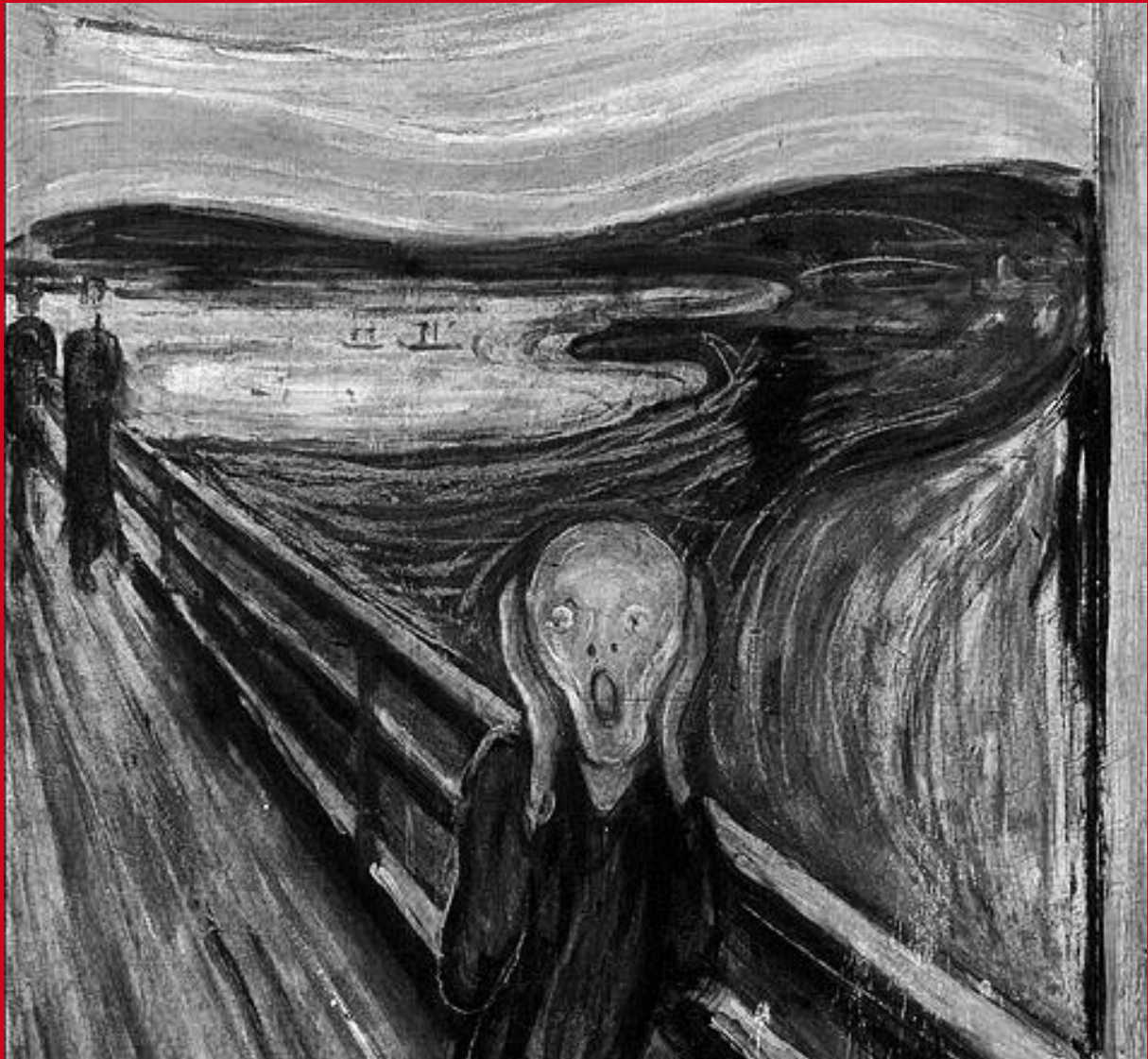


# ***Revolutionary Perspectives*** **61**

**Spring  
2012**



## **Europe's Debt Agony Deepens**

***Journal of the Communist Workers' Organisation***

***Revolutionary Perspectives***  
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**Cover**

Edvard Munch's "The Scream" sold at auction in New York this month for £74 million to a private collector as millions across the globe were plunged further into penury.

## It's Coming Yet For All That ...

For years we in the Internationalist Communist Tendency predicted that the speculative bubble which really started in the 1980s with the deregulation of financial markets would not last. We were confident that what Marx said about speculation being the sign that a cycle of accumulation has entered its final stages still held. But as the years went on and the bubble kept swelling there were some amongst us who began to ask questions about it. The crisis we are in today started with the devaluation of the US dollar in 1971 and the post-war boom was officially over. As the crisis approached 30 years in length (i.e. three times longer than the nineteenth century average) were we now perhaps wrong? After all, the previous crises of the Twentieth century had been resolved much earlier by war which had in turn sparked revolutionary situations. After the collapse of the USSR without a fight (the first time in history that an imperialist power had "gone quietly") we were clearly in a different historical situation.

We had long recognised that capitalism today was no longer quite the same beast as it had been before 1914 even if its fundamental laws remained the same. Monopoly and state domination of the economic scene meant that capitalism had the ability to attenuate its worst contradictions. Playing with interest and exchange rates seemed to give the system more room for manoeuvre. Unemployment remained historically high and inflation was a constant drain on workers' purchasing power but the overall system kept on going. Those of us who pointed to the various times in history when the capitalists claimed to have banished crises for ever (Hoover in 1929 being the best since he said it about 4 months before the Wall St Crash, but also US economists in the 1950s) only for it to blow up in their faces, were regarded as wishful thinkers. In the latest speculative boom in the first decade of this century it seemed that the capitalists were capable of magicking money out of money. In fact all that was happening



was that the debt was swelling but no-one thought it mattered. The Emperor's new clothes may have been transparent but no-one was letting on. Then the fall of Lehmann Brothers revealed that there were no clothes and all was illusion.

All the profit rates which had apparently been tending to rise under the impact of the speculative stimulus simply evaporated and the crash was upon us. However capitalism in its decadent form still has a few tricks up its sleeves and the state took on the debts to save the system. By guaranteeing deposits it ensured no banking collapse and averted the possibility of the economy going into an accelerated freefall. Instead we are all going to pay with death by a thousand cuts which will take years to hit us all. In this the political and economic overseers of capitalism are acting instinctively, with that conscious sense of self-preservation that overcomes all threatened ruling classes. By managing the crisis (i.e. carrying on doing what they have been doing since 1971) they hope to arrive at a point where the mass of debt is no longer so large that it does not threaten the world economy.

And this is an important point to remember when assessing the hitherto inadequate response of the working class to the attacks that have been made upon us. This issue was the centrepiece of the discussion at the recent Manchester meeting of the CWO. Some comrades when assessing the strength of our class enemy and the lack of class consciousness on our side were quite negative about the future prospects not only for the working class but humanity as a whole. How do we face this sober thinking?

Capitalism is now in the deepest crisis for three generations. Its real level of debt is actually so large that there is no prospect of it being paid in centuries. That's the objective situation

— always the easiest bit to deal with. Capitalism thus has no other option but to attack the working class.

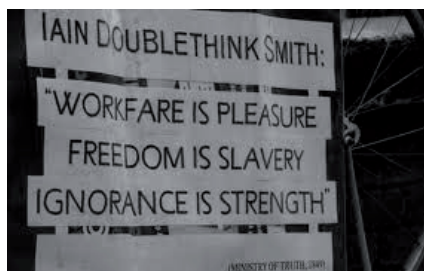
Now we get to the subjective bit which is never easily predicted. What we can say is that capitalism's attacks have hardly begun in Britain. Here the cuts are only now beginning to be felt in earnest for most workers. In most of Southern Europe the suffering is already enormous. But everywhere there will be a lag between the desperation that people feel now and any response. It may be that people are not yet ready to give up on capitalism with its promise of individual consumer choice even when it becomes a taunt (thus provoking riots like last summer). It may be like in 1917 that the outbreak will come out of the blue as the gnawing wretchedness of existence becomes too much to bear. However it comes, the whole history of humanity suggests that we stand on the brink of just such a period. It may not be tomorrow or next year. It may be further off. It will certainly be when some revolutionaries have written off the working class in their lifetimes but come it will. As Robert Burns (almost) wrote over two centuries ago

*For all that and all that  
Its coming yet for all that  
When man to man the world o'er  
Shall brothers be for all that.*

And before it does come those of us who hope for a better future for humanity had better prepare so that we have an international revolutionary organisation which is worthy of the challenges that lie before us.

## **Workfare:**

### **A Scroungers Charter**



Workfare<sup>1</sup> is a brilliant scheme, if you're an employer. It allows you to take on staff without paying them under the guise that you're 'training' them back into the world of work. And there are lots of schemes to choose from; five in all. You can benefit from Mandatory Work Activity where you can get someone to work for you free for four weeks if you can persuade the government you've got something to do with the community (this isn't difficult, they'll accept quite a few tenuous links. You don't have to be a charity or anything; you can tag on a bit of about community involvement in your bid and make it sound good). Or you can sign up to the Work Programme. You can get people to work on six month's placements; you won't have to pay them a penny. Or you could choose Work Experience (free labour for between two to eight weeks, 25 – 30 hours a week), or sector-based Work Academies (you can get free workers for up to six weeks with this one) or there's the Community Action Programme (where somebody will come and work in your business for 30 hours a week, totally unpaid, for six months). And best of all, the whole thing is conveniently funded by the taxpayer to the tune of an estimated £5bn. It's clever because you get the working class to pay twice; once by wringing the taxes out of the ones that have jobs to fund the ones that don't to work for you for free. Win win.

There are downsides of course. Some of the workers you might get may not be suitable. Some of them might be the 'recently unemployed', many of whom have lost their jobs due to the capitalist crisis. A lot of these people have very high skills. They may object to stacking shelves or doing other mundane activities, they may even say this scheme is ruining their chances of getting a real job, but don't worry, you don't have any commitment to them and you can get rid of them quite

easily. Or you might find yourself saddled with somebody who is sick, has cancer for example, because the job centre isn't really fussy who it sends out. Or you might get a young person who isn't really interested in what you have to offer, but don't worry, all of these people are quite easy to deal with because many of them can be threatened with a loss of benefits if they don't comply.

Of course, Workfare has its detractors. There are those who question whether it actually succeeds in getting the unemployed back into work at all. Some organisations are quite scathing about this, like the Social Security Advisory Committee<sup>2</sup>. In April 2011 it published a report saying that the chances of workfare helping people back into work was at best 'ambivalent'. And the Centre for Social and Economic Inclusion stated that the average rate at which people come off benefits without such schemes is almost the same. It concluded that work experience had

*no additional impact on the speed at which young people leave benefit, and may have actually led to them spending longer on benefit<sup>3</sup>.*

Come to mention it, even the big businesses who benefit can't really come up with any figures to justify its massive cost to the state. Most companies are reluctant to talk about the scheme, (many initially involved have since opted out, fearing the stench of 'slave labour' will affect their public image) but figures from Tesco and McDonald's show between 20 and 25 percent of people on placements have gone on to get a permanent job. It might seem like a paltry figure, but to be fair to Tesco and McDonald's why would you want to take on permanent staff when you've got so much free labour to choose from? It's just good business sense to let the government supply you with free workers.

Of course, if you're one of those workers, you might not see it in such a positive light. You might suspect you're being monumentally screwed over, being forced to work for free in some dead end job which won't benefit you at all. You might think that these schemes exploit the unemployed, that they push down wages so that when you do eventually find another job your pay will be lower than it should have been. You might also be sick of listening to multi-millionaires calling you a 'job snob' because you won't flip

burgers or price tins for eight hours a day for no money at all.

And if you're young (and worst hit by this crisis), you may resent being sent on one of the government's apprenticeship schemes. You may resent working full time and then not getting a job at the end of it as promised (Asda took on 25,000 apprentices and not one of them got a job at the end). And you may be so fed up that businesses like Asda walked away with £250 million between them to run these schemes that delivered very little. You may even wonder what 'skills' firms like Asda or Morrisons (which accounts for 70% of apprenticeships) could teach you in the first place.

#### **The Real Scroungers**

But really the government is right; there are too many scroungers who live off the state and who don't want to pay their way in society. The government should know because they belong to the biggest class of scroungers alive. All of their money comes from wealth created by the working class, from the surplus value created by workers who are then taxed on top of that and then pay hidden taxes like VAT. And nobody knows how to screw the system like the ruling class; they know every dodge going (because they created them). They know how to avoid paying their taxes and how to screw as much out of the state as possible (can it be we've already forgotten about the MP's expenses scandal?). And they know how to reward their cronies by giving workfare contracts to the likes of A4E (currently being investigated for fraud by Thames Valley police and by the DWP in an independent audit), Ingeus (owned by city financiers Deloitte) and Serco (which also runs prison transport and detention centres). These and others have been handed millions by the ConDems as part of the "Big Society", the ConDems of course following the last Labour Government's lead.

This problem won't go away. Workfare is designed to both cut benefits by getting rid of 'non-compliers,' and reduce wages for those working alongside free labour and it's come at a time when further education is now just a dream for many young people, when training schemes are being cut back, when the retirement age is being raised, all of which are adding to the growing numbers of unemployed, growing of course because of the capitalist crisis. Unemployment in the UK officially stands at 8.3% and is projected to rise to





9% by the end of this year and growth is predicted not to rise at all. So as more and more of us lose our jobs (and our rights) we will increasingly be forced onto these schemes. As workers we make a living by selling our labour power, being forced to give it away for free damages not only those of us who haven't any work but also those who do.

We're in a bad enough situation as it is. At the moment the average labour cost in the UK is about two-thirds of the levels in Germany and 60% of levels in France. The move to push wages down to make the UK attractive to inward investors may have been started by the last [Labour] Government but it's been taken up with relish by this one. It must be pointed out that those who hoped the unions would be up in arms about workfare have generally been disappointed. For the most part the unions have limited themselves to ensuring the schemes are operated 'without abuse' (like the TUC). Some, however, have been more active in actually backing it and helping its implementation, like the communications union, the CWU, which has signed an agreement with Royal Mail to help introduce workfare into the postal service.

### The Fightback

The only way to fight back is through solidarity between employed and unemployed workers, linking up regional campaigns and then linking these with strikes as they emerge. There have been some successes. In February the government had to climb down in a well-publicised U-turn after demonstrators invaded Tesco branches (and employers became nervous about tarnishing their carefully crafted 'public images'). As many distanced themselves from the scheme

the government was forced to concede that young people will no longer lose their benefits if they leave the work experience programme.

But shaming employers only goes so far and there's still a long way to go. Punishments will still work on other schemes, most notoriously for disabled and chronically sick people on employment support allowance. The state is determined to pick off the most weak and vulnerable among us, but we will only stop the attacks on us as individuals by fighting back as a class.

We live in an upside down world where the majority work so a tiny minority can live in unimaginable luxury, where the real wealth producers, the working class, are labelled scroungers and where the rules are made up by the rich as they go along. But that's the capitalist system for you. How little it has really changed since Marx described this:

*It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse. The law, finally, that always equilibrates the relative surplus population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.*

The slavery of Workfare was not in Marx's *Capital Volume One* but the principles of exploitation he revealed have not changed. If we're united we can make a real fight against Workfare and in the process start to fight against the system that produced it

So, will the real scroungers please stand up? And can the rest of us start to think about organising our lives without them.

RT

### Footnotes

1 This article is a follow up to two texts we published from the Edinburgh Coalition against Poverty in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 59

2 The Social Security Advisory Committee

Report 2011 also mentioned its concern that the scheme 'punished' claimants who were deemed to have displayed the 'wrong attitude' and that this could further hamper a claimant's chances of work in future, signifying an inappropriate attitude to work

3 Centre for Social and Economic Inclusion report 'Youth Unemployment, a million reasons to act?' November 2011.

### Starvation Wages are becoming the Norm

On April 28 cleaners cleaning the Department for Work and Pensions left a note on the desk of its boss, Iain Duncan-Smith. It stated that

"Every morning we clean these offices and these hallways. Our hard work helps you to do your job properly and comfortably. However because of our pay, we are struggling every day to buy the things we need."

The workers are employed by a cleaning agency Mitie which has the contract for Government offices. It pays the minimum wage of £6.08 an hour. This is impossible to live on in London. All 64 cleaners at the DWP are in debt. They want the so-called "living wage" of £8.30 in London. Duncan-Smith has proclaimed that he wants to make work pay but this seems to be about more carrots than sticks. The DWP has refused to meet the cleaners and insists that a wage rise would cost millions (c.f. the **billions** handed to banks). Duncan-Smith has revealed his real attitude when he slagged off disabled workers at Remploy [which the Government want to shut down] who he said "sat around all day drinking coffee".

But this seems almost generous by comparison with those who work on P&O luxury liners. They get £250 a month for an 11 hour shift 7 days a week. That works out at 75p an hour. What a perfect metaphor for where we are today. The ship of capitalism sails on whilst the galley slaves are sinking to drowning point. Something has got to give ...

## **One Law for the**

### **Rich.....**

#### **The Irresistible Decline of Legal Aid**

In December of 2011 Justice Secretary Ken Clarke trumpeted the opening of the Rolls Building, an

*... impressive new court complex  
... located at the heart of the City  
of London on Fetter Lane and is  
the largest specialist centre for the  
resolution of financial, business and  
property litigation anywhere in the  
world.*

The Secretary of State has good reason to promote English law as international commercial dispute resolution is a significant export earner. One example of the type of litigation the Government is so keen to host in the English courts is the recent dispute between Russian billionaire oligarchs, Roman Abramovich and Boris Berezovski, over control of the Russian oil industry, and a number of similar Russian cases are due to be heard within the next few months. Abramovich's QC Jonathan Sumption is known to have made at least £3 million in legal fees, and seemingly on the back of this great achievement has become the first QC since 1948 to be promoted directly to the highest court in the jurisdiction, the Supreme Court.

But while the bourgeoisie are being welcomed with open arms to experience the benefits of British justice, those who have little means and, in many instances have been victims of the very State that promotes justice for the rich, are going to find it a lot more difficult and in some cases impossible to get any justice at all. On 1 May 2012 the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act was passed. This means in April 2013 there will be massive cuts in the scope of civil legal aid. The areas that will be cut are those that have the greatest significance for workers, both employed and unemployed and those with disabilities. The areas of law being cut include employment disputes (unless there is a discrimination), debt (unless repossession of the home is imminent) and welfare benefits advice. If you suffer injury at the

hands of the NHS there will be no legal aid for clinical negligence claims and you will be left to find a solicitor who is prepared to accept the risk of representing you on a 'no win, no fee' basis.

These cuts will reduce the legal aid budget by just under a quarter, but perhaps more significantly will deny the poorest sections of society access to redress against the decisions of the State that affect them. The cutting of legal aid for welfare benefits advice comes at a time when major changes to the benefits system are being implemented and those who fall victims to the State's attempt to deprive them of benefit or even just the inevitable bureaucratic chaos that ensues from changes to the system, will struggle to find any assistance to challenge the DWP's increasingly arbitrary decisions (see article on Workfare in this issue). Similarly employers will know that they can flout what remains of the employment protection laws with little risk of any comeback. These legal aid cuts are a direct attack on the working class.

#### **Preserving Democracy?**

Just as the Government is making it more difficult for us to challenge its decisions it is also planning to increase its control over us and further restrict the supposedly cherished 'liberties' that are said to characterise the 'democratic' state. In the next Parliamentary session the Government is planning to introduce legislation that will allow the State to monitor all e-mails and to hold court hearings in secret where evidence provided, for example by one of the security services, is deemed to pose a national security threat if revealed. The e-mail monitoring proposals are similar to those previously mooted and then withdrawn by the last Labour Government... so much for the Conservatives ridiculous claim to be the party of freedom for the individual, unless of course it is freedom of the individual to economically exploit others. The predictable outrage in liberal circles and also by some on the right (even the *Daily Mail*!) illustrates how the importance of maintaining the idea of individual liberties is greater than its substance. This is of course always



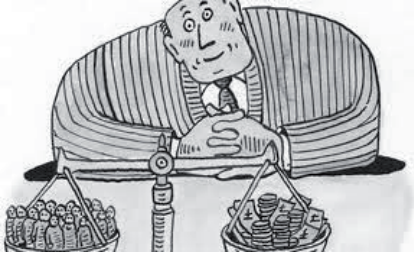
in order to preserve the legitimacy of bourgeois democracy. In some ways the e-mail issue is a red herring as far as revolutionaries are concerned. For years the State has covertly tapped the phones, e-mails and Skype conversations of militants, and in that respect it seems pretty irrelevant that the State now wants to do this legally. One significant difference would be that if this type of snooping is legal it would make it easier for evidence obtained in this manner to be used in court, although again that's not so important as in British courts there is no absolute bar on admitting illegally obtained evidence.

The proposals for secret court hearings are perhaps more worrying although even this is not unprecedented in the UK. Hearings of the Special Immigration Appeals Commission (SIAC) Tribunal deal with deportation hearings against individuals who allegedly pose a national security threat. Not only are the proceedings heard in private but sometimes even the defendant is not allowed to know the evidence against him or her. There is huge potential for miscarriage of justice where trials are held in secret as there is no accountability for the behaviour of the prosecutor or the judge. If this system were to be extended to other courts it would be an extremely worrying development which could be used to deal with anyone deemed to be a 'threat' to the State, just like Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany and myriad 'Third World' dictatorships.

**PBD**

## The Eurozone Crisis

## There is an Alternative but It's Not on Any Electoral List



The British Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson once famously remarked that a week is a long time in politics. And indeed it is amazing how quickly the capitalist class can forget. Take how the current phase of the crisis really started. If you read the financial commentators or listen to politicians in any country today, whether in the UK, US or Europe itself you would think the world crisis of capitalism was due to workers living it up in luxurious welfare states that now can't be paid for!

### Political and Economic Paralysis in Europe Continues

From Greece to Portugal via Italy and Spain the Southern European debt crisis is put down to lazy workers and tax-dodging petty bourgeois. To hammer this home numerous journals have printed quotations from "a (usually anonymous) worker" agreeing that "we all lived beyond our means". They seem to have forgotten that it was the bursting (initially in the US) of a financial bubble created by bonus-bagging bankers and financiers that started it all. The banks and big financial institutions had to be bailed out by the state because they were "too big to fail". It was this bailout which saddled the governments of Europe (and not just Europe) with their current "unsustainable" borrowing costs.

But even this does not get to the root cause of the crisis. States everywhere bailed out the financial system in order to save the entire capitalist order. The last twenty years of financial speculation came about because the whole system was already in deep crisis. This was a crisis of accumulation of capital which began in the 1970s. When other "solutions" like nationalisation and deficit financing failed to re-start accumulation to the post-war boom levels the capitalist crisis could only take one course. It evolved in traditional fashion towards speculation which Marx frequently equated with "swindling" in *Capital Volume III*.<sup>1</sup>

But speculating on the basis of arbitrary values attached to "assets" which were only assets on paper could only be sustained by the pretence that this fictitious capital was actually based on real production values. In fact it was based on a mountain of debt which extended down to the least capable of paying it in society.

This, paradoxically, was a useful alibi when the crash came. It made it so much easier to play on the "we are all in this together" lie. And haven't our masters done well? After four years of increasing austerity to "bring down the debt" global banking debt has not substantially shrunk. According to the Bank of International Settlements, it remains at \$22,347,200,000,000 [see [http://www.bis.org/statistics/r\\_qa1206\\_anx3a.pdf](http://www.bis.org/statistics/r_qa1206_anx3a.pdf)] nor has the speculative trade in so-called derivatives. Indeed the latter (which are a form of hedging against future losses) **continues to grow**. In June 2009 total contracts were valued at \$594.5 trillion but for the latest quarter for which data are available this is now \$707,569,000,000,000. [See <http://www.bis.org/statistics/derstats.htm>]. It is not just bankers' bonuses which have been safeguarded by state intervention but the whole game of financial speculation itself. The derivative debts are not only not unwinding but have expanded by \$100 trillions in the last six months alone. This is more extreme in some states than in others.

As always the Anglo-Saxons continue to play hardest in the financial game with the UK being the only large state in the EU to increase banking debts in the last year. As Robert Peston affirmed at the end of last year

*One other slightly surprising and - perhaps - disturbing trend is that the debt of financial institutions has risen, from 205% of GDP to 210% of GDP.<sup>2</sup>*

And UK capitalism can do little else. Having drastically reduced the manufacturing sector to a point where it counts for only an eighth of GDP it is desperately reliant on the financial sector if it is to get any GDP growth. And this is why the eurozone crisis hits home here too. If the Eurozone economy stagnates how can the British banking sector find new financial and speculative games to play (or "provide banking services" as the British ruling class like to call it)?<sup>3</sup>

Add to that the debt question. Amongst the so-called PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain) the UK has not much exposure to Greek or Spanish debt but is very exposed to Portuguese and Irish debt. If they default (and both survive on IMF and Eurozone handouts) then the British banking sector will also

## Crisis and Class Struggle

arrive at an absolutely unsustainable point. And rising debt in relation to GDP is unstoppable as far as the richer economies of the world are concerned. According to a recent report on 'deleveraging' (i.e. reducing debt):

*Total debt has actually grown across the world's ten largest mature economies since the 2008–09 financial crisis, due mainly to rising government debt. Moreover, the ratio of total debt to GDP has declined in only three countries in our sample: the United States, South Korea, and Australia.*

*In terms of percentage of GDP to debt the UK tops the world's debt league. UK aggregate debt has now gone beyond 500% of GDP, closely followed by Japan. For Spain the percentage is over 300%.<sup>4</sup>*

### The Capitalist Choice

And to try to get these under control they have only one policy. It is to make the working class pay in cuts in welfare, health spending, wages, pensions and jobs. But as we wrote in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 59

*Austerity is resulting precisely in the opposite of what was intended<sup>5</sup>*

As the working class are thrown out of work, as welfare is cut so the economy contracts and government revenues diminish and so borrowing increases. The debts of the all countries, but particularly the so-called PIIGS, continues to rise and only further debt forgiveness and international bailouts will be needed.

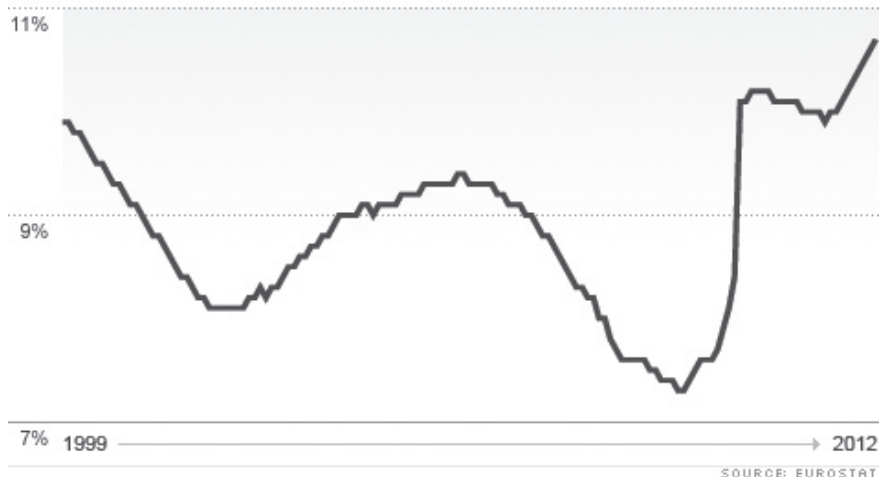
Meanwhile the agony for millions increases daily. The latest unemployment figures given in the *Guardian* [1.5.2012] show that:

*Across the European Union, there are now 24.7 million men and women out of work.*

*Within the eurozone, the youth unemployment rate jumped to 22.1% from 20.6%, with 3.345m adults under the age of 25 out of work.*

Spain and Greece have unemployment amongst under 25s of over 50%. Even in Italy it has reached 36%. And this is official. What would it be like if all those in temporary, casual and part-time work were taken into account?

### EUROZONE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



Given that the general forecast is for this to last a decade we are looking at a lost generation. On top of that across Europe millions of families have reached a desperate situation with some families drowning under debt which continues to mount. Suicides are already on the increase in Greece and Italy in particular.<sup>6</sup> In Greece the average fall in family income over the last four years has been at 30%. Many families with children have only €10 a day to spend on food and many will never get out of debt.<sup>7</sup>

The total bankruptcy (if we can be forgiven the irony) of the cuts policy has dented the confidence of the apostles of austerity. Amongst the global ruling class what could be described as the neo-Keynesians are making a comeback. Headed by economists like James Krugman and Larry Summers they are now pointing to the futility of current policy and calling for "stimulus". And, taking their tone from this, the social democrats, in Britain and France particularly, are pretending they have a new policy to soften the blow of austerity. To many debt-laden and poverty-stricken workers who are totally cynical about the political establishment it seems a worth a try. It cannot be worse than the present.

It is however based on sand and in any case in real terms is not an alternative. The foundations of Keynesianism is deficit financing. The state borrows money (or just prints it) to invest now in projects which create jobs for workers who are then able to give a boost to spending (the so-called multiplier effect) and we get the magical growth. What this forgets is that historically Keynesian policies have only been applied **after** years of austerity have

got down government borrowing. Now however the states are all saddled with so much debt how can they launch a policy for growth based on further deficit financing? These states will find it difficult to finance some of their borrowing through bonds issues to investors (i.e. big financial institutions) who are already running scared of sovereign debt! As it is they are already pursuing a policy of quantitative easing (printing money) just to give to the banks to keep the system going. Once this sort of money gets into circulation then the Merkel Weimar inflation nightmare will be the reality.

### Bankrupt Policies on Offer

In fact, the politicians like Ed Balls and Francois Holland who are offering "change" or to do something different, are only offering to postpone austerity for a year or so longer than their right wing opponents. The idea of launching a policy for growth via the financing (on borrowed or printed money) of new infrastructure will only exacerbate the problem. In truth every segment of our ruling class has no better policy for getting out of the capitalist mess we are in than Charles Dickens' Wilkins Micawber. But desperate voters will probably buy into it. Labour's success in the local elections in the UK (albeit 7 out of 10 voters did not even go to the polls) and Hollande's victory in the French Presidential elections are both signs of this. But nothing will change for workers as a result.

Down the road more desperate solutions are on offer. The extreme right is on the rise proposing "simple" if illusory solutions. For them unemployment and falling earnings are not consequences of the failure



of the capitalist system but due to the European Union and immigration. In the Greek situation our comrades have already raised the alarm over the rise of xenophobic and ultra-nationalist alliances which have sprung up as the crisis is increasingly portrayed as one “Made in Germany”.<sup>8</sup> The likes of Golden Dawn in Greece which has now entered parliament for the first time (with 21 seats), Geert Wilders party in the Netherlands and, not least, the National Front in France have all stepped up the anti-immigrant and anti-EU message. In Greece the thugs of Golden Dawn, like the Nazis they ape, will start to make life more hellish for immigrants than it is already. The more subtle Marine Le Pen hopes to build on Sarkozy’s failure by splitting his party over the issues of immigration and crime in order to make the National Front the main party of the right. Playing the “national” card comes naturally for our ruling class. The “we are all in it together” and sacrifices are needed for the “good of the country” messages are all aimed at diverting attention away from the fact that the working class are paying for the ruling class to continue enjoying the fruits of our exploitation. No doubt the political climate will get nastier. Our Greek comrades have tried to counteract this growing nationalism with an appeal to both German and Greek workers. This has been distributed in its thousands and has been well-received in factories in Germany.<sup>9</sup> The leaflet shows that the working class in Germany have already paid and are still paying for the “economic miracle”.

*The other side of the German “economic miracle” of the last decade are the shrinking wages of the population dependent on employment, because they have paid and are still paying the price of “improving the competitiveness” of the German economy. Real wages of German workers are falling year by year and companies’ profits “inflate” constantly. Purchasing power is now well below inflation. 7 million (about 20% of the workforce) work part-time under fixed-term contracts (“mini-jobs”), with monthly earnings below 400 euros and without insurance. While real wages have declined over the last 10 years, banks have increased their profits by 39%.*

And this is what the ruling class everywhere want for us all. Take the

following piece on the eve of the French Presidential election from Josef Joffe in the *Financial Times* [3 May]

*Francois Hollande is odds-on favourite to win the French Presidency, a bleak prospect for all but new Keynesians and old socialists. ... he should take the lead from his fellow social democrat, Gerhard Schröder.*

*Why the former German chancellor? Because he dared tell his own electorate what neither Mr Hollande nor Nicholas Sarkozy would have uttered even on the rack. Nine years ago, Mr Schröder warned his country: reduce social benefits, loosen up labour markets and accept individual responsibility – or else. Then he carried through with his “Agenda 2010”. And lo, Germany went from zero to 3 per cent growth in the two years before the crash – and back to 3 per cent thereafter.<sup>10</sup>*

Today German workers are no better off but the mass of surplus value they create has given weapons for the likes of Merkel to use in trying to force through more austerity. And as our comrades point out the problem is the same everywhere.

### Elections or Real Change?

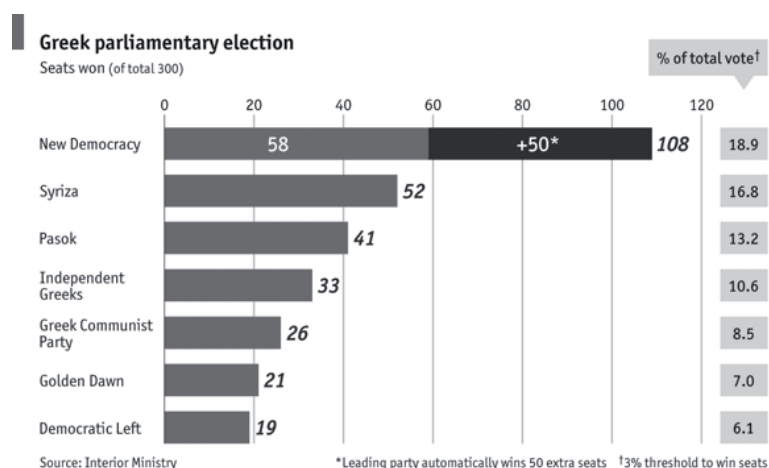
Since the crisis broke 4 years ago twelve governments in the major capitalist states have been replaced including those in Greece and France this month (May 2012).

Elections, as the article from a French comrade which follows this makes clear, are only the means by which the ruling class get us to give them legitimacy. By nominally choosing our rulers we

become accomplices in what they do to us. The options on offer from our rulers are increasingly narrowing. For us the electoral choice the capitalist class offers is like that of the concentration camp – either death by overwork or through starvation. Greek workers have naturally tried to avoid such a choice as the election results there showed. Despite it being illegal not to vote more than a third of the electorate did not do so. Those that did vote (in contrast to France) massively abandoned the social democrats of PASOK for those left parties who oppose the deal with the EU. Hollande won in France for promising to renegotiate the European stability pact but PASOK was almost wiped out for accepting the EU terms for its bailout.

That apart the Greek election result gave no clear indication as to a course of action for the Greek ruling class. Indeed the stand-off in Greece is almost a metaphor for the whole world economy. The difference is that Greeks are already experiencing what we will all face in years to come. In fact the Greek elections only confirm the economic and political impasse of capitalism today. The state of the crisis has led to heavy losses for the two parties of the coalition which negotiated the austerity package with the EU and IMF. Despite the peculiarities of the Greek parliamentary system which gives the leading party 50 extra seats PASOK and New Democracy have fallen two MPs short of being able to form a government to carry on with the EU deal. In fact it would be a travesty if they had been able to achieve it as 7 out of 10 of those that did vote gave their votes to parties which campaigned against the deal.

The surprise second largest party was



## **Crisis and Class Struggle**

the so-called left coalition of SYRIZA which benefitted most from the discontent with the EU deal. It gained votes from PASOK but also from of young professionals who would lose their professional association status under the proposed EU-sponsored reforms.<sup>11</sup> As many of these were former New Democracy supporters it can hardly be trumpeted as a new rise of the electoral left as some are doing both inside and outside Greece. The voters have not given a vote of confidence to SYRIZA, because this party apparently lacks any serious alternative to the deep crisis. Its vote was achieved through a reaction against increasingly harsh austerity. Another paradox of the situation is that the voters want to renegotiate with the EU rather than leave the eurozone for a fistful of dodgy drachma and an even more uncertain future. The resultant confusion is political paralysis for which the only solution the Greek ruling class are offering is – another election. Not one of these parties offers an alternative to the continuation of the capitalist system which is the root of all the misery in the first place.

### **The Unions**

Even where an increasing number of workers are abandoning hope in the electoral system there is still no clarity about a way forward. Many agree that workers should resist austerity but think that uniting as workers means putting our trust in unions. On face value the idea of all being together to force some redress has a certain appeal but it falls down on two counts. In the first place the unions don't unite us but actually divide us. In second place the assumption behind all the union campaigns is that there is still plenty of money about, it just needs to come our way a bit more. In other words capitalism is really OK and just needs to be better run to be fairer. This is utopian but not surprising. The unions which once were real workers' organisations are today bloated bureaucracies with paid officials on 6 figure salaries. They are a well-integrated part of the capitalist system.

All the above features were made obvious in the recent street protests in Spain after the Rajoy government announced that the austerity measures already undertaken were not enough. A further €36 billion of cuts would

have to be made to meet the agreed debt reduction target agreed with the EU.<sup>12</sup> Spain already has the highest unemployment in Europe and this latest cut will reduce its people to the same level of desperation as those in Greece. The anger on the streets was predictable but the unions were divided as to how to react. The two biggest establishment unions the Workers' Commission (CC.OO linked to the Communist Party) and the General Workers' Union (UGT – linked to the Socialist Party) tried to take control of class anger by calling a general strike (for only one day of course). The *Daily Telegraph* reported

*In Madrid, protestors stopped traffic through the capital as they took to the streets braving the rain to protest austerity measures. Coming together for a rally in Puerta del Sol, the site of Los Indignados protest last summer, demonstrators were fired up by the words of union leaders.*

*"Nearly a million workers across Spain are in the streets saying 'No' to this way of understanding labour relations," said Ignacio Fernandez Toxo, secretary general of the CC.OO union.*

Eh? Were workers only complaining that the unions had not been consulted before they were sacked? We don't think so but the emphasis is indicative of the union mentality – they just want to be asked nicely by the state before they manage our exploitation. And then they will still negotiate away our jobs and conditions. The time, however, for negotiations is long past.

### **The Real Alternative**

The real alternative to playing the game the capitalist way is much harder to take in and, despite the misery inflicted on us, most are not yet ready to contemplate it. This is no less than the overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement by a new social order in which money, debt and exploitation will no longer exist.

This is clearly not going to be an immediate quick fix. The process of mounting a fightback has to begin from the working class itself autonomously organising their own struggle via mass assemblies and strike committees which are accountable to those mass meetings of all the workers in the struggle. To

some extent this is already happening, particularly in Spain. The Indignados and Occupy movements have helped to raise the political awareness of the need for an anti-capitalist agenda. In some places the mass meetings have recognised that the real secret of success is to keep everyone involved by having wider debates about the current situation and what we do now. To take one example, here is an extract from a leaflet put out by the Workers' Group of Palencia:

### **FOR A STRIKE WITHOUT INTERMEDIARIES**

*Once again the ruling class has reminded us who is in charge; this time with the Labour Reform which leave workers even more at the mercy of the employer. From now on, whether you keep your job or not will depend exclusively upon the boss's need to maximise profits. This is not due to this or that government but rather expresses the fact that for Capital we are nothing more than commodities. Faced with this prospect we have no other option than to struggle: What should this struggle be? How to carry it out?*

*The majority unions offer us their model: they command, we obey. They make a lot of fuss about the Labour Reform, but at the same time they cut deals that make things worse for the workers. In reality, our rights are of no importance to them. For them we are nothing more than a number that justifies their existence and their subsidies. What is important to them is that we are exploited and enslaved while they continue their charade! They are nothing more than puppets in the service of the capitalists. Their real function, which is why they continue to exist, is to absorb, divert and subdue the real struggle of the working class; to stop it becoming a real danger to the system and its ruling class.*

*... we cannot follow the majority unions nor their strategies. In order to nullify all revolutionary struggle, they have agreed to hold a strike with conditions, the so-called "minimum services". When have we ever seen a war where a pact has been signed with the enemy in order to "not cause too many problems"? The aim of a strike is to cause harm,*

*to oblige the employers to bend before our interests. To strike where it hurts them most: the economy. This will not be done with an agreed strike and only on one day: it will be achieved through indefinite wildcat strikes.*

*We cannot give the traitorous unions and the opportunists on the Left of Capital more time. We must organise ourselves and without intermediaries in assemblies, in workers' councils. Only through determined action and without conditions can we defeat the exploiters and their servants in all areas: from the stopping of the Labour Reform to the destruction of the capitalist system.*  
**AGAINST THE CUTS  
 ORGANISE OURSELVES WITHOUT  
 INTERMEDIARIES!**<sup>13</sup>

What is equally significant here is that the leaflet does not stop at a mere defensive struggle against the cuts but puts the issue of the system that causes it. This is already a step beyond that of the Indignados and Occupy movement agendas. The issue raised here is not to make capitalism fair but to get rid of it.

And this is not only a question of how we organise. It requires political consciousness. The problem is that all these movements arise now in one place then in another. Political consciousness is so hard to hold onto. Moreover, if we are to avoid the pitfalls of the past we have to take on board the lessons of our own history. In our understanding those who share the political agenda of the need to overthrow capitalism, the need for a society without money or exploitation, without a state and oppression need to get together in a global political entity which for want a better word we call a party. This party is not a government in waiting but an international fighting body whose single aim is to advance the programme of the world revolution. In itself it does not take power in any place. The party's organs are not the medium for the mass struggle. Rather the international party will fight for the establishment of organs of workers' power (or "workers' councils" as the Palencia workers say in their leaflet). And once these organs are established it fights within them, as part of the class to which it belongs, against any return to capitalist schemas (not least those which will be proposed by the state

capitalist and social democratic left). This is obviously not a perspective which will be taken up immediately by masses of workers but it is the only perspective which offers us a real alternative. This is the perspective which we are patiently fighting for everywhere we can.

Jock

#### **Footnotes**

- 1 See for example "Banking and credit, however, thereby also become the most powerful means for driving capitalist production beyond its own barriers and one of the most effective vehicles for crisis and swindling" Capital Vol III p. 742 Penguin version.
- 2 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-15820601> *UK's Debts Biggest in the World*
- 3 It is this overdependence on the financial sector that has led to the total isolation of the British government in Europe over the nature and scope of the Basel III regulations. See "Osborne hand hovers over No vote on key reform" in the *Financial Times* 4.5.2012
- 4 Report by McKinsey Global Institute, available on [http://www.mckinsey.com/Insights/MGI/Research/Financial\\_Markets/Uneven\\_progress\\_on\\_the\\_path\\_to\\_growth](http://www.mckinsey.com/Insights/MGI/Research/Financial_Markets/Uneven_progress_on_the_path_to_growth)
- 5 See "Capitalism in the Quagmire of Debt". Those looking for our opinion on the future of the Eurozone will find more on that issue there.
- 6 See <http://blog.occupiedlondon.org/2012/03/21/little-stories-from-imf-run-greece-81-year-old-woman-sets-herself-alight-man-drowns-in-the-port-of-piraeus-after-driving-his-car-into-the-sea-70-year-old-man-storms-tax-office-with-a-shotgun/>
- 7 See <http://www.channel4.com/news/extremist-politics-on-the-rise-as-greek-austerity-bites> and for the UK "Credit boom left low-income groups in debt forever" *Financial Times* 4.5.2012
- 8 See <http://www.leftcom.org/en/comment/9693#comment-9693>
- 9 See <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2012-04-19/open-letter-to-our-fellow-workers-in-germany> or read *Aurora*, Bulletin of the Communist workers' Organisation. Free to anyone who sends a stamped addressed envelope to BM CWO, WC1N 3XX.
- 10 <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c1095e6c-938a-11e1-8ca8-00144feab49a.html#axzz1u110aCxD>
- 11 In Greece there is a special status for dozens of professions. These professions are "closed" because a special permission

is required in order for someone to practice. For example, a would-be notary, taxi driver or pharmacist has to buy a licence from a retiring one. The cost for a pharmacy licence is upward of 400,000\$. There are more than 130 "closed" professions: beauticians, drama and dance school instructors, bakers, antiques dealers, insurance agents, insurance consultants, employment consultants, diagnostics centre staff, divers, cameramen, driving school instructors, cab drivers, tourist bus drivers, newspaper stand owners, electricians, sound technicians, private school owners, tobacco sellers, gun manufacturers and sellers, hairdressers, private investigators, port workers, real estate agents, lifeguards, carpenters, financiers, opticians, auditors, movie/theatre director and even car mechanic. The opening of the so-called "closed" professions comes after strong pressure from the troika (IMF, ECB, EU) – however some real profit-making professions like pharmacists and lawyers will still remain closed.

12 And to top it all more money will be needed for Bankia, the bank set up two years ago to absorb much of the bad debt is now in trouble as the banks it took on board had understated their debts and overstated their assets. It has debts of over €52 billion. The Spanish Government has had to nationalise it in order to save the banking system but this has only added to its sovereign debt burden.

13 This was quoted by "Ernie" of the ICC on [libcom.org](http://libcom.org) and we are grateful to him for pointing us to it.



## **Presidential Election in France**

*This article was written by a French sympathiser of the communist left before the outcome of the second round of voting in the Presidential election but the eventual winner was already virtually known: François Hollande, the social democratic candidate.*



### **Elections: For Workers – A Rotten Terrain! For the Bourgeoisie – The Best Way to get their Agents to Power!**

**E**lections are the bourgeoisie's favourite terrain. Here they have delicately manoeuvred for 150 years in France as elsewhere in the big democratic powers. Elections are thus not the terrain where the working class can assert its right to life and a decent existence. The working class does not choose its exploiters!

Every five years the President of the French Republic is elected by universal suffrage. This election took place in a deafening media barrage. This year ten candidates were on the list with representatives from the extreme left of the Trotskyist Lutte Ouvrière (Workers' Struggle) with Nathalie Artaud to the extreme right of the National Front of Marine Le Pen via Jean-Luc Mélenchon of the Left Front (a coalition of parties including the old Communist Party). There was also Nicholas Sarkozy, candidate of the tradition conservative right and François Hollande for the social democrats.

Whatever the result of the ballot the designated candidate will wisely settle down to the task of defending the interests of the bourgeoisie and capital. The ruling class knows that its economic and political system is in great difficulty with an unprecedented economic crisis that is far from over and the effects of which only reveal themselves more clearly with every day that passes: mass unemployment, hunger and growing poverty throughout the world. It knows especially that it has to strongly attack the working class in the months and years ahead.

In this framework the ruling class has already played its cards well in this election. How has it been able to do this?

The electoral barrage has been exceptional. It has been able to mobilise the energies of a great number of workers who abstain on principle because they no longer have confidence in democracy and its leaders who were seen as corrupt

and because they did not defend their real interests.

For thirty years it (abstention) never failed to progress, At the last elections for parliament in 2007 (39.6% in the first round), local elections of 2008 35.5% in the first round), the European in 2009 (59.4% ), the regional of 2010 (53.6 in the first round) or the cantonal (56% in both rounds) the record was surpassed every time.

Only the Presidential election has escaped this tendency: where even here abstention had also increased in the course of the previous 20 years it fell again in 2007 to a level close to that registered in the first two decades of the Fifth Republic: 16.2%.

We have to go back to 1988 to find a rate of abstention lower than that of the first round this year, 2012 where it was 20.5%. In 1995 and 2002 it was 21.5% and 28.4% respectively. The bourgeoisie has thus succeeded in getting the workers to the ballot box even though they well know that the economic situation after the elections will prove to be catastrophic. They have gone to the ballot with no illusions but they have gone and that is already a victory for the ruling class.

These very good results for the ruling class don't stop there. Very likely François Hollande will emerge the winner of the second round. Thus they will be able to benefit from the left in power to pass the inevitable austerity measures which will make them appear "rosy"<sup>1</sup> the better to make workers accept them. Traditionally it is the bourgeois left that has taken on the business of hitting the working class.

This manoeuvre is completed by the saving of the Communist Party through the creation of the Left Front which can thus check, at least for a bit, its constant loss of popularity and voters since the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. It has been well-known that in every country where there used to be strong Communist Parties their disappearance has been inescapable. In France its almost total disappearance from



the political scene was a real source of weakness for bourgeois mystifications. In the next Assembly the Left Front will, in all logic, have some deputies following the parliamentary elections to be held in June. By using radical words they can take aim at the Socialist party in the factories and on council estates in order to make “left” austerity acceptable.

At the same time Lutte Ouvrière has adopted more “left” language. In the course of recent elections this group often adopted a trades union and moralist language against “naughty” capitalists. In 2012 it became more radical: it clearly appealed for class struggle and for a third “social” round which must take place in the factories.

And to complete the picture the National Front reinforced its appeal amongst certain sectors of the unemployed and casual part-time workers with the idea that it is foreigners who are taking their jobs. If democracy doesn’t work in the future or finds itself in difficulties the ruling class is ready to play with anti-fascist ideology.

What will remain of all this electoral noise once the lights on the electoral platforms have been extinguished? What will remain when on the combatants in this scene have once again returned to their anti-working class roles?

With its procession of unemployed and poor the economic crisis is going to continue to play havoc. In France, as in other European countries, not to speak of the undeveloped countries there are reductions in wages, pensions, less social security, less educational provision and public services and less care for a lot more which we will have to wait longer to get. That’s what’s in store for the working class.

Certain members of the ruling class have not been unmoved by what is happening internationally:

*Yet, perhaps the most important point to have emerged is that the crisis is subject to growing political risks. The fall of the Dutch government and the victory of François Hollande in the first*

*round of the French presidential election demonstrate this point. The street might overwhelm the establishment. The fear of just this might cause yet another self-fulfilling prophecy of crisis. Even France might be dragged in. Then the game might be up.*

(Martin Wolf – commentator of the *Financial Times* on April 25 in *Le Monde* 2 May 2012)

#### Footnotes

1 A pun on the symbol of the French Socialist Party, the red rose.

#### Our Pamphlets

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Translated from Prometeo these articles were written some time ago but show that our late comrade was ahead of his time in analysing the unsustainability of capitalist production.

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For details of how to order see inside front cover.

**Red Squares:**

**The Quebec Student Strike**

**Poses the Question**

**Only the Working Class**

**Can Answer it**



Largely unreported in the global media 170,000 students in Quebec (more than a third of the total) have now been on strike for three months. It has lasted so long that some journalists have taken to likening it to the movements in the Arab world and dubbed it “the Maple Spring”. The students in universities and GECEPS (colleges) are fighting to prevent a 75% hike in tuition fees over the next five years. It will come as no surprise to anyone that this is part of an austerity package of budget cuts announced by the Liberal Government of the province to “bring down the deficit” from \$3.8 billion to \$1.5 billion in a single year. On this level it has a familiar sound.

**The Issue**

The bitterness and extent of the conflict is however remarkable. Behind it lies two different visions of the world we live in. On the one hand you have students who uphold the right to a free education (something abandoned everywhere else some time ago). They point out that Canada is a signatory of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which calls for “the progressive introduction of free education”. On the other hand are the corporate interests promoted by the decidedly corrupt Jean Charest<sup>1</sup>, the Liberal Prime Minister of the Quebec Government. Already under investigation for corruption over construction contracts his favoured project is the so-called Plan Nord. This will pave the way for the destruction of the ecosystem of Northern Quebec as it opens the area up to the likes of Rio-Tinto-Alcan, ArcelorMittal, IAMGold, Alcoa, Agnico Eagle, and Xstrata. All have already benefitted from promotional fees (worth \$500 million) and huge government grants worth over \$1.6 billion are planned over the next five years.<sup>2</sup> The annual savings from the higher education fees hike would only be about £250 million. The connection has not been lost on the student movement

On April 20, students demonstrated outside a job fair for Quebec’s Plan Nord — a major initiative to develop the province’s north — where Mr. Charest was speaking. One demonstrator was pepper sprayed in



the face as he tried to enter the Palais des Congres. In his speech that day, Mr. Charest mocked the protesters and offered to give them jobs in the province’s north.<sup>3</sup>

Little wonder that two days later a quarter of a million demonstrated in Montreal on Earth Day. Many of the demonstrators pinned the small red squares which denotes the student movement to their clothes in solidarity with the strike. No wonder the Government would not negotiate and has poured vitriol on the students. It has tried to portray them as selfish spoiled brats who want everything for free. This flies in the face of the fact that they were not fighting for themselves but for the rights of those who would follow them. No wonder this Government rhetoric has incited its paid thugs (aka the police) to use unprecedented violence on peaceful demonstrators — a violence which makes anything seen so far in the “advanced democracies” look rather tame. No wonder it has cited the antics of a few who have responded with violence to condemn the whole movement when the real violence has been that of the state.

**A Wider Struggle is Needed**

In the face of this the tenacity of the students has been admirable. Militant and resolved though the students have been they cannot win this fight alone. Some them know this, and have made attempts to reach out to rest of the society and, in particular, to the wider working class. They have not done enough of this but they have also come up against the hypocrisy of the unions. The unions have



supported the strike verbally (how often do they do that with workers?) but have not once organised a single day of solidarity action with the students. This is because they are in reality part of the corporate management of the state. In recent years they have signed hundreds of deals to ensure the profitability of Quebecois capitalism which has led to lay-offs, speed-ups and wage freezes for workers. And this weekend the union leaders were the ones who “brokered the deal”, as one of our comrades put it, to get the student leaders into signing away the principal aims of the fight.

When it comes to negotiating a defeat behind closed doors no-one can compete with the union leadership. The deal that was finally stitched up was nothing less than a complete climbdown for the students. The fees will rise but over seven years rather than five and the way is open for further fees rises in the future. A committee is to be set up to look at further savings from university budgets which **might** then reduce administrative fees students have to pay. But as its composition is dominated by business and government this is unlikely to find any and the Government has already said it is unlikely to make savings.

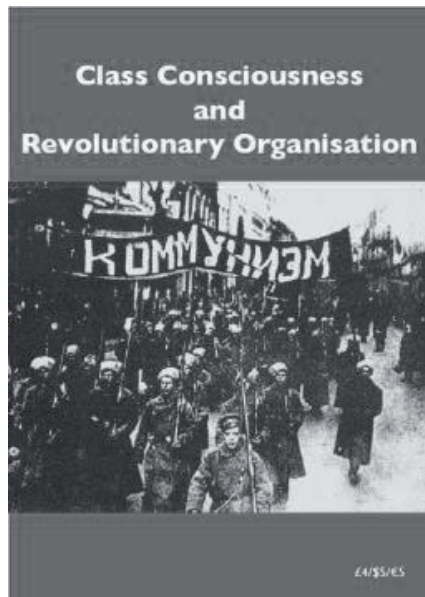
Not surprisingly the leaders of the three student organisations have held this last clause out as a sop to the movement to hide their sell-out. It is equally unsurprising that they have not been able to sell the deal to their members.

The stakes are indeed high. Global capitalism in crisis cannot escape from its need to make us all pay for its plight. By resisting its attempts to turn back the clock the Quebec students are implicitly posing an entirely different mode of social organisation. If capitalism can only offer more misery, more debt and worsening conditions of existence it is time to explicitly reject it. But the students can only pose the question. The answer can only be given by the working class as a whole. The movement has to widen to become a full-scale anti-austerity movement which takes in the fears and aspirations of the majority of society. This is not going to come about any time soon but the anger and rage of this movement has to be built on. What is needed is an organisation which recognises explicitly that capitalism offers no future. We need to abolish the society that puts profits before people, that needs money for its functioning and its state to repress all opposition. It is time for a communist programme.

**Jock**

#### Footnotes

- 1 And opinion polls suggest that he and his Liberal party cronies will be thrown out at the next election this year (as happened after the last big student revolt in 1990).
- 2 See “Violence budgetaire” by Michel Chossudovsky at <http://www.mondialisation.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=30451>
- 3 <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/05/03/quebec-student-strike/>



#### An apology

Due to an oversight part of the text on page 36 is missing. This is hidden beneath the picture of Lenin. The missing text reads as follows;

“topple the Provisional Government. However the rest of the class was not yet ready. The consequences of the failure of the June Offensive had not yet sunk in to a wider layer of the class. This the Bolsheviks, present in the factories, understood so the sailors action left them in a terrible dilemma. Here demonstrating below the balcony of the Kreshinskaya Palace, where the Bolsheviks had their headquarters, were thousands of armed sailors demanding that the Bolsheviks put themselves at the head of the demonstration (which, after all, only repeated the Bolshevik ...”

We apologise to all of you who bought the pamphlet

### Syria

#### Caught in the

#### Vice of Imperialism



In early May multi-party elections were held in Syria. These were the first, so called, “free” elections since the Syrian Ba’ath party seized power in 1963. A referendum, held in February, paved the way for these elections by securing a vote to permit constitutional changes which would allow multi-party democracy. As we go to press the results of these elections have not been announced, but they will be largely irrelevant since the country remains on the brink of civil war and the opposition has boycotted the poll. However, the fact that the regime has organised these elections shows it is responding to the pressures being put on it by its enemies. In February an organisation calling itself “The Friends of a Democratic Syria” and having amongst its members the US, UK, France, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, met in Tunis to demand, in President Obama’s words that:

*“A message is sent to President Assad that it is time for a transition (to democracy).”*

The Syrian regime has, therefore, formally more or less implemented the US demand. Whether this will make any difference to the outcome in the country is highly doubtful as this is not, in any sense, the real demand of the US and its clients.

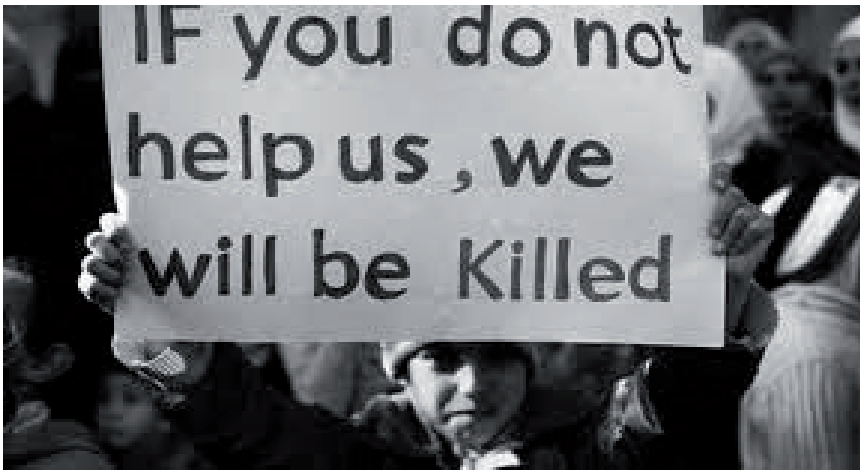
An internal accommodation between the regime and its enemies within the parameters of a democracy controlled by the Ba’ath regime is also very unlikely. Too much blood has flowed. The UN estimates that 9000 have now been killed in the 14 months since the uprising started<sup>1</sup>. The majority of the dead were civilians, many shot after arrest and some tortured to death. In addition whole areas of cities, such as Homs, have been reduced to rubble in artillery barrages lasting weeks. The brutality of the regime is legendary. February saw the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its massacre of its opponents, namely the Muslim Brotherhood, in the city of Hama. Between 20 000 and 30 000 people were killed in this atrocity<sup>2</sup>. The Hama massacre ushered in a period of relative stability for the Ba’athist regime, and no doubt there are elements of the regime who think the same can be achieved today. However, as the regime is discovering to its cost, today’s uprising is based on much more general economic hardship brought about by the global crisis and is much more widespread. It cannot be ended with a short sharp bloodbath. The UN has put forward a plan which

is supposed to end the violence via its special representative to Syria, Kofi Annan. The Annan plan, as it is known, has been approved and issued as a statement from the president of the UN Security Council. It is therefore not binding, but the Syrian regime has agreed to it with the condition that it will respond to attacks by the rebels. Under this plan the army is supposed to withdraw from civilian areas and there is to be an end to the killing. UN observers are supposed to monitor its implementation. At present only a few dozen observers are in place rather than the 300 proposed and the requirements of the plan appear to have been widely violated. The opposition claim tanks and personnel carriers remain hidden in the cities and the snipers only stop killing civilians during the period when the UN inspectors are in the area. The regime, for its part, claims its soldiers are being ambushed and roadside bombs are still being used against the military. The best that can be said for the Annan plan is that the rate of killing has decreased. These few facts illustrate the principal forces at work in the Syrian crisis. Firstly, the Syrian masses, suffering under the pressures of the economic crisis and savage repression by a hated regime, and prepared for a desperate fight-back. Secondly, external opposed imperialist interests determined to dictate the outcome of the present crisis. These forces are setting the stage for civil war.

#### Vultures of imperialism

Syria is strategically positioned in the matrix of imperialist relationships in the Middle East. It is the ally of Iran and the artery for support to forces opposing Israel, particularly Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. Syria has always been a client of the US’s rivals in the Middle East. In fact after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, during the period of euphoria, the US openly called for regime change in Syria. Donald Rumsfeld famously threatened Syria with the message “you’re next.” The US is trying to direct the present uprising in a direction which will lead to regime change. The hypocrisy involved in this process is breathtaking. The organisation “Friends of a Democratic Syria” was formed after the Russian and Chinese vetoes of UN Security Council motions condemning Syria, as a means of channelling support to the uprising. This organisation includes key US allies, the monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Their detestation of democracy was illustrated by the Saudi invasion of Bahrain to brutally put down





the democratic protests by the Shia majority. The US made no criticism of this anti-democratic invasion by its ally since Bahrain is the base for the US Fifth fleet. It is clear that the issue of democracy is camouflage for a wider ambition in Syria which concerns US domination of the Middle East. A more honest statement of US intentions is spelt out by the American Enterprise Think Tank whose spokesman, D. Pletka writes:

*"Syria is the soft underbelly of Iran, Tehran's most important ally, conduit for arms and cash to terrorists.... A unique confluence of American moral purpose and America's strategic interest argue for intervention in Syria.... It's time to start arming the Free Syrian Army." ("Obama must do something tangible for Syria," February 8, 2012)*

Iran remains a thorn in the side of US imperialism in the Middle East. It continues to supply oil and gas to US rivals Russia and China, and to oppose Israel and US client monarchies in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The invasion of Iraq has had the unintended consequence of strengthening Iran and installing an Iran friendly regime in Baghdad. The US has attempted to weaken and isolate Iran by sanctions and to manoeuvre the country into a position where it is in defiance of the UN over its supposed nuclear developments, thereby laying the grounds for another war. Regime change in Iran is a key US objective. If it could be isolated from its Syrian ally a strike at Iran's nuclear facilities would be a lot less risky and make retaliation against Israel less likely.

All these considerations mean that it would not make any difference what democratic or other changes were made by the Assad regime, the US would still want the regime replaced with a US friendly one. The initial steps

in this direction have been taken with sanctions against the regime. These have halved Syrian oil production and cut foreign exchange at the same time as Syrian bank assets abroad have been frozen. Inflation is rapidly reducing living standards and deepening the economic crisis. The economy contracted 6% in 2011. The exile group abroad, the Syrian National Council (SNC) has been recognised by France & UK as legitimate representative of Syrian people. This move is similar to that taken in Libya where the Benghazi "Transitional National Council" was recognised as the representative of the Libyan people. This organisation was later given access to the Libyan funds in frozen accounts and presumably something similar is planned if the SNC proves itself to be useful.

The US appears to be starting to arm the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Already Hilary Clinton, US secretary of state has promised \$12million to the FSA for communications equipment with more money to come.<sup>3</sup> If the civil war can be won then the external organisations, such as the SNC, could be used by the US of to form a friendly government. For their part the Russians and Chinese are not prepared to offer any assistance to the US in these plans. Both think they have been double crossed by the Libyan adventure. A "no fly" resolution which they agreed to was used to bomb the Libyan regime into submission with NATO acting as the air force of the rebels. For China the result was a loss of oil interests in the country. For the Russians Syria represents the last bastion of Russian imperialism in the area and provides the Russian navy with a base at the port of Tartus. Thus Russia's stated policy for the last year or so has been non-intervention which means no-one should aid the rebels. To enforce this the Russians appear to now be prepared to veto any US resolution on Syria. There is thus an imperialist impasse over Syria which is likely to lead

to further bloodshed.

### The Uprising

The Syrian uprising is part of the Arab Spring. This revolt which started in Tunisia and rapidly spread to Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen and elsewhere was driven by the effects of the capitalist economic crisis. Increasing economic hardship drove people onto the streets and brought open criticism of the entrenched regimes. In Syria criticism of the regime was met with immediate and brutal violence. In the initial response to protest 100 people were killed in the town of Daraa. It is a measure of the desperation and determination of the Syrian masses that this scale of repression has not halted protests. In both Tunisia and Egypt the working class entered the battle on its own terms by striking, and when this happened the regimes crumbled. Unfortunately this has not occurred in Syria. Workers have taken part in a heterogeneous inter-class movement. The result has been this long stalemate during which killing and destruction have steadily increased while imperialist powers have circled like vultures.

At present bourgeois ideology appears to dominate the opposition. Nationalism, bourgeois democratism and Sunni Jihadism appear to be dominant. All of these ideologies are incapable of solving the Syrian crisis because, in reality, the Syrian crisis is a symptom of the global capitalist crisis, the same crisis which is affecting workers in Europe and the US. The Syrian crisis is a result of the operation of the capitalist system on a global level. The way out of this crisis is similarly global. The path towards this is via the working class struggling autonomously of other classes for its own interests. This struggle needs to form part of a global struggle to replace the capitalist system which is the cause of these disasters.

CP

### Footnotes

1 The opposition estimates that 11100 have been killed

2 For background to Syrian history and the Hama massacre see: <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2011-06-13/syria-so-many-deaths-so-many-illusions-to-be-shattered>

3 Quoted in Counterfire: <http://www.counterfire.org/index.php/articles/international/15701-imperialism-and-the-syrian-revolution>

## **Sudan**

### **Open War for Oil Breaks Out Again**



In April the long war for control of Sudan's oil broke out again. South Sudan, which became an independent country in 2011, shut down all oil production in the oil fields which it controls and launched an incursion into Sudanese territory and captured the Sudanese town and oil field of Heglig. It is reported that oil facilities in Heglig have been destroyed. Sudan responded with a counter offensive, which appears to have recaptured Heglig, and launched bombing raids on South Sudan towns. Both sides meanwhile mobilised for war. In response to these developments, the US, which did not want to see its South Sudanese client embroiled in a war it was unlikely to win, tabled a UN Security Council motion demanding an end to hostilities. This motion, which was subsequently passed with backing by China and Russia, demanded both sides restart negotiations and reach an agreement on the border location and division of oil revenues within 3 months. If this was not accepted, mandatory economic sanctions would follow. Both sides appear to have accepted this resolution and at present (mid May) an uneasy truce exists.

The latest fighting is simply the continuation of the long war for control of Sudanese oil which has raged since 1983; a war which has been extraordinarily destructive even by Africa's standards. It is estimated that 2.5 million people, most of whom were civilians, have been killed and 5 million have been displaced and become refugees. The independence of South Sudan was the result of an agreement, ratified in 2005, to end this long war. Following the agreement there was to be a period of 6 years in which there would be greater autonomy for the 10 states forming South Sudan, after which there would be a referendum on independence if the south still wanted it. During this 6 year period the oil revenues were shared equally between the north and the south.

The referendum duly took place in January 2011. An overwhelming majority were in favour, and South Sudan officially became an independent country with a seat at the UN etc. in July last year. At a stroke Sudan lost approximately 75% of its oil fields. Sudanese oil

production is now approximately 500 000 barrels per day (bpd) but only 115 000 of this comes from wells in Sudanese territory. Both states are almost completely dependent on oil export for their revenues. Revenue from exports of oil represents 98% and 93% of the total for the South and the North respectively<sup>1</sup>. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that disputes have rapidly arisen over the location of the border, which passes through the oil fields, and the sharing of the oil revenues. The oil producing region of Abyei is claimed by both countries and has been occupied by Sudanese troops. The existing pipelines run north from the southern oil fields through Sudanese territory to Port Sudan on the Red Sea, and all the existing refineries are in Sudan. (See map below.) Sudan levied transit fees for southern oil passing through these pipelines, which the South disputed, and this led to the closing down of production mentioned above and the assault on Heglig. The Heglig field supplied approximately 55 000 bpd, or half of the oil which remained in Sudan. The war which now looms will produce further massive bloodshed and destruction of the existing oil facilities and other wealth.

#### **Theatre of Imperialist Wars**

The South Sudan war is one of many low level wars which continue to smoulder and periodically break into flame in this region of Africa. Within Sudan war still continues in Darfur<sup>2</sup> and further west there is war in Chad. To the east there is a war in Somalia; to the south there is a guerrilla war in Uganda and the never ending war in the Democratic Republic of Congo<sup>3</sup>. To the north there is war in Libya.

These wars are mostly surrogate wars between states with guerrilla movements confronting state forces. The guerrilla forces being armed and financed by the local states to further their local ambitions. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the main force which brought about the independence of South Sudan, is supported by Uganda. Uganda has interests in South Sudan and hopes to get some of the oil of the South. The guerrilla movements in Darfur, the Sudan People's Army (SPA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) are supported by Chad. Sudan

for its part is supporting and arming the Lord's Resistance Army fighting in Uganda and South Sudan. Within South Sudan there are internal conflicts between the government and armed groups supported by the north in 9 of the 10 states which form the south. In Chad, Sudan is supporting the Union of Resistance Forces against the current government forces. However, these states are themselves clients of the major imperialist powers, and the arms money and training for the guerrilla forces come from their imperialist masters. The US, for example, armed and financed the SPLA via Uganda and Ethiopia and organised for it to be trained by Israel. Its previous leader John Garang was given officer training in the US. The US has ultimately guided and financed the breakaway of South Sudan. The US similarly supports SPA and the JEM in Darfur via Chad and Uganda. Sudan in turn is armed and protected by China and it is this which enables Sudan to support guerrilla movements against its enemies. These states are little more than the agents of their imperialist masters in the US, China or Europe.

The ultimate aim of these wars is a re-division of the resources of this region between the major imperialist powers. The wars are therefore what we would call imperialist proxy wars.

### Chinese Challenge to US Dominance

China is now the world's largest exporter of capital and is emerging as an imperialist rival to US in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Africa, which was previously an area where US and European capital dominated, China is making massive investments. These generally take the form of infrastructure developments in return for raw materials. In the wake of these investments comes trade. China's trade with Africa, which was \$150bn in 2011, is now almost double that of the US, which was \$82bn in the same period.

China has invested approximately \$8bn in Sudanese oil and takes 60% of the production which amounts to 11% of China's oil imports. In addition China has supplied Sudan with telecommunications, other infrastructure construction and services such as hotels. The



immediate effect of the present crisis is that China has a shortage of oil, while the long term threat is that most of this investment will be lost and it will be permanently excluded from the oil fields of the south. To avoid this, China has been courting the new regime in South Sudan and urging its leader, Salva Kiir, who was actually visiting Beijing when the latest flare-up took place, to avoid war and return to negotiations. The oil installations in South Sudan are controlled by Chinese engineers of the Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) who are now in a vulnerable position. China has sent a small force of "peace keepers" including infantry to the troubled border region<sup>4</sup>. This has not prevented Chinese nationals being kidnapped.

Sudanese oil was originally discovered and exploited by the US oil company Chevron, but it pulled out of the country during the early stages of the civil war in 1985. The oil fields were later taken over and developed by the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC), a consortium in which the Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) dominated. Certain US interests would dearly love to regain control of this source of oil

and to have the ability to prevent the Chinese using it. Hence US support for independence of the south and support for the construction of a new pipeline to the Kenyan port of Lamu. A southern pipeline through Kenya to Lamu would substantially weaken Sudan and make much of the existing investment in pipelines and oil refineries valueless. The Sudanese oil fields are, however, thought to be much larger than the existing discoveries indicate and to extend north/west from South Sudan to Chad. If this is, in fact, the case a great deal of this undiscovered oil will lie in Sudanese territory. The US would therefore prefer to install a friendly regime in Khartoum which would give it access to all the Sudanese oil fields. It has been trying to bring about regime change in Khartoum for over 2 decades but this has been frustrated by the Chinese. Their development of the oil resources has given the regime the resources to fight the US backed insurgencies and US resolutions at the UN to impose an oil embargo have been vetoed. The US has, however, made as many problems as it could for the Sudanese regime. It has imposed sanctions on the regime since 1996 proscribing any US investment there. It has branded the regime a sponsor

## Imperialism

of terrorism, while, of course, at the same time as sponsoring guerrilla wars inside Sudanese territory. It has ensured that the Sudanese President Al Bashir has been indicted for war crimes by the International Criminal Court, and a warrant for his arrest has been issued. The US promise to lift sanctions if the regime agreed to the breakaway of South Sudan has not been fulfilled.

### African Oil

The US struggle for control of Sudanese oil is part of a more general struggle for African oil. Walter Kansteiner, the US Secretary of State for African Affairs from 2001 to 2003 stated the US position as follows:

*African oil is of national strategic interest to us and it will increase and become more important as we go forward.....We don't see anything stopping the Chinese increasing their equity participation in oil and think it probably would be problematic if they were the dominant player.<sup>5</sup>*

African oil in 2008 amounted to 21% of all US oil imports<sup>6</sup> and it is estimated this will rise to 25% by 2015. In 2007 the US military set up a new command centre AFRICOM to protect US interests, particularly oil interests, in Africa. This command centre draws on US military resources throughout the European theatre and North Africa while a new US naval base has been established in the islands of Sao Tome & Principe. This base is strategically placed to protect US oil interests in the Gulf of Guinea. All this indicates the seriousness with which the US is preparing to frustrate Chinese advances and to both protect and expand its interests in Africa. The recent war in Libya, which represented a direct setback for Chinese oil interests in the country, is an indication of the type of confrontation which lies ahead.

### Wars Caused by Capitalism

The developments described above are a symptom of a more general development, namely the challenge of a rising imperialist power to the domination of existing imperialist powers. It is a struggle, sometimes open, sometimes hidden for control

of resources, just as we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan. The real motor forces behind this need to be explained.

Although local causes can be advanced to explain the wars in Sudan and throughout the region, killing on such a scale and over such long periods and across the continent cannot be explained by a series of contingent causes. On the contrary such wars must express some deeper general malaise. We argue that they are an expression of fundamental problems in the capitalist system of production. In particular they express the increasingly desperate competitive struggle of capitalist powers for cheaper sources of raw materials and energy while at the same time, the struggle to exclude their rivals from these things.

This struggle, in Marxist economic terms, represents a struggle for a greater share of the surplus value produced by the world's workers. This, in turn, is required to offset the law of the tendency for capitalist profit rates to fall. These wars are therefore, an indirect expression of the fundamental problems which lie at the heart of the capitalist system of production. With the decline in profit rates and the consequent sharpening of competition such wars become more and more frequent. Periods of peace become temporary intervals during which new wars are being prepared. The only long term peace which capitalism can offer is the peace of the grave.

The stupidity of these wars would be evident to any observer who did not view them through the lens of what capitalism presents as realism. Instead of sharing resources and developing them for the benefit of all we see a war which lasts decades and leaves 2.5 million people dead. Under capitalism a weaker country's possession of resources becomes a curse instead of a benefit, as these resources are continually fought over. The Democratic Republic of Congo where war over minerals has left 5.5 million dead is a fine example of this, but so are the wars in Iraq and Libya. Of course, as we have seen above, these wars are stoked up and controlled by imperialist powers, who are quite happy to wade

through rivers of blood to get their hands on the oil. Any talk of sharing the world's resources or common development is considered absurd, or even insurrectionary, since we live in a world whose rules are determined by capitalism's need to extract a profit.

Can there be a more graphic illustration of the urgent need to overthrow the capitalist system than the agony of Africa? Global capitalism is taking the world to disaster. We need to replace it with a system where resources will be developed for the benefit of all the world's people.

CP

### Footnotes

1 Figures from BBC 4/7/2011

2 See "Genocide today – oil tomorrow"

RP 33

3 For an analysis of the war in the Congo see "Behind the slaughter and looting stand imperialist interests" RP 48

4 Reported in *Financial Times* 21/2/12

5 See "Behind the smell of blood in Darfur lie imperialist interests" RP 40

6 See <http://www.manhattan-institute.org/energymyths/myth1.htm>



## ***Moralism is no Substitute for a Materialist Understanding***

### ***Debt: The First 5,000 Years, David Graeber***

Melville House Publishing (New York),  
May 2011, 534 pp [hardback \$32.00]

Along with capitalism's voluminous debt mountain a veritable avalanche of books on debt and the financial crisis has descended onto the market place. With almost four hundred pages of text, a further sixty of notes and a substantial bibliography, David Graeber's book is an encyclopaedic attempt to situate today's global debt crisis into the wider context of credit, indebtedness and obligation which he argues make up the web of human relations that exist in one form or another in all human societies.

Despite the title, this is not a history book. It is rather a treatise on how the existence of money — in both metallic and 'virtual' or tally accounting form — always undermines the basic 'give and take' that is the essence of any human community. Once someone's debt to another becomes monetised, whatever form that money takes: whether cattle, nubile females, cowrie shells or silver coin, then danger lurks. From a simple "rearrangement of relations between people" one of the sides in the arrangement "becomes unequal when obliged to the other" and eventually "hierarchy takes hold". When that happens tribute, debt peonage, slavery are the order of the day. It is a version of the money is the root of all evil proverb. And yes, you've guessed if you didn't know already, David Graeber is an anarchist — an anarchist anthropologist at that. He's also a Wobbly — or at any rate he's in the modern version of the IWW and (in an online video) cheerily maintains that these days 'most Wobblies are anarchists'. Maybe so. In any case the working class hardly feature in his narrative, much less the prospect of workers taking over industry and thereby establishing communism.

When it comes to communism it is the influence of Kropotkin that is far more in evidence. This is despite the fact that in his section on 'Communism' Graeber defines 'communism' as "any human relationship that operates on the principles of from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs." Churlishly he refuses even here to acknowledge the words are those of Karl Marx. This is no accident. His intention is to replace materialism with moralism. This communist principle, he boldly



**Sumerian tax tablet**

asserts, "is the foundation of all human sociability" and as such is a "principle of morality rather than just a question of property ownership" which means "that this sort of morality is almost always at play to some degree in any transaction — even commerce." When it comes to 'exchange' (whether it be barter, simple commodity exchange or presumably full-blown capitalism, since Graeber does not distinguish one from the other) there is always a moral aspect in both sides of the relationship which the author now prefers to call 'mutuality'. This moral aspect to any 'deal' can be anything from one-upmanship to saving face, keeping one's word and maintaining integrity etc. The meaning becomes decidedly vague but he consistently argues that "any system of exchange is always necessarily founded on something else, something that is, in its social manifestation at least, is ultimately communism" (p.267).

As if this were not enough to destroy any vision of communism as a specific communal way of organising production to directly meet human needs, some of Graeber's other remarks fly in the face of even (surely?) an anarchist vision of a classless society without private property. In fact Graeber specifically rejects the notion of what he calls 'discrete societies' (well, you would if communism is simply a timeless issue about morality) and makes some utterly daft assertions such as: "We are all communists with our closest friends, and feudal lords when dealing with small children." (p.114) For Graeber there can be communism amongst the rich (when they help each other out) just as "communitistic relations can easily start slipping into relations of hierarchical inequality..."



Ancient Mesopotamian coin

So, like the poor, like debt, like hierarchy, communism is always with us. It's just a matter of teasing it out.

But if this is the essence of what Graeber has to say, why bother reading the book? It would be ungenerous not to acknowledge that his wide-ranging narrative, based on anthropological research, sociology, histories from near and far, plus anecdotes and even jokes, makes for a good, at times fascinating, read. In this sense it is recommendable. However, behind the chatty style there is a not-so-hidden agenda which is basically to sideline Marx and historical materialism. In the process Graeber manages to jettison any prospect of capitalism being superseded by a "new and higher social structure than was the case in the preceding forms of slavery, serfdom, etc" (Marx). This is not because the book is an 'academic' work rather than a political tract. It is the very heart of his overview of world history.

At first the argument appears innocuous enough even if he does set up a straw man in order to easily prove his point. Briefly, Graeber argues that economists always assume that money first arose from barter in its role as medium of exchange and this is how they explain the origins of 'the market'. On the contrary, says the anthropologist, history shows that money first arose around 3000 BC as unit of account, or rather a record of 'who owes what to whom' in a complex web of debt and obligation in the 'great agrarian empires' of the Near East. The role of this 'virtual money' had little to do with exchange, was not based on coinage and only incidentally involved silver bars at the great grain storage sites of the temples. Coinage, he maintains, is

indeed associated with the market which, far from being free from the state is indirectly created by states when rulers (kings) introduce coins in order to pay the armies they need for their imperialist aggrandisement they turn to as a way out of their debt crisis. This is not just a pot shot at Adam Smith and the modern capitalist myth of the free market (and of course at Marx, who is criticised in a footnote for tacitly agreeing with Smith), the argument that 'virtual money came first' (and indeed is always present in some form or other) is central to his interpretation of what capitalism is today.

For Graeber, who does not ask what is the basis of any particular society's wealth, who does not see how the value produced by a minority of productive wage workers can support a much wider population, who in fact denies that wage labour is the basis of modern capitalism, who cannot see beyond merchant capital and does not take on board the function of money as capital nor how the credit system within capitalism differs from usury, history is an eternal cycle. Basically he portrays history as divided into alternating ages according to whether they are based on credit and virtual money or on bullion. "... while credit systems tend to dominate in periods of relative social peace ... in periods characterized by widespread war and plunder, they tend to be replaced by precious metal". (p.213) Thus:

**The Age of the First Agrarian Empires (3500-800 BC)** characterised by periodic debt cancellations (at least for personal debt, not for trade) "in the face of a world plunged into chaos" secured the continued existence of the regimes. Followed by:

**The Axial Age (800BC - 600AD)**, a time of commodity markets, born of war and typified by the decline or end of slavery and appearance of world religions (which were opposed to slavery and debt). Followed by:

**The Middle Ages (600-1450AD)** and the return to virtual credit money where, "However oppressed medieval serfs might have been, their plight was nothing compared with that of their Axial Age equivalents." Followed by:

**The Age of the Great Capitalist Empires (1450-1971)** which "turned away from virtual currencies and credit economies and back to gold and silver" and brought with them a host of other nasty things which had been held at bay in the Middle Ages ("vast empires and professional armies, massive predatory warfare, untrammelled usury and debt peonage") but also had some good sides, such as "scientific and philosophical activity". The classification itself is part of Graeber's refusal to acknowledge any significant difference between mercantile capitalism (based on profits derived from commodity exchange) which gave way to the domination of industrial capitalism (based on the production of commodities by wage labour).

In any case this era came to an end with Nixon's floating of the dollar (which is roughly when we Marxists identify the return of capitalism's cyclical crisis of profitability). This ushered in the present period or:

**The Beginning of Something Yet to Be Determined.** With little understanding of why Nixon was obliged to de-link the dollar from gold (he opts for "the need to pay for bombs" for the Vietnam War) Graeber argues that this opened up another age of the domination of 'virtual money'. At the same time he tries to take on board the significance for US power in the world by the dollar being the world's reserve currency, something he thinks began in 1971, not in 1944 when the greenback was made the standard by which all other currencies were fixed (albeit linked to gold). What happened in 1971 was that the rest of the world, with currencies still linked to the dollar, felt the immediate impact of the devalued US currency which doubled up as the

currency of international trade. In any event, Graeber takes the present international financial crisis with its ballooning of government and state debt, unpaid credit card loans, the yet-to-be-written-off losses from financial speculation and banking black holes, as evidence of a return of the world to an age of virtual money where,

*If history holds true, an age of virtual money should mean a movement away from war, empire-building, slavery and debt peonage (waged or otherwise), and toward the creation of some sort of overarching institutions, global in scale, to protect debtors.(p.368)*

He admits that “What we have seen so far is the opposite.” But then, its early days yet ... sooner or later, who knows? He leaves unsaid the obvious conclusion from his own historical overview: Maybe capitalism will save itself by a programme of wholesale debt forgiveness, as with the ancient Sumerians or the Hebrew Jubilee year of the Old Testament when every 50 years or so the land was returned to its original owners, debts were cancelled and slaves were freed. (Perhaps on 5 June we’ll see more than street parties on the streets of Britain.) Maybe the slate will be wiped clean, but apparently not before “capitalism — “or anyway, financial capitalism” — simply explodes”. Then we can start all over again, with debts and obligations mounting up on one side and the power over others that accrues to the creditors...

It’s not much to look forward to. Instead of the ‘end of history’ we have a never-ending cycle where the best we can hope for is that people be kind to one another in some sort of moral economy. Abolition of wage labour? It doesn’t matter. What matters is mutual aid, whether between employers and workers or between workers. Capitalist production having created the material basis for a classless society where production will directly meet human needs? Nonsense. There will always be exchange of some sort. In the face of the almost inescapable evidence that capitalism is a system in historical decline Graeber is unable to see a way out. At the end of the day his a-historical anthropological

approach only reinforces his essential petty bourgeois anarchist outlook: ignore the fundamental robbery of the surplus value produced by wage labour and demand that human relations be placed on a fairer footing where debtors are protected.

This is the mind set of a radical reformist. (For Graeber is not just an academic, he has a track record as an activist, from campaigning for the abolition of Third World debt to his more recent infamous involvement in the Occupy Wall St movement.) In the right sort of circumstances radical reformism can be transformed into millenarianism: it’s not impossible to imagine a modern version of the Peasant’s Revolt sweeping the capitalist world, demanding cancellation of debts. But even if all personal debts were cancelled as in ancient times, this would simply exacerbate the capitalist crisis and bring even harsher wage cuts and austerity.

Moreover, Graeber does not understand that by far the largest part of the global ‘debt burden’: is in the form of a gargantuan mass of fictitious **capital** that has amassed since the freeing up of financial markets in the 1980s. The flight to finance is one of the consequences of the low rate of return (due to the falling rate of average profit) on capital invested in production. Once this fiction is destroyed the **real** crisis of capitalism will be even more acute than it is already.

And historically the ultimate solution of capitalism to its crisis of profitability is to devalue real capital values: in the last century this was done on a global scale through two World Wars. A universal debt amnesty is a utopian dream that would not put an end to the advance of the capitalist crisis. Ultimately this has earth-shattering implications.

Rather than waste effort demanding that capitalism reform itself, rather than watch capitalism descend into its own particular form of barbarism in the hope of a millenarian revolt to cancel debts, communists, as always, call for a conscious political act not simply to forgive debts but to overthrow the existing ruling class and with it the whole method of

producing and distributing wealth.

Despite David Graeber’s scholarship and easy style what starts out as a good read gradually reveals itself as an underhand challenge to Marxism and any idea of working class revolution. Read it by all means but don’t expect to be any the wiser about how to get from capitalism to communism.

E Rayner



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## The Committee of Intesa

### 1925 in Farsi

*The Internationalist Communist Tendency is pleased to announce that thanks to the work of Iranian comrades the Committee of Intesa of 1925, one of the seminal texts of our tendency has been produced in Farsi. The short document that follows is the introduction for Farsi readers which reminds people that one of the founders of the original Communist Party of Persia, was Avetis Sultanzade (Mikailian). He later was to take on Lenin in the Communist International on the national question recognising that the time for support for those movements was now over. Our comrades will be publishing more on this remarkable communist who deserves to be better known.*

## Introduction to the

### Farsi Translation

The history of the communist movement in Iran is closely linked to that of the Russian. The presence of hundreds of thousands of Iranian workers in Russia as early as 1876<sup>1</sup> was the background for the emergence of social democratic ideas in Iran, which manifested itself in the formation of a number of organizations that actively participated in Persia's Constitutional Revolution in 1906. It is reported that thousands of migrant Iranian workers were members of the Baku Social Democratic Party.

The 1917 October revolution inspired and influenced those early- formed organizations to link themselves to the International, the communist movement and resulted in forming the Persian Communist Party (June 1920), the first within the peripheral countries where in its ranks contained had a prominent figures such as Sultanzadeh, (the signatory of the 2nd International Congress minutes) along with other communist leadership such as Bordiga.<sup>2</sup>

As the degeneration of the Russian Revolution accelerated, the consequence was the dominance of Stalinism. This was so grave that for decades it overshadowed the working class movement in absolute terms. To the new generation of workers Stalinism was presented as communism. A shining example of Bolshevik diplomacy came in 1917 it exposed the Asia Minor Agreement<sup>3</sup>, between the United Kingdom, France (with Russian agreement) and published all the Tsarist colonialist treaties, from the Russo-Persian War (1826–1828) on. Under Stalin this gave way to a Russian nationalistic agenda. Any doubt or questions about USSR policies by inquisitive minds was silenced and any challenge to Stalinism was dismissed by referring to Lenin's book "Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder!" Thus the history of the Left's struggle and resistance to degeneration were either completely hidden or at the best subsumed under the label of Trotskyism. Trotskyism now had a chance to present itself as the only true opponent of Stalinism. But with



**Avetis Sultanzade (Mikailian)**

its inherited opportunism (such as the attempt to re-enter social democracy in the 1930s), it succeeded only in creating confusions.

However, with the collapse of the USSR, hope was raised that the demise of the ominous shadow of Stalinism over the communist movement would also be witnessed soon and the path for the ascension of Communism would be opened up. Time proved that this hope and expectation were too optimistic.

The pro-USSR Stalinist parties either quickly transformed themselves, almost overnight into democratic parties, merely to carry on with what they are good at, i.e. distortion, though this time with the new magic word of "democracy" which was celebrating its victory over "communism" or else they adopted some of the Left Communist positions on an ad hoc basis, while officially dismissing them by referring to them as "dead stars".

The translation of this document into English in 1995 was one among many attempts by the CWO to present a specific communist tradition to a wider audience as a historical gap and opportunity with the collapse of USSR was opened up and to help to overcome the internationalist isolation that has been imposed by both Stalinism and Trotskyism.

The comprehensive introduction to the English translation of this document covers all that needs to be said on the Committee of Intesa. However this short introduction to the Farsi translation is an opportunity to





honour comrade Sultanzadeh, albeit just by mentioning him in the ranks of Left Communism, as well as explaining how two terms in Internationalist literature translate into Farsi.<sup>4</sup>

For the formation of new political vanguards who are starting to settle accounts with the counter-revolutionary role of the so-called left organizations and in the process exposing the limitations of the demand struggles which these organizations promote; who are having to face up to and deal with the causes of the current dilemma of the obscurity and unpopularity of the internationalist agenda, this document presents a valuable experience of how Italian comrades defended an independent working class programme in a very hostile environment and under unfavourable conditions, which the Iranian working class, like the working class everywhere else, are facing today.

#### Footnotes

1 SULTAN-ZADEH, A. (1889-1938). He settled in Russia and joined the RSDLP in 1907 and the Bolshevik Party in 1912. In 1920 he organised the founding conference of the Persian CP. From 1923 until 1927 he worked for the Soviet government. In 1928, he was criticised as a 'leftist' and in 1932 was removed from the leadership of the Persian CP. Returning to work for the Soviet Government, he was arrested during the Stalin purges and died in prison.

<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/delegates.htm>

2 Wage Labour and Migration: Persian Workers in Southern Russia, 1880-1914


<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=3007716> NK "http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=3007716"&HYPERLINK "http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=3007716"aid=3007716 3 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sykes%E2%80%93Picot\\_Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sykes%E2%80%93Picot_Agreement)

4 In Farsi political literature:

a, "left" is taken as synonymous with "socialist" and "communist", in Internationalist literature the terms "left" and "leftist" refer to Stalinists, Trotskyists, Maoists, reformists ..... in general to left-wing capitalist, individuals and organisations. In Farsi translation, "The Left" is distinguished from "left" by highlighting when referring to Left Communism.

b, both "Represent" and "Delegate" is translated by the same word. In Internationalist literature, the former has a parliamentary meaning to it (where the elected representative is not obliged to carry out the mandate of the electors); the latter term connotes the idea of having a mandate for a specific programme or course of action, with the person mandated being recallable at any time, as in the concept of Soviet democracy, we have distinguished this in our translation by using an old farsi word "hayaat".

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## **Report on the Manchester Meeting**

The document that follows is based on the notes of the introductory speaker for the CWO's Manchester meeting on April 21. The meeting was also attended by members of the ICC and the Anarchist Federation as well as individual council and left communists.

The meeting was held in a fraternal manner with all seriously trying to grapple with the problem of the development of a wider class movement. The ICC comrade who replied first quoted extensively from the editorial in the last *Revolutionary Perspectives* (60) and stated that the ICC fully supported the introduction. He also agreed with the criticism of the democratist illusions of Occupy and emphasised the fact that it is only the international working class which can make the revolution. He also stressed that the working class still had to break out of union dominated ideology to face up to the crisis of today. He took heart from the Unilever strike analysed in RP60 as it was a place he knew well where paternalism had dominated the workforce for generations so it was good to see that even here workers were beginning to see through the system's ideology.

A Manchester comrade then took up the point about how the working class which has no property to defend can materially alter its consciousness in the current situation and this became the main focus of much of the rest of the discussion. He argued that workers in struggle tended to reinforce their own embedding within the system and thus their struggles did not tend to develop their consciousness in a more general way. He gave the example of Greece where, despite the draconian cuts they had not yet found a way to resist. The only sign he had seen was that some people had started to take over hospitals but even this was fraught with problems. In Britain he pointed to the fact that the TUC is already using the idea of "solidarity" to get workers to accept some cuts.

Against this rather depressing view the meeting agreed that it was a

real question sincerely posed but various comrades countered it by putting forward the notion that the acquisition of class consciousness was a process and we were only at the "starting line" as one comrade put it. Others pointed to the past history of the workers' movement that just when the working class is written off as a historical force it suddenly proves everyone, including revolutionaries, wrong. The example of 1914 when the working class marched off in universal support for imperialist war only to begin the greatest revolutionary wave in history less than three years later stood out as an example of how class consciousness can be changed by material circumstances. In the current crisis the cuts had still yet to really hit home and all past indicators suggest that there is no immediate reaction to such things but only after a time lag when the actual burden of the new situation builds up.

In the meantime it was the task for revolutionaries to not only generalise any struggle but to point the way forward in the line of march towards greater class actions. Whilst some comrades were more eloquent in expressing a militant hatred of the capitalist system and its consequences which they could hardly wait to be ended the meeting agreed that class consciousness would be developed gradually through the increasing alienation from a system which could do nothing but attack us. It was also agreed that revolutionary consciousness would not arise overnight and that a degree of patience would be required. Class consciousness could not be developed by the revolutionary minority through a mere act of will. If there was a low level of class consciousness generally there was not a lot revolutionaries can do (as the last 40 years prove). As the Committee of Intesa wrote back in 1925 you cannot build a revolutionary movement "through expedients and tactical manoeuvres". The sorry history of Trotskyism since 1938 is evidence enough for that.

There were also a couple of discussions which could be described as nominalist. The first was over the question of "party" and "revolutionary minority". Whilst the ICT was quite happy to use the term "party" in

terms of a class conscious political organisation it was recognised that for some (following Ruhle et al) the term had negative connotations given the experiences of the last revolutionary wave. Similarly the idea of "intervention" was a word imported from Italian and French comrades where it is common to describe any one individual's contribution, but in English gives the unfortunate impression of someone speaking from outside the class. In both cases it was concluded that it is not so much the word but the idea behind it that was important and like our idea of "communism" itself such terms would always require explanation in order to clarify their content.

The only minor disagreement was when an ICC comrade said that things were changing and you would not have got the Communist Left addressing some sectors of internationalist anarchism ten years ago as today. The CWO comrades pointed out that they had worked with anarchists for twenty years in anti-parliamentary campaigns and No War But the Class War. The key dividing line in the current period was more about accepting an anti-capitalist revolutionary agenda and rejection of all types of reformism put forward by the left of capitalism. Whilst the Communist Left organisations were all agreed on this the problem was that not all anarchists understood this.

However, this was minor issue in what was a positive meeting undertaken in a comradely spirit and we hope that future meetings will not only welcome more participants but also carry this level of discussion further.

## ***Beyond Protest Manchester***

For those of us who have dedicated almost all their adult lives to struggling for a movement through which to bring about proletarian emancipation these are suddenly interesting times. Obviously they are not yet interesting times for most of the working class or there would be more people here to discuss how we can go “Beyond Protest” but there is no doubt that the speculative bubble which had been swelling for more than two decades until it burst in 2007-8 has been a major shock to the capitalist system, revealing it for what it truly is.

The collapse did not come as a shock to us. A young American sympathiser recently got back in touch with us on our website and reminded us what we wrote to him in December 2006.

“The current speculative bubble which is distorting real capital values cannot last forever, and if the system goes through a new global crash, the working class will need to have organised instruments in place in order to fight the authoritarian barbaric solutions which the capitalists will themselves put forward.”

Well it is still early in this crisis to yet see outright barbarism but what is going on in Syria is not far off it. However we should also point out that this crisis did not start in 2007 or 2008 but when we older comrades were young. It was the end of the post-war boom that brought our generation into the communist movement. More precisely it was the resistance of the working class to that crisis in the late 60s and early 70s which encouraged us not to join the traditional left but to found in Britain at least a new communist movement.

The key facts of the last 4 decades are that capitalism despite trying Keynesianism, monetarism and neo-liberalism has been unable to get out of its stagnation. This has been because to really start a new round of accumulation it would need destroy an enormous amount of value. But to do this it would have to inflict austerity the like of which we have not seen since the Thirties and which would provoke social confrontations to threaten the system, or else a new global war would do the trick excerpt the consequences for the capitalist are so incalculable in the era of nuclear

weapons that this too would threaten their long term survival (and that is all they think about, bugger the rest of us). The speculative bubble based on massive debt was their last trick and now that has burst the prospects for capitalism are indeed dire. Indeed we can currently see no other future for it but more of the same – stagnation, austerity, bailing out the banks to keep the system ticking over. Even the Governor of the B of E is talking of a lost decade. Lenin said there was no situation which capitalism could not get out of but the current situation is a bigger impasse than any we have seen so far. Managed decline is the course that has been chosen in the Micawberish hope that something will turn up. In the meantime speculation is once again being rehabilitated (but on commodities and currencies and not on housing and real estate).

The only other policy they have got is austerity – cuts upon cuts. We have already seen plenty of these. Everyone has their own favourite stats on the crisis but the ones we have printed in our latest *Aurora* from various sources give us a flavour.

*“According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies:*

- \* This year’s tax changes mean the ‘average family’ will lose £511 per year.
- \* A nominal increase in the minimum wage will leave it lower in real terms than it was in 2004. The government has taken the Low Pay Commission’s advice to freeze the minimum wage for young people from October. [£4.98 per hour for 18-20 year olds, £3.68 for 16-17 yr olds above school leaving age but under 18. The ‘apprentice rate’, for under 19s or 19+ and in the first year of apprenticeship will rise by 5p to £2.65 per hour.]
- \* Inflation has also outstripped average income growth, leaving workers worse off in real terms. The Institute forecasts that real net income of the average household will be lower in 2015-16 than in 2002-3.

*Meanwhile the TUC estimates:*

- \* By April 2013 families on working tax credit may lose more than £4,000 from changes to the credit system while 1.6m council workers will have their pay frozen for a third

year in a row.

### *Consumer Focus estimates:*

\* 4 million people have a Pay Day loan. A 'typical' monthly repayment on £100 is about £130 but higher interest rates, up to 5,000% p.a. are far from unknown. Tony Hobman, chief executive of the Money Advice Service, a government agency to help people in debt, is paid £250,000 a year before bonuses.

### *The 'Institute of Health Equity' at UCL reports:*

\* The gap in life expectancy between the richest and poorest has widened in most areas of England. The largest gap is for males in Westminster where average life expectancy of the richest is 84 but for the poorest the average is 16.9 years less.

### *The ONS latest employment figures show:*

- The drop in unemployment is entirely due to the growth in part-time work."

And on top of this we have to realise that over 90% of the planned cuts have not yet hit us.

Little wonder that we have seen movements like Occupy and Indignados taking to the streets in scores of countries across the world. And little wonder that the bosses paper the FT keeps writing articles wondering at how they are getting away with it without greater social unrest. The important thing about the Occupy movement more than anything else is that it has raised a political agenda. Everyone now talks about "capitalism". 5 years ago it was only the "nutters" of the Communist Left who used that kind of archaic language. And this is important since we can have all the economic struggles you like but unless they raise a political dimension they are something the system can accept and cope with. The Occupy movement has also questioned the hierarchical nature of society and its structures. Its open forums have shown how discussions can increase people's confidence and widen their horizons. Our comrades have been able to participate in them in various countries. In Rome for example our comrades have been asked to organise a school of Marxism so that people read *Capital* in an attempt to understand the real crisis.

However before it sounds like we are getting over-enthusiastic about the Occupy and Indignados movements we also have to recognise their limitations. On a political level, the 'anti-capitalism' of Occupy, like the Occupy movement itself, has no coherency or substance. When questioned about the meaning of anti-capitalism most Occupy protesters would say they are against the banks and multinational corporations. But there is no economic critique of capitalism and no understanding of why capitalism will inevitably create these hated institutions. The Occupy Wall Street website states on its home page:

*OWS is fighting back against the corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process, and the role of Wall Street in creating an economic collapse that has caused the greatest recession in generations. The movement is inspired by popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, and aims to fight back against the richest 1% of people that are writing the rules of an unfair global economy that is foreclosing on our future.*

This sort of reformist perspective to 'democratise capitalism' in line with groups like *UK Uncut* who think that capitalism could be fair if only the government made the bourgeoisie pay their taxes, seems to be as close as the Occupy movement gets to having any political perspective at all. Such demands for a fair and democratic capitalism are rooted in petty bourgeois utopianism and serve only to peddle illusions about what is possible under capitalism, illusions that the working class must dispel if it is ever to wage an effective struggle against capital.

This brings us to the question of class. This is an issue that the Occupy movement chooses to gloss over, or perhaps even to deliberately obscure. Of course the inequality that exists in society is at the heart of what the Occupy movement opposes, but this is conceptualised in terms of the 1% of those that own and control the world's wealth, compared to the 99% who don't. This may be a graphic representation of that inequality but it is just presented as a given, the consequence perhaps of the power of greedy bankers or megalomaniac

multi-nationals. The fundamental point that capitalism is a class society based on the exploitation of the proletarian majority by the bourgeois minority is neatly overlooked, as this would undermine the Occupy movement's utopian demands for a fair and democratic capitalism. Those who hold a Marxist understanding of the need for a revolutionary transformation of society led by the working class as the prime agent of change recognise that there is no such thing as a fair and democratic capitalism.

### **So What is to be Done?**

The working class owns only the individual capacity to labour. It has no system of property to defend. For previous rising classes the question of revolutionary change was no problem. All they had to do was defend their form of property in every way they could and they coalesced into a movement which challenged the old order. The bourgeoisie in their struggle could even engender slogans which made it appear as though they were fighting for all humanity (liberty, fraternity and equality). What they didn't tell the workers was that equality was only for those who could afford it. In bourgeois society Orwell's nostrum that some are more equal than others is a daily fact.

The only other weapon the working class possesses is its consciousness. This is nurtured and formed by its own struggles from its position in capitalist society but these sparks of consciousness rise now here now there and then die with the struggle. How can the perceptions of workers in struggle be carried from one point to the next? Marx was aware of the problem. He knew that the emancipation of the working class was "the task of the workers themselves" yet he also wrote that under capitalist conditions the ruling ideas are those who own the means of production, including intellectual production.

### **How to Escape the Dilemma – the Political Party**

The solution to the dilemma lies in the formation of a revolutionary minority or party if you like. This turns the consciousness of those individuals within the working class who already see what is at stake into a material



force, a material force which fights within the wider working class to increase both the depth and the extent of its class consciousness. This revolutionary minority is entirely consistent with Marx's own vision of a future international party. Many people quote Marx's insertion into the rules of the IWMA in 1864 the nostrum that "the emancipation of the working class will be the task of the workers themselves". What they usually claim is that this shows that Marx was against the idea of a revolutionary minority altogether. But this is an error. After all why would Marx include this in the rules of the International if it was an anti-party statement. What he meant here was that the workers had to forge their own organisations independent of all the bourgeois parties. Without an organisation representing the historic acquisitions of the working class the bourgeoisie will be capable of imposing its own solution on any movement however militant.

However Marx could not have envisaged all the false starts that the workers movement would make on its road to emancipation.

The revolutionary minority we have in mind will have to be unlike any other produced in the past. In the first place it will not fall into the social democratic error of trying to have a mass party which can only be achieved by capitulating to the immediate demands for reform and take on a parliamentary agenda.

Professional revolutionaries are not the answer either. This was advocated by Lenin for the Bolshevik Party when it was clandestine and under the brutal Tsarist dictatorship. He wanted revolutionaries to be 'professional' in sense of not being bunglers who betrayed themselves and the workers to the secret police. We are against it for several historical reasons. Having party organisers who are employees mean they can be disciplined by the mere act of cutting their source of salary as Gramsci did to defeat the Italian Left majority in the Communist Party of Italy in the 1920s. However there is also another profound reason for not accepting this model and that is that the class party has to be a party of the class and the members remain with the class either in the workplace or in the community.

There were some good things about Bolshevism: before 1917 it was obviously an organisation which not only had a wide ranging debate but encouraged individual initiative at the local level and within workers' organisations. It was its roots inside the working class, established well before the revolution that were the key to its decision to drop its social democratic programme in April 1917.

Obviously though the next revolution will not be a re-run of the revolutionary wave of 90 years ago. Obviously too we have to learn from the errors of the revolutionaries of the past.

We have catalogued those of the Bolsheviks many times. On Day One Sovnarkom was set up which was really just a bourgeois cabinet with another name. The real revolutionary ruling body should have been the Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets. Other examples are well-known. In June-July 1918 soviet elections in Petrograd were rigged for the first time and the isolation of the revolution and the continuing social democratic ideas about socialism which still lingered in Bolshevism ensured by 1921 that the class had disappeared and the party was the class. Anarchists have used these errors to argue that all along Bolshevism was a plot to defeat the spontaneous revolution of the working class. But the anarchists themselves lacked cohesion and organisation – personalities rather than policies dominated. When the Bolsheviks rigged the Petrograd soviet elections in 1918 it was to keep out the reaction not to prevent a move to a third revolution. And this is why some anarchists recognise that anarchism had failed too and decided that they too needed organisation and a Platform which they produced in 1926. This remains controversial amongst anarchists even to this day but it is a recognition that a revolutionary minority is needed. And today the Anarchist Federation carries in its paper an outline of revolutionary action and organisation that is not too distant from our own. Similarly we have read on the ICC website of a group called the Birov Collective which calls itself anarcho-sindicalist but its ideas of syndicates are very close to our idea of workplace groups as both are essentially political in character (this contrasts with the Solidarity Federation in the UK). Today the debate is not

between Anarchism and Marxism but between revolutionaries from both camps and the traditional left which are all based on the restoration in one form or another of social democracy.

From the Russian Revolution we take the lessons that to make the revolution the class will have to create a revolutionary minority which is the material expression of its consciousness. That minority will fight in the class wide organs for the communist programme but being a minority it cannot wield power. As Onorato Damen wrote in the platform of the PCInt after the break with Bordiga "the working class does not delegate its power to any one not even its class party". And the revolutionary minority has other tasks than to rule in any one geographical area – spreading the world revolution takes precedence and if its members are elected to posts of responsibility they are elected on the same basis as other delegates i.e. revocably.

Today we are seeing the beginning of a revival of an anti-capitalist consciousness. It is only a beginning but those of us who have been fighting for a revolutionary class outcome all our lives have an enormous responsibility to the new generation. Up to now communists have separated over issues largely of historical creation. Past errors have become current shibboleths. Rather than a source of understanding history has largely been a nightmare weighing on the living and magnifying differences which are hardly ever properly explored. Today we are on the edge of new situation and we need to re-examine our practices. We have been saying for many months that the issue is not just to fight the cuts but to fight the system that produces them. This is the starting point for all revolutionaries and we have declared ourselves willing to work with anyone who shares that basic premise. Out of common work comes common respect, out of respect comes real dialogue, and out of that a more effective working class resistance.

**Jock**

**The Communist Workers' Organisation** was founded in 1975 and joined with the Internationalist Communist Party (Italy) to form the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party in 1983. The Internationalist Communist Party was the only significant organisation to emerge in the Second World War (1943) condemning both sides as imperialist. It is the most significant organisation produced by the internationalist communist left which fought the degeneration of the Comintern in the 1920s as well as the process of "bolshevisation" (i.e. Stalinism) imposed on the individual communist parties. In 2009, in recognition of the new elements that had joined the founding groups, the IBRP became the **Internationalist Communist Tendency**.

We are for the revolutionary party but we are not that Party. Nor are we the only basis for that party which will emerge from the workers' struggles of the future. Our aim is to be part of that process by participating in all the struggles of the class that we can with the aim of linking the immediate struggle of the class with its long term historic programme — communism.

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**33** ESF; Beslan; Housing; Class Struggle; IBRP in Germany; Iraq; Saudi Arabia; Matteotti and Oil; Fahrenheit 9/11.

**34** US Election; Iraq; Middle East; China; Ukraine; 1905 Russian Revolution (pt 1); Germany; IBRP; Tsunami.

**35** UK Election, Abstentionism, Rover, Capitalism's New Economy (1), Pensions, 1905 Russian Revolution (2), John Paul II, Lebanon and Syria, US and Iran, Germany, Letters on Parliamentarism

**36** Tribute to Mauro Stefanini Jr; Oil; Airline Workers; London bombings; IRA "Stand-down"; Holocaust and Hiroshima; History and Empire; Marx is Back; Capitalism's New Economy (2);

Uzbekistan; Make Poverty History; Africa, Aid and Debt Relief; Future of the EU.

**37** French Riots; Gate Gourmet; Hurricane Katrina; German "Left Party"; Capitalist New Economy (3); Iraq; Iran; Gaza; Economic Role of War in Capitalism's Decadent Phase; Critique of Gotha Programme; Recuperated Factories in Argentina; Review: *Collapse*.

**38** Tehran Transport Workers Gaoled; Workers Fight Outside Unions; Anti-Terrorism: Smoke-screen for State Repression; Turner Pension Plan; Capitalism's New Economy (4); Russian gas; Revolt in Paris Suburbs; Hamas victory; Latin America; Global Warming (2).

**39** France: Class struggles: CPE: Student Movement; Human Rights; Democracy and Profit; Car Workers: Only International Unity Can Bring Victory! British State Terrorism; Shipwreck of US Ambitions; Immigration; Capitalism or Communism? Palestine; Gas Follows Oil; Gas and Imperialist Manoeuvring; India; Myth of Parliamentary Road to Communism.

**40** Tribute to Goupil; Terrorism UK; Global warming; Middle East; Darfur; Suez 50 years on, Hungary '56.

**41** Capitalist Barbarism: War without End; BA and Civil Service Strikes; Student Fees; Somalia; Gaza and Lebanon; Working Class under Imperialism; Falklands; Turkish Communists.

**42** Civil Service Attacks; Iran; Barcelona May '37; *Bilan* on May '37; Zimbabwe; Global Crisis; Tata Takes over Corus.

**43** Postal workers; PM Brown; Housing; China protests; Russian Imperialism; Turkish Elections; Subprime crisis; Reply to ICC on Economics of War.

**44** Britain: Repression; NHS; Inequality; Urban Decay; Class Struggle in Germany, Italy and Egypt; Lessons of October; Capitalist Financial Crisis; Iran, Turkey and Pakistan: Contradictions of US Imperialism.

**45** US Imperialism's 100 Years War? Capitalist Equality: Low Pay for All; Death at Work; German Transport Workers; Food and Fuel Price Inflation; Marx and the Sub-prime Crisis; "Do you have to be Red to be Green?"; Italian Communists in Gulags; Housing; The First Years of Soviet Rule in Petrograd.

**46** Food Riots; Pomigliano Struggle; Biofuels; Zimbabwe; Education Crisis.

**47** Public Sector Workers; Economic Crisis; Olympics; Georgia; Chinese Imperialism in Africa; New Development for the IBRP.

**48** Class War in China; Education Fight in Italy; Mumbai Massacre; Obama; Capitalist Barbarism in Congo; Learning from German Revolution; Left Communism in Turkey.

**49** British Construction Workers' Fight; Unite: The Union that Divides; Gaza; End of Paper Money Economy; Gas Wars in E. Europe; Darwin's Revolution; Letter from Greece.

**50** MPs Expenses; EU's Reactionary Agenda; GM Bankruptcy; Fiat and Pomigliano; the Af-Pak War; Obama in Cairo; Midlands Discussion Forum; The Commune.

**51** Global Capitalism; South African Class Struggle; Ssangyong Occupation; The Cost of the Crisis; The Miners' Strike 25 years on; The Last Fighting 'Tommy'; Iranian Election; Power and the State in Capitalist Society.

**52** CWU Sabotages Postal Workers' Struggle; Nationalism Against Working Class; Berlin Wall; Climate Change; 30th Anniversary of Death of Onorato Damen; Anti-Zionism, Anti-Semitism and Revisionism; Reviews: *The Power of Yes* by David Hare, Learning from the Revolutionary Experience in Russia; Fall in the Rate of Profit: Crisis and Consequences.

**53** Capitalism's Global Attacks; Struggle Must be International; Racism in Italy; Global Warming; Haiti; Afghanistan; Reply to the ICC, Commune's Reply to RP50; Public Meeting in Manchester.

**54** Unite and Fight; Class War at BA; Financial Crisis Engulfs Eurozone; Chinese Workers Show Their Class; BP's Deepwater Horizon; The Bolshevik Left and Workers' Power; Armenian Genocide 1915; Review: Capitalism—A Love Story

**55** Austerity Britain; Global Crisis Will Have to be Fought Globally; Unions' Phoney War; The Financial Manoeuvres of the Bourgeoisie; English Defence League; Education 'Reform'; Los Angeles Teachers' Struggle; Make the Bosses Take the Losses; The National Question Today; The Other Global War; Life of the Organisation.

**56** Tunisian Rising; Student Protests; Open Letter from FIAT Workers; Student Movement; Heinz Struggle: Pension 'Reforms' in France; Wikileaks; Crisis in Ireland; Bangladesh Workers Struggle; US Prisoners Fight Back; Cancun Climate Conference; State of Global Capitalism; ICT meeting report.

**57** Fighting Cuts Means Fighting Capitalism; NHS; AV Referendum; Class War in Wisconsin; Sovereign Debt; Iran Austerity; Nuclear Disaster in Japan; Cote d'Ivoire; Marxism or Idealism, differences with ICC; SPGB; Life of Organisation.

**58** Sovereign Debt; Terminal Crisis; News International; Legal Aid Cuts; Failure of Capitalism; Arab Uprising; Crisis in Iranian Ruling Class; Great Unrest 1910-14; Bordiga; Life of Organisation.

**59** N30: One-off Protest?; Occupy: No Solution; Oct 15 Rome Riots; Housing Question; Economic Crisis and Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty; Euro Crisis; Germany and Euro Crisis; Egypt; Imperialism and Arab Spring

**60** Britain: All in it Together; The Occupy Movement - Just another diversion?; Thirty Years On: The Falklands War and the Working Class; Italy: "The Revolt of the Pitchforks" and the Southern Proletariat; Social Protests in Romania; ANC - A Hundred Years in the Service of Capital; Murder and Manoeuvre in the Middle East; Book Launch: Onorato Damen: Bordiga - Beyond the Myth; Durham Open Meeting: Communist Intervention in the Workplace

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