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

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

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

The student revolt in the UK is the best answer to the idea that the working class in this country is going to passively put up with the torrent of attacks being launched by the new government (in continuity with the previous government) on every aspect of our living standards: jobs, wages, health, unemployment and disability benefits as well as education. They are a warning to the rulers that a whole new generation of the exploited class does not accept their logic of sacrifice and austerity. In this they are echoing the massive struggles which have shaken Greece, France, and Italy, and which are threatening to explode in Ireland, Portugal and many other countries.

But the capitalist class, facing the deepest economic crisis in its history, is not just going to cave in to our demands. Not ideology, but the very material logic of their dying system compels them to make these attacks. And to force them to make even the most temporary concessions, we have all shown the real nature of the ‘democracy’ we live under.

The student revolt in the UK is a call to use this opportunity to organise, to unite, to be conscious of what it is fighting for.

This is no utopia. It’s already taking shape in the initiatives of demonstrators on the streets, and the insistence on collective decision-making in occupations and meetings, the rejection of manipulation by would-be bureaucrats, however ‘left wing’ they claim to be. The tendency towards the unification of the working class can be seen when teachers and lecturers, parents, pensioners, workers from other sectors or the unemployed take part in general meetings in the occupied university buildings or join the student demonstrations, or when students go to the picket lines of striking tube workers. Consciousness about the goals of the movement can be seen both in the formulation of clear demands for today and in the growing recognition that this society cannot offer us a human future.

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

- to keep the struggle under our control, to make sure decisions are made collectively and not imposed from above, we need to organise mass meetings in the schools, college and universities, open to both students and employees. All committees and co-ordinations that speak in the names of these meetings have to be elected and recallable;
- we need to make direct links between different schools, colleges and universities. Don’t leave it in the hands of the union apparatus or self-appointed leaders;
- to broaden the movement beyond the education sector, students need to go directly to the employed workers, to the nearest factories, hospitals and offices, calling on them to come to their meetings, to join their occupations and demonstrations, to walk out alongside them and bring their demands into a common fight against austerity and repression.

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

International Communist Current, 2 December 2010

Inside this issue

Occupations, towards unity, self-organisation

Leftist networks help unions regain control

SWP put forward a capitalist ‘alternative’

Britain: economic crisis and imperialist dead-ends

Struggling behind the unions' ‘leaders to defeat

Attempts to struggle outside union control

Italy: revue, the revolt is international

A proletarian debate in Edinburgh

After the rescue, Chilean miners buried under nationalism

Meetings, subversives, pamphleteers

Ireland: example of capitalist collapse

Australia $2.25, Canada $1.50, Europe £1.3, India $10 rupees, Japan ¥300 USA 90¢
The tactic of occupying university buildings has been seen as a way around the present mobilisation against education fees and cuts. Although they have often involved a determined minority rather than the whole body of staff and students, and without claiming that they have yet achieved a real autonomy from the NUS, SWP activists often argue that the revolt in universities is not isolated from certain key aspects: the demands they have raised, and their efforts to apply methods of debate and decision making that reflect the need for workers to control their own struggles.

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

1) We demand that the university pledge not to introduce tuition fee increases.
2) The occupation will continue to implement cuts, no staff redundancies or wage reduction.
3) The London living wage must be immediately implemented for all workers, including contracted workers.
4) We demand that the Vice Chancellor issues a statement against fees and cuts as well as a commitment by the members of the Million Plus group to do the same.
5) There must be absolutely no victimisation or disciplinary action taken against any of the students, tutors or representatives involved in this occupation.

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

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

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

The Edinburgh University occupation, which had a strong anarchist presence, was rather more effective in its support for real decision-making and action from below: it described itself as “non-hierarchical” and “entirely leaderless” and affirmed that the strength of the occupations up and down the country was that they had been carried out without relying on leaders or student unions. We may disagree with the alternative being advocated in this statement – a kind of chaotic “swarm” without any attempt to centralise from the bottom up – but these ideas do express a rejection of the kind of premature and manipulative centralisation that the left are always trying to impose on social movements (See “Our chaotic swarm - Edinburgh University Occupation”, 4/12/10). These are just a few examples and this particular movement is very much at the beginning. But

**Leftist networks help unions regain control**

As any reader of the Daily Mail will know there were “at least one” member of the NUS at least one meeting of the Education Activist Network in London. But contrary to the hysterical media articles, the present student movement against cuts and increased fees is not the creation of either the ICC or the EAN. Nor even of the EAN’s rival National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts. On the contrary, among the most positive signs of militancy has been the ability of the movement to escape the clutches of the NUS or the activist networks on its left wing, particularly the NUS, that it has just escaped. They want to oppose the NUS, that it has just escaped. They want to oppose the NUS, that it has just escaped. They want to oppose the NUS, that it has just escaped. They want to oppose the NUS, that it has just escaped. They want to oppose the NUS, that it has just escaped. They want to oppose the...

**Bourgeois media focus on trashed van and play down occupations**

In the recent wave of demonstrations and occupations of students across Britain there has been a wide range of ideas and slogans put forward. Whether in discussions, on placards, or elsewhere, the common theme has been the limited to “Down with the rise in tuition fees!”

The understanding that the increasing problems facing students are not in any way isolated from the experiences of workers, the unemployed, the sick and pensioners is widespread. It’s because of the range of ideas thrown up, about how to organise the struggle, about the nature of society, that leftist groups like the Socialist Worker and Workers’ Liberty, a Trotskyist group, take a fresh look at putting their propaganda to students.

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

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

All this gives the impression of an imminent collapse of the coalition government. It’s really true in with recent experience elsewhere in Europe. Note the scale of recent struggles in Greece, Spain and Portugal and the fact that each government is still in place.

Of course, the focus of the SWP is on a potentially “divided” government, yet the differences between the NUS and LibDem views on the maintenance of capitalist order are mostly superficial – as are both parties’ differences with Labour. After all, in the Labour Party there is a ‘coalition’ between who emphasise the needs of business and the market economy, while others, on the left, see the labour-capital relationship as a means to organise the country, and therefore the university authorities.

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


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**SWP put forward a capitalist alternative**

In the recent wave of demonstrations and occupations of students across Britain there has been a wide range of ideas and slogans put forward. Whether in discussions, on placards, or elsewhere, the common theme has been the limited to “Down with the rise in tuition fees!”

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**Leftist networks help unions regain control**

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

Crisis

1. Between 2007 and 2009, capitalism experi- enced a profound crisis. Starting with the collapse of the housing bubble in the US, the crisis spread throughout the world, disrupting manufactur- ing and service sectors, drawing the developed economies into recession and slowing the rate of growth in emerging economies like China and India. Credit dried up or became increasingly costly, as financial institutions feared to lend one another in case their money was not repaid and their own existence was put in question. This crisis exposed the structural weaknesses underlying all the supposed post-Keynesian policies. This weakness is capitalism’s inability to accumulate according to the basic laws of the production and reproduction of capital: the growth bubble blos- somed from the difficulty of finding profitable outlets for capital; the credit crunch reflected the bubbles’ instability; the response of the bourgeoisie has been the resort to debt to try and keep the economy functioning. Although capitalist- ism has returned to growth over the last two years the problems that have been resolved have not been resolved. In particular the weight of debt worries the interna- tional bourgeoisie.

2. The recession in Britain has been the deep- est since the Second World War with a peak to trough fall in GDP of 11.2%. Even in terms of the rate of recovery, the bubble that never quite burst other than since the breakdown of the housing bubble, which had been at the heart of the eco- nomic growth under Blair and Brown. The manu- facturing sector was the most severely hit and the construction sector was savaged with a fall of nearly a third. The impact on the service sector was greater than in previous recessions and its weight in the economy meant that it contributed most to the steep decline in GDP. Imports and exports in both manufacturing and services fell as global trade declined. The number of companies going into administration exceeded twelve and a half thousand in 2009 to seventeen thousand in 2009. The stock market reacted with a sharp decline from a high of over 6100 to 5500 at the low in early 2009. The recovery has been punctuated in early 2010 as fears of highly indebted- ed countries defaulting on their loans spread. The pound fell more sharply against other currencies than since the breakdown of the Bretton Woods Agreement in the early 1970s.

3. The crisis posed a particular threat to Britain because of its reliance on the financial sector. From the last part of the 19th century, Britain ex- plowed in its trade and its position as the “world’s banker” to compensate for the loss of its manu- facturing dominance; this tendency was further accelerated by the steep decline in exports. Follow- ing the Second World War and the US’s assertion of its dominance Britain was forced to look for other ways of appropriating a share of the global surplus value. The route it took was to develop its financial sector with the result that this was financed accounting for above half the growth in new credits be- tween 1948 and 1970 to 15% today. The state has supported this development with successive governments from Thatcher onwards pursuing the liberalisation of the financial markets. By 2006 the assets of British banks totalled more than five times the national GDP. In comparison, US bank- ing assets rose from 20% to 100% of GDP over the same period. The spectacular growth in assets was closely associated with the increase in the “banking’s” capital ratio, which fell from 15-20% at the start of the 20th century to just 5% at its end. All of this meant that when the crash came the British economy was particularly exposed and the collapse confronted with a threat not only to its financial sector but also already as a whole and to Britain’s international status.

4. The immediate response of the British bour- geoisie reflected the scale of the threat facing it. The state did not hesitate to assert itself to defend its class interests. Despite its ideology about the greater efficiency of the free market, the bour- geoisie did not hesitate to nationalise some banks and force others to merge. It cut inflation rates to the lowest level on record and effectively below the rate of inflation. It injected £200bn of “quan- titative easing” in an effort to boost lending. In fact the banks mainly used this fictitious capital to restore their finances and resume speculation. It is a sign of the extent of the main crisis that the British state has had to try and stimulate consumption. It has even used ter- ror laws against the Icelandic banks. The total cost of this intervention was £121.9bn in 2009 alone with the overall cost of the financial crisis estimated to increase in the total state debt to £296.9bn in July 2010. The effect was to prevent any further bank failures, to stabilise the financial sector and fa- cilitate the modest recovery recently seen.

5. Today the bourgeoisie has moved from the im- mediate containment of the effects of the crisis to an attempt to restore the profitability and standing of the sector. This involves a push for increased productivity and to re-duce the national GDP in the name of win- ning the confidence of the financial markets. This is the immediate purpose of the attacks on pay and conditions. The problem of such large debts is that in addition to the interest payments being a further deduction from the surplus-value produced – and hence a deduction from future profits unless the proportion of the value produced that goes to the working class can be reduced - its existence poses questions about the long term viability of the economy to produce profits. The second is to reduce the cost of labour and the amount of the profit. This involves not only the push to long term in order to increase the productivity and competitiveness of British manufacturing and hence reduce the profits available to the capi- talist class. In this effort a renewed importance is being given to manufacturing which, despite its continued decline, is still a significant part of the economy, especially as regards exports where it accounts for a much larger proportion of the total than the service sector.

6. The recession did not affect the working class as severely as might have been expected during its official phase. In particular, although unemploy- ment went up by nearly a million, the increase was less than in previous recessions and one mil- lion is a long way short of the 2.3 million reached in 1980-81. One of the reasons for this was that the decisive inter- vention of the state limited the immediate impact of the recession, protecting both industry and the workers employed from the full force of the crisis. The other was that the working class accepted low wages and longer working hours in order to avoid the advance of their own interests. This is especially evident in the area comprising Pakistan, Afghanis- tan and Iraq where a rapid increase in the size of the military has brought about a massive boost in military spending. This has resulted in a massive increase in the cost of living in the area and hence the profits available to the capi- talist class. In this effort a renewed importance is being given to manufacturing which, despite its continued decline, is still a significant part of the economy, especially as regards exports where it accounts for a much larger proportion of the total than the service sector.

7. The crisis has posed a particular threat to Britain because of its reliance on the financial sector. From the last part of the 19th century, Britain ex- plowed in its trade and its position as the “world’s banker” to compensate for the loss of its manu- facturing dominance; this tendency was further accelerated by the steep decline in exports. Following the Second World War and the US’s assertion of its dominance Britain was forced to look for other ways of appropriating a share of the global surplus value. The route it took was to develop its financial sector with the result that this was financed accounting for above half the growth in new credits be- tween 1948 and 1970 to 15% today. The state has supported this development with successive governments from Thatcher onwards pursuing the liberalisation of the financial markets. By 2006 the assets of British banks totalled more than five times the national GDP. In comparison, US bank- ing assets rose from 20% to 100% of GDP over the same period. The spectacular growth in assets was closely associated with the increase in the “banking’s” capital ratio, which fell from 15-20% at the start of the 20th century to just 5% at its end. All of this meant that when the crash came the British economy was particularly exposed and the collapse confronted with a threat not only to its financial sector but also already as a whole and to Britain’s international status.

8. The imperialist situation continues to be large- ly defined by the drawn out crisis of American im- perialism as its ability to dominate the globe other than through shows of military strength continues to decline, and by the increasing complexity of the situation as the lesser powers seize the chance to advance their own interests. This is especially evident in the area comprising Pakistan, Afghanis- tan and Iraq where a rapid increase in the size of the military has brought about a massive boost in military spending. This has resulted in a massive increase in the cost of living in the area and hence the profits available to the capi- talist class. In this effort a renewed importance is being given to manufacturing which, despite its continued decline, is still a significant part of the economy, especially as regards exports where it accounts for a much larger proportion of the total than the service sector.

9. British imperialism is also struggling in the impasse that it got into as a result of the failure of its imperialist policy under Blair. The attempt by Blair to adapt to the American offensive that began in the days of Bush Sr. and the chaos in Iraq and Afghanistan with the result that its position on the world stage became further weakened by the dramatic decline in the size of the British imperialist class. In this effort a renewed importance is being given to manufacturing which, despite its continued decline, is still a significant part of the economy, especially as regards exports where it accounts for a much larger proportion of the total than the service sector.
Struggling behind the unions leads to defeat

The movement of struggle against the pension reforms in France has been so far. Workers and employees of all sectors have regularly come into the streets in their millions. Since then, the major moments of the movement have appeared here and there, expressing a profound and growing discontent. This mobilisation is the expression of the class struggle which shook the world financial system in 2007-8. It is not only a response to the pension reform itself but also, in the industrial and social depth, it is a clear sign of force to the violence of the attacks over the last couple of years. Behind this reform, and the other attacks being prepared at the same time, we see the whole world of power and the whole energy system being pushed further into poverty, precariousness and misery. And these attacks aren’t even close to ending because of the inevitable deepening of the economic crisis. This struggle is clearly only the harbinger of others following on from those in Greece and Spain in the face of drastic austerity measures.

However, despite the massive and impressive side to the movement, it has not gone clear. On the contrary, it is unwavering, despite the pressure in the streets, relentlessly affirming its firm will to push through this attack, constantly and cynically repeating that it is “necessary”, in the name of “solidarity” between the generations. Everyone knows this is a lie, almost a provocation.

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

Why does this massive movement not succeed in pushing back the government?

The answer is simple: the government is sure the unions have control of the situation, unions which have always accepted the principle of a “necessary reform” of pensions which is usually accepted by the machine. All they can and will do is to graft themselves onto the mobilisation to avoid losing all credibility, are also fully agreed on the necessity of this attack on the working class. After all, they voted for it.

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

Why does this movement meet with success?

First of all because the students were organised in mass meetings (general assemblies) open to all, making decisions together, public and private, at work or unemployed, etc. This surge of confidence in the capacities and strength of the working class, of profound solidarity in struggle, created a dynamic of extension in the movement, a breadth drawing in all generations. On the one hand the mass meetings aimed to hold the widest possible discussions, without being confused to the problems of students; on the other hand we saw demonstrations by workers mobilised alongside the university students and high school students.

But it was also because of the students’ determination to organise against the fragmentation of the working class into open struggle, not falling for the unions with the bells and whistles of “unions defend the CPE”. As was said in the leaflet from the “AG interpro” at the Gare de l’Est on 6 November: “The strength of this movement does not only lie in blocking a petrol depot here or there or even a factory. The strength of the workers is to unite in their workplaces, over and above their job category, where they work, for which enterprise or industry, and to make decisions together…”

We have seen the unions united in one “Inter syndicalise” everywhere, all the better to promote the appearance of unity, setting up the appearance of meetings without any real content, caught up in the most corporatist preoccupations, all the while publicly adhering to their pretended will to fight for all and all together’… but each organised separately, behind its little union cell, and doing everything to prevent massive delegations searching for solidarity in neighbouring enterprises.

A movement rich in perspectives

On the other hand there is huge mobilising going on all in the media about the numerous interprofessio nal committees or general assemblies’ which are appearing this period, all organised within their areas and their unions, their employers, their centre social and in the media, all the while preventing any real expression of workers’ solidarity on the ground. In brief: a lot out and out barraging on the one hand and on the other activity aiming to sterilise the movement and marshal it behind false options, to erect every division, confuse and better lead it to defeat.

The refinery blockage is the most obvious example. When the workers, who were initially militant, showed an increasing will to express their solidarity with the whole working class against the attacks, the CGT leadership, in particular the CGT national leadership, turned against the workers, against the CGT convention that solidarity must play to the gallery and appear to orchestrate the most radical struggles, and choreograph the work of the different unions in their respective fields.

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

This is still the same unapparatus which stifled and marginalised the real expressions of autonomous class struggle.

However, this defeat bears many fruits; for de spite all the efforts of all the bourgeoisie’s forces to seal off any breaches where workers’ anger es caped, they have not succeeded in dragging it into the general defeat of a sector as they did in 2003 (see JR 114), when the struggle against public sector workers cut came way to a bitter retreat among workers in education after several weeks on strike.

This movement is coming to an end. But “the attack is only beginning. We have not lost a battle. The bourgeoisie has de clared the class war on us and we still have the means to contain it” (leaflet entitled “No-one can struggle, take decisions or win in our place” signed by the workers and precarious workers of the SNCF, the SNCF-RATP, the CFDT, the CFDT de l’Est et de- FRANCE, already quoted above).

To defend ourselves we have no choice but to ex tend and develop our struggles massively and to take them into our own hands.

“Have confidence in our own strength” must be the slogan for tomorrow. WW 6.11.10. Trans lated from our paper in France, Revolution intern ationale, no 417

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

Workers and students in revolt

Daily Mail Exposes ICC Plot

Tabloid hysteria about “foreign subver sives”

Testimony on the repression meted out at the demonstration of October 19 at Lyon in France

French police use the kettling tactic too

Tekel- Turkey: Passing on the experi ence of the class struggle

Tour in Europe by a member of the Tekel workers’ struggle group

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

Catastrophes

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

War

Tensions mount between North Korea, China and the USA

en.internationalism.org
Attempts to struggle outside union control

Below we are publishing two leaflets that demonstrate the effort on the part of what is still a minority, but a growing minority, to take control of its own struggles. 1 The first one was written and adopted by the general assembly of the CNT-CNT-AIT in Toulouse. The second was produced by some individually active participants in the inter-professions GA of the Gare de l’Est in Paris. 2

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

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

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

We can decide the form that the movement will take. We have to build it with strike committees in our workplaces, on our train journeys, in our neighbourhoods. We must unite the largest possible numbers of the working population, coordinated at the national scale with elected and revocable delegates.

We have to decide the forms of action to take and our demands… and not let anyone else do it.

Letting union leaders, Chérèque (CFDT), Thibault (CGT) and Cie take decisions for us, will lead to defeats. Chérèque supports 42 years of pension contributions. We no longer have confidence in Thibault after he didn’t call for the legislation to be withdrawn, just as we can’t forget how in 2006 he drank champagne with Sarkozy while thousands of us were laid off, leaving us all to struggle all on our own. We haven’t got confidence in so-called “radicals” anymore. Mailly (FO) shows his radicalism by shaking hands with Aubry on the demo while the PS (Socialist Party) votes for contributions of 42 years. As regards Southern-Solidarity, the CNT3 or the far left (LO, NPA), they have no other perspective to offer us than uniting the unions. That’s to say uniting us behind those who want to negotiate a retreat.

If today they are pushing the case for retrievable strikes, it’s above all to avoid getting things out of their control. Controlling our struggles is what entitles them to be present at the negotiating table… why? So that, as it was written in the letter signed by seven union organisations to the CFTC to Solidarité pop’art across the union organisations’ viewpoint, “with a perspective of defining all the correct and effective measures to guarantee the sustainability of the pensions system by sharing out the costs.” Can anyone believe for a moment that it’s possible to deal with those who’ve attacked our pensions since 1995, with those who have led a methodical demolition of our living and working conditions?

The only unity that can force the government and ruling class to back down is the grass roots movement from retired, unemployed and young workers, students, the precarious and immigrant, union and non-union in joint assemblies and by taking control of our struggles ourselves. We think that withdrawing the pensions’ legislation is our minimum demand. That’s not enough though. Historically, new generations of workers are already expected to exist with less than 700 euros a month, while hundreds of thousands of young people scrimp by with RSA (overtaking a lack of) jobs. For millions of us, we are already facing questions of whether we will be able to eat, be able to house ourselves or if our health will suffer. That’s what we don’t want.

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

To deal with the situation we must not put our trust in the left wing parties (PS, PCF, FG …).

They still badly manage the affairs of the bourgeoisie and never question private industrial and financial property or large-scale land ownership. We must take the offensive against the state and capital. Forging alliances with other struggles, the struggles of the whole working class, as Karl Marx said, “unite the largest possible numbers of the working population, coordinatied at the national scale with elected and revocable delegates. Let’s get together and share information and perspectives for the struggle in the GA at the end of the demonstration, but also on every evening this week: Union building. Place Saint-Sernin – 6 pm.

Leaflet of the GA of Saint-Sernin (Toulouse)

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

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

Affirm your unity and take control of your struggles.

The movement is not being led by the unions or by the Left. The demonstration was immense. We have strength in numbers, we now have to deepen our consciousness of the fact that only by taking the struggle into our own hands, by conducting the broadest possible discussion, by uniting across all sectors, with the support of temporary and unemployed workers and students, can we really succeed in imposing the will of the majority.

Let’s not delay in opening the GA’s to everyone, let’s decide on joint actions that extend the struggle and spread solidarity! Let’s share our experience of the recent picket lines and blockades, let’s send for support, let’s decide on the possibilities for forming the biggest sectors of all: Thales, Airbus? The only “violent acts” of ours are in wanting to spread the strike. The real violence comes from the state which generates it and provokes it too.

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

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

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

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

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

“Today thousands of students went back to the streets. Assessments and news are being held all over the place to decide about mobilisation tactics for the next few days, and many more schools, colleges and faculties have been occupied.

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

Yesterday’s protests paralysed Italy. At least 24 major train stations were completely stopped for hours; motorways and airports were targeted for direct action and pickets. Other targets, just like in the last few days, were monuments and government buildings. The protests got fiery in Rome when students gathered outside Montecitorio (Chamber of Deputies) and tried to break in just when the Chamber was voting on the reform. Marches in the centre city very violently charged by the police, who used teargas.

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

Amos 4/12/10

Continued from page 6

A proletarian debate

of the present writer, this presentation confirmed a feeling that the ICC underestimated the anti-poll tax movement of the time, tending to stress the class struggle in the universities and schools already occupied in 1968. But today ‘higher education’ is far less a privilege of people from better-off families. A far larger proportion of young Italians expect to go to university as part of their training for a life of wage labour – and many are also compelled to work part time to fund their studies. The present revolt in the universities and schools is much more directly a part of the working class struggle in general; and it is much more strongly supported by the working class as a whole, who see their own children struggling against government attacks which are part of the general austerity offensive of the capitalist state. The promise of direct solidarity between students and workers is already beginning to be realised.

Amos 27/11/10

The meeting ran out of time at this point. The only problem with this was that there was no opportunity to discuss what happens next: is the day school a one off or will it be a basis for more regular meetings? Can we imagine the same kind of meeting happening in Midlands discussion forums? We certainly hope that the latter will be the case and we will support the GA’s efforts in this regard. A number of the participants stayed for drinks at the bar afterwards where a lot more informal discussion took place. It was an excellent meeting and there was by far the clearest of expression of what we would de-scribe as a ‘proletarian culture of debate’.

Amos 27/11/10
After the rescue, Chilean miners buried under nationalism

Our comrades from the Grupo de Lucha (Labour Action Group) in Chile have been buried under the weight of nationalist propaganda. This is a very clear and visible phenomenon of the way Piñera and the Chilean bourgeoisie have tried to use the tragic situation of the Chilean miners to wage a whole campaign of nationalism.

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

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

A great media show

In no time at all the media (press, radio, TV, internet...) had informed everyone concerned about this event. It filled the media for almost 24 hours a day. 33 miners buried alive in a mine, since 24 November 2010 to 7 February 2011. TheBehaviour of those who were entombed were: the Chilean state lead by Piñera and the mining company San Esteban.

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

Hiding the terrible working conditions

But it was not enough just to show “solidarity” with the miners. The state along with the miners’ unions, national, local or international, (VSN, UAC, USO, etc...) is trying to deflect the miners’ reproaches by accusing all the others towards attacking the Lib Dem “betrayal of the promise to oppose tuition fees, typified by the rounding of the march on 24 November 2010”.

A question connected to the problem of working with leftist was: do we agree with the NUS, the Unison, the TUC, the Lib Dem, the Greens and others towards attacking the Lib Dem “betrayal” of their promise to oppose tuition fees, typified by the rounding of the march on 24 November 2010? (Source: Lib Dem HQ in London). Although some present supported this approach, here again we were not at all alone in arguing against any policy of trying to ‘split the coalition government’ or ‘bring down the Tories’ because such ideas play directly into the hands of the Labour Party and the official opposition whose job it is to stifle any real causts. Furthermore, the focus on Lib Dem HQ would lead protestors into a trap set by the police following the example of the anti-austerity march on 10 September in London that came only too true with the kettling of the demonstration on the 24th.

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

Dutch and German communist left

The next session, given by a member of the AF, was on the Dutch and German communist left. We were in agreement with virtually all of it. The presentation made no attempt to hide the fact that the Dutch and German communist left were Marxists and were often very critical of anarchism; that they were always ready to enter into discussions on liberation and the Holovest party at the beginning of the 1917-23 revolutionary wave. The description of their activity in struggles against unions, state bureaucracy and the USSR was accurate and nuanced. The speaker defended the left communists as the main group that had been involved in the struggle for freedom and tiny sect, showing that their membership and their influence among the most advanced sectors and organizations was very strong. When the discussion turned to the reasons for the dramatic shrinking of this current in the late 20s and 30s, the emphasis was really laid on the general defeat of the working class which reduced all its revolutionary expressions to an almost inexpressible state. The same speaker, in a particularly trenchant way that some had accused the AF of ‘pinching’ the mantle of left communism, which we took to be a correct analysis of the situation. The CC has made a great effort to bring about the situation.

The proletariat in Chile and the rest of the world must understand that nationalism leads to a dead-end, by dividing the proletariat by country, and that it ends up in world-wide massacres. Capitalism, racism, and nationalism are the same, whether it is the Chilean “Chilean”, “The great Chilean Family” “thanks to Chileans”, “The great Chilean”...

We have been living through a massive campaign of nationalist propaganda with a disgustingly Whittie bit of paternalism and triumphalism around the effort to rescue the miners in Chile. The State, with Piñera, has created a climate of nationalist festivities among the miners rescue, we have been shown that the state and the bourgeoisie are involved in the extraction of minerals from Chile to keep alive their own bourgeoisie. We have been taught that Chile is with them and they are presented as Chilean citizens above all else.

Nationalism hides the deception and exploitation of the working class. We have seen workers singing the national anthem in squares and streets, dressed in the flag along with their brothers exploitation and explorers. Workers have fallen into a bourgeois trap and the nationalismopenhed bought by the exploiting class “Love Chile”, “Proud to be Chilean”, “The great Chilean Family”...

The next session – which replaced a more historical one by the CNT-AIT - was an open discussion and presentation on the miners’ struggle. The presentation made no attempt to hide the fact that the miners were part of the same social class and that the mining bosses have the same interests as the workers, that they are part of the same social class and therefore have the same interests to defend. When workers support the fatherland and the state, they are reinforcing the chains of exploitation and slavery. The proletariat has to draw the lessons that it cannot lose its class perspective. Faced with paternalism colored taps, gifts and bribes, they must affirm that all these efforts by the bourgeoisie and state are nothing more than huge deception and sleights of hand. Their sole concern is to profit from our toil. After this rescue, the working conditions will remain the same or even worsen due to capital’s new offensive. The new crisis, and the ruling class can do nothing to change this situation. Only workers’ unity against the interests of the exploiting class will allow us to set against the imperialists’ orders, as the examples set by the international working class, through spreading its economic struggles, regaining and deepening its political influence, and by continuing to promote the humanist humanity that is capable of putting forward a truly human community, where its role as beasts of burden is abolished forever.

Workers of the world unite!
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 anything that we think is not of general interest, then we may publish both correspondence and our reply in our press.

Write to the following addresses without mentioning the name:

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From the rest of the world use international@internationalism.org

Visit the ICC Website http://www.internationalism.org

ICC Public Forums

Lessons of the struggle against pension reform in France

BIRMINGHAM 11th December, 2.00pm
Friends of the Earth, 54A Allison Street, Digbeth, Birmingham B1

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ICC books on the history of the workers’ movement

The Italian Communist Left £10
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Governments could take the banks under their control and would make sure it got over the message that the austerity measures were unfair and too hard and it was a pity that Corporation Tax tax would be increased up to 33%. Protesters insisted that the government were ‘poppets of the EU and IMF’. Even government ministers complained that Ireland, like Portugal, was being pressured into accepting EU/IMF conditions. While financial support came from the IMF, various EU bodies and the UK, Sweden and Norway, the Irish state was compelled to make its contribution to the bank bailout by taking €17.5 billion from the National Pension Reserve Fund.

There is no secret in the role of the IMF and EU bodies. After Greece, the bourgeoisie internationalisation of the collapse of the economies of Ireland and Portugal would have an impact on the stability not just of the euro, but the European Union. Even if the state is not part of the eurozone, but the government judged its 67bn contribution as a necessary step to take, ultimately in the interests of the British economy. All economies are interdependent, none can function in isolation from the rest of the world economy. After the latest bailout there was still concern about the possibilities of mass unemployment spreading widely. As well as speculation about whether it would be Spain, Italy or Belgium that would be the next country in need of emergency treatment.

False alternatives

The collapse of the banks is just one of a series of rounds of attack, the critics might disagree on details, but, as in the UK, there is agreement on the need to deal with the deficit. Kim Feni, for example, have recently produced a document entitled ‘There is a better way’, which they boast ‘is fully costed and endorsed by independent economists.’ In it they claim that greater taxing of the rich and big corporations will generate billions, and if the government were to ‘take €7 billion from the National Pension Reserve Fund for a three and a half year state wide investment programme’ it would “...accelerate economic recovery and cut the fiscal deficit would be reduced because the stimulus to the economy would bring growth. The experience of the Russian revolution, over the last seven years has shown that whether resorting to debt, investment, spending cuts or tax rises, no government can ever rise to the challenge of escaping the reality of the capitalist economic crisis.

Socialist Worker (27/11/10), writing about the Irish crisis, has a solution that will suit all countries. ‘Aid of the working people could take the banks under full control—taking any profits, sucking the bankers and using the cash for projects society needs... involving the working class in economic and business [...] The expenditure on imperialist war and the military should end tomorrow. Governments such as Greece and Ireland could defy the International Monetary Fund and the European Union’s demands for cuts.’

The nationalisation of the banks is already very far advanced in Ireland, as it is in the UK and elsewhere. Following the latest bailout the government in the Allied Irish Banks (AIB) is now 95% owned by the Irish State. The International Communist Current argues that ‘the right to nations to self-determination’ and ‘the right of nations to self-determination’ are examples of the art of the possible in long-term eco-political struggles.

* * *

The large demonstrations that have accompanied every round of announcements have shown that there is widespread anger in Ireland at how the exploited have to pay for the crisis. In opposition to the government’s imposed austerity, people have taken to the streets, from discussing the means and goals of their struggle, and fighting for their own interests. To put any confidence in governments or unions is fatal for workers’ struggles. The history of the workers’ movement shows that government reforms and union concessions offer the working class nothing, as only the reliable perspective lies in massive struggles culminating in the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. 1/12/10

International Review 143

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

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

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

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

Decadence of capitalism: the age of catastrophes

World Revolution is the section in Britain of the International Communist Current which defines 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 imperialist war and the military should end tomorrow. Governments such as Greece and Ireland could defy the International Monetary Fund and the European Union’s demands for cuts.

- * The Paris Commune of 1871 was the first attempt by the proletariat to carry out this revolution, in a wave which put an end to the imperialist war and went on, a confrontation with the capitalist state. In order to advance its combat, the working class

- * All factions of the bourgeoisie are equally re-

- * 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 in a world scale: the international power of the workers’ councils, regrouping the entire proletariat.

- * The decadence of the bourgeoisie is rapidly re-

- * The regroupment of revolutionaries with the aim of creating a world-wide, 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 experience, but the product of the Russian experience, but the product of the International Communist

- * The Stalinist regimes which arose in the USSR, eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc and were called ‘socialist’, ‘communist’, ‘socialist states’, ‘communist

- * The political positions of the ICC

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