

Nelson Mandela's legacy

The ANC leader's death has provoked a veritable paroxysm of moral sentiment on the part of capitalist politicians and the media. Bronwen Handyside looks behind the hysteria at some of the political issues

*"The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society."
(Nelson Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom, p. 435)*

How is it that UK Prime Minister David Cameron can say of Nelson Mandela: "A great light has gone out in the world. Nelson Mandela was a hero of our time"?

How is it that newspapers like the *Daily Telegraph*, the voice of the British ruling class, can express their regret at Mandela's passing?

Contrast this with Maggie Thatcher's opinion that Mandela and the ANC were nothing but a bunch of murdering terrorists.

Some might say the British ruling class is just jumping on a bandwagon and hoping to bask in some kind of reflected glory from the international outpouring of praise directed towards the ANC leader.

Inequalities

I think their approval of Mandela's history goes deeper than that. It fits in with the world bourgeoisie's global narrative of how the world's brutal inequalities should be solved, which is pumped out on a daily basis by their lackeys in the mass media. It is also propped up by the remnants of the grip that Stalinist ideas retain on the international working class (in particular the idea of "peaceful co-existence" between capitalism and socialism, which arose out of the deal the Stalinist bureaucracy made with imperialism to divide the world between them after the Second World War. This line constantly tended to limit and hamper struggles against imperialism, including those against colonial domination, and blunted them by stifling revolutionary socialist forces and working through handpicked bureaucratic leaders. This is why uprisings of ANC militants demanding to wage the armed struggle in South Africa were violently, sometimes fatally, suppressed by the ANC's security apparatus¹.)

Brutal systems like apartheid are based on deliberate divisions created between working people across the world. Over centuries they have enabled imperialist countries and

capital to exploit labour power and natural resources belonging to other nations and peoples. Apartheid stands out as a particularly anti-human system of institutionalised racism.

The soothing myth the politicians and media are peddling is that such systems do not need to be violently overthrown, but can be resolved peacefully to the benefit of the oppressed through a "negotiated settlement".

It says that the protracted and deepening problems of gross inequality between different countries, and different classes within those countries do not emanate, as the siren voices of socialism say, from the capitalist system. They do not require the overthrow of the system of private property (progressing through a programme of nationalisation of the banks, industry, and land) but a process of "civilised" negotiation in which big business (aka capital) preserves the

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lion's share of the wealth while permitting a minority of the country's bourgeoisie to participate in the feast.

The bourgeois narrative tells us that the brutal inequalities we see today (where an Indian child of 11 can be sold into a brothel for life, while on the other side of the world boys like David Cameron and Boris Johnson are born to wealth and power) are nothing to do with the class system, where the majority who produce all the wealth through their labour are exploited by a minority who own all the industries and the land.

This narrative declares that the violence of each side during the oppressed classes' struggle for equality can be brushed over with the "bland screen of moral equivalence"² as it was in South Africa at the so-called "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" (a useful model the bourgeoisie rolled out across the world, notably in Northern Ireland). The just violence of the masses in their fight for the equal redistribution of wealth of their nation is declared to be the same as the reactionary violence of those preserving their right to exploit others.

It says: not only is there no necessity for class antagonisms, there are actually really no class divisions in society. It is just that some people are born clever and resourceful and naturally grow rich, while others are not.

The British ruling class, on a roll with its austerity measures and full of confidence, has started articulating much more clearly what really lies at the heart of this fairy tale.

Tory London Mayor Boris Johnson, now positioning himself for the Tory leadership – treading the ground where the rest of the Tories still do not quite dare to go – says:

"Like it or not, the free market economy is the only show in town. Britain is competing in an increasingly impatient and globalised economy, in which the competition is getting ever stiffer.

"No one can ignore the harshness of that competition, or the inequality that it inevitably accentuates; and I am afraid that violent economic centrifuge is operating on human beings who are already very far from equal in raw ability, if not spiritual worth."

Tory Prime Minister Cameron now calls for permanent austerity – "a leaner state" – in other words a country in which the hogging of resources by a tiny elite will plunge millions into poverty, illness, despair and degradation. He wants a world in which such inequality is simply accepted – as a kind of natural phenomenon.

Plan B

Negotiated settlements such as those in South Africa are the plan B the bourgeoisie rolls out at the point where it realises it can no longer govern with the iron fist, murdering and torturing to repress dissent, and that it is under threat by a militant working class which is looking to the redistribution of wealth from the despoilers to the toilers. It needs to collaborate with a selected layer of the oppressed which it feels will do business, and in particular will collaborate in the suppression of the working class and its political programme of socialism.

This plan appeared in South Africa in the mid-1980s, when the country had become ungovernable, brought to its knees by a popular uprising led by an extraordinary and brand new trade union movement – which above all, and most important of all, had at its heart a conscious working-class socialist current which produced the *Workers Charter*, demanding the redistribution of the wealth and the land to the masses of South Africa. "The scent of revolution was in the air"³. The *Workers Charter* was founded in opposition to the ANC's 30 year old *Freedom Charter* (which as Nelson Mandela explains, was never a socialist document, but rather a programme for the establishment of a black bourgeoisie).

Mass resistance

The plan appeared as it became clear to big business and the banks inside and outside of South Africa that the productivity and therefore the profitability of South African workers had plunged into terminal decline as a result of the mass resistance against apartheid.

The suppression of the socialist *Workers' Charter* in favour of the reformist (i.e. aimed at reforming capitalism and not overthrowing it) *Freedom Charter* inside the trade union movement, after the formation of COSATU in 1985, was the signal to South African capital that the way was open to a deal with the ANC.

Talks about the possibility of such a settlement had begun in late 1984, between exiled ANC leaders (in Lusaka and in London) and representatives of South African big business.

Some may say: what's the problem? Didn't that negotiated settlement bring about the enfranchisement of the black masses, and the creation of the "rainbow nation" so highly praised throughout the world's media?

But that deal between the white bourgeois exploiters of South Africa and a new and very small black bourgeoisie, together with the violent repression of the working class and its socialist programme, is precisely what is currently bearing fruit in the "new" South Africa. Its government openly pursues the worst of the neo-liberal policies (fiscal discipline, deregulation, free markets and trade liberalisation, privatisation, low taxes and secure property rights) and instructs its police force to shoot down unarmed striking miners in the back (not the first time its police force has shot down protesters against its policies).

It is clear why the rhetoric of Thatcher and her political allies was different from Cameron's, because when she was making her pronouncements, the South African ruling class was still hesitating between the iron fist of repression and the necessity of a settlement.

The "new" South Africa has resulted in:

- The second most unequal society in the world – more unequal now than before Mandela came to office. The greatest inequality exists between blacks and other racial groups. Black income has virtually flat-lined since the ending of apartheid, in contrast to that of other racial groups, particularly white South Africans⁴.

- 40% unemployment. Importantly, 70% of SA's unemployed are younger than 35, while the unemployment rate among people aged less than 25 is around 50%
- 50% of the population living below the poverty line
- More than half of black children are growing up in poverty
- Average life expectancy declining from 62 years in 1990 to 52.6 years in 2012
- A crisis in public services including housing
- A collapse in social structures which means the highest rate of rape, gang rape and child rape in the world
- The highest rate of HIV infection in the world
- The slaughter of 34 striking miners at Marikana, shot for demanding a living wage, after ex-NUM and current ANC leader Cyril Ramaphosa urged both the ANC Police Minister and the mining company Lonmin to deal with them, referring to them as "criminals"⁵
- The fabulous enrichment of a tiny minority, like Cyril Ramaphosa, (currently worth \$700m, which the ANC explains he made out of his business acumen – see Boris Johnson's explanation for the divisions in society), and current ANC president Jacob Zuma who recently did up his residence to the tune of £17.2m of public money

Was it for this that the black masses fought and died?

And was it for this that the millions in the international workers' movement, students and others waged their decades-long campaign against apartheid, and gave unstinting political and financial support to the exiled ANC, SACP and SACTU (the South African Congress of Trade Unions)?

Confusion

Mandela was surrounded by political forces from the 1960s to the 1980s which sowed confusion by representing him as a "communist" – including the South African and British ruling classes, and the South African Communist party (SACP) (under instructions from their international leaders). The SACP now declares that Mandela was a secret member of their Central Committee at the time of the Rivonia trial, which completely fits with their theory of the necessity for a two-stage revolution for South Africa. First a revolution in which the native bourgeoisie would come to power, followed many, many, many years later by a socialist revolution against capitalism, bringing the working class to power.

But Nelson Mandela never pretended that the ANC was a socialist organisation, with any desire to attack capitalism. He himself said at his Rivonia trial:

"The most important political document ever adopted by the ANC is the *Freedom Charter*. It is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state. The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society."⁶

Later, speaking about the *Freedom Charter's* demand for the nationalisation of the mines and industrial corporations, Mandela said:

"The charter strikes a fatal blow at the financial and gold mining monopolies that have for centuries plundered the country and condemned its people to servitude. The

breaking up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous non-European bourgeois class. For the first time in the history of this country the non-European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own, in their own name and right, mills and factories and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before."⁷

When the constitution of the "new" South Africa was negotiated (by Cyril Ramaphosa and Thabo Mbeki, ANC leader following Mandela), a clause was inserted which, according to the ANC leadership, entirely negates that section of the *Freedom Charter* which calls for nationalisation of the land, the mines, and the banks.

Throughout his life Mandela acted completely in accordance with his principles, which were to build a society in which a black South African bourgeoisie could partake of power and wealth along with the white owners of the banks, industry and the land.

Unfortunately that has produced a society of brutal inequality.

In 2006 Tory leader David Cameron was able to say:

"The mistakes my party made in the past with respect to relations with the ANC and sanctions on South Africa make it all the more important to listen now. The fact that there is so much to celebrate in the new South Africa is not in spite of Mandela and the ANC, it is because of them - and we Conservatives should say so clearly today."

Fortunately the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and other forces in South Africa continue the battle for the working class and its socialist programme. We should lend them every possible support in their fight against the violent repression promoted by the likes of Cyril Ramaphosa and the other bourgeois rulers of South Africa.

References

1. See the 1992 report by Amnesty international on the torture carried out in the ANC camps <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR53/027/1992/en>. Based on first-hand research among surviving victims of such abuse, it documents a long-standing pattern of torture, ill-treatment and execution of prisoners by the ANC's security department.
2. Terry Bell. *Unfinished Business: South Africa, Apartheid and Truth*. 2001.
3. Terry Bell. *Unfinished business: South Africa, Apartheid and Truth*. 2001 p 204
4. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2013/12/daily-chart-6>
5. <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-10-25-marikana-massacre-ramaphosas-statement-revisited/#.Uqm2gPRdV8E>
6. Mandela. *The Long Walk to Freedom* p. 435
7. Anthony Sampson. *Mandela: The Authorised Biography* (1999)

A serious case of brainwashing

BALAZS NAGY comments on a typical piece of deliberate confusion by media . The example taken was published in France, but the point has general relevance

The bourgeoisie and its hordes of eagle-eyed propagandists have kept a sharp lookout to eliminate the very words “class struggle” and “Marxism”, banning their mere mention by the sciences which seek to explain society. You often see scribblings along these lines which insult human intelligence. But the 14 November issue of *Challenge* really takes the biscuit.

Not that that should surprise anyone: this is a magazine that expresses the interests of the most short-sighted and grasping element in the bourgeoisie and puts their vulgar objectives into words. That is probably why they thought the good French word “défi” was too trivial for a title and found the English “Challenge” more suitable because of the peculiar current snob appeal of everything that smacks of Anglo-Saxon neo-liberalism. This kind of fooling around with language is another example of this craze among the liberated petty-bourgeois.

Anyway, in this issue of the magazine someone called André Compte-Sponville has delivered himself of an article evocatively entitled “Vain revolt”. The title alone says a lot about the author’s intentions. Indeed, he shows his colours in the very first sentence: “Revolution ... as a Marxist might imagine it ... doesn’t cut it anymore”. And to further shore up his this pretty clear credo he wonders aloud: “So what can you believe in?”

Such a thoughtless hurry to junk the class struggle, revolution and Marxism is a bit suspicious anyway. It has a lot more to do with superstitious medieval exorcism than with current realities. And this pen-pusher has absolutely nothing at all to say about the basic ills that actual capitalism is inflicting on working people and entire countries. So he says absolutely nothing about the ongoing crisis of the system, or the hopeless efforts to resolve it which actually help to spread it and make it worse in every sphere (falling production, falling living standards, chronic mass unemployment, rising costs, cultural degradation, destruction of nature, pollution and so on). Instead he goes straight to the thing he fears the most, i.e. working class struggle, revolution, Marxism. He cannot even see that this sort of attempt at exorcism only exposes the very thing he tries to hide – the incurable gangrene capitalism is suffering from – and could draw attention to the very thing he is so quick and eager to condemn.

And here doubt afflicts even minds as resolutely committed to serving the system as his, doubt which forces him into flagrant contradictions which he cannot avoid but, as we shall see, tries to deal with in his own way.

“Revolution is dead ...”, he says, but without batting an eyelid he adds “...but revolt is brewing”. Incoherence of this standard shows ignorance rather than naivety, and leads him immediately to re-offend, proclaiming that “class struggle seems to be out of date”, only to talk in the next

breathe about “the threat of riots”. If you can’t make head or tail of these diametrically-opposed statements, then it’s your fault for being normal.

Our unfortunate hack tries get out of the trap he has set himself by leaping from difficult sociological contradictions into moral sermonising, a sphere whose subjectivity, he hopes, is better suited to his maunderings. This sort of preachifying always was the language the possessing class prefers, especially when it comes to hiding contradictions in order to control and channel their development. And this journalist too hastily and unscrupulously chooses the same not very original route. “Anger incites them to programmes, poverty to reason”, he goes on, not even trying to give a glimpse of what this anger might be about. Which would surprise most people, but not the man who said a few lines back that “revolution is dead”. Then – again with no explanation – he plunges into realms of pure sentiment, in particular benevolent indulgence. “The anger is understandable; the poverty is moving”, he concedes hypocritically, before mounting his condescending hobby-horse: “But which” (the anger and the poverty) “do not resolve a single one of the problems which cause them. What’s the point of a demonstration in the face of a market in crisis? Against international competition?” And at a stroke as he writes, these appear as the obscure, shadowy powers of a mystic realm far beyond human understanding and immune to our will and action.

After these preparatory remarks, aimed at soothing rebellious spirits and making them receptive to the required instruction, we at last see the real intentions and concrete objectives of the article take shape:

“In a democracy, you have the right to fight against a law, not to break it” our hack thunders, carefully avoiding saying whether there are any he would like to change, and how. But the way he moralises leaves us in no doubt: “Let’s not crack down on this one or that one”, he proclaims, warning us: “It’s easy to criticise, and even easier to mock. But if they go too far they end up doing more harm than good”.

So there you are; you’ve been warned! But to cap it all he makes it absolutely clear where these tortuous comments are heading: “...the rise of the National Front ... shows clearly enough who benefits from stirring up discontent”.

This unexpected mental leap mixes everything up into a real muddle, as if anger and dissatisfaction did not have profound causes quite independently of the Le Pen phenomenon, and as if they had nothing to do with the existence and calamitous policies of capitalism and its rule. And we’ve gone round in a circle: The social system is off the hook: all the blame comes back twice as hard – on the malcontents!

Balazs Nagy,
December 2013

Extracts from the report of the Greece Solidarity Campaign Delegation to Greece 27-30 Oct. 2013

The delegation consisted of: Tony Simpson (Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation), Simon Renton (President, University and College Union), Mary Compton (Former President, National Union of Teachers), Cllr Isidoros Diakides, Mike Davis (Editor, 'Chartist' magazine), James Youd (Treasurer, GSC), Bob Archer (co-ordinator). (The further reports see the Greece solidarity Campaign website on http://greesolidarity.org/?page_id=1192)

Sunday 27 October:

8.00pm, everybody met at hotel with Themis and Eleni of OLME (national secondary teachers' union), got to know each other and planned further discussions over dinner.

Monday 28 October:

Not only was this a significant national holiday, but the area around our hotel on Amalias Avenue including access to the Parliament Building and Syntagma Square were the scene of a ceremonial march by school students to mark "Ochi" Day (the day Greece said "no" to German occupation) and were completely blocked by a police cordon. This was a severe blow to all our plans for the morning. Nevertheless Pavlos Charamis (President of OLME Centre for Research) led a group of delegates through police lines to join a demonstration of University staff on the other side of the cordon and Simon Renton was able to address them and bring a message of solidarity from UCU.

Meanwhile Panos Trigazis and a group of peace activists (Nani Politou, vice president of the Energy Workers' trade union and leading member of Greek Citizens Against Racism, Maria Atvaniti Sotitopoulou, President of the Greek International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, and peace campaigner Judy Giannakopoulou) arrived at the hotel at various times to start discussions. Also Tony is arranging publication of an English edition of Panos' book about Dr. Grigoris Lambrakis. (Those unfamiliar with this history should see the film "Z").

Among other points, Panos emphasised that the struggle against neo-liberal policies is linked to the struggle for peace and against fascism and xenophobia. There was considerable discussion around this point. Panos reported that Golden Dawn recruit actively in the schools and that rescinding the Memorandums which tie Greece to crippling austerity measures would be a vital step towards peace.

He pointed out that there are many flashpoints in the Middle East, saying that SYRIZA supports the Geneva peace process in relation to Syria because it favours peaceful solutions to international problems based on dialogue. He explained SYRIZA is for a just settlement in Palestine based on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

By now the other members of the delegation had returned and a fairly broad discussion followed. Among other things we were asked about the possibilities of developing educational work against racism and xenophobia in schools. Maria raised problems among some Greek doctors attached to the army who want to limit blood transfusions only to Greek citizens. Mary proposed that UK

unions should send messages of support and solidarity to Greek trade unions involved in the forthcoming General Strike, reported on the progress of the "Teachers Solidarity" website and mentioned the current strike of Nigerian University lecturers.

We were running seriously late and just had time for some lunch before gathering again to travel to the Grava school complex in Patisia where volunteers have re-opened medical facilities closed by austerity cuts. To quote from their handout:

"The Pharmacy of solidarity at Patisia welcome and serves for free any homeless or jobless person or any person without social insurance but who carries a medical prescription".

The pharmacy has access to doctors who will furnish a prescriptions if necessary. The volunteers need to see some sort of valid proof that the patients have no other access to medical services. They collect medicines and recruit new volunteers and are open to patients all day on Mondays and Wednesdays and during the morning on Thursdays. The teachers and parents present talked about the plan for teachers to provide free coaching for pupils (very few pupils could succeed in the very high-standards for examinations without tutoring) in order to strengthen solidarity within the community.

It is impossible to convey in a few words the atmosphere of our discussion with volunteers, parents and teachers in this setting. Voula Arnaoutaki made a presentation about the work of the Pharmacy and there was a very wide-ranging discussion involving most of the Greek people in the room and all the Delegation members. The political maturity and self-confidence of all the Greeks of whatever social background, age or gender was truly inspiring considering the catastrophe they are undergoing. This is a genuinely powerful community initiative which is most impressive and deserves fuller reporting. Significantly, while they are stepping in where the state has backed out of its responsibilities, they firmly deny that they are working as charities; they insist that they are building a movement to force the state to resuming doing what it should do for the people. We must add that despite everything the Greek hosts are going through, we were met with humbling kindness and hospitality. We informed the volunteers at the Solidarity Pharmacy of our fund-raising in the UK, and subsequently a payment of 1977.61 euros (£1,700) was transferred to them. (You can see a video interview with activists at the

Solidarity Clinic on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epENVfi_GVI&list=HL1384897947&feature=mh_lolz

We were again running very late, and it was not until about 8.30pm that we got back to central Athens and the OLME Head Office.

The OLME group included National President Themis Kotsifakis, Director of Research Pavlos Charamis, General Secretary Nikolaou Stamatis and the union's national Vice-President, together with Eleni Zografaki. There was a very wide-ranging discussion based on Mary Compton's question: "Since we all face the same battles, how can we work together?" Contributions dealt with the effects of financial cuts:

- 90% of supply teachers sacked
- 2,500 teachers in vocational establishments suspended
- in certain subjects many students do not now have a teacher
- salaries have been reduced (by 45% for new entrants, by 25% at the top of the scale)
- difficulties in pupils even getting to a school rural areas
- tightening discipline and supervision
- plans to use appraisal to suspend teachers (OLME will fight to oppose this, as also performance related pay)
- a trend towards privatising peripheral activities (initiatives helped by EU money!)
- moves toward a national high-stakes testing system and steps towards league tables
- moves towards breaking up national pay and conditions
- the significance of the wide-spread tutoring needed to succeed in the examinations

Mary Compton raised the question of Social Movement Trade Unionism (referring also to the discussion at Grava / Patisia). Tony Simpson (a school governor back in the UK) raised academy schools. The Greek government appears to be encouraging "failing" schools to seek private business sponsorship. There is a huge pressure to privatise at Higher Education level.

In this report it is only possible to give the flavour of a discussion which actually went a good deal deeper. For example it would be impossible here to convey the full significance of Simon Renton's exchange with Themis about the relationship between trade unions and politics, but that was only one moment in a very concentrated and rich exchange of views.

It was also reported that:

- 1200 schools have been closed since 2010 alongside a reduction of 102 vocational schools
- The number of substitute teachers has been reduced from 20,000 to 10,000
- Pavlos reported that the government has changed the law relating to Lyceums (15-18 year olds) which will now have exams every year (with teacher putting 50% of questions and government other 50%). This was seen as the first step to national exams and the iniquity of comparative league tables
- Further it was reported that the school building service has been privatised.

- A new law is also being introduced to increase teaching hours
- Special needs support has been abolished and the numbers of school librarians cut
- Other external school subject support services have been cut drastically while in-service training has been eliminated
- OLME's request for one year sabbaticals has been rejected
- There has been mounting strike action against these changes, with particularly strong resistance to changing the public service approach
- Themis reported a change – from oppositional to listening – in the perception of ordinary people towards teachers and unions. OLME is seeking to build on this sentiment.
- Greeks are rethinking party political trade unionism and trade unionism is becoming more political

All present shared contact details and agreed to continue the discussion as the situation develops.

Tuesday 29 October:

The secretary of the public service workers trade union federation Yorgos Harisis came to meet us at the hotel before setting off for Crete to meet local trade unionists and prepare for the forthcoming general strike. We then met SYRIZA MP Theano Fotiou who made a report on the party's work and progress. This included the rapid development of the Solidarity networks across Greece (for which she had lead responsibility). Some of the issues she highlighted included:

- 1.5m now unemployed
- An auction wave of house selling with 20,000 properties reposessed because of debt. With a tradition of 85% home ownership, the middle class is being destroyed
- Legal support provided by Solidarity for All on house and energy issues
- Free markets, bazaars, medicines and free lessons in supplementary schools

All of this activity was vital to establish new relationships and new ideas with an active movement as the basis for a future Syriza government.

We then moved to the Parliament building for a meeting with Manolis Glezos. Mike Davis put the question about how Syriza hopes to deal with the situation if and when it wins power. The 92 year old war resistance veteran summarised his view:

- Analyse the reasons for the crisis
- Write off all the Memoranda charges
- Money itself does not generate any values, it merely represents values. Only the worker makes value, so ensure everyone is working to generate more value
- On public finances: impose progressive incomes tax (not a property tax), close down tax evasion, cut waste
- On the banks he urged that the Euro 680 billion bailouts be taken back by the state
- Germany should pay back what it owes from the devastation caused during the Nazi occupation. (He presented each member of the delegation with signed copies of *The Black Book of Occupation* which provided

horrific evidence for the legal case for reparations which was being pursued through the courts and European Union)

- Defence spending needed to be reduced from US levels to the lowest European levels and VAT should be abolished.
- Finally, he wanted internal borrowing or lending to the state – voluntary for those on low incomes but compulsory for the rich.

A high point in this discussion was a fairly direct exchange between Manolis and Simon about policy towards the EU and the Euro. Tony Simpson asked about parallels between the situation in 1945 and the present day. James recalled that Manolis had “instigated the end of one form of fascism” and asked about his attitude to Golden Dawn. Broadly, Manolis’ reply was that Golden Dawn are **an** issue but **the** issue.

The delegation were then briefly presented to the Syriza parliamentary fraction who were gathered for a meeting. In the presence of the 71 Syriza MPs Isidoros delivered impromptu greetings from the GSC delegation, eliciting warm applause.

Tuesday afternoon:

We then moved straight off to the campus of the National Technical University Athens on the outskirts of the city. Union representative of all grades and functions in Higher Education from across the whole country were meeting there. Funding cuts have made Higher Education virtually inoperable in Greece, and at that moment administrative staff were on strike and some departments were under student occupation. The strike resulted from the sacking of over 500 administrative staff and a demand from the New Democracy government that all lecturers sign a statement giving their CV and other details.

The meeting in a large lecture hall was to determine what to do next. With term about to start, unless the universities could find some way of functioning, students would miss a whole semester.

As soon as we arrived, Simon was led to the rostrum and gave a powerful message of support and solidarity on behalf of UCU. While the union reps continued their deliberations, we then sat next door in the refectory and talked to those there.

For example we met a number of young academics who have qualified as university lecturers but have not yet been appointed or paid. They have successfully completed the selection process as lecturers but the authorities have not completed the process of actually appointing them to the job. They have therefore worked for several years without pay. There are 800 of them across the country. Following protest action, the government in August “decided” to properly appoint 400 of them (although they have not yet done so). No new lecturers will be selected until this cohort has been absorbed, so work prospects for doctoral students are poor and there is a constant brain-drain to the UK, Europe and the US. We were told this is even worse than the situation in sub-Saharan Africa, etc., since such people here tend to take alternative employment and lose touch with their subjects.

Professors who retire are not replaced. The School of Architecture has seen its establishment reduced from 110 to 60.

Bob, Mary and Tony left at this point to return to the UK.

Tuesday evening:

The remaining delegation members visited the Community Assembly of Solidarity in Vironas (Byron district) (Vironassolidarity.wordpress.com)

We met about 20 volunteers from this Solidarity Network in a converted shop on loan from the owner. The ground floor was used for meetings, one of which would follow our visit. The upstairs was packed with donated clothes, toys and foodstuffs which would be distributed to 540 families that in the words of their leaflet “have immediate need for food offering them a package with basic nutrition goods, such as pasta, legumes, olive oil, tomato paste, flour, sugar, milk, etc. every 20 days. In parallel, the network collects clothing and toys for children that are offered monthly for free in exchanging and sharing bazaars.”

The Assembly is democratically run, with a council meeting weekly, and includes almost 50% of users of the service. It was established in August 2013. It was reported that because of heavy demand people in the countryside are sending food direct.

Volunteers also make jams and cakes which are sold to assist users, of whom 31% are immigrants. 187 of users have young children and all are on low or no incomes. Fund raising also takes place at cultural evenings where people are also encouraged to bring foodstuffs. This Solidarity Network was claimed to be the biggest in Greece in terms of users.

We heard again that the philosophy was one of “fight for your rights” rather than charity.

Some activists intended to stand in municipal elections and the ex-president of the teacher’s union, now a councillor and supported by Syriza, was also involved in the Assembly council.

Main recommendation:

- In light of the activities at Pitisia Social Pharmacy and the big school campus it is embedded in, and the proposals of teachers to provide free tutoring, we should continue our efforts to collect resources for the Social Pharmacies, which are not carrying out charity but organising resistance, and continuing to demand that the state carries out its responsibilities.
- We should consider either trying to twin schools in the UK with schools in Greece with an eye to collecting resources for eg. stationery and inoculations (which children are not receiving and while they are not yet epidemic, the diseases involved are increasingly prevalent), or getting trade union organisations in the UK to adopt a social pharmacy and collect resources for it.
- We should use resources such as “Teacher Solidarity” website and especially the section providing access to research work to popularise information about the attacks on education and teachers.

'Regulating' the profits of the 'Big Six'

Nick Bailey's notes on current economic and social issues

"Liberal Capitalism, based upon competition and free trade, has completely receded into the past ... The necessity of 'controlling' economy, of placing state 'guidance' over industry and of 'planning' is today recognized – at least in words – by almost all current bourgeois and petty – bourgeois tendencies ... in their cowardly experiments in 'regulation' democratic governments run head-on into the invincible sabotage of big capital." (Founding Programme of the Fourth International 1938)

Another time, another crisis: Right now we are hearing of quite a few proposed "cowardly experiments". People are seeing big hikes in their energy bills. In the period from 2002 to 2011 in the UK bills increased by an average of 44%. In the same period median income has remained static, but those on low income actually saw theirs fall by 11%. While the big six energy companies are raking in large profits, 11% of households here are now estimated to be "fuel poor".

The main parties are terribly concerned. There is a deal of hand wringing from all quarters. Labour kicked off with a proposal to freeze prices for 18 months should they get elected. We need, they claim, to "re-set" the market, whatever that may mean. The Tories scramble to catch up, with promises to lower the bills. They too admit that the market "isn't working", but blame the former Labour government for the way it was set up.

According to a report from the UK National Audit Office (NAO), the big financial investors in energy are not too concerned about what consumers think. When asked if a high level of consumer satisfaction was a factor in their investment decisions, 37% replied no.

Commenting on the estimated investment in water and energy needed in the next decade, the NAO report went on to say:

"Since the privatisation of the public utilities in the 1980s, new infrastructure has increasingly been privately financed and paid for by consumers through their bills.

"Since 1997, the level of infrastructure investment paid for by consumers has exceeded the amount paid for by taxpayers. HM Treasury expects at least two-thirds of the £310 billion of expected infrastructure to be wholly financed, owned and operated by private companies, which are accountable to their boards and shareholders."

So the privatisations have not only allowed energy companies and their financial backers to siphon off a guaranteed revenue stream from consumers, it is also a far more regressive system of financing, where working class people are effectively subsidising the wealthy.

Privatisation played its part in growing inequality.

The companies have a web of cross holdings and connections and their claims and figures are even contested by the regulators. Like the banks the production and distribution of energy cries out for social control and planning and not just on a UK scale. Not to mention issues of climate change and carbon reduction, bound up with these industries, which clearly cannot be tackled within a system based on profit.

A survey by opinion pollsters YouGov found that 83 per cent of people believed that energy suppliers maximise profits at the expense of customers.

The challenge is to create the situation where these demands can be taken up by working class people and their organisations. Meanwhile leading Conservative and London Mayor Boris Johnson

hailed greed as a "valuable spur to economic activity" in the annual Margaret Thatcher lecture delivered to the Centre for Policy Studies. He added: "I don't believe that economic equality is possible; indeed some measure of inequality is essential for the spirit of envy and keeping up with the Joneses that is, like greed, a valuable spur to economic activity."

Johnson and his kind often condemns the "greed" of trade unionists fighting for demands that are infinitesimally modest compared with the takings of bankers and energy CEOs. Most recently a Tory London Assembly member wrote to local newspapers in London suggesting transport workers should not be allowed to strike. Their claims could be determined, he thought, by a judge in court. Would this be the same judge who has systematically ruled that unions like Unite and RMT failed to satisfy the byzantine regulations covering strike ballots under the UKs highly-restrictive labour law?

Johnson also called for a return to selective education (i.e. separate selective schools for children to perform to a higher level academically) in some poorly-researched remarks about "innate ability" which several academic experts on intelligence later struggled to make sense of.

At the same time Johnson suggested that the next crop of billionaires would need to display "a genuine sense of community (!) and acts of prodigious philanthropy" to avoid the stigma of "nasty party" which attached to Margaret Thatcher's period in power.

If some of them paid their taxes it would be a start!

Johnson nevertheless speculated that "She (Margaret Thatcher) would have found some way of making far wider use of that most powerful utensil of academic improvement - and that is academic competition between children themselves," which rather undermined his thesis.

How to understand politicians like Johnson and Cameron, the leading Lib. Dems or even Labour Party shadow ministers? They are "bourgeois", that is, they speak on behalf of the class of billionaire CEOs, high-net-worth individuals, bank executives, brokers and private financiers who use their "higher ability" to siphon off wealth from the process of social production.

The point about today's bourgeoisie is that it is completely parasitic. Even capitalist commentators know they would be better off without them, but there is no going back to the days of "liberal capitalism" – we are now in the age of imperialism and finance capital.

To help that understanding to make greater headway in society, Workers International will support every genuine attempt by wider layers to place real controls upon the likes of the energy companies, or banks like RBS, who, it is claimed, forced viable companies into bankruptcy in order to seize their assets.

Perish the thought that any banker would be involved in that sort of thing!

But just in case they might, why should we not have a commission of ordinary men and women, whether working and/or raising families or unemployed, who collaborate with people who know how the finance system works but are not bought by it?

They could systematically track information about how the big banks and the big utility firms and taxation work and explain it all in straightforward terms to the lay-person.

It's worth a try.