



world revolution

Revolt in universities, colleges, schools: A beacon for the whole working class

A whole series of demonstrations up and down the country, strikes by university, further education, sixth form and secondary school students, occupations in a long list of universities, numerous meetings to discuss the way forward...the student and pupil revolt against the rise in tuition fees and against the abolition of EMA payments is still on the march. Students and those supporting them have come to the demonstrations in high spirits, making their own banners and their own slogans, some of them joining protests for the first time, many of them finding new ways of organising the protests. The strikes, demonstrations and occupations have been anything but the tame events which the trade unions and the 'official' left are usually given the job of marshalling. Spontaneous walk-outs, the taking of Tory HQ at Millbank, the defiance or creative avoidance of police lines, the invasion of town halls and other public spaces, are just some expressions of this openly rebellious attitude. And the disgust at the condemnation of the Millbank demonstrators by NUS chief Aaron Porter was so widespread that he has had to make a grovelling apology.

This outpouring of barely-controlled resistance has worried our rulers. A clear sign of this is the level of police repression used against the demonstrations. On 24th November in London, thousands of demonstrators were kettled by the police within minutes of setting off from Trafalgar Square, and despite some successful attempts to break through the police lines, the forces of order detained thousands of them for hours in the cold. At one point mounted police rode directly through the crowd. In Manchester, at Lewisham Town Hall and elsewhere, we have seen similar displays of brute force. The newspapers are playing their usual role as well, printing photographs of alleged 'wreckers' after Millbank and running scare stories about revolutionary groups targeting the nation's youth with their evil propaganda. All this shows the real nature of the 'democracy' we live under.

The student revolt in the UK is the best answer to the idea that the working class in this country is going to passively put up with the torrent of attacks being launched by the new government (in continuity with the previous government) on every aspect of our living standards: jobs, wages, health, unemployment and disability benefits as well as



Students protest despite violence of police kettle

education. They are a warning to the rulers that a whole new generation of the exploited class does not accept their logic of sacrifice and austerity. In this they are echoing the massive struggles which have shaken Greece, France, and Italy, and which are threatening to explode in Ireland, Portugal and many other countries.

But the capitalist class, facing the deepest economic crisis in its history, is not just going to cave in to our demands. Not ideology, but the very material logic of their dying system compels them to make these attacks. And to force them to make even the most temporary concessions, we have to realise their greatest fear: a working class that is organised, united, and conscious of what it is fighting for.

This is no utopia. It's already taking shape in front of us. The capacity for **self-organisation** can be seen in the initiatives of demonstrators on the streets, and the insistence on collective decision-making in occupations and meetings, the

rejection of manipulation by would-be bureaucrats, however 'left wing' they claim to be. The tendency towards the **unification** of the working class can be seen when teachers and lecturers, parents, pensioners, workers from other sectors or the unemployed take part in general meetings in the occupied university buildings or join the student demonstrations, or when students go to the picket lines of striking tube workers. **Consciousness** about the goals of the movement can be seen both in the formulation of clear demands for today and in the growing recognition that this society cannot offer us a human future.

But we also have to discuss how to take these efforts further, because they are just the beginning. In our view – which we think is based on the experience of both past and present struggles of the working class – there are some concrete steps that can be taken right now, even if their exact form may vary from place to place:

- to keep the struggle under our control, to make sure decisions are made collectively and not imposed from above, we need to organise mass meetings in the schools, college and universities, open to both students and employees. All committees and co-ordinations that speak in the names of these meetings have to be elected and recallable;

- we need to make direct links between different schools, colleges and universities. Don't leave it in the hands of the union apparatus or self-appointed leaders;

- to broaden the movement beyond the education sector, students need to go directly to the employed workers, to the nearest factories, hospitals and offices, calling on them to come to their meetings, to join their occupations and demonstrations, to walk out alongside them and bring their demands into a common fight against austerity and repression.

David Cameron keeps telling us: we are all in it together. And he certainly is in it 'together' with his class and its state and its parties, which includes the Labour Party just as much as the Lib Dems and the Tories. All of **them** are in it to save the capitalist system at our expense. But **we** are in it together with all those who are exploited and oppressed by this system, in every country of the world. Today we are in it to defend ourselves from being exploited even more. Tomorrow we shall be in it to end exploitation altogether.

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Occupations – towards unity and self organisation

The tactic of occupying university buildings has been very widespread throughout the present mobilisation against education fees and cuts. Although they have often involved a determined minority rather than the whole body of staff and students, and without claiming that they have yet achieved a real autonomy from the NUS or the activist networks on its left wing, we would argue that the occupations are still infused with the same proletarian spirit that animates the revolt as a whole. This can be seen in two key aspects: the demands they have raised, and their efforts to apply methods of debate and decision making that reflect the need for workers to control their own struggles.

The demands that the occupations have put forward are not limited to the interests of university students but correspond to wider needs within the working class. A good example is the list of demands agreed by the occupiers at the University of East London:

- 1) We demand that the university pledge not to introduce tuition fee increases.
- 2) The university pledge not to implement cuts, no staff redundancies or wage reduction.
- 3) The London living wage must be immediately implemented for all staff including contracted workers.
- 4) We demand that the Vice Chancellor issues a statement against fees and cuts as well as pressurising other members of the Million Plus group to do the same.
- 5) There must be absolutely no victimisation or

disciplinary action taken against any of the students, staff and representatives involved in this occupation”.

At University College London, the occupation made similar demands, including for an increase in the wages of the cleaning, catering and security staff employed by the university.

At the occupied part of the School of Oriental and African Studies on 2 December, a general meeting rejected the university’s statement aimed at resolving the situation, not only because it didn’t clearly oppose rises in tuition fees, but also because it made no mention of the abolition of Education Maintenance Allowance, an issue for hundreds of thousands of post-16 students.

The SOAS meeting is also a good example of the attempt to turn the occupations into a focus for real general assemblies that are open to all and which have the capacity to vote after a serious discussion. The meeting was attended by a much larger number of students and staff than are usually present at the occupation, and yet it took the decision to continue with the occupation in the face of threats from the university authorities.

The Edinburgh University occupation, which had a strong anarchist presence, was rather more explicit in its support for real decision-making and action ‘from below’: it described itself as “non-hierarchical” and “entirely leaderless” and affirmed that the strength of the occupations up and down the country was that they had been carried out without relying on leaders or student



Bourgeois media focus on trashed van and play down occupations

unions. We may disagree with the alternative being advocated in this statement – a kind of chaotic “swarm” without any attempt to centralise from the bottom up – but these ideas do express a rejection of the kind of premature and manipulative ‘centralisation’ that the leftists are always trying to impose on social movements (See ‘On our chaotic swarm - Edinburgh University Occupation’, libcom.org).

These are just a few examples and this particular movement is very much at the beginning. But

they raise real questions about how in the future we can expect to see a truly unified class movement – raising demands that unify rather than divide, and finding forms of organisation that allow authentic discussion and decision-making to the widest possible number of proletarians. **Amos 4/12/10**

SWP put forward a capitalist ‘alternative’

In the recent wave of demonstrations and occupations by students across Britain there has been a wide range of ideas and slogans put forward. Whether in discussions, on placards, or chanted while marching, the protests have not been limited to ‘Down with the rise in tuition fees!’

The understanding that the increasing problems facing students are not in any way isolated from the experiences of workers, the unemployed, the sick and pensioners is widespread.

It’s because of the range of ideas thrown up, about how to organise the struggle, about the nature of society, that leftist groups like the Socialist Workers Party have thrown a lot of energy into putting their propaganda to students.

Characteristically they are currently selling the idea that the British government could soon be in serious crisis because of the force of the student movement. On the front page of *Socialist Worker* (4/12/10) as they look forward to another episode of parliamentary charades they headline with “When MPs vote on fees it’s... A day to break the coalition”. They claim that “government ministers are in a spin” as students enter into “battle against this vicious Tory-Lib Dem coalition.”

Elsewhere, in the same issue, they say that “The scale of the students’ revolt, and the splits inside the coalition, mean we can stop the attacks on education—and strike a hammer blow at other cuts too.” As they prepare for actions on 9 December there is an insistence that “The student movement has grown in size and militancy over the past three weeks—and if workers and students unite this can be the beginning of the end of the coalition government”. And if others were to copy the response of students, who knows what could happen? For example: “If our trade unions were to take up the Tory’s challenge in the same way as the students, the government’s days would be numbered.”

All this gives the impression of an imminent collapse for the coalition government which doesn’t really tie in with recent experience elsewhere in Europe. Note the scale of recent struggles in Greece, France and Italy and the fact that each government is still in place.

Of course, the focus of the SWP is on a poten-

tially ‘divided’ government, yet the differences between the Tory and LibDem views on the maintenance of capitalist order are mostly superficial – as are both parties’ differences with Labour. After all, in the Labour Party there is a ‘coalition’ between those who emphasise the needs of business and the market economy, while others, on the left, talk of nationalisation, planning and even socialism. This hasn’t stopped Labour’s essential unity in defence of the needs of state capitalism whether managing capitalism in government (for instance introducing student fees) or undermining and diverting workers’ struggles when in opposition.

The struggles of students today are a response to one of the latest attacks of capitalism in Britain. The SWP are trying to drag them into engagement with the parliamentary game. If the current government is ‘vicious’ it is certainly implied that an Ed Miliband Labour party would be an improvement. Although he’s not been portrayed as a left wing figure he is seen as partly breaking with New Labour and Blairism. On his election *Socialist Worker* (2/10/10) observed that “those with some connection to the left and the workers’ movement were chuffed to bits.”

For the SWP the ‘workers’ movement’ means institutions like the unions, the institutions that sabotage workers’ struggles. And yet for many students involved in recent demonstrations and occupations there is a very low level of confidence in the National Union of Students, particularly because of the denunciation of their struggles by some of its leading figures.

The SWP, wherever it finds struggles, tries to rein them back into a focus on parliament, support for the unions and the Labour Party. It also pushes illusions in the possibility that capitalism can be reformed, that it can operate without crises or austerity. *Socialist Worker* (13/11/10) says that “The money is there for education, but the government chooses to spend it on wars, weapons and bailing out the banks.” Imperialist wars and the vital role for finance are not ‘choices’ for the capitalist ruling class. They are at the heart of its very being. There are no alternative ways for capitalism to function. Only the destruction of the wage labour system can bring the satisfaction of human needs.

Car 4/12/10

Leftist networks help unions regain control

As any reader of the *Daily Mail* will know there was “at least one” member of the ICC in at least one meeting of the Education Activist Network in London. But contrary to hysterical media articles, the present student movement against cuts and increased fees is not the creation of either the ICC or the EAN. Nor even of the EAN’s rival National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts. On the contrary, among the most positive signs of militancy has been the ability of the movement to escape the control of the NUS or any other organisation set up in advance to drive in a particular direction. In fact the NUS has been so spectacularly unable to exert control that the EAN and NCAFC have become very prominent. So, what do they represent?

Anyone attending one of the EAN meetings during the struggles cannot fail to be impressed with the number of uni, FE or school students, teachers and others who come with information about the meetings, discussions and intentions for the next day of action, not only from around London but also around the country. That makes the meeting of interest, but it tells us about the movement the organisation is working in, not the nature of the EAN itself.

When discussing “Where next for the movement” the EAN teach-in on 5 December has speakers from the NUT, UCU and the NUS – in other words its perspective for the movement is to take it right back into the clutches of unions, including the NUS, that it has just escaped. They want to oppose “private companies... gaining the power to award degrees...” Here we see the imprint of the SWP and its campaign against privatisation – as if the British state that is actually organising all the attacks were somehow less capitalist and more benign. This is what lies behind the idea of trying to get all the occupations to adopt their predetermined set of demands.

The rival NCAFC promotes itself as non-aligned, but it is an open secret that the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, a Trotskyist group, regard it as their creature and live in fear of it being taken over by Workers Power, a rival Trotskyist group. One former participant concluded “The only difference between the NUS and the NCAFC is that the NUS has the veneer of respectable authority, ... It makes the perfect foil for NCAFC’s postur-

ing as the ‘radical’ wing of the movement. But now the NCAFC have tipped their hand. By trying to rein in student anger and delaying action, they will smother the spark that has been lighting this country up from Brighton to Aberdeen. ... the NCAFC attempted to turn a day of action that they co-opted into a day of leftist dogma and rhetoric. The NCAFC will try to sanitise this movement just as the NUS have.”¹ In fact he shows how they too want to drag students back into the NUS fold.

So what about People’s Assemblies being called for by the SWP and others? Haven’t we heard good things about assemblies in France trying to take control of their own struggles against the unions? Unfortunately the notion of “Build a People’s Assembly movement”, “democratic bodies representing everyone in a community”, sponsored by various organisations and individuals starting with The Right to Work Campaign, may take the same name, but it doesn’t have any good French wine in the bottle. This is another attempt to set up a body in advance, define a “template”, and persuade students, workers, and others to fit their struggle into it. In reality, these ‘Assemblies’ usually boil down to meetings organised by the leftist networks and taking decisions on behalf of a much larger number of people.

So far the student movement has escaped control by the NUS, but that is not enough. Like any movement or struggle, if it does not find the means to organise itself, other more radical versions are waiting in the wings, making themselves useful and even indispensable by providing info on their facebook and websites, but with the aim of taking control of the movement and dragging it back into the arms of unions and the left. That is why we need genuine self-organisation, mass meetings that discuss the perspectives and decide on actions. **Alex 4.12.10**

1. <http://libcom.org/library/national-campaign-against-cuts-fees-insider-perspective-leftist-dead-end>

Britain: economic crisis and imperialist dead-ends

We are publishing here the first part of the resolution on the British situation adopted at the recent Congress of the ICC's section in the UK. The second part, which looks at the political life of the bourgeoisie and the class struggle, will be published in a future issue, along with a summary of the main debates at the Congress.

Crisis

1. Between 2007 and 2009 capitalism experienced a profound crisis. Starting with the collapse of the housing bubble in the US the crisis spread through the financial markets to the manufacturing and service sectors, drawing the developed economies into recession and slowing the rate of growth in emerging economies like China and India. Credit dried up or became increasingly costly, as financial institutions feared to lend to one another in case their money was not repaid and their own existence was put in question. This crisis exposed the structural weakness underlying all of the spectacular growth of recent years. This weakness is capitalism's inability to accumulate according to the basic laws of the production and realisation of surplus value. The speculative bubble arose from the difficulty of finding profitable outlets for capital; the credit crunch reflected the bourgeoisie's recognition of this. One of the main responses has been the resort to debt to try and keep the economy functioning. Although capitalism has returned to growth over the last two years the structural issues have not been resolved. In particular the weight of debt worries the international bourgeoisie.

2. The recession in Britain has been the deepest since the Second World War with a peak to trough fall of 6.4%. Even after several quarters of growth, GDP was still 4.7% below its pre-recession level in the second half of 2010. The bursting of the housing bubble, which had helped to fuel the British economy, led to sharp drops in house prices and sharply reduced the growth in personal borrowing that had been at the heart of the economic growth under Blair and Brown. The manufacturing sector was the most severely hit and the construction sector was savaged with a fall of nearly a third. The impact on the service sector was greater than in previous recessions and its weight in the economy meant that it contributed most to the overall decline in GDP. Imports and exports in both manufacturing and services fell as global trade declined. The number of companies going bankrupt escalated from twelve and a half thousand in 2007 to nineteen thousand in 2009. The stock market reacted with a sharp decline from mid 2007 to early 2009 with its recovery punctuated in early 2010 as fears of highly indebted countries defaulting on their loans spread. The pound fell more sharply against other currencies than since the breakdown of the Bretton Woods Agreement in the early 1970s.

3. The crisis posed a particular threat to Britain because of its reliance on the financial sector. From the last part of the 19th century, Britain exploited its empire and its position as the "world's banker" to compensate for the loss of its manufacturing dominance; this tendency was further accentuated after the First World War. Following the Second World War and the US's assertion of its dominance Britain was forced to look for other ways of appropriating a share of the global surplus value. The route it took was to develop its financial sector with the result that this went from accounting for about 1.5% of profits between 1948 and 1970 to 15% today. The state has supported this development with successive governments from Thatcher onwards pursuing the liberalisation of the financial markets. By 2006 the assets of British banks totalled more than five times the national GDP. In comparison, US banking assets rose from 20% to 100% of GDP over the same period. The spectacular growth in assets was matched by the equally spectacular decline of the banks' capital ratio, which fell from 15-20% at the start of the 20th century to just 5% at its end. All of this meant that when the crash came the

British economy was particularly exposed and the bourgeoisie was confronted with a threat not only to its financial sector but also to the economy as a whole and to Britain's international status.

4. The immediate response of the British bourgeoisie reflected the scale of the threat facing it. The state did not hesitate to assert itself to defend its class interests. Despite its ideology about the greater efficiency of the free market, the bourgeoisie did not hesitate to nationalise some banks and force others to merge. It cut interest rates to the lowest level on record and effectively below the rate of inflation. It injected £200bn of "quantitative easing" into the economy and gave guarantees to the banks worth hundreds of billions of pounds in the name of kick starting lending and, thereby, the whole process of accumulation (in fact the banks mainly used this fictitious capital to restore their finances and resume speculation). It cut VAT and introduced the car scrappage scheme to try and stimulate consumption. It even used terrorism laws against the Icelandic banks. The total cost of this intervention was £121.5bn in 2009 and the immediate consequence was a rapid increase in the total state debt to £926.9bn in July 2010. The effect was to prevent any further bank collapses, to stabilise the financial sector and facilitate the modest recovery recently seen.

5. Today the bourgeoisie has moved from the immediate containment of the effects of the crisis to an attempt to restore the profitability and standing of British capitalism. The first step in this is to try and reduce the national debt in the name of winning the confidence of the financial markets. This is the immediate purpose of the attacks on pay and conditions. The problem of such large debts is that in addition to the interest payments being a further deduction from the total surplus value produced – and hence a deduction from future profits unless the proportion of the value produced that goes to the working class can be reduced – its existence poses questions about the long term capacity of the economy to produce profits. The second is to reduce the cost of labour and the amount of the national product taken by the state in the medium to long term in order to increase the productivity and competitiveness of British manufacturing and services and hence the profits available to the capitalist class. In this effort a renewed importance is being given to manufacturing which, despite its continued decline, is still a significant part of the economy, especially as regards exports where it accounts for a much larger proportion of the total than the service sector.

6. The recession did not affect the working class as severely as might have been expected during its official phase. In particular, although unemployment went up by nearly a million, the increase was less than in previous recessions and one million less than indicated by the fall in GDP. One of the reasons for this was that the decisive intervention of the state limited the immediate impact of the recession, protecting both industry and the workers employed from the full force of the crisis. The other was that the working class accepted low wage settlements, reductions in hours and other changes to its working conditions as the price of keeping jobs. However, as in past recessions it is likely that unemployment will continue to rise for several years after the formal end of the recession and it is now clear that there will be unprecedented cuts in the social wage in the years ahead. In this sense the intervention by the state can be seen as a way of spreading the impact of the recession in order to minimise its social consequences while still achieving its 'beneficial' outcomes of destroying surplus capital, eliminating the least competitive producers and reducing the cost of labour. For

the working class this will add to a situation that is already characterised by high levels of hidden unemployment and underemployment. Moreover the state has indicated its determination to force workers off benefits such as incapacity – one of the means previously used to hide the real rate of employment – into low-paid work or lower rate benefits. Most workers already have high levels of personal debt in the form of mortgages and unsecured borrowing; and although the rate at which it is increasing has slowed under the weight of the crisis, it still amounts to nearly one and half trillion pounds, or more than the total produced in the country each year. The consequences of this can be seen in the increase in the number of people effectively going bankrupt. It also finds a reflection in the increase in poverty over the last few years, from 18% to 22% of the population. In short, while the immediate effects of the recession have been slightly muted, the situation of the working class has become more precarious over recent decades and is likely to worsen in those ahead.

7. What are the perspectives for British capitalism? This cannot be separated from that of capitalism as a whole where growth of some kind will continue. Official figures are already showing several quarters of increasing GDP – slower in the developed economies, faster in the emerging ones. This is to be expected since capitalism cannot exist without expansion, without growth. However, the basis of growth in recent decades has been the use of increasing amounts of fictitious capital and a global reduction in the proportion of value taken by the working class (one of the main results of China's entry into the global economy has been to reduce the cost of labour power by massively increasing its supply). The repeated flight of capital – fictitious or otherwise – to speculation rather than production suggests that the underlying conditions for the production and realisation of surplus value remain weak. Given this, the conditions that historically pushed Britain towards reliance on the financial sector will not be overcome and the attempt to raise the competitiveness of British manufacturing will meet the challenge that all are trying to do the same and that many are in a better starting position. This does not mean that there can be no change in the economy, just that such changes will almost certainly be only marginal. To illustrate the scale of the problem confronting the bourgeoisie, a recent report revealed that the total (public and private) debt of the UK will reach £10.2 trillion by 2015, nearly six times GDP. The bulk of this debt is held by the private sector, giving the lie to the current ideology that it is government debt that is the main problem. British capitalism as a whole is bankrupt and this will undoubtedly be expressed in further and deeper convulsions.

Imperialism

8. The imperialist situation continues to be largely defined by the drawn out crisis of American imperialism as its ability to dominate the globe other than through shows of military strength continues to decline, and by the increasing complexity of the situation as the lesser powers seize the chance to advance their own interests. This is especially evident in the area comprising Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq where a range of strategic and economic interests collides. For the US it increasingly resembles a trap where leaving carries as many risks as staying.

9. British imperialism is also struggling in the impasse that it got into as a result of the failure of its imperialist policy under Blair. The attempt by Blair to adapt to the American offensive that followed 9/11 led to Britain being sucked into the chaos in Iraq and Afghanistan with the result that its position on the world stage became further weakened, continuing the decline seen for much of the previous century. Attempts to assume international leadership, such as during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and at the Copenhagen climate change summit, have been rebuffed, leaving Blair and Brown sidelined and humiliated. This humiliation has continued, first in Iraq where the British

Lion withdrew with its tail between its legs after its failure to control the situation in Basra, and then in Afghanistan with its failure to contain the conflict in Helmand province. In both cases the US had to come in and sort things out. However, for now Britain is hanging on in Afghanistan because it considers it necessary to keep at least a toehold in this centre of imperialist conflict.

10. Despite these failures the British bourgeoisie has not given up the pursuit of its imperialist interests around the globe. Forced to recognise the decline in its status and power it has not given up the ambition or the pretence to be a significant global player. Even before the election there were efforts to develop an approach that would escape the impasse by adopting a new approach that reached out beyond the dominance of the US and Germany (as the main power in Europe). The coalition has begun to try to develop this in practice, most notably through Cameron's foreign tour in July 2010 when he proposed taking a more robust approach towards the US and sought to cultivate better relationships with powers such as Turkey and India. The support for Turkey's application to join the EU seems designed to water down German domination of Europe by expanding it and bringing in countries that may be more hostile. The treaties signed with France to increase co-operation may indeed have a practical dimension, as has been emphasised in the media, but they are also seem to be an attempt to counter German and US influence.

11. The pursuit of economic interests is being given a greater significance in the new strategy being put together. This was evident in the trip to India in July 2010 when a deal to sell military equipment was signed, and has been confirmed in the visit to China in November 2010 with the proposed signing of deals to supply the Chinese market, reportedly worth several billion pounds. The reason for this development is the economic crisis and the attempt to build up the role of manufacturing in order to counter the dependence of the British economy on the financial sector and its consequent vulnerability to further crises when future speculative bubbles burst.

12. Despite these efforts British imperialism will find it very difficult to find a way out of the impasse and all but impossible to regain the power it has lost. At a practical level, the scale of the cuts in the defence budget means that it will be less able to intervene. The contradiction between its ambitions and this reality is revealed in the almost comic decision to build aircraft carriers without any aircraft. At the strategic and political level it has to continue to acknowledge the reality of American power in the world and German domination in Europe. While the growing imperialist power of China and to a lesser extent other emerging countries like India offer new fields for action it is unlikely that the former will become a serious challenger to the US in the near future while the latter remains focussed on its regional ambitions. Moreover the imperialist situation will continue to be characterised by great complexity since there is no real dynamic towards the formation of new blocs that would impose some order on the situation. The inescapable reality for Britain is that like most of the lesser powers it is dependent on grasping opportunities from the evolution of a situation that is shaped by greater or better positioned powers. Increasing the size of the special forces may enhance its ability to undertake covert operations but these can rarely gain more than tactical victories. In terms of developing networks beyond the major powers Britain has relatively little to offer such powers while the baggage it still carries from the days of empire and the legacy of its arrogance towards lesser powers and peoples that it retained even after the sun set on the empire is a hurdle to forging alliances of any duration or stability.

Struggling behind the unions leads to defeat

The movement of struggle against the pension reforms has lasted eight months so far.

Workers and employees of all sectors have regularly come into the streets in their millions. Since September more or less radical strike movements have appeared here and there, expressing a profound and growing discontent. This mobilisation is the broadest in France since the crisis which shook the world financial system in 2007-8. It is not only a response to the pension reform itself but, in its breadth and depth, it is a clear response to the violence of the attacks over the last couple of years. Behind this reform, and the other attacks being prepared at the same time, we see the whole working class and other strata in the population being pushed further into poverty, precariousness and misery. And these attacks aren't even close to ending because of the inexorable deepening of the economic crisis. This struggle is clearly only the harbinger of others following on from those in Greece and Spain in the face of drastic austerity measures.

However, despite the massive and impressive size of this reaction, the government has not given way. On the contrary, it is unwavering, despite the pressure in the streets, relentlessly affirming its firm will to push through this attack, constantly and cynically repeating that it is 'necessary', in the name of 'solidarity' between the generations. Everyone knows this is a great lie, almost a provocation.

At the time of writing the mobilisation is retreating and it is certain that the reform will be achieved for the bourgeoisie. Why is that? Why is this measure, which is a blow to the very heart of our working conditions, and when the whole population has so powerfully expressed its indignation, passed in spite of everything?

Why has this massive movement not succeeded in pushing back the government?

Because the government is sure the unions have control of the situation, unions which have always accepted the principle of a 'necessary reform' of pensions! All the left parties, which have tried to graft themselves onto the mobilisation to avoid losing all credibility, are also fully agreed on the necessity of this attack on the working class. After all, they voted for it.

We can compare it with the movement against the CPE in 2006. This movement, treated with great suspicion by the media at first as a futureless "student revolt", ended by forcing the government to withdraw the CPE.

Why did that movement meet with success?

First of all because the students were organised in mass meetings (general assemblies) open to all, making no distinction between categories, public or private, at work or unemployed, etc. This surge of confidence in the capacities and strength of the working class, of profound solidarity in struggle, created a dynamic of extension in the movement, a breadth drawing in all generations. On the one hand the mass meetings aimed to hold the widest possible discussions, without being confined to the problems of students; on the other hand we saw demonstrations by workers mobilised alongside the university students and numerous school students.

But it was also because of the students' determination and openness, drawing fractions of the working class into open struggle, not falling for union manoeuvres. On the contrary, when the unions and especially the CGT tried to place themselves at the head of the demonstrations to take control of them, university and school students overflowed the union banners several times, clearly showing that they did not want to be reduced to an after-thought when they had taken the initiative in the movement. Above all they showed their intention to keep control of the struggle themselves and not hand it over to the union leadership.

In fact one of the most disturbing things for the bourgeoisie was the way the students organised their struggle, the sovereign general assemblies, electing their coordination committees, and open to all. The student union often had a low profile, not making much ground among the workers when they went on strike. It is no accident that

during the movement Thibault, head of the CGT, often said that workers have nothing to learn on how to organise from students. If the students had their assemblies and coordinations, workers had confidence in their unions.

In the context of such a determined movement showing the danger of overflowing the unions, Villepin had to give something up as this was the bourgeoisie's last protection against the explosion of massive struggles which risked making a breakthrough.

With the movement against the pension reform the unions, often actively supported by the police and media, were able to do enough to take the high ground, seeing what was coming and getting themselves organised for it.

The Intersyndicale in the service of the government

From the beginning we saw a division of labour among the unions, with the Force Ouvrière holding its own separate demonstrations, while the Intersyndicale (inter-union coalition) organised the day of action on 23 March, aimed at 'tying up' the reform after negotiation with the government, and two other days of action on 26 March and especially 24 June, just before the summer holidays. We know that days of action at this time of year are often the coup de grace for working class when it is facing a major attack. Alas for the bourgeoisie and its unions, this last day of action showed an unexpected mobilisation, with more than double the number of workers, unemployed, or temporary workers, etc, in the streets. And while the first two days of action were gloomy affairs, as underlined by the press, anger and the feeling that enough is enough were evident on 24 June.

So, under the pressure of this open discontent and faced with a growing consciousness about the implications of this reform for our living conditions, the unions found themselves constrained to organise another day of action on 7 September, this time calling for the unity of trade unions. Since then, none have failed to call for the days of action which attracted around 3 million workers on several occasions.

But this "Intersyndicale" unity is a trap for the working class, destined to convince them that the unions are really determined to organise a broad offensive against the reform and that the way to do this is repeated days of action in which we watch and hear their leaders, arm in arm, engaging in their discourse on the 'continuation' of the movement and other lies. What they dread above all is that the workers escape the union shackles and organise themselves. This is what Thibault, secretary general of the CGT, said which "sent a message" to the government in an interview in *Le Monde* on 10 September: "*We could be going towards a blockage, towards a broad social crisis. It's possible. But it wasn't us that took this risk*", giving the following example to make his point better on what the unions see is at stake: "*We even found a SME without any union where 40 out of 44 workers were on strike. This is a sign. The more intransigence dominates, the more the idea of repeated strikes gains strength.*"

If the unions were not there workers would organise themselves and not only really decide what they want to do but risk doing it massively. Union leaderships, and particularly the CGT, have zealously worked to prevent this: putting themselves centre stage socially and in the media, all the while preventing any real expression of workers' solidarity on the ground. In brief, an out and out barrage on the one hand and on the other activity aiming to sterilise the movement and marshal it behind false alternatives in order to create division, confusion and better lead it to defeat.

The refinery blockade is the most obvious example. When these workers, who were already very militant, showed an increasing will to express their solidarity with the whole working class against the pension reform, and particularly confronted with drastic personal reductions, the CGT wanted to transform this solidarity into a high profile strike. So, the refinery blockade was never truly decided in the mass meetings where workers could really express their point of view, but had been decided according to the manoeuvres that union leaders

specialise in. So the workers were pushed into a dead-end action, spoiling the discussion. However, in spite of being locked into this by the unions, some refinery workers sought to make contact with workers in other sectors. But, overall, caught up in the logic of the 'complete blockade', the majority of refinery workers were trapped in the union notion of keeping to the factory, a real blow against the broadening of the fight. In fact, while the refinery workers wanted to reinforce the movement to push back the government, the blockade of the depots unfolding under union leadership proved to be a weapon of the bourgeoisie and unions against the workers. Not only to isolate them in the refineries, but to make their strike unpopular by causing panic buying and threatening a more general fuel shortage. The press prolifically spreading its venom against those 'taking us hostage, preventing people from getting to work or leave on holiday'. The workers in this industry also found themselves isolated; when they wanted to contribute with a solid struggle and create a relation of force in favour of the withdrawal of the reform, this particular blockade was turned against them and against the objective that they initially intended.

There were numerous similar union actions, in areas such as transport, and preferably in regions with fewer workers, for at all costs the unions want to reduce the risk of extension and active solidarity. They must play to the gallery and appear to orchestrate the most radical struggles, and choreograph the work of the different unions in the demonstration, all to spoil it in reality.

As was said in the leaflet from the "AG interpro" at the Gare de l'Est on 6 November: "*The strength of the workers does not only lie in blockading a petrol depot here or there or even a factory. The strength of the workers is to unite in their workplaces, over and above their job category, where they work, for which enterprise or industry, and to make decisions together...*"

We have seen the unions united in one "Intersyndicale" everywhere, all the better to promote the appearance of unity, setting up the appearance of mass meetings without any real debate, caught up in the most corporatist preoccupations, all the while publicly adhering to their pretended will to fight 'for all' and 'all together'... but each organised separately, behind its little union chief, and doing everything to prevent massive delegations searching for solidarity in neighbouring enterprises.

A movement rich in perspectives

On the other hand there has been nothing at all in the media about the numerous interprofessional committees or general assemblies which formed during this period, committees and assemblies whose aim is to remain organised outside the unions and to develop discussions that are really open to all workers, as well as to organise autonomous actions which all workers can not only recognise but also and above all participate in massively.

Besides, the unions are not the only ones to impede such a mobilisation, for Sarkozy's police, with their reputation for pretended stupidity and anti-left spirit, have been an indispensable aid to the unions on several occasions through their provocations. Example? The incidents at the Place Bellegour in Lyons, where the presence of a handful of 'rioters' (possibly manipulated by the cops) was the pretext for a violent police repression against hundreds of young school students, the majority of them only wanting to discuss with workers at the end of the demonstration.

Here we see what the bourgeoisie particularly fears: that contacts build up and multiply as widely as possible in the working class, young, old, at work, unemployed.

Today the movement is on the way to being extinguished and it is necessary to draw the lessons of this defeat.

1. We consider these as real expressions of the needs of the workers' struggle. They have nothing to do with the coordinations orchestrated by the unions and leftist organisations, often under-hand, and which we have denounced many times during the railworkers' struggle in 1986 and again during the heathworkers' movement in 1988.

The first lesson to draw is that it was the union apparatus that allowed the attack on workers to be passed and that this was not the only time. They were doing their dirty work, for which all the specialists and sociologists, as well as the government and Sarkozy himself, saluted their 'sense of responsibility'. Yes, the bourgeoisie can, without hesitation, congratulate itself on having 'responsible' unions capable of smashing such a broad movement and at the same time making it appear that they did everything possible to allow it to develop. This is still the same union apparatus which stifled and marginalised the real expressions of autonomous class struggle.

However, this defeat bears many fruits; for despite all the efforts of all the bourgeoisie's forces to seal off any breaches where workers' anger escaped, they have not succeeded in dragging it into the general defeat of a sector as they did in 2003 (see *IR* 114), when the struggle against public sector cuts gave way to a bitter retreat among workers in education after several weeks on strike.

This movement is coming to an end. But "*the attack is only beginning. We have lost a battle, we have not lost the war. The bourgeoisie has declared the class war on us and we still have the means to conduct it*" (leaflet entitled "*No-one can struggle, take decisions or win in our place*" signed by the workers and precarious workers of the inter-professional general assembly at the Gare de l'Est and Ile-de-France, already quoted above). To defend ourselves we have no choice but to extend and develop our struggles massively and to take them into our own hands.

"Have confidence in our own strength" must be the slogan for tomorrow. **WW 6.11.10.** Translated from our paper in France, *Révolution Internationale*, no 417

ICC online

Recent additions

Workers and students in revolt

Daily Mail Exposes ICC Plot
Tabloid hysteria about 'foreign subversives'

Testimony on the repression meted out at the demonstration of October 19 at Lyon in France
French police use the kettling tactic too

Tekel- Turkey: Passing on the experience of the class struggle
Tour in Europe by a member of the Tekel workers' struggle group

Catastrophes

Environmental disaster in Hungary: When the Blue Danube Waltz turns into a Danse Macabre

Cholera epidemic in Haiti: the bourgeoisie is a class of assassins

War

Tensions mount between North Korea, China and the USA

en.internationalism.org

Attempts to struggle outside union control

Below we are publishing two leaflets that demonstrate the effort on the part of what is still a very small minority of the working class to take control of its own struggles¹. The first one was written and adopted by the general assembly (GA) in Saint-Sernin (Toulouse). The second was produced by some individual participants in the inter-professions GA at

1. We have begun to put any information that demonstrates this on our discussion forum (<http://fr.internationalism.org/forum/312/tibo/4365/pre-nous-nos-luttes-main#comment-1685>). Of course we encourage all our readers to not only distribute this information but also to keep us informed of any initiatives that we haven't yet heard of, by posting them on our forum, for example.

Leaflet of a group of individuals from the GA at the Gare de l'Est (Paris)

ADDRESS to all workers

At the initiative of railway workers from the Gare de l'Est and some teachers on 18th September, around a hundred of us who are salaried workers (from rail, education, postal, farm-produce and computer sectors...), retired, unemployed, students, workers 'with papers' and without, unionised and non-unionised, joined forces on 28th September and 5th October to discuss pensions and the broader attacks they are inflicting on us and the perspectives for making the government withdraw the attacks.

Thousands of us demonstrated and came out on strike on the recent days of action. **The government still didn't concede anything. Only a mass movement will make it do that.** That understanding is emerging following discussion around the indefinite, general, renewable strike and putting a block on the economy...

We can decide the form that the movement will take. **We have to build it with strike committees in our workplaces and with sovereign general assemblies (GAs) in our neighbourhoods.** We must unite the largest possible numbers of the working population, **coordinated at the national scale with elected and revocable delegates. We have to decide the forms of action to take and our demands...** And not let anyone else do it.

Letting union leaders, Chèreque (CFDT), Thibault (CGT) and Cie take decisions for us, will lead to fresh defeats. **Chèreque supports 42 years of pension contributions.** We no longer have confidence in **Thibault after he didn't call for the legislation to be withdrawn**, just as we can't forget how in 2009 he drank champagne with Sarkozy while thousands of us were laid off, leaving us all to struggle all on our own. We haven't got confidence in so-called "radicals" anymore. **Mailly (FO) shows his radicalism by shaking hands with Aubry on the demo while the PS (Socialist Party) votes for contributions of 42 years.** As regards Southern-Solidarity, the CNT² or the far left (LO, NPA), they have **no other perspective to offer us than uniting the unions. That's to say uniting us behind those who want to negotiate a retreat.**

If today **they are pushing the case for renewable strikes, it's above all to avoid things getting out of their control. Controlling our struggles is what entitles them to be present at the negotiating table...** why? So that, as it was written in the letter signed by seven union organisations in the CFDT to Solidarity, **"to get across the union organisations' viewpoint with a perspective of defining all the correct and effective measures to guarantee the sustainability of the pensions' system by sharing out the costs."** Can anyone believe for a moment that it's possible to deal with those who've attacked our pensions since 1993, with those who have led a methodical demolition of our living and working conditions?

The only unity that can force the government and ruling class to back down is the grass roots movement uniting public and private, employed and unemployed, retired workers and youth, domestic and immigrant, union and non-union in joint assemblies and by taking control of our struggles ourselves. We think that **withdrawing the pensions' legislation is our minimum demand.** That's not enough though. Hundreds of thousands of elderly workers are already expected to exist with less than 700 euros a month, while hundreds of thousands of young people scrape by with RSA³ owing to a lack of jobs. **For millions of us, we are already facing questions of whether we will be able to eat, be able to house ourselves or if our health will suffer. That's what we don't want.**

Yes, the attacks on pensions are the tip of the iceberg. Since the crisis began, the ruling class with the help of the state has thrown hundreds of thousands of workers onto the street by cutting thousands of jobs from the public services. And this is only the beginning. **The crisis continues and the attacks on us are going to get more and more brutal.**

To deal with the situation **we must not put our trust in the left wing parties (PS, PCF, PG ...). They still loyally manage the affairs of the bourgeoisie and never question private industrial and financial property or large-scale land ownership.** Moreover in Spain, as in Greece, **it is the Left in government who are organising the offensive of Capital against the workers.** To protect our pensions, health, education, transport system and **so as not to starve, workers will have to take back the wealth they produce to satisfy their needs.**

In this struggle, we must not appear to be defending any vested interests but those of the whole working population, including the small farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, small shopkeepers, who are plunged into poverty with the capitalist crisis. We have to give them a lead and put ourselves at the forefront of all the struggles to better take the struggle to Capital.

Whether working, unemployed, in temporary jobs, working 'without papers', and whatever nationality we are, the whole working population is in the same boat.

Come along and discuss in the inter-professions GA Tuesday 12th October at 6 pm and Wednesday 13th October at 5 pm. Union building at Métro République

A group of full-time and temporary workers from the inter-professions GA at the Gare de l'Est
(lecole_duraille_trenteseptcinq@yahoogroupes.fr)
8th October 2010

2. The CNT referred to here is almost certainly not the one mentioned above as playing a role in the formation of general assemblies., the CNT-AIT, which split from the CNT now generally referred to as 'CNT-Vignoles' precisely because of its efforts to play the role of a 'normal' trade union.

3. *Revenu de Solidarité Active, a new term for social security payments.*

the Gare de l'Est (train station in Paris). There are many other examples. In Tours or in Rennes, workers have participated in inter-professional GAs. Almost everywhere in France, the CNT-AIT (anarcho-syndicalist) has initiated popular and autonomous assemblies.

Today as the movement in France has died down these meetings have often become more like struggle groups which provide a space for militant workers from different sectors to come together and prepare for the next round of battles.

"The emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves" (Karl Marx).

Leaflet of the GA of Saint-Sernin (Toulouse)

Faced with Sarkozy, the media and the police state all determined to smash the current struggle and to discredit it with the most shameful provocations, we say:

Unemployed, retired, temporary and full-time workers, students in higher education and those still in school,

Affirm your unity and take control of your struggles!

The mobilisation and enthusiasm of last Tuesday's demonstration was immense. We have strength in numbers, we now have to deepen our consciousness of the fact that only by taking the struggle into our own hands, by conducting the broadest possible discussion, by uniting across all sectors, with the support of temporary and unemployed workers and students, can we really succeed in imposing the will of the broad masses.

Let's not delay in opening the GAs to everyone, let's decide on joint actions that extend the struggle and spread solidarity! Let's share our experience of the recent picketing and blockades; let's send delegations of support, let's coordinate our work. Isn't it time we took the struggle to the biggest sectors of all: Thales, Airbus? The only "violent acts" of ours are in wanting to spread the strike. The real violence comes from the state which generates it and provokes it too.

Solidarity with the victims of repression! This struggle of ours is shared by others like those in Spain and Greece: in every country the working class is suffering at the hands of Capital and its irrepressible thirst for accumulation. **The working class in every country is counting on our victory for their future struggles!**

Let's get together and share information and perspectives for the struggle in the GA at the end of the demonstration, but also on every evening this week: Union building, Place Saint-Sernin – 6 pm.

Leaflet written by the retired, unemployed and employed workers and students at the union building 20/10/2010.

<http://saint-sernin.internationalisme.fr>

Italy, Greece, the revolt is international

The movement of student protest is clearly international. High school and college students played a leading role in the movements in Greece at the end of 2008, following the police murder of a young anarchist, and they have been active in the various general strikes against the government's austerity packages. The movement in Greece in 2008 showed a very high degree of internationalism in many of its declarations, and we saw this again on 2 December, when 2000 Greek students, also fighting their own government's education 'reforms', marched on the British embassy to express their solidarity with the student protests in the UK. After clashes with the police, 5 students were arrested, after which the march proceeded to the police station to demand their immediate release.

In France this autumn, university and high school students were massively involved in the widespread mobilisations against the government's attack on pensions, just as they had been in the movement against the 'CPE' (a law underlining the precariousness of employment for those in their first jobs) in 2006.

But at the time of writing, there is an even bigger battle going on in Italy against the 'Gelmini reform' which uses the trick of privatisation to push through budget cuts and increased fees. Here is an extract from the blog Italy Calling (<http://italycalling.wordpress.com>), written on 1 December and also published on www.libcom.org:

"Last night the Chamber of Deputies approved the Gelmini reform. 307 votes in favour, 252 against, 7 abstained. The reform will be passed over to the Senate on 9th December for its 3rd reading, then to the Chamber of Deputies again for the final vote.

Today thousands of students went back to the streets. Assemblies and meetings are being held all over the place to decide about mobilisation tactics for the next few days, and many more schools, col-

leges and faculties have been occupied.

In Naples, students have occupied the train station. Up until 3pm all train circulation was completely stopped. In Bologna, students have occupied the Council House. The local airport has been broken into again in Pisa. In Palermo the students spent last night in the occupied Council House. Faculties and schools already occupied have decided to keep the occupations going till the 14th December, when the Chamber of Deputies will give its final vote.

Yesterday's protests paralysed Italy: At least 18 major train stations were completely stopped for hours; motorways and airports were targeted for direct action and pickets. Other targets, just like in the last few days, were monuments and government buildings. The protests got fiery in Rome when students gathered outside Montecitorio (Chamber of Deputies) and tried to break in just when the Chamber was voting on the reform. Marches in the city centre very violently charged by the police, who used teargas"

Many will be reminded of the student protests of the 1960s, which were often the swallow announcing the summer of workers' strikes in many countries, most notably France in 1968 and Italy in 1969. But today 'higher education' is far less a privilege of people from better-off families. A far larger proportion of young proletarians expect to go to university as part of their training for a life of wage labour – and many are also compelled to work part time to fund their studies. The present revolt in the universities and schools is much more directly a part of the working class struggle in general; and it is much more strongly supported by the working class as a whole, who see their own children struggling against government attacks which are part of the general austerity offensive of the capitalist state. The promise of direct solidarity between students and workers is already beginning to be realised. **Amos 4/12/10**

Continued from page 6

A proletarian debate

of the present writer, this presentation confirmed a feeling that the ICC underestimated the anti-poll tax movement of the time, tending to stress the dangers of 'inter-classism' when, as the speaker showed, many of its expressions were definitely on a working class terrain, part of the 'real movement' of the proletariat that provides a good antidote to the actual 'inter-classist' approach embodied in the community reformism articulated by the speaker from Liberty and Solidarity earlier on.

The meeting ran out of time at this point. The only problem with this was that there was no opportunity to discuss what happens next: is the day school a one off or will it be a basis for more regular meetings on the model of the Manchester and Midlands discussion forums? We certainly hope that the latter will be the case and we will support it in whatever way we can. A number of the participants stayed for drinks at the bar afterwards where a lot more informal discussion took place in a very friendly atmosphere. The whole day had been a very clear expression of what we would describe as a 'proletarian culture of debate'. **Amos 27/11/10**

A proletarian debate in Edinburgh

On 20 November we took part in the Edinburgh Class Struggle Day School. The initiative for this meeting came from the Edinburgh Group of the Anarchist Federation, although it also seems that the example of the Manchester Class Struggle Forum played an important part in the decision to organise it. Up to 40 people took part at different times during the day. A fair number belonged to anarchist groups like the Anarchist Federation (which seems to have the strongest presence at the university), Solidarity Federation and Liberty and Solidarity, while others would probably define themselves as left communists.

Workers' Assemblies

The first presentation was made by a member of the Solidarity Federation and was on the subject of workers' assemblies. He spoke about the experiences in Puerto Real in Spain, and his own personal experiences in South Africa, where he had worked in a factory and been involved in the creation of a workers' assembly that had shaken the bosses with its determination and its ability to unify the workforce. He stressed a number of points about assemblies which we strongly agreed with, and which were taken up in the discussion that followed: assemblies are not the expression of a particular political tendency or organisation, or of a coalition between them, but express the unified will of the workers in a given workplace or area. They alone allow workers in struggle to control the results of any negotiations with the bosses, as opposed to entrusting 'specialists' in the form of union officials,

Two strands of the ensuing discussion seem to us to be the most significant. On the question of political coalitions, there was a view among some present that anarchists may not like forming coalitions with leftist or reformist groups but in the present circumstances, where there is a real fight against the cuts to be organised, they have to be realistic and take part in such alliances or fronts. Opinions among the AF members present seemed to be divided on this point. But in this and subsequent discussions we found ourselves in agreement with the Solfed comrade who argued that assemblies take us beyond this dilemma. Certainly all kinds of political organisations will have members in the assemblies – there is no question of debates within them staying 'neutral' towards political questions – but decisions are made by the assembly itself and not through negotiations between political groups or factions. The other point raised the question of the shop stewards and their relationship to assemblies or mass meetings. They are not full time officials and usually continue working alongside their workmates, but the problem is whether their ultimate loyalty is towards the workers who elect them or the union whose apparatus they also represent. On this point there were two clearly opposed views expressed: one by a member of Liberty and Solidarity, who made a plea on behalf of the National Shop Stewards Network as a vehicle for fighting the present attacks, the other by an ICC comrade who insisted that in the final analysis shop stewards are part of the union machine and have to defend it if they want to remain shop stewards, even when it means going against their own workmates. For us – and we think for others as well – the main point is that it is the mass meetings not the union apparatus that should be in charge of mobilising the workers.

Community Organising

The next session, on community organising, was introduced by a member of Liberty and Solidarity. The present writer is not very well informed about this group but it appears to be a 'platformist' split from the AF, aligned with groups like the Workers' Solidarity Movement in Ireland. We have noted that most of the 'platformist' groups today seem to represent what one might call the "neo-Trotskyist" wing of anarchism and this was certainly the case with the speaker on community organising, who came under a good deal of criticism (and not just from ourselves) for his ultra-pragmatic approach which talked about the possibilities of working with councillors, faith groups and even the police ("tactically", of course) as part of the

process of establishing a "left libertarian" presence within the community organising networks. Further justified umbrage was taken at statements along the lines of "doing things for the workers" which confirm the approach of an emerging local bureaucracy tied to the existing (state) institutions. The main merit of this session is that it allowed people to see more clearly the dangers of a purely reformist approach to struggles outside the workplace.

Fighting the cuts

The next session – which replaced a more historical one on syndicalism in the UK, since the intended speaker was ill – was a general round up of comrades' involvement in the current struggles against cuts, particularly in the education sector. The question of coalitions came up again, as did the question of assemblies, and there was real interest in what we had to say about the ICC's recent experience in France, where we have worked with the CNT-AIT and others in initiating street assemblies, not only at the end of demonstrations but on a more regular basis in between them. As a result of this discussion, the proposal was put forward, and accepted, that those involved in the various struggles in Edinburgh should try in the immediate future to take practical steps towards the formation of an assembly where workers and students could come together and discuss the way forward. No doubt such an assembly would be more like a struggle committee of a militant minority than a true mass meeting to direct the struggle, but when the movement is rising there may not always be a hard and fast line between the two forms of organisation. In the week after the day school a number of those attending were involved in an occupation of the university. It would be interesting to know whether this action is being linked to the idea of initiating an assembly.

A question connected to the problem of working with leftists was this: do we agree with the orientation of the NUS activist wing, the SWP and others towards attacking the Lib Dems' 'betrayal' of their promise to oppose tuition fees, typified by the routing of the march on 24 November to Lib Dem HQ in London. Although some present supported this approach, here again we were not at all alone in arguing against any policy of trying to 'split the coalition government' or 'bring down the Tories' because such ideas play directly into the hands of the Labour Party and the official opposition whose job is to stifle any real revolt. Furthermore, the focus on Lib Dem HQ would lead protestors into a trap set by the police following the events at Millbank on 10 November – a prediction that came only too true with the kettling of the demonstration on the 24th.

Finally, one comrade, playing devil's advocate, posed the question: why should anarchists be defending public services when we are against the state in all its forms? A valid question given that the leftists always try to turn struggles against attacks on benefits into a battle to defend the state organs that manage them (the classic one being 'defend the NHS'). But there was strong agreement when we said that in fighting these inroads we are defending the social wage and not the state that administers it.

Dutch and German communist left

The next session, given by a member of the AF, was on the Dutch/German communist left. We were in agreement with virtually all of it. The presentation made no attempt to hide the fact that the Dutch and German communist left were Marxists and were often very critical of anarchism; that they were unequivocal supporters of the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik party at the beginning of the 1917-23 revolutionary wave. The description of their positions on unions, parliament, national liberation and the USSR was accurate and nuanced. The speaker defended the left communists from the charge that they had been an irrelevant and tiny sect, showing that their membership and their influence among the most advanced sectors of the working class was far from insignificant; when the discussion turned to the reasons for the dramatic shrinking of this current in the late 20s and 30s, the emphasis was rightly laid on the gen-

After the rescue, Chilean miners buried under nationalism

Our comrades from the Grupo de Lucha Proletaria (Peru) have sent us this article, which is a very clear, simple and vibrant denunciation of the way Piñera and the Chilean bourgeoisie have made maximum use of the rescue of the Chilean miners to wage a whole campaign of nationalism.

It is the same in all the mines in Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico and in every mine in the world¹. Miners are always faced with the most terrible working conditions, along with illness and accidents. The mine operators are all the same, because terrible working conditions translate into less running costs and thus increased profits. Miners are condemned to breathing dust in these hell holes and are always faced with the threat of being engulfed by the earth.

This is what happened in the San José mine, in Copiapó, 850 kilometers North of Sanitago, Chile, when 33 miners were trapped for more than two months in a deep tunnel.

A great media show

In no time at all the media (press, radio, TV, internet...) had informed every corner of the earth about this event. It filled the media for almost 24 hours a day. 33 miners buried alive in a mine, scenes of silent death. The heroes to the rescue of those who were entombed were: the Chilean state led by Piñera and the mining company San Esteban Primera.

The aim of the whole thing was obvious from the beginning: to show that the state and the company were with the workers in their worst moments and were worried about them.

Hiding the terrible working conditions

But it was not enough just to show "solidarity" with the miners. The state along with the mining company quickly sought international help (NASA and other specialists) in order to hide the deplorably insecure conditions in which the workers of the San José mine had to work.

"The miners had already raised the deplorable lack of safety at the mine. In July they asked the Minister Laurence Golborne² to close down the San José site. There have been repeated complainants about the company's accident record.

1. The recent death s underground of 29 miners in a more 'advanced' country like New Zealand is a tragic confirmation of this statement
2. Laurence Golborne, the present Chilean Minister of Mines

eral defeat of the working class which reduced all its revolutionary expressions to an almost invisible minority. At the same time he recognised that those sections of the Dutch/German left who had most theorised anti-organisational ideas also helped to dig their own political graves. One point in the presentation we endorsed with particular enthusiasm: at the beginning, when posing the question 'why should we as anarchists look at this Marxist tradition?' the answer given was that anarchists should learn as much as possible about all the genuinely revolutionary expressions of the workers' movement. The comrade had also said that some had accused the AF of 'pinching' the mantle of left communism, which we took to be a reference to past statements the ICC has made about the AF. Our response to this was to admit that in the past we have been too dismissive of the revolutionary tendencies in anarchism; and while we had indeed made such statements about the AF, we are now fully convinced that we can only welcome the fact that comrades coming from an anarchist standpoint want to find out as much as they can about the history of the communist left.

Struggling against the Poll Tax

The final session was on the poll tax, in particular the rebellion against it in Scotland. The speaker, who had been directly involved at the time, supplied a lot of interesting information about mass mobilisations against the bailiffs and illegal demonstrations in working class areas. In the opinion

The Minister of Mines responding by saying that the mine created work"³

The complicity of the state and the mining company

It was impossible for the state to hide the responsibility of the management. Therefore the state and the Ministry of Mines had to present themselves as heroes of the working class in this tragic situation, which is the kind of thing faced every day by the miners of Chile and the whole world.

The bourgeoisie's fear of widespread discontent

Piñera understood that these events are commonplace for miners, and he knows that the best way to deal with this is to show concern for the suffering of the miners and their families. He had to do this quickly because he knew that the indignation of the miners' families and the surrounding miners was going to grow, and that there was a possibility that this solidarity would spread within the working class, creating the possibility of an uprising. The state was fully aware of the militancy of the miners and feared it.

A massive nationalist and triumphalist campaign

We have been living through a massive campaign of nationalist propaganda with a disgusting whiff of paternalism and triumphalism around the effort to rescue the miners in Chile. The State, with Piñera in the forefront, has created a climate of nationalist festivities around the miners rescue, we have been shown that the state and the bourgeoisie have the same interests as the workers, that Chile is with them and they are presented as Chilean citizens above all else.

Nationalism hides the deception and exploitation of the working class. We have seen workers singing the national anthem in squares and streets, kissing the flag along with their brothers: exploited and exploiters. Workers have fallen into a bourgeois trap and the nationalism spewed forth by the exploiting class: "Long Live Chile", "Proud to be Chilean", "The great Chilean Family" "thanks to the whole of Chile". All of these are expressions of nationalist poison, a poison that directly attacks, workers' class consciousness, dragging them off the terrain of class demands and struggles.

The proletariat in Chile and the rest of the world must understand that nationalism leads to a dead-end, by dividing the proletariat by country, and that it ends up in world-wide massacres. Capitalism's only interest is to maintain divisions and conflicts between workers. What are the differences between miners in Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia or Mexico...? None. However they have many things in common. They all suffer the same inhuman working conditions, in each tunnel and mine. They also have the same common denominator: they are part of the same social class and therefore have the same interests to defend. When workers support the fatherland and the state, they are reinforcing the chains of exploitation and slavery. The proletariat has to draw the lessons that it cannot lose its class perspective. Faced with patriotic hymns, colored rags, gifts and bribes, they must affirm that all these efforts by the bourgeoisie and state are nothing more than huge deceptions and sleights of hand. Their sole concern is to profit from our toil. After this rescue, the working conditions will remain the same or even worsen due to capitalism's worldwide crisis, and the ruling class can do nothing to change this situation. Only workers' unity against the interests of the exploiters offers the possibility of another life. The international working class, through spreading its economic struggles, regaining and deepening its political vision, can demonstrate to the whole of humanity that it is capable of putting forward a truly human community, where its role as beasts of burden is abolished forever.

Workers of the world unite!

Grupo de Lucha Proletaria (20-10-2010)

Continued on page 5

3. For more see www.surysur.net

Contact the ICC

Debate is vital to the revolutionary movement. One of the most important elements of our activity, defined in our Basic Positions, is the "Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions". This, we are convinced, is only possible through the confrontation and discussion of differing views and positions within the revolutionary camp.

For this reason, we urge our readers to write to us with their comments, opinions and disagreements on the positions and analyses that we defend in our written press, including our web site.

We will do our best to reply to all serious correspondence as quickly as possible, although given our limited resources we may not always be able to do so immediately. Should the subject matter be of general interest, then we may publish both correspondence and our reply in our press.

While debate amongst revolutionaries is vital, it is equally necessary not to fall into the trap of thinking that our activity is something anodyne and acceptable to the bourgeois dictatorship disguised under the trappings of the democratic state. We will not under any circumstances publish our correspondents' real names, nor their home or e-mail addresses.

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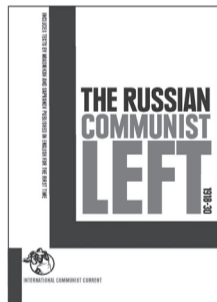
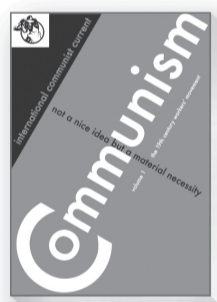
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Communism is not a nice idea but a material necessity £7.50
The British Communist Left £5

A “shining example” of capitalist collapse

Tourists to Ireland are invited to explore a land of myths and legends. Over the last fifteen years imaginative tales about the state of the Irish economy have added enormously to the available mythology.

From the mid 1990s there was the tale of the Celtic Tiger, the story of how Irish prosperity was becoming so entrenched that even perpetual emigration was being reversed. As George Osborne put it in 2006 “Ireland stands as a shining example of the art of the possible in long-term economic policymaking.”

But since Ireland became the first country in the eurozone to go into recession there has followed, from the emergency budget of October 2008, an escalating series of austerity measures and funds pumped into banks during 2009 and 2010. Far from leading to a happy ending the spending cuts and tax rises have only led to the latest round of cuts and the €85 billion bailout from the IMF, EU and ECB.

There was nothing substantial in the ‘prosperity’ and the imposition of austerity will bring only suffering, offering no solution to the crisis of the capitalist economy.

The latest round of attacks

The most recent measures proposed at the end of November are by no means the last: more are expected in the budget of 7 December. What we have already seen over the last two years are the loss of thousands of jobs and the cutting of services that the majority of the population rely on. One in seven is already officially out of work and workers in the public sector have already seen their wages cut. In the latest package the minimum wage has been cut by 1 euro per hour (that’s 12%). The income tax threshold has been brought down from €18,000 to about €15,300, bringing more of the lowest earners into the tax regime. Pensions have been frozen for the next four years. Pension age will gradually be increased to 68. There will be cuts in a variety of welfare payments, including unemployment benefit, but the details will not be revealed until 7 December. VAT will go up in 2013 and also 2014. Carbon tax is going to be doubled. A brand new water tax is going to be introduced, as well as a property tax that will affect all households. The government’s calculations rely on 100,000 people emigrating by 2014.

Political positions of the ICC

World Revolution is the section in Britain of the **International Communist Current** which defends the following political positions:

* Since the first world war, capitalism has been a decadent social system. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction and new crisis. In the 1980s, it entered into the final phase of this decadence, the phase of decomposition. There is only one alternative offered by this irreversible historical decline: socialism or barbarism, world communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.

* The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a period when the conditions for it were not yet ripe. Once these conditions had been provided by the onset of capitalist decadence, the October revolution of 1917 in Russia was the first step towards an authentic world communist revolution in an international revolutionary wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on for several years after that. The failure of this revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and to a rapid degeneration. Stalinism was not the product of the Russian revolution, but its gravedigger.

* The statified regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called ‘socialist’ or ‘communist’ were just a particularly brutal form of the universal tendency towards state capitalism, itself a major characteristic of the period of decadence.

* Since the beginning of the 20th century, all wars are imperialist wars, part of the deadly struggle between states large and small to conquer or retain a place in

In response to each round of government attacks there has been a major demonstration organised by the unions. This time round the Irish Congress of Trade Unions made sure it got over the message that the austerity measures were unfair and too harsh and it was a pity that Corporation Tax hadn’t been put up. Many protesters insisted that the government were ‘puppets of the EU and IMF’. Even government ministers complained that Ireland, like Portugal, was being pressured into accepting EU/IMF conditions. While financial support came from the IMF, various EU bodies and also the UK, Sweden and Denmark, the Irish state was compelled to make its contribution to the bank bailout by taking €17.5 billion from the National Pension Reserve Fund.

There is no secret in the role of the IMF and EU bodies. After Greece, the bourgeoisie internationally was anxious that the collapse of the economies of Ireland and Portugal would have an impact on the stability not just of the eurozone, but far beyond. The UK is not part of the eurozone, but the government judged its €7bn contribution as a necessary step to take, ultimately in the interests of the British economy. All economies are interrelated; none can function in isolation from the rest of the world economy. After the latest bail-out there was still concern about the possibilities of success with the Irish economy, as well as speculation about whether it would be Spain, Italy or Belgium that would be the next country in need of emergency treatment.

False alternatives

As for the harshness of each round of attacks, the critics might disagree on details, but, as in the UK, there is agreement on the need to deal with the deficit. Sinn Fein, for example, have recently produced a document entitled ‘There is a better way’, which they boast “is fully costed and endorsed by independent economists.” In it they claim that greater taxing of the rich and big corporations will generate billions, and if the government were to “take €7 billion from the National Pension Reserve Fund for a three and a half

the international arena. These wars bring nothing to humanity but death and destruction on an ever-increasing scale. The working class can only respond to them through its international solidarity and by struggling against the bourgeoisie in all countries.

* All the nationalist ideologies - ‘national independence’, ‘the right of nations to self-determination’ etc - whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical or religious, are a real poison for the workers. By calling on them to take the side of one or another faction of the bourgeoisie, they divide workers and lead them to massacre each other in the interests and wars of their exploiters.

* In decadent capitalism, parliament and elections are nothing but a masquerade. Any call to participate in the parliamentary circus can only reinforce the lie that presents these elections as a real choice for the exploited. ‘Democracy’, a particularly hypocritical form of the domination of the bourgeoisie, does not differ at root from other forms of capitalist dictatorship, such as Stalinism and fascism.

* All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally reactionary. All the so-called ‘workers’, ‘Socialist’ and ‘Communist’ parties (now ex-‘Communists’), the leftist organisations (Trotskyists, Maoists and ex-Maoists, official anarchists) constitute the left of capitalism’s political apparatus. All the tactics of ‘popular fronts’, ‘anti-fascist fronts’ and ‘united fronts’, which mix up the interests of the proletariat with those of a faction of the bourgeoisie, serve only to smother and derail the struggle of the proletariat.

* With the decadence of capitalism, the unions everywhere have been transformed into organs of capitalist order within the proletariat. The various forms of union

year state wide investment programme” it would “stimulate the economy and create jobs.” The deficit would be reduced because the stimulus to the economy would bring growth. The experience of the capitalist economy over the last hundred years has shown that whether resorting to debt, investment, spending cuts or tax rises, no government has found a way of escaping the reality of the capitalist economic crisis.

Socialist Worker (27/11/10), writing about the Irish crisis, has a solution that will suit all countries. “Governments could take the banks under full control—taking any profits, sacking the bankers and using the cash for projects society needs... Taxes should be massively increased on the rich and business [...] The expenditure on imperialist war and the military should end tomorrow. Governments such as Greece and Ireland could defy the International Monetary Fund and the European Union’s demands for cuts.”

The nationalisation of the banks is already very far advanced in Ireland, as it is in the UK and elsewhere. Following the latest bailout the government stake in the Allied Irish Bank is more than 96%; in the Anglo Irish Bank it’s 100%; in the Bank of Ireland (so diminished that it’s now a smaller financial institution than Paddy Power the bookmaker, but it is still a bank) it’s more than 70%; in the Irish Nationwide it’s 100%, as it is with the EBS. The intervention of the capitalist state in every aspect of economic and life has been a major trend over the last century and in no way represents any gain for the working class. The Socialist Workers Party does talk about the need for a “powerful mass movement” but only as a way of backing governments. To say that Greece or Ireland could ‘defy’ the IMF and the EU is a denial of the reality of the capitalist economy: beggars can’t be choosers. And, if there were to be a foolish show of ‘defiance’, then the renunciation of military expenditure would be unwise, as capitalist powers very readily resort to military ways of enforcing their will.

As for the increased taxation, behind this lies the idea that if only capitalist society was organised in a different way it could be made to function without exploitation and economic crises. A year ago, in December 2009, Irish Finance Minister Brian Lenihan said: “We have turned a corner . . . If we work together now and share the burden, we can deliver sustainable economic growth for all.” A year later we can see that no corner was turned and that, far from sharing the burden, the poorest organisation, whether ‘official’ or ‘rank and file’, serve only to discipline the working class and sabotage its struggles.

* In order to advance its combat, the working class has to unify its struggles, taking charge of their extension and organisation through sovereign general assemblies and committees of delegates elected and revocable at any time by these assemblies.

* Terrorism is in no way a method of struggle for the working class. The expression of social strata with no historic future and of the decomposition of the petty bourgeoisie, when it’s not the direct expression of the permanent war between capitalist states, terrorism has always been a fertile soil for manipulation by the bourgeoisie. Advocating secret action by small minorities, it is in complete opposition to class violence, which derives from conscious and organised mass action by the proletariat.

* The working class is the only class which can carry out the communist revolution. Its revolutionary struggle will inevitably lead the working class towards a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to destroy capitalism, the working class will have to overthrow all existing states and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale: the international power of the workers’ councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.

* The communist transformation of society by the workers’ councils does not mean ‘self-management’ or the nationalisation of the economy. Communism requires the conscious abolition by the working class of capitalist social relations: wage labour, commodity production, national frontiers. It means the creation of a world community in which all activity is oriented towards the full satisfaction of human needs.

* The revolutionary political organisation constitutes the vanguard of the working class and is an active

are the biggest victims. As for growth and sustainability, wherever they are shown to exist in the world you can be sure it’s at others’ expense.

The large demonstrations that have accompanied each wave of announcements have shown that there is widespread anger in Ireland at how the exploited have to pay for the crisis. In opinion polls 57% think the government should default on all its debts. This would produce no more gain than has resulted from the union controlled demos. As elsewhere the needs of the working class can only be met through workers organising themselves, from discussing the means and goals of their struggle, and fighting for their own interests. To put any confidence in governments or unions is fatal for workers’ struggles. The history of the workers’ movement shows that government reforms and union processions offer the working class nothing, as the only reliable perspective lies in massive struggles culminating in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. 1/12/10

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Economic debacle, ‘natural’ disasters, imperialist chaos: capitalism is a bankrupt system which needs to be overthrown

Hot Autumn in Italy 1969, a moment in the historic revival of the class struggle, part II

What are workers’ councils? part IV: 1917-21, the soviets attempt to exercise power

Manifesto of the Workers’ Group of the Russian Communist Party, continued

Decadence of capitalism: the age of catastrophes

factor in the generalisation of class consciousness within the proletariat. Its role is neither to ‘organise the working class’ nor to ‘take power’ in its name, but to participate actively in the movement towards the unification of struggles, towards workers taking control of them for themselves, and at the same time to draw out the revolutionary political goals of the proletariat’s combat.

OUR ACTIVITY

Political and theoretical clarification of the goals and methods of the proletarian struggle, of its historic and its immediate conditions.

Organised intervention, united and centralised on an international scale, in order to contribute to the process which leads to the revolutionary action of the proletariat.

The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of constituting a real world communist party, which is indispensable to the working class for the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of a communist society.

OUR ORIGINS

The positions and activity of revolutionary organisations are the product of the past experiences of the working class and of the lessons that its political organisations have drawn throughout its history. The ICC thus traces its origins to the successive contributions of the *Communist League* of Marx and Engels (1847-52), the three Internationals (the *International Workingmen’s Association*, 1864-72, the *Socialist International*, 1884-1914, the *Communist International*, 1919-28), the left fractions which detached themselves from the degenerating Third International in the years 1920-30, in particular the *German, Dutch and Italian Lefts*.