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Are networks better than parties? p8-9



Putin: The tsar of Russia p6



Sparks victory p2

Leveson exposes Met police corruption

Rachel Brooks

As week 13 of the Leveson Inquiry draws to a close, the parasitic and corrupt bond between the press and police has been exposed for all to see. For example, the Metropolitan Police gave Rebekah Brooks,

former News International chief executive, a retired police horse for her own personal use. What she did to deserve this gift remains unclear - but at least we know for certain now, after much denial, that David Cameron did go out for a canter on that particular horse.

The inquiry has uncovered corruption at the highest echelons of the Met, with former Met commissioners being forced to answer uncomfortable questions about illegal dealings and cocktail happy hours with rotten elements of the press. Champagne appears to be the

drink of choice for the Met police. Lord Paul Condon, who was commissioner of the Met at the time of Stephen Lawrence's death, testified this week. The Independent had obtained evidence that one of the

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ALL OUT ON 28 MARCH



Jeremy Dewar

- **No cuts to pensions – no rise in retirement age**
- **Unite with other workers in struggle – stop all the cuts**
- **Escalate the strikes – stay out to win**

On 1 April, millions of workers could lose around £50 a month from their pay packets. Within two years, the amount deducted could be £200 a month.

When they retire, sometime in their late 60s, they might lose tens of thousands of pounds, while today's pensioners already face erosion of their meagre income.

That's why hundreds of thousands of teachers, civil servants and nurses are right to strike on 28 March in defence of their pension schemes. They are right to reject the Pay more, work longer, get less offer from

the coalition government. They are right to continue from last year's strikes left off.

Education workers in the NUT, UCU, possibly Nasuwt, alongside the regional unions, EIS, UCAC and INTO, civil servants in the PCS, Nipsa and Unite members in the MoD, and health workers in Unite and Scottish Unison could all be out in coordinated strike action.

It is a disgrace that other union leaders, like Dave Prentis of Unison and the GMB's Paul Kenny, have withdrawn their troops from the battle. Rank and file members in these unions should refuse to cross picket lines and demand the strikes are brought back on.

They have won no serious concessions through negotiations. More strikes are needed – and if these gentlemen cannot see that, then new leaders are needed as well, ones who are in touch with and accountable to ordinary members.

But we can all take heart from the tremendous victories scored recently by anti-workfare activists, who have forced multinational corporations, like Tesco and Burger King, to withdraw from the government's slave labour schemes, or by electricians on building sites, who organised unofficially to frighten off construction giants like Balfour Beatty, from imposing a 35 per cent pay cut.

This shows we can win against the bosses and this makeshift government. But we need to take something of the spirit of the sparks. Let's organise joint union meetings in every workplace and town to get out the vote and secure solidarity action.

Let's draw students, welfare claimants and service users into the heart of our actions. And let's demand our leaders escalate the action, leading to an all out, indefinite strike until all unions have won – or we will do it without them!



The anticuts movement faces great challenges in the coming months

SPRING 2012 could see a turning point in the anticuts struggle. After last years broadening of resistance to the coalition's austerity programme from the student revolt in November 2010 to the mass N30 public sector strike the major unions – we are now at a stage when we can marshal our forces for a fresh struggle against the government, or we risk fragmentation and further frustrations.

Between now and May either a N30 style mass strike will resume and go forward into to a major confrontation with the government, or it will disintegrate as the government imposes its pension reforms. The same can be said of Lansley's Bill wrecking the NHS. On both issues the union bureaucracy's cowardly and inept leadership threatens a major setback to our struggles.

Such an outcome was always lodged in the strategy adopted by both the left and centre-left bureaucracy.

The bureaucrats reason for concentrating on pensions was that if they took on all the major attacks – the NHS, local and central government job losses, pensions, youth unemployment, etc they would be charged of interfering in politics and, if they took simultaneous strikes, would be charged with breaking the anti-union laws. As we point out in this issue the "fight" against the destruction of the NHS has not seen even a proper national demonstration called by the big unions.

Workers Power argued from the beginning that focusing exclusively on the public sector pension struggle had severe limitations based as it was on pursuing a "line of least resistance" rather than creating a generalised resistance the Tory Lib-Dem assault on the health service, welfare, education, along with real wage cuts, job losses, and pensions.

In fact Andrew Lansley's Health and Social Care Bill is probably more universally feared and hated than any other Tory measure. A real direct action fight against it could unite all workers and many of the middle classes with the health workers. In popular consciousness it would be far easier to win mass strike action in solidarity with the health workers and to save the NHS, than even public sector pensions could.

Meanwhile all the other anticuts fronts remain fragmented or at best are only locally coordinated. Local anticuts committees remain gatherings of only dozens of activists rather than the delegate based councils of action we need to mobilise mass action. Actions are largely limited to small local demos, symbolic occupations or support for local trade unionists' or services users' actions. Important as this is it does not yet constitute the wave of mass resistance we need.

The Labour Party has been incredibly weak and treacherous in opposition – even by past standards. Instead of seeking to reconsolidate its working class base the leadership, after a few feeble hints of Keynesian solutions, under pressure from the media and the right wing in the PLP accepted that they cannot and will not reverse the Tory cuts if they win the next election. As a huge slap in the face for their union backers Miliband and Ball announce that they support a freeze of public sector workers wages.

In the unions developing a national rank and file movement remains a burning necessity. However, as the victory of the Sparks and #Occupy show, resistance will continue as the youth remain a source of vibrant protest movements and sections of workers are driven to take militant action to defend themselves in the coming months and years of recession and austerity.

The Spark's victory and the retreat by the government and employers on its workfare programme show that campaigns that do not wait for the union leaders, much less cede them initiative, and take action can win. The workfare protests showed that even a small but well-targeted campaign of action by the left can actually force a government u-turn on the most vicious of its policies. These are small scale about important victories, the sign of what a mass campaign against the NHS privatisation could do if we organise one.

Now we need to use the mobilisations already planned in the coming months to fight for the revival of the anticuts and anti privatisation struggle.

Sparks' victory shows the power of the rank and file

Direct action and the threat of a strike forced the construction companies to back down, writes John Bowman. What are the lessons of the electricians' dispute?

ELECTRICIANS ON building sites – commonly known as sparks – facing a 35 per cent pay cut have won a stunning victory in a hard-fought battle as construction firms pulled out of plans aimed at deskilling and devaluing their trade.

A campaign by ordinary sparks that picketed sites, disrupted shareholders' meetings and mounted noisy demonstrations in London scared off construction giant Balfour Beatty – and six other companies immediately after.

This was remarkable given the ambivalence, slowness and occasional outright hostility from Unite union officials towards the campaign's organisers.

After rank and file workers elected representatives in democratic conferences across the country, Unite's appointed negotiator Bernie McAuley called them a "cancerous group".

In the face of this rank and file campaign, union leaders were forced to ballot for official action against which Balfour Beatty immediately obtained a court injunction, triggering union tops to call for a re-ballot. This delayed action, but in the end Balfour lost their court case, driving a final nail into the coffin of BESNA, the new industry-wide contract they were trying to impose.

The sparks' victory shows that rank and file organisation independent of the leaders can get the goods, and their campaign is a shining example of how millions of public sector workers facing cuts to their pensions and privatisation of services could win despite union leaders who won't put up a real fight.

Blacklist

The campaign against BESNA didn't start at all from a position of strength. The last few decades saw unions all but disappear in the construction industry, with workers casualised with temporary agency contracts.

Worse still has been the widespread use of blacklists to keep tabs on workers' trade union activity, political affiliations and other sensitive information. While now illegal, such lists are still very much in use, with many denied work on all major contracts regardless of their skills and experience. Anti-blacklist activist Steve Kelly is one of the few construction workers to have obtained his file after a successful legal battle – and



found that it was eighteen pages long.

Blacklisting has taken key union organisers off many large sites, a weakness compounded by the failure of unions to reorganise the sector – as admitted by Unite Assistant General Secretary Gail Cartmel at a conference in September.

The Unite leadership used this to justify delaying a strike ballot until the last moment. The original suggested date was 9 December – two days after construction firms said they would sack workers who had not signed the new contracts. Sparks were urged to sign the new agreement, but with a letter to outline their concerns. But none of this put off the electricians, who were determined to fight the new terms immediately, regardless of the unions' passivity.

Pickets, protests, wildcats and walkouts

Indeed, there wouldn't have been a campaign if it had been left to the union bureaucrats. So how did the sparks do it?

The campaign started with a 500-strong unofficial conference against de-skilling last August, organised in part by Jerry Hicks, chair of UNITE Grassroots Left, and long-term campaigners against the construction blacklist like Steve Kelly and Steve Acheson. The conference called for immediate unofficial action. As Jerry Hicks said, "When employers go on the attack you can't always wait for a ballot."

The immediate target was the Big Seven – construction giants, led by Balfour Beatty – who threatened to unilaterally leave the Joint Industry Board (JIB) and impose new contracts, known as BESNA, on construction site electri-

cians. Central to this was a 35 per cent pay cut.

The rank and file sparks elected an accountable steering group and organised regional conferences to spread the message. At an 80-strong meeting in Manchester, one spark announced to huge cheers plans to walk out at Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station near Nottingham.

Since then, there have been numerous actions across the country every Wednesday – albeit often falling short of full wildcat strike action. That hasn't however meant that the actions were not successful.

Demonstrations of several hundred sparks have been held at sites like the new Crossrail link in Farringdon, often supported by anticuts campaigners and left-wing activists.

Sparks in Manchester and Liverpool alternated pickets between a politically important site next to Manchester Town Hall and a £250 million project to build a paper mill in Carrington. Pickets there cost Balfour Beatty dearly, angering their Spanish client for delaying work by over two months, as agency workers refused to cross picket lines.

In London activists from Occupy frequently joined the sparks at Blackfriars Bridge for the early morning picket. And in November, builders and students combined their national demos, giving the police a merry runaround. By February, the US Teamsters and the Aussie construction unions were threatening international solidarity actions.

A winning strategy

The sparks haven't just breathed life into a trade union struggle, they have shown how rank and file organisation and a determined campaign of struggle can win.

Leading rank and file activists, like Jerry Hicks and Mick Dooley (candidate for UCATT general secretary), have pushed a political perspective into the campaign from the outset, relating the struggle to a wider campaign against cuts and austerity, and questioning the bureaucratic regime within their unions – as well as their unions' huge donations to the Labour Party.

Every meeting witnessed debates and discussions over tactics. Should they target the smaller or larger contractors first? Should they picket sites or shareholders meetings? How should they get other construction workers and trade unions involved in the fight?

Social media and weekly national emails were used to report on every action, every twist and turn in the campaign, keeping every spark fully informed of developments in the unions, and any backtracking by the construction bosses.

Now we can adopt and adapt these tactics to revive the struggle in other trades and industries. If we are to transform the unions into fighting organisations so we can defeat all the cuts, we need to build up workplace organisation in every union and link them together in a rank and file movement.

'Time to push forward with our own agenda'

Steve Leadbeater, a Manchester spark, spoke to *Workers Power*:

"We've won the battle against the BESNA and put them on the back foot, and can push forward now with our agenda, against blacklisting for instance. For years they've been chipping away and chipping away at us until finally they took this radical step. We've used different tactics to put the pressure on such as lobbying but I've been pushing for direct action in the rank and file meetings, the mass pickets of sites, that's had the greatest effect.

"Even I was surprised they caved in as quick as they did, the clients saw the unofficial action going on and got worried and began to put pressure on Balfour Beatty and the other seven. Water companies and other utilities wrote to them and said if they're not in the JIB they'd be taken off the tender list. Now Unite's suspended industrial action and the big companies are proposing high level talks with the union, it's really important that we have rank and file representatives in those meetings to keep an eye on the negotiations. That's why the rank and file committee is continuing to hold national meetings to discuss what next for the campaign and control over the negotiations."

Workfare - No Way!

Joy Macready

ANTI-WORKFARE PROTESTS across the country have forced a number of high-profile corporations to pull out of the government's "work experience" scheme: Tesco, Poundland, TK Maxx, Waterstones, Burger King and Matalan to name a few. These companies fear that their reputations will drop through the floor for being involved in slave labour – and rightly so.

These companies make hundreds of millions – McDonald's UK saw an 11 per cent rise in profits in the last three months of 2011 to £886m – yet they are using unpaid labour while the taxpayer picks up the bill. Under this scheme, 16-24 year olds on Jobseeker's Allowance are doing up to eight weeks' "free" work.

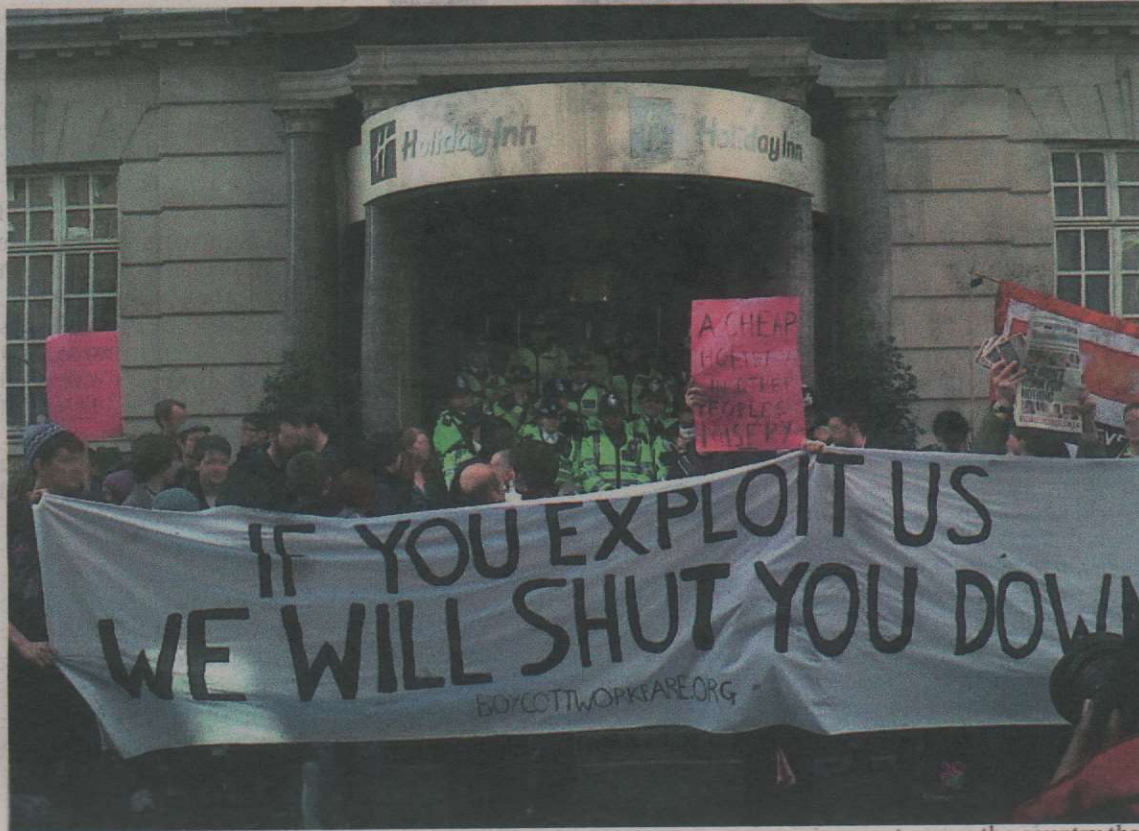
This has a direct effect on workers' pay. ASDA sent paid staff home early over Christmas and used workfare to fill the gaps. Argos stated that "Christmas is our busiest time of year and we are pleased to provide the opportunity for work experience during this time"; while a Holland and Barrett worker informed Corporate Watch that workfare has replaced overtime that used to be available to staff.

Although the government has repeatedly stated that the work experience scheme is voluntary, many dole offices have told claimants otherwise. Plus, prior to the government's climbdown, youth who left the programme after more than a week ran the risk of seeing their benefits cut. Even now they could still lose benefits in cases of "gross misconduct", according to Chris Grayling, the Employment Minister.

Boycott Workfare, Right to Work, Youth Fight for Jobs and the newly formed South London Anticapitalist Network, among others, have taken to the high streets to name and shame the culprits. Many of the organisations involved have been vilified in the right-wing press and labelled extremists by Tories from David Cameron down. Former Marks & Spencer chief executive Sir Stuart Rose accused demonstrators of "sabotage". Yet it is precisely these protests that have made the government scrap the punitive measures of the scheme and forced Tesco to offer real jobs and pay real wages to young people. This shows the importance of street agitation.

However, the battle against workfare is far from over. On the back of a number of companies pulling out, the government announced that three more large companies – Hewlett-Packard, Airbus and Center Parcs – are keen to be part of the scheme, plus over 200 small and medium-sized firms.

In addition, "work experience" is only one scheme among many. In many other workfare schemes, the threat of sanctions has yet to be removed. The Work Programme is



Work for Free? You Must be Joking!

Fat Cats Total Compensation

McDonald's CEO James Alan Skinner \$20.71 million
 Tesco CEO Philip Clarke £1.59 million
 Argos CEO Terry Duddy £1.12 million
 WH Smiths CEO Kate Swann £1.65 million
 Pizza Hut CEO David Novak \$29.67 million

Source: *Boycott Workfare*



Sir Philip Clarke

another one of these schemes in which job seekers will be forced to work unpaid in high street stores, including for well-known charities. Not only can job seekers be forced to work unpaid for six months, but also disabled people will find themselves fast tracked onto this scheme after only three months of unemployment.

Work Experience?

It important to counter the idea that workfare is the only way to address unemployment and the "lost generation" of youth that are not in education, training or work – which currently stands at 1.04 million people aged 16 to 24 in the UK. Workfare proponent Nick Clegg said: "I cannot for the life of me understand the kind of messed-up sense of priorities of people who want to prevent young people from finding opportunities to get into permanent work."

The "opportunities" he is talking about are stacking shelves for Tesco or flipping burgers for McDonald's. Forced to work a minimum 30-hour week in return for benefits of £67.50 (£53 for under-25s), they earn just £2.25 (or £1.76) an hour – less than half the legal minimum wage.

This is slave labour and will hardly give the next generation of young people the skills they need to be suc-

cessful in life.

The problem of unemployment in Britain is not caused by a lack of work experience; it is caused by a lack of jobs.

Fight back against Workfare

There are a number of different fronts we need to fight on. We need to fight for free university education, so that youth that want to continue in education do not hit a barrier of £9,000 a year tuition fees. Trade apprenticeships should also be an option and paid a decent living wage during training. Education maintenance allowance (EMA) needs to be reinstated so that young people have the choice to go to college.

At a time when unemployment is nearing the 3 million mark, we need to fight for a mass programme of public works so that people are employed in socially useful work, not low skilled, dead end jobs. To end unemployment, we demand that companies cut the hours not the jobs, with no loss of pay and a living wage for all.

To achieve this, we need to unite the different anti-workfare campaigns, drawing in the trade unions and making them fight for the mass of the unemployed, in the process building an unemployed workers'

movement across the country that can take militant action, such as occupying dole offices or headquarters of companies that continue to use slave labour.

The unions will play a crucial role in this movement. The civil service union PCS and the University and College Union have backed the anti-workfare campaigns, yet scandalously the postal union CWU was supporting workfare. A CWU Leeds motion, which was passed without opposition at its AGM, has turned this around and is making the rounds at other branches. The biggest unions Unite and GMB must step into the fray, organise the unemployed and fight.

Leveson

cont. from page 1

police officers investigating the Lawrence murder was neck-deep in illegal activity. Detective Sergeant John Davidson, who interviewed key Lawrence suspects and witnesses within days of the stabbing, was a key player in an organised gang of bent coppers in the 1990s. It turns out that he was on the payroll of Clifford Norris, the gangster father of David Norris, who has been charged for Lawrence's murder.

The stench of corruption is rising from the ground up. The Leveson Inquiry is an important step in uncovering the extent to which the corruption goes. However, to truly expose the collusion between the politicians, police and press, who have shown just how 'friendly' they are outside of the office, we will need an independent workers' tribunal that can break through the web of lies and deceit.

Stop Remploy Closures

The government has decided to close two in three of the remaining Remploy factories for disabled workers with the loss of more than 1,700 jobs, including 1,518 people with disabilities. UK Minister for Disabled People Maria Miller said that disabled people should not be corralled in an employment ghetto – instead they can be unemployed like the rest of us. A few dozen Remploy factories were shut down by Labour in 2008 and 85 per cent of those affected are still out of work.

Remploy workers staged their first ever strike earlier this year in Glasgow and Chesterfield against privatisation. Now the GMB should ballot every Remploy member and call a national strike.

Get out of Jail - and into Workfare

Up to 30,000 prisoners leaving jail each year, who then claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), will be referred immediately to the government's Work Programme, and lose benefit if they refuse to cooperate. Jobcentre Plus staff will process benefit claims in prison, fast tracking the process and making immediate referrals to the programme. It is difficult enough to reintegrate into society and regain your dignity after a spell inside – forcing ex-offenders into crap jobs with the threat of destitution hanging over their heads is not rehabilitation

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Egypt: counter-revolution in heartland of the Arab Spring poses new challenges

Simon Hardy

FOR ALL that is new and distinctive about the Arab uprisings, they still have all of the 'classical' features of revolution. One of the cruellest is that revolutions cannot proceed without a backlash of the old elites; to sustain their power and privilege a counter-revolution will always ensue.

Egypt is a textbook example of these contradictions. After the euphoria when Mubarak resigned, the real struggle for power began. The ruling classes and the military manoeuvred to secure their position through an electoral process under their control.

Despite the role that left wing forces played in organising the revolution, it was the Muslim Brotherhood who benefited. Only they had an established institutional base, with a significant degree of support amongst the poorest layers. They were the only organised mass opposition under Mubarak, and after his removal they did a deal with the military to help shape the post-revolutionary phase.

This deal became the manifesto of the counter-revolution. It emerged from within the revolution, but its task was to stabilise the situation, to keep any change within the parameters of capitalism. Egypt



Nader Bakar, spokesperson of the Salafist party, arrives in parliament

would continue to meet its obligations to the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other creditors under the conditions of global austerity.

Half a revolution

The mobilisations of 2011 saw millions of Egyptians protest and take strike action, but they did not succeed in splitting the army. And the Muslim Brotherhood has since agreed to a series of concessions that effectively grant the generals the power to interfere with the electoral process in the future, in the name

of 'upholding the constitution'.

But the revolution on the streets is still ongoing. The recent uprising of football supporters against the police shows that the energy of the movement has not yet dissipated. The danger is that the masses will be demobilised, placated temporarily with elections, and that the street protests and strikes will be isolated and lack mass support.

The left is fragmented across a myriad of different parties. Many boycotted the elections, in protest at the violence carried out by the military during the campaign, which made a

mockery of the claim that the elections were 'free and fair'. Attacks on women and Coptic Christians increased, stoking up the fires of sectarian division typical of the divide and rule politics on which military juntas and reactionary elites rest. Those who did participate did quite poorly, winning only a handful of seats.

More worrying still is the rise of the ultra-reactionary Salafists, whose extreme conservatism contrasts with that of the Muslim Brotherhood. They had none of the Brotherhood's pre-established infrastructure, but were flush with money – suspected to come from Saudi Arabia – and won 25 per cent of the vote.

The critical question now is the relationship between the streets and workplaces on the one hand, and the military institutions and Islamist-dominated political system on the other. The latter will seek to cohere Egypt around a socially conservative political agenda, while carrying through massive austerity measures. This will inevitably strain the relationship between the huge numbers of poor people who voted and the political elite that promised social justice.

That huge numbers of Egyptians abstained in the election is therefore not likely to be down to 'apathy', but because they could see that the elec-

toral process was flawed.

These are still reasons to be optimistic for the future of the revolution. The political system that is being created today will be inherently unstable. The breathing space the left and workers' movement won last February – freedom to protest, to strike, and to organise – will have to be defended vigorously.

The forthcoming 100-person constituent assembly that will be created by the parliament will rest not on the revolutionary masses in struggle, but on the old state apparatus. The army has decided to refrain from nominating its share of 90 politicians to the lower house until after the presidential elections in June. They will probably allow the new president – almost inevitably from the Muslim Brotherhood – to do this for them, between to cement the new alliance between the army and the Brothers against the people.

The revolutionary that began on 25 January has not yet ended. The new masters of Egypt still have to contend with the fact that one dictator was toppled, and that their governments also can be. Next time the Egyptian people must clean out the entire system, rooting out the capitalists, the generals and the reactionaries, in order to secure their real liberation.

Baba Amr falls to Syrian regime

Marcus Halaby

THE CITY of Homs, Syria's third largest, is today a city under a military occupation, one imposed on it by the government of its own country. After four weeks of merciless siege, which saw the Syrian army launch hundreds of shells and rockets at it in a way that bears direct comparison to Israel's 2009 bombardment of Gaza, Homs is now divided by checkpoints and dependent on outside aid for the essentials of day-to-day life.

Baba Amr, a working-class district where hundreds of armed fighters – mainly defectors from the Assad dictatorship's own army – had taken refuge amongst tens of thousands of civilians, has been largely flattened by artillery, its residents either dispersed as refugees, subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or summary execution, or warily waiting for their fate.

This is not yet the end of Syria's uprising. The rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters who vacated Baba Amr on 1 March to spare its population have reportedly decamped to Qusayr, the nearest town on the road to Lebanon's Beqaa region, from where they may yet return. Only two days after their tactical withdrawal, reports emerged that government



Civilians in Baba Amr suffering under bombardment

troops were facing armed resistance in other districts of the city. And other sporadically "liberated" zones like Baba Amr continue to exist elsewhere in the country, most notably in the small northern city of Idlib, where rebels are bracing themselves for a government offensive, and in the rural region around Damascus and its satellite town Douma.

It is, however, undoubtedly a setback for the revolution. Anyone who had hoped to see Syria's uprising develop into a military struggle for control of territory would have set their sights on Homs. Close to the Lebanese border – and therefore to potential sources of arms, aid and

strategic depth from a friendly population – and dividing the capital Damascus from Syria's populous coastal region and its second city Aleppo, Homs would have been well-placed to act as Syria's Benghazi.

The fall of Homs has deepened divisions within the opposition, with twenty secular and Islamist members of the 270-member Syrian National Council (SNC) forming a "Syrian Patriotic Group", to advocate increased reliance on and coordination with the FSA. It has also hardened attitudes against negotiations, with SNC president Burhan Ghalioun denouncing UN envoy

Kofi Annan's warnings against the "militarisation" of the conflict, as well as Annan's calls for "dialogue" with the Assad regime.

It has, however, also produced signs of dissent within the regime. Four senior officers, including Brigadier General Adnan Qassem Farzat, have now defected to the FSA, the most senior to do so since Brigadiers General Fayez Amro and Mustafa Ahmad al-Sheikh in January. The deputy oil minister Abdo Hussameddin has also announced his defection on video, urging the Syrian people to abandon a "sinking ship" and declaring that he was "joining the revolution of the dignified people".

What should now be clear is that Assad's regime will only be brought down by force. A regime that is willing to launch missiles built to bring down jet fighters at civilian homes will not simply abandon its figurehead as it did in Egypt. But the plight of Homs – and the failure of a Syrian army weakened by poor morale to split decisively in protest at this onslaught on its own people – continues to illustrate the limitations of a purely military strategy to bring down the Assad regime.

Possessing only such arms as they can take with them or smuggle in from Lebanon, the military defectors remain hostage to the whims

of the great powers. And despite the occasional prodding of their Saudi and Qatari allies, the Western states are in no mood to offer Syria's revolution even the self-interested and destructive "aid" that they offered to Libya's rebels.

US President Obama has explicitly rejected military intervention, while UK Defence Secretary Philip Hammond has ruled out arming the Syrian opposition, instead advocating pressure on Assad's Russian and Chinese allies to promote a political solution. And it is not just Russia and China's continued backing for Assad that worries them, but the sheer unpredictability of what might come after him. They fear the consequences of his revolutionary overthrow, more than they might hope to profit from it.

The Assad dictatorship's days are numbered. But if the Syrian workers, peasants, youth and urban poor want to avoid the inconclusive outcome of Yemen's uprising – where men with blood on their hands continue to remain in place – then they must act to shape its outcome themselves. A revolutionary general strike – and the forms of coordination necessary to bring it about – remains essential to paralyse the regime, and win over the mass of Syria's conscript army to the side of the people.

Why we still need to fight for women's rights

This year marked the 101st anniversary of International Working Women's Day. A day dedicated to the heroic acts of working class women across the globe, this year it barely got a mention. *Joana Ramiro* argues that women's social and sexual rights are coming under increasing attack, it is on this day that socialists must reflect on where we are at, and what is to be done.

It is not often that you might look to the Oscars as a marker for society, but this year it might be of use. There were some great roles for women in this year's Hollywood flicks, but this was not reflected in how the awards went. For it was not the woman enacting the emancipatory journey of a black maid in 1960s America, nor the actress portraying the bisexual crime investigator Lisbeth Salander from the feminist novels *Millenium* by Stieg Larson, that took the Oscar home. Neither did the award go to Glenn Close's performance as Albert Hobbs – a cross-dressing hotel waiter, who after being raped as a child discovers that living as a man is the only chance of survival. No, the Oscar went to Meryl Streep as Margaret Thatcher.

Thatcher is still seen by many liberals as a paragon of feminism – a strong, independent woman who stood up to the chauvinists in both her own party and the Labour opposition. Seemingly, an inspiration to many other women. Yet Margaret Thatcher was much more than just a woman ascending the political ranks. She was the head of a government responsible for setting back millions of women's lives. Her policies destroyed whole communities, sending men and women alike into unemployment and extreme poverty. Unsurprisingly, when the movie was shown in Chesterfield, women whose husbands used to work in the mines picketed the screening. "We were the Iron Ladies!", they said referring to how resolute and strong they had to be in the face of Thatcher's barbarism. It is they who deserve the status of "feminist icon", not Thatcher.

Many ask if we are not already beyond such events as International Women's Day. Women can vote, they can run for elected office, they can manage companies and are increasingly out-earning their male counterparts. An epidemic of articles focusing on the trauma that having successful wives inflicts on men has recently spread across the media. The message is clear – equality is pretty much achieved, now the men just need to accept it. But the reality today is a million miles away from the kind of middle class myth-making the media indulges in. Whilst it is true that some women in the West have become more upwardly mobile in the last generations, once you get out of the white, middle class bubble, women internationally are still struggling, often with the basics.

Women in the west

Just in the UK alone the Fawcett Society estimates that women are largely bearing the brunt of the finan-



Best places to be a woman

Iceland
Sweden
Canada
Denmark
Finland
Switzerland
Norway
United States of America
Australia
Netherlands

Worst places to be a woman

Sudan
Ethiopia
Pakistan
Niger
Soloman Islands
Mali
Democratic Republic of Congo
Yemen
Afghanistan
Chad

Data based on analysing access to Justice, health, education, politics and economic independence from Newsweek/The Daily Beast

cial crisis. The coalition's 'we are all in this together' motto falls flat when one comes to realise that the changes in tax policy and the overarching cuts will hit female taxpayers disproportionately harder than any other social group – with over 70 per cent of revenue coming now directly from them. Any area affected by these savage austerity measures has a greater impact on women – be it the cuts on benefits vital to single parents, of which 9 in 10 are women; or cuts on local authorities' social services, which will force predominantly women to give up their jobs and their incomes, in order to take care of children and elders (58 per cent of carers being women already). These stats say much, but equality is something they do not spell out.

Then we look at the United States, where retrograde radio host Rush Limbaugh calls a student a prostitute for testifying in favour of contraception in a Democrat-held hearing about birth control (the Republican one having only allowed males onto the panel!). Limbaugh (amongst others) called Sandra Fluke a "slut" and suggested that if she wanted to be paid for sex (i.e. that federal government should force insurance companies to cover the cost of contraceptives), she should film herself doing it and put it on the internet. "We want something in return", growled Limbaugh, sounding more and more like the paralytic he probably is.

"We live in a world in which women do 66 per cent of the work and only get 10 per cent of the pay"

We look at Canada where a police officer infamously suggested women should stop dressing like "sluts" to avoid being raped. Clearly, the 'First World' is just as ready to castrate women as any other society less 'civilised'. Instead of circumcision, women have to face bullying and censorship. As far as oppression is concerned, is there a lesser evil?

Does feminism still have a role?

When Helen Lewis Hasteley argued in the *New Statesman* that feminism's greatest challenge in 2012 is to justify its existence, she is giving far too much credit to the primarily white middle-class voices that question feminism in the first place. I doubt a single mother, with two jobs and outstanding rent, would ever say that we live in an equal society, where the fact that a woman can buy a vibrator means she is emancipated. In a world where possessing equals

being, being dispossessed obliterates your very existence; and since women own only 1 per cent of the world's property one could conclude women barely are.

Hasteley's logic can only exist in the West. The media focuses on the most outrageous forms of women's oppression at the hands of the Taliban, but are oblivious to the hypocrisy inherent in the critique. The plight of women in supposedly free flowing market economies in the global south, benefiting from the "grace" of the Washington Consensus of globalisation, is not a happy one. In rural areas of the global south where women are still largely uneducated, they spend most of their day collecting wood and water for the house and have no independent existence outside of the family. It is only when the cause of women's liberation has reached into the most out of the way places, the most isolated peasant village, that we can show real progress.

The real goal is not simply to ensure western women benefit better from what capitalism has to offer, but that some of the most deprived women are leading the kind of lives that are only the preserve of a minority in the west.

So how could anyone doubt the necessity for a strong women's emancipatory struggle today? How could one ever question the need to continue fighting for women's rights (from suffrage to equal pay) not just

in the distant 'Third World', but also right here, in imperialist centres, like the UK and the US?

And this is where class is so important. Without looking beyond the more conspicuous and immediate forms of oppression (for instance the plight of women in Saudi Arabia), there is a dangerous one-sidedness in how we see women's equality.

The kind of bias that lead to the Women's Social and Political Union exclusive focus on women's suffrage rejecting all other areas of the emancipatory struggle; or to the individualistic solutions to oppression offered by radical feminists like Betty Friedan, who simply advised women to escape domesticity and get a career. In the words of Evelyn Reed: "It is good but not enough for women to become more social-minded (...) [they] should now become socialist-minded". It is the interests of capital that forces women into subjectivity, they are the ones that profit from inequality, that indoctrinate passivity. Having a credit card and titling yourself "Ms" does not mean you are valued the same as a man. Only by freeing women (and men) from the market, not just allowing them equal access to it, can we erode the inequalities deriving from the oppression intrinsic to the system we live in.

It is exactly because we live in a world that allows people like Rush Limbaugh to broadcast their misogynist opinions; a world in which women do 66 per cent of the work and only get 10 per cent of the pay; a world in which women not contented with the decisions that society makes for them are called 'hysterical', 'paranoid' or just 'women' (with all the derogatory associations that can turn someone's gender into an insult); that anyone but the woman depicting Margaret Thatcher should have been awarded an Oscar. It is because our societies still believe that merely associating 'woman' and 'success' is reason enough to celebrate that we still need to organise on International Women's Day – 8 March.

We live in a world where women are under attack: through physical violence; sexual harassment; forced marriages; oppressive representations of a "real woman"; airbrushing; wage cuts; benefit cuts and everything else in between. If anyone dares to question the necessity of an International Women's Day they only need to look around them, whether it be in Afghanistan or Greece, to see that equality has not been met. Until we can destroy the oppressive grip that capitalism has on women and their lives, we will still continue to call for International Working

Indian general strike heralds the

Uslan Yentik investigates the impact of the recent all India general strike which saw millions take action

TENS OF millions of Indian workers went on to strike on 28 February, following 11 major union federations' call for action. Banking, education, transport, coal, electricity and manufacturing industries were all crippled. The police attacked picketers and demonstrators, particularly in Jammu, Kashmir and West Bengal, arresting at least 5,000 workers.

In Delhi, striking taxi and rickshaw-drivers brought traffic to a halt, while in Mumbai, the country's financial capital, the banking sector was completely shut down. In Nagpur, the ordinance factory that produces Pinaka rocket-launchers saw its first strike in many years.

The Trinamul Congress government of West Bengal went to extraordinary measures to prevent the strike, threatening a break in state employees' service so they would lose their pensions, and even organising sleepovers. Yet still 35 per cent of workers went on strike. The most militant part of the country was the southern state of Kerala.

The movement's demands include a statutory minimum wage of



Rs10,000 (rupees), as compared to the current situation where different states and industries implement different minimum wages, varying from Rs5500 to Rs6500. Other demands included:

- A national social security fund for unorganised workers
 - No subcontracting and outsourcing of permanent work - no more privatisation
 - All wages and benefits to be raised to the same level as those for regular workers
 - Secure pensions for all
 - No delay in recognising trade unions
- These basic demands are so impor-

tant today. Indian workers have suffered real wage cuts due to extremely high increases in food prices. The everyday cost of living has risen by around 30 per cent, with general inflation around 9 per cent.

Precarious work is an extremely important issue in the developing industrial sector - keeping in mind that more than two-thirds of the working class are in the informal sector. Some large industrial companies have more than twice as many subcontracted workers as members of the permanent workforce. The unions are calling for 50 million precarious workers to be granted permanent contracts.

This problem is exacerbated by the widespread misuse of apprentices, usually on two-year contracts and paid not much more for than subcontracted labour. The pretext that they are being trained is quite ridiculous, as these workers often have practical experience, along with two to three years' attendance at vocational schools.

Pensions are also very in low in India and only regular workers, employees and state officials have

Spanish general strike looms large

Tens of thousands of students and young people in Spain marked the European TUC Day of Action against austerity measures by taking to the street to demand an end to education cuts and mass unemployment, by Jeremy Dewar

NEARLY HALF of all Spain's youth are jobless.

On the European TUC Day of Action against austerity measures, 29 February, one of the biggest demos in Spain was in Valencia, where 20,000 protesters marched. They assembled at a school, where the police had attacked students a week earlier, injuring dozens and arresting 43 people. Tens of thousands more took part in Madrid and across the country.

But the biggest and most militant protests were in Barcelona. Again the police brutally attacked the demonstrators with repeated baton charges and plastic bullets. Students responded by building barricades out of rubbish bins and some occupied the university. More significantly, around 10,000 trade unionists swelled the ranks of the youth in the early evening. The day was a great success for the anti-austerity movement, proving beyond doubt that workers and youth want to fight to bring down the Popular Party (PP) government. It followed and surpassed the scale of an earlier day of action on 19 February. Now the main unions, - UGT and CCOO - have called a general strike for 29 March.

Spain's woes

Spain's plight bears an uncanny resemblance to the UK's. The country enjoyed a decade-long boom under the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government, largely pro-



pelled by a construction boom and resulting housing bubble. Families, banks and regional governments borrowed heavily on the back of rising house prices, only to come crashing down in the 2008 financial crisis.

An 18-month recession followed, which saw unemployment soar - to its current level of 4.7 million (23 per cent). For the under-25s, the situation is even bleaker - nearly one in two are out of work.

The PSOE leader José Zapatero initially promised a stimulus package, including €8 billion for infrastructure and a €2,500 "baby cheque" for new parents. He also bailed out the banks with €99 billion of taxpayers' money. If anyone in the UK is wondering whether Ed Balls' Keynesianism-lite package would work here, the Spanish example tells us - no.

The budget deficit spiralled and the debt ballooned. By 2010, the deficit hit 11.2 per cent and the debt was up to €225 billion, about the size of the Greek economy. Only Iceland was suffering a higher twin

deficit. First Standard & Poor and then Moody downgraded Spain's credit rating and borrowing rates climbed.

Soon Zapatero's government managed an ugly U-turn: raising the pension age from 65 to 67, cutting public sector wages by between 5 and 15 per cent, cutting the budgets for public services, and raising VAT by 2 per cent. To cap it all, the PSOE government passed labour market counter-reforms, making it easier for the bosses to sack workers. In its last act, in September 2011, the PSOE government forced through a constitutional amendment, forcing all future governments to pass balanced budgets. At the same time, the economy stagnated and a new recession loomed. If ever a reformist government 'deserved' to be punished at the polls, it was this one.

Unsurprisingly, their vote collapsed two months later and the right-wing PP now has a clear majority, despite hardly improving on their 2008 vote.

Plans for deeper austerity measures

In a macabre coincidence, the right wing came back into office on the anniversary of general Franco's death, 20 November. The new Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has wasted no time, already announcing measures that will have a devastating impact on Spanish society.

Rajoy has already introduced €15 billion of tax rises and spending cuts this year. But to hit the EU's deficit reduction target, it must implement twice as many cuts in the next round of austerity. Even before these savage cuts are announced, economists are forecasting a 1-2 per cent reduction in GDP this year.

News from the recent EU summit confirms that Europe's big players are in no mood to compromise. "Spain must respect the targets it has been given," said Euro Group president Jean-Claude Juncker.

So what does Rajoy have in store for Spanish workers? Deeper cuts in health and education, pay and pensions. The PP is also keen to transfer much of the responsibility for cuts onto the 17 regions, which enjoy varying degrees of autonomy, with a new law that will give central government the right to veto regional budgets. Fears of control from Madrid, dating back to Franco's repressive regime, will certainly be reawakened.

All out general strike!

A new, much tougher labour law has

just passed through parliament. It threatens to slash redundancy pay, tear up collective bargaining rights and effectively turn all Spain's workers into precarious labourers. It is this law that has finally woken the sleeping giants CCOO and UGT and galvanised them into action.

But a one-day general strike - on the important, but ultimately too narrow, basis of forcing a government retreat on the new labour law - will not be enough. At best, it will show workers and the wider movement what their real power could be. At worst, the union bureaucrats, who barely lifted a finger to stop rising unemployment under the PSOE, will simply use 29 March to allow their members to let off steam. Then they will return to fruitless 'negotiations' - a dialogue with the deaf.

No wonder some of the 'indignados' in the 28-M movement, which prefigured Occupy Wall Street, have washed their hands of the unions. At its height, 28,000 young people occupied Puente del Sol in Madrid last spring, calling for "real democracy now". They still need democracy - and jobs, services and welfare.

Socialists need to bring these two great social forces together in fighting unity. By linking up the struggles across the regions and building on the protests of the past few weeks, young people and workers can launch not just one-day protests but an all-out general strike and indefinite occupations to bring down the government.

awakening of the working class



access to them.

There have been several days of action and even one-day general strikes in the past few years, for example September 2010. This testifies to the growing unrest among the working class, which forces the unions to act. The left federations, such as the All India TUC (AITUC), connected to the Communist Party of India, and Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), linked with the CPI-Marxist, have been joined by the ruling Congress party's Indian National Trades Union Congress (INTUC) and even the right-wing Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), which is connected to the Hindu nationalist BJP.

This pressure from the working class on their leaders is growing due to the increasing problems of rising prices and unsecure jobs. However, it is clear that even a massive one-day strike will not achieve these demands. One reason is that large

sectors of the working class did not participate. The main absentee was private sector labour, but also large parts of the public sector, such as the railway workers, which is the single largest workforce in India.

Where next?

The general strike marks an important stage in the struggle of the Indian working class. To achieve the movement's demands, permanent local action committees must be built, based in the workplaces but also integrating contract, domestic and rural workers, the large number of 'self-employed' toilers, and crucially those exploited in the private sector.

The existence of workers centres that take care of the social needs of the working class, such as housing, children's education, etc, shows not only the burning necessity for the broadest alliance but also a way to draw in the informal sector of the working class,

where illiteracy and a lack of knowledge about rights is still endemic.

Equally necessary is for the struggle to develop a permanent leadership. On one hand, it would need to include the leaders of the traditional federations; on the other hand - given the bureaucratic character of these leaders - revolutionaries would fight for a representation of local or regional delegates, elected by local and factory committees, who can be democratically replaced at any time.

In the event of an indefinite strike, which could force the government to concede, workers' centres, action committees and rank and file-led factory committees would have to fight to wrest control of the movement from the official leadership, and fight for a revolutionary party and a workers' government, which will be capable of not only implementing their demands but opening the road to socialism.

Putin's re-election masks growing divisions in Russia

Andy Yorke

Vladimir Putin's election to a third term as president of Russia on 4 March, adding another six years to his unbroken stretch of power since 2000, has been greeted with cynical apathy or anger across the country. The day after the announcement, 20,000 protestors filled Pushkin Square in Moscow chanting "Putin - thief". The regime immediately stepped up its repression and hundreds were arrested. But the protests continue - on 10 March around 20,000 people demonstrated in Moscow.

Putin is determined to keep the reins of power in his hands, and has simply resumed after a four-year hiatus as prime minister. Constitutional limits on two terms forced him to put forward his subordinate Dimitri Medvedev in 2008; Medvedev kept the seat warm for Putin who continued to rule behind the scenes. Now Putin hopes to rule for another two terms, up to 2024, which would make him the longest serving ruler of Russia since Stalin.

The Voters' League, founded as a watchdog against fraud, has declared his real vote closer to 53 per cent rather than the official 63.6 per cent. It logged thousands of complaints, including those against managers in schools, hospitals and factories forcing employees to vote for Putin. Golos, another election watchdog, said that despite more subtle forms of fraud this time, there are still instances of forced voting, suspiciously high numbers of postal votes, and unrealistically big turnouts (near 100 per cent in some areas) that sug-



gest ballot box stuffing. The anti-Putin blogger, Alexey Navalny, claimed widespread "carousel" voting in Moscow, where voters are bussed round to vote several times in different polling stations.

The outward trappings of democ-

racy - elections, parties and media debates - mask the immense power that is concentrated in the state apparatus, which controls television and uses the courts to close down independent media. Putin has mastered the art of organising fake front par-

ties to take votes off the opposition, while the Nashi (Ours) youth organisation harasses opponents. More sinister, scores of journalists critical of the government have been killed in Russia since 2000, with most cases unsolved.

While Putin did receive a majority of votes, on a low turnout of 63 per cent, the ground beneath his regime is shifting. The optimism of the boom years up to the 2008 financial crisis has given way to stagnation and cuts to the standards of living of the working class, poor and pensioners. There is widespread cynicism towards the corruption of the regime, with Putin's cronies and "bureaugarchs" (former KGB officials) filling their pockets, particularly from Russia's oil revenues.

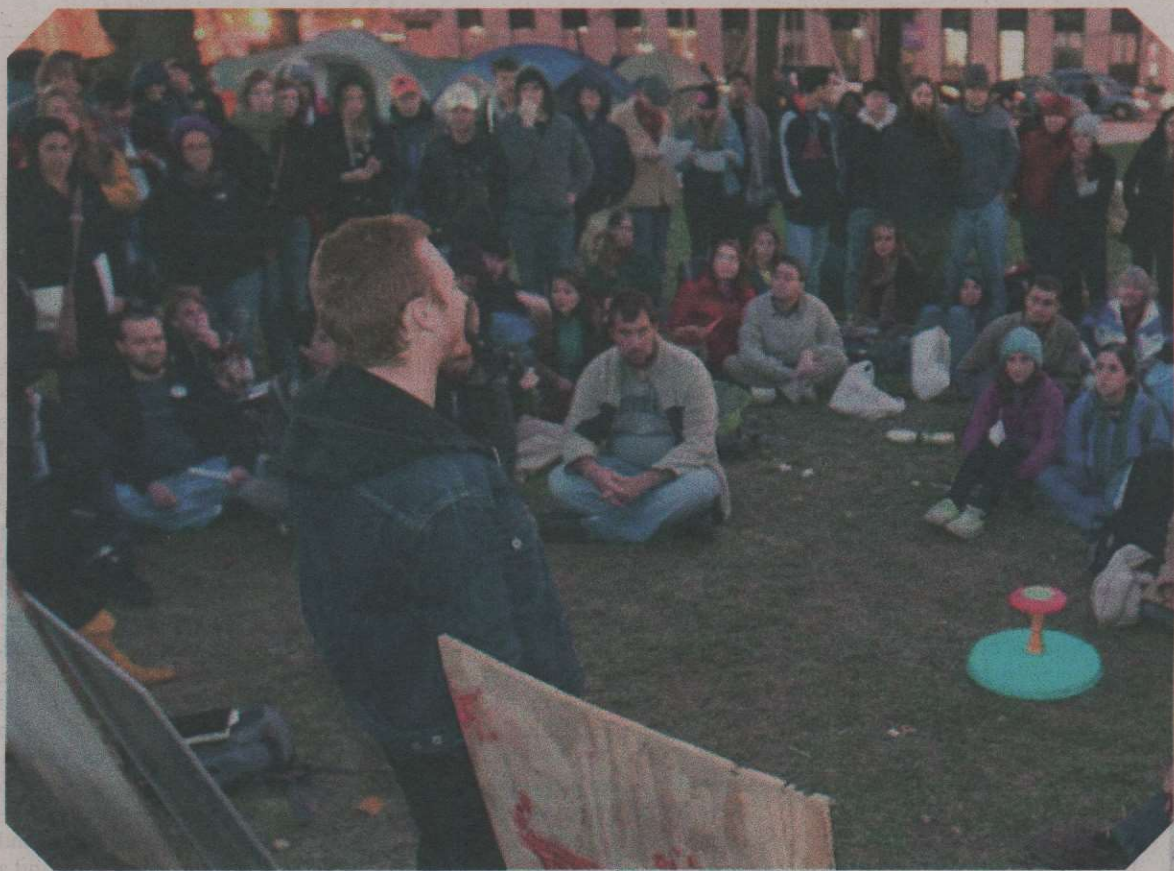
Meanwhile Russia's income per person is projected at \$13,650 in 2012, over \$4,000 less than Greece. Polls show that the percentage of people who no longer trust Putin has risen to 40 per cent, and most believe that Russia is stagnating. His support is falling fastest among poorer people 55 years and older. For the first time Putin was forced to campaign for votes, yet in Moscow he polled less than half the vote.

This disillusionment was first exposed in the December 2011 parliamentary elections when United Russia, the main prop for Putin's regime in the Russian Duma (parliament), struggled for the first time to get a majority despite evidence of vote rigging on a massive scale. The fraud sparked historic demonstrations against Putin of up to 50,000 in Moscow and demonstrations more than 50 cities, the biggest political mobilisations since 1991 and inspired

by the Arab Spring events that toppled similarly aging, presidents-for-life.

Now Putin is rewarding his base and promising harsher repression for his enemies by increasing spend for the army, police and other security forces by 33 per cent in 2012. Russia is fiscally strong with low debt and financial reserves, however any slip in oil prices - which is still above £120 a barrel - would mean a deficit budget. With growth rates half of what they were pre-2008, capital is flowing out of Russia as the wealthy secure their loot abroad. The job opportunities for graduates, who make up 70 per cent of the anti-Putin protestors, have stagnated. However, the exasperation and anger of the youth and intelligentsia, the visible revolt of the middling layers on the streets, reflects much deeper tensions within society.

Putin's room to manoeuvre is squeezed, which means that increasingly it is the riot police's truncheon that keeps him in power, not jobs or the illusion of a new start and future growth. His greatest advantage is that the alternatives from the billionaire free marketeer Mikhail Prokhorov, who made his money in the dodgy privatisations of the 1990s, or the Communist Party's Genady Zyuganov, who is tainted by his Stalinist history, are not poles of attraction for the young protestors or workers. The young activists, who are braving Putin's repression to protest against the corrupt system, need to join their democratic demands to social issues - housing, jobs, cuts, poverty - to bring down the regime and build a new party of social revolution.



A General Assembly at Occupy DC

TEN YEARS ago, the movement around the World Social Forum (WSF) and the European Social Forum (ESF) took up the slogan, "another world is possible". Even at the time Marxists noted its uncertain, plaintive tone, which prompted the question: what is it then? It was clearly meant to avoid the confident answer: Socialism.

The movement's organisers plainly believed that socialism had been fatally discredited by the collapse of Communism, by the triumph of ideas like Tony Blair's New Labour and Gerhard Schröder's New Centre. They even insisted on calling it the "alterglobalisation" rather than the anticapitalist movement, identifying the enemy as neoliberalism rather than capitalism. In a conscious negation of the working class movement's traditional slogan of "unity is strength", they claimed: "in our diversity is our strength."

The NGOs and trade union bureaucrats who controlled the WSF appealed to horizontalist principles to ban political parties from participating, and to ban world and regional forums from voting on calls to action or from creating representative bodies, except for the already existing and self-appointed WSF International Council.

The WSF and ESF attracted huge numbers to their early gatherings. In 2002-03, thanks to the pressure of the Marxist left, "unofficial" assemblies of the social movements in Florence and Porto Alegre called for a worldwide day of action to halt the impending war against Iraq. In response, 20 million people demonstrated worldwide on 15 February 2003.

The potential of these gatherings was evident. Its self-limitation was that there was no elected body between meetings to repeat and extend the call for strikes and direct action to block the war. In the end, as the radical surge that marked the years 1999-2003 abated due to the failure to stop the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, the social forums – frustrated from taking any further initiatives – also faded away.

Horizontalism claims to allow everyone to become active and direct

participants in the decisions and actions that affect the individual by decentralizing and fragmenting power. Top-down directives – or any obligations on the individual's autonomy – can be avoided. Only mutual agreements and voluntary commitments that respect the diversity of individual capabilities and personal desires are permissible.

But the great horizontalist experiment of the anticapitalist movement does not bear this out. On the contrary, it highlights its shortcomings.



What is Horizontalism?

Marianne Maeckelbergh, author of *The Will of Many*, explains horizontalism as an alternative form of democracy to the "hierarchical, authoritarian democracy practiced or created by 'vertical' organisations", like political parties. Its whole vision starts from its emphasis on a radically de-centred method of taking decisions:

"This is why one of the key values underlying decision-making in the alterglobalisation movement is 'diversity'. Diversity is a rejection of unity as the guiding principle of cooperation... This multiple outcomes approach, however, requires that people realise that they have the option to act autonomously. This means that if they don't agree with a decision taken, they don't have to implement it and they can do something else..."

"Autonomy between participants is essential to keep the 'general assembly' from becoming a source of centralised and hierarchical power. If

equal outcomes are multiple outcomes then the best-suited political structure for horizontality is a structure that allows for multiple, separate groups of people to coordinate with only limited unity of purpose. Decentralised network structures are ideal for this."

All those who participated in the Occupy movement will recognise these practices. Rigidly operated at first, these principles soon had to be loosened as the crippling effects of the paralysis they caused were felt. These included the initial impossibility

of any detailed explanation of the movement's objectives, of having spokespersons, etc. Initially too, as in Madrid's Puerta del Sol, not only was any participation by political parties banned, including those with a good record of fighting against capitalism, but also trade unions. This would have been a disaster.

The necessity of working class direct action – that is, strikes – seemed to escape the more doctrinaire horizontalists, repulsed as they were by their "vertical" character and the lack of autonomy. Happily, in many of the occupations this tendency was overcome and strong links made with militant trade unionists. In New York it was the transport workers, in Oakland the dockworkers, in London electricians and public sector workers. Indeed the full potential of the movement could only have been realised if they did link up with workers, helping to build rank and file democracy in the unions and all out strikes against austerity and police repression.

How should we orga

Network or a

In fact horizontalism – in its most dogmatic form – is clearly influenced by individualist anarchism, which is an expression of layers and classes whose position in capitalist society gives them no natural unity: the lower middle classes, students, long term unemployed, precarious workers, intellectuals and cultural workers, who seek to escape cut-throat capitalist competition but at the same time feel collectivity, especially discipline imposed by a majority, an intolerable violation of their freedom.

The notion of "counter-power" is a key concept of horizontalism. Counter-power does not seek to seize power or to smash the bourgeois state. Rather it seeks to create an alternative to it within bourgeois society. It is prefigurative in the sense of being a model of the future classless and stateless society: a form of utopian socialism, trying to build the new society and create a new human personality in the middle of the old society.

This shows horizontalists are reformists not revolutionaries: but reformists who hardly ask themselves how the necessities of life will be produced or distributed except on the smallest scale and for incredibly short periods of time. For consistent horizontalists even these mini-utopias must not become "institutionalised" or they will lose their emancipating character, becoming instead a new oppressive power.

Working class principles of organisation

The principles of the workers' movement run directly counter to those of horizontalism. The history of all countries since the development of capitalism shows workers have an objective predisposition towards collective action, to united and indeed centralised organisations – trade unions but also political parties. The working class is organised by the social production, exchange and service provision, which they are essential to. Workers have been holding mass meetings and assemblies and electing delegates from the earliest days of capitalism. Over a century ago the

The great recession has tested parties to the limit. Almost all and labour party has reposed cuts and austerity. For a new the Occupy movement and rebellion seem to offer a way without parties. *Dave Stoddart* arguments

The notion of "counter-power" is a key concept of horizontalism. Counter-power does not seek to seize power or to smash the bourgeois state. Rather it seeks to create an alternative to it within bourgeois society. It is prefigurative in the sense of being a model of the future classless and stateless society: a form of utopian socialism, trying to build the new society and create a new human personality in the middle of the old society.

workers' council or soviet emerged from this essential process and has reappeared countless times.

Trade unions – even anarcho-syndicalist ones – could not exist for five minutes under horizontalist principles. How could a strike ever be decided on if it had to wait until all the workers involved agreed? How could it be maintained if the minority decided to exercise their autonomy and not strike? In fact horizontalism is not democratic since it would allow a minority to block the majority.

Leadership and delegation are made necessary by the concentration of private property in the hands of a tiny minority and by the centralised state. Workers – propertyless except for limited means for reproducing their ability to work – have no strength except their numbers. As Marx wrote in 1864, "One element of success they possess – numbers; but numbers weigh in the balance only if united by combination and led by knowledge."

The class struggle in fact quite simply does not allow for horizontalist principles. The picket line is an institution of authority, a means to exer-

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Workers Party?



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dom of the individual."

How too could any strike be effec-
tively organized without the princi-
ple of delegation? To avoid this vir-
tually all the strikers would have to
be assembled in one place all the time.
On strict horizontalist principles strike
committees would be impossible –
they represent vertical organisation,
they are leaders.

But out of workers' mass meetings
must arise leadership - the democratic
choice of the people best equipped to
direct the struggle to victory. Of
course these people must account for
their actions, retain the support of
those who elected them, be instantly
recallable by them when their actions
are not approved of. This is why the
struggle for mass meetings with the
power to vote on policy, delegate
based councils of action to unite
across workplaces and unions, and
rank and file control of all negotia-
tions and strikes are key demands in

the workers' movement.

The necessity and the danger of parties

The German Social Democrats from the 1860s to the 1890s perfected an organisation that could not only mobilise millions as voters, but win hundreds of thousands to actively fighting for an anticapitalist and socialist programme. It was able survive heavy state repression (thousands arrested and imprisoned, or dismissed from their jobs). It also transcended national limits, helping to form two international organisations in the space of three decades. In Russia, the Bolsheviks built an even more effective type of party that founded a Third International and enabled the working class to seize power.

Of course the history of workers' parties and trade unions has a bleak side to it – the history of bureaucratisation. In the trade unions, the twentieth century saw the rise of a layer of full time officials, paid considerably more than their members, controlling the process of negotiating with the employers and thwarting democratic control over themselves by the rank and file. Anarchists claim this arises from the central purpose of a party – the struggle for power and from the creation of any sort of leadership. Marxists have a different explanation.

In Labour and Social Democratic parties, members of parliament, local councillors and full-time party officials – often with the help of the union bureaucracy – also lifted themselves above the control of the membership. The reason for this is that under capitalism the working class is not a spontaneously homogenous class.

Skilled and better-paid workers gravitate to the view that capitalism only needs gradual reform, not the dangerous solution of revolution. This social layer – the aristocracy of labour as Marx called it – is a natural base for bureaucracy and reformism, if bureaucracy and reformism are not combated by revolutionaries and controlled by the more harshly exploited and oppressed majority of the working class. Where this has happened, revolutionary parties have arisen, and

in the case of the Bolsheviks been able to seize power and establish a workers' state.

In Russia, however, the isolation of the first workers' state led to the rise of a caste of state and party officials, which then repressed all opposition, creating a monstrous totalitarian regime that ruled by terror.

After the Second World War these two bureaucratic forces – Social Democracy and Labourism on the one hand, Stalinism on the other – dominated the workers' movements for



UCL university occupation in 2010

decades. Once established, their leaderships restricted their parties to the horizon of reforms within capitalism.

They were able to do so because capitalism in the West stabilised itself, and the reformist parties presided over serious gains for the working classes – health and education services, social housing, higher wages. At the same time the Communist Parties in Russia, Eastern Europe and China developed industry and social services in a way that backward capitalist economies could not.

The prestige of mass consumer Fordist capitalism (the long boom) and the proof positive, so it seemed, that reformist welfarism or Stalinist bureaucratic planning "worked", combined to isolate and marginalise the remaining tiny revolutionary forces.

The serious crises for world capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s led to a revival of left forces that sought to build revolutionary parties. Unfortu-

nately they turned out to have absorbed too many of the ideas and practices of Stalinism and reformism. Their internal life either mirrored the bureaucratic centralism of the Stalinists or the loose discussion clubs and permanent factions of social democracy.

Moreover these conflicting sects engaged in sectarian "party building" schemes that often broke up the unity of action needed to take the class struggle forward. Indeed this situation still exists in Britain today, with

three or four rival anticuts "united fronts", the secret of whose separation is their sponsorship by one or other of the "revolutionary" sects.

A revolutionary party today

However this unfortunate situation does not prove that we do not need a revolutionary party. The historic crisis of capitalism is threatening to destroy all the working class gains of the post-Second World War period. So we need a resistance that is revolutionary and dares to say clearly that the alternative we need is socialism.

The basis for such a party is not only a resolute fight against bureaucracy, but also a revolutionary strategy accepted and understood by all of their members and by wide layers of the working class. We will not do this simply by building up small propaganda societies of dozens, hundreds or even thousands but by winning the most resolute activists to the project of creating a real mass party on a rev-

olutionary programme.

In addition we need to make sure that such a party does not succumb to bureaucracy, and that means establishing real democratic centralism. Apologists for capitalism, reformists and anarchists alike say this is a bureaucratic and undemocratic way of organising. This is not true. Democratic centralism – as the Bolsheviks practiced it – means the maximum level of debate and discussion within the party over the correct strategy and tactics to adopt. But when a decision has been reached, it requires unity in its implementation.

Then, after the results can be seen, it allows for full and democratic discussion of them. Against this background a revolutionary party elects its leadership, trying to select the best organisers, theoreticians, speakers, those who act honestly and loyally to one another and to the membership. If leaders prove inadequate or if better individuals emerge, they can be replaced.

Such revolutionary leadership can break the hold of the reformists and win the support of the working class, as the Bolsheviks did in 1917, not by tricks or deception but by proving themselves the most consistent fighters for the interests of the working class and all the oppressed and exploited.

For without revolutionary leadership, the revolution cannot triumph. For example, in Egypt a powerful uprising by young people and rank and file workers overthrew a rotten regime. It mobilised millions for change.

But revolution lacked leaders who knew where they were going and who were able to organise the masses around such goals. So other "leaders" emerged, who did not fight on the streets or take risks, and who used their links with the masses through the mosques to steal the revolution from those who did.

Only a leadership – organised as a revolutionary party – can take these movements forward to a victory not only over the military regime, which still runs Egypt, but over capitalism that spells misery for millions.

Green councillors vote for cuts in Brighton

Simon Hardy

MANY SUPPORTERS of the Green Party were shocked and angered when Green councillors proposed and voted for a cuts budget on Brighton council. Brighton is the only place in the country where Greens have a majority on the council, giving them a chance to propose a radical alternative to cuts.

But the Greens' budget is far from radical. In order to generate more money to protect services, they proposed a two year 3.5 per cent increase in council tax. Even then, they would still envisage job cuts, though they would attempt to avoid compulsory redundancies. This still means fewer jobs for the unemployed to chase.

At the budget meeting on 23 February, Tories and Labour united to vote down the council tax increase. After their flagship policy was defeated, the Green's slumped in behind the Labour's cuts budget, which will slice £35 million from local services. In the entire council chamber only Alex Phillips from the Greens voted against the cuts. Phillips later made it clear on her blog she only opposed the budget because it froze the council tax.

Local Green MP, Caroline Lucas, spoke out against the vote, and the



local unions tried to put pressure on Labour councillors to put forward a "no cuts" budget - but to no avail.

However even worse was to come. The motion to discuss the Brighton fiasco at the Greens' national conference in February was understandably submitted late. This meant that a vote had to be taken on whether to suspend standing orders and allow time for the debate. But conference voted to not even discuss it after leading party members argued against having the debate on this strategic issue: what to do when in office.

Denied a chance to address the conference on this key issue, the socialist wing of the Greens, Green Left, has responded with increasing frustration. Some have resigned.

When Lucas spoke at the Occupy camp last autumn, she called for "a

new kind of politics". Sadly the Greens have failed to provide that. The one chance they had to prove they are a principled anticuts party has now been lost. What has been proven is that, once in power, they play the same game as the mainstream parties.

This is of a piece with European Greens, who have entered coalition governments. In France the Greens voted for cuts, in Germany they voted for the Afghan war and in Ireland for the bailout package. This is because the Greens are not a working class party, but defend private property and the profit system.

Socialists and progressives in the Green Party should reconsider their position and look to building an anticapitalist alternative embedded in the working class.

The Catholic Church wages war on gay rights

Dave Stockton

IN A letter read out in 2,500 parish churches across England during Sunday Mass, the English catholic church's two senior archbishops urges Catholics to do all they can to block the adoption of the right of gay couples to contract civil marriages.

They argued that were such a right to be granted "there would be no recognition of the complementarity of male and female or that marriage is intended for the procreation and education of children."

For an all male celibate priesthood, shamed around the world for covering up the abuse of children placed in its care, to be so emphatic about the need to fulfill the demands of 'the natural law' could be simply a cause for scorn were it not that the lobbying of this immensely powerful hierarchy could easily scare Cameron and legislators to drop the proposal. We have seen these shepherds mobilize their flock to campaign to force women to go through with unwanted pregnancies.

The head of the Catholic Church in Scotland came up with the incredible piece of logic that "No Government has the moral authority to dismantle the universally understood meaning of marriage". Imagine for a moment that the Government had decided to legalize slavery but assured us that 'no one will be forced



Why does the Catholic Church have such a problem with gay marriage?

to keep a slave'.

Aside from the fact that slavery was for centuries legal in the realms of Catholic and Anglican monarchs and their churches raised no objection to it, how on earth can the fact that people of the same sex choose to marry cause any harm to people of different sexes getting married? It is plain that what they want to do is to continue unchallenged with spreading misery and oppression because of one's sexual orientation just as it seeks to force women to go through with unwanted pregnancies.

The churches know that the more suffering there is in this 'vale of tears' the more people will turn to the opium of religion to dull their pain and continue pay its pushers handsomely for the job.

Next steps for the Occupy movement?

Anton Solka

THE EVICTION of Occupy London on 28 February saw bailiffs and police surround the camp, destroy the tents and equipment that had been assembled there and disperse activists. "You can't evict an idea" is the now popular response from Occupy camps across the world that have faced state repression. And they are right.

What the Occupy movement represents is an alliance of those who dared to vent their anger - youths, students, workers, the socially excluded and exploited - against the severe injustice of the government's austerity bill and the bankers who landed us in the biggest recession since the 1930s. This manifested itself in making the working class and poor pay for the errors and greediness of the financial sector.

We have been sold the repugnant lie that unfortunately there is no other way, we must all 'tighten our belts' in order to remedy this crisis. Yet for those who see past the government's rhetoric, Occupy has provided a great source of hope and inspiration.

Undoubtedly one of Occupy's biggest strengths has been the way in which it has asked awkward questions: why are people unemployed, why are they in so much debt, why

can they never attain the standards of living and happiness our leaders promised? At the same time, the movement showed that we are strong together, we can struggle together, and we can win together.

To this extent, Occupy's slogan "We are the 99%" has brought the issue of class to the fore - there really is a difference between us and them. Not only has it highlighted inequalities in the West, but the movement has consciously linked up with revolutions from Syria to Tunisia and radical social movements in countries as diverse as Nigeria, Greece, Spain, USA, Kyrgyzstan and Russia.

If we get passed all the ridiculous complaints about how "messy" the camp was, we come to the reality of what it represented - part of a growing international movement of people who are in resistance to their governments and ruling elites.

The factors which have led to the emergence of the Arab Spring are the same ones that led to the Occupy movement, and can be found in the global crisis which began in 2008. As Marx argued, every so often a crisis grips the world and causes tremendous social upheaval. The current crisis created the conditions for new social movements and revolutions to feed off each other and challenge the capitalist system.

This has led to increasing international solidarity between those who desire radical change. In some countries it is an end to dictatorships; in others it is a demand for an end to the rule of the Bankocracy. In both cases the movements centre on demands for more democratic rights.

Inevitably, the reinvigoration of radical social movements has begun a debate around anticapitalist alternatives. For many activists, simply seeking to reform the system is not on their agenda. They intend to rip it down entirely. This has been fueled by repeated examples of the state mobilising its forces to protect its interests, be that in Oakland, where police fired plastic bullets at Occupy campers or in Cairo, where activists were dragged away and raped.

Weaknesses in the strategy

Despite Occupy's strengths, we must ask ourselves some serious questions about the Occupy movement and whether it can continue to develop. From the start, Occupy has had some worrying and unsettling attributes. As Marxists, we have to analyze the contradictions evident within the movement.

Firstly, the organisational structures of Occupy come from the "horizontal" tradition: mass assemblies without formal representation, autonomous working parties, con-

sensus decision-making. It is not hard to envisage the potential problems here. Autonomous bodies working independently will quite possibly operate in contradiction to one another. General assemblies that insist on 90 per cent agreement on any specific policy or course of action will often, especially at crucial moments, be unable to make quick and effective decisions. Moreover, as each Occupy movement operates independently, demands and aims can differ radically from reformist to revolutionary politics.

Occupy involves a broad range of people, from graduates-without-a-future to the long term unemployed, workers, activists and so on. The debates over what Occupy is or should be are testament that this is work-in-progress. The heterogeneous nature of Occupy is, at first, a strength, as it is inclusive. But transforming quantity into political quality is a hard task and, as the movement ebbed, those who had no interest in building a mass movement gained influence.

This highlights problems of the movement's ambiguity about linking up with the organisations that must be at the core of any revolutionary movement - the trade unions and socialist groups - that can penetrate the workplaces and housing estates. Without a political and eco-

omic perspective to reach out and win over the 99%, the Occupy movement could simply become a space for an illusionary reformist utopia.

Where next?

The danger is that young activists, politicised by the student movement, the anticuts protests and mass strikes, could become burnt out and disillusioned. Unless Occupy can develop greater ties with the student movement and workplace activists - like it started to do with the rank and file electricians - its focus on occupation as a means to an end would consign it to a footnote in history.

That's why Occupy's international call for a global strike on May Day is such a positive development. May Day clearly situates Occupy within the working class, but the demands being raised by some of the Occupy groups are limited to calls for more rights for workers, women and immigrants. What about an end to capitalism?

Limiting itself to headline grabbing stunts and building communities within capitalism will not be enough - we need to think more clearly about not just the problems of the banks and attacks on our democratic rights, but on how to get rid of the system once and for all. We need a revolutionary answer to the questions that Occupy poses.

Morning Star call for a conference and (possibly) a new party

The Morning Star, daily paper of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), has issued an appeal to all organisations of the working class to convene a conference to discuss the crisis of political representation in parliament. *Richard Brenner reports*

IT'S A timely call. With Labour's leaders Ed Miliband, Ed Balls and Liam Byrne accepting all the Tory cuts, the public sector pay freeze (a pay cut in real terms) and the slashing of benefits, CPB general secretary Rob Griffiths wrote in an open letter on 1 February:

"The policy of the Labour Party leadership to align itself with this ... is a betrayal of the millions of workers and their families who should be able to look to Labour for support and solidarity."

This was far from an overstatement. After all, Ed Balls said on 14 January, "the reality is, given the economy failing as it is, that pay restraint is going to have to continue". As well as calling for workers to pay the price of the capitalist crisis, he repeated the lie of the bosses' economists that "high pay" causes unemployment: "And if people expect Labour to say 'we'll just oppose', we can't do that. [It] would be irresponsible because the priority has got to be getting people into jobs rather than people being paid more."

Balls' neoliberal lunge drew only the tamest of criticism from right wing union leaders, like Brendan Barber of the TUC and Dave Prentis of Unison. But it provoked angry responses from leaders of more militant unions, especially those not affiliated to Labour. Mark Serwotka of the civil servants' PCS union said: "Instead of matching them on the cuts, [Labour] should be articulating a clear alternative and speaking up for public sector workers and ordinary people in society."

And president of the RMT transport union, Alex Gordon, asked "if Labour doesn't want to be the opposition, then where is the opposition going to come from to this government?" adding, "Our members aren't going to stand by and take another two years of this kind of punishment and then turn out at the ballot box in 2015 and meekly vote for a Labour opposition that has supported these punishing cuts."

Open Letter

Reflecting the anger of union members, and aware of the position of the left wing of the TUC, the Morning Star has now made a shift in its policy. Throughout the 2000s, despite the repeated betrayals of the Blair government and the mass opposition it generated, the CPB opposed calls for unions to break from Labour and form a new working class party.

Now however, under the blows of the economic crisis and in the face of mass opposition such as November's two million strong strike against the Tory pension robbery, the CPB



is adjusting its dress.

Correctly, Griffiths points to "the need for the affiliated unions to campaign in a more determined, planned and co-ordinated way to change the policies and if necessary the composition of the Labour Party leadership."

Concretely he proposes that affiliated unions should "cease paying financial donations to the Labour Party centrally until its leaders and MPs oppose real cuts in public sector wages and express solidarity with workers fighting to defend their pensions". At the same time, to maintain union influence and allow a challenge to the current policy and leadership, Griffiths advises that "affiliation fees should be maintained in order to step up the challenge to the Labour leadership's current policies from inside the party as well as from outside".

As a key element of this suggested campaign within Labour and the unions, the Open Letter proposes a conference. Specifically Griffiths writes: "Affiliated trade unions should meet to convene an all-Britain conference at the earliest opportunity to discuss the current crisis of political representation for workers and their families." He adds demands for a recalled conference of the Labour Party and that the TUC "resume its historic responsibility and convene a special conference of all labour movement organisations to discuss the political representation of the labour movement in the House of Commons".

This series of conference proposals do of course beg the question: what should these conferences decide to do? For Griffiths it's an either/or answer – if Labour does not

"Our members aren't going to stand by and take another two years of this kind of punishment and then turn out at the ballot box in 2015 and meekly vote for a Labour opposition that has supported these punishing cuts."

Alex Gordon RMT



Rob Griffiths, leader of the Communist Party of Britain

change course, a new party may be necessary. But he defines the character of the new party in advance, another parliamentary-oriented,

legalistic and reformist party committed to governing within the existing institutions of the capitalist state:

"We believe these actions are the most realistic and effective way of ensuring that the interests of working people are represented in the Westminster Parliament. Should the Labour Party continue on a right wing course, its future will be at risk and the trade union movement will have a duty to re-establish a mass party of labour capable of winning elections, forming a government and enacting policies in the interests of the people not the bankers." [Emphasis added].

Reclaim Labour...

Now of course much of Griffiths' call is to be welcomed. A fight in the unions and Labour is urgently needed. But we need to go further than Griffiths and be much clearer about the limitations of Labour and the sort of mass party the working class needs today.

The fact is that a struggle within the Labour movement to force Miliband and Balls to change policy can only, at best, rally mass forces to oppose them. Given the undemocratic and rigged structures of the Labour Party in which the pro-finance, neoliberal MPs control the show, the very idea of overturning the capitalist consensus that governs the party and winning a majority is ruled out.

The right wing would rather split the party than allow socialist policies and leaders to take it over – and by threatening a split, they would aim to force the timid union officials and lefts to back down and accept their control, as Tony Benn did at

the infamous Bishop's Stortford talks in 1982, almost exactly 30 years ago.

...Or new party?

Therefore Marxists should say openly, in advance, that the struggle to oppose Miliband and Balls should aim not at taking over Labour but at winning key affiliated unions to break from Labour and convincing the unaffiliated unions to participate in a new project: the formation of a new mass working class party.

Given the defects of our corrupt and undemocratic electoral system, and the fact that even with 600 left wing MPs power would still remain in the hands of unelected and unaccountable civil servants, army and security chiefs and bankers, our goal should be not another party focused on forming a government by winning elections and carrying out reforms through parliament, but a party focused on activity in the workplaces and on the streets.

A mass working class party will only succeed in defeating the rule of the capitalists if it aims to convert the resistance to the crisis into a struggle for revolution: through a general strike against the cuts, bringing down the Coalition, establishing councils of workers' delegates that can seize the power and form a workers' government.

The Morning Star, of course, follows in the footsteps of its predecessor, the Daily Worker, which abandoned all talk of such a revolutionary strategy back in the 1930s, under orders from Joseph Stalin and Georgi Dimitrov. Instead their British Road to Socialism programme is based on the strategy of a broad democratic alliance of Labour and "progressive capitalists" (presumably the Lib Dems?), forming an elected government and carrying out an inflationary economic policy. Today that strategy relies on the illusion of winning Labour to socialist policies. Tomorrow, it appears, it may rely on the formation of a new party, but one our Stalinists will insist should remain on Old Labour's strictly reformist terrain.

As a first step in its campaign, the Morning Star is holding an All-Britain conference of its supporters on 31 March at the Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, London, EC2M 4QH, between Liverpool St station and Spitalfields Market.

Speakers include Owen Jones, Megan Dobney (SERTUC), Hugh Lanning (PCS), Michelle Stanistreet (NUJ), Sally Hunt (UCU), Len McCluskey (Unite), Bob Crow (RMT); Michael Meacher MP, Kelvin Hopkins MP.

Unemployment in Britain grows amongst women and young black men

Rachel Archer

OVER HALF of black men in Britain between the ages of 16-24 are unemployed according to the latest figures from the National Office for Statistics. This figure has more than doubled in the last three years, rising from 28.8 per cent in 2008 to 55.9 per cent in the last three months of 2011. It is clear that the effects of the recession are hitting ethnic minority groups hardest.

Media pundits and sociologists waste acres of print suggesting ways to motivate young black men - giving them role models and mentoring - as though joblessness was primarily their fault rather than a result of racism and discrimination.

The report also claims that unemployment, is hitting young men harder than young women.

Nevertheless unemployment amongst women is at a 25 year high as jobs in the public sector - where women making up 67 per cent of the workforce - are slashed.



The number of women aged between 50-65 out of work is also much higher, which has a knock on effect in terms of their pension contributions.

With few jobs on the horizon, coupled with the loss of educational opportunities, these statistics paint

a bleak picture.

To avoid a generation of women and young black men who suffer even worse alienation and poverty the labour movement and youth organisations need to organise the unemployed and fight for decent jobs for all.

Defend Alfie Meadows – end police violence

Luke Cooper

The case of Alfie Meadows highlights the injustices being inflicted on anti-cuts protesters. Back in December 2010, Alfie was part of the huge protests of students against £9,000 fees, and was attacked at the protest outside parliament on the day of the vote. Hit so hard with a police baton that he required three hours of brain surgery, Alfie was quite literally lucky to be alive.

Despite an ongoing investigation from the Independent Police Complaints Commission into the near-fatal incident, Alfie was charged with violent disorder only a few days before the Royal Wedding last year. The Royal Wedding itself was to see some of the most severe repression to date. The police took “pre-emptive” action against a series of protesters, including through dawn raids on squats, under the pretext of “preventing public disorder” and a “breach of the peace”. Those like Alfie who now had charges hanging over them were given exclusion orders to keep them out of central London.

With cuts tearing apart the fabric of our communities, the government and police feel compelled to ratchet up repression, curtail civil liberties, and make use of “deterrent sentencing”, so that those considering taking direct action are aware of the “costs” involved. Indeed many students who protested last year have been given sentences that are totally out of proportion to the offence on “deterrence” grounds. One such student, Zenon Mitchell from the University of Sussex, received a fifteen-month sentence for violent disorder after throwing a small placard stick.



Alfie Meadows received life saving brain surgery after police assaulted him on the student protests

As John McDonnell MP put it, “Zenon’s sentence, like so many others handed out to protesting students, was disproportionate to his actions. At most he and his lawyers were expecting a community service order. Why was the sentence so heavy? Well it’s fairly obvious that the courts, whipped up by the statements from politicians and the outrage in the right wing press, wanted to make an example of Zenon.... The message from the courts to young people was pretty clear. Join in the protests and this is what you could get. Your future will be put at risk.”

At Sussex some 250 students turned out to a Right to Protest meeting in solidarity with Zenon, and the student union has passed unequivocal statements of support. The cases of Alfie and Zenon encapsulate the political and often violent nature of British policing in an age of austerity. They both deserve and need our solidarity. It shows the fight against the cuts is also about democracy; we need to stand firm to defend our civil liberties and our right to resist.

Join the international day of action against police brutality on Thursday 15 March and protest for Alfie Meadows outside Kingston Crown Court on Friday 16 March.

More details at www.defendtherighttoprotest.org

22 dead in Gaza after Israeli airstrikes

Sally Turner

AT LEAST 22 Palestinians, including 18 militants and at least four civilians, have been killed in recent air strikes on Gaza. The latest victims were a 65 year old man and his 35 year old daughter in the Jabaliya refugee camp.

Islamic Jihad’s military wing, the Al-Quds Brigades, demanded that Israel call a cease fire and stop targeting militants pre-emptively.

However Israel’s prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said these attacks would continue as long as necessary though on 13 March a ceasefire was finally brokered.

Israel claims as its excuse that more than 240 rockets had been fired from Gaza injuring over 30 people but failed to mention the cross-boarder exchanges were triggered by an air strike on a senior leader of the Popular Resistance Committee (PRC) who Israel claimed had been planning an attack.

This outburst fighting has once again drawn attention to the stalled Palestinian-Israeli peace talks. Although there might be a temporary ceasefire, it solves none of the fundamental issues. Gaza is still largely under siege, it has barely enough electricity to keep water pumping stations going. The terrible conditions there have been the cause of tremendous concern by foreign aid agencies, so far with no real moves to alleviate the terrible suffering of the people.

Also stalled are the negotiations between Hamas and Fatah on national unification. Mahmoud Abbas still rules from Ramallah, outstaying his term as President by several years and with no elections in sight.

Israel’s bombardment of Gaza, as well as its repeated threats against Iran, are further reminders of its colonial, expansionist role in the region. It is constantly at war to defend the Zionist settler state.

US soldier massacres 16 civilians in Afghanistan



A man points to the bodies of children killed by the US soldier

Sally Turner

NINE AFGHAN children are among 16 dead after a US soldier went on a murderous rampage after leaving his Nato base earlier this week.

The Afghan government has urged civilians to show restraint until investigations have been completed but the authorities are concerned that this will spark off more demonstrations similar to the ones that swept Afghanistan after US servicemen burnt copies of the Koran in February.

One man who lost all 11 members of his family said the Afghan people would not let the US authorities get away with this warcrime.

The attack comes at a time when President Hamid Karzai and US officials are negotiating a future role for forces within Afghanistan after 2014 when troops are due to be withdrawn.

The American government are trying to cover it up as much as possible by issuing a statement saying they will be carrying out full investigations, explaining that the soldier acted on an individual basis and even getting Obama to call the

family of the victims offering his condolences and saying it wasn’t a representation of the US military.

Long list of crimes

Far from an “isolated incident” this shows the attitude that is bred into occupying troops – one of hatred and fear of Afghans. The troops have been in Afghanistan since 2001 and what is happening is the inevitable from a long term occupation. In January a video emerged which showed US marines urinating on the corpses of three Taliban fighters and in February eight young Afghans were killed in a Nato bombing. The list is a long one. Each time an investigation is promised but rarely anything comes of it – this is why violent protests have been sparked across the country.

Now the US military are saying they will bring the soldier back to the US for trial – Afghan people are justifiably demanding that he be tried in Afghanistan, the scene of the crime. The demonstrations and resistance will only grow as the occupation continues.

France's New Anticapitalist Party faces uncertain future

Marc Lasalle and Dave Stockton reports on the crisis in the NPA as it heads for the presidential elections

IT IS a paradox that in the depths of the most severe and prolonged crisis of capitalism since the Second World War, France's New Anticapitalist Party is itself in deep crisis.

Since the founding congress of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) in 2009, there has been no shortage of social struggles - in the universities and the lycées, in the banlieues and workplaces. Some of them, like the 2010 movement against President Nicolas Sarkozy's pension law, were of exceptional strength and duration. The movement peaked on 12 and 19 October days of action, when 3.5 million people were on the streets and power station and refinery workers took indefinite strike action. If the entire movement had joined them in an all out general strike, Sarkozy's government would have been brought down.

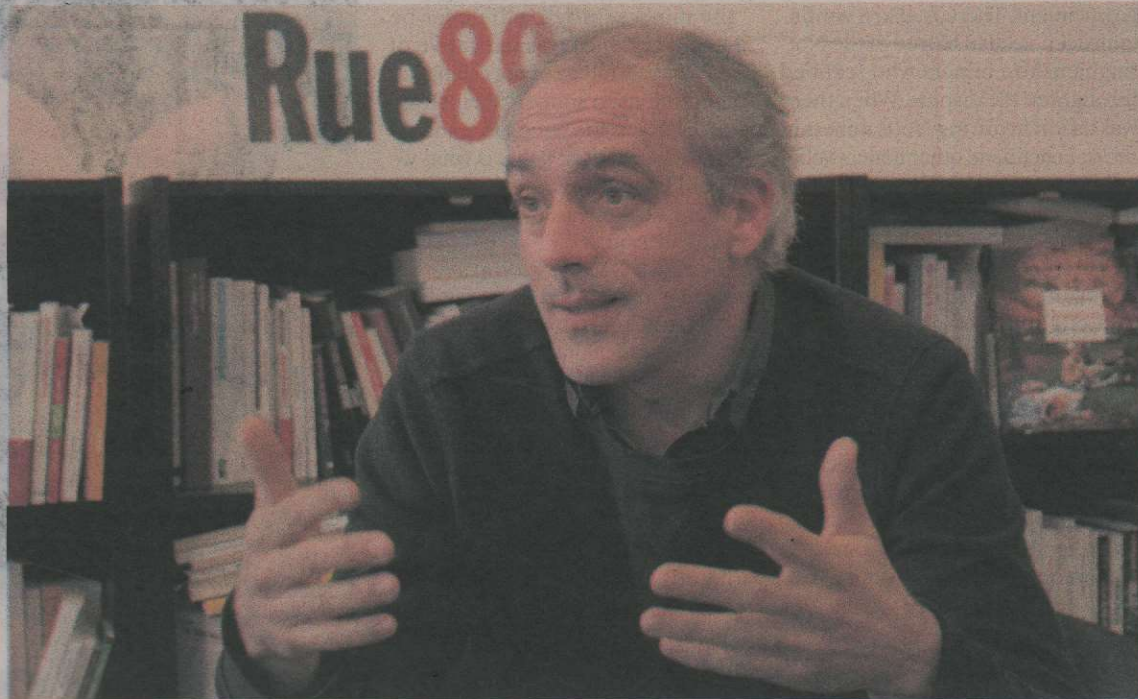
The failure of the NPA to make a breakthrough to become large fighting party in such a heightened period of class struggle cannot be put down to objective factors, from a lack of resistance or a workers movement hostile to revolutionary politics. Instead it lays in the inner contradictions of the NPA itself and its failure to rise to the potentialities of the situation. It seems the NPA membership has fallen back from 9,000-10,000 of its first year to around 3,000 today.

The NPA contradictions

The League for the Fifth International (LFI) has always regarded the NAP founder, the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR) as a centrist organisation combining revolutionary and reformist elements in its politics in an unstable mix. Like the Fourth International, of which it is the largest section, it has for a long while sought to build parties and an International not on the basis of its own politics but as an mélange of a range of traditions, stemming from libertarianism and left Stalinism (Guevarism, Maoism). However, these projects have rarely got off the ground. The NPA is by far the most successful attempt.

The reason we welcomed the NPA was that the LCR opened a process of mass meetings across France and advanced a prospect of debate and discussion on its programme. Thousands joined the new initiative, but this healthy process did not last for long.

The old LCR had a habit of alternating between involvement in mass days of action called and led by the unions, sometimes with waves of youth movements, and electioneering on a left reformist programme. This pattern was soon repeated in the NAP. Electioneering, with its inevitable temptations to form electoral blocks with one or another of a cluster of small left parties, has always been a source of illusions in



Philippe Poutou, the NPA presidential candidate

the 'great breakthrough'. These have been invariably followed by frustration and disappointment - with a mass of principles thrown overboard en route.

Since the LCR rejoiced in its division into several permanent factions, an untroubled development for the NPA was unlikely, especially if growth slowed or election successes were not sustained.

Right and Left

Since the beginning of NPA, the ex-LCR right wing has been a powerful obstacle to building the new party. Two incarnations of these currents, Christian Piquet's Gauche Unitaire and Convergences et Alternatives, rapidly split from NPA to join the Front de Gauche (FdG). Those who remained have openly sabotaged party activities - protected by the extremely lax party discipline. For instance, the bulk of the NPA full-time apparatus belong to these pro-FdG trends.

At the January meeting of the NPA National Council (the leading body between congresses), the current version of the right wing, confusingly called the Anticapitalist Left (GA), unashamedly called for an end to the presidential campaign of the NPA candidate Philippe Poutou, saying that the campaign had no political function, "therefore no audience, and this weakens our ability to diffuse our ideas."

The GA strategy is to stop the campaign for the presidential election in order to prepare the campaign for the parliamentary elections in June. They would like to turn this campaign into a joint campaign with FdG with the cynical and hopeless argument: "If we must be marginal, it is better to be so inside a functioning

party, rather than inside the NPA."

However, the right wing is not the only obstacle to NPA. Its historic centre faction, based on leaders like Alain Krivine, Olivier Besancenot and François Sabado, have shown that they lacked any vision of the NPA development, indeed any strategy for it whatsoever.

The party has turned out to be a halfway house between reform and revolution. Only a clear and sharp debate on programme involving all the new members could have clarified this muddle. But according to the LCR's tradition, a programme is little more than a catalogue of measures to be popularised during an election campaign, like wage increases, defence of public services etc. There is no conception that a programme is a more general understanding of the tasks and struggles of the party and no idea that it must be a strategy for a revolutionary seizure of power.

Then came the first electoral battles and the confrontation with reformism. It is significant that today NPA has no well thought out approach towards reformism. Its only foundation is the pragmatic position raised to the status of a dogma: "we will not support the Socialist Party (PS) or ally with parties that will not commit themselves not to support PS." That the NPA intends to stand against the PS and will not join coalitions to administer the bourgeois state at local or national level is a correct position.

Of course this call obscures the fact that it may be necessary - and indeed be perfectly principled - to call for a critical vote for François Hollande in the second round of elections where the PS will almost certainly face only a right-wing bourgeois

party - Sarkozy's RPR or Marine Le Pen's FN. Millions of French workers will undoubtedly do so. It is a historic weakness of the far left that it never understood Lenin's tactic of critical electoral support - "like the rope supports the hanged man." Its objective is the exposure of the reformists in office, starting with placing key demands on the PS that can break illusions and start the process of a fight against François Hollande should he win.

On top of this, the electoral platform contains nothing concrete: no talk of a general strike, of the need to form councils of action, co-ordinations, assemblies in the workplaces, nor of the concrete experience of the two or three major social movements that took place over the last five or six years. Above all there is no mention of the fact that the union leaders sold them out and led them to defeat, that the non-PS left (i.e. the Communist Party (PCF) and the Partie de Gauche (PdG)) offered no leadership at the critical moment, supporting the union leaders. One would think the only problem in the French workers movement was the PS and is right wing policies in government.

Because there is no concrete perspective of a revolutionary upheaval with working class democratic organs of struggle being formed the question of the NPA willingness to govern and the reforms (for they are all reforms) it would take are dealt in a similar feeble manner.

Where is the NPA going?

What is then the perspective for NPA in the election and after? At the moment, given the weakness and disorientation of the left, a crippled, paralysed and rightward moving

NPA is a real danger.

After the presidential elections, the parliamentary elections will probably follow the same course. This would not be a catastrophe if the NPA leadership were not obsessed about success in the election as the only true measure of party building and had not permeated the rank and file with their electoral cretinism.

Given this culture a widespread demoralisation for the election-oriented oriented NPA is, unfortunately, a probable outcome, with or without a split inside the organisation. Yet for all its limits and failures, the NPA remains today a focus point for many of the best activists. It could play a central role in the resistance against austerity, whether it comes from Sarkozy or Hollande.

But to play this role, the party must be virtually refounded. It must acknowledge its electoralist and trade union errors, and launch a struggle for an action programme against austerity, in the unions, the workplaces, and schools and universities. It must radically break from the practice of strictly separating politics (elections and demonstrations) from trade unionism.

Despite the NPA members active involvement in all the strikes and days of action, despite Besancenot's outspoken rejection of the CFDT leaders demand the NPA keep off the picket lines in 2010, the party does not see as its role as a strategist on all the fronts and for all the sectors of the class struggle.

Elections must not be a chase after votes on a minimum programme but a tribune from which to call for a revolutionary strategy in the struggles to come whoever wins the elections. The social movements and days of action must not be left in the hands of union leaders who have sold them out time and again. The NPA must warn of their treachery, organise rank and file democratic over them, campaign to reject any sell-out and recruit the best union militants to the party.

The NPA is now threatening to fall victim to the project of keeping to a course halfway between reform and revolution that the LCR leaders designed for it. These inner contradictions are now threatening to undermine the enormous positive potential the NPA showed when it attracted thousands of working class militants and youth in 2009. But even if the NPA is in decline and confusion, the struggle for its future can still be waged. For these reasons we not only call for a vote for Poutou but for a fight for a revolutionary programme against reformism and centrism in the ranks of NPA.

This is an edited version of the original article:
<http://www.fifthinternational.org/>

Reliving a crucial battle of the working class

Joy Macready reviews *The Battle of Orgreave* (2002)

In 2001, Turner Prize winning artist Jeremy Deller orchestrated a re-enactment of the Battle of Orgreave, one of the most violent confrontations of the Great Miners' Strike. More than 800 people took part, many of them former miners, reliving events that they themselves took part in. The film of the re-enactment, directed by Mike Figgis, deftly pulls together interviews, the build up to the event and the event itself, capturing the fighting spirit of miners who fought so hard for their livelihoods and communities.

In 1984, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) went on strike. On 18 June, thousands of miners bravely defended themselves from police batons, snatch squads and cavalry charges in a field outside Orgreave coking plant near Rotherham in Yorkshire. Scandalously, the BBC – acting as part of the state's propaganda machine – reversed the footage of the attack so that it looked

as if the miners instigated the violence. The BBC was forced to issue an apology for this 'mistake' – but only in 1991.

The film shows clearly that the anger and rage remains, even 27 years after the miners' defeat at the hands of Margaret Thatcher's Tory government. There is also a continuing deep-seated hatred of the Nottinghamshire miners who scabbed throughout the dispute. When there was talk of involving Notts miners in the re-enactment, other miners vehemently opposed it: "They weren't on the picket line then, why should they be part of it now?"

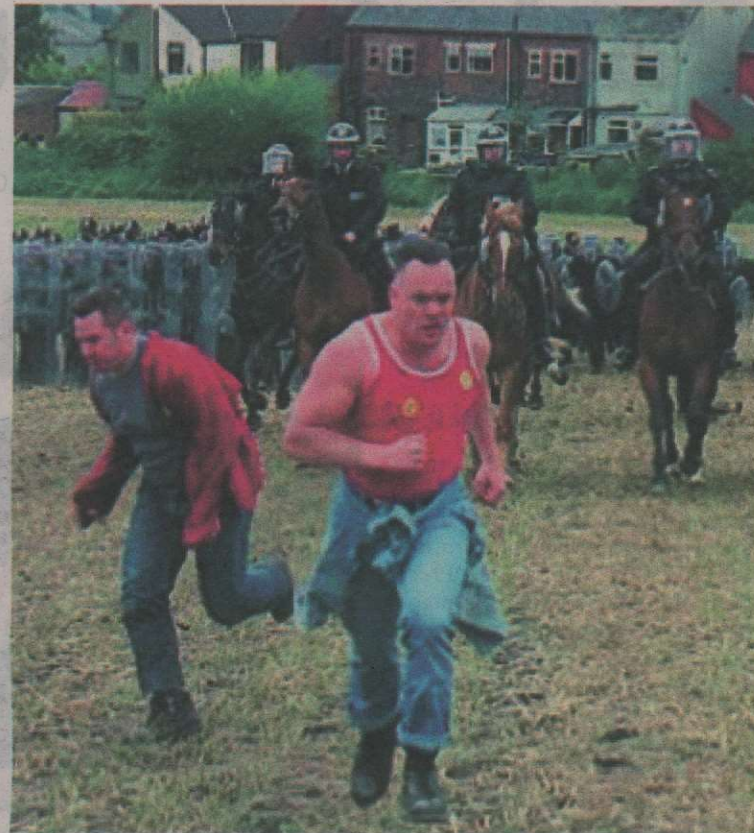
The film interviews a number of different people, including Mac McLoughlin, a former miner who joined the police force just prior to Orgreave. McLoughlin expressed his personal shame at being on the state's side against his former comrades. "I joined the police because I wanted to do something for my community. And I did do something – I helped Thatcher rip apart our communities and destroy our lives."

Stephanie Gregory, from the Women's Support Group, spoke about the effects on family life and the changing role of women in the dispute from support to fighter.

The film also draws out a few lessons learned during the dispute. One miner criticised the NUM slogan of "the miners united will never be defeated", which was indicative of the NUM's strategy of not calling out other unions to support their struggle. "This was the wrong slogan. It is the workers united – that is what we should have been arguing for. The miners' strike was a working class issue," he said.

During a Q&A session at a recent showing at the Reel Islington Film Festival in February, Deller argued against the idea that this project was about healing old wounds. "I wanted to make people angry," he said. "This was a recreation of a huge criminal act by the state against a community."

The Battle of Orgreave is being shown as part of an installation at the Hayward Gallery, until Sunday 13 May 2012.



Taking the red pill – Marx Reloaded

Simon Hardy reviews *Marx Reloaded* by Jason Barker (2011)

MARX IS back, but are his ideas still relevant? That is the basic theme of this documentary by Jason Barker.

Having a documentary about Marx with such luminaries as Slavoj Žižek, Antonio Negri, and Nina Power is certainly worthwhile if it gets these ideas back into a wider audience. It is not often you can go to the cinema and someone talks about the labour theory of value.

However, Barker's documentary, while initially promising, does not really succeed on its own terms. It can't seem to decide what level it is working at. Coming in at only an hour long, it deals with a number of serious issues, topics, debates and thinkers without producing a satisfying whole.

Getting philosophers and economists to sit in front of a camera, and giving each one less than five minutes screen time, inevitably leads not only to a truncating of ideas but to some strange not-quite-connections of debate. It was almost as if Barker had to go with whatever ideas Negri and Jacques Rancière talked about and then struggled to make some kind of narrative.

In brief, the documentary deals with the crash of 2008, then goes straight into a very incomplete debate about the relevance of Marxism today. Negri explains his concept of immaterial labour, Alberto Toscano critiques it, Žižek talks about his theory of rent (that we rent Bill Gates' ideas when we buy Microsoft products), and then it cuts back to classical Marxist theory.

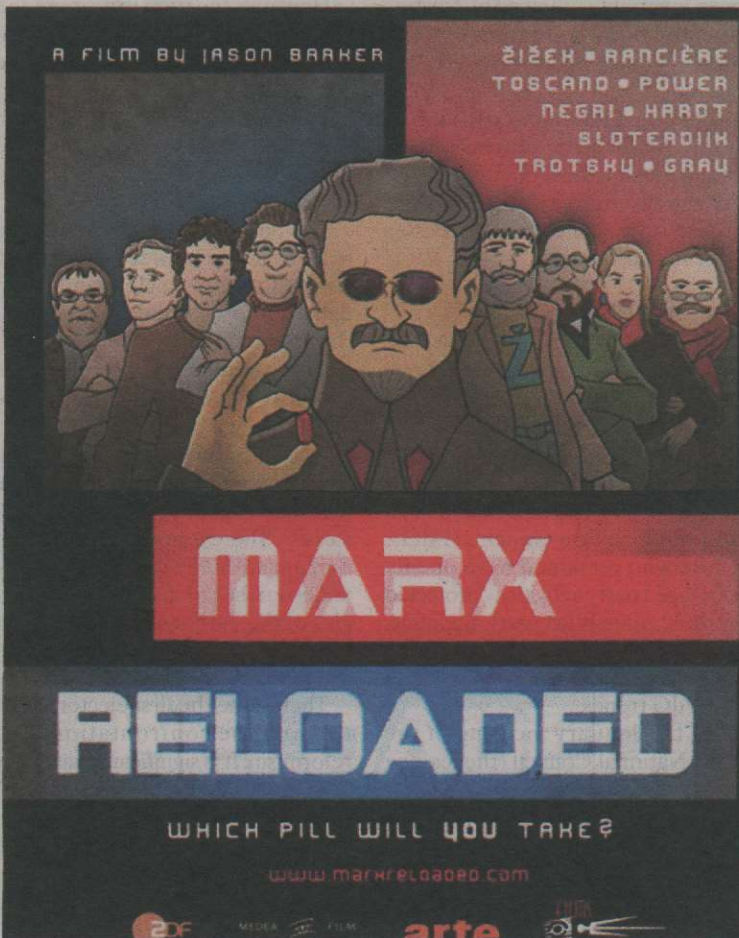
The explanation of exploitation was quite good, but it quickly skips

to the idea of commodity fetishism, which, in my opinion, it explains badly, largely confusing it with consumerism and how we find our souls in the things we buy. It all sounded a bit more like Herbert Marcuse than Karl Marx.

The documentary jumps to a short piece on ecology, before heading into a section about overpopulation, which I found slightly unsettling. Barker's general idea seems to be that there are now too many people for capitalism to absorb as workers. The images accompanying this section were what seemed like shantytown dwellers somewhere in Africa, which I felt conceded too much to right wing arguments about over-population and "too many black people", even if this is not what Barker intended.

The arguments of the pro-capitalists were also dealt with unconvincingly. Eamonn Butler from the Adam Smith Institute was offered a chance to explain what his solution would be, and he offered up the example of the Suffolk Bank model from the days of the American Revolution. The idea is that each bank can pay what it wants for another bank's currency based on how solvent it thinks the other bank is.

His proposal is certainly something I have not heard before, and it not mainstream within pro-capitalist circles. What about the more straightforward proposal to reform banking by separating high street retail banking from the investment banking business? This idea has credibility because it claims to overcome the problems that led to the 2008 credit crunch. John Gray dismissed the Suffolk Bank idea as a right wing fantasy, which got a laugh from the



audience, but I thought it was too easy a target.

The idea of Communism

The final section turned back to philosophy, Rancière and Negri's ideas were given the most screen time. Negri put forward his theme from *Goodbye Mr Socialism* (recently taken up by Žižek in *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce*) that "socialism" is simply a way of managing capital rather than destroying it, that

what is needed is a vigorous discussion about the communist future. Rancière disagreed, introducing useful criticisms counter-posing the "idea of communism" (Žižek, Alain Badiou) to actual work to build equality now.

Žižek gets his chance to explain communism near the end, and ruins it in that way that only he could. His argument is communism would be like a surrealist painting, people dressed as chickens doing what they

wanted, a carnivalesque montage of different lifestyles. His appeal to individual freedoms after the revolution unfortunately draws laughter from the audience, leaving the whole thing feeling a tad anti-climatic.

The hook of the documentary comes from the first *Matrix* film: will you take the Blue pill and go back to the bourgeois world knowing nothing of the class struggle, or will you take the Red pill and fight for revolution? The different philosophers answer this question in different ways. Žižek had already done so in his documentary series *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*: "I want a third pill!" Some of course chose Red, while Peter Sloterdijk said neither, as both had already been swallowed and were poisonous.

The real problematic at the heart of the documentary should have been around the criticism that Gray put forward at the end. He argued that there was no longer a historical agency for revolution, no mass communist parties, no more working class revolutions and that the kind of leftist debates that had featured in the documentary were hermetically sealed in the lecture theatres.

Whilst there was much to disagree with there, this discussion would have made for a more fruitful documentary, showing the ways in which communist politics could really break out of the universities and tiny groups of Marxists and gain a hearing amongst the millions of workers fighting austerity. Instead the documentary stayed firmly in the realm of ideas, failing even on its own terms to deliver a coherent and consistent debate, or to give a useful presentation of where we are now.

The new anticapitalist project

AROUND 80 people came to a meeting organised by the New Left Initiative at Sussex university in early March to discuss the threat of war with Iran. Kamran Matin a lecturer in Middle Eastern studies spoke about how any threat of war or an actual conflict would only strengthen the regime and help the government to crush the newly emerging grassroots pro-democracy movements. Synne Laaspad Dyvik talked about the

problems of using the war on terror as a justification for 'liberating women'. Jessica, a speaker from Smash EDO campaign, explained how arms companies benefit from the war mongering and the work of activists to try and shut these war profiteers down. After a lively discussion activists met to discuss the next steps for the project - there was support for setting up a website and to ask Owen Hatherley, author of

Militant Modernism to speak.

South London

Members of South London Anticapitalists organised a protests on the Boycott Workfare day of action on 3 March. 25 people toured through Brixton high street naming and shaming companies that use workfare labour. They got an excellent response from the public - an excellent start for the new organisation.

Building the League in South Asia

Martin Suchanek

OVER THE last decade the Asian continent has moved into the centre of world politics and economies.

We witness not only continuous wars and barbaric imperialist occupations like in Afghanistan, we also saw the emergence of new imperialist power - China. It is not only in growing conflict and antagonism with the US and Japan, but also with another regional power - India.

This means that the weaker semi-colonial states and governments - ranging from countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Burma or Nepal - are both up for further bullying by the larger powers, as well as having a certain room to manoeuvre.

At the same time, the combination of global instability, crisis, poverty and increasing social unevenness within these states also point to an increased tendency towards more or

less overt dictatorial rule and the scrapping of democratic rights.

Work of Commission

This is the general political situation the sections of the LSI in Sri Lanka and Pakistan as well as supporters in Nepal face. Discussing and analysing these developments formed a major part of the recent meeting of the South Asia Commission of the LSI with delegates from the Asian Sections and comrades from Europe.

There we discussed our work in detail - including how to intervene in the newly emerging Anti-imperialist Alliance in Pakistan, how to intervene in the Movement for Peoples Struggles (a 5,000 strong Maoist-Stalinist split from the chauvinist JVP in Sri Lanka). For this we also had educationals on Trotskyist and Leninist tactics, including how to intervene in such developments in a principled way, utilising the united front tactic and fighting for a revolutionary action programme.

Two major parts of our discussion centred around the struggle for a new workers party in countries like Pakistan and on tactics to overcome the extreme weakness and fragmentation of the trade union movement.

We discussed how to fight for a new revolutionary, Trotskyist organisation in Nepal under the unusual conditions of a Maoist led government urging for foreign capitalist investment. Finally, the commission also worked out a plan to gain new contacts and supporters in other Asian states, most importantly China and India.

The working class in East and South Asia is a growing class - a key sector of the world working class. But in order to be able to play a corresponding political role, it needs to be organised in new revolutionary parties. In this way, it will become a driving force in the building of new, Fifth International.

League supporters in Brazil

AT A meeting in southeastern Brazil, on 21 and 22 January a group of comrades decided to join the League for the Fifth International and set about the task of building a Brazilian section of the League. A delegation of members of our European sections attended the meeting.

Discussions ranged over the programmatic basis for a section and different aspects of present class struggle situation in Brazil. They noted the increased use of police repression against demonstrations and strikes and their criminalisation.

There was extensive discussion of the trade unions, in which the comrades are very active and hold local leadership positions. The meeting discussed the history of the CUT (Central Única dos Trabalhadores) which is the largest federation with around 7.5 million members. There was agreement that though the CUT has undergone considerable bureaucratisation and its leadership has sold out many workers struggles the policy of the two largest far left groups in Brazil the PSol and the PSTU in setting up their own small union federation is a wrong one.

Revolutionaries should, in the



Liga pela Quinta Internacional

opinion of the meeting not cut themselves off from the mass of the workers in this way. They should defend the CUT against the attacks of more right wing federations but at the same time fight within it for rank and file democracy and militant policies.

The Brazilian Workers Party

The meeting also discussed the history of the Workers Party (Partido

dos Trabalhadores - PT) which claims 1.4 million members. The comrades were of the opinion that the party had, since its foundation at the start of the 1980s, evolved rightwards in a number of stages. They believe that over the last decade and the years of Lula and Dilma's presidencies in particular the party has undergone a serious degeneration, carrying through large scale privatisation and austerity policies.

The meeting also discussed the main groups of the far left in Brazil, particularly the P-SOL Partido Socialismo e Liberdade,) and the PSTU (Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado).

The League's programme has now been translated into Portuguese and our task now is the elaboration of key programmatic demands for Brazil, particularly addressing the struggles of women, the landless workers black and indigenous minorities. Last but not least the meeting discussed the tasks involved in building a section in the country, setting up a blog/website and a regular publication. The League looks forward to admitting a Brazilian section at its next congress in 2013.

WHERE WE STAND



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

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



The Trade Unions must be transformed by a rank and file movement to oust the reformist bureaucrats, to democratise the unions and win them to a revolutionary action programme based on a system of transitional demands which serve as a bridge between today's struggles and the socialist revolution. Central to this is the

fight for workers' control of production. We are for the building of fighting organisations of the working class - factory committees, industrial unions, councils of action, and workers' defence organisations.

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

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

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



Imperialism is a world system which oppresses nations and prevents economic development in the vast majority of third world countries. We support the struggles of oppressed nationalities or countries against imperialism. We unconditionally support the Irish Republicans fighting to drive British troops out of Ireland. But against the politics

of the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalists, we fight for permanent revolution - working class leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle under the banner of socialism and internationalism. In conflicts between imperialist countries and semi-colonial countries, we are for the defeat of the imperialist army and the victory of the country oppressed and exploited by imperialism. We are for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. We opposed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, they were not struggles to liberate the people but to secure imperialist power.

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

Fighting to save the NHS from privatisation

Mark Booth

THE HEALTH and Social Care Bill, is entering its final stages in parliament, and could soon be passed into law. Though it has taken a battering in the House of Lords, with over one hundred amendments attempting to undo its worst aspects, the reactionary core of the Bill remains – opening up the NHS to the full force of privatisation.

If this bill goes through the HHS will rapidly become just a logo, attached to a network of private providers. The profiteers will gobble up a huge part of the health budget. Vital services will be cut to shreds by a process of deficit reduction and outright “bankruptcy.”

Cameron has stated he is determined to force the bill through parliament no matter how much it damages the government in the polls. The Lib Dems after a sideshow of opposition, putting down amendments and then voting against them, can be relied on to vote it through with its core untouched.

The Tories contempt for democracy is staggering. First there were their election pledges – ‘no top down reform to the NHS’, ‘we’ll cut the deficit not the NHS’, and the old chestnut “the NHS is save in our hands.” In plain violation of all their promises, once in office they announced, “all bets were off.” It could be put more bluntly – “ever been had!”

Despite promises of consultation when all the union and professional bodies working in the NHS responded with a categorical NO they pressed ahead. Now despite a petition to force a debate on the bill in parliament securing over 165,000 signatures, 65,000 more than the necessary amount, the Commons Business committee refused to allocate a single day to debate the Bill.

Lansley has refused to release the National Risk Register, an official government document detailing the potential damage his reforms will do, despite freedom of information requests from several MPs. Even though the government has repeatedly lost court cases to release the register, they continue to appeal to the High Court to stop its release. Most recently when the Labour party moved a motion in parliament to have the register published it was defeated 299 to 246.



Regional risk registers published in the last several weeks have exposed the risks to patients of the fragmentation and break up of services, the fracturing of care for patients with chronic conditions and the detrimental effect of the reforms on the safety and quality of care as private health corporations initiate a race to the bottom in terms and conditions. This is what the government wants to conceal.

Where is the national campaign?

Given the massive public opposition to this bill- the huge majority who want to keep the health service with its original principles of free public provision, the question is not can this bill be stopped but why has it not been stopped already?

The answer lies with the leadership of the main healthcare unions and the TUC.

The best they have managed is lobby of parliament a night of speeches to a 2000 strong rally in Central Hall Westminster on a March 7th. Despite the heartrending litany of what NHS privatisation will mean there was not a single call to action from the leaders of the main unions.

“Left” union leader Len McCluskey said:

“We have just 13 days to save the NHS from falling into the hands of the private healthcare companies that are set to make millions in profits for their shareholders. ... We need to mobilise the hundreds of thousands of NHS employees and mil-

lions of NHS patients onto the streets in opposition to this bill.”

Fine words, but when is Unite going to call NHS unionists and NHS users onto the streets? Why have you and the other leaders left it to the eleventh hour? Not a single national or regional mobilisation has been called by any of the unions against the bill, let alone a national demonstration which could easily bring out a million.

When Rank and file health workers and members of REVOLUTION unfurled a banner calling for strike action to defend the NHS they were roughly bundled out of the hall by stewards. Earlier a student feeder march was not even allowed into the venue. Almost thousand people, including medical, nursing and other

What kind of Health Service do we need?

MARK FISHER in *Capitalist Realism* accuses the left and the unions today of limiting themselves to opposing Tory “change” rather than themselves posing a positive alternative. In the case of the NHS most people regard it as already socialist, as not in need of any alternative. In the enemy camp the Adam Smith Institute calls the NHS a “socialist relic.”

Certainly the the creation of a service free to all removed the terrible fear of illness that haunted working people before the War. It was the greatest achievement of any Labour government, however the pharmaceutical industry, most equipment suppliers and entire branches like the dentists and opticians were

left out of the system. Free medicines did not last long; prescription charges were reintroduced under a Labour Government.

Waves of “reforms” under Thatcher, Major, Blair and Brown have driven wedges of the market and private enterprise into the system and broken up its overall planning.

A socialist NHS

So what would be needed to create a truly socialist NHS? Firstly all the privatised elements should be re-nationalised with no compensation to the parasites who took them over. The huge debts run up under PFI schemes should be cancelled. All the outsourced

services with their workforces, often underpaid and with no job security, would be brought back into the NHS and paid a decent living wage.

GP’s practices could be amalgamated into a system of local polyclinics, providing minor operations, preventative care to their communities. The huge drugs companies should be nationalised.

Medical research would be freed from business secrecy and competition, management of every unit should be by representatives of nurses, doctors, auxiliary workers, and patients. Thus all the features of the NHS at its best could be restored and improved on. This must be an integral part of a programme for working class power.

healthcare students, were left outside. Calls for action were plainly not welcome at the media-packed, photo opportunity staged by the trade union bureaucracy!

The lack of activity by the unions against the bill is truly astonishing. The NHS is the most popular institution in the country; millions would mobilise to defend it if they were given a fighting lead. The secret was a little phrase included in all the union leaders speeches in the Central Hall on March 7 – “the governments will be punished for this at the next elections.” All the big unions are in effect saying wait till we re-elect a Labour Government.

The union leaderships are terrified of unleashing mass action by their members, of linking defence of the NHS, to the pensions struggle. Why? Because they know this would cause a full scale political crisis – a mobilisation on such a scale that it could bring down the government. They believe that even if the bill passes it will almost certainly guarantee a Labour victory. The ballot box rather than the mass movement is their preferred strategy. But what would this historic act of cowardice and betrayal mean?

It means conceding the destruction of the NHS, with all the suffering and misery this will cause, in the hope that Labour will win the election and reverse it. This ignores two simple facts. Allowing the Tories to win a huge victory over the working class - as Thatcher was allowed to do in the first half of the 1980s - does not lead to the speedy return of a Labour government. Secondly if anyone believes that Labour would “buy back” the NHS from the private vultures, is living in a dream world when it was Tony Blair and Labour Health Secretary Alan Milburn who began the privatisation process

UNISON, UNITE, the GMB, the BMA, the RCN should call a national demonstration against the bill now. They should initiate a national campaign to kill the bill or the act before it can take effect.

But realistically it is grassroots unionists and NHS campaigning groups that will have to take the lead, drawing in the local anti-cuts organisations. We should convene a conference as soon as possible to plan a campaign of demonstrations, militant direct action and strikes to defend the NHS.