

workers power 5



Where is Britain going?



Pakistani workers' new party



Will Israel attack Iran?

Winter 2012-13 ★ Donation – £1 suggested ★ Issue 368

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

Turn TUC words into grassroots action

LET'S WIN THE UNIONS

TO A GENERAL STRIKE!

- **Assemblies to discuss a general strike in every town and city**
- **Convene councils of action to co-ordinate every strike, every struggle**

Now turn to pages 3 and 5

Obama wins four more years – what does it mean for workers?

Peter Main

Barack Obama has got his “four more years”. That there was any doubt, shows the contrast to four years ago. Rather than maintaining the momentum of his campaign against George W Bush, Obama disappointed his supporters on virtually every issue since.

Guantanamo is still open, there are more troops in Afghanistan and the war has been extended into Pakistan.

When the people of Egypt rose, Obama's first instinct was to back the dictator, Hosni Mubarak.

Back home, the bankruptcy of General Motors and Chrysler ensured the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. The Employee Free Choice Act, which would have strengthened union recruitment, was not passed. Universal health-care provision was dropped in favour of enforced purchase of private insurance.

Unable to appeal to voters on the basis of his record, Obama relied on superior organisation to “get the vote out”. This extended to using cable TV viewing records and Yahoo's analysis of programme audiences.

The campaign also benefited from fears of a Republican victory. Having gained nomination by pandering to the Tea Party, Romney then revealed his arrogant class prejudice against the “47% who don't

pay taxes” and called for “illegals” to “self deport”.

Is it any wonder the Republican voter demographic is increasingly white, male and aged? In fact this could lead to bitter clashes between the Tea Party crazies of the right and those who want to compete for Latino, Asian and younger voters with the Democrats.

Add to that the advantages of being the incumbent when the hurricane hit the East Coast, and it would be easy

to see the outcome as a foregone conclusion, without any greater significance.

That would be wrong. Obama still had the support of the urban working class – white, Latino and black – as well as a majority among women. If one term was enough to dispel euphoria, it was not enough to remove all illusions.

However, the 14,000 votes (27 per cent) that Kshama Sawant received in Washing-

ton state when she challenged the speaker of the House as an Occupy-inspired Socialist Alternative candidate shows the potential for anticapitalist politics in the US.

And indeed history has shown that until there is an independent working class alternative, bold enough to target capitalism and to present a socialist alternative, illusions in the Democrats will not be shattered.

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Obama re-elected

Continued from page 1

Some think Obama will be more radical in his second term because he will not be seeking re-election. We disagree. In his second term, Obama will have the same priorities, beginning with his solution to the "fiscal cliff": already promising \$4 trillion of cuts in state spending and "a little more taxation of the wealthy".

Since he has to undertake a bipartisan stance with the reactionary Republican dominated House of Representatives it is likely we will see even bigger cuts in already meagre social programmes that mean the "richest nation in the world" has one of the most shamefully inadequate welfare systems among the older capitalist countries.

With unemployment numbers climbing once again, and union funds drained again by the \$400 million thrown away on Obama's re-election campaign and the Democrats, American workers will have to pick themselves up and organise the fight back including against the "friend of labour" in the White House.

This will have to include a struggle against the union bureaucrats on their eye watering salaries, who tie labour to the Democrats. These bureaucratic fat cats are also willing to sell their members wage levels and workplace rights as they claim to preserve jobs – in fact to cheapen labour power for US capital to aid it in its increasing rivalry with their fellow exploiters in Asia and Europe.

In the fight against Obama, a working class party has to be built so that disillusion in him does not benefit the Republicans or forces even further to the right, as the global crisis of capitalism grinds on.

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Support grows for Europe-wide general strike

Peter Main

As we go to press, workers across southern Europe are gearing up for a coordinated, cross-border general strike. On 14 November there will be one-day general strikes in Portugal, Spain, Greece, Italy, France, Malta and Cyprus. And the list is not closed. Unions, youth organisations and social movements are mobilising in Belgium and in other countries in Western and Eastern Europe.

Even the conservative bureaucracy of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) which has hitherto shamefully supported the debt repayment programmes of the European Union, is calling for solidarity, encouraging "strikes, demonstrations, rallies and other actions".

Not quite a pan-European general strike – but something which points in that direction.

The initiative for 14 November came last month from Portugal's largest trade union, CGTP, which called a general strike on that date against "exploitation and impoverishment".

Then Spain's unions – Confederation Sindical de Comisiones Obreras, the Unión General de Trabajadores and the smaller federations, announced they would join in and "celebrate the first Iberian general strike".

This comes against a backdrop of a wave of protests against the 2013 State Budget, expected to include €39 billion in additional spending cuts and tax increases.

In Italy, according to organisers, 100,000 demonstrated in Rome on 27 October against Mario Monti's austerity government. In a separate demonstration, 20,000 doctors and nurses protested against the attacks on the health service. The CGIL, and smaller rank and file unions like COBAS, are taking their place in the day of international action.

In France, the CFDT, CGT, FSU and the Union Syndicale Solidaires have committed their troops – with the CGT calling on its unions to strike against austerity.

The day of action is the crest of a rising wave of indignation against a battery of cuts – austerity with no end in sight – which has hit almost every European country. The tide of protest has naturally run strongest in those countries suffering the heaviest attacks – in Greece, Spain and Portugal. But there are clear signs that resistance is now mounting in Italy, France and even in non-Eurozone Britain.

On 15 September, Portugal saw its biggest demonstration



Greek trade unionists march past Greek Parliament in Athens, November, 2012

since the Revolution of 1974.

In Spain, on 26 and 27 September, hundreds of thousands demonstrated and huge numbers besieged the Spanish parliament as it was passing Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's latest cuts budget.

In Greece, on 19 October, another general strike, the second in three weeks, took place against the Troika-backed right wing government of Antonis Samaras. That was then followed by the massive 48-hour general strike of 8 and 9 November, as the Greek parliament voted on the government's next round of cuts.

In Britain, on 20 October, 150,000 marched and heard Len McCluskey, leader of Unite, the second biggest union in the country, call for a general strike and appeal for the crowd to vote for it – which they did in their thousands. An international conference called by the Coalition of Resistance, with participants from Greece, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and elsewhere, was held in London the following day. The meeting resolved:

"We will work together in the months ahead, cooperating for the ETUC Day of Action on 14 November, moving towards the Alter Summit in 2013, and increasing our work for left and movement unity, for common action, mutual solidarity, communication and coordination."

International Solidarity

So far, Europe's rulers have played the game of divide and rule on its workers. Our union general secretaries and our so-called socialist party leaders, have fallen into line, lecturing workers that some cuts must be made, leaving each sector to struggle over which will suffer the least.

Internationally, they have not combated the filthy chauvinist propaganda of governments, media and the EU authorities that the workers of the heavily indebted countries are "lazy" and "spendthrift".

Class solidarity and internationalism have remained empty phrases.

It's time to put a stop to this ruinous game and act ALL TOGETHER; as the French say, Tous ensemble, tous ensemble! Oui! Oui! Oui!

In every country, this means that both private and public sector workers must be drawn into the struggle. Where the bosses' press and TV stations argue that low wages and insecure employment in the private sector are economically necessary to justify privatisation, downsizing and offshoring, we have to insist on an end to superexploitation.

We need secure, well paid jobs with pensions for all at full union rates, jobs for the millions of unemployed, citizenship rights for the migrant

workers, cuts in taxation for the workers and the poor and higher taxes on the super-rich to pay for health, education, transport, social security – services that everybody needs.

We need to recognise that isolated struggles, sector-by-sector, country-by-country. Neither will one-day general strikes. No matter how big and impressive they are, they remain only protests – and protests will not soften the hard hearts of the billionaires and their bought and sold politicians.

In Spain and Greece, demonstrators have recognised the hollowness of normal parliamentary "democracy", where the media are all in the bosses' hands and the police have the power to break up protests and protect the legislators against the people.

What protests can do is mobilise people, demonstrating where the millions stand. But then decisive action needs to be taken; the millions must become a force.

We need all out, unlimited general strikes to drive out the austerity governments, to scatter and dissolve the riot cops and repressive forces, to install governments based on the mass movement of the working people, the unemployed and the poor.

So far, the major unions have done little or nothing. Indeed, Berthold Huber of the massive German engineering union, IG Metall has even condemned Spanish and Portuguese unions for striking. However, anti-cuts committees and Greek solidarity committees will demonstrate in Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, and other German cities, with the support of local union branches.

After 14 November, union branches and trades councils should sponsor local, delegate-based committees to co-ordinate the campaign for a general strike in every town and every union. By drawing in other unions and campaigns, this would not only maximise their impact locally, but take forward the fight within the unions for national action. We need to start campaigning now so that, when the next European action is called, there will be a general strike in Britain, too.

Florence summit fails

Joy Macreedy, Florence

In November 2002 the first European Social Forum in Florence issued the call for worldwide anti-war demonstrations on February 15, 2003. To mark its tenth anniversary, 1,500 activists gathered there for an event titled Firenze 10+10.

The title was meant to indicate the meeting would draw a balance sheet of the struggles of the last ten years and plan for those of the decade ahead. Instead it repeated the ESF's failures of the past decade, indicating that its organiser had, as the saying goes, "learned nothing and forgotten nothing".

Billed as an opportunity to coordinate action against austerity across Europe, instead we were presented with a bland call for "a European permanent mobilisation to support the fights to overcome the crisis and build a future for everyone in Europe and in the world",

followed by a calendar of events that had already been planned by other organisations.

These start with the general strikes and ETUC day of action on 14 November and proceed, via a demonstration outside the European Summit in Brussels in March, to an "Alter Summit" in Athens in early June. Although the forum had been organised around five extended workshops, the final statement contained none of the proposals arising from those discussions. Even a call for mobilisations on 8 March, International Women's Day, was not included.

The failure of Firenze 10+10 to attract any involvement from the mass movements that have shaken Europe in the last year is proof that history has passed the ESF by. For ten years the leading forces in it have refused to let it develop it into an organisation that could initiate struggles. Instead, they insisted it remain a "space"

from which political organisations were excluded, and at which no decisions could be taken. Its first success, 15 February 2003, was its last.

As the strikes on 14 November show, the potential for pan-European working class organisation and action certainly exists; even the bureaucratic trade unions have recognised that. The task now is to fight within the unions and the mass movement for a democratically controlled coordinating centre that will lead an effective pan-European fightback.

In this struggle a truly European one-day general strike would be a declaration of solidarity of all those under attack and encourage the movement in each country to mobilise all-out action to bring down the austerity governments and replace the European Union with the Socialist United States of Europe.

Hillsborough police cover up exposed

Stu Bates

On 15 April 1989, 96 Liverpool supporters attending the FA cup semi-final at Sheffield Wednesday's Hillsborough stadium never returned home. Now, 20 years on, a new independent report has exposed a massive police cover-up.

The police and Sheffield Wednesday bosses were to blame for the disaster, not the fans. The stadium failed to meet safety standards, and similar crushes had taken place before. There weren't enough turnstiles open to deal with the high volume of supporters.

As the disaster unfolded, police beat back fans climbing fences to escape the crush, and allowed only one of the 44 ambulances into the stadium. Supporters attempted to resuscitate the victims as best they could, and ripped up advertising hoardings to use as stretchers for the injured.

This year the Hillsborough Independent Panel concluded the lives of 41 supporters could have been saved if they had received prompt medical

treatment. Those deaths are down to the police, not the fans or some unavoidable disaster.

The original coroner limited his investigation to events before 3:15pm, when ambulances arrived, ignoring the one of the main causes of death – the police obstructing ambulances. Nearly 200 police statements were changed, removing any comments which exposed the police. The police, media and Prime Minister Thatcher herself blamed Liverpool supporters for the crush.

Miners' strike

This wasn't the first cover-up in South Yorkshire. The "Battle of Orgreave" was a key event in the Great Miners' Strike of 1984-85, where police brutally attacked picketing miners, injuring 51 and arresting 93. South Yorkshire police were forced to pay half a million pounds in compensation in a case that QC Michael Mansfield called "the biggest frame-up ever". But not a single officer was disciplined for misconduct.

Mansfield's claim that the South Yorkshire police had a culture of fabricating evidence has been vindicated by the new Hillsborough inquiry, prompting calls for a new investigation into Orgreave.

In both cases the press published police lies as truth, and put the blame on working class people. After Hillsborough, Thatcher praised the police and attacked fans. The Sun went furthest with an article, "The Truth", accusing fans of pickpocketing and obstructing the police – when it was the police who obstructed ambulances!

This just proves that the capitalist state and media are not "neutral". They systematically smear trade unions and are full of anti-working class prejudice.

It's not just South Yorkshire, the police up and down the country cover up their crimes: phone-hacking and bribes from the Murdoch press, the unlawful killing of Ian Tomlinson during the G20 protests, the shooting of Mark Duggan and Anthony Grainger... the list goes on.



South Yorkshire's finest prepare to smash a well-aimed truncheon over the head of a defenceless woman photographer – just one of the many pieces of evidence showing police brutality at the 'Battle of Orgreave' in June 1984

Now West Yorkshire police chief Sir Norman Bettison, involved in the Hillsborough cover-up at the time, and having boasted of "fitting up Liverpool fans", has resigned, hoping to avoid the consequences. He and all the

other guilty cops should be prosecuted. All the families, support groups, campaigns for justice, and trade unions should launch an independent inquiry into all these cover-ups and campaign for justice together.

Editorial

The New Year's Resolution – Fight for a General Strike

IT'S NO LONGER a question of *if* we need a general strike, but *how* can we get one.

As 2012 ends and a new year begins the economic, political and social crisis of capitalism continues and even deepens.

Two and a half million people are spending their mid-winter break with little cheer: jobless, broke and harassed until they stop claiming benefits. Young people are bearing the brunt of this crisis.

If the working class as a whole did not cause this crisis, then the youth most certainly are not to blame. Yet a million under-25s are not in education, employment or training. Now Chancellor Osborne wants to rob them of housing benefit, forcing many onto the streets or back into violent homes. And this is supposed to be the Big Society.

Real wages continue to plummet. TUC research has found that an average worker on £26,000 has lost £1,500 over the past three years alone. Supermarket prices for basic foodstuffs are rising steeply, while the big six utility companies have raised tariffs by 7 to 10 per cent.

Privatisation and cuts are the inevitable result of the Tories' fragmentation of the health and education systems. Isolated and competing against each other, hospitals and schools are shedding jobs, restricting services or closing their doors.

Popular demand

So it was no surprise that over 150,000 workers converged on London on 20 October for the TUC's march for *A Future That Works*, with significant numbers also assembling in Belfast and Glasgow.

The most popular slogans on the demo were those calling for a general strike. Earlier in the month the TUC Congress voted overwhelmingly to consider "the practicalities of a general strike". Well, if this was their first public consultation exercise, the answer was an overwhelming "Yes".

At the rally in Hyde Park, Unite General

Secretary Len McCluskey electrified the huge crowd when he called for a vote: "Who here wants a general strike?" A forest of hands went up.

This indicates we are entering a new phase in the struggle.

Faced with the longest and deepest recession since the 1930s, millions of workers are daunted by the prospect of fighting back section by section. With 2.5 million unemployed ready to take your job, every sector of the economy in dire straits and the government demanding £99 billion of cuts, the chances of winning significant concessions by strike action – usually only for one day and well spaced out – at local or even national level looks increasingly daunting.

But the idea that we should do it **all together** looks like sheer common sense to increasing numbers. Being part of a huge social movement with all the unions, both public and private sector, involving the unemployed, students and welfare claimants, seems far more promising. Besides, when we are suffering a political attack, a political response – which is what a general strike is – is clearly appropriate.

So we should no longer ask, "Is the time right for a general strike?" but "How can we get one?"

Here's five things we can all do to help bring a general strike closer.

1 In your workplace and your union branch, in your school or college, **argue for a general strike**. If you can, pass a resolution in your branch or student union in support of the general strike. *Workers Power* members have done this in a variety of unions and received enthusiastic support.

Draw up a petition to pass around. This will give you the opportunity to start a discussion, to identify and gather the details of those who agree, and demonstrate to others the groundswell of opinion rising in support.

Shop stewards and union branches can hold meetings to discuss the call for a general

strike. Some are doing this on the European TUC's day of action on 14 November.

Students are planning to raise the question on and around the national demo on 21 November.

2 Put pressure on the union leaders. In Hyde Park, Mark Serwotka publicly called on union members to put their leaders under pressure, "including me" as he put it.

All members of the TUC General Council should demand that body votes on a general strike resolution – and votes "Yes". Union leaderships should "ballot" their members, with a recommendation to vote in favour of such a strike.

Those unions already on board should launch a campaign to popularise the idea, with leaflets, posters and social media tools. If Len McCluskey and Mark Serwotka can tour the country when they want to get elected, then they can do so again to whip up support for a general strike.

3 Build local links. Join together all supporting union branches, put resolutions to trades councils, and link up with the anti-cuts groups, students, the unemployed, pensioners, disabled, anti-racists and other action groups – and form **councils of action** for a general strike.

Street stalls on Saturday high streets can reach out to those not yet in unions but angered by the cuts. Door-to-door leafletting on estates can likewise find new supporters and activists ready to campaign with us. We should consider holding local demos in the New Year against austerity and in support of a general strike.

4 Support all local and national disputes – **strikes, occupations, and protests**. Join the picket lines and discuss the call for a general strike.

Where possible, we should try and take **solidarity** action, whether this consists of raising money for strikers or refusing to cross picket

lines. The point is to put solidarity back on the agenda of valid responses to the cuts.

5 Last but not least, we need to form a **national campaign** for a general strike. Unite the Resistance and the Coalition of Resistance both have national conferences in November, while the National Shop Stewards Network is holding regional gatherings. **Let's really unite!**

They should all join forces to campaign for a general strike. It is no use hiding behind the excuse that they have "different policies" – a unity conference could debate and maybe resolve these positions. The point is that a real united front – rather than rival campaigns each controlled behind the scenes by a different socialist group – would attract far broader forces and be capable of more effective action.

New leadership

More important still, it is vital we do not rely on the TUC leaders to campaign for a general strike, let alone to lead one.

Either the right wing, relying on their lawyers' advice, will block the left and refuse to call a strike, which is what outgoing general secretary Brendan Barber virtually said should be done, or they will find any pretext, such as a court injunction, to call it off. After all, this is how they got out of the public sector pensions dispute last winter.

Only the rank and file members, organised independently of all wings of the trade union bureaucracy, can fight for, organise and lead to victory a general strike.

And when we can do this, we can finally take our rightful place, shoulder to shoulder with our European sisters and brothers, in a continent-wide struggle not only to bring down the governments and EU institutions of austerity, but to get rid of this rotten capitalist system that puts profit for the tiny few above the needs of hundreds of millions.



Bolshie Women

Waging a war on inequality

Joy Macready

WOMEN COUNCIL workers in Birmingham, including cooks, cleaners, caterers and care staff, have struck another blow against inequality. On 24 October a Supreme Court ruling upheld 174 city council workers' rights to compensation over missed bonuses from 2004 to 2010. Male workers on the same grade received extra money that the women workers didn't get. Five thousand council workers have already won their case for equal pay at employment tribunals in 2010. More will follow.

This ruling opens up the possibility of women working in other sectors launching equal pay claims. Bankers and finance bosses should be quaking in their boots – the pay gap rises from an average of 14.9 per cent up to 55 per cent in the finance sector.

Women workers in Birmingham haven't relied solely on the courts as a battleground. When the council tried to equalise pay – by slashing men's pay by up to £12,000 to level it down to the lower levels of women workers – up to 3,000 council staff took strike action on 5 February 2008. This was the biggest strike in Birmingham for decades.

A century of struggle for equality

It is this fighting spirit that brought about equal pay legislation more than 40 years ago. The Dagenham Ford sewing machinists' dispute, with fiery speeches and flying pickets up and down the country, forced the Labour government to pass the 1970 Equal Pay Act. The women laid down their tools and refused to return to work until they were paid the same wage as men on the same grade.

Women's resistance against inequality has a long history in Britain. Over 100 years ago, the suffragette movement led the way. On the day the Birmingham council workers won their legal battle, UK Feminista organised a lobby of parliament for women's rights, dressed as suffragettes and led by Sylvia Pankhurst's granddaughter, Dr Helen Pankhurst. Many turned out after Jeremy Hunt, the new rightwing secretary of state for health, called for the legal time limit for abortions to be halved. Even those rights we've already won are coming under attack.

Class and Oppression

But today, as in the past, feminists seek to obscure the class conflict that exists within the women's movement. It is telling that UK Feminista emphasised Helen's lineage ties to Emmeline Pankhurst, Sylvia's mother, a true middle class feminist.

In 1912, under the leadership of Emmeline and her daughter Christabel, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), or the suffragette movement in the UK, completely turned away from the working class and resorted to direct action aimed at terrorising the government, such as chaining themselves to railings, setting fire to mailbox contents,

smashing windows and occasionally detonating bombs. Their tactics and isolation from the mass of working class women meant that in the period 1910-1913 the WSPU went from being a mass movement to a small guerrilla organisation.

Sylvia, a true revolutionary, broke with her mother and sister in 1913 and set up a working class organisation based in the impoverished East End of London. She knew that suffrage was a universal issue and that winning this demand meant organising the working class, both women and men. She fiercely disagreed with the WSPU's swing to support the British war effort in WWI and gain "respectability", and instead adopted a revolutionary socialist stance against imperialist war.

How can we win equal pay?

When women workers are still paid on average 15 per cent less than men almost 40 years after the Equal Pay Act came into law, the burning question remains: how can we get equal pay? Legislation alone won't change the status quo. Working class women must lead the way once again:

Open the books to challenge the bosses' secrecy and expose unequal pay schemes. Regular pay surveys and clearly defined wage brackets will give women workers the ammunition to stand up to discriminatory schemes. Mass meetings of male and female workers can collectively discuss pay and how to fight for wage rises. We can strike for our rights, like in Birmingham!

Roll back precarious working: For two decades bosses have restructured the workforce to expand part-time, low paid, temp-contract or under the table work. Women workers are pushed into these types of jobs to balance work with childcare. Let's reverse this neoliberal drive and get the service sector unionised!

Fight Tory cuts to childcare, nurseries, social services, healthcare and public sector jobs, where two-thirds of working women in Europe are concentrated. Cuts in all these areas will force women to spend more time in the home and into more precarious work. We need a general strike to bring down the Tories – that will protect rights we've won like abortion too.

Under capitalism, the bosses benefit from inequality. They exploit women with low wages and use this to drag wage levels down. Birmingham shows how struggle can turn the tables on them.

The system as a whole benefits from the unpaid labour women do in the home, raising the next generation of workers – cooking, cleaning, childcare. The only way to rip up the roots of our oppression, which lie in the family, is by socialising this housework so women can participate in society on an equal footing with men.

That's why we fight for an international working class women's movement to mobilise women and link the revolutionary fight against capitalism to the fight for our emancipation and socialism.

Car pile-up ahead: may cause strikes



Ford's is closing the gate on 1,400 plus jobs

Jeremy Dewar

ON 25 OCTOBER, Ford stunned workers at its Southampton transit van and Dagenham stamping plants, announcing 1,400 job cuts and the closure of both sites next year. Unions say job losses could be as high as 2,000. Closure would threaten a further 10,000 jobs in the supply chain.

The US car giant had promised its Southampton workers just months beforehand that they would be making the new transit van from 2014 onwards. Unite and GMB unions joined in condemning the move, with Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey saying, "Ford has betrayed its workforce."

The job losses will reduce Ford UK's workforce to just 11,400, down from 52,000 workers at the turn of the century.

European crisis

This is only the beginning of a jobs massacre. As the euro crisis rumbles on with no end in sight, there is overcapacity across the EU car industry. Put simply, with unemployment soaring and wages plummeting, workers cannot afford new cars.

Even in Germany, a worker on the average income would today have to put aside 16 months' wages to buy a car, up from nine months back in 1980. Wages and what they can buy are shrinking across the developed world, hitting car sales hard.

In the first half of 2012, most of Europe's car manufacturers have seen sales fall dramatically: Peugeot by 14 per cent, Renault 17 per cent, General Motors and Ford 11 per cent and Fiat 17 per cent. Volkswagen has offset some of its losses by selling 30 per cent of its cars to China, but even its sales are down 1 per cent.

As a result, production has been cut back, causing thousands of lay-offs, short-time working and closures. On top of the 2,000 jobs here, Ford is shedding 4,300 jobs at Genk in Belgium, Peugeot is slashing 8,000 shifts in Paris and Fiat

is looking to close its Naples factory. General Motors – known as Opel in Europe and Vauxhall in the UK – has cut 2,600 jobs in 2012 alone, and is rumoured to be planning to close its factory in Bochum, which would be Germany's first car plant closure since World War II. Short time working in Germany has cost tens of thousands of car workers 20 days' wages in 2012.

Strike – occupy – resist

On 31 October, Manganese Bronze, the manufacturers of London's iconic black cab, sacked all 156 workers at its Coventry plant, less than 24 hours after telling Unite reps that it was hopeful of finding a buyer.

The workers were outraged. But they didn't wait for the union to act – they occupied the plant, locking management and the suits from PricewaterhouseCoopers outside. Although the occupation ended after promises of talks with the union, this is a taster for the kind of resistance car workers need to mount if they are to stop the jobs massacre.

Despite staring at short-term losses on their balance sheets, the bosses are scared stiff by the prospect of occupations and strikes. That's why Ford managers sent the shift home early at Southampton when they announced the closure, rather than risk workers barricading themselves in. They don't want their machinery being held to ransom.

Occupations and strikes also bind the workers together, not allowing bosses to drive a wedge between them. Ford is offering up to two years' wages – £60,000 – to those with permanent contracts, hoping to buy them off, while sacking temporary workers on the cheap and leaving ten thousand workers in the supply chain in the lurch. So it's great that former Ford employees from Visteon, who successfully occupied the outsourced suppliers in 2009 to secure their pensions, came down to leaflet

the Southampton workers, encouraging them to fight.

Nationalisation and internationalism

All 11,400 Ford workers should be balloted immediately for action – preferably an all-out strike. The Dagenham and Southampton plants should be occupied. As one rep put it, "This is a fight for the community, for the next generation." Exactly. That's why an occupation could become a beacon of hope for car parts workers, the unemployed and youth.

Ford workers in Genk have shown the way. They have led several walkouts and have blockaded the factory since 24 October, the day Ford announced its plans. Although they plan to return to work on 13 November, they will continue to prevent finished cars from leaving. Car workers from Southampton, Dagenham and across Europe are attending a solidarity demo in Genk on 11 November. While there, they should draw up a plan for a Europe-wide fight back.

We must not allow the bosses to divide us along national lines. Transit van production is set to be transferred to Turkey in 2013. Let's contact the militant Turkish unions and secure their solidarity in saving jobs in the UK, while unions here should support Turkish workers' battle to raise wages to the level of the best in Europe. The only way to prevent the "race to the bottom" is to fight together to raise everyone's to the top.

Across Europe, the unions should insist that there is a solution to the car crisis: nationalisation without compensation and placing production under workers' control. Only when production is in the hands of the workers, will we be able to rationalise production and ensure our transport needs are compatible with environmental needs. So let's use this crisis to take control of the motor industry, secure jobs for future generations and reduce global warming.

The left and the general strike

A debate has opened up in the labour movement since the vote at the Brighton TUC to consider the 'practicalities of a general strike'. The debate has inevitably exposed differences on the left. Andy Yorke intervenes

NOT EVERYONE on the left supports a general strike, much less campaigns for it.

The Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), for example, rejects the slogan as "catchpenny phrasemongering", and pins its hopes instead on "a Labour Party committed to expropriating the banks, taxing the rich, restoring public services, and establishing workers' control". They worry that if "a general strike did bring down the government, then Labour might well not then win the ensuing election".

This is pure parliamentary cretinism, as Lenin called it, thinking that the most revolutionary tactic short of an armed insurrection should be adopted, or not adopted, on the basis of whether it helps or hinders the election of a Labour government.

Any general strike that had actually brought down a Tory government would in the very process radically transform the labour movement, including its political consciousness and forms of organisation. It would pose the need for a genuine workers' government that could really carry out the AWL's suggested policies and more besides – by relying on the very organisations, i.e. councils of action, that the workers' movement would have to create to win a general strike.

At the same time the AWL's alternative – according to which the Labour Party could be won to such policies while the unions restrict their resistance to the sort of tactics we have seen over the last two years – is a complete fantasy. So too is the idea that it is possible in today's conditions to capture the post-Blair Labour Party for socialism.

The Weekly Worker also rejects the slogan as "out of place", arguing that what we really need is a new party, an alternative to Labour. Though apparently proposing the opposite solution to the AWL's, it involves exactly the same method; it diverts attention from an immediate tactical necessity, which is certainly difficult to realise, towards a strategic problem (the revolutionary party) that is even further off. In the here and now it advises caution – wait until we have the right party or the right leadership.

Socialist Resistance and Counterfire, in partial contrast, actually do welcome the left union leaders' 20 October speeches, and the TUC's decision to "examine the practicalities" of a general strike. But they do not campaign for one, because they too believe the working class is "not ready".

They similarly pose a task that is totally off from that of defeating the governments' onslaught, in their case arguing that a general strike isn't possible without first rebuilding the unions from below, recruiting more members, building branches and organising around immediate issues like pay.



Some of the badges and placards, papers and slogans raised by the left on the TUC demo on 20 October

This fails to recognise, however, that on the one hand these vital tasks can all be helped by a political campaign for a general strike that energises and organises the most militant activists, but on the other hand they will be massively set back if the Tories succeed with their attacks.

The Socialist Party

However, the two biggest left organisations in Britain have taken up the slogan. To their credit, the Socialist Party (SP) has argued through the National Shop Stewards Network (NSSN) for a 24-hour general strike, lobbying the TUC for two years running. It is their artificial insistence on a time limit that is wrong; two years of 24-hour and 48-hour general strikes in Greece have failed to stop massive austerity.

The SP has been forced to address the question of whether a one-day general strike is sufficient, and whether an all-out indefinite one would be needed. Here the SP becomes timid and evasive, pointing to the size of the stakes this raises.

Knowing well enough Trotsky's argument that an indefinite general strike poses the question of "who is the master in the house", and that it is "a war manoeuvre designed to compel the enemy to submit", while a one-day general strike is really only a large demonstration, the SP hold onto the latter like a safety rail to

avoid falling into the dangers of the former. "An all-out general strike is one of the most serious actions the working class can take, posing as it does sharply the question of power in society. Either the working class takes power and establishes a new socialist society or the capitalists can inflict a crushing defeat... Therefore, before engaging in such a decisive battle it is necessary to go through a preparatory stage, maybe a number of limited strikes of one day or even longer, as in Greece. It is vital to understand the rhythm of the workers' movement at each stage." (*The Socialist*, editorial 31 October)

The SP does take into account that in Britain, a general strike is illegal under the anti-union laws, and unlawful under common law too. Undoubtedly the employers and the government would let off a barrage of injunctions the moment individual unions or the TUC tried to call one.

But for the union leaders, the anti-union laws are the biggest obstacle to any strike action, whatever its scope or duration. This is an obstacle that cannot be got around by the manoeuvres the SP suggests, but only confronted head-on and smashed by mobilising from below under the slogan, "They can't arrest us all".

But the SP takes fright at this prospect and looks for a way out:

"It is possible to go a long way towards a general strike even within

the straitjacket of the anti-union laws. If the TUC was to name the day, all unions with live disputes could coordinate their ballots in order to be able to strike on the same day. Each individual union would be striking over their own issues – whether pensions, pay, privatisation, job losses, all of these or other issues – at the same time collectively it would be a general strike against austerity. This would create a powerful core to a general strike, and there is no question that, once called, other workers would want to take part." (*The Socialist*, 24 October)

This in reality is just a repeat of the legal, coordinated sectional ballots of the N30 public sector pensions strike. It is a general strike in name only, and would be sabotaged by the weakest leaders ducking out as a result of threats and bribes from the government, just as they did in December 2011.

The Socialist Workers Party

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) makes many of the same mistakes as the SP, and is unwilling to build the rank and file movement that would make an all-out indefinite general strike possible.

The SWP was zigzagged on the general strike slogan, tailing the movement with calls for it up to the 30 November strike last year, then dropping it, but reviving it since the Brighton TUC. While it has not

explicitly limited its call to 24 hours, its model motion for the 17 November Unite the Resistance conference "calls on the TUC to name the day for a general strike against austerity as soon as practically possible" – effectively calling for a 24-hour coordinated strike as advocated by the Socialist Party.

In the union branches around N30 and at this year's PCS Annual Delegate Conference, the SWP opposed motions to "strike with or without other unions" and to "escalate up to all out action", and there is no sign they are advocating such action now.

In raising the general strike slogan, the SWP fails to explain how it is that we can actually get one. They are currently saying, rightly, that we need to raise the confidence of workers by fighting every single cut, and combine this will the call for a general strike.

However, simply increasing the pressure on the union leaders to support a general strike is not enough. We have to place demands on both the right wing and the left wing union leaders, and organise independently of them.

Unlike the SP, the SWP has always formally rejected the idea of "Broad Leftism", in favour of the rhetoric of building rank and file organisations. But in unions where it has people in leading positions, it has covertly always pursued a policy little different to the SP's. Since Unite the Resistance was set up last year, however, this policy has become more explicit. As the SWP's industrial organiser Martin Smith put it:

"The campaigning organisation Unite the Resistance... is neither a rank and file group, nor a broad left type formation, looking to capture the top of a union. Instead it seeks to bring together rank and file workers with those union leaders who want to resist. It hopes that by doing this it can give rank and file workers more confidence to fight, and bolster the fighting spirit of the union leaders. But if we are not to repeat the awful sell out of the pensions battle last year we have to set about rebuilding our unions from the base up." (*Socialist Worker*, 15 September)

Uniting together "rank and file workers with those union leaders who want to resist", and making this into a strategy, ignores the fact that at the first critical juncture the right wingers will betray... and the left wingers will stand silent and perplexed, as they did after the betrayal of N30.

But if this occurs in the run-up to, or during a general strike, it will be an even bigger disaster. The need to maintain our political independence of the union leaders, and to make merciless criticisms of their every hesitation, is the absolute duty of revolutionaries – and the only way we can insert a backbone into the TUC lefts. This was the main lesson of 1926 and we forget it today at our peril.

Where is Br

As the Coalition government gears up for the second half of its term in office, it is clear that the British economy is far from the path of recovery. Despite some terrible betrayals over the past year, the labour movement is debating its next move and the possibility of a general strike. On the following three pages, we print a resolution passed by the November meeting Workers Power National Committee on the way forward for the working class

THE BRITISH labour movement is facing unparalleled challenges:

- A period of recession and stagnation that has already lasted five years and shows no sign of ending
- A right wing Tory-dominated government with half its life still to run and a programme of austerity that will, if carried through, demolish the welfare state
- A weak trade union movement – too heavily dominated by the public sector – whose leaders are unwilling or unable to mount a united fightback
- A far left which insists on setting up rival anti-cuts campaigns each claiming (falsely) to have ‘united the resistance’.

However the balance sheet is far from being all negative.

- In November-December 2010 we saw a massive week-long wave of militant student demos protesting the hike in fees to £9000 and the abolition of the education maintenance allowance
- Starting in October 2011 the Occupy movement came to Britain and exposed crying social inequality and the corruption of the of the 1 per cent
- 2011 also saw the total number of working days officially lost to strike action rise to 1.4 million, the highest figure since 1990, thanks in large measure to N30. In fact the real figure was probably substantially larger.
- In 2012 we saw the return of the wildcat – walkouts, pickets and blockades of sites by rank and file electricians and construction workers, beating Balfour Beatty and moving on to the giant London Crossrail project.
- 2012 has also seen 20,000 London bus workers wage one-day strikes, using militant picketing to win payments for extra work during the Olympics.
- On the European mainland, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy, have seen mass general strikes with the ETUC calling a continent wide day of action on 14 November.

Add to this the international revolutionary movements and struggles – notably the Arab Spring, the Occupy movements in Spain, USA, Greece and Germany and the South African gold and platinum workers’ strikes – and it is clear that the depression has generated a new period of deep social crisis for capitalism.

This is made up of revolutionary and pre-revolutionary situations, but also counter-revolutionary ones, as the rise of Golden Dawn in Greece or Jobbik in Hungary threatens. These can well occur in the wake of major defeats – or failures by the left to rise to fight for power.

Nothing says revolutionary potential has to be realised. If its development is left either to spontaneity or to the trade union leaders, it will be frittered away as it has been several times over the past decade. But this time the punishment will be in proportion to the greater severity of the crisis.

The halving in size of the trade unions and weakening of their shopfloor strength has left the public sector unions as the big majority of the TUC. But these too will be decimated too if the Tory cuts are implemented in the next two years.

Unemployment will remain in the millions and fulltime secure jobs in central and local government, in social services, health and education will be decimated too – reducing us to a pre-1945 Poor Law provision, and releasing the upper middle classes from paying into the system.

But to do this, Osborne and Cameron must smash the resistance of the public sector unions, and pick on and destroy private sector unions such as the RMT which put up militant resistance to downsizing, closures, outsourcing and the array of wage reducing and profit boosting measures the bosses are intent on.

The historic nature of the attacks presents the necessity for an equally historic resistance. Our biggest enemy is thinking small, limiting ourselves to slowly rebuilding our unions, workplace by workplace. With this approach we will soon have precious few workplaces left.

There is a growing layer of new union militants and youth who are



Germany's Angela Merkel

waking up to the need to fight all together, with industrial action but with class-wide political goals. Such a tactic has a name – a general strike.

In September 2012 the TUC finally dared name it – if only to study its practicality. We should seize on this half-hearted measure with both hands and campaign over the coming year for a general strike to defend our jobs, services and union rights, and fight for a better future.

The ongoing recession

We are now five years into an economic crisis unparalleled in the post-war era. Weak recoveries have repeatedly given way to quarters of recession, indicating an overall stagnation in the old imperialist heartlands.

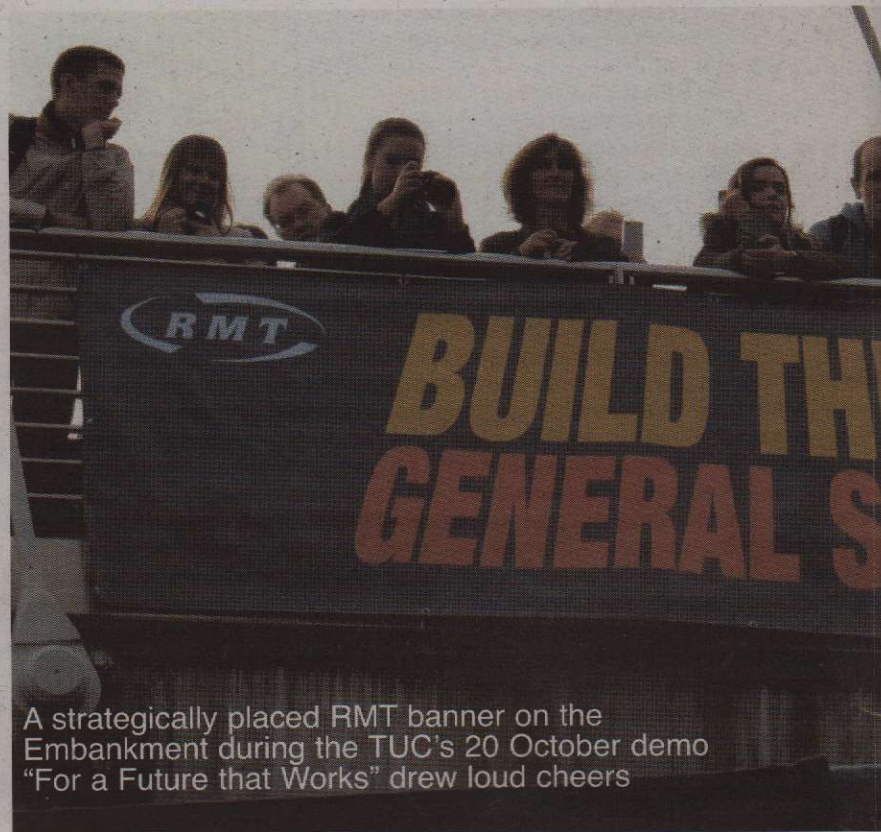
Its origins lie, as we predicted, in the failure of neoliberal attempts in the 1980s and 1990s to offset the tendency of the average rate of profit to fall. In fact these measures rather “blew back” causing a terrific crisis of the banking system.

There is not a shortage of capital. In Britain there is a £750 billion “corporate cash mountain”, roughly equal to half the UK’s annual GDP. The problem is not that banks are refusing to lend but that industry and commerce are unwilling to make long-term investments because they cannot foresee a rising rate of profit.

The feverish boom of 2002-06 led inevitably to a crash. It originated in the US as the 2007 subprime mortgage crisis, threatened to bring down their banking sector and rapidly spread to Europe. The trillion dollar bailouts of the banks in 2010 – not government spending – created a huge fiscal crisis in the Eurozone, starting with Greece and Ireland but spreading to the Iberian peninsula.

As a result the US and most of Europe remains in a great depression – a historic crisis of the capitalist system as a whole. As we predicted, this has engendered pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations and will continue to do so.

When the mortgage crisis of 2007 turned into a credit crunch in 2008, most governments responded with stimulus packages – public investments in infrastructure and services, education and training, and printing money (quantitative easing). Fearful of repeating the Hooverism of the 1929-33, Great Depression, governments, right and left, on both sides of the Atlantic, used public



A strategically placed RMT banner on the Embankment during the TUC’s 20 October demo “For a Future that Works” drew loud cheers

spending to boost demand – the standard Keynesian recipe. The long out of favour neo-Keynesian economists rejoiced. But their celebrations were short-lived.

In 2010, faced with fiscal deficits caused by the trillions spent on bailing out the banks, and a run on government bonds and currencies, European governments abruptly changed course, claiming the crisis had been caused by costly public services. Britain was in the forefront but Germany’s Chancellor Merkel took a similar line – not with Germany, but with Greece, the weakest link of the Euro chain.

The southern and Mediterranean EU states – Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy – are imposing brutal cuts to public services. But across Europe – from Ireland to Latvia – crushing austerity measures are being imposed. The EU heavyweights, Germany, France, and Britain, demand endless cuts and privatisation in return for bank bailouts and support in the bond markets.

Where next for the EU?

Austerity is underpinned by a new European Fiscal Treaty, railroaded through Eurozone parliaments or just signed by heads of state in the Spring and Summer. The treaty introduces a “golden rule” making balanced budgets mandatory. Every state’s structural deficit would be capped at 0.5 per cent of GDP. “Automatic brakes” will be triggered if this goal is missed. The new rules must be “preferably” enshrined into their constitutions – beyond the reach of democratically elected left governments. The unelected European Court of

Justice can impose fines of up to 1 per cent of GDP on any state which breaks it.

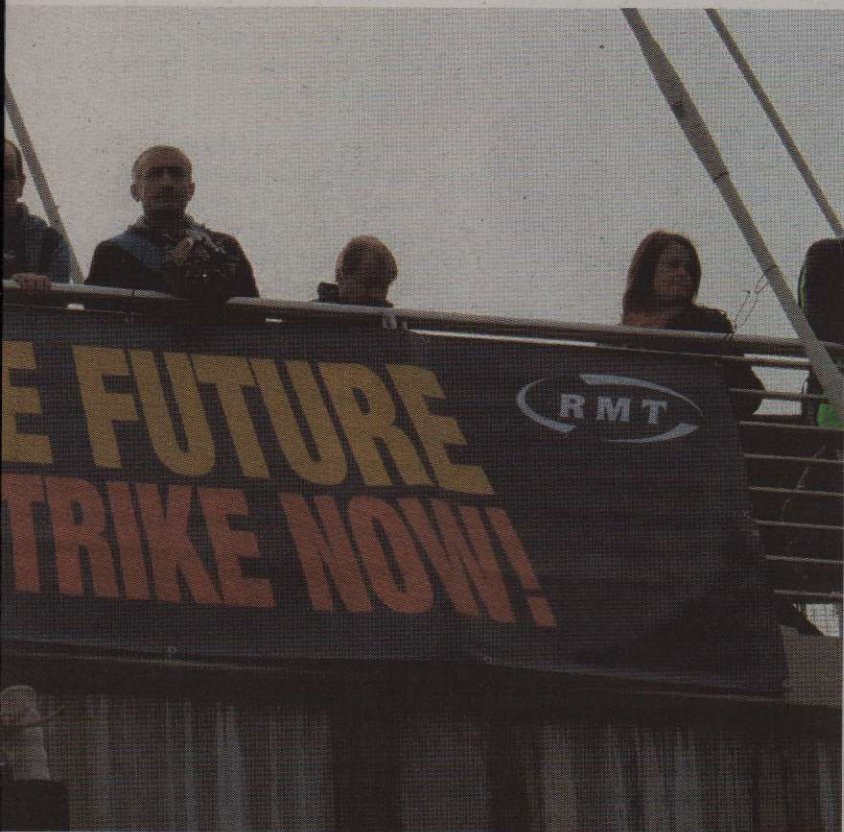
The treaty, which comes into force on 1 January 2013, was imposed by Germany as the price of further loans or support in the markets. It nakedly subordinates the economies of the weaker states to Germany and France and is a major leap in the centralisation of the EU. This is why Britain’s Tory government is considering its future as a full member of the EU and Cameron is talking of a referendum.

The Europe-wide austerity policy and the new treaty will drive countries into even deeper recession with more debt and increased misery for working people. Cyclical recoveries will hardly rise above stagnation. The winners are the big banks and assorted corporations of Germany and France, which are cherry-picking the potentially profitable enterprises and services in the states whose economies are subordinated to their dictates.

Germany’s strength lies in its domination of the EU’s markets and institutions, especially the European Central Bank. From this position of strength it has been able to set the Euro at a rate that has forced weaker economies to borrow massively to sustain their state budgets and less productive corporations: a rate enormously profitable to the German, French and British banks.

Another strength was the success of Schröder’s Hartz4 laws in holding down German workers’ wages at or below the rate of inflation. The entire German working class did not lose equally from this. A large labour

Britain going?



aristocracy, tied to their employers by the class collaborationist policies of IG Metall, has maintained job stability and wage levels for skilled workers – though this too is under threat, e.g. in the car industry.

But a huge part of the economy has slipped into precarious working, so German workers as a whole get only the crumbs from their bosses' pillaging. Indeed the workers of Europe should not line up with their "own" bosses and governments, whose cuts prove they have no loyalty to them. Instead we must use the international character of the crisis as a weapon against the capitalists and their institutions.

Massive, co-ordinated action across Europe is vital. Workers in Germany, France and Britain need to organise solidarity, and fight to cancel the debts.

How real is the recovery?

The IMF in October 2012 gives a bleak forecast for the world economy: "The recovery continues, but it has weakened. In advanced economies, growth is now too low to make a substantial dent in unemployment. And in major emerging market economies, growth that had been strong earlier has also decreased. Relative to our April 2012 forecasts, our forecasts for 2013 growth have been revised from 2.0 per cent down to 1.5 per cent for advanced economies, and from 6.0 per cent down to 5.6 per cent for emerging market and developing economies."

And as for Britain, The Financial Times – an ardent supporter of Osborne-ism – says it "led the way in voluntary deficit reduction... [but] is now enduring a prolonged period

of near-stagnation... Growth is expected to remain below 1 per cent in 2012 for the second year running and prospects have dimmed to such an extent that the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government is now planning for seven years of public spending cuts and tax increases to rein in the budget deficit, rather than the five it had intended on coming to office in May 2010."

By 2015-16 the Government will have slashed £99 billion of spending and raised taxes by £29 billion – a cumulative cut of £128 billion. However, the deficit, on current forecasts, will have fallen by only £64.5 billion. For every two pounds of austerity the deficit will only have fallen by one pound.

The economy has grown by just 0.6 per cent since the Osborne's first Spending Review of October 2010, compared to an OBR forecast of 4.6 per cent. GDP remains over 3 per cent below its 2008 peak.

But this policy is not, as the Keynesians think, the result of a fit of dogmatism or idiocy; it was the policy called for – virtually unanimously – by the bourgeoisie itself, via the CBI and the City.

Britain is officially out of recession, with Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures showing that the economy grew by 1 per cent in the third quarter of 2012. But the ONS report itself was far less adamant; admitting that 0.2 per cent of that "growth" could be accounted for by ticket sales to the Olympic Games, a one-off factor if ever there was one. Further, the ONS predicted back in July that this quarter's figures would gain by about 0.5 per cent simply because June's extra bank holiday had

depressed the baseline.

Manufacturing is down again, as is the long-suffering construction sector, by 2.5 per cent. The massive cuts in public sector construction will continue to erode jobs, outside of a few prestige projects like Crossrail in London. Banking and business services have seen a 1 per cent rise but the 10,000 job losses announced by UBS could be a sign of further down-sizing in the pipeline.

In short, we are still in the longest and deepest downturn since the 1930s. Further quarterly downturns could follow as British capitalism stagnates.

The rise of the part-time worker

The fall in unemployment figures is more sustained over the past few months and now stands at its lowest level since June 2011. There are also a record number of people in work. Nevertheless, there are still 2.56 million people looking for work and 1.6 million on the dole.

Nearly a million young people – one in five – are not in education, employment or training. The John Rowntree Foundation says that 66 people are chasing every retail job and one in four young black men are jobless. So the fight for jobs and against every cut is still vital.

Long-term unemployment has continued to increase: 897,000 people have been unemployed for over one year; 444,000 people for over two years.

The nature of work that is emerging from the recession is also changing: more likely to be part-time, lower paid, or "self-employment". Full time jobs are not being replaced like for like. With further cuts in the pipeline and 80 per cent of public sector cuts still to be implemented, this trend will continue.

Over 2 million people remain underemployed, as 1.4m people are in part-time work because they cannot find full time work, and 649,000 are in temporary work because they cannot find permanent work.

One in three new jobs are for less than 15 hours a week; 54 per cent of them, i.e. over half, are under 30 hours a week. Since the economic crisis hit in 2007, part-time work has increased by over 350,000 (to 8.1 million) while there have been a loss of 600,000 full-time jobs. It is estimated that 18 per cent of part-timers would like to work longer hours, but the jobs do not exist for them.

In addition, there has been an unprecedented rise in the number of self-employed workers: an increase of 350,000 since 2007. Over half of these, 200,000, are also part-time, a quarter of them in "elementary occupations". Clearly the tougher than ever benefits regime has forced many unemployed workers into registering self-employed and making up a subsistence wage with working cred-

its and housing benefit.

Part-time work also attracts lower wages, and tends to be temporary work, which again attracts lower wages. There has also been a dramatic increase in temporary and agency working in Britain over many, many years. The French have a word for this *précarité* – precarious working – and it is a Europe-wide phenomenon.

Falling real wages

According to PayScale the average wage of permanent full-time workers is £24,477, while pay for part-timers averages at £15,022 and for temporary staff, £18,918.

But we should beware of any attempt to pit "privileged" full-time workers against part-time workers. The truth is that all workers' wages are falling behind inflation. According to recent TUC research a worker on £26,000 a year is "£1,500 a year poorer than they were three years ago" and the "proportion of economic gains going on wages has been falling for 30 years".

Put another way, in the 50 months since June 2008, wages have fallen behind inflation in every month except for three – and this is according to the discredited CPI scale, rather than the more generally accepted RPI scale of inflation.

And inflation is set for another destructive impact on our pockets, with food prices rising again following poor rice, wheat and potato harvests across the world, and energy companies raising prices again by between 6 and 10 per cent in the next few months.

Against this backdrop, the minimum wage was raised by a measly 11p at the beginning of October to £6.19. If it had been pegged to top executives' pay back in 1999, when it was introduced, it would now be £19 an hour! New research shows that one in five workers – nearly 5 million people – earn less than the living wage of £7.45 an hour (£8.55 in London).

Beyond coordination

This is the real picture of Tory Britain – where the capitalist crisis is being paid for by mass unemployment and underemployment, as full-time, secure jobs are replaced by part-time, insecure and lower paid work, and falling real wages.

It is why hundreds of thousands marched with the TUC in October, demanding more action – a general strike – to stop the cuts and bring down this cruel government.

For a long while the big unions have neglected and ignored these workers and done little or nothing to organise the unemployed and bring them into the labour movement. Today some, like Unite, are beginning to stir on this front. Yet these mainly young workers have an enormous potential of militancy and creativity.

A general strike, if it is to be effective, cannot be a legalist and bureaucratic manoeuvre of the existing union memberships, mainly in the public sector. It needs to be a real uprising of the millions of young workers in precarious jobs, and the unemployed too, including their mass recruitment into a transformed trade union and socialist movement.

The attempts of the centre-right and left union leaders to avoid a head on political conflict with the government and its anti-union laws – especially the pensions campaign of "coordinated strike action" – has failed, as Workers Power, almost alone, predicted it would do. Any strategy, which bases itself on a series of separate "lawful trade disputes" with their separate ballots and negotiations, was doomed from the outset.

Coordination will always be at the mercy of the courts, subject to disruption by government and employers' new offers, arbitration and inquiries. Above all it would be liable to sudden betrayal by trade union leaders – ready to grasp at the smallest concession to hightail it off the battlefield, as they did after 30 November 2011 – leaving the other unions in the lurch. Worse, because of the legalism, the real objective of the struggle – a political clash with the government – could not be explained to the membership.

Political struggle

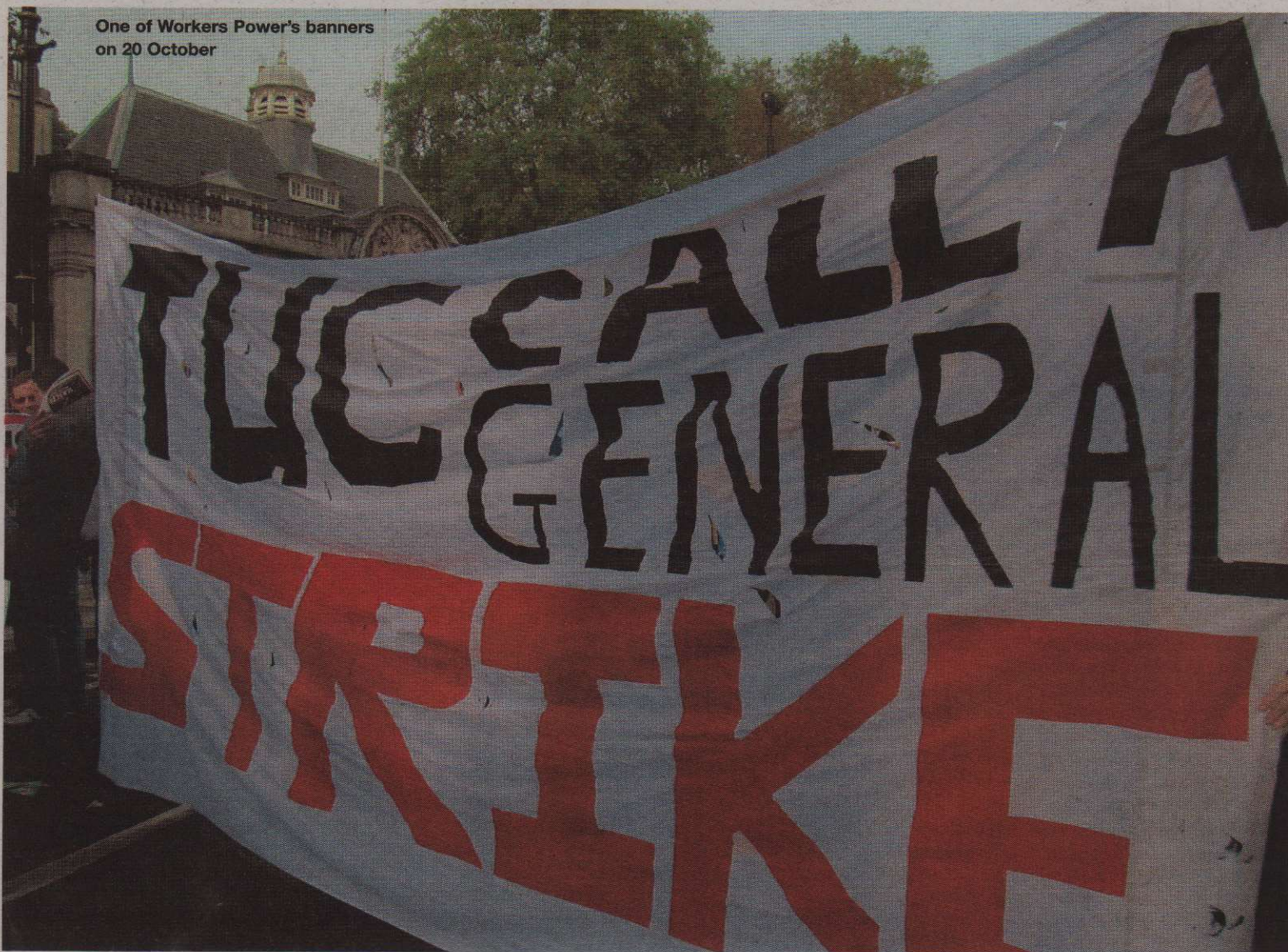
We are entering a new and decisive phase in the struggle against the Tory-Lib Dem coalition. The strategy of the left and centre-left union leaders – if you can call it such – has collapsed. The right are simply waiting for a Labour government.

But the lefts have been obliged to raise the spectre of a general strike in the hope of warding off the blows raining on their heads from a government eager to do the maximum damage in the two years or so left to it.

This change at the top lies behind the TUC decision to investigate "the practicalities" of a general strike and Len McCluskey's "vote of Hyde Park". It also reflects a growing awareness amongst the hundreds of thousands of union activists that we need to fight "all together" is finally becoming common sense.

But the question remains, how to get a general strike. This poses the question of how to impose our will on the right wing general secretaries – Dave Prentis (Unison) and Paul Kenny (GMB) – who hate the idea of a general strike and will do all in their power to avoid or sabotage it.

Then there is the need to establish control over the left wing general secretaries, Len McCluskey (Unite), Mark Serwotka (PCS), Bob Crow (RMT) and co. For all their talk, they tend to take the line of least resist-



One of Workers Power's banners on 20 October

and go down the road of legal, coordinated actions – exactly the strategy that led to defeat last year. The difference is that they may dress it up as a general strike.

How to stop this is not yet common sense. Revolutionaries have to blaze a trail for this – when it still seems “impractical” to most. Here the professional pessimists and naysayers of the far left are also an obstacle.

How do we do this? By agitation whenever there are demos, strikes or direct action, and by patient discussion and argument with activists, including the cadres of the far left groups, especially the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party.

Centrist obstacles

These two largest “Trotskyist” groups are likely to grow significantly in the year ahead. The SP has a flying start by having campaigned for a one-day general strike for years and also by having executive members in the POA, Unite and PCS, who played a key role in getting the TUC resolution passed. Their weakness is their uncritical attitude to the left bureaucrats and their dogmatic restriction of general strikes to one-day protests.

The SWP, after some hesitation, are now using the TUC's semi-call vigorously and not tying it totally to the one-day formula like the SP. Its biggest weakness is its retention of the “united front of a special type” – i.e. a block with a few left union leaders and Labour MPs at six-monthly or annual “conferences”, which they control from behind the scenes. They still seem determined not to risk a real united front from above and below, uniting all forces willing to fight the cuts.

So though Unite the Resistance is probably the largest anti-cuts campaign, it faces the Coalition of Resistance with Counterfire at its core and the National Shop Stewards Network with the Socialist Party and the RMT at its centre. This farcical triplication of effort merely limits the size of the movement and prevents it uniting in action.

Labour

As for the Labour Party it remains a bourgeois workers' party as Lenin called it – despite its major swing to the right under Blair and Brown. It remains massively dependent on union funding. Last year the GMB and Unison each donated £3.2 million and Unite £6 million to Labour.

Ed Miliband, despite owing his victory to the unions' vote, has not steered the party in their direction. Like his predecessors, he used the Labour conference to “stand up to the unions”, asserting that Labour is “not the party of any special interest group” but stands for “One Nation”, shamelessly stealing the Tories' clothes. Ed Balls also rebuffed the union leaders' calls to promise to reverse the cuts when in government.

Miliband on the platform in Hyde Park provoked loud boos and whistles by asserting he would not make any promises to restore the bulk of the Tory cuts. Meanwhile Labour councils are making the cuts “with a heavy heart” and the unions are not penalising them for doing it. Two Labour councillors in Southampton, Keith Morrell and Don Thomas, who have bravely opposed cuts, have since been expelled from the party.

The Labour Left – the Labour Representation Committee – is at an all-time low in terms of influence with

the party leadership, in the ranks of MPs and councillors. The indefatigable John MacDonnell is everywhere – on demos, platforms and picket lines – but he is virtually a one-man band, where once there was an orchestra of lefts.

Len McCluskey – the most tireless advocate of “reclaiming Labour” and staunch foe of attempts to found new party – has summoned 5,000 trade unionists to join Labour to do this, saying:

“We are trying to win Labour back for our core values: a belief in collectivism, a belief in fairness, justice, equality, decency and respect and to kick the New Labour cuckoos out of our nest.”

Yet a few days later, he was praising Miliband's conference speech as “very good”. Don't expect this man to lead the charge against the Blairites.

The Communist Party of Britain remains a force in the Labour movement mainly because of its influence within the union bureaucracy and the Morning Star. The paper has become a more lively read recently, mainly because the CPB itself is divided between those, like general secretary Rob Griffiths, who would like to abandon Labour and go for a new reformist party, and others, who are unwilling to break because of their links to the pro-Labour leaders of the GMB, Unison and Unite. Moreover the Morning Star is plainly unsympathetic to the general strike.

In summary: a year of decision

We are facing a decisive movement in the struggle against the coalition. The Tories are preparing to implement as many “irreversible” reforms as possible since they face the being

out of office in May 2015.

More cuts are planned, targeting benefits, especially for the under-25s. Privatisation will be stepped up, especially in the NHS. A massive anti-working class “reform” of the national education system is in process under Gove – with the reforms to the exam system, EBac and vocational-only courses for working class and “difficult” students at age 14. Politically there will be the Scottish independence referendum and possibly some form of anti-EU referendum (withdrawing from the federalising inner-core, dumping many legal restrictions, European Court of Human Rights, etc.)

Pay will increasingly become a real issue as inflation is again in the system, especially in food, fuel and imports from China. The three-year public sector pay freeze is now being followed by a two-year 1 per cent pay cap. It appears likely that there will be at least another big day of strike action, involving the right wing unions, Unison and the GMB, alongside the left. This could be over public sector pay or an attempt to coordinate on a wider basis (a “legal” or “non-political” general strike).

In particular they are preparing to take on the unions and win. The RMT will likely be provoked on London Underground. More anti-union legislation is likely – bans on action that affects “essential services”, strike ballot turnout/victory margin thresholds.

In this context, there will be further rank and file initiatives, but these are likely to be on a sectional and economic basis; for example, the electricians continue to be dynamic, but show no real interest in becoming a beacon for wider rank and file organisation. Unite Grass Roots Left will

have its national conference on 17 November but has so far failed to grow significantly. Labour is still toying with accepting the Tories' spending plans for two years in order to win over “middle England”. Miliband will, like Blair and Brown, act as ratchet mechanism for the boss class, preventing any reversal of the Coalition “reforms”.

If the Coalition's attacks are allowed to go through and then stand, we face a strategic defeat, bigger even than Thatcher's victories over the miners, the printers and the dockers.

To those who advocate rebuilding the labour movement when it is under strategic attack, we say bluntly: it doesn't work like that. If we go down to defeat: expect union membership in the public sector to fall like a stone, as it did in the private sector in the 1980s and '90s; do not expect to rebuild workplace organisation, little by little, expect to see it evaporate; expect to find militants on the dole or working in Starbucks.

The historic danger we face requires a historic change of strategy for union militants and the left. Worrying about the local and the individual workplace to the exclusion of the national and the international big picture will lead to disaster. So too will the idea that we need to unite the left on the lowest common denominator, rather than on the key issues we need to fight on and the tactics and strategy we need to win. Creating a broad party based on either submerging these differences, or making it a parrot house of individuals and cliques endlessly discussing will likewise lead nowhere.

A united party is however a possibility, providing it draws in a mass of worker militants from the struggles against austerity, allows debate over key policies for a fightback, and develops a strategy for the struggle for power.

Workers Power will be fighting around key issues and slogans we believe are of burning importance if we are to beat off the attacks and lay the foundations of a revolutionary socialist alternative.

These are:

- An all-out general strike to stop all the cuts and defeat the government.
- While we call on the TUC to organise a general strike – we call for building councils of action to fight for one and to control it.
- A rank and file movement to dissolve the bureaucracy, rooted in the workplaces and capable of delivering action without the official leadership – left or right – where necessary.
- A new working class party with support from the left unions and the socialist organisations, with the right for revolutionaries to fight for their programme.
- A revolutionary youth movement to fight education reforms, unemployment, super-exploitative working conditions, police harassment and the EDL.
- International solidarity and coordination, linked to the fight for a new International.

These will remain the principle policies Workers Power fights for in the coming period.

Awami Workers' Party founded



Leaders of the Awami Workers Party at their press conference

Shahzad Arshad

ON 11 NOVEMBER, the Awami Workers' Party was founded in Lahore. Initially, this party will organise some 15,000 working class activists, youth and students. This is still far from a mass party in a country of 172 million, but this includes many of the most politically advanced working class fighters, who can reach out to further tens of thousands.

This event could prove historic because it addresses a key problem that faces the Pakistan working class, that there is no independent workers' party in the country.

This has repeatedly led to the political subordination of the working class to one or another group of landlords and capitalists. For decades, the Pakistan People's Party of corrupt, pro-imperialist president Asif Ali Zardari has dominated the trade unions – whilst being a run by a tiny clique of landlords and businessmen. When it discredited itself in government, other populist and Islamist parties arose – most recently the Justice Party of Imran Khan. Worse, some people were attracted to reactionary movements like the militant Islamists, with their fake “anti-imperialism”, who are a constant threat to women, workers, and national and religious minorities.

Pakistan's crisis

There is no way out of this vicious circle as long as the working class has no party of its own. Without such a party, it will always be other class forces – whether liberal and pro-imperialist or reactionary and “anti-Western” – who will determine the future of a country in which the global crisis assumes an acute form.

Despite mass mobilisations of workers against poverty, inflation, inadequate infrastructure and energy supplies, there is a real danger the ruling class will resort to mass reactionary forces and a bonapartist, semi-dictatorial solution.

To overcome such dangers the working class' own leaders, in every factory and town, must be won to a political strategy that combines mass

mobilisation and organisation with the goal of overthrowing the entire economic and political system. In other words, we need a revolutionary working class party built on the basis of a transitional programme.

There is no guarantee that the Awami Workers' Party will become such a party. The potential for failure is already there because the founding organisations have drafted a programme that is far from revolutionary. It is a programme of minimum demands with a vague reference to the ultimate goal of socialism. What is completely missing is any strategy that could link the struggles against imperialist domination, capitalist exploitation, semi-feudalism in the countryside, and for the liberation of women and the oppressed nationalities, to the struggle for socialism.

Indeed, there is not much at all about this ultimate aim and how to achieve it: no mention of the need to smash the repressive apparatus of the Pakistan state or to fight for a workers' and peasants' government based on workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils and militias; no mention of the need to expropriate both foreign imperialist and “national” big capital and landlordism.

Who makes up the new party?

THE NEW PARTY has been founded by three main groups: The Workers' Party originated in the Socialist Party, which moved away from its Maoist origins to become a pro-Moscow Stalinist Party.

The Awami Party also has a Maoist background.

The Labour Party of Pakistan is an observing section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

Support for the initiative has come from several trade union organisations including the National Trade Union Federation, the Muttahida Labour Federation, the Labour Qaumi Movement of the power loom weavers as well as the National Student Federation.

Nor is there mention of a democratic plan to re-organise the economy in the interest of the working class and the rural and urban poor. There is no mention of the need to make the Pakistani revolution permanent, to spread it and link it to the Indian revolution and the struggle for a Socialist Federation of South Asia.

Moreover, the draft statutes do not allow for the formation of factions or tendencies inside the party. This runs the danger not only of stifling life in the organisation and allowing bureaucratic expulsions but also of creating what it claims to prevent – secret and unprincipled factionalism behind the backs of the members.

These weaknesses, however, should not blind working class militants to the enormous possibilities; this is a party whose future character is not yet decided. That will depend on the further development of its actions, its programme and its ability to rally thousands of militants in the struggles ahead.

The new party should use the approaching parliamentary elections – and any seats it can win – as a tribune to expose the crimes of the government and our rulers, as a means of exposing anti-working class, anti-democratic and all other reactionary legislation, as a means to rally the people to struggle. Any elected representatives should take only a skilled worker's wage and contribute the rest of their salary to the party. They should hold themselves accountable and recallable by the party and their electors.

Within this new party, the comrades of the League for the Fifth International will fight for it to become a consistent party of struggle. It needs to combine mass mobilisations for better conditions and wages, against the scrapping of democratic rights, against war, imperialism and the military, against capitalist exploitation and the big landlords with the struggle for the revolutionary overthrow of the entire system. It needs to replace the rule of the imperialists and the capitalists with a workers' and peasants' government based on workers' and peasants' councils and the armed people.

Imperialism in the dock



Will Israel attack Iran?

Marcus Halaby

Two countries where people will have kept a close eye on the US elections are Israel and Iran. It is, after all, no secret that Barack Obama and Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu have clashed over Iran's nuclear programme, with Netanyahu publicly threatening a unilateral military strike at Iran to prevent it acquiring the ability to build nuclear weapons.

The risk of an Israeli attack on Iran may have receded somewhat with the defeat of Republican candidate Mitt Romney, who would have given Israel a carte blanche for military action. Now there will not be two months of a lame-duck administration that Israel can use to create facts – as happened when Israel bombed Gaza to rubble in the closing weeks of George W Bush's presidency in December 2008 and January 2009.

The threat of an Israeli attack, however, has not disappeared, and could yet become one of the defining issues of Obama's second term. This is because Iran's status as a regional power, capable of changing the balance of forces in the region with or without a nuclear arsenal, is something that no Israeli government can tolerate.

Like the old radical Arab nationalist regimes – of which Iran's ally Syria is the last surviving example – Iran's theocratic regime relies for its claim to popular legitimacy on its noisy defiance of Israel and its superpower master, and on its show of support for the Palestinians.

Moreover, non-Arab and Shi'a-majority Iran's attempts to gain hegemony in the region required it to appeal to the overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim populations of the Arab countries over the heads of their rulers, by emphasising its support for “resistance” to Israel, in the form of the Lebanese Hizbullah and the Palestinian Hamas.

Iran's rise, however, has not been consistently anti-imperialist even in the most limited sense. The 2003 US invasion of Iraq handed the Iranian regime a gift by overthrowing Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, who in the 1980s fought a destructive eight-year war with Iran on behalf of the Western powers.

Iran's clients in Iraq, Shi'a leaders Muqtada al-Sadr and Ali al-Sistani, were quite happy to cooperate with the US-led occupation, with their supporters joining the pro-occupation Iraqi security forces and taking part in the US-dictated “political process”. They came into conflict with the occupation only as a result of pressure from below and the US imperial viceroy Paul Bremer's intolerance of independent popular forces.

Israel, for its part, remains a key component of US imperialism's system of alliances for controlling the region, alongside oil-rich Saudi Arabia (one of the most reactionary states on the planet), Egypt (the most populous Arab country and a massive recipient of US military aid), and, in the past, the Shah's Iran.

Israel, however, occupies a unique position in this system of alliances, as an ultimately unviable settler-colony existing on land seized from and emptied of its original inhabitants, and surrounded by populations that are spontaneously hostile to it, whatever the official view of their governments.

It is this strategic dependence of the Israeli state on Western imperialism – reflected in the largely “Western” origins and ideological outlook of its ruling class – that makes it the most reliable of its allies. Western politicians and planners can rest assured that unlike Egypt or Iran – or even Saudi Arabia – there is no risk that Israel will one day experience a popular revolution that might seize the assets of Western multinational corporations, or stand against Western interests in the region.

But Israel's very “reliability” on this score leaves its sponsors strategically dependent on it in return. And Israel's rulers periodically use this to advance interests of their own that are either irrelevant or deeply inconvenient to Washington, London and Paris.

Typically, this means military adventures that the United States, thinking in terms of its global position, sees as being precipitous, while Israel, looking through the narrow “security” prism that frames the thinking of all its main political parties, sees as being urgent and essential. Israel's determination to prevent Iran changing a balance of forces in which Israel can make war on any combination of the surrounding states and win is a case in point.

Israel's sabre-rattling has even frightened Saudi Arabia, which is now the Arab state most vehemently opposed to a US or Israeli strike on Iran. Additionally, the outbreak of revolution in Syria, and Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad's abandonment by his former allies Turkey and Qatar, has given the Saudis an alternative, of weakening Iran by breaking the so-called “Shi'a Crescent” linking it to Lebanon and the Palestinian Hamas through Iraq and Syria. Israel, however, prefers to deal with the devil it knows on its own borders, a weakened Assad too busy slaughtering his own people to pose a threat to the Zionist state, while striking at Iran directly.

We must therefore be ready for anything from Israel in the period ahead. Moreover such a strike could have unforeseen consequences in the entire region; for the imperialist powers, for the Arab revolutions and regional powers like Turkey. In Europe it could (and should) generate a major revival of the antiwar movement.

The British General Strike of 1926 – Part Two

In Workers Power 367 we saw how the Communist Part of Great Britain (CPGB) initiated the powerful rank and file Minority Movement, but became ever more uncritical supporters of the union leaders when the British TUC formed the Anglo-Russian committee with the Russian trade unions. **Dave Stockton** looks at what this meant for the 1926 General Strike

THE RISE of a left wing on the Trades Union Congress (TUC) General Council, including Alf Purcell, Alonzo Swales and George Hicks, convinced the CPGB that their influence was growing by leaps and bounds, despite their small size.

In January 1926, the Party adopted the slogan "All Power to the General Council". Unlike its earlier slogan of "more power to the General Council", its meaning was not limited to proposing that the individual unions cede their power to direct struggles. By mimicking the Bolsheviks' 1917 slogan "All Power to the Soviets", it even suggested the General Council was the leading instrument of a struggle for state power.

The government's subsidy to the mine owners was due to end on 30 April. The TUC basked in their "Red Friday" victory for six months while the government prepared a strikebreaking outfit, the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS), which now had several hundred thousand volunteers and special constables.

At the end of January 1926, the General Council finally appointed a nine person Special Industrial Committee to liaise with the miners. It consisted of right-wingers James Henry Thomas, Arthur Pugh and Alexander Walkden, centre-right figures Arthur Hayday, Walter Citrine and Walker, and left-wingers Ben Tillett, John Bromley, and George Hicks. Increasingly dominated by the right wing, this committee would play a crucial role.

At its first monthly meeting on 26 February, the General Council resolved to "stand firmly and unitedly against any attempt further to degrade the standard of life in the coalfields", calling for "no reduction in wages, no increase in working hours and no interference with the principle of National Agreements."

This was a victory for the left, supported by the centre around TGWU leader Ernest Bevin. Meanwhile, Arthur James Cook continued giving fiery speeches at miners' rallies across the country, popularising the slogan "Not a minute on the day; not a penny off the pay".

The Samuel Commission, set up as a diversion after "Red Friday" by prime minister Stanley Baldwin, issued its report on 10 March. It recommended wage cuts, or "a temporary sacrifice by the men in the industry", when the government subsidy came to an end.

Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald immediately welcomed Samuel's report as "a conspicuous landmark in the history of political thought", while Thomas said that it was 70 per cent in favour of the miners, and should form the basis for negotiations.

Cook, however, totally rejected any wage cuts, while the TUC lefts ominously failed to endorse the miners' rejection of the Samuel report. This was an early signal that they would cede leadership to Thomas and the right wing, just as Leon Trotsky had predicted.

In sharp contrast, the CPGB declared Samuel's report "a declaration of war



Police horses charge into the crowds in the Elephant & Castle in South London

against the miners and the whole working class movement." As if to confirm this, the mine-owners published new terms of employment to begin on 1 May, which added an hour on the day, reduced wages by up to 25 per cent, and replaced national wage agreements with district level ones.

The Minority Movement declines to lead

In response, the Minority Movement called a National Conference of Action on 21 March 1926. Its 883 delegates (including representatives of 52 Trades Councils) claimed to represent 957,000 workers, making it the largest conference in its history.

Tom Mann made a militant speech in solidarity with the miners, and people discussed transforming the Trades Councils into real Councils of Action, by bringing in political organisations, cooperative societies and the Unemployed Workers' Movement.

Dozens of such Councils of Action had already been formed in areas where Communists and the Minority Movement were strong, like the Fife coalfield in Scotland. Mann also emphasised the need for defence organisations to protect strikers against the inevitable repression of the police, the OMS and the small but violent National Fascist movement.

Although the CPGB had presented the General Council as the "general staff of the movement", there was little debate or discussion on what was to be expected of it, or of the lefts. This failure was a fatal weakness in the CPGB's strategy.

Only on 27 April – three days from the mine owners' deadline – did the General Council commission a plan for solidarity action. However, it did summon the executives of its 141 affiliated unions to a special conference in London. These 828 delegates assembled on Thursday 29 April in Farringdon's Memorial Hall, and met daily until 3 May to hear reports of the negotiations.

In a speech to the assembled union executives, Ernest Bevin leader TGWU stressed the radical nature of what the movement was doing:

"You are moving to an extraordinary position. In 24 hours from now you may have to cease being separate unions, for this purpose you will become one union with no autonomy. The miners will have to throw in their lot and cause and the general movement will have to take the responsibility of seeing it through."

Bevin was right. The situation did indeed require that the union executives act for the movement as a whole, indeed as leaders of the working class. What he and they refused to recognise was that a general strike was intrinsically a political struggle, a struggle with the state.

For this, however, they were totally unprepared. The TUC did not wish to force the government to submit, but to pressure it to arbitrate more favourably to the miners with the employers. It remained, left-wingers included, a collection of union officials looking for a deal.

They were faced with the executive of a ruling class of a very different temper. Baldwin himself was inclined to delay, but he was surrounded by a group of hard-nosed class warriors – Winston Churchill, William Joynson-Hicks and Lord Birkenhead. They were not looking for a compromise but for victory, and were determined to smash the unions' resistance and make industry profitable again, even if this meant facing a general strike.

The right wing union leaders were more aware of this than the lefts, and drew completely defeatist conclusions from it. Thomas revealed his thinking to the TUC's new acting secretary, Walter Citrine:

"I am perfectly convinced Walter there is no hope. Stanley Baldwin talks to me just like a pal. There is going to be trouble and there is no way out of it. [...] They

are going to smash it. It won't last more than a few days. [...] You see Walter they have made up their mind they must fight. Who is this strike against? It is not against the coal owners. The money is not in the industry so it must be against the state. Well, Baldwin states the state must be supreme, and he is right."

Their dilemma was that neither the Cabinet nor the coal owners would offer a compromise that the TUC could sell to the miners' leaders. Neither an immediate sell-out nor a government retreat was possible. A general strike was absolutely inevitable.

What was not inevitable was its defeat – or its victory. These were determined by the actions, strategy and tactics of its leaders, not just of the General Council, but also of any alternative leadership – the CPGB, the Minority Movement and the hundreds of thousands of militants in the Trades Councils.

At precisely this point, however, the CPGB failed even more dramatically by renouncing any revolutionary perspective for the strike. In the last issue of the Workers Weekly before the strike, in an article entitled "Fighting for life – Revolution not in sight" J T Murphy put it like this:

"Our party does not hold the leading positions in the trades unions. It is not conducting the negotiations with the employers and the government. It can only advise and place its forces at the service of the workers – led by others. And let it be remembered that those who are leading have not revolutionary perspectives before them. [...] To entertain any exaggerated views as to the revolutionary possibilities of this crisis and visions of new leaders 'arising spontaneously in the struggle' etc is fantastic."

And what of Purcell, Swales and Hicks? They were now ready to let Thomas take responsibility, as Trotsky had predicted in his pamphlet Where Is Britain

Going? This was because the only alternative to surrender was an all-out indefinite general strike, facing inevitable legal and police-military repression.

Even the miners' leader Cook was utterly unprepared for that, and began to look for a way out. In the Daily Herald of 27 April he wrote, "I am convinced that a settlement can be reached by a straight return to the [Samuel] Commission's proposals".

The government, however, insisted on an explicit commitment from the miners to accept wage reductions, and refused to put any pressure on the mine owners, either to withdraw their lockout notices or to provide any further government money. In short, Baldwin called the TUC's bluff.

Negotiations fail

The General Council turned its Special Industrial Committee into a Negotiating Committee under Thomas's leadership, engaging in shuttle diplomacy between TUC headquarters and 10 Downing Street.

Meanwhile, the day of the lockout came and one million miners found themselves out of work. Huge May Day marches, all supporting the call for a general strike, demonstrated the mass enthusiasm for it. The central London May Day demonstration marched past the Memorial Hall in Farringdon Street, and one union executive member recalled, "I never heard the Red Flag sung so loudly and with such spirit".

Inside the executives were, quite literally, singing from a different hymn sheet, to Cardinal Newman's Lead Kindly Light. Its words "amidst the encircling gloom, lead thou me on, the night is dark, and I am far from home" rather aptly expressed the mood of a trade union bureaucracy faced with a mass struggle.

Thomas, addressing the conference, uttered words that were to become infamous:

"I suppose my usual critics will say that Thomas was almost grovelling, and it is true. In all my long experience – and I have conducted many negotiations – I have never begged and pleaded like I begged and pleaded all day today. [...] For ten



Some things never change: Communists and police fight over red flags

days we said to the government 'you force the coal owners to give us some terms, never mind what they are and however bad they are. Let us have something to go on'. They said, 'No, it cannot be done'."

With no alternative but to honour their pledge, the conference voted overwhelmingly for the General Council's motion for an industrial stoppage in defence of miners' wages and hours, to begin at midnight on Monday 3 May.

Although negotiations continued on 1 May, a sell out was already under way, brokered by Thomas. He and the Negotiating Committee believed an agreement was within reach on the basis of the Samuel Report, by conceding pay cuts for the miners. Thomas even drafted a memorandum with Lord Birkenhead that accepted wage cuts. But the miners' executive continued to dissent, and Cabinet die-hards also jibbed.

When printers at the Daily Mail declared an unofficial strike to prevent the publication of a provocative anti-union editorial, the Cabinet feigned outrage and broke off negotiations. With his sell-out cruelly snatched from under his nose, Thomas left Downing Street in despair. As he said later, "I gave way to tears. It was like seeing the fabric you loved smashed to fragments."

The TUC leaders cravenly repudiated the Daily Mail strikers and dispatched Pugh and Citrine back to Downing Street. When they got there, the doorman curtly informed them that the prime minister had gone to bed and could not be disturbed. The strike was on, but ever with so unwilling a leadership.

The Strike is on

Between 1.5 and 1.75 million workers solidly obeyed their unions' instructions to strike, as well as a million locked out miners. This figure was to rise to 3.6 million workers by the end of the strike. Under Bevin's bureaucratic plan, the majority of workers had been instructed not to strike, and many who did were ordered to return.

In London, the main groups called out were the dockers, printers, power station workers, railwaymen, and transport workers. Henry Hamilton Fyfe (editor of the British Worker, the TUC's strike paper) recorded the first day in his diary:

"On the railways scarcely a wheel turns... Docks everywhere are empty and silent. The roads, outside of the cities, have little traffic on them. Building has almost entirely stopped, except on housing schemes and hospital extensions. Iron and steel works are closed; so are the heavy chemical factories. There are none of

the ordinary newspapers. Nothing like a strike on this scale has been seen before – anywhere."

On the second day, the Liverpool Council of Action, founded ten months before, reported that all engineers and shipyard workers on the Mersey were out. In Birkenhead and Wallasey, a group of strikers attacked the trams and brought them to a halt. The strike was solid, and it remained so throughout the nine days. In no sense could it be said that it failed due to the rank and file. Its main organisers were not the Eccleston Square bureaucrats, but the local Trades Councils and the Councils of Action.

The Government immediately proclaimed a state of emergency, giving itself enormous powers. It deployed the OMS and 226,000 special constables. The middle-class OMS volunteers were able to get a few buses running, but failed completely when it came to trains; it obviously takes time to learn to drive a steam locomotive.

Scab buses and trams were waylaid by mass pickets and set on fire. There were fierce battles between police and strikers in many cities, especially around the London docks. The picture of strikers and police playing football, an image encouraged by the TUC, is a false one. But then the TUC's message had been to keep calm, that is, to stay passive.

The Councils of Action, however, had other ideas. In Fife coalfield, a CPGB and Minority Movement stronghold, defence guards massively increased their numbers after a clash between pickets and police, and patrolled the streets in military formation, armed with pick axe handles. Police provocations stopped, and a situation approaching dual power ensued. Similar conditions emerged in the North East and in the Welsh mining valleys.

The government commandeered all available newsprint and published a newspaper, The British Gazette, with Churchill as its editor. The TUC responded by printing the British Worker on the Daily Herald presses. Police raided it and continually harassed its distribution. Churchill confiscated some of its newsprint reserves. The Cabinet, however, decided not to take direct control of the BBC, as it was already loyally toeing the government line.

The Betrayal

Despite the solidity of the strike, the Negotiating Committee never stopped looking for a way to end it at the miners' expense. Here, Sir Herbert Samuel returned to action. The TUC met him, behind the miners' backs, and agreed to his drafting a memorandum that included a reduction in wages. The committee accepted these terms, with the left Alonzo Swales fully concurring. The miners once more rejected them. This was then taken as an excuse by the TUC to call off the general strike.

A TUC delegation consisting of Bevin, Pugh, Thomas and Citrine, was sent to Downing Street. They announced that the general strike was over, provided that the Samuel Commission proposals were negotiated on, and provided that the Government promised there would be no victimisation of strikers. Baldwin bluntly rejected any such conditions, and bullied them into an unconditional surrender.

Lord Birkenhead later wrote that their collapse was "so humiliating that some instinctive breeding made one unwilling even to look at them." Ernest Bevin, truthfully for once, said on exiting Number Ten

that "we will never be forgiven for this day's work".

The British Worker's last strike edition ran the deceitful headline, "Strike Terminated Today – Trades Union Congress General Council Satisfied That Miners Will Now Get a Fair Deal". The Hull strike committee's bulletin more truthfully reported: "Alarm – Fear – Despair – a victorious army disarmed and handed over to its enemies".

In fact, on Thursday, 13 May, there were 100,000 more on strike than on any previous day. The employers immediately began to victimise strikers and workers were forced to resume the strike on 14 May. On 20 May, a miners' delegate conference once more rejected Baldwin's proposals and the lockout continued till November when, with its funds exhausted and an uncoordinated return to work underway, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain finally accepted the harsh conditions. Many militants were victimised and remained unemployed for years.

The Aftermath

There can be no doubt as to the courage and determination of the CPGB. Its members were the heart and soul of the Councils of Action for which they had fought for nearly a year. Of the 5,000 workers arrested throughout the strike, 1,200 were Communists.

Their problem was the political line of their party. Its immediate reaction to the calling off of the strike by the General Council, a decision supported by both left and right, was one of total shock.

Nor did they learn from their mistakes. A CPGB Executive Committee statement in Workers Weekly on 4 June observed: "There will be a reaction without our party against working with left wing leaders. We must fight down this natural feeling, and get better contact with these leaders and more mass pressure on them."

The task that the Communist Party faced was to develop a strategy for victory in the general strike, and to fight for it openly. This meant more than Councils of Action, workers' defence guards and so on, as vital as these were.

It meant placing demands on the TUC leaders and on the lefts to explicitly rule out a surrender of the miners' demands. It meant winning the Councils of Action to a clear recognition that the strike was a political strike against the bosses' government, a "challenge to the constitution" as Baldwin (correctly) claimed it to be, and not a trades dispute as the TUC pathetically asserted.

It is impossible, as Trotsky said, to suspend the functioning, not only of the economy but also of the state itself, without the strike raising the question "who shall be the master in the house?" It meant recognising the revolutionary potential that is always present in an all-out general strike.

It also required giving the clearest possible warning of the inevitable treachery of the TUC right wing and the inevitable unreliability of the centre and the left. It meant popularising proposals to control the leaders, to call them to account and, above all, to take the initiative the moment they wavered or tried to retreat or surrender.

This would have meant the Minority Movement clearly posing itself from the beginning as an alternative leadership for the strike, and the CPGB as the political alternative to MacDonald and the Labour Party. This, the CPGB and the Minority Movement utterly failed to do.



Lord Birkenhead

Gove's reactionary policy for schools means...

Education for exploitation

James Copley

THE TORIES are making free gifts of local comprehensive schools to groups of well-off parents, businesses disguised as charities and faith communities. Their "free school" programme, building on Labour's academies, is aimed at completing the privatisation of the state education system by 2017.

"Free" in this policy means free from any trace of democratic control by parliament or local authorities, free to privilege their founders' children, free to set their own curriculums, free to employ unqualified staff and free to ignore nationally agreed pay and working conditions. "Free" also accurately describes the gift of school property, paid for over generations by working class (and middle class) taxpayers, to outfits that should not be allowed within a mile of a school.

Education Secretary Michael Gove intends to carry through a real Thatcherite counter-revolution, abolishing GCSE exams in favour of a return to 'O' levels and using the English Baccalaureate, or Ebac, as a filter to prevent a large part of the working class reaching 'A' levels.

Gove's aim is to abolish what's left of the liberal reforms of the 1940s and 1970s, which led to the comprehensive system – always detested by the Tory public school elite. Gove wants to introduce a system that openly fosters class privilege, social inequality and pro-capitalist and imperialist ideology.

The Tories' strategy is to create separate education pathways for the different classes, allowing the ruling class to cherry-pick a few "gifted children" from the working and lower middle classes and giving the rest only a training that will prepare them for their role as wage slaves – if they are lucky enough to get a job.

Schools for profit

The Forum of Private Business charmingly describes what it wants: "work-ready employees who can write a properly punctuated sentence free from spelling mistakes, and mentally



able to work out a simple maths problem". This was exactly what the old public-grammar – secondary triad of schools achieved and what the comprehensive system undermined, although Labour never dared abolish public schools like Eton whose haughty products now stuff the cabinet.

Their education project is of a piece with their other "reforms". In the NHS, these will destroy any possibility of rational planning in favour of a free market in which GPs make decisions on the basis of cost and profitability. Similarly, they intend to transform the jobs market into the allocation of temporary, part-time work by private agencies. Their objectives are economic, channelling state funding direct to the private sector; ideological, the eradication of any notion of entitlement to public services; and political, to weaken and break up public sector unions.

To make sure the employers get what they want, Gove plans to keep up the close control of pupils via SATs tests at ages 7, 11 and 14, and equally close control of teachers via the micro-management

by OFSTED. The re-introduction, by whatever name, of 'O' levels, i.e. memory-based, end-of-course exams, is intended to suppress creativity, critical thinking (and rebelliousness) in favour of a return to rote learning and respect for authority. They will focus heavily on those subjects deemed necessary for work.

These changes only apply to state schools, however. The academies, private schools and free schools can choose their own curriculum and hire teachers with or without qualifications. This will ensure the creation of a two tier academic system in which the working class can either learn to work in a "McSchool" or church, or take their chances at an inadequate state school. Meanwhile, the children of the rich will receive a much higher quality of education in private schools, charging fees only they can afford.

Clearly, the Tories fear an educated workforce. We saw in Tunisia how jobless graduates became catalysts for a revolution. Throughout the Arab Spring, we have seen students and young workers rising against oppressive social con-

ditions and inequalities. This is not a situation that the Tories want here so they seek to restrict the education system to fit their vision of work.

These changes to the education system, which ruthlessly ignore the views of teachers and students, will result in worse education for the working class. This is on top of the massive attacks on the university system, which have seen huge reductions in the funding of humanities and social sciences, precisely the subjects that are vital to fostering creative expression and development as critical, socially active citizens.

Socialism and education

Gove's goal is an individualistic, capitalist, exam-based model, which sees the student as an "empty vessel" to be filled with the knowledge necessary for work, and education as a means of disciplining children to become automatic cogs in the profit-making machine. Socialists understand that education is a lifelong process that enables the young not only to become skilled in the techniques of production but also able to cre-

atively develop and take control of it.

Work and education should be integrated, not by training children as cheap labour drilled into obedience, but as fellow workers and co-learners who can criticise what they are doing, invent better ways to do it and save time from mind-numbing tasks for more creative work, saving a threatened environment and, first and foremost, fighting collectively against oppression and exploitation.

Education is not, and cannot be something, which only occurs in schools and universities. Socialists believe that education is a constant dialogue between those who are knowledgeable and those who seek to learn. This is because, as individuals, we can come to only a partial understanding of the world but, through debate with others, we can critically evaluate ideas and reach a higher level of understanding and practice.

By a constant exchange of our own experiences of the world in which we live, its history and the relationships found within it, we can foster a critical understanding of it.

Only if we understand the laws, both natural and social, that govern society will we be able to change it.

The comprehensive system introduced in the 1960s and 1970s, was basically a liberal education system but, nevertheless, it was forced to draw heavily on Marxists, anarchists and populists who had criticised typical capitalist education for the masses in the twentieth century.

This led to GCSEs being based less on exams and more upon coursework, which fosters dialogue between teacher and student, and between students themselves. Long-term learning, over time, fosters a much greater engagement with a subject than spitting out facts from memory in an exam. Gove's counter-reforms aim to shatter decades of such educational advances for working class young people. They must be stopped.

Fightback

But they will not be stopped by an uprising of youth alone. Despite a courageous struggle by students against the abolition of the EMA and the massive university fees hike, they were still introduced. It is also unlikely that protest strikes by the National Union of Teachers, could prevent the introduction of these backward reforms.

To win requires unity between school and college students, working class parents, school staff and teachers. It requires a political campaign to challenge Gove's whole ideology, as well as his wrecking plans. That means winning all these forces to a positive idea and proposals as to how education must be reorganised to meet the needs of working class students and the labour movement.

Such a fightback against Gove must also be an integral part of the wider struggle against the Tory austerity programme that is trying to use the current crisis of capitalism to break and fragment the working class. Only through the struggle for a political general strike and a socialist revolution will the oppressed begin the liberation of education.