

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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rhetoric in
order to
compete with
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distract people
from the real
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capitalist crisis**

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the cuts!

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

Contact us:

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Syria falls into chaos

By Mark Osborn

The carnage in Syria continues with the regime unable to crush the rebels, and the rebels — despite making gains — unable to overrun the regime's heartlands.

Although the figures are difficult to verify it seems likely that 60-70,000 have died in the conflict so far. Analysis of data by the London-based Syrian Observatory suggests two-thirds of the fatalities are civilians, and 2,300 are children under 18.

The Observatory states that over 14,000 security personnel have been killed in the fighting. Among those whose identities are unknown are over 1,000 opposition fighters, mostly — it is assumed — not Syrians.

The Observatory believes the number of fighters

killed may be double the number they can verify because of the secrecy surrounding deaths suffered on both sides. They have not included some hundreds of people they suspect have died in prison during the conflict.

The death rate is now greater in Syria than in Iraq in 2006. According to one pro-opposition source, the Violations Documentation Centre, 4472 Syrians have been killed on average each month since December; an average of 149 Syrians killed per day. The equivalent figure in Iraq, in 2006, was 111 deaths per day; Syria's population is two-thirds of Iraq's.

The number of refugees who have left Syria is now over a million, from a population of 23 million. The Syrian Red Crescent thinks that — at a conservative estimate — 2.5 million are in-

ternally displaced.

Hunger and poverty are most acute in rebel held areas in the north. Foreign aid is mainly going into areas held by President Assad's forces because of a UN restriction that stipulates donors obey rules set by governments. Assad has, for example, prevented aid crossing the Syria-Turkey border into rebel-held areas in the north.

In government controlled areas displaced people are helped in UN-run camps. However, the *New York Times* reports, "Ghassan Hitto, [who] runs the aid coordination arm of the Western-backed Syrian National Coalition, estimates that 60% of the Syrian population lives outside the Assad government's control, and thus beyond the reach of most aid."

Research carried out among refugee children by

Bahcesehir University in Turkey shows one in three report having been punched, kicked or shot at.

A senior official from Save the Children reports meeting one child, now escaped to Turkey, who said he was in a prison cell with 150 people, including 50 children.

"He was taken out every day and put in a giant wheel and burnt with cigarettes. He was 15. The trauma that gives a child is devastating."



More court for Bob

The Federal Magistrates Court in Brisbane, Australia, will hear further submissions on Tuesday 2 April in the case of victimised trade unionist Bob Carnegie.

Bob faces charges brought against him by construction contractor Abigroup, backed by the right-wing Queensland state government, because of his role in a successful construction workers' dispute in August-October 2012. If he is found guilty, he faces a huge fine and possible jail sentence.

On 11 February, the day his trial began, construction workers and dock workers across Australia shut down construction sites and the port of Sydney for the day.

On Friday 22 March, supporters in London demonstrated outside Queensland House (the UK offices of the Queensland government) and the Australian High Commission.

● bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com

Basildon council orders Dale Farm families to pay for their own eviction

By the Traveller Solidarity Network

In October 2011, Basildon Council violently evicted 83 families from land they owned (at Dale Farm) because they did not have planning permission.

Now, Basildon Council has told families who have virtually nothing left that they must pay £4.3 million for the cost of the eviction!

Many of the families had lived in Basildon for over 10 years: their children were born in the borough, attend the local school and were the first generation in the community to learn to read and write. The bulldozers turned this once thriving and close-knit community into a virtual wasteland, creating deep troughs and huge banks of earth to make it uninhabitable.

In the 18 months since the eviction, the families, including elderly people, young children and those with serious health conditions, have been living in refugee camp conditions by the side of the road leading to their former home. They have limited access to electricity, heating, running water and sanitation.

In 2006, an official planning needs assessment stated the need for 157-163 new pitches for gypsy and traveller families in Basildon by 2011. In that time, the Council provided no new pitches.

Rather than help the families identify sites where they could get planning permission Basildon Council has spent a significant proportion of its budget on protracted legal proceedings, the infamous Dale Farm eviction and a recent £1.1 million contract for bailiffs to complete more evictions in the future.

The Dale Farm community always said that they would leave Dale Farm if there was somewhere else for them to go.

The Council knows that the families have no way of ever paying the £4.3 million eviction price and have stated that they will seize Dale Farm in lieu of costs.

This is a shocking land grab by the council, who are forcing the families to pay for the unjust eviction that made them homeless.

Mary Sheridan, a former Dale Farm resident, said "Basildon Council say we have to pay for what they did to us. Imagine all the good things they could've done with that money, instead of making us homeless — new sites or putting it into schools or doctors for people. We didn't choose what happened to us, they did — we've paid enough already, we've already lost our homes and had our community torn apart, but they still want more."

● A petition has been launched in protest: <http://tinyurl.com/cdr4bum>

They fought for the right to stay on their own land. Now it could be taken away

Migrants scare is a distraction

By Gerry Bates

On Sunday 25 March David Cameron wrote a piece for the *Sun* railing about so-called health and benefit tourism by migrants!

He carefully calibrated his language so as to appear reasonable — the sane alternative to UKIP was the image he was going for.

He made a nod to “Polish wartime heroes” and “hard working” West Indian migrants who helped us “re-build” Britain after the war.

But the underlying message was clear enough: “Hey you, East European good for nothing, if you think you’re going to get more than £8 an hour and a bed on a park bench, bugger off!”

His claims were spurious. He said migrants don’t pay tax (mostly they do), grab benefits (overwhelmingly they don’t), are given a council house the minute they step off the bus at Victoria coach station (does anyone get a council

house?). But this concocted narrative about “some migrants” was being used to denigrate “all migrants”.

Two things are going on here. Despite claiming he wouldn’t, Cameron is trying to undercut support for UKIP.

Somebody in the Tory

Reject his elitist rhetoric!

party or the civil service has been sent away to find a legal loophole which will enable the government to limit benefits and services to EU migrants — not because it will “save money” but because they want to look busy, tough, effective.

Next year restrictions on migration from European Union member states Bulgaria and Romania will be lifted. There is growing pressure for workers from those countries to be excluded and denied rights.

So when a Bulgarian cleaner slips and breaks their leg cleaning one of our hospitals they may not be able to claim out-of work

benefits or get their leg fixed.

The fact that Cameron and Co are comfortable treating people like this, people like us, as if they are second class citizens, says a lot about the kind of people they are. Elitist, rich, cut off from the world where people have to struggle to survive. Working-class people have nothing in common with him, we have everything in common with migrant workers.

A politician’s foul verbal bashing from the Ivory Towers of London today, could mean a punch or a kick or a stab in the guts for some poor person on the streets of Peterborough tomorrow. Playing catch-up with UKIP by stirring up bitterness is a dangerous game — one which migrants pay for with their lives and health.

Some in the labour movement and on the left foolishly agitate against “Europe”. That plays into nationalist right sentiment. They should stop it!

People come to the UK to make a better life for ourselves in an insecure and unequal world. We all want that. Migrants are not to blame for the lack of jobs, the cuts in services, the increasing inequality we all suffer. Politicians and the powerful are to blame!

The Tories point a finger at migrants so that their mates in banking can continue to pay themselves big bonuses. So that the shareholders in big businesses can rake in the profits of privatised public services.

An effective fight against the Tories and all they stand for demands solidarity with migrant workers. We need to oppose these changes, oppose all cuts and fight for rights for all.

The Tories smirk

By Colin Foster

The vocal Tories at the *Daily Mail* were pleased about chancellor George Osborne’s 20 March budget.

There was “no Lib Dem drivel about mansion taxes”, they crowed.

And a scheduled rise in fuel duty was scrapped, leading the *Mail* to “hope this is the end of the Coalition’s economically crippling obsession with global warming”.

The *Mail* conceded that “this Budget will seriously harm the living standards of public employees. And... the public sector... is really being clobbered”.

But that is all right by the *Mail*, because the Budget is “aimed at stimulating growth by liberating the energies of the enterprising” (i.e. bosses: for the *Mail*, workers are never “enterprising”, however hard they work).

It is a scandal that the *Mail* feels confident about such views, and that there is probably more pressure on Osborne to be even more right-wing than there is to push back his assault.

The Government deficit (excess of spending over income) went up from £90 billion in 2011 to £98 billion in 2012. Government debt as a percentage of annual economic output (GDP) has

gone up from 52% in 2009 to 75% in 2012. (Figures excluding financial intervention).

Yet the 20 March budget:

- added another year of a one per cent pay cap for public sector workers.

- proposed to extend the abolition of regular annual “increments” along pay scales (distinct from whether the pay scales themselves are raised) from teachers to NHS workers and civil servants. The Government wants any “increments” to be included in the one per cent pay cap.

- cut Whitehall budgets by another one per cent, meaning more job cuts for civil service workers.

At the same time:

- corporation tax is to be reduced by a 1% to 20% in April 2015, the lowest rate of an old capitalist country.

- employers’ national insurance payments will be cut by £2,000.

- the “stamp duty reserve tax” on asset management funds will be scrapped.

The sweeteners were small: a 1p cut in duty on a pint of beer. The limit below which people pay no income tax will be increased, saving workers about £2 a week.

The unions and the labour movement must be mobilised to press the case for taxing the rich and taking high finance into public ownership.

Support, resistance and collective action

Fighting the cuts

By Lawrie Coombs



Teesside Solidarity Movement (TSM) is a new explicitly anti-capitalist/anti-cuts group, seeking to engage in direct action, whilst developing bottom-up organisation, hopefully on a sustainable basis.

The origins of the group are in the 4 People Not Profit Human Rights/Global Awareness events network and plans made by Teesside-based activists to celebrate May Day 2013 in a more imaginative and creative manner that it was hoped would stimulate anti-capitalist activism and promote workers’ struggle.

The group emerging from this process began to organise regular activity including a council lobby, a street presence in seven separate locations across the Teesside area and the development of a campaign against the Bedroom Tax.

Other initiatives have included the setting up of an artists’ collective, plans for

activist cafe/co-operatives, local TSM groups, guerilla gardening, family picnics and environmental/educational events.

The utilisation of social media has been a well-exploited tool with a Facebook group approaching three hundred.

Whilst clearly standing in the anti-capitalist tradition, TSM includes a small number of Labour Party members, alongside activists from a range of anarchist and Marxist groups, independents and those new to political activism form a majority.

The general approach to the Labour Party has been pragmatic, however its denunciation of pro-cuts, Labour Party councillors rattled a number who initially sought to take advantage of the TSM activist base for its own ends.

How different individual groups and individuals relate to the TSM varies. Its

fortnightly central structure is starting to take shape as a horizontally organised mechanism for directing and facilitating the work of upwards of a hundred individual activists.

Fighting austerity we are looking at developing practical support networks to facilitate our campaigning.

A May Day demonstration, organised by local trade union branches, will be held on 27 April (we are organising our own May Day celebrations in May day week starting on 1 May). It is being enthusiastically backed by TSM who will seek to turn this event into a carnival of resistance.

Arguably, this reflects our ambition and determination to rejuvenate a culture of protest, rehabilitating the notion that collective action gets results and that being hard-up is not a crime.

With a month to go, we plan to build for a demo of thousands, mobilising from our local communities, dovetailing this with general campaigning on the Bedroom Tax and other anti-cuts issues.

It’s been inspiring to see

previous non-politically active individuals taking a lead.

It would be good to share experiences with others in the construction of a new militant working class movement, both independent from the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, but drawing from the best traditions of Marxism, anarchism and direct action.

As an experienced militant since the mid 1980s, it’s positive to note my own voyage of self-discovery through embracing the TSM project.

A local AWL member described it to me as “brilliant, if a little bit outside of my comfort zone” and I guess this sums it up well.

Meeting some great new people and making new friends has all been part of the mix, as has been the unleashing of clear collective talents, often left dormant in people.

Imagine if society was based on this dynamic, we could achieve anything.

- Contact us to share ideas: 07804 799562.

Barnet Spring march

In a measure of Barnet residents’ determination to fight the Tory Council’s “One Barnet” outsourcing programme, more than 300 turned out in a blizzard on 23 March to march from Finchley Central to an inspiring rally at Friern Barnet Community Library.

Our “Barnet Spring” march was the culmination of a week that saw resident Maria Nash bringing an application for Judicial Review of One Barnet in the High Court. During a three-day hearing it was clear that the Council had made no effort to consult residents over the privatisation plan. Their entire defence was bureaucratic — residents should have brought the JR application earlier. The judge gives his verdict after Easter. Whatever he decides, we will continue to fight.

- barnetalliance.org

Vote no, argue for working-class politics

Scotland

By Dale Street



The Scottish National Party government in Holyrood finally announced the date for the referendum on independence for Scotland: 18 September 2014.

Everyone over the age of 16 and resident in Scotland will be entitled to vote in the referendum, in which the question on the ballot paper will be: "Should Scotland be an independent country?"

Some members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL) advocate a call for abstention in the referendum, on the basis that the only choice on offer is: a capitalist Scotland which is part of the UK; or a capitalist Scotland which is independent from the UK. The majority, however, favour a "no" vote.

This not because we are committed to the preservation of the existing UK state structures. We support, for example, the abolition of the monarchy, the abolition of an unelected second chamber, genuine proportional representation, and electoral mechanisms which make elected representatives directly accountable to, and recallable by, their electorates.

We advocate the creation of a federal republic, i.e. a federation of the four different national units which currently constitute the UK. This would involve a massive transfer of powers from the central Westminster parliament to the four "regional" parliaments.

As consistent democrats (i.e. socialists who do not dismiss democratic rights as a bourgeois concept but see them at the heart of a future socialist society) we also recognise the right of the people of Scotland to determine their relationship with the other peoples of the UK.

Although socialists are generally hostile to the idea of government by referendum (referenda are open to manipulation by various means) the most logical way for the people for Scotland to determine that relationship is by way of a referendum.

Yet this referendum has been manipulated. If a referendum were held tomorrow, there would be an overwhelming vote against independence. Delaying it for 18 months, and staging it in the aftermath of various "feel-good" sporting events which Scotland will host in 2014, increases the SNP's chances of securing a "yes" vote.

The wording for the referendum originally backed by the SNP was: "Do you agree that Scotland should be an independent country?" Widespread opposition to the leading nature of such a question resulted in the current version.

"NO" VOTE

There are three basic reasons why the AWL favours a "no" vote.

First, Scotland is not an oppressed nation, a colony or semi-colony of British imperialism, which requires independence to free itself from that denial of democratic rights. For centuries Scotland has been an integral part not just of the British state but also of British imperialism.

(In fact only the most fringe elements of the pro-independence camp — to be found on its left wing — would argue that Scotland is an oppressed nation.)

Nearly 20% of Scotland's population do not even self-identify as Scottish. 800,000 Scots live as equals in other parts of the UK. Around 400,000 people from other parts of the UK live in Scotland — not as a privileged metropolitan elite but, again, as equals.

Where there is an integration of peoples based on equality and an absence of coercion within the framework of a single state, it makes no sense, from a socialist point of view, to advocate the break-up of that state into smaller national units.

Second, notwithstanding the fact that the Scottish TUC is an independent body, there exists an integrated British labour movement which would be broken up, or at least severely weakened, in the event of independence. (There are only two trade unions in Scotland which do not exist in England.)

True, the British labour movement is often bureaucratic, routinist, and a home for time-serving careerists. But the reason why that labour movement is not "fit for purpose" is

rooted in the absence of rank-and-file control over its leadership — not in the fact that it exists at an all-British level.

Equally true, there are trade unions which organise across national boundaries. But they do so because those national boundaries already exist. There are no trade unions which demand the creation of a new national boundary so that they can then organise members across that national boundary!

Third, the referendum is about the *future* relationship of the people of Scotland with the majority of the UK.

It is not a retrospective vote of "no confidence" in British imperialism, its blood-soaked history, its plunder of the world's resources, its enslavement of a third of the world's population...

Nor is the referendum to be viewed in purely negative terms, i.e. as a chance to "break up the British imperialist state" without any serious consideration being given to how such a break-up (supposedly) fits into the larger socialist project and the central role of the working class as the agency of

"A cacophony of nationalisms" — the case for Scottish independence

change in that project.

For some on the left (mainly around the remnants of the Scottish Socialist Party, the depleted ranks of the Socialist Workers Party, and the politically incoherent International Socialist Group), this peculiar brand of "anti-imperialism" has become central to their rationale for a "yes" vote.

The AWL has consistently opposed this idiot "anti-imperialism" which is now so prevalent in sections of the left. We have no intention of pandering to it in determining our attitude to the referendum in 2014.

However, our considerations are far removed from the way in which the debate about the referendum has been posed by the "Yes Scotland" campaign versus the "Better Together" campaign.

DEBATE

"Yes Scotland" is nominally a cross-party campaign — it is backed, for example, by the Green Party and the Scottish Socialist Party — but largely under the control of the SNP.

Its case for independence might best be described as pork-barrel-politics writ large, and with the queen perched on top. Scotland is a wealthy country — more than £1 trillion worth of oil and gas reserves! — and independence would allow that wealth to be spent on the people of Scotland rather than being squirreled away by Westminster.

Trident would go. The bedroom tax would go. But free higher education, free healthcare for the elderly, free prescriptions, free bus passes for the elderly and lots of other free things would remain, soon to be joined by even more free things. (And by a cut in corporation tax for big business.)

But the queen would remain head of state. And the pound would remain the currency. And the Bank of England would still be the lender of last resort. And the Tory/New Labour opt-outs from EU regulations would still apply. And Scotland would remain in NATO. And in a "social union" with England. And in the EU.

In this vision of independence everybody is better off, but otherwise everything remains pretty much the same.

The "Better Together" campaign has more of the character of a genuine cross-party campaign: it brings together Labour, the Lib-Dems and the Tories.

"Better Together" could not resist portraying an independent Scotland as an industrial wasteland, cast out of the EU, deprived of British defence contracts, and with the bulk of its population reduced to living in cardboard boxes.

The rational argument for maintaining the status quo which such a campaign might advance — that a Westminster government could use the resources of the larger unit of the British state to redistribute wealth and power in order to create a fairer society — is ruled out by virtue of the campaign's constituent elements.

An alliance of a latter-day Scottish brand of New Labour with Lib-Dems and the Tories is inherently incapable of promoting a pro-union case which challenges inequalities and injustices.

Insofar as the parameters of the debate about the referendum are set by "Yes Scotland" and "Better Together", that debate is not one in which socialists can have any truck with either side.

The Radical Independence Movement, launched by the International Socialist Group last November, aspires to present a radical left-wing case for independence. Not by chance, it functions like a Scottish version of Counterfire.

It begins with a big launch conference with a big platform of big-name speakers and lots of workshops which launches a political programme of five minimalist demands which no well-meaning liberal could disagree with.

That the programme calls for "a social alternative to inequality, austerity and privatisation" rather than a socialist alternative is not a typing mistake.

The conference is followed by setting up local People's Independence Assemblies and maintaining a flashy website with some rather less flashy articles. (One article suggests we live in a society "ruled by Tories that look after the rich and the interests of the US".)

"RED PAPER COLLECTIVE"

And then there is the campaign being run by the "Red Paper Collective" (largely an extension of the Labour-left Scottish Campaign for Socialism), which has the merit of attempting to adopt a class approach to the question of Scotland's constitutional status.

They say what is needed is an assessment of the powers which need to be devolved to Holyrood in order that it can implement a pro-working-class agenda. This, in turn, would be linked to a broader federal structure of government throughout the UK.

But the "Red Paper Collective" is confronted by three problems.

What it advocates amounts to a form of "devo plus". But this is not "on offer" in next year's referendum. The "Red Paper Collective" has yet to argue explicitly for a "no" vote, which is the logical position for it to adopt if, as is the case, the referendum is a straight yes/no question.

Its portrayal of an independent Scotland tends towards being a left-wing equivalent of that promoted by "Better Together".

And its approach to the referendum is fatally weakened by the anti-EUism which is now a hallmark of the mainstream labour movement left in Scotland.

An independent Scotland, argues the "Red Paper Collective", would be too small and too weak to stand up to the EU. Independence would amount to no more than swapping rule from Westminster for rule from Brussels. Scotland should remain in the UK in order to better stand up to the real enemy: the Brussels bureaucrats!

Despite the current domination of the referendum debate by "Yes Scotland" and "Better Together", over the next 18 months socialists need to make sure that the voice of independent working-class politics and socialist internationalism is heard above the cacophony of competing nationalisms.

Unity must be linked to real action

The crises and splits in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Respect have spurred more talk about left unity. The left needs systematic unity in action where we agree, and honest dialogue where we differ, in order to reinstate socialist ideas as an option in the working class.

On 26 March the Coalition of Resistance (within which the key force is the SWP splinter Counterfire) held a press conference to promote a "People's Assembly Against Austerity" for 22 June (previously announced in a letter to the *Guardian* on 5 February). Workers' Liberty supports all such gatherings; but, worryingly, the press release described the event as a "rally" rather than a conference.

There is a back-story. In late 2010 and early 2011, as anti-cuts campaigns flourished in the first angry response to the Tory / Lib-Dem government, a number of left groups called conferences to try to make themselves the hub of the anti-cuts movement. The SWP called one (Right to Work, since morphed into Unite the Resistance), and the SP called one (National Shop Stewards' Network). Counterfire's effort, the Coalition of Resistance, was the biggest.

More than 1,000 people attended the Coalition of Resistance conference on 27 November 2010. Listening to many platform speeches from celebrities calling for militancy against the cuts, including from Unite leader Len McCluskey (who also backs the June event), some of those thousand must have felt they were in on the start of a real new movement.

But not much came of it. CoR has run an informative website, and some useful stunts; but for local anti-cuts committees usually the best contribution that CoR has been able to make is to refrain from organising CoR local groups as rivals to the main committees (and CoR has not always refrained).

The CoR conference was dominated by top-table speakers, 20-odd of them in the opening and closing plenaries. Little came of most workshops. At the workshop billed as dealing with political representation, speakers were a Green Party councillor; Liz Davies, who declared herself a critical supporter of the Green Party; Billy Bragg, whose speech was a straight plea to vote yes in the May 2011 referendum on AV; and *Guardian* contributor Laurie Penny. It was chaired by a Green Party member and allowed little debate.

The conference applauded a call from the platform for a week of action from 14 February 2011, but there was little action that week. CoR faded.

There is also a back-story to the "People's Assembly" trope with which Counterfire hopes to revive CoR. They did it first on 12 March 2007, as a People's Assembly Against War, when the people who now run Counterfire were in the leadership of the SWP. That event drew a good crowd, too — 1,000 or more — but its contribution to unity in action or to serious dialogue on differences was smaller than the attendance. There were almost 40 celebrities speaking from the top table.

On 25 March, film-maker Ken Loach and writer Gilbert Achcar co-signed a letter to the *Guardian* promoting the "Left Unity" initiative started in December 2012 by Andrew Burgin and Kate Hudson after they had quit George Galloway's Respect movement. The initiative's website claims that 3000 people have signed up on the web to back Ken Loach on this. No conference has been announced, but the website reports on local groups.

If those local groups can act as left forums, bringing the left together in joint action where we agree and honest debate where we disagree, then they will make a contribution.

Again, there is a back-story. Burgin had previously been active in Gerry Healy's Workers' Revolutionary Party as well as Respect; Hudson, in the Communist Party of Britain before she joined Respect. Loach was close to the Workers' Revolutionary Party, and then in Respect.

There have been quite a few other unity initiatives in recent years. A weary shrug ("not another one!") would be wrong; but so would the idea that we need not think about and learn from why they didn't work.

In 2009, both AWL and SWP made proposals for left unity (only, it turned out that the SWP's idea of left unity didn't include talking with AWL...) The Convention of the Left, launched in September 2008 by John Nicholson (previously Labour deputy leader of Manchester City Council, and then

in the Socialist Alliance) won wider endorsement than any of the current efforts — *Morning Star*, *Red Pepper*, LRC, Respect, *Labour Briefing* and *Socialist Worker*, as well as Workers' Liberty. It agreed to set up local left forums. Trouble is, the forums never really got going, and the "convention" turned into a series of conferences, of diminishing vitality.

The Left Unity Liaison Committee, set up by activists from the Socialist Alliance, brought together different groups to discuss, but also petered out (in the end, AWL was the only one of the activist groups attending regularly). According to the Socialist Party, their electoral vehicle, the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition, is the best hope for left unity. AWL was able to get a loose alliance with the SP and the Alliance for Green Socialism — the Socialist Green Unity Coalition — up to 2008-9, but the SP and AGS then pulled out in favour of No2EU and what became TUSC.

The Anti-Capitalist Initiative, in which the main force is splinters from the Workers' Power group, also promotes itself as the way to left unity.

NOT ENOUGH

None of these, not even CoL which was perhaps the best effort, has had enough substance of agreed united action or of real open debate.

Paradoxically, it often happens that the smaller and more splintered the group which proposes itself as the hub for left unity, the better the initial response it gets. But it's not necessarily easy sailing from there on!

If an activist group with a known record of political activity makes a call for unity, then people judge it partly accord-

Big rallies... or big organising conferences, where political ideas are discussed?

ing to their opinion of that record. If a splinter of a split of a splinter (just two people initially, as with Burgin and Hudson, or a few dozen, as with Counterfire) makes an appeal, and puts it in the vaguest terms — Burgin and Hudson suggest no more political definition than "rejects austerity and war, advocates a greater democratisation of our society and institutions, and poses a new way of organising everyday life" — then everyone can read into it what they want.

Everyone who wants to build a socialist organisation, but is unsure about how to do it, and so holds back from joining any of the existing groups, can believe they have found a short cut. Just a click on a website, or a "like" on Facebook, and they're already part of the big movement they want!

Burgin and Hudson cite Syriza in Greece and Die Linke in Germany as their models. But neither of those dropped from the sky in response to a few activists writing a letter to the *Guardian*, or doing a press conference. Syriza builds on a long political tradition — that of the Greek Communist Party, since the 1920s the main force in the Greek workers' movement - and on sharp political battles which separated Syriza's core both from the old Stalinists and from the soft reformists now in Greece's Democratic Left. Die Linke rests on having been able to take over a chunk of what was the old ruling party in East Germany.

Also, neither of them is adequate. If Syriza did not have organised left groupings like DEA and Kokkino battling within it against its mainstream leadership, then there would be no hope for it doing anything other than collapsing into reformist adaptation. Die Linke is more Keynesian than socialist, and has supported cuts where it is in provincial coalition governments.

Unity is good. But talk about unity will be just a way of floating yet another left splinter unless it is translated into specific unity in action and specific dialogue about differences.

To the credit of Burgin and Hudson, they have posted on their website a thoughtful contribution from SWPer (or ex-SWPer?) Keith Flett. "However, and however frustrating some may find it, there is no way of by-passing the weight of Labour and perhaps in particular Labour activists in the unions and localities in all this.... The electoral support of Labour and its impact can't be ignored.

It may be argued that membership is hardly what it was in the 1950s but that is true of all political parties. It may also

be argued that the hold of Labour's approach to political change is less, but it is an argument not an historical fact.

"Even if we accept time scales change with context, historically it has taken time to build left parties". Not just time, but effort, argument, education. And politics! Talk of unity is good, but only if it leads to specific united action and specific dialogue. Not if it becomes only a way to float yet another left splinter making its claim as being the one which is *really* for unity...

AWL will work with the Left Unity forums, and the People's Assembly, on that basis.

- Burgin/Hudson initiative: leftunity.org
- Counterfire's People's Assembly: bit.ly/pa22jun
- AWL leaflet to first Coalition of Resistance conference: bit.ly/cor10

Cyprus shows eurozone crisis isn't over

By Theodora Polenta

Barely one month after Greek and European rulers assured us the European debt crisis had been resolved, Greece had been stabilized, and the euro wasn't in danger, a crisis in the Cypriot banking system and uncertainty over a bailout deal threatened the "peace".

To be fair, recent forecasts for the European economy showed that the EU will be in recession during 2013 and even the German economy will be in stagnation. A new crisis in the EU and the euro — as the recession exacerbates the problems of deficits and debt — was always on the cards. None of the objectives in any of the bail-out memorandums, imposed on countries in southern Europe, will be reached this year.

But then came Cyprus.

Small and insignificant compared to the size of the whole eurozone (only 0.2% of GDP) Cyprus threatened — could still threaten — to compromise the whole eurozone project. Mounting panic and uncertainty rose as to the potential impact of the events.

Stocks fell in the other so-called peripheral European economies. Values of Italian and Spanish banks fell by up to five percent on 19 March and the stock exchange in Athens was down by over three percent. The euro reached its lowest level in four months, falling below 1.29 against the US dollar, before rising slightly after the ECB assurance that it would for the time being support Cypriot banks.

But this crisis has no end. It is not due to "bad" policy

choices by governments. It is not caused by the "laziness" and "corruption" of the Greeks or some other southerners. It is a crisis that stems from the functions of the capitalist system, the internal logic of the system.

The system cannot find a "normal" or "peaceful" way out of the crisis. The only way for the system to deal with it would be by a levelling of the economy, as during war periods, with a massive destruction of productive forces. On the ashes the capitalists could rebuild, make new economic "bubbles".

WHAT HAPPENED

The Cyprus government had to search for roughly 5.8 billion euros in order to meet the terms of a European bailout. That was enough to threaten bankruptcy in Cyprus.

At the eleventh hour, to raise those billions, Cyprus agreed to a restructuring of its banking sector, tax rises and privatisations. The bank measures mean deposits over 100,000 euros will effectively be used to pay the bulk of the 5.8 billion euro bill. These investors may lose up to 40% of their money.

Laiki Bank will be dissolved immediately — its uninsured deposits and toxic assets transferred to a "bad bank" and the guaranteed deposits (those under 100,000 euros) transferred to the country's biggest lender, Bank of Cyprus. Large deposits with Bank of Cyprus above the insured level will be frozen until it becomes clear whether or to what extent they will also be forced to take losses. According to government sources the agreement does include a 30% "haircut" on deposits over 100,000 euros in Bank of Cyprus.

For these 5.8 billion euros, the EU has effectively destroyed the Cyprus economy; that is the combined effect and what the austerity package will mean. Immediately the closing down of Laiki Bank will mean at least 3,000 bank workers losing their job.

But the crisis is not yet over. Cyprus's banks are only due to re-open on Thursday 28 March.

Most importantly, all the predictions for the depth of the recession and the sustainability of the public debt are no longer valid. According to new figures Cyprus should have found more than 5.8 billion euros to make its public debt viable. The prospect of worsening public debt means that Cyprus will soon need another two billion euros, which is a huge amount relative to the size of the Cypriot economy. Even worse the two billion predicted revenue from the privatisation of Cyprus public assets has been reduced to 700 million euros because of the dire state of the economy.

But, to put things into perspective: the 84 richest people in the world have increased their wealth by 241 billion euros last year, with a grand total of 1.9 trillion euros for 2012. Just one year's income of the 84 richest people in the world is higher than the ever shrinking Greek GDP and more than 41 times greater than the 5.8 billion Cyprus needs.

CHANGE OF HEART

The life of the Cypriot working class dramatically deteriorated during the last week. With all the banks shut and restrictions being imposed on ATM withdrawals (initially at a maximum of 250 euros to a meagre 100 euros) the Cyprus economy was effectively cash starved. Business only accepted cash transactions and imports and exports were frozen.

The shelves of the supermarkets were emptied and a petrol crisis was ready to erupt. The "unlucky ones" (mostly working-class people and the poor), those with no cash and no access to bank accounts, formed long queues for emergency food hand-outs run by government and charities.

The popularity of the president Anastasiadis, elected less than four weeks ago, has plummeted. At the same time the Cypriot people's faith in the eurozone and the idea of a memorandum to bail out the Cypriot economy has been shattered.

Prior to the election the vast majority of the Cypriot population, including (Communist) AKEL supporters, were in favour of a memorandum. Anastasiadis was elected on the premise of having the ability to network with EU, eurozone and IMF high officials; this would guarantee a "pain free" memorandum for the good of all Cyprus.

The script is a familiar one. The prime minister promises dynamic troubleshooting, and tough negotiation with the troika. Then, once elected, implements hard class-based attacks on the working-classes to make them pay for the crisis caused by the bankers and big business.

But public wages have already been reduced by 15%. The cut followed the recession that struck the Cypriot economy and pushed unemployment to 14% (from 3-5%).

POLITICS

Critically this deal does not need to be ratified by the Cyprus parliament. When Cyprus's parliament rejected the terms of the EU's original bailout plan it served to deepen the crisis, spreading out across Europe, posing the risk of national bankruptcy.

Thirty-six parliamentarians voted against the deal, while 19 abstained and none voted in favour. The initial bailout plan would have charged Cypriot bank investors with a tax of 9.9 percent for those with account balances of more than 100,000 euros, and 6.75 per cent for those with balances between 25,000 and 100,000 euros.

So money from all bank accounts in Cyprus — both small and large — would have been affected. But those primarily affected would have been Russians and British depositors who use the island country as an offshore financial centre.

Thousands gathered outside parliament to protest; and a last-minute adjustment to exempt those with less than 20,000 euros from the levy had no impact. The total collapse of Cyprus's financial system has been avoided only by the continued closure of the banks.

Cyprus's parliament passed legislation granting the state emergency powers, including capital controls, to block sudden outflows of money from Cyprus. The government also announced the formation of a so-called National Solidarity Fund. This misnamed entity would take money from Cypriot pensions, the Church of Cyprus, and donations from private citizens to help fund bank bailouts.

The Cypriot government's proposal was rejected by the Eurogroup.

Cyprus was also considering offering Russia partial ownership of its financial sector, access to offshore natural gas deposits near Cyprus, and the use of a naval base at Limassol. Major Russian banks, including Alfa Bank and VTB, stand to lose large sums if Cyprus's banks collapse or Cypriot capital controls cut them off from their assets in Cyprus.

But the fundamental character of the bailout is a massive attack on the living standards of the working class. Coming after a large anti-EU vote in the Italian elections, on-going strikes and protests in Portugal, Greece and Spain, and the toppling of the Bulgarian government last month, ruling circles are well aware that class conflict in Europe is heating up.

Cyprus is also strategically important — caught in the rising confrontation between NATO and Russia in the eastern Mediterranean.

EU officials' attempts to present their attack on Cyprus as a popular measure — taxing Russian oligarchs with billions stashed in Cyprus — are cynical and false. The looting of Cyprus has nothing to do with expropriating capitalists in the interests of working people. While workers lose their savings and pensions, the EU is forcing the transfer of cash and business from Cyprus and Russia to the wealthiest, most powerful sections of finance capital.

EU officials clearly want to reduce the size of Cyprus's financial sector. The Cypriot crisis effectively forces businesses now banking in Cyprus to move their financial operations

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into larger Western European countries.

The left needs to assess the meaning of the “No” protests by the people of Cyprus and the different “No” of the Cyprus politicians and ruling class. These are not the same.

The people rose in an unprecedented way but had neither the strength nor the scale to impose their will on the Cypriot Parliament.

The Cypriot Parliament decided to temporarily challenge German demands. Their outrage stemmed from the nature of the Eurogroup’s offered deal — it affected not only the lower classes but also the Cypriot bourgeoisie. It would shatter the model that post-1974 Cyprus governments (rightist and leftist alike) had built: international financial centre, laundering money, out-of-proportion growth in banking. The Eurogroup’s decision threatened all that.

The strongest reactions came from the Cypriot bankers and the Church. Archbishop Chrysostomos said “the church property is available to Cyprus, to avoid the collapse of the banking system and to save the country.” Of course the mighty Cypriot Church is a main shareholder in the banks. The Greek prime minister speaks to God, the Cypriot archbishop speaks with financial markets.

The vice president of the Bank of Cyprus said that the deposits of foreign investors should not be taxed, only the deposits of the Cypriot people need to be taxed. Safeguarding the interests of the financial oligarchy is the only imperative that the Cypriot ruling class recognises.

Because Cyprus has historical relations with Russia, the Middle East, the UK and, lately, with Israel, its political staff showed a degree of independence from Europe never matched by Greece. Cyprus was a financial centre before the introduction of the euro, benefited as a financial centre inside the euro, would like to preserve this dual capacity. If it doesn’t work out, the idea of returning to a national currency will definitely be in play.

But the need for a hard currency was one of the main reasons that Cyprus — modelling itself as a little Switzerland of the Mediterranean — rejected the Cypriot pound in favour of the euro. And it remains a powerful reason why the first thoughts of a referendum and exit from the euro were replaced by second thoughts of accepting a highly detrimental deal and keeping the euro.

The Cyprus economy is similar to that of Iceland and Ire-

land. It too has a disproportionately large banking sector (the banking sector in Cyprus is about eight times bigger than the country’s GDP). Until 2009 the Cyprus economy was doing well, its figures better even than Germany’s: the public debt of Cyprus before the crisis was less than 60% of GDP, while the budget had a surplus.

Problems began with the speculative games of the Cypriot banks — Laiki and Bank of Cyprus — which gambled on the government’s bailout funds by “investing” in Greek bonds and other toxic assets with potential high returns. These banks are now in tatters.

ALTERNATIVES

The policies of the Cyprus government — as political representatives of ultra-neoliberal capitalism — are predictable. The same cannot be said about AKEL, which led the government of Cyprus until February 2013’s election.

When in government AKEL was the first to cut salaries and pensions to save the bankers. AKEL was in government when the economy plunged into recession. Instead of nationalising the Cypriot banks under workers’ control (in order to guarantee the deposits of the lower classes) it attempted to “manage” the capitalist system. AKEL paved the way for the victory of right-wing Anastasiadis.

AKEL still insists on talking about the need for “national unity”, about the need to form a government of broad, patriotic cooperation, something which will cold-bloodedly lead the Cypriot workers into the slaughterhouse.

In Greece, a large chunk of the left, most notably the leadership of SYRIZA, until recently looked to AKEL’s leader Demetris Christofias as a role model, as a “left-wing” way to negotiate a memorandum. The left refuses to draw the necessary conclusions. If Syriza were to become a government of the left in future and managed the capitalist system with policies similar to those used by AKEL, the result will be a disaster.

Struggle against EU bailout conditions cannot be exhausted in tough talking on the terms of repayment. Neither can they be resolved by the exit of a country from the Eurozone and the EU.

Any “deal” will have a negative outcome for deposits, revenues and workers’ living standards and working conditions.

Conditions will not improve if Greece, Cyprus, etc., just leave the EU but remain under capitalism. The depreciation of the new national currency of these countries as a result of leaving the Eurozone will be at least equal to those of the current confiscations and reductions of deposits, wages, pensions and welfare.

- The first step out of the systemic crisis, to benefit the working class, is an immediate ban on big depositors moving their money out of the banks. Without such measures the big losers from any bailout agreement will always be the small and very small depositors.

- The second measure is the nationalization of banks, without compensation to shareholders, and under workers’ control. The confiscation of this subsection of bourgeois property is the minimum price to be paid for the immense profits that they have got by the overexploitation of the working class. This has to be directly linked to the nationalisation of the big capitalist private enterprises that are of critical importance to the economy, which have borrowed from these banks and cannot now repay their loans. In this way, the state can collect all the economic resources of the country and, in a designed and planned way, redistribute them to safeguard the survival of the population.

- Thirdly there needs to be the total cancellation of debt, not in a bourgeois nationalist context, but within an internationalist context, linked to a United Socialist States of Europe

The public debt of Greece created for the sake of financial speculation is five times greater than the wages given to workers annually. Therefore, in order to pay this debt, from a bourgeois perspective, the workers “need” either to work five times more, or five times as hard, with the same wages. None of this can be done or should be done.

- The task is to overthrow the bourgeois governments in Greece, Cyprus, Italy and throughout Europe. Workers need to get the power into their hands, to put through these economic measures, to democratically plan, organise and reorganise the economy according to working-class interests.

Either they “confiscate” our lives for the sake of the capitalist private profit spreading misery and absolute destruction, or the working class will take the lead to expropriate their expropriators and crush the capitalist state for the sake of the vast majority of people.

Staging ideas: politics of form and content

The Cultural Front
Sarah Weston



I would identify myself as a socialist as well as a theatre-maker.

But someone viewing my work would not necessarily describe it as socialist theatre. Not because it's apolitical, but because I wouldn't say the theatre that I make is explicitly socialist (in the way we perhaps might describe Ken Loach as a socialist film director). However, I believe that what makes drama political is not just the themes the text discusses — whether it involves political events, characters, or explicit political arguments — but the form the theatre takes itself.

Radical theatre has never just been radical ideas played out: it is reinventing the form.

In his article in *Solidarity* 278, "Putting Working-Class Voices Centre-Stage", Edd Mustill rightly highlights how the accusation of dogmatism is unfairly targeted at left-wing texts, whereas more liberal theatre is allowed to be as moralistic as it likes.

Equally rightly, he makes the point that, "There are human stories at the heart of political events, just as much as there

are at the kitchen sink or between an arguing couple placed in a black box theatre" — and, further, that this — the arguing kitchen-sink drama couple — doesn't hold much weight without the shadow of bigger political context hanging above it.

This idea of dogmatism is something I'd like to elaborate on. Whether or not left-wing theatre is rightly or wrongly labeled dogmatic isn't the issue for me: whatever the political ideas (both those I agree and disagree with), I do have a problem with dogmatic, or didactic theatre.

If you have an idea, or a message, or something you want to tell the world, what has made you decide that the best method to communicate this is theatrically? Is it something that would be much better explained in article or book? Is it really a piece of drama? Not because "messages" don't have a place in theatre, they do, but because so often I think political theatre misses the way in which theatre can be inherently political: it is live, it is active. Like education, it can be transitive and dialectic.

As political creatives we should avoid producing theatre that is just preaching a message, because we are missing using the form of theatre itself to its full political potential. Playing with form, i.e. how we communicate the message, can be more politically powerful than the words themselves (we

could just read words — how does performance bring out meaning?). This is two-fold: how do we perform the message, and how does the audience receive it?

I think verbatim is a wonderful example of this. Verbatim theatre is the performance of exact-word-for-word speech from real people. Here we are beginning to experiment with form by playing with the real and non-real (real words in an artificial context).

Playing with the real and non-real is something I am especially interested in as a theatre-practitioner, mainly because it changes the audience's relationship to the event. I like the idea of the audience being complicit in the performance: they become co-creators... or co-conspirators.

I run the risk of suggesting that all political theatre has to be some far-out, wacky, devised piece, with perhaps the audiences locked in cages staged in a car park (sounds cool). But even what are deemed as straight, text-based plays that seek to be political ought to play around with form, and use it to their political advantage. For example Lucy Kirkwood's "NSFW", recently performed at the Royal Court, excellently used plot revelation as a tool to make political points.

Essentially theatre does not have to rely on its text to be political.

10 years since the Gulf War

No to Saddam Hussein! No to war!

As We Were Saying



To mark the 10th anniversary of the start of the Gulf War in 2003, we reprint below extracts from *Solidarity* articles about the start and the aftermath of the war

David Aaronovitch writes in the *Observer*: "If, in a few weeks time, the Security Council agrees to wage war against Saddam, I shall support it." Others who consider themselves to be broadly on the left put the same case, from Salman Rushdie to Christopher Hitchens.

These are people who backed the war in Afghanistan after September 11, and who felt their stand was vindicated. Those opposing war, including this newspaper, warned of dire consequences and thousands upon thousands of dead. But, in the event, the Taliban were defeated quickly. Far fewer Afghans died in the process than we had anticipated.

Delighted by this, Christopher Hitchens wrote, addressing the anti-war left, "well, yah boo and sucks to you, too."

As Aaronovitch notes, his own current of left-wing opinion really emerged over Bosnia and Kosova, and — negatively — over Rwanda, where the failure to intervene led to a million dead. It is not simply gung-ho for Western imperialism; in part, it is motivated by disgust at the moral emptiness of much left-wing argument — at those who opposed self-determination for the Kosovars, who played down the awfulness of the Taliban, or who side now, openly or covertly, with the butcher in Baghdad.

What if... Saddam is overthrown by a quick, "clean" war, and replaced by a democracy?

Saddam's regime is very unlikely to be so easy to defeat as the Taliban. [Saddam's regime] has survived war with Iran and the last Gulf war. His army is not what it was, after military defeat and sanctions, but it is still not negligible. If it was that easy to overthrow, someone would have done it by now.

It will be defeated, of course.

But there is equally no chance that Bush and Blair will replace it with any kind of democracy. On the contrary, their stated aim is for "regime change" in a much more limited sense — any old alternative dictator less hostile to them will do.

If the war led to freedom for the people of Iraq, you might argue that it would have been worth anything but the most colossal number of casualties. But we can't know how colossal that number will be. And who, really, is prepared to lay bets on it?

Who is prepared to lay bets on other incalculable consequences of war?... On the boost militant political Islam, from Pakistan to Egypt, will get — more than compensating for the Taliban's defeat?...

If we had our own army of democrats, we might set off for Baghdad tomorrow to help the Iraqi people throw off their oppressor. The techno-might of the US marines is no such army. They will deliver death and destruction first from the sky, then from the ground, and we don't know with what result.

Aaronovitch is right that Saddam is a terrible dictator. For this reason, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty is [saying] "No to war! No to Saddam!" — which is gaining support worldwide.

But the liberation of the Iraqi people can only be the task of the Iraqi people themselves. We can assist it by preparing to build solidarity with any genuine democratic movement which emerges there.

If Bush and Blair's war calls such a movement into being, it will be by accident not design. Any genuine popular movement will find that Bush and Blair are its mortal enemies.

23 February 2003

At the end of December, the last US troops will withdraw from Iraq, eight years and eight months after the invasion of March 2003.

The invasion was the product of a surge of US triumphalism following the collapse of European and Russian Stalinism in 1991, easy US military successes in Kuwait (1991), Bosnia (1995), and Kosova (1999), and seeming US military success in Afghanistan (2001).

By invading, US politicians around George Bush thought they could cut short a possible process of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein gradually regaining the regional support and influence he had lost after the Kuwait war in 1991. With a quick, sharp blow, they thought they could get a US-friendly, market-friendly regime in Iraq and use it as a lever to transform the Middle East and North Africa, which would otherwise fall to political Islamists when the decrepit old dictators

like Mubarak, Assad, Qaddafi, Ben Ali, and the Saudi monarchy finally went.

In those terms, the invasion failed heavily. Iraq has a government dominated by Shia Islamists; the Iranian government, hated by the USA, probably has more influence in Iraq now than the US does.

US clout in the region and the world has declined.

The USA has repeatedly declared it wants a two-states settlement in Israel/Palestine, and quickly, but has been unable to produce even a significant nudge in that direction.

Hardly anyone in Iraq positively endorsed the US invasion.

Some of Iraq's Shia majority, long suppressed by Saddam, were at first willing grudgingly to welcome the US's overthrow of the dictator and to deal with the US troops on a wary "wait and see" basis, hoping they would tidy up and leave soon. Hassan Jumaa, leader of the oil workers' union which sprang up in southern Iraq after the fall of Saddam's police-state, said: "The occupation is like a headache, but Saddam was like death".

The wariness soon turned to outright hostility, as the US clumsily destroyed the fabric of civil government in Iraq and tipped the country into a gangster-ridden chaos over which Americans strode demanding flat-rate taxes and rapid privatisations.

The USA was sucked into a long military presence. The chaos led the majority of Iraqis to demand that the US withdraw — but also to say that the withdrawal should come only after some civil order had been restored, so that withdrawal would not tip the country into full-scale sectarian civil war and the destruction of all the limited democratic and labour-movement opportunities which had opened with Saddam's fall.

Socialists hoped that the new Iraqi labour movement would shape that reconstruction.

In fact the uneasy exhaustion into which Iraqi society finally fell from late 2007 was under the rule of a cabal of Shia Islamist parties, in loose alliance with Kurdish nationalists, and gradually reconstructing a state machine around themselves.

The Iraqi labour movement remains alive, though battered and still scarcely semi-legal. It will still need our solidarity after the US withdrawal.

14 December 2011

The workers' government

This is the third part of a review article looking at the themes of John Riddell's new book of documents* from the early communist movement. This week Paul Hampton discusses the idea of the workers' government.

Probably the most wide-ranging and rancorous discussion at the Fourth Congress concerned the transitional slogan of a workers' government.

This debate is of exceptional importance to the tradition represented by the AWL, yet outside our ranks it is rarely discussed or propagated at present. Translations of the theses and debates at the Fourth Congress were published by our predecessors in the 1970s, when the original texts were long out of print and hard to obtain. They informed our own discussions about intervening to transform the labour movement from that period onwards.

Riddell has done a first class job in translating the various draft resolutions and speeches, so as to clarify the meaning and importance of the workers' government slogan. He regards the concept of a workers' government as "the awkward child of the early Communist International" but nevertheless an important step forward at the pinnacle of the united front approach. The key question addressed in this debate at the Fourth Congress was: What kind of government should Communists advocate for the achievement of the demands in their united-action programme? As with transitional demands, it was the German experience that loomed largest.

On 13 March 1920 a right-wing military putsch led by Wolfgang Kapp and General von Lüttwitz ousted the government in Berlin. The SPD-led trade unions (ADGB) called for a general strike to defend the republic. By 14 March the strike was solid across the country. Workers formed local strike committees, demonstrated and formed militias. On 17 March the putschists capitulated and fled. The general strike continued as workers demanded a new government and decisive action against the militarist threat. Carl Legien, chair of the ADGB, proposed that the SPD's coalition with bourgeois parties be replaced by a workers' government formed by the SPD, the USPD and the trade unions. The KPD leadership eventually expressed support for this proposal, stating that "formation of a socialist government, free of the slightest bourgeois or capitalist element, would create extremely favourable conditions for vigorous action by the proletarian masses," and promised, subject to certain conditions, to act towards such a government as a "loyal opposition" (Broué 2006: 369). The USPD refused to participate, which effectively finished the proposal. However, as Broué (2006: 385) pointed out, "for the first time in the history of the Communist movement, the problem was posed of a transitional form of government, which breaks from government of the parliamentary kind but is not yet the dictatorship of the proletariat, the conciliar republic".

However, the debate continued to rage, particularly in state elections where the combination of SPD, USPD and KPD votes gave the workers' organisations a majority. The KPD called for a workers' republic based on councils like the Russian soviets. But in 1921 such councils did not exist in Germany or elsewhere. The KPD's leadership and Karl Radek tried to formulate a governmental demand that related to Germany's existing political institutions, while pointing towards the goal of workers' power and came up with the "workers' government".

Riddell argues that when the Fourth Congress opened in November 1922, its leaders used the term in three different ways, which can be summarised as pseudonym, illusion and transition:

- **Pseudonym:** The International's president, Gregory Zinoviev, as well as ultra-left leaders such as Ruth Fischer and Amadeo Bordiga held that the term "workers' government" referred only to a regime of the type established by the Russian revolution of October 1917, that is, a dictatorship of the proletariat resting on revolutionary workers' councils. This was the approach taken in the first two drafts of the Fourth

Congress resolution on this question. However, delegates of the German party majority convinced the congress to abandon this approach mid-way through its proceedings, and it did not appear in the third draft.

- **Illusion:** This concept, advanced mainly by Zinoviev, referred to parliamentary-based governments formed by workers' parties but carrying out a basically capitalist agenda. Zinoviev predicted that such a "liberal workers' government" was likely to be formed by the Labour Party in Britain (as indeed it was in 1924). Zinoviev's view was open to the charge that his "workers' government" was a euphemism for a form of bourgeois rule. The changes made in the fourth and final draft of the Fourth Congress resolution did not eliminate Zinoviev's concept, but renamed it as a "illusory workers' government" and strengthened the argument against such a misinterpretation.

- **Transition:** This concept, advocated by the KPD majority leaders such as Zetkin and by Radek, saw the "workers' government" demand as a component of a transitional programme, a set of demands that "undermine the power of the bourgeoisie, organise the proletariat, and mark out stages in the struggle for its dictatorship" (Third Congress resolution On Tactics 1921). Such a government, while possibly constituted by parliamentary means, would rest on the workers' mass movement and take measures to dismantle the bourgeois state. This transitional concept was presented in the later drafts of the Fourth Congress resolution.

EVOLUTION

The evolution of the debate became clear from the speeches.

In his Report of the Executive Committee, 10 November 1922, Zinoviev was circumspect in his presentation, arguing **The Petrograd Soviet; the workers' government slogan was developed for countries where soviets did not exist**

that the slogan of the workers' government had not been sufficiently clarified and was of "exceptional" and "limited application". He said the slogan was "an application of the dictatorship of the proletariat". At the Comintern executive in June 1922 Zinoviev apparently said: "The workers' government is the same thing as the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is a pseudonym for a soviet government. It is more comfortable for an ordinary worker, and that's why we want to use this formula" (2012: 129-130; 140)

The German communist Ernst Meyer disagreed, reading out Zinoviev's statement from the June executive meeting. Meyer argued that it was important to differentiate between a Social-Democratic and a workers' government. He said: "We have seen Social-Democratic governments in Germany, in Saxony and Thuringia, and earlier also in Gotha, governments that we must support but that have nothing in common with what we understand to be a workers' government". He said that the workers' government "differs fundamentally from a Social-Democratic government, in that it does not merely carry the label of a socialist policy but actually carried out a socialist-communist policy in life". A workers' government will therefore not be parliamentary in character, or will be parliamentary only in a subordinate sense. It was "not a necessary occurrence, but rather a historical possibility" (2012: 139).

Radek's intervention the following day agreed with Meyer. He said: "Comrade Zinoviev said in the Expanded Executive, for us the workers' government is a pseudonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat... In my opinion, this definition is not right." Instead he argued that the workers' government was "one of the possible points of transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat". The German, Norwegian, Czechoslovak workers could take a stand of "no coalition with the bourgeoisie, but rather a coalition with the workers' parties that can secure our eight-hour day, give us a bit more bread, and so on". That could lead to "the establishment of such a workers' government, whether through preliminary struggles or on the basis of a parliamentary combination". It was "nonsense to reject in doctrinaire fashion the possibility of such a situation" (2012: 167).

Radek accepted some of Zinoviev's concerns and reservations. The workers' government would be "worthless unless the workers stand behind it, taking up arms and building factory councils that push this government and do not allow it to make compromises with the Right". But if that were done, "the workers' government will be the starting point of a struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat". For example, in Britain, "a parliamentary victory for the Labour Party is quite possible, and then the question will arise, what is this workers' government? Is it nothing more than a new edition of the bourgeois-liberal government" (2012: 167-8).

Radek's approach was transitional, taking the demands from the united front to their logical conclusion. But he did not argue that a workers' government was the only, indeed the necessary or even likely road to power. This he summed up with a rather pithy joke. He told the congress: "It would be entirely wrong to present a picture that the evolution of humanity from ape to people's commissar necessarily passes through a phase of workers' government" (2012: 168).

Zinoviev returned to the podium somewhat chastised the next day, with rather sharper formulations. He conceded that the workers' government had nothing at all to do with the word 'pseudonym', and declared that he was "gladly prepared to give way in the quarrel regarding this word". He argued that "every bourgeois government is simultaneously a capitalist government. It is hard to imagine a bourgeois government that is not also a capitalist government. But unfortunately we cannot say the opposite. Not every workers' government is also a socialist government... Even many workers' governments can be bourgeois in terms of their social content" (2012: 266).

Instead he set out four different kinds of workers' governments, which "far from exhausts the list of possibilities". First

there was a workers' government that, "in terms of its composition, is a liberal workers' government, like that of Australia". Such a liberal workers' government in Britain "could be the jumping off point for revolutionising the country... At present we Communists vote in Britain for the Labour Party... Why? Because it is objectively a step forward". The second type was a Social-Democratic government. Zinoviev asked delegates to "imagine that the unified SPD in Germany forms a purely 'socialist government'. That will also be a workers' government (in quotation marks, of course). We can conceive of a situation where we would grant such a government a conditional credit, that is, conditional support". A third type was the so-called coalition government, that is, a government composed of Social Democrats, trade union leaders, persons without party affiliation, and perhaps Communists as well. Fourth was "a workers' government that is really a workers' government, that is, a Communist workers' government". Zinoviev regarded this fourth possibility as "indeed a pseudonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat" (2012: 266-7).

But Zinoviev retained some reservations. He noted that "yesterday our friend Radek said that the workers' government is a possible form of transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat. I would like to say that it is a possibility, or to be absolutely precise, this possibility arises only exceptionally... It is probably the least likely path". He warned that "woe betide us if, in our agitation, we permit for one moment the idea to crop up that there will necessarily be a workers' government, that it could come about peacefully, that there is some organically fixed period that could replace the civil war, and so on". The workers' government slogan "remains correct as a way of getting a hearing from the masses... It harbours the same dangers as the united front tactic" (2012: 267-8, 270).

But Radek did not leave the matter there. In his speech on the capitalist offensive three days later, he returned to his critique. He said: "Zinoviev offered an abstract classification of the possible forms of a workers' government. I agree with this attempt at classification... It is important for us here to replace the abstract classification with the question: 'What do the working masses — not just the Communists — think when they talk of a workers' government?'... In Britain, they

* *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International* (Haymarket, 2012)

think of the Labour Party... The idea of a workers' government has the same meaning for the working masses: they think of a government of all workers' parties" (2012: 399).

Radek accepted some caveats and acknowledged the nuances between different speakers. He said that "the workers' government is not inevitable, but possible. Or, following Comrade Zinoviev, we can say paradoxically that it is not inevitable but is likely the most improbable road". The question to decide when going to the masses was "whether or not we are prepared to struggle for a workers' coalition government and create the preconditions for it". In his opinion, "in our struggle for the united front, we should say frankly that if the Social Democratic worker masses force their leaders to break with the bourgeoisie, we are ready to take part in a workers' government, provided this government is a vehicle for class struggle". The workers' government slogan "conceives of the united front as a unified political goal" (2012: 399-401).

Broué (2006: 668) argued that Radek's view of the workers' government slogan was based on the experience of the struggles in the West. It took into account that "the West differed from Russia, where the majority of the workers could be won directly to Communism, whilst in the West the workers showed strong allegiances to various parties". Further discussion took place in the commission formulating the resolution, On the Tactics of the Comintern. Edwin Hoernle reported on the last day of the congress, 5 December 1922, that "the most significant amendments concern the section on workers' government". The Commission was "concerned to define and highlight the question of the workers' government as clearly and distinctly as possible" (2012: 1097).

The resolution stated:

"The Communist International must consider the following possibilities.

I. Illusory workers' governments

1. A liberal workers' government, such as existed in Australia and may exist in Britain in the foreseeable future.

2. A Social-Democratic workers' government (Germany).

II. Genuine workers' governments

3. Government of workers and the poorer peasants. Such a possibility exists in the Balkans, Czechoslovakia, and so on.

4. A workers' government with Communist participation.

5. A genuinely proletarian workers' government, which, in its pure form, can be embodied only in the Communist party" (2012: 1161).

It also clarified what these meant:

"The only type of government that can be considered a genuine workers' government is one that is determined to take up a resolute struggle at least to achieve the workers' most important immediate demands against the bourgeoisie. That is the only type of workers' government in which Communists can participate.

The first two types, the illusory workers' governments (liberal and Social-Democratic), are not revolutionary governments but can, under certain circumstances, speed up the decomposition of bourgeois power.

The next two types of workers' government (workers' and peasants' government; Social-Democratic-Communist government) do not yet signify the dictatorship of the proletariat and are not even an historically inevitable transitional stage to this dictatorship. Rather, wherever they come into being, they are an important starting point for a struggle for this dictatorship" (2012: 1161-2).

SAXONY

One important caveat should be noted in relation to the actual experience of regional workers' government in Germany.

As the Fourth Congress convened, there was a high-level discussion about the possible entry by the Communists into the Saxon government. According to Broué's account (2006: 657), the Social Democrats rejected two points of the Communists' programme, the arming of the workers and the calling of a congress of factory councils in Saxony. The German delegation declared in favour of deleting these two points and forming a socialist-Communist government, with four of the Left voting against. "At that point, the Russians intervened. For an entire evening they argued against Thalheimer and the German majority. Lenin, Trotsky, Radek and Zinoviev were unanimous. There was no question of yielding on this point. It had to be upheld. The Communists had to insist upon the Social Democrats accepting their demands in full, or else they would be politically disarming themselves. The Germans gave in to the pressure."

Overall, while Radek, Zetkin and Meyer's arguments on

the workers' government slogan appear insightful and innovative, Zinoviev's position was contradictory and ultimatumist. The latter showed little evidence of grasping the transitional method or indeed the united front. Throughout the debate, the slogans raised were always related to concrete realities and the role of the revolutionary party as active protagonist is assumed. Sadly, the Fourth Congress discussion and particularly the debate in Germany were only just beginning in 1922 and they would be neutered by the rise of Stalinism soon after.

Soon after the congress, Zetkin wrote an article "The Workers' Government", (translated on the AWL website — tinyurl.com/bte8yyn) summing up the importance of these discussions. She wrote: "In easily the majority of countries under capitalist domination, the workers' government appears as the crowning summit of the tactic of the united front, as the propaganda and rallying slogan of the hour". The approach allowed Communist parties to grow and develop their influence within the labour movement, until they were neutered by the rise of Stalinism. But the method was not forgotten: it was renewed and developed by the Left Opposition forces around Trotsky into the 1930s.

The SWP in Britain has long denounced the slogan of a

Ramsay Macdonald formed the first Labour Cabinet in January 1924; the death of Lenin was announced at the same time

workers' government, even after it revived the language (but not the content) of the united front under the Rees-German leadership. Chris Harman regarded it as a minor tactical slogan which was soft on the nature of the state. Duncan Hallas's book *The Comintern* denounced the workers' government slogan as "clearly wrong in principle" and something that "inevitably shifted the emphasis to the question of parliamentary majorities". Riddell has made the point that the SWP's position probably relied on a misreading of the earlier drafts of the thesis, rather than the final one published in the book. This is too generous: the SWP did not accept the approach of transitional demands, the united front and the workers' government because it never understood the importance of the early Comintern, recoiled from the post-Trotsky Trotskyist abuse of that tradition, but mainly because of its Stalinoid version of the revolutionary party. The SWP's essentially Second International maxi-mini approach explains why it has been rigid on the question of the Labour Party, why it has only ever run tightly controlled front organisations rather than genuine alliances and why its work in the unions has largely lacked any alternative strategy to that of the bureaucrats.

The AWL regards the workers' government slogan as a bold tactical compromise. Although conditions today are very different, making propaganda for a workers' government — for example when Labour came to power in 1997 or when the financial crisis broke — makes sense. It also has more agitational purchase in circumstances like present day Greece, where a government of Syriza may be posed.

The demand plays a pivotal role in the transitional programme, linking day-to-day struggles within the present political system to the struggle to disrupt, overthrow and replace that system.

Cleaners strike for dignity

By Ira Berkovic

Cleaning workers employed by the contractor Mitie at the Barbican Centre in London struck on Thursday 21 March.

They were demanding a pay increase to bring them in line with the London Living Wage of £8.55 an hour. Their current wage is £6.19 an hour.

They also want an end to the bullying and harassment they face from managers.

Strikers maintained a lively presence from 5.30am, the time the first cleaning shift begins, de-

spite freezing cold conditions, and held a lunchtime rally that was addressed by Mitie contractors from other sectors, including London Underground.

The Barbican cleaners' union, the Industrial Workers of Great Britain, is also organising struggles at financial multinational Shroeders, Canary Wharf law firm Clifford Chance, and St. George's Hospital in Tooting.

On London Underground, cleaning workers in the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT) have gone into dispute with cleaning contractor ISS over a variety of

issues, including the possible introduction of biometric booking-on for staff. They have instructed their union to prepare a ballot for industrial action. Cleaners employed by ISS at

free travel privileges that directly-employed transport workers have access to.

Cleaners employed by Churchill on Arriva Trains Wales are also preparing to strike. They earn poverty wages while Churchill has made £7 million profit in the last five years, and its top director has enjoyed 18% pay increases since 2008. The RMT is also running a political campaign to pressure Arriva Trains to bring cleaning work back in-house.

At the University of London, a rank-and-file election slate led by migrant cleaning, catering, and se-

curity workers is still waiting to hear the outcome of election results to the branch committee of the University of London Unison branch. The incumbent branch leadership had been obstructive to the workers' self-organised "3 Cosas" campaign for pensions, sick pay, and holidays.

Activists believe the branch leadership has colluded with regional Unison officials to prevent a rank-and-file victory.

- iwgb.org.uk
- facebook.com/3coca
- rmtlondoncalling.org.uk

with other unions but I think we're the catalyst for other unions to take action. The teachers plan to take action soon."

Andrew

"We've made a big dent on the peers dining. They've had to cancel all functions today. They are hitting the bottom grade staff the hardest when we're the ones that work the hardest. We already have the lowest pay for the longest hours. We're striking because they're trying to cut our overtime. We have 25 chefs out today. It's great PCS called a strike — there

needs to be more of this."
Parliament chefs

"It's going well. It's always a bit shaky here plus people are hard-up, there is a pay freeze. It would be better if other unions joined us but someone had to make the stand. There is more of a plan by the look of it. More of a campaign instead of just a one-day strike; also, the teachers have called action now. I'm sure there will be a link-up between us. It's great that the TUC have started leading — so many people are affected by these cuts."

Voices from the PCS Budget Day strike

"I'm really glad we're doing it, I just wish we had more people along. There are a lot of different strands of action. It would help if we had one or two clear demands. Some members are disheartened because it isn't coordinated

Reinstatement campaign wins

By Darren Bedford

All three trade union activists at London Metropolitan University suspended by management have now been reinstated.

Steve Jefferys, Max Watson, and Jawad Botmeh were suspended over allegations of misconduct relat-

ing to the disclosure of Jawad's background (he has spent time in jail), but all three are now back at work. A high-profile campaign involving both Unison and the University and College Union put huge pressure on uni bosses.

Unison activist Jonathan McCree, in a letter to the *Islington Tribune*, said: "This

is testament to the campaigners from two unions at London Met, Unison and UCU, which laboured tirelessly in their free time to gather the support needed.

"I know that Max, Jawad and Steve wish to acknowledge the overwhelming backing they have received and extend their heartfelt thanks to all their supporters.

"It is, however, a concern that, despite their reinstatement, the university is continuing with a disciplinary process for the three when none of them has done anything wrong and there is clearly no case to answer.

"All three will therefore continue to receive robust support until they are no longer threatened with censure."

Post Office workers strike

By Ollie Moore

Post Office counter staff will strike on Sunday 31 March.

The strike was endorsed by an 88% majority in a ballot, and could see 4,000 workers at 373 Crown

Post Office sites across the country walk out.

The strike is attempting to halt the closure or franchising of 76 Crown offices, as well as securing a pay increase for staff whose pay has been frozen since April 2011.

Unite election: vote McCluskey

By Darren Bedford

Voting in the election for the general secretary's position in Unite began on 18 March, with the ballot due to close on Friday 12 April.

The incumbent, Len McCluskey, is re-standing. His only opponent is Jerry Hicks, a former shop steward at a Rolls Royce plant in Bristol.

Workers' Liberty members in Unite are backing a vote for McCluskey because he is the candidate of the United Left grouping in which we are involved.

While on some issues we agree with Hicks against McCluskey (such as union officials taking an average worker's wage), we do not believe Hicks's campaign offers a serious alternative or a credible attempt to build a rank-and-file network in Unite. Hicks got an impressive vote in the 2010 general secretary election, but did not use it to build any lasting network or permanent organisation. On some issues, such as the question of workplace branches and full rights for retired members within the union, we think Hicks's platform is wrong against McCluskey's.

McCluskey has also overseen a reorientation of Unite's political strategy that commits the union, at least on paper, to a more combative and assertive attitude towards the Labour

leaders within party structures.

Workers' Liberty wants to see that strategy properly implemented and taken further.

Hicks, who has a more sectarian attitude to union self-assertion within Labour Party structures, would put the brakes on this strategy.

PRAISE

We do not, however, agree with those on the left, such as Counterfire and the International Socialist Group in Scotland, who heap praise on McCluskey and claim that he is a "grassroots general secretary".

The political culture inside Unite has improved under his leadership, and the union is on the whole more willing to back its members in taking industrial action. But he remains the chief administrator of a bureaucratic regime that,

like all union bureaucracies, must ultimately be broken down and replaced with structures based on rank-and-file control. McCluskey's election address, which smeared Jerry Hicks by association with the Socialist Workers Party without making any attempt to explain or justify this politically, was a crass and unnecessary lowering of the election's tone (unnecessarily personalised criticisms have been used by both camps in the election).

With 1,089 branch nominations to Hicks's 136, it is almost certain that McCluskey will win. The real battle for Unite's future is not in this election but in ongoing fights to build member-led workplace and industrial organisations that can take on employers.

- Workers' Liberty's full statement on the election: bit.ly/14obph6

BBC workers' anti-cuts strike

By Clarke Benitez

Members of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and broadcasting union BECTU at the BBC will strike on Thursday 28 March.

The strike is the latest action in an ongoing cam-

paign against a cuts plan which unions say will put 2,000 jobs at risk.

Unions also want a change to management culture.

Workers say bullying and harassment of staff has increased as workloads have gone up.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Sussex students fight privatisation

On 25 March, despite term being over, 1,000 Sussex University students and supporters from around the country took possession of the Sussex campus in a national protest against privatisation. Sussex students are organising in solidarity with 230 workers who university management are outsourcing.

The demonstration pushed back a line of riot police, forced its way into a management building and then reinforced an existing occupation where a discussion on spreading the movement took place. This is a struggle which should inspire the student movement.

Sussex University are now seeking an injunction to ban protest on campus.

Workers' Liberty students were among the many National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts activists who organised solidarity delegations, mainly from London colleges and from Birmingham.

• More: sussexagainprivatization.wordpress.com

Socialist becomes President of Scottish National Union of Students

At this year's National Union of Students Scotland conference, socialist and National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts national committee member Gordon Maloney was elected NUS Scotland President. He spoke to *Solidarity*.

Although it didn't always feel like it I did expect to win.

The size of Scotland means that candidates can — and have to — make the effort to visit and speak to the majority of delegates in the run-up, and that allows the campaign to go quite deep into the politics of the candidates.

Some very bold left-wing policy was also passed.

My support was very broad. The organised left all backed me, but so did most of the NUS Scotland leadership.

The make-up of NUS Scotland conference is very different from the rest of the UK. Even Labour Students, traditionally by far the biggest faction, could only claim about a dozen delegates on conference floor, with a similar amount identifying themselves as NCAFCers.

Unlike NUS UK's conference, over half of our delegates are from colleges, and

most of them are very clued-up and politically switched on. College students' associations are now just as active as lots of university Student Associations.

We had three key themes. Firstly, building the capacity of the movement. NUS Scotland has been very effective over the last two years, but it's done that in meetings with ministers and managements. I want to take the campaign out onto the campuses.

Secondly, the social value of education: the big arguments in Scotland are around access and retention in higher education, parity of esteem and funding for colleges, and how universities and colleges are run. I want to tie these all together to say education should be a public service.

Lastly, campaigning around students' rights as tenants and as part-time workers.

**INDEPENDENCE
NUS's policy is to remain neutral on independence.**

Any stance would be hugely divisive — it wouldn't be surprising if unions disaffiliated over it, for example. And picking a side would hinder our ability to be a part of the discussion, to win concessions.

We should lay out a vision of the kind of society we want and force the two campaigns to have the debate on our terms.

[The left has won a lot of student elections in Scotland, why more so than in England?] Scotland generally — and most of the institutions where lefties are getting elected — doesn't have a history of factionalism in the same way as much of England. A lot of them have never had organised left groups at all, not in living memory. I know of student officers down south who are left-wing but have been alienated by what they (often understandably) see as the petty, sectarian and dogmatic nature of the organised left at their campus. The lack of these groups on campuses means that this happens less.

The fact that tuition fees are off the table up here helps. The discussion on further and higher educa-

tion, free from the big fight on fees, has been able to flourish into something more mature and nuanced.

In Parliament, the SNP dominates everything. Outside Parliament, most of the left seem busy with the debate on independence.

Both of these situations will probably change after the referendum (whatever the result) and the, medium-term task for the left is to make sure we have something to say once the question of independence is settled.

People often attribute losing elections in NUS to some bureaucratic conspiracy. The organised left often run ill-qualified candidates in elections they plan to lose under the flimsy auspices of "propagandising".

There are two key lessons for me: firstly, the left can win elections. The second is that running an election is a lot of hard work, during and before.

We should run serious, competent candidates because we think they're the best placed for the role, and we should put serious effort into their campaigns.

The idea that someone getting up and shouting, and then coming last, is a good result is absurd but it's a trap we fall into far too much.

National Union of Teachers 27 June must be national strike

By Patrick Murphy, National Union of Teachers Executive (pc)

No matter what happens at the National Union of Teachers (NUT) conference (29 March-2 April), delegates will return home with the task of preparing members for strikes.

But the NUT leadership's current plan, jointly agreed with NASUWT and beginning with a regional strike on 27 June, is vague and uninspiring.

It's far too late to have any meaningful effect on the plan to tear up national pay scales, which take effect from 1 September. Despite these plans being announced in December and well known before that, we will have taken no action of any kind before the end of June, and even then we start not with a huge show of national strength but with a regional strike.

It's also far too little to make any real impact on Gove and the Coalition government. By the first time they feel the effects of any national strike action at all national scales will be no more, the third and final pension contribution increase will be around the corner and all the details of the "pay more, work longer, get less" pension scheme will be finalised.

Rolling action which combines national and more selective strike action can be an effective way to maximise our impact and minimise the demands on members. To start with regional action and leave unified national action to the end, however, makes no sense.

TOP DOWN

The whole plan has been designed from the top down taking little or no account of the express views of members.

Whether in surveys, pay rallies, annual conference or local associations, members have repeatedly indicated their willingness to support urgent strike action to defend pay and pensions. This view, however many times expressed, has been ignored and written off as unrepresentative.

The NUT leadership have moved dramatically from a belief that NASUWT involvement is desirable (we agree) to one where it is in effect a condition of NUT action. That's not the public position but it's the only way to make sense of the NUT leaders' decision making since 2011.

As a result of all of the above we have an action plan which has no clear focus, aims or logic. There is a huge gap between its professed objectives (to oppose the pay and pensions attacks) and the real agenda (to stage occasional protests against the government in the run-up to an election in the hope that the problems go away).

At the NUT conference, supporters of the Local Associations National Action Campaign (LANAC) will be pushing for an alternative strategy — although, as the old joke goes, "we wouldn't have started from here".

Despite the mess, it is still possible to agree a more effective and purposeful campaign of action to confront these attacks. LANAC will be demanding that conference declares the 27 June strike a national action rather than a regional one, and that dates for regional and national strikes in the autumn are announced as soon as possible.

Whatever plans come out of conference, LANAC supporters will be working hard to make actions as strong as possible. But if the NUT wants to defeat the government's attacks rather than register a meek protest, it needs to change course.

This text was adapted from an article that will appear in the LANAC bulletin for NUT conference. For more, see nutlan.org.uk