

# WORKERS INTERNATIONAL

# JOURNAL

Print version  
**£2.50**

Political and theoretical journal of Workers International to Rebuild the 4th International  
No 2 Autumn 2013



*Former Goldfields South Africa (TCL) miners in Namibia and their supporters demonstrate over their missing pension funds. (See "Draft Unified Programme of the Namibian Working People, p. 16)*

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## **Editorial**

# **‘We will consistently explain the source of the crisis in the decay of the capitalist order and clarify the historical stage humanity has reached’**

**A**lmost all the myriad of different movements, disturbances, revolts, “Springs”, “Indignados”, “Occupy”, open violent riots, etc. since the banking and finance catastrophe broke in 2008 reveal one essential fact: The millions of people who are at the heart of the productive forces, those who have work and those millions whose access to it is precarious or non-existent, are running up against the social relations of production, epitomised in modern day finance capital.

A few big imperial powers (US, EU) and potential rivals dominate the world, interwoven with the massive social and economic weight of giant banks, major corporations and simply hugely rich individuals. Despite all the pious talk about “lifting people out of poverty”, this constitutes a violent barrier to progress for the majority of the world’s population.

It is not just that world economy has yet to recover from the finance crisis or that the effects are still hammering Southern Europe, the Middle East and for example Brazil.

All political life is dominated and stifled by the power of capital. It decides (and its mouthpieces repeat) that many people are simply not suited to run their own lives democratically. The election of a government in Egypt dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, swiftly followed by its removal at the hands of the Armed Forces (with US and European Union advisers hovering in the shadows), the violent suppression and state murder of the MB’s supporters, are urgent object lessons. This civilised and naturally well-endowed country needs to be taught it is not ready for democracy. Capitalist imperialism will not and cannot afford it.

The mass of Egyptian people are caught between the ruling US-backed military grouping (SCAF) with its immense stolen economic wealth and the blind alley of political Islam. Without its own independent political, social and economic programme aimed at smashing capitalist imperialism, the Egyptian people (like those of Turkey and Tunisia

too) face with their own version of the civil wars which have ripped apart Libya and Syria.

The US socialist journalist and “Occupy” supporter Chris Hedges can explain the situation up to a certain point:

*“Our enemy is not radical Islam. It is global capitalism. It is a world where the wretched of the earth are forced to bow before the dictates of the marketplace, where children go hungry as global corporate elites siphon away the world’s wealth and natural resources and where our troops and U.S.-backed militaries carry out massacres on city streets. Egypt offers a window into the coming dystopia. The wars of survival will mark the final stage of human habitation of the planet. And if you want to know what they will look like, visit any city morgue in Cairo.”* (<http://www.nationofchange.org/murdering-wretched-earth-1376648838>.)

### **Confident**

Naturally Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International does not share the pessimism expressed in the final sentence quoted. We remain confident that the working people of the earth can confront every difficulty and obstacle and carry out the necessary revolution to abolish capitalism.

(Our proposals for a way forward in the Middle East and North Africa are available on our website at <http://workersinternational.org/?p=5>).

Meanwhile, so-called western “democracies” are ruled by the bought creatures of capital, bourgeois politicians who rule in corruption and privilege hand in greasy hand with mendacious mass media.

Such is the essence of the situation in which the human race finds itself. The way forward, however, is only slowly making itself felt in the consciousness of the mass of human beings.

Almost none of the post-2008 mass movements has yet challenged the essence of the power that thwarts them – capitalist social relations – head-on, and projected a future where the power of capital is smashed. All have fixed on

nearer-to-hand phenomena of oppression or frustration (disempowerment, high-handed action by authorities, austerity, town-planning, public transport fare hikes) and turned them into the axes of genuinely mass movements which have actually drawn in all social grievances. At most there is a pious wish for society to be organised along more equal lines.

(The current [August 2013] Wikipedia article on the Occupy Movement sums the matter up quite well:

*“The Occupy movement is an international protest movement against social and economic inequality, its primary goal being to make the economic and political relations in all societies less vertically hierarchical and more flatly distributed. Local groups often have different foci, but among the movement’s prime concerns is the belief that large corporations and the global financial system control the world in a way that disproportionately benefits a minority, undermines democracy and is unstable.”*)

**The outstanding exception to all of this is the industrial, political and social movement of working people in South Africa and Namibia which came to the world’s attention with and after the strike and police massacre at Marikana.** The draft “Unified Programme of the Namibian Working People to take political power”, published in this issue of Workers International Journal, expresses the high level of consciousness among the masses in these countries.

No doubt further discussion and refinement of this draft will follow. But it plants a marker, placing the working class and working people at the centre of the revolutionary struggle for a socialist future.

In general, elsewhere the organised working class has a presence in all the movements. However, it has been disorganised and thrown onto the defensive by the rapid economic and social changes of recent decades which have hollowed out industrial employment and reduced large numbers of working people to penury and dependency. Auto-

mation and intensified productivity have reduced the sheer numbers needed in production, while the shift in industrial production to the Far East and elsewhere has also sharply reduced industrial employment in its old centres.

One consequence of the swollen power of finance capital has been the intensified pressure it brings to bear on industrial production, to squeeze out ever more value. The debts accumulated in the buying and selling of industrial plant for profit mean the highest possible amount of surplus value has to be extracted by making sure each worker works harder and with fewer interruptions, and is more and more completely tied to the rhythms imposed by the work.

This means that for example in the UK – the home of trade unionism – a million workers are known to be on “zero-hours” contracts. Most of these have to make themselves available as and when the employer requires, without any guarantee that they will be employed (and therefore paid) at all. Naturally this also means the employer can cherry-pick, preferring the most able and compliant when work is available. This and parallel developments (outsourcing, sub-contracting and so on), besides placing enormous strain on peoples’ lives, have undermined the traditional, class-conscious militancy in outlook and practice of the working class.

### **Degeneration**

At the same time the degeneration and then collapse of the Soviet Union and the Stalinist-dominated Communist movement associated with it removed a horizon to which working people could direct their aspirations. Traditional “socialist” parties (SPD, UK Labour Party, etc.), having long been run by reformist bureaucrats who were only too keen to keep actual workers at arm’s length as much as possible, were taken over by open supporters of the new capitalists, their ideologues and mouth-pieces.

The analysis of the results of the Italian elections in the spring by Balazs Nagy in this edition of *Workers International Journal* lays bare the roots of the political problems and difficulties working people face, and proposes a way forward in the development of a continent-wide movement against the attacks of the bourgeoisie and for a Working People’s Europe.

All the problems described have hobbled the opposition to the wave of

attacks on working people’s rights and social gains following on the crisis of 2008, an opposition which made itself felt in the riots of August 2011 in the UK, endless general strikes and other actions against cuts in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece, the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt, the Gulf States, then civil wars in Libya and Syria, and not least in recent movements in Turkey and Brazil.

(There is a very useful and detailed video account from a libertarian point of view of the movement in Turkey which draws attention to its economic and political background in the ambitions of the Turkish bourgeoisie to become the hegemonic power in the Middle East. It also shows the scope and breadth of the movement that was aroused. It is available at <http://roarmag.org/2013/08/istanbul-protests-occupy-gezi-documentary/>. The Brazilian academic working at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, Alfredo Saad-Filho, wrote for a student magazine an extremely informative account of recent events in Brazil which is widely reproduced on the internet, for example at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-mass-protests-in-brazil-in-june-july-2013/5342736>.)

An example of the difficulties the movement faces was the recent march of miners’ wives against pit closures in Spain. The march organisers felt it necessary to reject direct links with any trade union or political party because that would be seen as “sectional” and therefore divisive. Similar pressures are brought to bear on the workers’ movement in Egypt.

None of these movements has been able out of its own resources to formulate an aim for genuine social change beyond shaking a fist at a nebulous enemy or its nearest understrappers. A revolutionary movement which truly reflects the situation facing masses of people would have to embrace effective organs of popular power capable of making serious inroads into the rule of capital. So far the various movements have mainly been distrustful of proposals for politics of this kind and have tended to shun them.

It was to formulate and render effective such aims that Trotsky composed the *Transitional Programme* of 1938 as the basis for the Fourth International, preserving and developing what had been gained in the Russian Revolution and the struggle to defend the Soviet Union and the Communist International against bureaucratic degeneration.

Through all the vicissitudes, splits, sect-building and degenerations that the Fourth International suffered, it was this content which mattered.

It is this work that the *Workers International Journal* will take forward. We will consistently explain the source of the crisis in the decay of the capitalist order and clarify the historical stage that humanity has reached.

Marxism is a body of knowledge established in theoretical and practical struggle. It was always controversial because the class interests of property-owners always tried to crush it from the outside and subvert it from the inside. *Workers International Journal* will be an organ of struggle to defend and develop this body of knowledge from the point of view of humanity liberating itself from capitalism.

### **Resistance**

Serious activists who are involved in the movement of resistance to austerity and interested in taking it forward are already starting to pose profounder questions about the situation, questions which only Marxism can answer.

It is important for us to explain each new turn and development in the situation to explain the causes of the crisis in ways that make sense to those – and they are starting to emerge – who are deeply involved in the defence of social gains and now seek a theoretical underpinning for what they are doing.

A good starting-point is the discussion about solutions to the crisis. Some latter-day supporters of John Maynard Keynes still promulgate versions of his policies of government expenditure to provide public health, education, welfare and housing.

It is correct to fight to defend the social gains, enshrined in welfare states, which working people made decades ago while bourgeois governments still officially followed Keynesian policies. It is correct to point to the vast wealth of the super-rich and to assert that the resources are available for humanity to meet its material needs.

On the other hand it is wrong and misleading – and a reformist pipe-dream – to think that the bourgeoisie can allow this. The turn away from Keynesian policies to “neo-liberal” policies was not a whim; it reflected an urgent need of capital to take back what it had previously given away. As far as the bourgeoisie is concerned, the years of Keynesian policy and welfare states were an aberration, forced upon them by an active and politically conscious

movement that had an international scope. Fighting for a decent standard of living now requires profound social change.

Another example has arisen within the Occupy movement in the UK and among some environmentalists. This is the programme for "Positive Money". In order to curb and control finance capital by removing banks' ability to create money by opening lines of credit, this programme proposes a politically and commercially completely independent "Monetary Supply Committee" to regulate the creation of money. According to this plan, which understands money purely and simply as items in a (digital) account, banks will provide "transaction" accounts for people to deal with their day-to-day income and expenditure and "investment accounts" for savings, with the bank customer able to specify in what field these savings are to be invested.

Banks will manage customers' accounts, but the "money" will be lodged in accounts at the Bank of England, where all transactions will be settled. Banks will only be able to loan out the amount of money held in "investment" accounts.

### Illusions

These and similar schemes are based on illusions. Nevertheless, explaining what is wrong with them provides the opportunity to present and discuss what money really is and the role it plays in capitalist society.

But Marxism is not just a set of programmes and a theoretical treasure-house. Marxists must also pay attention to guiding strategically and practically the political action of the masses in struggle.

We must pay attention to the way that the working class and working people at large find a way forward in this situation. Between recognizing the depth of the crisis and mobilizing and co-ordinating the huge positive force of the working masses to solve it lies the job of rebuilding the world socialist movement, its consciousness and structures.

Many on the "revolutionary" left show a talent for raising tangential, inessential issues, for example recommending strike action at every turn and making the call for a general strike a divisive shibboleth when such a strike should be one element (and one to be treated very cautiously) in the tool-kit of working class action.

The working class will be able to play its progressive role in the struggles ahead in the process of re-establishing its existence and self-consciousness as a class. The propaganda of the isolated Marxist groups (often but not always correct and essential explanations of the causes of the crisis) cannot solve this task.

That is why Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International has greeted the formation of new working people's parties across Europe in the form of Syriza in Greece, Die Linke in Germany, Front de Gauche in France, etc. Another essential initiative is the campaign of Unite the union in the UK to force the Labour Party (to which almost all trade unions in the UK are officially affiliated) to reflect in its policies and personnel the needs and ideas of working people in the union. (See: "The back ground to London & Eastern Region United Left statement: Unite, the Labour party and Falkirk" by Bronwen Handyside in this issue).

In this and in the campaigns to defend social gains across Europe, Workers International will do its utmost to build and encourage the broadest and strongest possible united campaigns,

striving to participate at every level in the reconstruction of the working class and its combative class consciousness.

### Overcome

The point is to overcome the division which has been violently imposed between revolutionary Marxism and the mass of working people. Neither part can do what has to be done without the other.

We are against any sectarian abstention from this work. We are very interested in the ideas of all those, like Sam Gindin and Leo Panich, who are working to re-orientate working class organisations socially and politically in new circumstances through forming Workers' Associations, or like Professor Lois Weiner in the US who are making similar efforts in relation to teacher trade unions and their involvement with broader social struggles.

**Propagandists might see our approach as a retreat from Marxism. On the contrary, it is the elaboration of Marxism as a guide to practice.**

In all this, Workers International Journal will continue to explain and elucidate the world from the point of view of the struggle to change it.

# A political tsunami

This analysis of the political and social background to the shock Italian election results was written in May by **Balazs Nagy**

There is no point simply repeating the results of the latest Italian elections. Everybody knows them. We also know the astonishment, apprehension and barely-disguised fear they caused among the bourgeoisie and its European satraps and propagandists.

Even most of those who are genuinely against these were completely gobsmacked. So pretty much nobody understands what is going on. To penetrate the mystery of it all, you obviously need to go a bit further, to look behind the contestants' political badges and the voting figures. Those colours and facades are only the superficial, immediate and direct reflections of a deeper-going relationship of forces between social classes.

Of course this means looking at the political actors and the votes they get. But it also means, unlike all the – sincere or partisan, merely superficial or frankly cosmetic – commentators, looking a little more closely behind the candidates' branding and costumes, especially if you hope to derive useful lessons of general interest beyond the borders of Italy.

To do that, we need first of all to clarify the historical and political conditions which have left their indelible mark on these elections.

## **The break-up of bourgeois democracy**

Important political developments are usually explained, discussed and analysed using the generally prevailing method, i.e. in themselves, separated from their social and historical context. This short-sighted approach is characteristic of various sets of bourgeois analysts. Sadly, it also influences a number of political currents which in other respects oppose capital. But in imposing this narrow view on the Italian elections, the great mass of reports, once they had expressed their dismayed – or indeed satisfied – stupefaction, have been content merely to



*'Beppe' Grillo: High share of vote reveals how far the bourgeoisie's decomposition has gone*

describe the results. They did not look for any deeper cause of this veritable upheaval beyond pointing out that the Italian people had massively rejected the destructive bourgeois offensive, before wandering off into conjecture and subjective and even fantastic speculation. But the internal motive forces behind this readjustment of political lines remained beyond their reach.

One of the most fundamental things to bear in mind about our epoch, what makes it different from the 19th century, is that from World War I onwards capitalism visibly entered into the phase of its decline and death-agony. To avoid overloading this article, I shall spare the reader the very complete analysis Lenin provides of this imperialist stage of capital compared to the preceding phase, nor shall I polemicise against the dogmatic perception of this decline which mechanically imposes it on reality as if it were a constant uniform downward motion. On the contrary, it must be emphasised that this decadence

is not a static given, an immutable element suspended like some external threat over a constant and unchanging society. Far from it, since it is bound up with this economy's and this society's organism, it is part and parcel of it, just as ageing and physical decrepitude are a result of the declining phase of a human body. And just as a human being declines, so too imperialism is declining to the point of exhaustion. Since Lenin's essential analysis of imperialism's anatomy (including the damnation of its soul) in 1916, the system has continued to trace a generally downward curve. Of course it has not been an uninterrupted linear fall, but nevertheless a flagrant, notorious and necessary descent, despite occasionally stopping or even starting to rise again, as Trotsky describes it like the brief periods of lucidity in a being in its death agony, interludes which bring neither respite nor cure.

Keeping a constant eye on this decline and refreshing our analysis of it

(as indeed of other manifestations of imperialism) has been and remains an important task for the workers' movement. Understanding it is an indispensable tool for all those who struggle for working people's emancipation. After Lenin's death, his companion in arms, Trotsky took on the responsibility for constantly improving this valuable and necessary compass, a task made all the more difficult and arduous by the way in which the Stalinist bureaucracy perverted and rendered gangrenous the USSR and the Communist Parties, altering and falsifying the teachings of Marx and Lenin and persecuting Trotsky and his comrades even to the point of assassination.

Concretely and constantly examining this decadence, in particular the incessant deterioration in the democratic system of the bourgeoisie's political regime as an intimately-linked product of it, was one of Trotsky's most important preoccupations. All his analyses of the processes involved in the decay of petty-bourgeois democracy deserve our attention, since this degradation has not only not stopped, but country by country and period by period it has got worse and assumed a variety of forms depending on the mutual positioning of the classes and the intensity of the struggle between them, and also on specific national circumstances.

One undeniable symptom of imperialist decadence is the noticeable shift in the physiognomy of economic crises. Once again it suffices, without going into details, to mention their much greater frequency and the appearance of great general crises of a new type. These are world-wide in scope, spreading from one economic sector to another (finance, production, distribution), becoming infinite in duration and, inevitably, leading to a re-modelling of political life. These crises of a new type drastically reveal the total bankruptcy of capitalism-imperialism and call imperatively for its overthrow. Thus they openly pose the question of power.

The first such crisis lasted from 1929 to 1945, since World War II was an integral part of it, both as its ineluctable outcome and as its "solution". We are currently living through the second, whose depth and duration are also starting to disturb a good number of even bourgeois economists. In France, only Hollande and his people retain, for public consumption, as it were, any illusions over the approaching end of a

"cyclical" crisis. So this "normal" president hopes for a "normal" crisis.

But at the height of the crisis of the 1930s Trotsky provided a galaxy of magisterial analyses of political upheavals that were the worm-eaten and toxic fruit of imperialist decline. The most important, he showed, arose from classical democracy's inability to contain the violence of class contradictions produced by imperialism. Hence the bourgeoisie's orientation towards more authoritarian political systems. This is why democracy degrades and rots and is abolished.

How Trotsky examined fascism, what he called for and proposed and what he warned against, are more or less well-known. But these have become separated from the theoretical basis of his investigation and reflections i.e. imperialist decadence and the sharpening of class contradictions, which are pushed into the background or frankly ignored. So, as Trotsky himself had occasion to comment, an examination of concrete reality has been replaced by the abstract categories of "democracy" and "fascism".

This is how Trotsky presented this problem (just after Hitler's tragic seizure of power):

*"The Stalinist theory of fascism ... represents one of the most tragic examples of the injurious ... consequences that can follow from the substitution of the dialectical analysis of reality ... by abstract categories formulated upon the basis of a partial and insufficient historical experience ... The Stalinists adopted the idea that in the contemporary period, finance capital cannot accommodate itself to parliamentary democracy and is obliged to resort to fascism. From this idea, absolutely correct within certain limits, they draw in a purely deductive, formally logical manner the same conclusions for all the countries and for all stages of development."* ("Bonapartism and Fascism" in Writings of Leon Trotsky (1934-35), New York, 1974, p. 51)

Among the Stalinists' generalisations, Trotsky then notes, they worryingly "forgot" that "between parliamentary democracy and the fascist regime a series of transitional forms, one after another, inevitably interposes itself, now 'peaceably,' now by civil war". With many comrades today in danger of sliding into the schematic method of the Stalinists, this advice is irreplaceable. How important it is, is emphasised by the fact that over that decade of the 1930s, Trotsky never

stopped stripping down and analysing bonapartism as one of the intermediate forms between parliamentary democracy condemned to disappear and its replacement by fascism – or the proletarian revolution.

From this rich literature, which is particularly relevant to an understanding of our present problems, we should also quote his article "Whither France?" written three months later. His words in this study resonate today even louder and with particular acuteness:

*"Capitalism not only cannot give the toilers new social reforms, nor even petty alms. It is forced to take back what it once gave. All of Europe has entered an era of economic and political counter-reforms. The policy of despoiling and suffocating the masses stems not from the caprices of the reaction but from the decomposition of the capitalist system. That is the fundamental fact which must be assimilated by every worker if he is not to be duped by hollow phrases. That is precisely why the democratic reformist parties are disintegrating and losing their forces one after another throughout Europe".* (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1936/whitherfrance/ch00.htm>)

Just like now, as if he had just written these words today, although it was actually almost 80 years ago! And of course it raises the question: Where are we now?

### **The bourgeoisie's European con-trick**

Trotsky's teachings and advice help us to grasp today's situation. Using this Marxist method we can get an understanding of the recent elections in Italy and bring out the main political lessons they offer. But it would be quite wrong to see the current crisis as a mere copy of the previous one, even though they share the same formal basis -- i.e. the decline of imperialism -- and the current crisis does resemble its forebear in the 1930s.

The great crisis is not a simple repetition of its ancestor in the last century. In the intervening period the prolonged death-agony of capitalism-imperialism has weakened the system to the point where most, if not all, its traditional reserves are exhausted. The shift of its centre of gravity to Asia is a significant symptom of this exhaustion which in turn has made the retrogression faster and worse. Faced with continual depletion of its normal internal resources and threatened with complete exhaustion, anaemic world capitalism relies entirely

on the artificial intravenous drip-feed of finance and the illusory nutrients it brings. At the same time, its most enfeebled European branch has decided to risk all on a death-defying “European” feat of acrobatics which flies in the very face of the continent’s eminently national character. And paradoxically, it has found a lifeline by developing and generalising this survival therapy.

Conveniently screened behind the claim to be “building Europe”, it has brought together and concentrated the last measures (before fascism!) for regenerating capitalism and has imposed them on every country. These stewards of European capital have gained some space to impose the bitter doses by presenting them as necessary steps towards European integration.

There is no way national parliaments would have simply swallowed them without provoking severe crises and the inevitable risk of mobilising working people into tumultuous resistance. In any case, they do not have much room for moving towards the kind of bonapartist regime that Trotsky described in the 1930s as one of the intermediate regimes between parliamentary democracy and fascism.

The sort of (even pretend) wheeling and dealing between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat which is a typical feature of bonapartism would be very difficult given the anaemic state the bourgeoisie is in. It is unable to offer even the shadow of a reform and is in urgent need of resurrection, which has turned out to be impossible without tackling head-on all the gains the working class has made; there is hardly any room left for any kind of balancing act between the classes, even an illusory one.

Nevertheless, bonapartism is very tempting, especially in France, where Sarkozy recently tried to put it into practice – although that too rested on the “European” fiction. That remains the basis and framework of all efforts to turn towards bonapartism, elements of which, especially the authoritarian side, are present in every country.

Nevertheless, this Europe remains indispensable for the bourgeoisie, first of all because it allows them to be sparing in the use of fascism, which is not only a costly adventure but also very risky and dangerous for them because European workers have not forgotten its horrors. However, it would be seriously wrong to dismiss it completely because it is still the bourgeoisie’s final resort. So as their decline leads to more



***EU General Affairs council: Those who ask this Europe to apply the most elementary democratic principles have got the wrong address***

and more problems accumulating, fascist parties are gaining strength across Europe and biding their time.

This can be seen everywhere, from Greece to the Netherlands. For the time being, however, the bourgeoisie is more inclined to rely on the supposed European unification which they have shaped to their own requirements, i.e. to a considerable extent perverted.

First of all, the mongrel edifice which they and their supporters call Europe is admirably adapted to fill the space between democracy and fascism that used to be occupied by national bonapartism. It has the immense advantage of neutralising and shrugging aside democracy and its useless, “dangerous” institutions while maintaining their empty husks or rather, to be precise, degrading them into transmission belts for their own purposes. The crying lack of democracy that is a distinctive mark of the whole of this European edifice, and the obviously authoritarian and profoundly anti-democratic way it functions, are not mistakes arising from miscalculation, chance or caprice. They reveal its essence, express its nature and indicate its vocation to compel, impose and assert the will of the bourgeoisie while side-lining democratic procedures with which it is incompatible.

The sole and invariable aim of all their “recommendations” is to set up projects to save and shore up capital which is on the ropes and a bourgeoisie which is adrift without a rudder. They are handed down like decrees to docile national “parliaments”. (Strangely not a

single one of these measures aims to improve the lives of working people!) This being the case, those who, however sincerely, ask this Europe to apply the most elementary democratic principles, or even its own social regulations, have got the wrong address and simply make themselves look stupid. Instead of begging for these things you have to win them in struggle. The mission of this Europe is precisely to dictate what capital requires, side-lining democracy that gets in the way. The present great crisis powerfully exposes this and testifies to it in the most striking way.

### **The current crisis and the role of debt**

This great crisis did not explode simply as a consequence of contradictions of the capitalist-imperialist system already familiar from the 1929-1945 crisis. It was fed and bloated on top of that by all the extra costs arising from the long-drawn-out decadence and deterioration of imperialism and efforts to contain it.

Public debt requires particular attention in this regard because it plays a special role and is important, concentrating within itself the whole extra weight of capitalist retrogression and the vain efforts to overcome it. I cannot deal with it fully here, but it would be wrong to leave it out entirely, since it has a central place in the world – and particularly European – bourgeoisie’s arrangements.

Briefly, then: this high level of public indebtedness has its origins in the more and more marked deficiency in capital-

ist accumulation which from more or less the middle of the twentieth century was decreasingly able to play the role of stimulating constantly expanding extended reproduction. This inadequacy, which is the main basis and organic reason for the capitalist-imperialist system running out of steam and falling into marked decline over a long period, inexorably drove it under the domination of its financial component.

The poor returns on production – profit – was no longer enough to secure it vigorous renewal. As indicated above, it needed an artificial and total intravenous drip of finance. To put it another way, finance went from being a partner to a hegemonic position.

One consequence was a serious drop in state income, already reduced by the cuts politicians like to make to the taxation of the bourgeoisie. This happened just as state expenditure was rising. This process as a whole necessarily culminated in all bourgeois states being massively in debt, especially in the economically most advanced countries.

A feature of a general crisis is that it exposes weaknesses and problems of the system for all to see, and so it was with this catastrophe. The real weight and extent of current debt far surpasses the normal and necessary role of money-capital loans in the production-cycle of capital and the classic debt-levels which go with them. Still lacking the space to deal with it properly, here, I can mention only what seems absolutely essential to understanding the situation.

As we saw above, finance capital has gained the upper hand and become a monster whose tentacles tightly embrace the whole of social life. Of course it is not the mythical monster that bourgeois politicians and journalists try to portray it as, lurking inaccessibly behind the enigmatic domination of “market forces”. It is certainly flesh and blood, sheltering in the banks and similar institutions and personified in the cohorts of shareholders, small-time speculators and other parasites.

What really is strangely new about this situation and at the same time represents a deepening of the “decay” Lenin spoke about, is the fact that this finance capital has managed to turn all the countries of Europe (not to mention others) into permanent debtors bound to yield up their regular feudal dues like medieval serfs.

The most fundamental role of this thing they call Europe and its institutions is to tie these modern serfs to their financial masters and make sure they

pay the many and various exactions upon them. The previously independent national leaders and their parliaments unquestioningly carry out orders and instructions prescribing how they are to fulfil their role of collecting the cash. Their main activity is to raise, amass and guarantee the considerable sums owed to the sacrosanct “markets” as they suppress and destroy all social gains previously achieved.

It is a fully-worked-out system where astronomic debt levels make any hope of final payment vain and utopian, especially since, while countries and workers bled white in this way find they are completely unable to reproduce the necessary wealth, their governments still keep turning up regularly at the banks to borrow further billions. So the debts grow and this whole edifice of abject exploitation is set to go on and on for ever.

This problem as a whole is the concrete expression of Lenin’s overall characterisation of imperialism as an epoch of “wars and revolutions” or “as capitalism in transition, or, more precisely, as moribund capitalism” disintegrating under the weight of its contradictions.

By 1934 Trotsky was talking about the “capitalist system decomposing”. Now, the essential meaning of the current situation which the above analysis reveals is a growing inability on the part of the bourgeoisie to preserve and guarantee its domination using the old means to which it has become accustomed and its chaotic search for a way out. Lenin clearly described this as one of the necessary conditions for revolution.

Despite all fairy stories, there is no doubt that we are in a period in which revolution is maturing, and in which the main job of all those who take seriously the emancipation of working people is preparing for it. The facts clearly pose the choices: workers’ revolution or a descent into barbarism (of which war is one of the components).

### **Displacement of class forces – key to the election results**

The Italian election results were unexpected and astonished everybody. They express the fact that, on the rotten basis of capitalism-imperialism, there has been a veritable general political re-alignment in Italy, a social re-positioning that has brutally redrawn the political map. In reality we are at the end of a series of enormous whirlwinds, of dislocations and re-groupings involving political parties in Italy since the

1990s. These have been years of real cataclysm which have shaken political life from top to bottom, radically changing the traditional spectrum of parties. These twenty short years have wiped the two main opposing parties off the map: the one, Stalinist and the other, bourgeois Christian Democracy.

Their collapse reflected their inability to hold back and channel workers’ and peasants’ struggles using their old, outdated methods and means, an impotence which was accentuated by the way these struggles intensified on the basis of the worsening decadence of capitalism and attempts to deal with it on a “European” level.

Their political re-composition in a new configuration was obviously motivated by their abiding desire to shore up the rickety bourgeoisie and thus bar the way to the masses of working people. They only differed – sometimes acutely -- over how to do it. The recent elections provide us with the first materials assessing the outcome of this metamorphosis, which no doubt will exert a strong influence on national – and European – political life.

The potential impact across the continent will be very deep because what was directly at stake in the political contest in Italy itself was the way the European project expressed itself in that country. It was in relation to this central axis that the political actors and their organisations defined their programmes. Their domestic views and concerns were merely derived from these commitments. Moreover, this same transformation or mutation of purely national programmes into European stances had already marked previous elections, in Greece or France, for example.

The main issue in the Italian elections is the outstanding fact that, following their Greek brothers, the Italian proletariat inflicted a stinging defeat on the bourgeoisie’s concentrated offensive. They swept aside its nefarious objectives and measures and its anti-democratic methods, thus crushing the political line of their Italian personification and direct proxy of Brussels and Frankfurt, Mario Monti, along with the shattered remnants of bourgeois parties who clung to him. This proletarian drive was expressed directly in the votes, but also in the pressure exerted upon all other classes and their parties.

First of all, the elections exposed and set the seal on a fault line in the Italian bourgeoisie, breaking apart under the heavy burden of re-structuring its forms



of rule. One significant wing realised the difficulties involved in applying in Italy the European offensive aimed at taming and subjecting the proletariat and rejected this path. It chose a different route to weakening and dominating working people, the route of adventurist demagoguery and runaway nationalism.

The fact that this coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi did very well at the polls underlines how important this orientation on the part of the bourgeoisie is. The two parts making it up arose not so long since out of the decomposition of the traditional political parties of the bourgeoisie. They testify to a significant political re-composition on the part of one section of it.

Side by side with the adventurist party of the bourgeois wheeler-dealer Berlusconi, the Northern League expresses a clear orientation towards an authoritarian nationalist regime, thus straddling the tendency towards a rupture in national unity.

The League openly espouses the desire to drive ahead with the super-exploitation of the south of the country, the famous Mezzogiorno, and even to cut all state aid to this traditional “internal colony” of the Italian bourgeoisie. Even now the average income per head of the population in the Mezzogiorno is 40 per cent less than in the north of the country. Between 2007 and 2010, gross domestic product (GDP) in the south fell by 6.1 per cent, while in the centre-north the reduction was “only” 4.1 per cent, and since 2008, 70 per cent of job losses have been in the Mezzogiorno (Le Monde, 22 February 2013).

This coalition kept afloat by Berlusconi’s demagogic adventurism and the Northern League’s threadbare local patriotism clearly forms the antechamber to a second edition of fascism. Rather than unifying the country, bourgeois Europe’s aggressive policy of ravaging it and imposing authoritarian centralisation have heightened the contradictions and inequalities between provinces, dividing them and pushing them towards separation. A considerable part of the “national” bourgeoisie straddle this drive – this is very clear and far-reaching in Italy – and, dragging along a good proportion of the petty bourgeoisie, adopt a no less retrograde and reactionary nationalist orientation, going so far as to repudiate the unity of the country.

(It should be noted in passing that this phenomenon is not confined to Italy. Besides the visibly nationalist parties in many countries, one can also



*Silvio Berlusconi*

see several movements for national dismemberment. That is concretely on the agenda not only in Italy, but also in Belgium and Spain for example. Of course such a turn on the part of a section of the bourgeoisie in this or that country cannot at all be a path to national emancipation, even in cases as legitimate as the Catalan and Basque nations in Spain. For working class activists to take this nationalist path would mean them being swallowed up in the process by which the façade of bourgeois national unity breaks apart, which would weaken the desirable unity of the country’s proletariat. The nationalist turn, even under apparently positive slogans, is precisely the other variant of bourgeois politics, through which it seeks to maintain its leadership and hegemony by trying to channel the revolt against bourgeois Europe into a nationalist dead-end pointing straight at fascism. The bourgeois “independence” adventure would only add to the already immense burdens Catalan [or Basque] working people have to bear and certainly not bring any “national” advantages. Real independence for Catalonia will only be obtained in the course and within the framework of a struggle for socialism throughout the whole of Spain. Now the indispensable condition for such a struggle, and especially for a successful outcome, is the fighting unity of all Spanish working people. The Asturian miners realised that recently when they marched to Madrid to unite their struggles with other working people against bourgeois Europe’s anti-working class measures.)

The other significant section of the bourgeoisie lines up behind the so-called “left” coalition of Pier-Luigi Bersani. The dominant segment of this coalition is the Democrat Party which also, but only partly, came out of the

break-up of the old political apparatus (party) of the bourgeoisie and its re-composition during the 1990s. But unlike the parties of the opposing coalition of Berlusconi, the birth of this Democrat Party follows a different fracture line and also a sticking-together of ill-matched pieces. The new bourgeois parties, particularly Berlusconi’s “People of Liberty” and the Northern League, are bourgeois formations of a distinctly DIY character, but their class origins are homogenous. The Democrat Party, on the other hand, has its roots in the dissolution of the once-powerful Stalinist party of Togliatti.

Since this party dissolved itself in 1990, its majority have undergone a period of decomposition punctuated by various break-aways and re-compositions. This opportunist mutation, accompanied by alliances and ruptures, culminated in the current Democrat Party founded in 2007. But it also contains the fusion of this Stalinist rump with the “left” vestiges of Christian Democracy.

It should be noted straight away that the sudden degeneration of the CP and its amalgamation with a piece of the bourgeois Christian Democrat party, although written into the DNA of Stalinism – as one saw in the USSR – was treated with obstinate silence by the European and world press, which modestly abstained from stirring the stink of this rotteness in its reports on the elections. This Democrat Party draws its strength from its implantation in the various workings of the state and municipal machinery and among the trade union bureaucracy. President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano, formerly Togliatti’s crafty opportunist henchman, was one of the bosses of this



*Bersani*

party which simply installed the government of the bankers' agent Mario Monti in power – without elections – in 2011 because their European Union told them to.

Besides this Democrat Party, Bersani's coalition also involves two small and obscure parties which eke out an existence in the shade of this "big party" as independent "socialist" and ecological survivals of the great political upheaval.

All in all, these two coalitions are separated not only by their programmes but also by their antecedents and class backgrounds. They express the two divergent projects through which the bourgeoisie is trying to discipline and dominate the working class and get a grip on its crisis: one of them by getting together with Europe, the other by retreating into nationalism. This fracture has laid bare the perplexity this perdition-bound class is in over how to secure its domination. And that is how this conflict between the two variants in Italy led temporarily to a no-score draw.

One unusual feature of these elections and this conflict is the appearance of Giuseppe (Beppe) Grillo's formation, which played a significant role. Their high share of the vote (25.5 per cent in the elections to the lower chamber, 23.7 per cent for the Senate) reveals how far the bourgeoisie's decomposition and its contradictions have gone.

This "Five Star Movement" is not even an actual structured organisation but, is described by its chief ideologue Gianroberto Casaleggio as a vague community whose members are linked by internet (according to *Le Monde*, 14 March 2013). But working class activists need to characterise this unstable and little-known nebula according its social composition and political content and orientations. (Information on this is taken from the well-documented article by Marc Wells and Peter Schwarz on *World Socialist Website*, 13 March 2013).

The spokesperson for this Movement, Beppe Grillo, is one of the richest men in Italy, with an annual income of up to 4.3 million euros in 2005. But the real head of his political network is Casaleggio, the prosperous founder of Milan ITC firm, "Casaleggio Associates". One of his close supporters, Enrico Sassou, is currently taking a back seat to disarm possible criticism, since he is the director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Italy and editor of *Harvard Business Review Italia*. But "Casaleggio Associates" itself is linked



**Gianroberto Casaleggio**

by partnerships to several powerful American and British firms.

This on its own provides a serious indication of the class nature and direction of this movement. So it was quite understandable that the millionaire Leonardo Del Vecchio, owner of a firm called "Luxottice", and the steelmaker Francesco Biasion of Vicenza should support Grillo. Explaining his support, Biasion said he wanted to encourage the Movement because "nowadays business is in the grip of the bureaucracy and the unions".

However, the Movement is far from being directly an association of well-to-do bourgeois. The great majority of its supporters, especially those who front it up and form the vast majority of its 163 new members of parliament, are young graduates and students, IT workers, accountants, teachers, surveyors and others, the same déclassé intellectuals pauperised by the crisis in a "casualised generation" that exists in every country. This impoverished and completely disorientated stratum shares many point in common with those who Mussolini's movement recruited, or Hitler's Nazis. Their aimless wanderings express the sad lack of a genuine revolutionary movement. What we have here really is a petty-bourgeois setup which has drawn in a great number of working-class voters because of its virulent opposition to bourgeois austerity and those who serve it.

According to the Demos Institute (quoted in *Le Monde*, 16 March 2013), the Grillo Movement received 49 per cent of working-class votes, while Bersani's Democrat Party only won 21 per

cent of workers! Among the unemployed and jobless, these figures were 42 per cent for Grillo against 20 per cent for the Democrat Party. The "Five Star Movement" also garnered 40 per cent of the vote among artisans, peasants and small business-people, more than Berlusconi's party at 32.5 per cent.

So while they threw out their immediate enemy, the Monti government, working class votes were dispersed between two political blind alleys. The fact that they were politically derailed to this extent is distressing and requires fuller explanation.

Further on, we will examine in a little more detail the absence of a real workers' movement and its politics, which is the main reason for this temporary loss of direction. Let us just note for the moment that the relatively low proportion of working-class votes cast for Bersani's coalition is also explained, above and beyond their distrust of this formation's politics, by its announcement that it was going to maintain Monti's anti-working class measures. Working-class revulsion over this policy, however, was not enough to eliminate all illusions in this "left". Nevertheless, it was strong enough to channel a mass of working class votes towards Grillo's petty-bourgeois Movement.

But this formation's ideology and political line are not just completely foreign to the working class, they are even diametrically opposed to workers' reality-based conception of the world and, above all, their political aims. Casaleggio, considered to be the spiritual guide of this setup, is indeed a visionary, but his "visions" are motivated by virtual online information which he confuses with reality. In his video clips he predicts the imminent disappearance of social classes, ideologies, political parties and – of course – trade unions, leaving behind a "community" with "generalised participation" through the internet.

This is a fantasy world which smells strongly of fascism, with its characteristic elimination of any democratic organisations acting as intermediate connections in society, replacing them with direct links between the individual and the boss. But it is the comedian Grillo who translates these crypto-fascist hallucinations into a political language laced with demands that are very often as shrill as they are demagogic.

This political position categorically denies the existence of social classes, replacing them with "two social blocs".



**Leonardo Del Vecchio**

In bloc A, Grillo places “millions of young people who have no future” vegetating in “casual jobs”, very often unemployed and “the excluded” who “themselves want to become institutions ... and create a new Italy out of the ruins”. Here, too, he puts “small and medium businesspeople who ... are forced to shut up shop or kill themselves out of despair”. How easily one can discern in these summary and simplistic descriptions the contours of an alliance between the upper layers of the petty-bourgeoisie and various elements of the Lumpenproletariat, essential components of the fascist shock battalions.

In bloc B, on the other hand, he places “those who are surviving the crisis” who, he says, “often have a decent current account and a good pension, or the security of a public sector job”. He indulges in a demagogic amalgam by putting workers and working people in state and municipal employment alongside the parasitic bourgeoisie in one bag in his bloc B. By doing this, Grillo is trying to divide the working class and working people by setting up young and impoverished layers against older workers and those who work in the public sector.

He keeps insisting that the struggle between these two blocs has replaced the class struggle, which he hold up to public ridicule. In this way he hides what is really at stake in the struggle, carefully protecting the bourgeoisie while driving a wedge between working people, so that the sharp edge of his demagogy tends to be directed against these working people. For example, it is not so easy to see through it when he

claims that we face “a generational conflict in what is at stake is age and not class”, whereas things are a lot clearer when he writes that “every month the state has to spend 19 million on pensions and 4 million on civil service salaries. This burden is no longer sustainable”.

It is hardly surprising that certain bourgeois commentators are drawn towards Grillo’s programme even if in general they condemn his demagogy. In any case, the vast majority of them do not say a word about the fascist overtones in what he says, or simply treat it as vague, indefinable political adventurism. Fortunately this movement remains very instable and its disparate elements could easily break up along class lines.

### **But where is the party of the working class?**

These elections were marked by a noteworthy – and at first sight surprising – apparent contradiction between on the one hand the immense pressure the proletariat exerted on the majority of political actors to reject the bourgeoisie’s European offensive and on the other the obvious absence of any genuinely working class organisation and policy.

In this sense they differ considerably from the elections in Greece and France, where coalitions like Syriza and Front de Gauche were able to embody the first and certainly limited but already effective steps towards rebuilding the working class’s political weapon, its party, without falling into sterile sectarianism.

Now nothing of the sort has emerged in Italy, despite the powerful workers’ movement, rich in long-standing and once-flourishing revolutionary traditions. It is also the country of Antonio Gramsci, the great Marxist organiser and educator of Italy’s communist movement in the 20th century. So it is absolutely essential to understand this tragic discrepancy between the working class’s history and basic instincts and the flagrant and deplorable lack of its own party. To grasp the content of this and the main reason for it, we need to broaden the scope of our analysis.

Gramsci’s original theoretical heritage was already falsified and perverted by Togliatti’s Stalinist party so they could use it as a theoretical cover for their opportunist move to so-called “Euro-communism”, the antechamber to its own liquidation and suicide. From another side, faced with this shameless



**Antonio Gramsci**

deceit, young intellectuals undertook the necessary work to theoretically cleanse this heritage. However, one fraction of these intellectuals, Antonio Negri and his ilk, chose to act on the ultra-left opposite pole to the Stalinists’ right deviation (but just as alien to Gramsci’s thought), falling into the black hole and blind alley of terrorism, while another group of these intellectuals turned their backs on political action, converting this heritage into academic canons of a “political philosophy”.

As for the political development of Italian communism, that too followed a twisting path. During the bourgeois transformation of the Italian Communist Party into the Democratic Party of the Left in 1989-1990 (later they even dropped the word “Left”!), a minority rejected this road, shortly afterwards setting up the “Rifondazione Comunista” (Communist Re-foundation). Now you might have thought it was going to return to its revolutionary roots, but this rebel party, which remained faithful only to the worst opportunist moments of its Stalinist hey-day, degenerated along the same class-collaborationist itinerary, while formally insisting on the name “communist” more or less in the same way that François Hollande’s party clings to the word “socialist”. We cannot go into the whole trajectory of this “Rifondazione” here.

Nevertheless it should be said that in 2006 it, too, entered Romano Prodi’s bourgeois government (2006-2008) and with 41 MPs furnished a substantial part of its parliamentary base (having already supported the first Prodi government from 1996 onwards). It supported not only that government’s attack on pensioners (also labelled a

“reform”) and its deep budget cuts, but also sent troops to occupy Lebanon and later Afghanistan. No surprise, then, that in the 2008 elections it lost all its MPs and the Prodi government had to give way to Berlusconi! “Rifondazione” stayed out of Bersani’s coalition in the latest elections, but it linked up with a sort of alliance of various groups, including the bourgeois anti-mafia judges, which in the end got 2 per cent of the vote, which was not enough to have even a single MP!

This sombre itinerary is highly instructive, especially just now, when it is so highly important for the working class to achieve the kind of political re-grouping that is bearing the first promising fruits with Syriza in Greece and Front de Gauche in France (having already seen the appearance of Die Linke in Germany).

The collapse of “Rifondazione Comunista” in Italy forcefully reminds us that nothing is guaranteed, that even the most promising fruits can easily go bad and rot. The repellent example of “Rifondazione” is all the more edifying in that it embodies the final degradation of the Italian section of the so-called Fourth International formerly led by Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel and Pierre Frank.

Indeed, “Rifondazione” accepted various political groups into its ranks as organised factions, including “Sinistra Critica” (“Critical Left”), the Italian section of this Pabloite pseudo-international led by Livio Maitan (who remained a wise and devoted supporter of this International right up until his death in 2004).

Of course, an entry of this sort is entirely justified as long, and only as long, as you use it to help advance the independent position of the working class in preparation for its revolution. But from the outset there were serious grounds for doubting that this would happen, since Pablo and his companions have long since been severely criticised for bartering revolutionary proletarian politics against illusory hopes of a revolutionary development on the part of the Stalinist bureaucracy. So they adapted to this bureaucracy and as a consequence revised the teachings of Marxism. Maitan and his Italian friends were faithful and active supporters of this orientation.

The inevitable happened. Instead of putting forward a revolutionary opening against the politics of “Rifondazione Comunista”, the “Sinistra Critica” group, motivated by its Pabloite origins and training, simply adapted to the

“Rifondazione” mould to the extent of becoming its strike force in a typically popular front policy (joining up with the “progressive” wing of the bourgeoisie).

The source of this profoundly wrong and mistaken policy lay in their emollient appreciation of the situation and moderate view of the tasks that flowed from it. In those elections, as they have long since, the vestiges of the Stalinist bureaucracy swear by all that is holy that these tasks consist purely and simply in improving and correcting aspects of the capitalist system, and that that is all that it needs. In this they join hands with the old Social Democratic reformists and they are indeed renewing co-operation with them. On the way they jointly influence a whole range of new petty bourgeois movements. Moreover, they also contaminate several of those who claim some allegiance to the working class.

But the crisis brutally exposed the fact that, confronted with complete bankruptcy when it comes to carrying out the most basic functions of its decomposing and anachronistic system, the bourgeoisie turned naturally to destroying the great advances made by humanity represented by the working class and its achievements. It is happening to everything, from the many and varied conditions for a materially and culturally decent life to democratic rights and the framework in which they operate.

The bourgeois social class was once an active participant in this historic progress, if not its actual promoter, but it has become its ruthless gravedigger. The crisis reveals, brings out and accentuates these profound tendencies in the capitalist-imperialist system in its death-agony, acting as such since its formation described by Lenin. Past and recent history prove there is no magic remedy or miracle cure which can soothe the pain caused by this bedridden system or patch up its open sores.

Capitalism-imperialism has to be eliminated and its power overthrown. That not only does not exclude participation in elections – it often makes it absolutely necessary.

But “Rifondazione”, including its “Critica Sociale” component, did not stand in elections in order to express this essential demand on the special terrain offered by elections, nor to open a clear path to this revolutionary solution. Far from it, they confined themselves to offering their own recipe for improving that same system of exploitation. Their insignificant results prove that, in the role of improvers of the system, they could only be a minor assistant, as it were a poor relation of proper, established bourgeois families.

On the other hand, we have seen, as was only to be expected, a large number of working-class voters were misled by Grillo’s vociferous demagoguery which – in the absence of any revolutionary opening – they took to offer such a hope.

But this role of minor assistant rescuing the system which “Rifondazione” and its ilk fulfil in Italy is not new, nor specifically Italian. They have even more important fellows, not just in Europe, who urge workers to repair broken pots instead of showing them how to get rid of the noxious bosses and their malign stewards. They are the main obstacle to a revolutionary development, so it is essential to reject their false, deceptive conceptions.

Therefore a theoretical clarification is just as badly needed as the elaboration of a political line. They will both develop in an implacable struggle not only against the ideological poisons of the bourgeoisie but also against wrong ideas which divert the class struggle and park it in other sets of opposites. The restricted framework offered by this article make a detailed examination of them impossible, but it is nevertheless important to cast a glance at the some immediate effects of the Italian elections



***Sinistra Critica contingent on a demonstration***

and sketch a way out of the present blind alley.

### **The immediate impact: Bourgeois Europe drifting rudderless**

Voting patterns in the Italian election results provoked general anxiety and consternation throughout bourgeois Europe, noisily expressed by its politicians and journalists. Let us leave aside this panicky, thunderstruck moaning and their grotesque and yet significant warnings.

For example, the puppet president of the Council of Europe, Van Rompuy, hopes to be “convinced that the new Italian government will continue on the path of its predecessors”. Clearly this is one towering intellect with not a clue what is going on (we shall see later how his prayers were answered). In any case, they all “discreetly did homage to the great loser, Mario Monti” (*Le Monde*, 28 February 2013).

In other words, whatever a great European people massively and unequivocally voted for, these unblushing democrats lost not one whit of their determination to smash working people in order to save the bourgeoisie. Anybody who thinks you can budge these ferocious defenders of capital should ponder these words.

However, much as it is an unpardonable illusion to believe that elections can turn the situation around to the benefit of working people, it would also be a serious mistake to believe that they are no use at all. As for the Italian elections, they have not only radically changed the political terrain in the country, but also inflicted a perceptible shift in the European political scene. This still weak but nevertheless apparent metamorphosis is merely the visible expression of a hardening in the class struggle which, at this stage, is still largely entangled in various intermediate linkages.

What is indirectly reflected in the recent clear fissure splitting the alleged unity of bourgeois Europe is the pressure from workers amplified by the Italian election results. One part, especially in the South where they are more openly exposed to workers’ fury, openly questions the so-called unilateral policy of austerity. One should not over-estimate this vague desire, which is only a pale echo of the powerful proletarian rumbling. But nor should one underestimate it, but use it and push it further, which, fortunately, the Front de Gauche seems to realise.

But it is also urgent for the Front to use it to extend and consolidate its



### ***To 'rescue' Cyprus from her debts, Europe's finance ministers 'generously' robbed her of 10 billion euros, but – in under pressure from the entire population the Cypriot parliament rejected the deal***

struggle to generalise it into a European working-class orientation, and within this framework to work for the formation of a political European force alongside Syriza, Die Linke in Germany and other similar organisations – possibly also Italian, so as to bring together opposition to the destructive policies of Brussels.

Now such an opposition could not be limited simply to rejecting the bourgeois offensive. Were to be content simply to say “another policy is possible”, this would disarm it and render it ineffective. We need, on a European level, to back this assertion concretely with positive policies for a Europe of Working People. This practical orientation backed by demands leading up to it are what we should be putting forward. One main demand of this sort must be to propose measures to get a grip of finance and its instruments, such as banks, and the use of indebtedness. A programme of that sort would put some backbone into the preparations for European elections in May 2014.

A rallying call of this sort for a Working Peoples’ Europe, without going into detail about the demands which should accompany it, is urgently needed. It would be a genuine political expression of the intensification in working-class mobilisation and radicalisation. Already on 2 March, hundreds

of thousands of Portuguese workers, following in the footsteps of their Italian brothers and sisters, organised powerful demonstrations to demand: “Troika Go Away!”, and while bourgeois politicians and journalists strive to present these same workers as docile sheep you can keep shearing, they have themselves calmly disproved such self-serving fabrications. And the Portuguese Socialist Party, terrified of losing influence, immediately denounced the very austerity it used to support. Even the right-wing government has caught the spirit of revolt among those who are now openly trying to soften the intransigence of austerity in Europe.

Horse-trading over this was the only agenda item at European meetings (finance ministers on 4 March, then heads of state and heads of government on 14-15 March). At the very heart of a Europe already variously divided, cracks now appeared within the Eurozone itself. Two opposed camps started to emerge, with France, Spain, Italy and Portugal pitted against inflexible members like Finland and Austria with Germany at the helm, the latter also having a real grip on the European bureaucracy.

The issue they are fighting over is relatively significant; they are arguing about choosing and deciding the best way to secure the bourgeoisie’s power

in current extremely difficult circumstances. Should they continue and even reinforce the austerity policy, or should they not -- without abandoning their goals -- slow down the pace and soften their demands to avoid a social explosion?

No sooner had this row started, than the finance ministers came up with their "solution" to Cyprus' debt problem. It's a pity we cannot spend more time on this point which is most instructive from every angle. Let us just say that they took a series of dictatorial steps which flagrantly breach their own bourgeois rules protecting bank deposits. In their high-handed impatience towards a vulnerable little country left high and dry on the unfathomable mud-banks of the bourgeois offensive, they took money straight out of the Cypriots' own pockets. To "rescue" Cyprus from her debts, they "generously" robbed her of 10 billion euros, and -- as if that were not enough -- they simply and unblushingly slapped a tax on all bank deposits. When the leaders of the Parti de Gauche used the word "bastards" to describe the 17 finance ministers who decided on this particular act of burglary, the press squealed in scandalised outrage. But it would be difficult indeed, not to say impossible, to find another name for this shameful theft. When, under pressure from the entire population, the Cypriot parliament rejected this theft, *Le Monde* ("the bourgeoisie made newspaper") talked about "Europe at an impasse" (21 March).

The European puppets and their new, greenhorn, financier had to go back on a decision which was as brutally undemocratic as it was blatantly aimed at people of modest means. But the mask slipped again. Their ever-poorer and more dispossessed Europe has crossed another threshold in its slide towards inglorious general rout. There is no way to know in advance what concrete steps this disintegration will involve, but particularly since the Italian elections the warning signs have become more palpable. The growing tension in the relationship between the anti-democratic executive centre in Brussels and the rubber-stamp European Parliament in Strasburg is more obvious by the day. At the 13 March session, the MEPs by a huge majority rejected the new European budget which had taken 26 hours of painful and angry negotiations between ministers to achieve.

It would be wrong to overestimate the significance of this act, which in any

case left intact the total set at 960 billion, and failed to discuss the surprising fact that for the first time ever this budget was smaller than the previous one. This astonishing reduction ought itself to have as a warning to all those who keep crowing about the progress their Europe is making.

This is not the place to go through all the other signs that bourgeois Europe is tending to fall apart gradually, but just note how in a single year (official) unemployment has risen from 10.9 per cent of the active population in the eurozone to 12 percent. It is 26.4 per cent in Greece and Spain, followed by around 12 per cent in Italy and France. And consider the disturbing conclusion of a survey which estimates that 67 per cent of young people under 30 in Spain are thinking about emigrating. This shows up not only the state bourgeois Europe is in but how destructive it is, too.

There has been a hint of a ministerial revolt against austerity in France, too, particularly in the week ending 13 March. That was when fifty or so striking PSA-Citroen workers at the closure-threatened Aulney car plant invaded the building where the National Council of the Socialist Party was meeting. These workers accused the government of betraying them, and the left wingers there, including several ministers, applauded them. An open breach was only avoided because everybody present suddenly started to "talk left". Even prime-minister Ayrault talked about the "European right not listening" and the need to "restore the balance of forces in Europe". As if! ... The paid conciliators had a real job on their hands, as very often, if not always, is the case, one is tempted to say.

It is surely no coincidence that that dyed-in-the-wool bourgeois politician and Giscard d'Estaing's former right-hand-man, François Bayrou, reacted immediately with quite a significant open letter to President Hollande. This political boss without a following -- Bayrou had so clearly anticipated Sarkozy's defeat that he alone among his bourgeois colleagues voted for Hollande -- saw the danger immediately. It's a shame we cannot look in more detail at this panicky warning which at the same time was a real apology for the European bourgeoisie's offensive and a profession of faith in sustaining it. That on its own constituted an unequivocal offer to serve Hollande in a more structured way. To put it broadly, he offered his

services as Prime Minister under Hollande in the place of the largely discredited Ayrault. In any case this threat had a certain impact in moderating the mood of revolt in the Socialist Party and the government; even if a small number of critics did vote against ratifying into law the anti-working class agreements between the employers' associations and some unions, this time, again, the conflict was blurred and an actual break was avoided.

But since the crisis is only going to get worse, sharpening the contradictions, this rebellion has not said its last word and a more trenchant expression of it is still brewing. That is why Mélançon's tactic of trying to encourage criticism of bourgeois Europe inside the Socialist Party is fully justified, particularly if such criticism can be underpinned with a clear anti-bourgeois European policy that can identify its goal in a Working People's Europe.

Now the bourgeoisie is vigilant and sees the dangers which threaten its plans. Most recently its Brussels janitors opted to slacken the pressure slightly and give members states a bit more time to reduce budget deficits below 3 per cent of GDP. But we need to be vigilant, too, because this is a trick. They present this new timetable as if it were a gift, a sign of some supposed change in the rigor of their policy, whereas in reality the budget plans had turned into a fiasco they could not keep up. They are simply displacing the pressure on budgets into a determination to carry out more and greater attacks on employment rights, pensions, social security and all the rest.

### **For a working class and socialist opening in Italy, too!**

Political life has not stood still in Italy, either. The elections were a testimony to the fact that the bourgeoisie has not been able -- now its traditional tandem of Christian Democracy and Stalinist CP has broken up -- to reorganise a durable political, governmental, expression of its power. The elections testified not only to this, but also to a veritable political fault-line in the bourgeoisie over programmes and methods for re-constituting this power in some renewed form. Subsequently a series of successive setbacks in forming a government have confirmed the fact -- which has dramatic implications for them -- that Italy is now radically ungovernable using traditional political means. But on its own this dramatic

situation for the bourgeoisie does not imply any relief, never mind a solution, for working people who cruelly lack any theoretical equipment or practice that matches their aspirations.

Under these conditions and in view of the fact that politics, too abhors a vacuum, various dangers start to take shape on the immediate horizon. One of them – and it is real – is that the bourgeoisie will take one of the authoritarian roads leading to fascism in order to overcome its crisis. It will not be held back by any democratic principles or rules, but by the fear that such an upheaval might arouse a massive revolt by working people. However that may be, while they deploy some fascist objectives and slogans, the Italian bourgeoisie, like the rest, is not yet quite ready to institute and operate fascist power.

That is the main reason why the gestation of a new government is so long and painful, and its content so explosive and in such violent contradiction to the verdict of the elections – while in the end somehow maintaining the illusion that nothing has changed. In reality the forced marriage between Berlusconi the groom getting the most out of the prenuptial agreement, and the Democrat Party as reluctant bride, is inevitably heading for a series of conjugal dramas. It will be all the more paralysed in action and unsustainable in the long run for being based on cheating the voters. To put it another way, it has thumbed its nose at the new disposition of class forces, so it has set off on the wrong foot in relation to them. Whatever promises and paltry concessions the new government made when it came in are like plasters and poultices applied to a dying man.

And yet ... condemned as it is to the rack, even this government might just, precisely in order to prolong its existence, tie in with the rising anti-establishment wave across southern Europe for a “softening” of austerity. In fact everything points to the possibility that it will add its voice to Hollande and others who are begging for a respite. Meanwhile, since this new Italian government was first installed, the European bourgeoisie and certain of its factions here and there have cherished the illusion that they might be able to avoid the split in Europe and the threatening political crisis by uniting “left” and right wings in the same governments. In precisely such a “united” government in Italy they see an opportunity to overcome the crisis and prevent an opposi-

tion from crystallising through this kind of “grand coalition”. But at the moment only a very nervous “left” in the shape of the so-called “socialist” parties would take such a lure seriously and give up the prospect of forming a consistent opposition in the face of such a “threat”.

Now in fact such a “grand coalition” is unviable even in Italy, where the bourgeoisie is well aware that it cannot find a satisfactory way out of the crisis, and has finally resigned itself to an improvised lash-up. The more the different components of it cling to their certainties, the more radically and swiftly the worsening social contradictions will tear apart its artificial unity. And that is where the danger of a fascist adventure by a section of the bourgeoisie becomes real. The Northern League could well be biding its time to exploit precisely that situation, using the strength of an enraged and disorientated petty-bourgeoisie and a desperate Lumpenproletariat to try such an adventure.

It is high time for really socialist and communist activists who up to now have been trapped in the bourgeois blind alleys offered by “Rifondazione Comunista” and “Critica Sinistra” to pull themselves together. Not because there might be a danger of fascism, but because the worsening contradictions make necessary a political re-grouping of the working class. In particular they

should address the abovementioned organisations because we cannot agree with the American comrades of David North’s *World Socialist Web Site* who stigmatise them as bourgeois organisations. The more lucid and closest to the working class of their members should make an honest assessment of a conception and a political line hanging on to the extreme left of a bourgeoisie in its dotage. A renewal is possible, and its beginnings lie beyond the national soil. It will have to open up via a clarification of the socialist attitude at a European level, which nowadays is the only way to delimit oneself from every version of bourgeois politics, either nationalist or originating from Brussels.

In this respect, Marxist practice will shrug off the heavy burden of the “Rifondazione” / “Critica Sinistra” combination groaning under the weight of a Stalinist heritage, either completely ossified or somewhat amended, by following in the footsteps of Syriza and the Front de Gauche.

This route is also open to Italian comrades. By struggling for a Working People’s Europe, they will find a way towards living Marxism and towards the re-appearance of the Italian working class directly on the political scene, a working class long relegated to the background by a Stalinism which, although officially defrocked, never abandoned its political practices.



**Car workers fighting plant closure at PSA-Citroen’s Aulney plant (above) invaded the National Council of France’s governing Socialist Party**

# **Unified Programme of the Namibian Working People**

Our programme will be titled the Unified Programme of the Namibian Working People to take political power.

Our objective is to consolidate and strengthen the socialist movement in this country through a Unified Demand of the nation engendering the following two tasks:

1. Rebuilding the working class's basic organisations, the trade unions and civic organisations, and,

2. Consolidating and strengthening the socialist movement in this country through rallying the working people around a Unified Demand of the nation.

The Unified Demand comprises the transitional demands of the working class, individual demands of the various national groupings (peasants) and the general demands of the nation. These constituent (individual) demands will be more significant, more empowering and all-embracing as they will be different facets of the same National Demand. They will be unifying and not distinctive, as separate demands tend to be.

## **Organisation of the Socialist Social Movement**

It was resolved in a meeting in February 2013 by Workers International members, the Forum of the Future, the NAMRIGHTS and individuals to call on the various working class groups we are working with and other groups fighting on individual issues to unite in a social movement. The necessity to form it as and call it socialist was unanimously agreed.

The groups we are working with are:  
The former Goldfields South Africa (TCL) miners and mineworkers;

Members of the teachers' strike committee.

The Southern Peoples Allegiance.

Women and youth groups.

The Mbaroma Camp Committee.

Housing and homeless groups.

Poor peasants in the struggle for reparations and land.

Fundamental rights groups.

The leadership of this movement will initially be comprised of represent-

atives of each group in a national committee. This committee will begin the centralisation of the movement by propagating and organising around the Unified Demand and Programme. The leadership is formed on the principle that the working class leadership is independent and leads the poor peasantry and articulates the land and national issues in correspondence with working class interest.

It will assist the poor peasantry to organise independently and to develop appropriate demands wherever they endeavour to do so such as in the current land struggles, land seizures and demands.

## **The Unified Demand**

The following demands amongst others constitute a summary of demands informing the propaganda and organisational work of the SSM.

1. In general it is true that the capitalists seek to load off their intensifying woes and their falling profits onto the working class these days by labour rental and waning benefits and wages. However, in Namibia profits are maximised by the legacy of apartheid and by a new servile caste of officials which sell for example US\$80 billion worth of mineral reserves for a million dollar kick-back or give it away free through their courts to international firms. It is guessed that fishing companies make 800% profit. Banks run uncontrolled scams such as housing loan schemes. Companies, banks and mines do not go bust in Namibia. Rio Tinto Zinc declared in 1980 that it had long-term uranium contracts until 2025 and it would not be affected by periodic slumps in demand as were others. Since independence it periodically threatens to close shop due to unrealistic workers' demands and the world economic situation.

The national government does not know nor endeavour to know the extent of the extraction of mineral reserves and fish and the GNP and GDP. Thus, the SSM demands a public inquiry into the

natural and national resources of the country and the opening of books of all mines, corporations and business in general.

2. Nationalisation of oil and gas.

3. The working class seeks immediate measures for full employment with a living wage. Such a programme of allocating quotas of employment to the various branches of industry and commerce to fill, public works, renationalisation of rail and road transport services, postal services for expansion of employment and work security, and collective and co-operative farming, shall be financed through levies on large scale mining and industry.

4. The derogation of labour rights through a corruption and derogation of labour supervisory state mechanism through the changes in labour legislation and employment of semi-literates shall be reversed by the establishment of workers councils in each town and city.

5. Education will be reviewed to remove it from the control from Cambridge and to put it under national control through the various communities.

6. The SSM encourages and assists workers to organise to remove their trade union functionaries who are stifling each struggle and assisting the derogation of rights and conditions by the capitalists. The trade union experience at Marikana should caution against short-cuts of forming new unions instead of fighting for the expulsion of corrupt and reactionary leaderships. However in mergers with the state and the old unions such as at Marikana the only way may to substitute the union for new organisations.

## **National question and the Contract Labour System**

The SSM spearheads the conceptualisation and formalisation of demands of national groups/nations into a comprehensive coherent demand for national self-determination and in the process



uniting the working class. (Recent experience has amply illustrated that the peasant leadership comprised by the tribal chiefs is unable to formulate consequential demands and create appropriate strategies in their demands and struggles for land and reparations against the incumbent regime directed and assisted by the German Government.)

7. SSM supports unconditionally the demand for War Reparations by the Herero and Nama groups. However, it puts forward a more comprehensive demand centring on the land and properties (corporeal (movable and immovable), and incorporeal) within Namibia which had been expropriated or engendered and on which untold wealth is continued to be produced with the labour of the expropriated. Moreover, our demand is not for war reparations alone, but for restitution of property expropriated by Imperial Germany from 1884 to 1915. It forms a significant part of the land issue and is based on the demand for socialisation of land without compensation. The demand serves further as a propaganda tool to focus on Germany's imperialist role and relations in Namibia to maintain colonial bondage and to shackle all and any development tending towards the material and social emancipation and development of the Namibian nation. With it, it tends to publicly highlight imperialist relations generally as it has already achieved with sections of both the Namibian and German peoples.

8. A similar demand against South African colonialism as the above by national groups in particular the Nama, the San, the Damara and the Baster.

9. A demand for restitution of the abuse under the contract labour system which has displaced whole communities from especially Ovamboland and Kavangoland to southern Namibia where independence released the administration from the responsibility of provision of proper shelter, food, healthcare and employment. The compounds had been imploded and the masses of contract labour ejected into cities of squatter camps where they are left to their own devices for survival, and where they continue to serve the objectives of the contract labour system, but without its liabilities and responsibilities. Farm labourers both contractual and traditional are ejected from commercial farms where the latter had for generations created the wealth on these farms and had served the landlords with kith



**Former Goldfields South Africa (TCL) miners gather for a demonstration in Windhoek**

and kin in production, maintaining and serving the households. The vast majority are unemployed. The demand for provision of permanent proper shelter, free food, healthcare and permanent employment issues against the self-same mines, corporate commercial and industrial concerns, commercial farms or their successors and the State. Failure to meet the demand must be met with confiscation, compensation and socialisation.

10. The demand for return of Namibian remains from Germany killed during the wars of extermination and shipped to Germany is extended to the Angolan, Zambian and Tanzanian States and the SWAPO for the remains of Namibians killed by themselves and by the SWAPO leadership in exile until 1990.

11. The institution of a public inquiry into the period of 1962 to 1990 into the abuse and extermination of political fighters and refugees for a full report on the circumstances and causes of the

treacherous period in the life of the Namibian nation.

12. A demand to the same instances for accounting of the unaccounted missing persons. This is a continuing crime against the Namibian nation whose resolution is intimately linked to the struggle against the obscenities and abuses of the imperialists and the abuses of their surrogates.

13. The high profile international publication and propaganda around the last four demands are absolutely necessary as part of a concerted effort to preclude the revisiting of the continual, extreme and punctuated tragedies perpetrated on a resistant people by imperialism.

Most of the above demands are at least partially articulated as single issues by particular groups.

Through the Unified Demand and Programme we will unify the nation.

**The inaugural meeting of the SSM will be on 12 October 2013**

**UK: Unite the Union**

# **The background to London & Eastern Region United Left statement: ‘Unite, the Labour party and Falkirk’**

By **Bronwen Handyside**

Unite set out around three years ago with a serious intention of reforming the Labour Party. The intention of the leadership was to carry the voice of ordinary workers into that party, and to change it so it carried out the interests of the working class. There has been a battle between opposing class forces for the soul of the Labour Party ever since its formation, but following the bitter disappointment of the last Labour government, Unite decided to devote great resources to this effort with the painful understanding that the unions and the class could not afford to elect another Labour government like the last one.

The Unite leadership did not enter this project with the explicit understanding that the Labour Party is a reformist party, and therefore not adequate to its current task (or rather the task the working class needs it to perform). Most, if not all of them, would think that this is unnecessary dressing up of a simple situation. What they know at this point is that the dominant class in the Labour Party is the petit bourgeois (increasingly presenting the interests of the bourgeoisie) and their class instincts and class militancy identify this current as an enemy to the interest of working people. They consider that the Labour Party is their party, and has been stolen by these alien class interests. In this they express the very straightforward needs of the class – for its own party, which expresses its independent needs.

## **Proposal**

The proposal was made in Unite that a really serious effort be made to commandeer the Labour Party to represent the interests of the class. This was expressed as an effort to “reclaim” that party for the class. Unite has worked through its National and Regional Political Committees to recruit union members (with some success) into the Labour Party, and the argument used to convince union members was that the more union members were in the party fighting for the interests of the class, the

more likely it was that it could be bent to the will of workers. Unite has also put in systematic work on intervening in the selection process for parliamentary candidates, and has trained up working class union activists to be candidates – in opposition to middle class careerists – also with some success.

Unite has also withheld all but its basic affiliation fee from Labour (whereas in other years it has made contributions of millions of pounds).

It drew up “Constituency level agreements” which were made not with MPs but with their constituency which laid out that Unite would only give money if the constituency carried out Unite policies. All of these initiatives have been carried out with complete openness inside the Labour Party and reported back at every meeting of all the regional and national committees in Unite.

It has been carried out also in the context also of a gathering disillusion with the Labour Party which was expressed in a vote at the last Unite rules conference, for example, which split almost 50/50 on a rule change which would have meant disaffiliation from Labour. This disillusion is also expressed in the fact that the criticisms made of Labour by those who seek a new party are identical to the criticisms expressed by those who are engaged in this fight to “reclaim” it.

Those who are taking seriously Unite’s political strategy are extremely conscious of the crimes, faults and failings of Labour, and angry about them. But they think it is worth a serious struggle to try to get their party back. They do not know (i.e. they are nowhere near convinced) at this stage that they need a party to lead them in the overthrow of capitalism.

The Unite leadership has also had to combat the conservative elements within its ranks who place the interests of the Labour Party above the interests of the union, and moved out of his position the National Political Director, Steve Hart, former CP Central Committee member, who abandoned the Com-

munist Party with the collapse of the Soviet Union some 25 years ago but has unfailingly carried forward its treacherous propaganda and activity presenting Social Democracy as the leadership of the working class. The conservative adherence to social democracy (which does not waver no matter what the policies of the Labour Party) inside the union is in contrast to the real thrust towards transforming the Labour Party (already described) which expresses the needs of workers in the face of the class war launched on them. This adherence owes everything to the influence of Stalinism within the workers’ movement – and manifests itself in a similar fashion in South Africa for instance – with the SACP’s active promotion of the ANC as the party of the class. It remains evidence that the workers’ movement still retains Stalinism as the only one available to them to combat bourgeois ideology, and shows the failure of Trotskyism to successfully promulgate its theoretical understanding.

## **Convinced**

Unite’s leadership is also dealing with those in its ranks (the Socialist Workers Party [SWP] and the Socialist Party [SP] in the main) who already “know” that the Labour Party cannot be reclaimed, and are convinced that because they know this, then it is only a matter of time and the giving of some fine speeches explaining the crimes of the Labour Party before that knowledge migrates out of their heads and into the heads of the working class. It is also dealing with the “Grassroots left” who supported Jerry Hicks in the last two General Secretary elections, and achieved a vote 55% of McCluskey’s in the last election (i.e. not an insignificant layer) which says dismissively that the “reclaiming” of the Labour Party has failed, and that Unite should simply withhold the money from the Labour Party until it carries out what is required. This is a position which regards the party of the class as something that cannot in and of itself repre-

sent the interests of the class, but must be coerced into doing so. Such a party could never unite the many strands of the current struggle in order to challenge the existing structure. It is thus a rejection of the class instinct for its own independent party represented in Unite's current efforts to remake the Labour Party.

In my opinion Unite's project is the class speaking up, through its best and most class conscious leadership in its last all-out effort to turn the Labour Party into the instrument needed to defend the interests of the working class. The class has to prove to itself with absolute finality that its tool, the Labour Party, is useless for its purposes.

Furthermore – the more that Unite's political strategy is pushed, the more the Labour leadership are forced to define themselves – and they define themselves in the eyes of millions – through the enormous publicity given to the current tussle for power which is presented by the media as a struggle between Labour leader Miliband and the unions, but which is really a struggle waged by the working class to wrest control of their party away from the petit bourgeois.

The contradiction between Unite's thrust to recreate the Labour Party and that party's essential class nature recently came to a head over the selection process for a parliamentary candidate in Falkirk (Scotland).

Unite recruited 100 workers from a local factory into the Falkirk constituency, with perfect legitimacy under Labour Party rules. They were signed up using a procedure initiated prior to Miliband's election to the leadership, which meant trade unions could enroll blocks of union members by paying a reduced rate for them for the first year of membership.

One of the candidates offering themselves for selection as an MP at Falkirk was a Unite candidate.

### **Denounced**

Miliband denounced Unite's activities, produced a report which the Unite leadership have not until this day been allowed to read, let alone answer - and called in the police to investigate. The Labour leadership followed up by suspending the Unite candidate and the chair of the constituency. Labour Party. Falkirk is now in "special measures", effectively controlled by the central Labour Party.

Thus Labour defined itself very publicly during the Falkirk selection dispute

as rejecting the voice of the unions inside the Labour Party. Many of the Labour politicians' declarations at the time exemplified how they saw the Labour Party and the trade unions as two entirely different phenomena, with different identities and different interests, with the illimitable contempt of the petit bourgeois for their own party's history and its founding by the unions.

Thus the more Unite seeks to create a party that will act on behalf of the class, the more the Labour Party is forced to openly declare that it absolutely will not be that party.

The desire of the class, in its best leadership, is to fight this process of "reclaiming" through to the end. In the process, the Labour Party is forced to declare itself – thus enabling millions of British workers to arrive at the point of the break with social democracy. To seek (as the Socialist Party does) an emergency recall of the Unite Rules Conference with a view to disaffiliation from the Labour Party is to be impatient with that process. The danger is, if the process is cut short, that the necessary clarification on a mass scale will not take place and that the class is left with the lingering conviction: "If only we had tried harder or longer to finish the project, perhaps it might have worked".

The determined effort to transform it is the only way that the class will be able to decide whether that party can be the party of the class, because the effort to change it forces the Labour Party to stop vacillating between the classes and become what it in essence is: a tool of the bourgeoisie and not of the working class.

And it will become that in the eyes of the mass movement, not of the small select group who for one reason or another (some reasons better than others) are already convinced. This process forces it to show itself as it really is, with no disguise.

The question arises: how will we know when we have come to the breaking point in the links between the unions and the Labour Party – in other words, between the working class and the Labour Party. I think that we will know, and that the Labour Party itself will be a large element in letting us know.

It is under those circumstances – with a mass clarification and break from Social Democracy by workers – that the way to a new party opens up, which must arise out of the best militant and conscious leadership of the trade unions, a split in the Labour Party, some in other left parties, and the best ele-



**Len McCluskey**

ments of the anti-austerity campaigns. It is hard to predict when this process might come to fruition.

London & Eastern region of United Left drew up a statement in opposition to the motions circulated by the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party which assume that the class is clear on the nature of the Labour Party, and call for the union to take steps to break the links with Labour. The regional United Left statement is an attempt to draw together all the threads in a moment in a process. That process is developing the understanding of what the British Labour Party is in the eyes of millions of people.

### **Committed**

That is why the motion calls for the return of a Labour government committed to oppose the anti-austerity measures, even though we Marxists know already that this will not happen. It also says that more trades unionists should join the Labour Party. If it is the case that Unite's fight within the Labour Party is forcing it to manifest openly what it truly is, then it is correct to call for trades unionists fighting for the interests of the class to join it, on the basis that that will ensure that we find out once and for all whether it can be made into a party for the working class.

The motion expresses the current position of the class in the absence of an openly anti-capitalist leadership founded firmly on a working class whose best elements are convinced that what is needed is socialism to solve their problems. The demand that Social Democracy become a tool controlled by the working class to stand up for the

rights of ordinary working people is in my opinion a transitional demand for this particular point in the struggle.

If Marxism is the science of the mass movement, we are not Marxists if we approach this development by saying (like the Socialist Party and SWP) we are clear about Social Democracy – but the class is not, so we will proceed by explaining to as many people in as eloquent a fashion as possible that the Labour Party is committing all sorts of crimes, and thereby ensure their clarification.

We cannot be sitting back, as the SWP is, while Unite conducts this huge and difficult clarification process, saying complacently:

“Union leaders are caught between the pressure of their members and their loyalty to Labour. That’s why they bounce between praising and condemning Labour leaders.

“Their reluctance to lead a fight means they are ever more reliant on the prospect of a Labour government as an alternative to that fight.” <http://socialistworker.co.uk/art/34006/McCluskey%E2%80%99s+strategy+won%E2%80%99t+reclaim+Labour>

“Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”. Here you can see the utter incapacity of this political current to see that big changes are taking place in the trade union movement and that the allegiance in its most active and militant layers to Social Democracy is being stretched to the limit. If we took the position of the SWP, workers would quite rightly say to us: but how can we be sure we cannot reclaim the Labour Party, if we have not fought the process all the way to the end?

### **Block vote**

Fundamental to these developments is also the very big question of the block vote, which the Labour movement has always considered the collective voice of the class in the Labour Party, as opposed to the voice of those individual trade unionists who have joined as individual members.

The block vote derives from the historic origins of the Labour Party (its establishment by the trade unions). Members of the 15 trade unions affiliated to Labour (who do not opt out of the political levy, an additional sum added to their basic subscription fees) are deemed to be members of the Labour Party, and the union leaders can cast votes as a “block” on their behalf. (This system does not operate in the selection of the Labour leader, as the rules were changed in 1992.)

Labour leader Ed Miliband, under pressure from the right wing in his party and following the tussle over Falkirk, declared that he would remove the block vote from the unions by making a rule change so that union members would have to opt in to Labour Party membership, rather than being automatically enrolled and having to opt out.

Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey, instead of rejecting this proposal (as expected on all sides) responded in favour of encouraging individual membership of trades unionists in the Labour Party.

### **“Turning point”**

He said: “It is clear we are at a turning point in the historic relationship Unite and its predecessor unions have had with the Labour Party.

“This will have come as a surprise to many of you – although no one will be shocked by the knowledge that strains in the Labour-union link have been building up for years, at least since the advent of New Labour in the 1990s. Those strains have been fuelled by the failures and disappointments of Labour in office, not least its refusal to seriously address the unique legal impediments trade unions have to work under in Britain.”

He went on to say: “Ed Miliband has made some bold and far-reaching proposals for recasting the trade union relationship with the Labour Party. I know that some pundits were expecting me to reject them outright, to re-run the experience of the last generation on this issue – the party leader says something, the unions reject it and have no positive proposals of their own. The first plan goes through anyway and we look like not just losers but conservative losers.

“Well, we all honour our movement’s traditions, but this is one tradition overdue for a change. Unite is doing things differently in one area of our work after another, including politics. And we need to do things differently here too. We need to engage, rethink and see if we can find better ways to advance our ends.

“... Why dig in behind a status quo that has not worked for us? The block vote didn’t stop a Labour government invading Iraq. Affiliation didn’t keep Labour out of the clutches of the banks and the City. Our special relationship didn’t get the union laws repealed. So don’t let anyone say that the status quo is worth defending.”

McCluskey also said that he did not feel he could speak on behalf of the

million members of Unite who presently contribute to the block affiliation fee as if they all wished to be active participants in the Labour Party.

He said that if Unite – and the Labour Party – were to persuade Unite members to join, it would have to be a party that “. . . our members want to support, because they believe it can and will make a difference in their lives. Not a party that is a pinkish shadow of the present coalition that gives the City a veto over economic decisions and embraces the austerity agenda squeezing the life out of the country. But a party that offers real hope, that stands up for the poor and vulnerable, that puts growth at the heart of its agenda, that confronts privilege. A party that makes the 2015 election a real and vivid choice as to the future of our country, not one that leaves the electorate indifferent.”

(See here an edited version of McCluskey’s speech <http://www.leftfutures.org/2013/07/unite-is-at-a-turning-point-in-its-relationship-with-the-labour-party/>)

Unite’s leadership are aware that Labour leader Miliband is listening to the siren voices of those telling him that he must have a “Clause 4” moment – the point at which Blair’s New Labour established its domination of the Labour Party by deleting the clause in its constitution which called for “the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange”.

### **Looming**

They can see that what is looming is a big set piece confrontation at the Labour Party conference – which their experience tells them they are bound to lose, at this annual travesty of democracy. They consider that this kind of set-back will be a public, demoralising defeat for the class, which it can’t afford with the near approach of the General Election in 2015. Their tactic has been the “body swerve” – a move which martial arts aficionados will recognize, the following of the opponent’s line of force and the reinforcing of its direction with your own impetus so it passes you harmlessly by.

In addition there is a huge frustration in the leadership of the union with the Labour Party and the failure of the trade unions to influence it during its 13 years in office, in particular its failure to repeal the anti-union laws which the conscious leaders of the class know have crippled its ability to fight. There is a feeling that we have to try new ways to overcome the problem; that the old

forms (e.g the block vote) have not served, and new forms have to be found to give us greater success, all of this arising out of a real and genuine attempt to force the Labour Party to become the party the class so desperately needs.

It is notable that the two most left wing and level headed trade union leaders (McCluskey and Mark Serwotka of the PCS, which is in merger talks with Unite) spoke at and supported the People's Assembly meeting in June, along with the new Secretary of the TUC. Unite was central to organizing the event.

### Massive fall

Unite presently provides Labour with £3m in affiliation fees. Rejecting that block affiliation in favour of individual membership means a massive fall in that affiliation fee at the point where Labour is gearing up to fight an election in 2015. Unite's leaders think they will be better able to use our financial resources to wield influence over Labour during the election campaign if we are giving money outside of the affiliation process.

Some on the left in the union, including the SWP and the SP, are calling for a fight to retain the block vote, as the collective voice of the trade unions in the Labour Party. The numbers of individual Unite members in the Labour Party would not be sufficient to have an impact on party policies, even if they were organized to vote the same way, and even if that party's lack of democracy allowed them to do so.

So – what the militant union leaders are faced with is a decision on what tactics are necessary to take the class forward with the greatest confidence into the battles ahead. Will it strengthen the class fighters if the Labour Party rejects the block vote – or will it weaken them to know that the only political weapon they have has made a decisive declaration that it wants no part of them? They are working on the project to reclaim the Labour Party for the class because they (expressing the needs of the class) genuinely believe that this is possible, but they also know it is absolutely crucial to preserve and develop the fighting capacity and self-belief of the class. It is a difficult path to follow, in the absence of a real and visible alternative to the Labour Party.

## Unite the Union

# London & Eastern Region United Left motion on Falkirk

*'We condemn the efforts from the Labour Party and the gutter press to smear our union as acting unlawfully in the Falkirk selection process. We express our total solidarity with Stevie Deans and Karie Murphy and demand their immediate reinstatement to the party.*

*We endorse our union's demand for an independent inquiry into the Falkirk selection process in the confident knowledge that (like the police investigation instigated by the Labour Party) it will completely exonerate Unite of any wrong-doing.*

*We call for an end to the witch hunt by the right wing Tory press, As Len McCluskey said; Unite will not bend the knee to corrupt press barons.*

*The witch-hunts must stop. Our member's suspensions must be lifted. All Unite Party members must be allowed to operate freely under Rule.*

*We fully support our union and its leadership in the pushing forward of the interests of our class within the Labour Party – which has resulted in these attacks.*

*It is in every Unite member's interest that our union does not walk away from this fight. The stakes are too high. We have to confirm once and for all, one*

*way or the other, that we can turn it into a party fit for purpose –which will stand up for the interests of our class.*

*The trade union movement needs a voice in Parliament. We need a political party that will fight austerity, enact legislation to enable free trades unions, enact progressive tax legislation, reverse the destruction of the welfare state, and defend and rebuild the NHS. We need to fight for a democratic conference and an end to Lord Sainsbury's millions bankrolling Oxbridge careerists and bag carriers. Unite must fight all attempts at creating a 'political' class in the Labour Party.*

*The re-election of a Tory or coalition government in 2015 would be a political disaster. To this end we need to continue the fight for the return of a Labour government in 2015 committed to the above policies*

*We ask that our EC continue to debate the issues around the links between the trade unions and the Labour Party and that that discussion is publicised throughout the union. In the meantime, we need more trade unionists to join the Labour Party and join the fight.'*

*'The trade union movement needs a voice in Parliament. We need a political party that will fight austerity, enact legislation to enable free trades unions, enact progressive tax legislation, reverse the destruction of the welfare state, and defend and rebuild the NHS'*

# Motions submitted for debate at TUC Congress 2013 in Bournemouth

(The full agenda is available at [http://www.tuc.org.uk/the\\_tuc/tuc-22485-f0.cfm](http://www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/tuc-22485-f0.cfm))

## 01 Anti-austerity campaigning

Congress welcomes the initiatives taken by the General Council over the last year to stimulate campaigning against austerity and the poverty that has caused across the country, in particular the bus tour in summer 2013.

Congress further recognises the depth of social misery being caused by government policies, often to the most vulnerable, and therefore resolves to place the organised labour movement at the heart of a national campaign of opposition to austerity and its consequences and for the promotion of alternative policies.

Congress:

i. instructs the General Council to organise in the course of 2014 a nationwide march against poverty, focusing on the bedroom tax, food banks and other effects of government policy; designed to draw in working people and their communities in all parts of the country and to unite people around the trade union movement  
ii. welcomes and supports the People's Assembly Against Austerity and encourages affiliated organisations and trades councils to involve themselves in this and similar local initiatives aiming at opposing the bedroom tax and welfare cuts, defending the poorest, and demanding action to end unemployment  
iii. reaffirms that mass industrial action to oppose the cuts and the wrecking of the welfare state is a legitimate option in Britain as it has been in Greece, France, Spain and other countries in Europe, and that it will continue to work to create the conditions, including membership support and public sympathy, which makes discussion of this option a realistic possibility.

**Unite**

## 03 Defeating austerity

Congress notes that people are facing the biggest fall in living standards on record, with the average family £1,800

worse off this year – with UK disposable income falling from fifth in the world to twelfth.

Congress further notes that far from tackling the deficit, Chancellor Osborne's strategy will mean an extra £245bn in borrowing – not for growth-creating investment, but for filling the gap left by his growthchoking policies. Congress believes that with all major UK parties signing up to the same spending plans and promising further austerity after the 2015 general election, it is up to trade unions and communities to resist these failed policies that are only succeeding in impoverishing increasing numbers of people.

The programme of cuts and privatisations affecting our NHS, schools, social security system, and public services is a co-ordinated and systematic attack – that is disproportionately hitting working class communities, and in particular women, disabled people and ethnic minorities. Congress believes that the crisis facing people and their local services is so severe that we cannot wait for a general election in 2015, we must act now.

Congress therefore instructs the General Council to:

i. facilitate a co-ordinated programme of industrial action and civil disobedience involving trade unions and other campaigns

ii. promote and support the day of action called by the People's Assembly for 5 November 2013

iii. step up the campaign against austerity and for an economic alternative based on tax justice, investment, job creation, public ownership, and the redistribution of wealth.

**Public and Commercial Services Union**

## 05 Alternative economic strategy

Congress congratulates the General Council in its continuing work that highlights the unfairness of the coalition government's cuts and austerity policy and offers an

alternative approach based on fairness, full employment, inclusion, social justice with high labour standards and workers rights.

Congress continues to reject the economic policies of the coalition government, including the further measures announced in June's comprehensive spending review that will further damage the economy and people's standards of living. Congress is particularly critical of measures such as the 'bedroom' tax, cuts in legal aid and work capability assessments for disabled people that are targeted at the poorest and most vulnerable in society. By contrast, at the same time, the wealthiest in society continue to prosper and get richer and more powerful with highest earners benefiting from a cut in income tax, company executives being excessively remunerated and transnational companies like Google and Starbucks who are allowed by current laws to avoid UK corporation tax altogether, or pay very little.

Congress considers that the coalition government's economic policy will continue to fail at all levels and result in higher national debt, dwindling capital investment, falling living standards and increased levels of poverty.

Congress calls on the General Council to continue to challenge the coalition government's economic policy and work with affiliates and other progressive, like-minded organisations in mobilising opposition to this failed approach and put forward a real alternative that will deliver sustainable economic growth, increased standards of living and a fairer and more equal society.

**Transport Salaried Staffs' Association**

**Amendment**

Insert new paragraph 3:

"Congress is alarmed that the Labour leadership has stated that a future government would apply the spending limits set for 2015/16. The prospect of further cuts in public services and

*falling living standards will not inspire working people. Congress pledges to challenge the austerity consensus, no matter who implements it"*  
Fire Brigades' Union

### **78 Solidarity with Greek workers**

*Congress notes the continued austerity programme carried out by the Greek government, backed by international financial institutions and other European governments. These attacks include sacking public sector workers, slashing salaries and pensions, worsening contracts of employment, cutting benefits and decimating public services.*

*Congress notes that workers, the unemployed, pensioners, the young and poor in Greece are at the sharp end of these attacks. But this austerity agenda is Europe-wide and affects us all.*

*Congress condemns the Greek government's actions bringing about the overnight closure of ERT (the Greek national broadcasting corporation) and applauds the Greek journalists and technicians, and the European Broadcasting Union, for their occupation of the building and the continued transmission of news and programmes to the Greek people.*

*Congress also calls on the Greek Health Ministry to end its appalling, degrading policy of forced HIV tests aimed at immigrant and marginal workers and the LGBT community, in the context of massive public health cuts.*

*Congress supports the Greece Solidarity Campaign, who organised a joint delegation with the FBU and other trade unionists to Greece in March 2013, as well as other campaigns and solidarity.*

*Congress supports the Medical Aid for Greece appeal, launched in response to a call for support from Greek anti-austerity campaigners in association with health unions, health workers and community organisations in Greece. Congress supports the labour movement resistance to these attacks and encourages all affiliates to forge direct links with workers and their representative organisations in Greece.*

**Fire Brigades' Union**

# AUSTERITY EUROPE: GREECE IN THE FRONTLINE

**Trade Union Congress 2013**

**Monday 9th September**

**5.30 - 7.15pm Branksome**

**Suite**

**Bournemouth International Centre**

Speakers:

**Theano Fotiou Syriza MP**

**Matt Wrack General Secretary FBU**

**Michelle Stanistreet General Secretary  
NUJ**

**Daniel Trilling New Statesman**

**Rachael Maskell Unite Head of Health**



**Come to**

**Medical Aid for Greece Fundraising Dinner,  
9 October, 7pm, Andys Taverna  
in Camden**

**- delicious meal, entertainment, speaker and  
raffle - all for £25! Contact**

**greesolidarity@mail.com for tickets.**

**All the money raised will be spent by free social  
health clinics on childrens vaccines**

# NO CUTS SAVE THE NHS

## NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION AT THE TORY PARTY CONFERENCE IN MANCHESTER

**Sunday 29 September**

assemble 11am,

Liverpool Road, M3 4FP



**full info/ transport:** [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk)

**This government is responsible for the biggest drop in living standards for over a generation.**

Millions of people's lives are being wrecked, but the government says the worst is still to come. The poorest are suffering most, while the millionaires who caused the crisis are getting richer. The NHS is being ripped apart and the fragments sold off to profiteers. Hospital departments and A&Es are being forced to close.

On 22 June 2013, the People's Assembly Against Austerity brought together over 4,000 people from every corner of the country. The aim was to create a movement big enough and powerful enough to stop austerity in its tracks.

On Sunday 29 September, tens of thousands will be converging on the Tory Party Conference in Manchester. The message will be: save the NHS and stop the cuts. We will be saying loud and clear: austerity is madness, and it is a lie that there is no alternative. **Join us on 29 September.**



**Getting there:** Transport is being arranged from across the country. From London, the People's Assembly is organising a special train. Check the website for details of transport near you: [www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](http://www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk)