Marxists are often the only ones to support persecuted religious minorities, like the Catholics in Northern Ireland, Ahmadis in Pakistan, or Muslims in Europe today.

Rather, it is because we propose to overthrow all the exploitative and oppressive conditions that make religion attractive as an illusory consolation; in Marx's words to abolish "the vale of tears of which religion is the halo". Human freedom will eventually put these opium dealers out of business by destroying the misery on which their market depends.

Finally, we demand that no religious institution should be granted privileges or protected from criticism – irrespective of whether it offends the priests or opportunist socialists.

70 YEARS SINCE THE ASSASSINATION OF LEON TROTSKY

The Transitional Programme

In the second of our articles on the ideas of Leon Trotsky, **Richard Brenner** examines the method and policies of his Transitional Programme and its relevance today. This is an extract from Richard's recently republished book, *Trotsky – an Introduction*

The founding congress of the Fourth International in 1938 adopted a programme drafted by Trotsky, "The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International". This short pamphlet has become one of the most important documents in the history of communism.

No study of the ideas of Trotsky would be complete without examining its contents and its meaning.

The Second International was founded in a period when the capitalist system was enjoying long years of relatively peaceful progress and economic advance.

The system of monopoly capitalism did not yet dominate the globe; the working class made steady progress in organising its unions and mass Social Democratic parties. These were years of preparation, of organising the workers for the great battles of the future.

In this period, the Social Democracy adopted a programme that was divided into two distinct parts: the minimum programme and the maximum programme.

The minimum programme was a series of demands that could be achieved within the capitalist system. It dealt with the most pressing needs of the working class and exploited masses: the need for a working day of no more than eight hours, health care, education, homes and welfare for all, and an end to poverty wages.

It set out the democratic rights necessary to allow the workers to organise and to prevent the worst abuses of the capitalists: the right to vote, to sovereign parliaments, to elect the judges and to bear arms.

These were all demands that the capitalists would try to resist – but they would still leave the capitalist system intact. Even if all these demands were granted, a boss would still be a boss at the end of the day.

The maximum programme, on the other hand, set out the goal of socialism and working class power. This was a statement of the ultimate goal of the movement.



But it was not linked to the demands of the minimum programme in a strategy of fighting for power.

Because of this, the opportunist trend in the Second International was able to treat the goal of socialism as a distant and far off prospect, with no practical consequences for the daily struggles of the workers and their party, to concentrate all its efforts on campaigning for reforms alone.

The eruption of the First World War revealed a whole new epoch of capitalism had come into being – what Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks called "imperialism". The Russian Revolution of October 1917 also revealed to socialist around the world that the question of power was posed by the struggles of today.

The Russian experience

It is therefore no surprise that it was the Russian Communists and the Communist International who made the first significant steps towards overcoming the division of the programme into maximum and minimum parts.

In his pamphlet, "The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat it", written on the eve of the October revolution, Lenin put forward a series of demands which addressed the immediate needs of the working class and which at the same time, if met, meant an immediate break with the

capitalist system. It was a programme that served as a bridge between the immediate aims and the revolutionary tasks of the workers.

This method was then used by the Communist International as a basis for influencing the programmes of the Communist Parties after World War I.

The Third Congress of the Comintern adopted a set of "Theses on Tactics", which described the old minimum programme of the reformists as "a counter-revolutionary deception".

They went on to explain that Communists should continue to fight for the immediate interests of the workers – however partial they might be. But they should do so not to rescue the capitalist system, but to destroy it.

By the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928, this revolutionary method had been abandoned. With Stalin's support, Bukharin drafted a programme in which the old minimum-maximum divide had been reintroduced. Trotsky was harsh in his criticism of the draft: "The proletariat needs not a catalogue of truisms but a manual of action."

For this reason the Fourth International's programme of 1938 took the real situation facing the world working class as its starting point. It then developed a series of transitional demands to build a bridge between the struggles of the present and the fight for revolution and socialism.

Trotsky wrote the programme draft after examining the lessons of the entire history of the movement, and the advances that the Comintern had made between 1919 and 1923.

Capitalism had already created the conditions under which a socialist society could be built. The world was not only ripe for socialism, but this ripeness had "begun to get somewhat rotten".

One thing and one thing only had saved capitalism in the crisis-ridden years of the 1920s and 1930s: the absence of a revolutionary leadership for the working

class. The failure of the working class to take power had led the world to the brink of catastrophe: economic collapse, fascist barbarism and war.

From this Trotsky concluded: “The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterised by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.”

The main job of revolutionaries was to overcome the gulf between the ripening of the conditions for socialism and the lack of political readiness on the part of the working class to take power into its own hands.

The key to this was “a system of transitional demands, the essence of which is contained in the fact that ever more openly and decisively they will be directed against the very foundations of the bourgeois regime.” This transitional programme replaced the old minimum programme of Social Democracy.

The main economic diseases infecting capitalist society on the eve of World War II were mass unemployment and inflation.



The Transitional Programme

The Fourth International’s programme put forward answers to these evils, ones that strengthened the self-organisation of the working class and took forward its struggle for power. It demanded jobs for all, a guaranteed minimum wage and a strictly limited working week.

To ensure these demands were not subverted by the capitalists, it called for the workers’ organisations themselves to form committees to draw up a plan for dividing all the necessary work among all those available to do it, with no loss of pay.

Wages, it declared, should rise to cover any rise in prices. If the capitalists could not “afford” to pay this, then their property should be taken from them: “If capital-

ism is incapable of satisfying the demands inevitably arising from the calamities generated by itself, then let it perish.”

The programme examined the situation facing the workers’ organisations. It was absolutely essential for communists to participate in the trade unions, to strengthen them and raise their militancy, opposing all attempts by the capitalists to control them or weaken them, whether through police repression or the more subtle dictatorship of “binding arbitration”.

Yet at the same time, the programme recognised the limitations of the trade unions, calling for a struggle against the conservative union leaders and the creation of bodies embracing the whole fighting mass of the working class, “strike committees, factory committees and, finally, soviets”.

Just as it would be criminal to turn one’s back on the mass trade unions, so the revolutionaries should not flinch from a break with the union apparatus if necessary to advance the struggle at a given moment.

Workers’ control

The programme went on to argue for workers’ control of production, the opening of all the economic secrets of the capitalists to inspection by the workers themselves, and the drawing up by the workers of a general plan for the reorganisation of economic life.

This struggle for control would be a declaration of war against the employers, who would resist it all the way. At the same time it would be the best preparation for the workers in running society themselves, as “a first step along the road to the socialist guidance of the economy”.

The programme called for the key branches of industry and the banks to be expropriated, taken out of the hands of private capitalists and put under the control of the state. At the same time it made quite clear that this would “produce favourable results only if the state power itself passes completely from the hands of the exploiters into the hands of the toilers.”

The Transitional Programme pointed out how the working class in its struggles* faced not just the violence of strike-breakers and the police, but increasingly that of the hired thugs of the employers, and of the fascist gangs: “The struggle against fascism does not start in the liberal editorial office but in the factory – and ends in the street.”

Taking the strike picket as its point of departure, the programme argued for youth



groups and trade unionists to organise workers’ groups for self-defence including learning the use of arms. The eventual aim of this work should be the construction of a workers’ militia “to root out . . . the traditions of submissiveness and passivity; to train detachments of heroic fighters capable of setting an example to all toilers; to inflict a series of tactical defeats upon the armed thugs of counterrevolution; to raise the self-confidence of the exploited and oppressed; to compromise fascism in the eyes of the petit bourgeoisie and pave the way for the conquest of power by the proletariat.”

The Transitional Programme also dealt with the tasks facing workers in specific parts of the world. In the colonial countries, it stood by the conclusions of the theory of permanent revolution: that the struggle for national liberation and democracy can be won only under the leadership of the working class.

The fight against Stalinism

It addressed itself openly to the workers of countries suffering under fascist regimes.

For the working class in the USSR, the Transitional Programme correctly judged that the upsurge of revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy would begin with “the struggle against social inequality and political oppression”. The programme fought for freedom for the trade unions and the press, and for the right to hold mass meetings as essential steps for the recreation of genuine workers’ councils and soviet democracy. It called for the freedom of all parties which the workers recognised as theirs.

It called for a complete revision of the planned economy, and combined a revolutionary defence of the gains of 1917 with a call for a “victorious uprising of the

70 YEARS SINCE ASSASSINATION OF LEON TROTSKY

oppressed masses” in an insurrection against Stalin and the dictatorship of the privileged bureaucratic elite.

In the face of the imminent world war, the Fourth International’s programme opposed a single penny being spent or a single person conscripted to fight this war. But at the same time it rejected pacifism as a useless illusion: “The only disarmament which can avert or end war is the disarmament of the bourgeoisie by the workers. But to disarm the bourgeoisie, the workers must arm themselves.”

It demanded that military training be placed under the control of the workers and committed the Fourth International to defend colonial countries and the USSR from imperialism, through methods of class struggle such as boycotts and strikes.

The twin cancers of sectarianism and opportunism plagued the socialist movement in Trotsky’s day as in ours. The Transitional Programme waged war on both. It mercilessly mocked the refusal of sectarian groupings to struggle for the elementary interests of the working class: “They have no need of a bridge in the form of transitional demands because they do not intend to cross to the other shore. They simply dawdle in one place, satisfying themselves with a repetition of the self-same meagre abstractions.”

It spoke with contempt of those who do not seek a road to the masses and who want to do nothing but discuss, describing them as “a dead weight to the party”.

Finally, the Transitional Programme turned resolutely to those layers of the working class ignored by the opportunists, who by nature concentrate only on the top layers of the working class where new careerists and officials can be found.

The oppressed sections of the class – in particular the women and the youth – were

given special emphasis, the youth for their “fresh enthusiasm and aggressive spirit” and the women workers for their “inexhaustible stores of devotion, selflessness, and readiness to sacrifice”.

The programme concluded with a defence of the Fourth International itself. Though it was weak in numbers, it was strong in its ideas, programme and the training of its members, cadres and leaders. Only the Fourth International offered a programme that could lead a way out of the crisis about to engulf humanity.

The Transitional Programme today

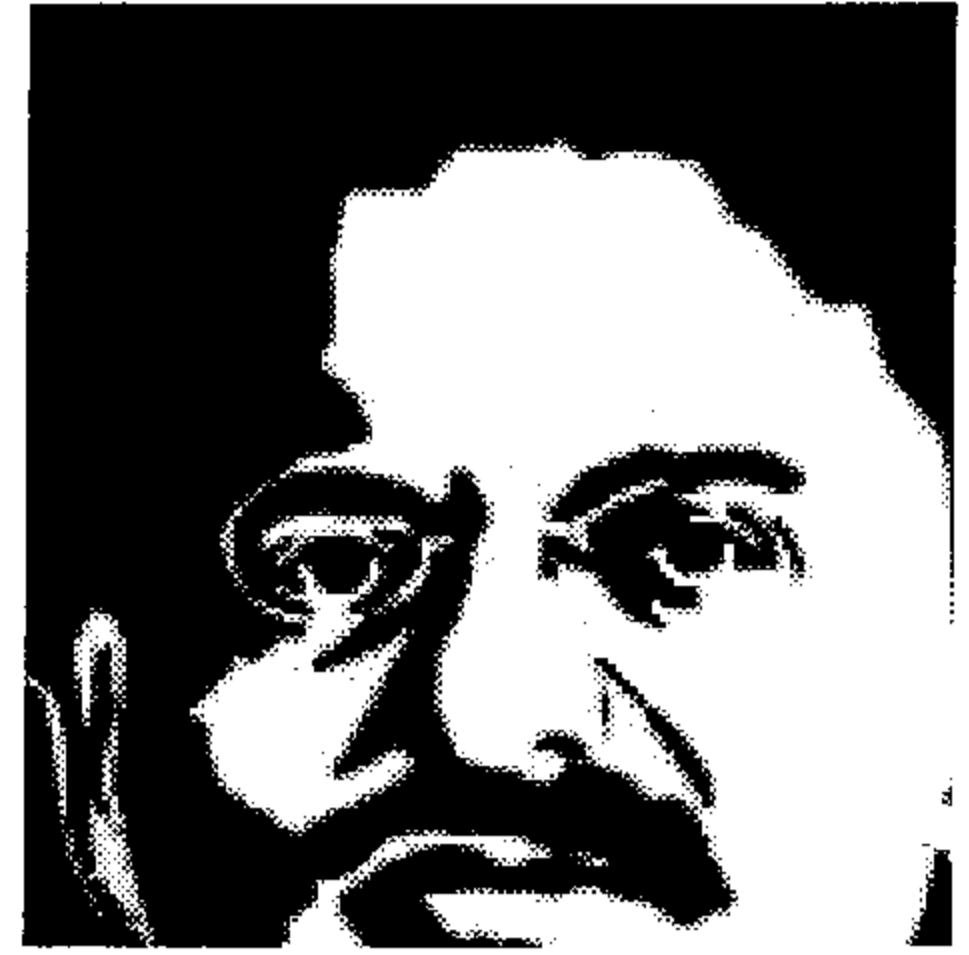
Is the Transitional Programme unrealistic? Would it not be better to raise only demands which are acceptable to the prevailing opinions of the working class?

In discussions with members of the Fourth International, Trotsky dealt with precisely this objection: “Our tasks don’t depend on the mentality of the workers. The task is to develop the mentality of the workers... Some will say: good, the programme is a scientific programme; it corresponds to the objective situation – but if the workers won’t accept this programme, it will be sterile. Possibly. But this signifies only that the workers will be crushed, since the crisis can’t be solved any other way but by the socialist revolution... even in the worst case... the best elements will say, ‘We were warned by this party; it was a good party.’ And a great tradition will remain in the working class...”

The Transitional Programme was written on the eve of World War II. Trotsky fully expected the war would end in the outbreak of socialist revolution in Europe. He believed that the imperialist democracies (Britain, France and the US), as well as the Nazis, would inflict such suffering and defeats on one another that revolutionary outbreaks would mark the end of this war as they had World War I.

Certainly France collapsed and was occupied. Britain stared defeat in the face. Trotsky correctly predicted that Hitler would invade the USSR and part-correctly that the Stalin regime would prove incompetent at defending it, giving rise to an uprising by workers, to create a government capable of victory over the invader. True Stalin was totally unprepared and huge areas of the USSR were devastated, but the Stalin regime did not collapse and no political revolution occurred.

Trotsky’s predictions were however not



of some sort of automatic historic process. They required human agency. The outcome would be decided by struggle.

The entry of the US into the war in 1941 with its immense resources, combined with the near total absence of a revolutionary leadership due to fascist and Stalinist repression, meant that Trotsky’s perspective was not realised. The US and the USSR emerged as victors who reordered the post-war world.

Trotsky did not expect the survival and expansion of Stalinism in Eastern Europe, and long decades of relative stability and democracy in the advanced Western capitalist countries.

Some believe that this error of perspectives means that the entire programme needs to be junked; this is wrong. No programme – no matter who writes it – can guarantee that its perspectives will be realised. Marx and Engels’ perspectives in the Communist Manifesto were proved wrong, as they themselves admitted.

What is wrong, however – and this is how the post-war followers of Trotsky fell into error and eventual collapse – is to cling on to perspectives after life has proved them wrong. Every programme is a guide to action in concrete circumstances. No programme will last forever without needing to be re-adjusted to meet new conditions.

Revolutionaries today should neither abandon the Transitional Programme nor treat it as the last word to be said. They should apply its fundamental propositions and method as a guide to writing new transitional programmes at every major historical turn, just as Trotsky himself did.

Trotsky – an introduction, is available from www.workerspower.com

• Now turn to **Spotlight on Communist Policy** on p20 for more on the transitional programme and the struggle against the Con-Dem cuts



WHAT WE STAND FOR

Workers Power is a revolutionary communist organisation. We fight to:

- Abolish capitalism and create a world without exploitation, class divisions and oppression
 - Break the resistance of the exploiters by the force of millions acting together in a social revolution smashing the repressive capitalist state
 - Place power in the hands of councils of delegates from the working class, the peasantry, the poor - elected and recallable by the masses
 - Transform large-scale production and distribution, at present in the hands of a tiny elite, into a socially owned economy, democratically planned
 - Plan the use of humanity's labour, materials and technology to eradicate social inequality and poverty.
- This is communism - a society without classes and without state repression. To achieve this, the working class must take power from the capitalists.

We fight imperialism: the handful of great capitalist powers and their corporations, who exploit billions and crush all states and peoples, who resist them. We support resistance to their blockades, sanctions, invasions and occupations by countries like Venezuela, Iraq or Iran. We demand an end to the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Zionist occupation of Palestine. We support unconditionally the armed resistance.

We fight racism and national oppres-

sion. We defend refugees and asylum seekers from the racist actions of the media, the state and the fascists. We oppose all immigration controls. When racists physically threaten refugees and immigrants, we take physical action to defend them. We fight for no platform for fascism.

We fight for women's liberation: from physical and mental abuse, domestic drudgery, sexual exploitation and discrimination at work. We fight for free abortion and contraception on demand. We fight for an end to all discrimination against lesbians and gay men and against their harassment by the state, religious bodies and reactionaries.

We fight youth oppression in the family and society: for their sexual freedom, for an end to super-exploitation, for the right to vote at sixteen, for free, universal education with a living grant.

We fight bureaucracy in the unions. All union officers must be elected, recallable, and removable at short notice, and earn the average pay of the members they claim to represent. Rank and file trade unionists must organise to dissolve the bureaucracy. We fight for nationalisation without compensation and under workers control.

We fight reformism: the policy of Labour, Socialist, Social-Democratic and the misnamed Communist parties. Capitalism cannot be reformed through peaceful parliamentary means; it must be overthrown by force. In Britain, we fight to build a consis-

tently socialist alternative to the Labour Party inside the movement, a revolutionary party. This can be won through addressing the most advanced sections of the working class with the need for a revolutionary programme of action, to take steps towards unity around such a programme, to fight for a revolutionary tendency in the Labour Party.

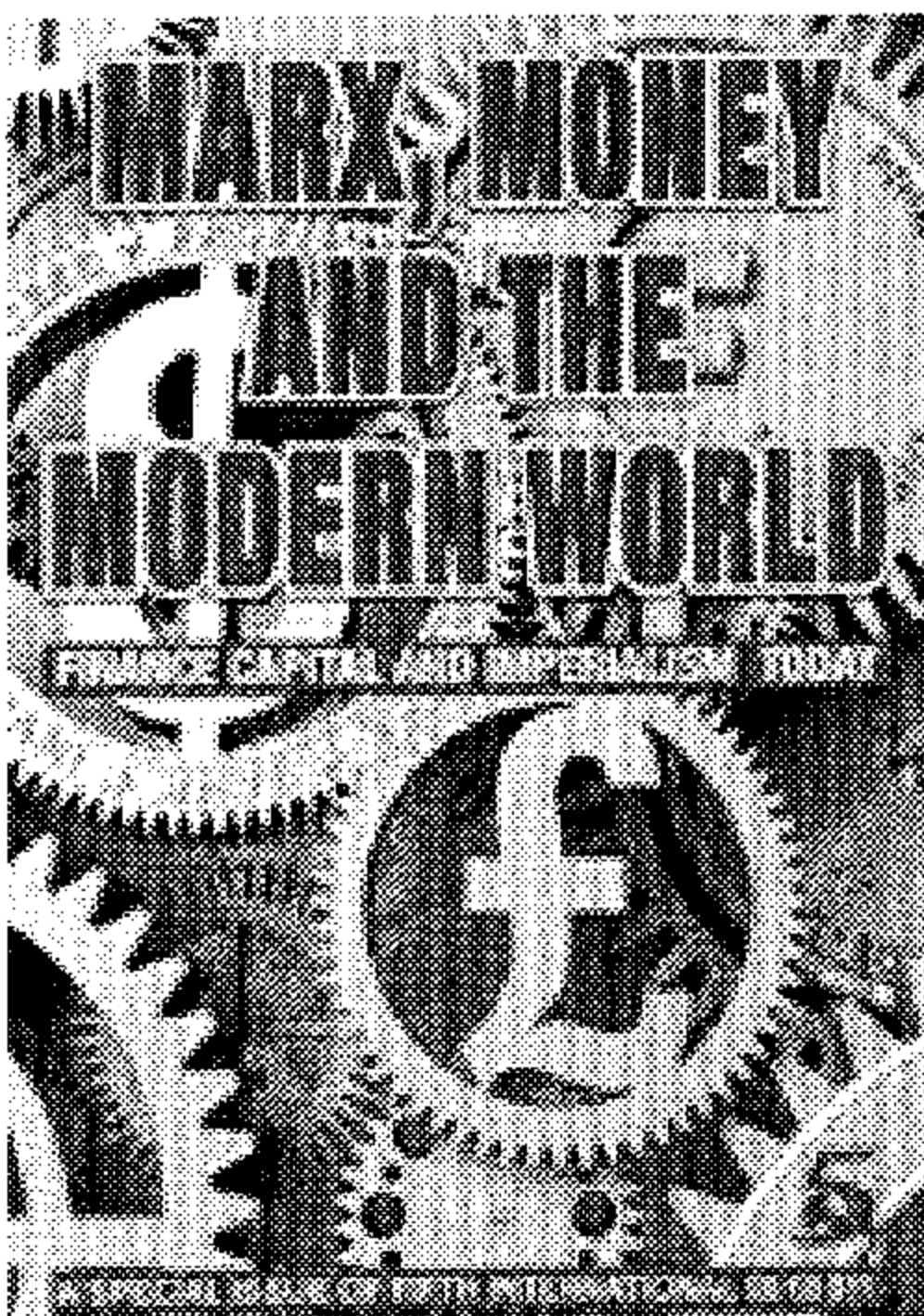
We fight Stalinism. The so-called communist states were a dictatorship over the working class by a privileged bureaucratic elite, based on the expropriation of the capitalists. Those Stalinist states that survive - Cuba and North Korea - must be defended against imperialist blockade and attack. But a socialist political revolution is the only way to prevent their eventual collapse.

We reject the policies of class collaboration: "popular fronts" or a "democratic stage", which oblige the working class to renounce the fight for power today. We reject the theory of "socialism in one country". Only Trotsky's strategy of permanent revolution can bring victory in the age of imperialism and globalisation. Only a global revolution can consign capitalism to history.

With the internationalist and communist goal in our sights, proceeding along the road of the class struggle, we propose the unity of all revolutionary forces in a new Fifth International.

That is what Workers Power is fighting for. If you share these goals - join us.

NEW FIFTH INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL ON SALE



The latest issue of Fifth International Journal is a special focussing on political economy. Marcus Lehner offers an outline of Karl Marx's theories of money, banking and finance and shows how it can provide a compelling account of what caused the great financial crisis.

Luke Cooper surveys the work of two recent high profile Marxist theories of imperialism developed by David Harvey and Alex Callinicos.

Keith Spencer makes a case-study analysis of a 'Great Power' that was at the centre of the global financial whirlwind: Britain.

- **Theories of imperialism, Callinicos and Harvey**
Luke Cooper
- **Marx, money and modern finance**
Markus Lehner
- **British imperialism today**
Keith Spencer

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Oppose every cut a spotlight on communist policy

By Simon Hardy

All the main political parties in Britain agree there must be some cuts; but they disagree on their tempo and extent. They agree because this is what the capitalist class is asking for. The Bank of England, the IMF, the economic experts, the financial journalists, the tabloid press, all express this opinion in deafening unison.

Indeed the capitalist press has done an excellent job of shifting the entire focus of public debate away from the banks and their role in the economic crisis to alleged over-spending by the public sector. Now there is consensus in the political establishment about the need for cuts and bank reform has gone out the window.

However, increasingly the difference between the Labour's Ed Miliband and the Conservative's economic plans are becoming apparent. Miliband represents a social democratic alternative based on a Keynesian approach. The Cameron-Clegg government plan nothing less than the complete restructuring of the British economy along neo liberal lines.

Cameron aims to continue the work that Thatcher started in the 1980s, when they attacked the state capitalist enterprises, British Steel, British Gas, etc. After marketising those industries they are now turning to the rest of the public sector. Under a media barrage against public sector workers and welfare claimants, the government is directing its attacks at first the soft targets (unemployed, single mothers) but eventually against the organised working class itself (probably starting with the London tube workers)

Julian Glover, a right wing journalist, openly calls for the cuts to be part of an ideological offensive against the "big" state. He writes: "The coalition feels a revolutionary duty to be brave". In fact this so called "revolutionary duty" is the dream of the British bosses to undo the gains that the working class has achieved since the Second World War – the welfare state, the NHS and comprehensive public education.

A general attack on workers' living standards, jobs and pay will inevitably lead to resistance. This is why Boris Johnson, the buffoon Tory mayor

of London, is asking the government to introduce legislation banning public sector strikes in "crucial" sectors like the London Underground. We will see the coalition make serious attacks on workers rights in the coming years to try to block resistance.

Keynesian strategy

Some say that the cuts are simply ideological. For the Keynesians in the Labour Party, the Coalition cuts are simply a wrong policy, which should be changed. They point to the crisis in Ireland, where a bank bailout of £39 billion coupled with public sector cuts has seen the economy slump into a real depression with growing unemployment.

The Keynesian alternative, popular amongst the centre-left, argues for state investment to ensure growth. They want to increase wages to stimulate consumer purchasing and revive the economy. They would favour more taxation on the rich, but not too much, and would not launch

The bosses desire for cuts is driven by the crisis of the system

a serious attempt to challenge the logic of the market and profiteering.

This strategy is doomed to failure because in reality, the current assault by the coalition government is part of the unravelling of the post-war Keynesian consensus. A mixed economy, pulled down by a declining market and artificially inflated by a parasitic financial system is a recipe for crisis. The Keynesian model was sustainable for a time as part of a general post war boom, but as the boom ended and economic stagnation and structural inflation became more common in the western world, the whole consensus began to unravel. Indeed the bourgeois class declared war on it with the invention of monetarism as pioneered by economists under Thatcher and Regan. It was revived for a time during the credit fuelled boom of 1992-2006, but was bound to a shuddering end in the great financial crisis.

The idea of "trickle down" – that allowing the rich to keep more of their profits and wealth would see it trickle down through the

economy to help the poor - is a monetarist deception, one that has been resuscitated by George Osborne.

Keynesian theory cannot grasp at the root of the problem, the inherent declining profitability of capitalism itself. It seems like the polar opposite of neo liberal monetarism, but it shares its underlying assumptions. Monetarists say there is too much spending, Keynesians say there is not enough, but neither can explain why the system repeatedly goes into crisis, and why capitalists must systematically drive down workers living standards to revive profitability.

Communist alternative

Whatever Miliband says, the cuts are not just ideological. The bosses desire for cuts is driven by the crisis of the system... there is an economic imperative to the coalition's policies, and there will be for as long as capitalism exists.

Communists believe we need to stop all the cuts to welfare spending and the public sector (though not to repressive agencies like the occupying armies, nuclear weapons and the police who repress our strikes and demonstrations).

The boom and bust of the capitalist cycle will see future recessions or even depressions, and again the question of who pays the cost will be raised. We need to break the cycle, not simply through more public spending but through a socialist revolution which will take the power from the capitalists, removing profit and the market as the main drivers of the economy, replacing them with democratic planning and co-operation for a prosperous and sustainable future.



League for the
Fifth International