



# world revolution

## Mass poverty in Greece, it's what awaits us all

As February came to an end the Greek parliament rushed through a further package of wage and pension cuts as part of yet another round of measures required to secure a second international tranche of bailout loans. The working class in Greece is being subjected to another vicious round of assaults on its living standards. But it is not alone. On the day this article was written (18/2/12) there were demonstrations in dozens of locations across Europe, and as far away as New York. With slogans such as “*We are all Greeks now*”, “*In solidarity with the Greek people, One world, One revolution*” and others, the demos expressed a basic solidarity, and an elemental acknowledgment that there are no national struggles in the epoch of a global capitalist crisis.

Facing the umpteenth austerity plan imposed on the Greek population, anger again erupted on the streets. Between 80,000 and 200,000 people gathered outside parliament in Syntagma Square, during the voting for the latest measures on the night of February 12 to 13, and clashed with riot police. The basic balance sheet of what the media called “night of the urban guerrilla” included 48 buildings that were set on fire and 150 shops that were looted. There were also a hundred injured and 130 arrests. The images of these scenes of violence and of Athens in flames, and later the smoking ruins filmed in the early morning, were used by the media, with constant references to the ravages of war, to impress and frighten the rest of the world. But, according to numerous witnesses on the web, nearly 300,000 people could not reach the Greek parliament, being caught by the police in the adjacent streets or at the exits to the underground. And it was the police who threw tear gas to disperse the crowd into small groups throughout the city centre. The media talked about young thugs but you could see many older women and men participating in or encouraging violence. Whether the fires and looting were the work of provocateurs or the product of desperate acts, the rage of the people was undeniable as demonstrated by the images of those throwing stones or Molotov cocktails at the forces of repression.

### Unprecedented austerity measures in a situation of impasse for the bourgeoisie

The final set of measures imposed by the “troika” (International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the European Central Bank) is particularly intolerable. All the protesters were calling out the same thing: we can no longer feed our families or care for our children; we no longer want to continue being suffocated like this. Judge for yourself:

- Reduction in the minimum wage by 22% (reduced from 750 to 480 euros) and a 32% cut for those under 25, with knock on effects for those whose income is determined in relation to the minimum wage – for most workers this means wages have been cut in half;
- The cutting of 150,000 civil servants, over the next two years with an immediate cut to 60% of their current salary;
- Reduction in pensions;
- Unemployment benefit limited to just one year;
- The abolition of automatic wage increases, including those based on seniority;
- Reducing the social security budget, depriving a large segment of the population of any reimbursement of care costs;
- The limitation to three years for collective agreements on wage agreements.

And this list is not exhaustive. The official unemployment rate in November 2011 was 20.9%



(up 48.7% year on year). The unemployment rate for youth between 18 and 25 is around 50%.

In two years, the number of homeless has increased by 25%. Hunger has become a daily concern for many, as in the days of the occupation during World War II.

The testimony of a doctor from an NGO was reported in the French daily *Libération* (30/1/12): “*I started to worry when I had one consultation, then two, then ten children who came for treatment on an empty stomach, without having had any meal the day before.*”

The number of suicides has doubled in two years, particularly among young people. Every second person suffers from depression as the level of household debt explodes.

The almost unanimous rejection of the latest austerity plan was such that at the time of the vote a hundred deputies abstained or opposed it, including some forty belonging to the two major parties of the right and left, dissociating themselves from the discipline of the party vote. The situation is increasingly chaotic as the two traditional major parties are completely discredited, with opinion polls indicating massive desertion by those who previously supported them. In this climate, the bourgeoisie will have the greatest difficulty in organising the forthcoming parliamentary elections announced for April.

And Greece is one link in this chain of brutal austerity that already surrounds many European countries. After Greece, the “troika” has moved to Portugal to send the same notice. Ireland will be in the spotlight after that. Then comes the turn of Spain and Italy. Even the new Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti, put in power to administer the same bitter medicine, is concerned about what the future holds for his country, questioning the “*harshness with which Greece is treated.*” France, whose economy falters more

and more, will be soon on the list. In Germany itself, despite all the praise for its health and economic strength, we see an increasing proportion of its population, especially students, sinking into poverty. Europe is not and will not be the only affected area and no country in the world will be spared. There is no solution to a global crisis that openly reveals the total bankruptcy of the capitalist system.

### How to fight against the attacks?

A desperate teacher said: “*Before the crisis, I had about 1,200 euros a month, now it's more like 760. For each day on strike, that's another 80 euros and there are retroactive measures: this month I took home 280 euros. It is not worth working, better to go and smash everything so they understand we're not going to let it go on.*”

This frustration and anger is further strengthened by the proven sterility and impotence of the sequence of days of general strikes against austerity of 24 or 48 hours over the last 2 years that have been called by the two main unions, ADEDY (public sector) and GSEE (private sector - related to PASOK) which share the work with the PAME (arm of the Greek Stalinists) to divide and undermine workers' struggles

In this situation, social unrest in Greece leads towards solidarity and attempts to organise. Meetings have been held in neighbourhoods, in cities and villages. Food kitchens and distribution

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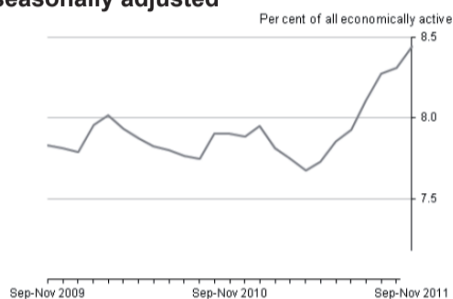
# The deteriorating material situation of the working class

This is an extract from a text prepared for a recent internal meeting of the ICC's section in Britain.

A range of official data allows us to see that the working class' working and living conditions are under sustained attack.

- **Unemployment** has continued to increase, reaching 8.4%, in the three months to November 2011, an increase of 0.3% over the preceding three months and of 0.5% compared to the same time a year ago. This amounts to 2.68 million people in total and to an increase of 118,000 compared to the previous quarter and of 189,000 compared to a year earlier. Of this total, 857,000 had been unemployed for over 12 months (a drop of 10,000 compared to the previous quarter but a rise of 25,000 compared to a year earlier) and 424,000 for over 24 months (up 1,000 on the previous quarter). Amongst 16 to 24 year olds the unemployment rate is 22.3%. Excluding young

## Unemployment rate (age 16+) seasonally adjusted



people in education (who are counted if they have been looking for work in the preceding 4 weeks), the total was 729,000, an increase of 8,000 over the previous quarter, making the rate of unemployment amongst young people not in education 20.7%.<sup>1</sup> Public sector employment fell by 67,000 in the third quarter of 2011.<sup>2</sup>

- The rate of redundancies has picked up over the last few months after falling back between November 2009 and November 2010. In the three months to November 2011 164,000 had become redundant (either voluntarily or enforced), an increase of 14,000 over the preceding quarter and of 5,000 compared to a year ago. The overall rate was 6.6 workers per thousand.<sup>3</sup>

- Growth in **pay** has slowed over the last few months falling to 1.9% in the three months to November 2011 from 2.8% in the previous quarter. The ONS offers an explanation: "This marked drop in earnings growth may reflect a number of pressures in the labour market: the desire by firms to reduce their costs in the face of weak demand; weak wage bargaining power of employees as a result of high unemployment and low employment levels; falling inflation that ease the decline in real wage growth and so reduce the pressure on employers to maintain wage growth; and falling demand and output."<sup>4</sup> The same report goes on to note that the rate of increase in the public sector in the three months to November was 1.4% compared to 2.0% in the private sector, "This demonstrates the impact of the sustained public sector pay freeze. Both public sector and private sector wage growth are well below CPI inflation and so the sustained decline of real wages has continued."<sup>5</sup> However, it is worth noting that overall cuts in pay were made much more rapidly in the private sector than the public sector – research by the IFS concluded that "it will take the whole of the two-year public pay freeze and two years of 1% pay increases to return public pay to where it was relative to private sector pay in 2008. This is because private sector pay reacted quickly to the recession. Pay in the public sector did not."<sup>6</sup> This

merely reflects the fact that the economic laws of capitalism take effect more rapidly in the private than the state sector.

- The average number of **hours worked** per week stood at 31.5 in the three months to November 2011, which is unchanged from the previous quarter. However, the total number of hours worked per week fell by 0.2 million to 916.3 million.<sup>7</sup>

- Labour **productivity** increased by 1.2% over the quarter to November 2011 while unit labour costs rose by 0.5%. However, this should be put in the context of falls in productivity compared to most major competitors during 2010.<sup>8</sup>

- The total amount of **personal debt** declined between December 2010 and 2011, falling from £1.454 trillion to £1.451 trillion. The majority of this borrowing is for mortgages, which increased from £1.238 trillion to £1.245 trillion. In contrast consumer credit fell from £216bn to £207bn. This suggests that workers are reducing spending or have less access to credit. Nonetheless, the average amount by owed adults in the UK stood at £29,547 in December 2011. This is about 122% of average earnings. The total owed is still more than the annual production of the country.<sup>9</sup>

- **The impact of debt** continues with 101 properties being repossessed every day in the last three months of 2011 and 331 people becoming insolvent. However, both figures have fallen since the previous quarter but in contrast it seems there has been a significant growth in the numbers using informal insolvency solutions while nearly a million "are struggling but have not sought help."<sup>10</sup>

- Older people have seen the value of their **pensions** eroded by effective rates of inflation that are above the official figures with a third reporting they can only afford the basics, a quarter saying they buy less food, 14% reporting going to bed early to keep warm and 13% saying they only live in one room to cut down on costs.<sup>11</sup>

These figures show the efforts that workers are going to in order to get by: cutting down on spending in order to keep their homes; accepting reductions in pay in order to keep jobs, albeit with limited success. The lower than anticipated rate of repossessions and insolvencies and the apparent willingness of financial bodies to agree informal arrangements to manage debt suggest that the bourgeoisie is also trying to mitigate the impact of the crisis. This makes sense both economically (managing debt means it is more likely to be repaid) and politically. How long this can be maintained is uncertain given that the cuts are only in their first stage:

- "By the end of 2011–12, 73% of the planned tax increases will have been implemented. The spending cuts, however, are largely still to come – only 12% of the planned total cuts to public service spending, and just 6% of the cuts in current public service spending, will have been implemented by the end of this financial year. The impact of the remaining cuts to the services provided is difficult to predict; they are of a scale that has not been delivered in the UK since at least the Second World War. On the other hand, these cuts come after the largest sustained period of increases in public service spending since the Second World War. If implemented, the planned cuts would, by 2016/17, take public service spending back to its 2004/05 real-terms level and to its 2000/01 level as a proportion of national income."<sup>12</sup>

- "The planned cuts to spending on public services are large by historical standards... If the current plans are delivered, spending on public services will (in real terms) be cut for seven years in a row. The UK has never previously cut this measure of spending for more than two years in a

"Latest public pensions reforms unlikely to save money over longer term; four year pay squeeze returns public/private differential to pre-recession level".

7. ONS "Labour Market Statistics" January 2012

8. ONS "International comparisons of productivity – First estimates for 2010". Interestingly, this report states that between 1991 and 2004 the UK experienced the fastest growth rates of all G7 countries.

9. Credit Action, "Debt statistics", February 2012.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid, citing research by Age UK.

12. Institute for Fiscal Studies, "Green Budget 2012"

row... if delivered, the government's plans would be the tightest seven-year period for spending on public services since the Second World War: over the seven years from April 2010 to March 2017, there would be a cumulative real-terms cut of 16.2%, which is considerably greater than the previous largest cut (8.7%), which was achieved over the period from April 1975 to March 1982."<sup>13</sup>

The report by the IFS goes on to note that no country has ever cut spending at the level proposed for the number of years proposed.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that all of these predictions are based on the assumption that the economy will pick up in the years ahead.

13. IFS Op Cit, p.68

14. IFS Op Cit, p.72: "On the internationally comparable measure, UK public service spending is set to fall by 11.3% over the five years from 2012–13 to 2016–17. This is large compared with the size of cuts to public spending experienced by other industrialised countries over the last forty years... None of these countries has, for the periods for which we have data, cut this measure of public service spending for five consecutive years. In two instances, cuts have run for four years in a row: in the United States from 1970 to 1973 (cumulative cut of 4.0%) and more recently in Canada from 1994 to 1997 (cumulative cut of 3.9%)."

- People retiring in the year ahead expect to have an annual income of £15,500, which is 6% less than those who retired in 2011, and 16% less than those who retired in 2008. One fifth expect an annual income of £10,000 while 18% of those retiring expect to do so with debts averaging £38,200. The ending of final salary pension schemes in the private and public sectors (this is likely to be the reality of any deal stitched by the unions and bosses to resolve the current confrontation) will see far more workers living in poverty in their old age.<sup>15</sup>

- Levels of child poverty are predicted to return almost to the level seen in the late 1990s when the Labour government began efforts to reduce it. By 2020/21 4.2m children are forecast to be living in poverty, compared to 4.4m in 1998/9.<sup>16</sup>

- "The Office for Budget Responsibility's November 2011 forecast for general Government Employment estimates a total reduction of around 710,000 staff between Q1 2011 and Q1 2017."<sup>17</sup>

North 08/02/12

15. Credit Action, "Debt statistics", February 2012.

16. End Child Poverty, "Child Poverty Map", January 2012.

17. Credit Action, "Debt statistics", February 2012

## Working for nothing A continuing attack on the unemployed

The government's change on the rules for its work experience scheme was marked in a *Guardian* headline as a "U-turn". Brendan Barber, the TUC General Secretary, described it as a "climdown" and *Socialist Worker* called it a "retreat". In the *Guardian's* small print the new emphasis on 'voluntary' rather than 'mandatory' is described as a "relatively minor concession" and all those campaigning against the government's schemes are well aware that sanctions for refusing work placements are still in place for Mandatory Work Activity and the Community Activity Programme.

In reality, the change came because of pressure from big businesses who didn't like what was happening to their reputations. It's not good for the image if there's an impression that you have young employees who are working for you for nothing and under threat of having their 'benefits' withdrawn. Sainsbury's, BHS, HMV, Waterstone's and a number of charities had already left the scheme, and others were threatening to. Although David Cameron spoke of the need to "stand up against the Trotskyites of the Right to Work campaign" it was the withdrawal of business co-operation that proved decisive.

The government claimed that there were very few sanctions taken against those on work experience schemes. From January to November 2011 of 34,000 on work experience placements 220 had been punished with the withdrawal of two weeks benefits. This rather misses the point. Firstly, if you're under 25 the current rate for Job Seekers Allowance is £53.45 per week, so you're already going to be struggling to make ends meet, regardless of whether you're on a scheme or not, and before you've been fined. Secondly, there is no evidence that any of the schemes actually work. Research shows that there is the same outcome, in terms of coming off benefits, for those with or without the unpaid work experience. Of 1400 who had placements with Tesco's, for example, only a fifth were offered permanent jobs. Thirdly, and most importantly, all these government schemes are part of a policy of intimidation toward the unemployed, to stop them claiming benefits, and, now, just passed by parliament, to impose limits on what can be claimed.

The Work Programme is one of the most notorious government schemes. Where Mandatory Work Activity involves compulsory unpaid work for up to eight weeks, and the Community Activity Programme can send workers for up to 30 hours per week unpaid labour for six months, there is no limit at all with the Work Programme. This includes 300,000 people in what's known as the work-related activity group and includes people who have been diagnosed with terminal cancer but have more than six months to live; accident and stroke victims; and some people with mental health issues. Last June Tory MP Philip Davies said that people who were disabled or had mental health problems should be paid less than the minimum wage because they were, in his words "by definition" less productive than those without disabilities. There was outrage at the time, but, in practice, those on the Work Programme can be made to work for an unlimited time for far less than the minimum wage, that is, for nothing. On top of this between September 2010 and August 2011 there were sanctions taken against 8440 people because of missing interviews etc. 'Sanctions' means loss of benefits.

The difficulties young people face in finding work have not been solved by the schemes of the current government or its Labour predecessor. Mass unemployment is all that's on offer. With maybe 6 million unemployed, with another 500,000 public sector jobs to go over the next five years, and with even the official figures at their highest for 17 years, there are very few opportunities for young or old. There are more than a million young people between the age of 16 and 24, not in full-time education, who are not in work. Proportionately, and using the official figures, where 75% of older people are in work, of 16-24 year-olds only 66% are in work. Young people are more likely to be laid off, and find it more difficult to get a job because of a number of factors. Ultimately the problems they face are not just an array of dodgy government schemes but a capitalist system that offers none of us any future. That's why the necessary struggle against new attacks on the unemployed needs to be integrated into the struggle of the whole working class to destroy capitalism. Car 1/3/12

1. ONS "Labour Market Statistics" January 2012

2. Credit Action, "Debt statistics", February 2012.

3. ONS "Labour Market Statistics" January 2012

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid

6. Institute for Fiscal Studies, Press Release 31/01/12:

# Electricians: bosses back off but we still can't trust the unions!



After six months of struggle against the BESNA agreement<sup>1</sup>, which would have meant pay cuts of up to 33%, serious deskilling throughout the building industry, and unemployment for all those refusing to sign the new contracts, the electricians have forced the bosses to back off. Following a failed injunction against an imminent official national strike called by the Unite union, the main BESNA signatory, Balfour Beatty, announced that it was dropping plans to bring in the BESNA agreement, and most of the other firms involved have now followed suit.

As we have shown in a series of articles about this dispute<sup>2</sup>, the electricians have fought this battle with an extraordinary degree of militancy and inventiveness. They have occupied public places, blocked roads, held open-mic debates in the street, disregarded the laws on picketing, accepted the support of other workers at their protests, and tried to link up with others in struggle, such as the students and the public sector workers at the big November demonstrations. The most significant expression of this combative spirit was probably

1. Building Engineering Services National Agreement  
2. <http://en.internationalism.org/wr/11/348/electricians>; <http://en.internationalism.org/worldrevolution/201111/4566/electricians-solidarity-across-industries-key> <http://en.internationalism.org/worldrevolution/201112/4611/sparks-don-t-let-unions-block-struggle><http://en.internationalism.org/worldrevolution/201201/4654/illusions-unions-will-lead-defeat>

the almost country-wide unofficial strike action that took place on 7 December when Unite called off an official national strike under the threat of an injunction. This is a far cry from the tame rituals which we have associated with the recent series of official days of action against public sector cuts or attacks on pensions. All this was almost completely blacked out by the media, including 'left' papers like the *Guardian*, indicating that the sparks' tactics and independent spirit were seen as a dangerous example to other workers.

In recent weeks, however, there have been signs that the movement has been ebbing, certainly in the London region which had been the epicentre of the movement for a long time. The weekly demonstrations outside selected building sites were becoming less well attended and there were often more leftist paper sellers there than electricians. These weekly actions were themselves in danger of becoming ritualised and did not often succeed in getting other building workers to join the movement. And as the leadership of the strike, organised in the Rank and File group made up mainly of shop stewards, began putting increasing emphasis on the need to pressure the union into calling a national strike, Unite's incessant delaying tactics were serving to sap workers' energies.

And then in the space of a few days, the picture changed dramatically. On Wednesday February 22<sup>nd</sup> there was lively demonstration outside the Mayfair hotel where Balfour Beatty bosses

and others were gathered for a black tie dinner. Park Lane was blocked for nearly an hour and the mood of the sparks was defiant. The next day it was announced that the courts had thrown out Balfour Beatty's latest injunction against Unite, who would now have no choice but to organise a national strike. Almost immediately Balfour announced that it was pulling out of BESNA.

The leftist press was exultant, trumpeting 'victory for the sparks'. A typical example was provided by *Socialist Worker* (25/2/12):

**"Victory shows workers can win in struggle"**

*The electricians' victory is a simple answer to those that say the working class isn't a force or that unions are too weak to win. Their determined campaign has humbled a huge corporation—and at the centre has been rank and file workers' organisation. Despite being ignored by the mainstream media, workers called protests to build up support and show the bosses the depth of opposition to the attack. The threat of an official strike, and the prospect of spreading unofficial action, was enough to force the bosses to back off.*

[...]

*Strikes are a direct challenge to the authority of the bosses. They can expose the class divide and show the power of the working class. An astonishing level of hesitancy and conservatism from the union leadership marked the electricians' dispute.*

*Nonetheless the rank and file rightly fought to get official backing and an official strike. But they were also prepared to act independently of the union bureaucracy. That process needs to be deepened and extended, building up the confidence and organisation of the workers. This can also help to inspire others, in construction and beyond. There should be no return to the corrupt "company unionism" that has infected construction. And the lesson for the rest of the labour movement is simple—militant tactics win"*

On the face of it, this was a vindication of the strategy put forward by the leftists and echoed by the majority of the 'rank and file' leadership: carry on with the inventive tactics, act unofficially as much as necessary, but put pressure on the union hierarchy to back the dispute. The very threat of a national strike seems to have forced the bosses to cave in.

It's certainly true that the bosses were worried by the prospect of a national strike. But the unions were also worried. The events of 7 December had shown that the sparks could organise strike action on a national scale without the support of the union machinery. Given the outward looking tactics of the sparks in their local protests and pick-

ets, there was a real danger that a national strike would get increasingly out of their control, even spreading to other sectors. This is why the union was so quick to get together with the industry bosses after Balfour withdrew from BESNA and to issue a joint statement.

On the libertarian communist discussion forum [libcom.org](http://libcom.org), the announcement that BB was withdrawing from BESNA also led to many calls of 'victory', but at least one poster (Jim Clarke) sounded a note of caution:

*"Have BB really given up on trying to kill off JIB? From having a read of the document sent round today Unite have called off strike action and agreed to come up with a new agreement for modernising the industry, which means electricians and everybody else will still get fucked over but with union approval this time"*

Our comrade Alf supported this approach:

*"I agree with Jim Clarke's caution here. A sudden (apparent) climbdown by the bosses on the eve of a union led strike, followed by the cancellation or indefinite postponement of strike action, points to some kind of back room deal. Plus as Jim says, both bosses and union are talking ominously about modernisation. Not to forget that a large part of the workforce in the building trade is not even covered by the JIB in the first place"*

(<http://libcom.org/news/attack-electricians-contracts-wobbles-balfour-beatty-folds-17022012>)

There is no doubt that the sparks have achieved a 'victory' in the sense of forcing the bosses to retreat. But this was the result of their own initiative and willingness to break out of the established union rules. It would be a serious error to think that the fight is now over and that the union has finally shown itself to be on the workers' side. Of course, the majority of sparks still see the unions as in some sense their organisations and certainly feel that it's possible to organise at the rank and file level through the shop steward system. But the shop steward network that ran the strike from below, despite being made up of many sincere militants, also served as the main vehicle for illusions in the trade unions and the strategy of pressuring the union machinery. This is an argument for workers taking further steps along the road towards independence from the unions, by ensuring that general assemblies rather than shop stewards' committees are really in control of the coming struggle against the 'modernisation' plans that are even now being cooked up by the bosses and the unions together. **Amos 28/2/12**

3. JIB: the Joint Industry Board regulations which the sparks see as providing basic protection of their interests at work

## Campaign about privatisation obscures cuts in NHS

Some 8 months after the government paused for a 'listening exercise' and repackaged some of the measures in its Health and Social Care Bill, there seems to be something missing from the resurgent opposition. The Bill certainly has some heavyweight opponents with the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Paediatricians balloting on whether to oppose it. On Wednesday 7 March the British Medical Association will join the Unite union in a lobby of parliament. Even Deputy PM Nick Clegg, who was representing the government in the listening exercise last year, is now promising amendments to "rule out beyond doubt any threat of a US-style market in the NHS". This is not so different from the behaviour of the Labour Party which has gone from imposing cuts in government to politely opposing them in opposition.

In all the words condemning privatisation it is hard to find any equivalent criticism of the cost cutting being imposed. This is in marked contrast to last year when 50,000 job losses in the NHS were well publicised<sup>1</sup>. Twenty billion pounds

1. *WR* 344, <http://en.internationalism.org/wr/344/nhs>.

worth of efficiency savings are still being made over the next few years, and it's unlikely they'll all be publicised. And it is these savings that are the real threat to our healthcare as well as jobs, pay and working conditions in the NHS.

Unite's leaflet tells us the Bill "puts profit before patient care and will destroy the NHS", and its lobby briefing accepts the £20bn cuts that are due to be made as if they were an inevitable fact of life "This is at the time when the NHS is faced with making 20% cuts..." The *Guardian's* Polly Toynbee also accepts the need for the cuts in funding – her answer is NICE rationing. That is, a preference for rationing carried out according to the centralised recommendations of the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence, as opposed to the government idea of rationing by local GPs organised in Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) with the risk of the post code lottery.

In fact there is no real contradiction once you take into account how the state organises its enterprises. The NHS not only took over a number of small businesses, GPs, in 1948, it has been setting them up ever since. This has allowed it to deliver

health care more cheaply than it could have done otherwise and often in scandalously poor premises with abysmal facilities. CCGs and more private sector involvement do not mean less state control, or more power locally, or power for patients, as the government says, since the state not only keeps funding on an increasingly tight leash, it is also ready to step in and take over any institution that threatens to go over budget.

The new Health and Social Care Bill is not going to introduce profit into state healthcare. It's always been there. Drug companies, banks, construction firms building hospitals, employment agencies supplying temporary staff, and others have all been directly making a profit out of the NHS. While all businesses have indirectly benefited from having the state keep their employees relatively healthy for free, or at least for no direct cost. It is not a change in the law allowing NHS hospitals to treat more private patients that leads to less money spent on other patients, it is the cut in services that leads to more demand for private health, in the UK for those who can afford it, or through health tourism to third world and Eastern

European countries.

The other odd thing about the new protests about the legislation is that no-one seems the least bothered by the fact that the reorganisation is already well under way. Primary Care Trusts have been run down, many of their staff made redundant, CCGs have been formed and have started work on innovative ways to manage, and when possible mitigate, the effects of a declining and inelastic budget. Anti-privatisation provides a very convenient smokescreen for this reorganisation. **Alex 3/3/12**

# Occupy Exeter

## An experience rich with lessons for the future

On 12 November 2011, protesters in Exeter established a camp on the Cathedral Green in the heart of the city in solidarity with similar movements elsewhere in the UK and around the world. The Exeter experience seems to mirror others and serves as a good example of the current efforts to come to grips with the enormous challenges posed by the current epoch, the difficulties encountered in struggle and the lessons to be drawn for the future.

The most significant factor in the Occupation in Exeter has been the emergence of a newly politicised generation, many (but not all) of them very young and only loosely aligned to formal political currents. They have a keen appetite for discussion and a profound desire to understand the historic situation facing humanity.

As usual, the left-wing defenders of capital were also present in the movement. These are the older, more experienced activists who have an explicitly reformist, liberal approach. These individuals often took on key roles as ‘facilitators’ in many of the meetings and ‘working groups’, enabling them to steer the movement along their own agenda. Traditional leftists (Trotskyists, for example) were largely absent from the core movement, although they have been much more active online.

A key component in the early days of the camp was the underlying battle between these two currents in shaping the evolution of the movement. The ICC participated in several meetings of the camp and did our best to polarise the differences between these two opposing tendencies, while supporting the new generation. A full account of the movement is impossible here, but we can point to some key moments.

### Who takes decisions?

At the 2nd General Assembly (GA) there was a discussion around a leaflet that was being distributed in the name of the movement. It quickly became obvious that this statement had been produced by a ‘working group’ and had not been agreed or even discussed by the GA, supposedly the decision making organ of the camp. Our comrade at the meeting insisted on the importance of a proper discussion around such statements and was quickly supported by other members of the camp. Many of these had already expressed unease about the way the statement had emerged but had been hesitant to challenge the experienced activists who had put themselves at the head of the movement. Once the question had been raised, however, they quickly began to assert themselves and expressed a desire to keep decision-making power centralised in the GA.

At a subsequent meeting, supposedly on the question of capitalism, a decision appeared to have been taken (no-one seemed quite sure by who) to change the agenda to allow someone to speak on legal matters concerning the camp. We challenged this vigorously and the meeting eventually decided to split the meeting between the two discussions. The ‘legal expert’ turned out to be a proponent of the “Freeman on the Land” movement who treated the meeting to a series of woefully inaccurate claims about English Common Law and some conspiracy theories thrown in for good measure. Most participants struggled to understand the relevance of this pseudo-legal lecture and eventually the discussion was ended.

The following discussion on the nature of capitalism, however, was wide-ranging with many ideas, both reformist and revolutionary, being presented. Against those who argued for nationalisation, pacifism, reforms to the tax system and ‘ethical’ capitalism we argued that the system was beyond repair and that the only way to respond to the current situation was to destroy the state and eliminate the core social relationships of capitalism. This received significant support from many of those there who also asked how such a future society would organise and how that related to the current movement. We insisted that centralisation was important and that the GA showed in embryo how a centralised decision-making process could work. Many struggled with this idea as they were convinced that centralisation had to mean domination by a minority.

Despite many disagreements, it was clear that

many wanted the discussion to continue and there was considerable interest in some of the ideas we presented. In an effort to end the discussion, a ‘facilitator’ proposed another meeting where it could be discussed further and suggested we present at that one. We readily agreed.

### The appetite for discussion

The subsequent meeting was attended by those with a more open attitude - the usual ‘facilitators’ were conspicuous in their absence. We presented our vision of the historical trajectory of capitalism, explaining why only a revolutionary struggle by the working class could offer a way out. A whirlwind of discussion followed! At first, one participant asked us our thoughts about Salvador Allende, the ‘first democratically elected Marxist’ in Chile. They were shocked when we denounced him as an enemy of the working class and even angered when one of our sympathisers labelled him a Stalinist. But this led on to a discussion about whether the state can be reformed or not, the role of figures such as Chavez, the nature of nationalisation and national liberation, the role of the state, the nature of communism and Marx’s vision, the nature of the revolution, the role of the national state, the nature of earlier social formations, and much more.

We were very heartened by the hunger for discussion and the understanding shown in the meeting and in spite of our intransigent critique of many of the illusions expressed. The passion of the participants during the meeting was maintained in a fraternal atmosphere throughout. We were warmly welcomed by the Occupiers who expressed great interest in having further meetings. The whole experience was very impressive.

At the next meeting, leading up to the public sector strikes, we proposed that the camp link up with the demonstrations, advertising the GA as a place to hold a discussion after the march. Once again, the younger Occupiers were very supportive and the motion was passed.

On the day, around 40 people attended and there was a discussion around how to organise resistance to the cuts and capitalism in general, the relationship between Occupy and the strike, and the role of the unions. We insisted on the need for workers to self-organise outside of union control; it was clear that many struggled with this idea and most supported the unions. But, once again, what characterised the meeting was a genuine desire to engage and understand all the issues. The discussion moved onto communism and another focus for discussion developed. A ‘facilitator’ made an attempt at one point to end the discussion on the pretext of discussing practical matters but we argued for continuing the discussion and the meeting voted in support.

In the ensuing discussion the question was asked as to why the Occupiers didn’t explicitly identify themselves as anti-capitalist. The answer was that most of them still believe in the possibility of a ‘fair’ capitalism and even those that don’t are not sure about what to pose in opposition to the present system. ‘Communism’ is perceived as having a negative connotation - but they could all agree on wanting something more ‘democratic’.

### Future potential – and obstacles

Throughout this experience, this conflict between revolutionary and reformist politics lay at the heart of the dynamic of the camp. The hunger for understanding was shown in a remarkable level of spontaneous public political discussion which we haven’t seen for a very long time. Our participation did not ‘create’ this dynamic but it did seem to embolden the revolutionary current in the camp to explore ideas. In particular, by challenging the leftist and liberals in their efforts to keep the discussion on the anodyne terrain of statements, petitions and democracy we enabled the discussions to develop a depth that they might not otherwise have had.

The driving force came primarily from the younger participants, but in spite of their openness and combativity, they were marked by hesitancy in challenging the dominance of leftists and liberals both at a practical and ideological level. While recognising disagreement, they were unable to

recognise the fundamental opposition between reformist and revolutionary ideas that have different class origins.

As is happening everywhere, the Occupy movement in Exeter is now coming to an end. The camp has been dismantled and they are now faced with the question of what happens next. Perhaps most significant is the difficulty many have in understanding that an ‘Occupation’ itself can create obstacles against the most positive aspects of the movement: open discussion. Right from the start, there was a tendency for the minutiae of running the camp to dominate discussion - as the practical difficulties increased this became more and more noticeable, with the maintenance of the camp becoming an end in itself. Moreover, the conditions in the camp were off-putting to many of the public, the ‘99%’ the Occupiers wanted to reach. Now the camp has been dispersed, there is a tendency to focus on finding ‘somewhere else to occupy’ rather than focussing on the need for discussion.

There is a very real danger that the newly politicised young people who have made up this movement will be sucked into its negative aspects: the fixation on ‘democracy’ often manipulated into the sabotage of discussions and preventing a genuine confrontation of ideas; the dominance of activism; the failure to connect with other groups despite a genuine desire to do so.

The camps and occupations have raised awareness and created a temporary space for discussion. They are now becoming a dead-end. Rather than attempting to artificially preserve them, the Occupiers should concentrate on deepening their political discussions, developing their understanding and drawing the lessons of this movement, ready to inform and strengthen the new movements that will inevitably emerge as resistance to capitalism gathers strength. **Ishamael 3/3/12**

### Out soon International Review 148

#### The economic crisis announces the end of a system and the struggle for another world

Debate in the revolutionary milieu  
The state in the period of transition  
from capitalism to communism (i)

Critique of the book: *Dynamics, contradictions and crises of capitalism*  
Is capitalism a decadent mode of production and why (i)

Contribution to a history of the workers’ movement in Africa (iv)

Decadence of capitalism (xii)  
40 years of open crisis show that capitalism’s decline is terminal

## ICC Online

### Internationalism is the only solution to the Kurdish Question!

“...resolution ... adopted by the recent territorial conference of the ICC section in Turkey ... aims to explain clearly who the millions of people encircled by this imperialist war are being forced to give their lives for...”

### China - No immunity from economic crisis or class struggle

“In an ominous development for the Chinese economy – and for capitalism more generally – there is a massive building boom/bubble swelling up which, like those in the USA, Ireland, Spain and elsewhere, can only burst, with dire consequences”

## Towards general assemblies in India

Up to 100 million workers were involved in a one day strike in India on 28 February. A strike that hit a number of sectors across the country was hailed by some as one of the world’s biggest ever strikes. Called by the eleven central unions (the first time they’d acted together since independence) and 5000 smaller unions, the demands included a national minimum wage, permanent jobs for 50 million contract workers, government measures to tackle inflation (which has been over 9% for most of the last two years), social security benefits such as pensions for all workers, better enforcement of labour laws, and an end to selling off stakes in state-owned enterprises. The fact that millions of workers were prepared to participate showed that, for all the talk of India’s economic ‘boom’, it’s not experienced by the working class.

However, the demands, as put forward by the unions, all make the assumption that the capitalist government of India is capable of responding to the needs of other classes. There are also the erroneous ideas that it could tackle inflation or that stopping the sale of public-sector assets would somehow benefit the working class. And anyway the bourgeoisie has its own problems to worry about. For example, the IT and call centre industry in India is dependent on US companies for 70 percent of its business. This sector has been traumatised by the impact of the economic crisis. No longer a growth area and source of great profits it’s experienced widespread wage and job cuts. This pattern is repeated in many other sectors. The Indian economy can’t stand aside from the world economy and its crisis.

On this occasion the unions all acted together, but they have not been backward in the past in mobilising protests against government measures. There have been 14 general strikes since 1991. But recently we have seen more examples of workers acting on their own initiative and not waiting for union directives.

For example, between June and October 2011 thousands of workers took part in factory occupations, wildcat strikes and protest camps at Maruti-Suzuki and other car factories in Manesar, a ‘boom town’ in the Delhi region. After a union-agreed settlement in early October 1200 contract workers were not rehired and so 3500 workers went back on strike and occupied the car assembly plant in solidarity. This led to further solidarity actions by 8000 workers in a dozen or so other plants in the area. It also led to some sit-in protests and the formation of general assemblies to avoid the sabotage of the unions.

The rediscovery of the general assembly as the most appropriate form for ensuring the broadest participation of workers and the widest exchange of ideas is a tremendous advance for the class struggle. The general assemblies of Maruti-Suzuki in Manesar were open to everyone and encouraged everyone to participate in shaping the direction and goals of the struggle. It didn’t involve millions of workers, but showed that the working class in India is clearly part of the current international development of the class struggle. **Car 3/3/12**

### Drama in Port-Saïd, Egypt: a police provocation aimed at the entire population

“Let’s not forget that what forced Mubarak to stand down last year was not just the social revolt but above all the workers’ strikes which spread throughout the country...”

### On the film *Tahrir, Liberation Square* A truncated vision of reality which conjures away the class struggle

#### Occupy LSX: Evicted

“we have to recognise their limitations. Undoubtedly a few people ... have been led to question the entirety of capitalism ...”

## Workers take control of the Kilkis hospital in Greece



The workers at the general hospital in Kilkis in Greek Central Macedonia recently occupied their hospital and declared it to be running under their control. Here is the public statement they issued on 4 February:

1. We recognize that the current and enduring problems of E.Σ.Y (the national health system) and related organizations cannot be solved with specific and isolated demands or demands serving our special interests, since these problems are a product of a more general anti-popular governmental policy and of the bold global neoliberalism.
2. We recognize, as well, that by insisting in the promotion of that kind of demands we essentially participate in the game of the ruthless authority. That authority which, in order to face its enemy - i.e. the people- weakened and fragmented, wishes to prevent the creation of a universal labour and popular front on a national and global level with common interests and demands against the social impoverishment that the authority's policies bring.
3. For this reason, we place our special interests inside a general framework of political and economic demands that are posed by a huge portion of the Greek people that today is under the most brutal capitalist attack; demands that in order to be fruitful must be promoted until the end in co-operation with the middle and lower classes of our society.
4. The only way to achieve this is to question, in action, not only its political legitimacy, but also the legality of the arbitrary authoritarian and anti-popular power and hierarchy which is moving towards totalitarianism with accelerating pace.
5. The workers at the General Hospital of Kilkis answer to this totalitarianism with democracy. We occupy the public hospital and put it under our direct and absolute control. The Γ.N. of Kilkis will henceforth be self-governed and the only legitimate means of administrative decision making will be the General Assembly of its workers.
6. The government is not released of its economic obligations of staffing and supplying the hospital, but if they continue to ignore these obligations, we will be forced to inform the public of this and ask the local government but most importantly the society to support us in any way possible for:

(a) the survival of our hospital (b) the overall support of the right for public and free healthcare (c) the overthrow, through a common popular struggle, of the current government and any other neoliberal policy, no matter where it comes from (d) a deep and substantial democratization, that is, one that will have society, rather than a third party, responsible for making decisions for its own future.

7. The labour union of the Γ.N. of Kilkis will begin, from 6 February, the retention of work, serving only emergency incidents in our hospital until the complete payment for the hours worked, and the rise of our income to the levels it was before the arrival of the troika (EU-ECB-IMF). Meanwhile, knowing fully well what our social mission and moral obligations are, we will protect the health of the citizens that come to the hospital by providing free healthcare to those in need, accommodating and calling the government to finally accept its responsibilities, overcoming even in the last minute its immoderate social ruthlessness.

8. We decide that a new general assembly will take place, on Monday 13 February in the assembly hall of the new building of the hospital at 11 am, in order to decide the procedures that are needed to efficiently implement the occupation of the administrative services and to successfully realise the self-governance of the hospital, which will start from that day. The general assemblies will take place daily and will be the paramount instrument for decision making regarding the employees and the operation of the hospital.

We ask for the solidarity of the people and workers from all fields, the collaboration of all workers' unions and progressive organizations, as well as the support from any media organization that chooses to tell the truth. We are determined to continue until the traitors that sell out our country and our people leave. It's either them or us! The above decisions will be made public through a news conference to which all the Mass Media (local and national) will be invited on Wednesday 15/2/2012 at 12.30. Our daily assemblies begin on 13 February. We will inform the citizens about every important event taking place in our hospital by means of news releases and conferences. Furthermore, we will use any means available to publicise these events in order to make this mobilization successful.

We call

- a) Our fellow citizens to show solidarity to our effort,
- b) Every unfairly treated citizen of our country in contestation and opposition, with actions, against his/her oppressors,
- c) Our fellow workers from other hospitals to make similar decisions,
- d) The employees in other fields of the public and private sector and the participants in labour and progressive organizations to act likewise, in order to help our mobilization take the form of a universal labour and popular resistance and uprising, until our final victory against the economic and political elite that today oppresses our country and the whole world.

Continued from page 1

## Mass poverty in Greece

has been undertaken. The occupation of the University of Novicki has served as a forum for discussion. There were occupations of ministries (Labour, Economy, Health), regional councils (in the Ionian Islands and in Thessaly), the Megalopolis power plant, the town hall in Holargos. Producers have distributed milk and potatoes. Workers have occupied the newspaper *Eleftherotypia* that employs 800 people. While on strike they have published their own newspaper.

But the most significant reaction which shows the determination of the movement in Greece also illustrates all its weaknesses and illusions. It took place at the hospital in Kilkis in Central Macedonia in northern Greece. Hospital staff in a general meeting decided to go on strike and occupy the hospital to demand their unpaid wages while taking the initiative to continue to operate

emergency services and provide free care for the poor. These workers have launched an appeal to other workers, declaring that "*the only legitimate authority to make administrative decisions will be the General Assembly of the workers.*" We are republishing this call which shows a clear desire not to remain isolated, not only by appealing to other hospitals but to all workers in all sectors to join in the fight. However, this call also reflects many democratic illusions, in seeking to rely on a "*citizens' reaction*" and an amorphous notion of "*workers' unions*", or of the "*collaboration of all unions and progressive political organisations and the media with goodwill.*" It is also heavily imbued with patriotism and nationalism: "*We are determined to continue until the traitors who have sold our country have gone.*" This is real poison

## Statement by the Occupied Athens Law School "In order to liberate ourselves from debt we must destroy the economy"

**We are publishing a statement by the occupiers of the Athens Law School. This seems significant because it directly attacks all nationalist and state capitalist 'solutions' to the debacle of debt in Greek, which it correctly identifies as an expression of capitalism's global crisis. Such positions no doubt reflect the views of a minority in the present social movement, but it seems to be a growing minority**

The political and financial spectacle has now lost its confidence. Its acts are entirely convulsive. The 'emergency' government that has taken over the maintenance of social cohesion is failing to preserve jobs, and the spending power of the population. The new measures, with which the state aims to secure the survival of the Greek nation in the international financial world, lead to a complete suspension of payments in the world of work. The lowering of the minimum wage is entirely with the full suspension of every form of direct or social wage.

Every cost of our reproduction vanishes. The health infrastructure, the educational spaces, the 'welfare' benefits and anything that makes us productive in the dominant system are now a thing of the past. After squeezing everything out of us, they now throw us straight into hunger and poverty.

The securing of the abolition of any form of wage, on a legal level, takes place via the creation of a "special account". In this way, the Greek state ensures that the money supply will be used exclusively for the survival of capital, even at the cost of our lives. The severity of the debt (not of the state, but of that which is inextricably contained in the relationship of capital) threatens to fall on our heads and eliminate us.

**The myth of the debt.** The dominant patriotic narrative promotes the idea of the Greek debt, promoting it as a transnational problem. It creates the impression that some stateless loan sharks have targeted the Greek state and our "good government" is doing its best to save us, or, on the other hand, that it aims to betray us, being part of international finance capital.

Against this false nationalist conception, the debt is a result of, and an integral part of political economy, a fact that the bosses know only too well. The economy is based upon the creation of shortages, upon the creation of new areas of scarcity (that is, the destructive creation, with negative, always, long-term consequences). The debt and debt obligations will expand to dominate society for as long as there exists property, the routine of consumption, exchange and money.

When we say that the crisis is structural and systemic we mean that the structures of the political economy have reached an end, that their very core has come under attack — that is, the process of value production. It is clear that for capital, we are surplus (see the sky-rocketing unemployment figures) and that at this point, the reproduction of the

labour force is merely an obstacle in the process of capital accumulation. The monetary-debt crisis, that is, the replacement of wages with loans, and the inability of issuing of loans, lead the system into a vicious circle of unsustainability. This happens, because it puts into question the value of work itself, that is, the same relationship through which those from below were part of the system.

**Should we then head for socialism and a 'people's economy'?** All kinds of union professionals and wannabe-popular leaders present their own illusions about a political solution within the system and the current political economy. They might talk of the nationalisation of banks, they might take the form of the rebirth of rational liberalism. Sometimes, they even take the form of integration and an alternative 'revolutionary spirit'. Sometimes we hear about green development, ecological decentralisation, direct democracy and the fetishism of political forms.

While the market itself and state intervention fail to offer any prospects whatsoever, the political spectacle continues to promote all sorts of products such as a people's economy and state socialism. The mythologies of the various dictatorships of the proletariat, survive at the same time when the masses of those excluded from production, from institutions, the unemployed, all fail to be a reliable customers for political parties and their unions. The reactionary political position of state capitalism has succeeded the previous empty ideology.

**Social war knows no borders.** Some, amidst the crisis, see a re-drawing of national boundaries. The national body and the various racists seem to see an opportunity to target immigrants, make attacks and pogroms, and to promote the institutional racism of the Greek state. For them, their resistance is painted in national colours; they struggle as Greeks, not as enemies of exploitation and the social repression they face.

We consciously chose sides, believing that any presence of any national symbol or flag belongs to the camp of the enemy, and we are willing to fight it by all means possible. Because the nazis of the Golden Dawn, the autonomous nationalists and the other fascists promote a pure national community as a solution, the pre-emptive attacks against them and solidarity towards the immigrants is a necessary condition for any radical project.

**The only solution is social revolution.** Against all the above, we propose social revolution, which we consider the only solution in order to have a life, not just survival. This means, to rise up against any financial and political institution. It requires, through the route of revolt, to take measures such as the abolition of the state, of property and any sort of measurability, the family, the nation, exchange and social genders. In order for us to extend freedom across every part of society.

This is what revolution means! Bringing to this direction any struggle centred on wage demands; any self-organised structure and assembly, especially at a time like the present when the political-governmental form of the systemic crisis can lead to a social explosion. 9/2/12

for the future of the struggle<sup>1</sup>.

This is the main factor in the decay of the "popular" movement in Greece. It is stuck in the trap of nationalism and national divisions that politicians and unions use every means to promote. All parties and unions increasingly inveigh against "violated national pride" Prime exponents of this populist demagoguery are the Greek Stalinists (KKE), which plays the same role as nationalists of left and right everywhere, and continues to spread its chauvinistic propaganda, accusing the government of sell-  
1. However the statement by the occupation of the Athens Law School, which we are also publishing on our site, directly attacks all nationalist and state capitalist 'solutions' to the debacle of debt in Greek, which it correctly identifies as an expression of capitalism's global crisis. Such positions no doubt reflect the views of a minority in the present social movement, but it seems to be a growing minority.

ing off the country, of being a traitor to the defence of the nation etc. They put forward the idea that the root of the situation is not the capitalist system itself, but is the fault of Europe, of Germany or the United States.

This poison puts the class struggle on the terrain of rotten national divisions which are the product of specifically capitalist competition. It's not only a dead end but it is a major obstacle to the necessary development of proletarian internationalism. We have no national interest to defend. Our struggle must grow and unite beyond national frontiers. It is vital that the proletarians of other countries enter into struggle and show that the response of the exploited around the world faced with the attacks of capitalism is not and cannot be on a national terrain. W 18/2/12

# The making of the UK state

The article in WR 351 on Scottish nationalism prompted some interesting responses on the ICC online forum. There was clear agreement with the article that, despite growing divisions in the ruling class, the period when the working class could support demands for the independence of certain states came to a definitive end with the First World War. But the thread discussed the question of whether there is a ‘rational’ basis for Scottish independence today, and the relative strengths and weaknesses of the UK state.

In order to develop our understanding of these and other related issues, we want to take up some of these questions at a deeper historical level, by examining the formation of the modern British state in the 17th and 18th centuries. This article, written by a close sympathiser, shows how and why the Scottish bourgeoisie’s attempt to form an independent capitalist state failed, and also some of the reasons why Scottish nationalism persists and still finds fertile ground today. It first looks at developments in the English state after the revolution of 1649 .

## Restoring the monarchy to restore order

Faced with the common threat from below the whole ruling class had rallied behind Cromwell and the army to crush the Leveller revolt, but once the threat was removed this united front splintered. The short-lived English republic (1649-1660) was constantly plagued by political instability that prevented the consolidation of the bourgeoisie’s victory; the army was actively pressing for more radical reforms and any remaining stability increasingly depended on Cromwell, who in turn depended on the continuing support of the City of London’s powerful financial interests. When Cromwell’s death provoked an attempted army *coup* and a return of the spectre of widespread social disorder, the English bourgeoisie, led by the City of London, concluded that the only way to preserve the hard-won gains of its revolution was to make a deal with the defeated section of the landowning aristocracy to restore the Stuart monarchy to power.

The Restoration was thus a compromise by the capitalist class in the interests of re-imposing order and discipline on the exploited masses: the army was purged and trusted units kept to garrison key towns; radical elements were expelled from the state and political dissent was suppressed; the mobility of landless labourers was restricted and tenants robbed of any security. The new regime was dominated by the landowning aristocracy, but the fundamental gains of the bourgeoisie’s political revolution remained intact, at least in England. For the English bourgeoisie, the success of the Restoration proved an early and valuable lesson about the usefulness of the monarchy as a source of mystification to disguise the reality of its class dictatorship.

## The ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688 - a *coup d’état* to ensure bourgeois supremacy

The ‘Restoration’ provided order and stability for the bourgeoisie but at the price of having to share power with the same semi-feudal, pro-absolutist elements who had been ousted by the revolution of 1649. Before long it was forced to wage a renewed political struggle around the same central issue: the subordination of the monarchy to the interests of capital. Eventually, faced with the threat of a Catholic Stuart dynasty allied to feudal absolutist France, the bourgeoisie, together with a section of the landowning aristocracy, staged what was in effect a *coup d’état*, inviting an armed invasion by Willem van Oranje, military commander of the Dutch republic and husband of the Protestant Mary Stuart. The bourgeoisie carefully prepared this so-called ‘bloodless revolution’ by manipulating events and exaggerating or falsifying the threat of ‘popish plots’ to whip up anti-Catholic hysteria.

The Dutch-led invasion in 1688 led to anti-Catholic riots and significant clashes in England, as well as serious fighting in Scotland and full-scale war in Ireland. The outcome was a definitive political victory for the English bourgeoisie, confirming the supremacy of its interests in the state and settling the respective roles of parliament and the monarchy. Just as importantly it led to the creation of new state structures to finance English wars and commercial expansion, including the Bank of England and the National Debt. The

road was now open for the unprecedented growth of English capitalism without further invasions or major changes in the structure of the state for over a hundred years.

Having thus assured its supremacy by violence, lies and political manipulation, the English bourgeoisie carefully constructed a self-justifying mythology of the so-called ‘Glorious Revolution’ as a natural, ‘evolutionary’ development of parliamentary democracy. Re-writing the story of its ruthless struggle for power, it still prefers to commemorate the ‘revolution’ of 1688 and quietly forget about the time when, in Cromwell’s words, it “*cut off [the king’s] head with the crown upon it*”. The state institutions that emerged from this time bear the aristocratic features of the landowning interests that played such a key role in their formation (along with the City of London financial interests). Above all the British state reflects the pragmatism and flexibility of this faction of the ruling class.

## The making of an English empire

The political struggle of the English bourgeoisie in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was not only to ensure the supremacy of its interests in the English state but also to extend the domination of English capital to the rest of the British Isles. This struggle led to the formation of the British nation state and the birth of British imperialism as a global power, but also to wars and military conquests, massacres and the destruction of whole populations, leaving a legacy of resentments and hatreds, nationalist divisions and conflicts that helped shape the UK state, and which still influence UK politics today.

The foundation for understanding this issue is the uneven development of capitalism in the British Isles. For a myriad reasons capital was concentrated in the south and east of England (and to a lesser extent in the Lowlands of Scotland). Religious differences, which played such a significant role in the early bourgeois revolutions, broadly reflected this pattern, with the most enthusiastic support for the Protestant Reformation coming from the economically advanced regions, and reactions against it coming from the more backward north and west of England, the Scottish Highlands and Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

This pattern of uneven development had a strategic significance: the greatest external threat to English capital’s survival in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was the feudal absolutist empire of Louis XIV, whose aims were to destroy England as a rival power, seize its commercially vital North American colonies and re-impose a Catholic absolutist monarchy. Within the British Isles, the main threat of counter-revolution was from an alliance of French absolutism with surviving military-feudal Catholic factions in the Scottish Highlands and Ireland. A strategic priority for the English bourgeoisie was therefore to destroy the power of these factions and impose regimes totally subordinate to its own interests, at the same time breaking down barriers to the penetration of English capital and eliminating any potential economic rivals.

As a result of all these factors, in Wales, Scot-

1. The most important uprisings against the Reformation in England were the Pilgrimage of Grace in York (1536), the 1549 Prayer Book Rebellion in Cornwall, and the Rising of the Northern Earls (1569). Ireland also saw a series of revolts. In contrast, Kett’s Rebellion in Norfolk (1549) was provoked by frustration at the slowness of change.

land and Ireland the bourgeois revolution was experienced to differing degrees as an invasion from the outside.<sup>2</sup>

The foundations of an English empire in the British Isles were laid in the last stage of feudalism when the centralising Tudor monarchy tried to concentrate power in its own hands at the expense of the weakened nobility by:

- asserting central control over the north and west of England;
- absorbing Wales into the English state;
- imposing direct rule on Ireland, and
- extending English influence over Lowland Scotland.

The resistance of the nobility to these attempts to further weaken its power helped to precipitate the bourgeois revolution in England by fuelling the political confrontation between the absolutist monarchy and the rising bourgeoisie. Ultimately, by further weakening the nobility’s power, the monarchy undermined its principal ally against the bourgeoisie and thus helped to ensure its own downfall, while its centralising efforts helped to create the necessary foundations of a modern capitalist nation state.

## The abortive Scottish revolution and the prolonged resistance of the nobility

A small mercantile and agrarian capitalist class emerged in Lowland Scotland but the power of the military-feudal nobility remained firmly entrenched in the Scottish state. In the absence of a bourgeoisie strong enough to assert its own interests, the class struggle in Scotland remained dominated by violent struggles between religious factions that threatened to undermine the conditions for the creation of a stable capitalist regime.

In the Reformation the Lowland nobility adopted a form of Calvinism (Presbyterianism), which served it as an ideological weapon against the absolutist monarchy and enabled it to successfully mobilise other classes in Scottish society against attempts to impose state control on the church. The coalition of interests in the Presbyterian ‘Covenanter’ movement directly helped to precipitate the English revolution by defeating the army of Charles I in 1639-1640 and forging a military alliance with the English parliamentary forces. But, deeply fearful of the popular discontent unleashed by the civil war, the majority of nobles changed sides, invading England with a Scottish army in return for religious and economic concessions. This split the Covenanter movement and led to civil war in Scotland itself. Following the defeat of the Scottish royalists by Cromwell’s army in 1648, the radical Covenanter wing, led by small farmers and supported by anti-royalist nobles, launched a successful insurrection and seized power in Edinburgh.

This was to be the high point of the Scottish bourgeois revolution from within. The new regime – a coalition of anti-royalist nobles, clergy and smaller landowners – purged royalist nobles from the state and took anti-feudal measures. But the ‘Kirk Party’ was dominated by extreme Presbyterian elements and lacked a wider base of support in Scottish society; at this crucial moment the bourgeoisie was not strong enough to assume state power, and there was no equivalent of the English Independents or radical democratic Levellers to push the revolution to the left.

Fearful of social disorder after the execution of Charles I, the nobles at the head of the Kirk Party proclaimed their support for the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in the British Isles. Faced with this clear danger of counter-revolution from the north, Cromwell’s army invaded Scotland in 1650 and forcibly incorporated it into the English republican state. What followed was in effect a bourgeois revolution from the barrel of a musket, with the nobility removed from power and further anti-feudal measures taken by the English rather

2. Even before its annexation Wales had been drawn into a colonial relationship with English capitalism as a supplier of agricultural products, but the formerly powerful Welsh military-feudal nobility was gradually transformed into a capitalist landowning class without further violent resistance, and the new class of small capitalist landowners or gentry that arose to meet the needs of the English market tended to integrate itself individually into the English aristocracy.

than the indigenous bourgeoisie, which inevitably provoked resentment among all classes in Scottish society.

Unlike in England, in Scotland the restoration of the monarchy was accompanied by a full-blown counter-revolution that swept away all anti-feudal measures and handed power back to the nobles, who proceeded to entrench their position and unleash state terror against any sign of dissent. Opposition to this restored feudal state was again led by small farmers and artisans in the radical wing of the Covenanter movement and took the form of an intensified sectarian struggle involving armed uprisings, peasants’ revolts and guerrilla warfare.

The deposition of the Stuart dynasty in the 1688 ‘Glorious Revolution’ provoked a political crisis in Scotland, posing the ruling class with a stark choice. The majority of the Scottish nobility decided to accept the new constitutional monarchy, but a sizeable ‘Jacobites’ minority (largely but not exclusively in the Catholic Highlands) actively opposed it, continuing, with French backing, to fight for the restoration of Stuart absolutism in the British Isles as the only way to preserve its waning power and privileges.

In order to neutralise this threat the English bourgeoisie now put the Scottish ruling class under increasing pressure to give up its political and economic independence. A last ditch attempt to establish Scotland as an independent colonial and commercial power failed disastrously in the 1690s, due in part to English sabotage. The Scottish bourgeoisie’s interests were still best served by building up a home market protected by its own state, but the nobility, as large landowners, needed access to English markets, and in 1707, despite opposition from a wide range of interests, the Scottish ruling class agreed to accept its incorporation into the new British state.

The Act of Union did not in itself represent an advance for the bourgeois revolution in the British Isles; in a compromise due to its overriding strategic concerns, the English bourgeoisie left the Scottish military-feudal nobility’s rights and privileges intact, including those of the Jacobites who proceeded to launch a series of insurrections. It was only after the military defeat of this surviving feudal faction in 1746, by combined English and Lowland Scottish forces, that the road was finally clear for the transformation of Scotland into a modern capitalist regime.

The destruction of Highland feudal clan society was an inevitable consequence as the military-feudal clan chiefs, newly transformed into capitalist landowners, proceeded to expropriate their own former clansmen in their quest for profit; these brutal ‘Highland Clearances’ completed the destruction of the peasantry in mainland Britain, a process that had begun four centuries earlier in England, as vividly described by Marx in *Capital*.<sup>3</sup>

This marked the end of Scotland’s strategic importance as a potential source of counter-revolution and completed a crucial phase of the bourgeois revolution in mainland Britain. The Scottish bourgeoisie was reluctantly forced to give up its attempt to build a rival commercial power and as consolation took the role of junior partner in British imperialism, benefiting from the unfettered expansion of agrarian capitalism that followed the dismantling of feudalism, that in turn enabled all the scientific and intellectual achievements of the ‘Scottish Enlightenment’ (David Hume, Adam Smith, James Watt...).

Unlike in Ireland therefore, in Scotland the ‘national question’ was largely settled through the creation of an English-dominated British state and capitalist power while capitalism was still in its progressive, ascendant phase. But the one-sided terms of the union forced on Scotland by its historic enemy, together with the survival of some distinctive Scottish institutions, encouraged the persistence of anti-English and nationalist ideologies within the UK state. **MH 14/2/12**

3. See “The Lessons of the English revolution” part 1, in WR 323.

## 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.

### Write to the following addresses without mentioning the name:

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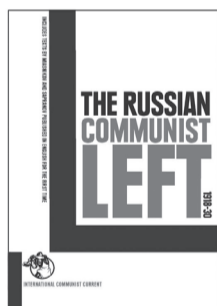
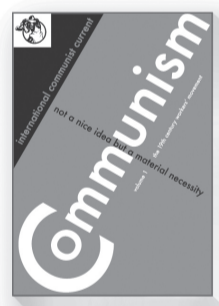
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Unlike the bourgeois press, revolutionary publications such as *World Revolution* have no advertising revenue, no chains of news agents and no millionaire backers. We rely on the support of our sympathisers, and those who, while they might not agree with all aspects of our politics, see the importance of the intervention of a communist press.

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# Syria – horror of the imperialist battlefield

Capitalism is a bottomless pit of horror. In all four corners of the globe this system destroys, starves and massacres. And in Syria today this system of exploitation is carrying out new acts of barbarity at the point of a bayonet dripping with blood. Life is valued less than bullets.

The UN now estimates that 7,500 have died in the violence and 70,000 have fled to Jordan, although the majority of the population cannot get out.

Saturday 4 February was an afternoon like any other in Homs. An enormous crowd was burying the dead in a mass funeral, and demonstrating against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Since the start of these events in April 2011 there has not been a day without a demonstration being repressed. In less than a year there have been more than 2,500 dead and thousands of wounded.

But on the night of 4 February and morning of 5<sup>th</sup> the mass assassinations were ratcheted up even further. For hours, in the dark, all that could be heard was Assad's army's artillery and the cries of dying men. In the early morning the horror of the massacre of Homs became apparent: in the light of day the streets were strewn with bodies. 250 dead, not counting those who died of their injuries later or who were finished off in cold blood by the military in the pay of the government. The massacre wasn't finished by the break of day; the injured were hunted down even in their hospital beds, in order to be executed; the doctors caring for the 'rebels' were beaten; some residents of Homs were shot dead simply for the crime of carrying medication in their pockets. Neither women nor children were spared the carnage. The same night *Al Jazeera* announced that large explosions were heard in the region of Harasta, in the province of Rif Damashq. In this town, about fifteen kilometres North of Damascus, there were violent conflicts between the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the forces of the regime. The massacres were abominable there also.

Since then the bombardments and deaths have only continued – at Homs, and at Binnish and Idlib as part of a new offensive in the North of the country. In fact the violence was stepped up during and after a ridiculous referendum on a new constitution.

How is all this possible? How could a movement that began by protesting against poverty, hunger

and unemployment be transformed a few months later into such a blood bath?

## Who is responsible for this horror? Who orders the killing?

The Syrian regime has done plenty to demonstrate its barbarity. The clique in power will stop at nothing, will not hesitate to massacre, to stay at the head of the state and maintain its privileges. But what is this "Free Syrian Army" which claims to put itself under the command of the "people's protest"? Another clique of assassins! The FSA claims to fight for the freedom of the people, yet it is only the armed wing of another bourgeois faction competing with Bashar al-Assad's. And this is the great tragedy for the demonstrators. Those who want to struggle against their intolerable living conditions, against poverty, against exploitation, are caught between the devil and the deep blue sea and they are crushed, tortured and massacred...

In Syria the exploited are too weak to develop an autonomous struggle; and so their anger has been immediately diverted and used by the different bourgeois cliques in the country. The demonstrators have become cannon fodder, enrolled in a war which is not their own, for interests which are not theirs, as happened in Libya some months earlier.

The FSA has nothing to learn from the blood-thirsty nature of the Syrian regime in power. At the beginning of February, among other things, it threatened to bombard Damascus and all the headquarters and strongholds of the regime. The FSA called on the population of Damascus to flee far from these targets, which it knew was impossible. The Damascus residents had no choice but to lie low, terrified, in cellars or underground like moles or rats, just like their exploited brothers in Homs.

But the Syrian bourgeoisie is not the only guilty party in these massacres. Those implicated internationally all have seats in the UN. Ammar al-Wawi, one of the FSA commanders, directly accused Russia and some neighbouring countries,

such as Lebanon and Iran, for their involvement, and indirectly the Arab League and the international community for their inaction which gave Assad the green light to massacre the people. What a discovery! The new calls for a resolution at the UN, being drawn up at the end of February, will come up against the same divisions of imperialist interest, against which the professed humanitarian concerns will pale into insignificance:

- China and Russia publicly and politically defend the Syrian regime. Russia, like Iran, supplies it with arms. And it is likely that some of their armed forces intervene directly on the ground under some pretext or other. For capitalist powers neither deaths nor the human suffering that they inflict count in the defence of their sordid imperialist interests.

- Iran relies on Syria for a large part of its power in the near Middle East. That's why this state does all in its power to support the existing Syrian regime, even with direct military involvement. And today's proclamations by the 'great democratic nations', hand on heart and crocodile tears in their eyes, that the repression of demonstrators by Bashar al-Assad's army is intolerable, have no real compassion for the bereaved families, only an interest in weakening Iran by putting Syria under their thumb. But this is dangerous because Iran is not Iraq. Iran is a country of 70 million, with a large and well equipped army. And above all with the capacity to create nuisance much greater than Syria. If Iran was forced to block the Straits of Hormuz preventing the supply of oil, what an economic catastrophe that would be! Any direct attack on Iran would unleash uncontrollable chaos. Bloody nights like those in Homs would spread throughout the region.

## Syria on the brink of imperialist war

Tensions are mounting every day between Iran and a number of other imperialist powers: United States, Britain, France, Saudi Arabia, Israel, etc. War is threatened, but for the moment is not breaking out. We are waiting, and the sound of boots marching towards Syria is heard more and more, amplified by the Russian and Chinese veto of the UN resolution condemning repression carried out by Bashar al-Assad's regime. All these imperialist vultures are using the pretext of the Syrian regime's infamy and inhumanity to prepare for full scale war in this country. We first heard through the Russian media, *Voice of Russia*, relay-

ing the Iranian *Press TV*, news according to which Turkey, with American support, is getting ready to attack Syria. The Turkish state is massing troops on the Syrian border. Since then this information has been taken up by all the western media. On the other side, in Syria, Soviet-era ballistic missiles have been deployed in the Kamechi and Deir Ezzor regions, on the border with Iraq and Turkey. All this has followed a meeting in November in Ankara, the start of a series of diplomatic meetings. The Qatari emissary offered Turkish prime minister Erdogan finance for military operations from Turkish territory against President Assad. Meetings were held with the Lebanese and Syrian oppositions. These preparations led Syria's allies, foremost among them Iran and Russia, to raise the temperature and make barely veiled threats against Turkey. For the moment the Syrian National Council (CNS), which according to the bourgeois press includes the majority of the country's opposition, has made it known that it is not asking for any foreign military intervention on Syrian soil. There is no doubt that this refusal is still holding back the Turkish armed forces, and ultimately the Israeli state. The CNS couldn't care less about the human suffering involved in all-out war on Syrian soil, any more than the other bourgeois fractions. What it fears is simply the total loss of the little power it presently holds in the event of a major conflict.

*The horrors which we are seeing every day on the television and in the bourgeois press are both dramatic and real. If the ruling class are showing us all this at length it is out of neither compassion nor humanity. It is to prepare us ideologically for ever more massive and bloody military interventions. Bashar al-Assad and his clique are not the only executioners in this genocide. The executioner of humanity is the dying capitalist system which produces the barbarity of inter-imperialist massacres just as surely as storm clouds produce thunder. Tino 29.2.12*

## 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 stultified 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

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

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

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*.