

# **BULLETIN**

## **June-July 2013**

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### **London: Solidarity with movement in Turkey**



Campaigners from the DayMer Turkish centre in London and supporters of the International Transport Federation demonstrated outside the Turkish Embassy on 21 June. Led by TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady and a number of senior trade union representatives, a delegation presented a protest to the Embassy over the treatment of demonstrators by the Turkish authorities

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This is the statement adopted by the 4000-strong Peoples Assembly Against Austerity held by a coalition of trade unions and anti-cuts groups in London on 22 June

# **The People's Assembly declares ...**

The declaration below represents the beginning of a democratic process leading towards a second People's Assembly in early 2014.

The People's Assembly, meeting in Westminster Central Hall, declares:

We face a choice that will shape our society for decades to come. It is a choice faced by ordinary people in every part of the globe.

We can defend education, health and welfare provision funded from general taxation and available to all, or we can surrender the gains that have improved the lives of millions of people for over more than 50 years.

We do not accept that government's austerity programme is necessary. The banks and the major corporations should be taxed at a rate which can provide the necessary resources. Austerity does not work: it is a failure in its own terms resulting in neither deficit reduction nor growth. It is not just: the government takes money from the pockets of those who did not cause the crisis and rewards those who did. It is immoral: our children face a bleaker future if our services and living standards are devastated. It is undemocratic: at the last election a majority voted against the return of a Tory government. The Con-Dem coalition has delivered us into the grip of the Tories whose political project is the destruction of a universal welfare state.

We therefore choose to resist. We refuse to be divided against ourselves by stories of those on 'golden pensions', or of 'scroungers', or the 'undeserving poor'. We do not blame our neighbours, whatever race or religion they maybe. We are not joining the race to the bottom. We stand with the movement of resistance across Europe.

We are clear in our minds that our stand will require us to defend the people's right to protest, and so we support the right of unions and campaigns to organise and take such action as their members democratically decide is necessary.

We stand with all those who have made the case against the government so far: in the student movement, in the unions, in the many campaigns to defend services, the NHS, and in the Coalition of Resistance, the People's Charter, UK Uncut, the environmental movement and the Occupy movement.

We do not seek to replace any organisations fighting cuts. All are necessary. But we do believe that a single united national movement is required to challenge more effectively a nationally led government austerity programme.

We have a plain and simple goal: to make government abandon its austerity programme. If it will not it must be replaced with one that will.

We will concentrate on action not words. We aim to provide the maximum solidarity for unions and other organisations and others taking action. We support every

and all effective forms of action and aim to build a united national movement of resistance.

Our case is clear. The government's austerity programme does not work; it is unjust, immoral and undemocratic. Alternatives exist. Debts can be dropped. Privatisation can be reversed and common ownership embraced. A living wage can begin to combat poverty. Strong trade unions can help redistribute profit. The vast wealth held by corporations and the trillions held by the super-rich in tax havens can be tapped. Green technology, alternatives to the arms industries, a rebuilt infrastructure including growth in manufacturing are all desperately needed. We are fighting for an alternative future for this generation and for those that come after us.

## **Proposed actions:**

The People's Assembly will support every genuine movement and action taken against any and all of the cuts. We support all current industrial actions by the unions. We encourage and will help to organise the maximum solidarity action with the PCS and teaching union members taking protest and strike action the week after the People's Assembly, as well as with other action by unions planned for the autumn.

Peoples Assemblies against the cuts should be organised in towns and cities across our nations, bringing all those fighting the cuts together into a broad democratic alliance on a local basis.

The national and the local Assemblies, in partnership with Trades Unions, Trades Councils, campaigning and community groups, can unite our movement and strengthen our campaigns. Local Assemblies will help us to organise a recalled National Assembly to review our work in the early spring of 2014.

We will work together with leading experts and campaigners both here and abroad, and friendly think tanks, to develop rapidly key policies and an alternative programme for a new anti-austerity government. We will continue to welcome support from all who fight the cuts.

We will call a national day of civil disobedience and direct action against austerity on November 5th and a national demonstration in Spring 2014.

We will support the call for local demonstrations on 5th July, the 65th Birthday of our NHS and specifically, at Trafford Hospital, Manchester, the birthplace of the NHS.

We will work with the trade unions, campaign groups and others to organise and mobilise for a national demonstration at Conservative Party Conference in Manchester in support of our NHS on 29th September 2013.





The scene in the main hall of Central Hall Westminster during a plenary session

# ***The People's Assembly calls for mass protest and direct action***

## **Statement from the Coalition of Resistance following the successful People's Assembly Against Austerity**

Thanks to everyone who came to the People's Assembly last Saturday. Well over 4,000 people attended throughout the day.

It brought together every organisation fighting and resisting austerity for the first time since the financial crash over five years ago.

Recognising the energy, potential and hope of millions of people affected by austerity, it called for concrete action to be undertaken across the country.

This includes:

- a mass national protest at the Tory Party conference on 29 September in Manchester;
- a day of civil disobedience on 5 November in every town and city across the country;
- local People's Assemblies to be established in every area possible;
- a national demonstration in London in the new year

We now need to create an infrastructure that can support the local organisations and take forward the national initiatives that were launched at the assembly.

To do this, we need your support. The People's Assembly are launching an urgent financial appeal to raise the funds to do this.

Please consider making a monthly donation, or a one off donation if you prefer. You can do this on the website here:

<http://thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/donate/>

Your support is indispensable in building on the determination and commitment of 22 June and taking the movement forward.

We will be contacting you over the next weeks and months about plans and actions. Video and pictures of the day will be available on the website soon.

In the meantime, we are compiling a list of local People's Assembly activist meetings and events for the website. If you have one planned, or would like to plan one in your area please send an email to: [office@thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](mailto:office@thepeoplesassembly.org.uk).

If you have photos or videos of the day please send them through to [office@thepeoplesassembly.org.uk](mailto:office@thepeoplesassembly.org.uk)

**Keep up with People's Assembly online: <http://thepeoplesassembly.org.uk/>**

# **‘Reconstitute the strength of the working-class movement as the only social alternative’**

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has asked affiliates to offer their views on how to implement resolution 5 passed by a considerable majority at Congress 2012, which reads as follows:

*“Congress welcomes the Future that Works demonstration on 20 October 2012 and recognised this as being an effective platform and foundation to resist the damaging austerity measures that are damaging the very fabric of our society in Great Britain. Further, Congress recognised that after the demonstration there needs to be a strong voice from all TUC affiliated unions to protect public and private sector workers, the unemployed, our children, the elderly and all those in society who are vulnerable.”*

*“Congress accepts that the trade union movement must continue leading from the front against this uncaring government with a coalition of resistance taking coordinated action where possible with far reaching campaigns including the consideration and practicalities of a general strike.”*

## **In response, unite would submit the following general points:**

1. There can be no doubt about the dire situation facing the economy, the British people and our own members. As the TUC has pointed out, we are on the edge of a triple-dip recession, with the worst of the government spending cuts to come – particularly in respect of welfare benefits – all in pursuit of a strategy that has manifestly failed.

2. Under these circumstances it is an obligation of the trade union movement to give a lead to our members and the community more widely that amounts to more than “wait until the next election” and the hoped-for return of a Labour government. No-one other than our movement can both express a plausible alternative and mobilise people in support of it.

3. We welcome the steps taken by the TUC so far – the huge demonstration in March 2011, the merely very-large one in October 2013, and the mass public sector strike action on November 30 2011. Taken together these are manifestations of our movement’s enduring capacity to mobilise its own members, to capture the agenda and reach out to a wider community. They represent the most significant intervention by trade unions into British public life for a generation or more.

4. Now we need to discuss how to go further. The government has shown no signs of abandoning its disastrous course as a result of the pressure applied by trade unions and others to date, although the public opinion climate has

been significantly shifted. We discuss our next steps in a context where there is a widely-shared belief that the existing elite has failed the country and where there is an urgent need therefore to reconstitute the strength of the working-class movement as the only social alternative. TUC policy should be directed to this end above all.

5. Unite sees the call to consider the practicalities of a “general strike” as the next step both in rebuilding the strength of our movement and in challenging government policies. It is not about setting a date for such a strike now, nor about pitting the demand for a “general strike” against other initiatives. It is, however, about recognising that the steps taken to prepare for such a mass industrial action have a value in and of themselves, and that undertaking them increases the range of options our movement has in resisting the government’s rush to disaster, whether or not such strike action is ever eventually called.

6. The first consideration is to be clear as to what a “general strike” would be called for. Clarity on this is, to say the least, essential. To put it broadly, it is in opposition to “austerity and a failed economic strategy”, more specifically the interlinked questions of the government’s attack on welfare and on the National Health Service coupled with its failure to promote growth across the economy, preferring to adopt a strategy of ever-increasing budgetary cuts to local services. These issues arouse the greatest public concern, as being emblematic of the Con-Dem determination to solve the economic crisis at the expense of the poorest in our society and of long-treasured social achievements.

7. Such a perspective would clearly show the trade unions as acting not for interests which could be misrepresented as narrow or selfish, but as acting on behalf of the wider community in a situation where the main direct victims of the government’s policies have little opportunity or capacity to act on their own behalf, as they are the most vulnerable in our society. In Unite’s view this is the best way to present the issue of mass coordinated strike action politically. Attempting to knit together a “general strike” on a plausible industrial basis would narrow our base of support and likely prove impractical in any case.

8. Such a broad approach, of the unions acting on behalf of the community as a whole, would also help win broad support and conviction among our members themselves. Without their understanding of the desirability of mass

strike action, a sense that it is both desirable and achievable and can make a difference, the idea is clearly still-born.

9. For some colleagues, the legal position presents unsurmountable obstacles to calling a “general strike”. Unite does not share that view. It is true that our movement still labours under the most reactionary trade union legislation in Europe. But this should never be seen as an excuse for paralysis. Such an attitude leaves trade unionism incapable of effective action. While proceeding prudently, our objective must be to find ways to make things possible, despite legal impediments, rather than using the latter as a rationale for passivity.

10. We note the views of John Hendy QC and Professor Keith Ewing that a general strike may indeed be legal under European human rights legislation. We should explore the implications of this, and certainly publicise the opinions of these two eminent specialists. However, it would be rash to assume that the British courts, in the event of a malicious legal challenge to strike action taken in pursuit of what would be deemed a “political objective”, would share the Hendy-Ewing view. Indeed, experience would indicate the contrary. Class justice prevails in Britain and establishing the definitive European legal position would likely be the work of years.

11. As noted above, Unite does not believe it would be possible (or necessarily desirable) to try to manufacture industrial disputes which would pass the test of law in order to make a “general strike” court-proof. Such an approach may indeed have some merit in the public sector, as the November 30 dispute showed, but it would not be possible, at least on any significant scale, in the private sector, where Unite has the majority of its members and, indeed, the majority of all private sector trade unionists. Therefore, we believe that the nettle needs to be grasped – that a 24-hour strike against austerity would be an explicitly political strike.

12. Calling such a strike should, however, be preceded by a ballot of those the unions would intend to call out, not merely for such legal protection as may be afforded (which may be negligible) but because it would add to the moral legitimacy of the action, both with our members and the wider public.

13. The real counter-balance to legal arguments is industrial strength. It is this which freed the Pentonville Five in 1972, for example. In today’s context, it would mean prioritising calling out our members in those workplaces and at those companies where we could be sure that the strength of union organisation would inhibit the employers from dismissing those who took strike action. Protecting our activists and members more generally at work must be the first consideration here. Unite believes that, given proper preparation and planning, this is far from impossible in many places. Conversely, it would be foolish to call out members in vulnerable positions where the union may not be able to act effectively to protect them from employer reprisals. It would also be the case that employers who do not act against members for participating in a strike against austerity would also be unlikely to pursue legal action against the unions themselves.

14. The timing of mass strike action has to be determined by several factors. First, preparation – bringing opinion amongst our members to the point of supporting such action through a range of campaigning initiatives. On its own, this consideration would indicate a build-up period of several months.

15. Second, there is the question of opportunity. Developments in the public sector industrially may provide a window for broadening industrial action on a political basis; or a particular event consequential on the implementation of the government’s cuts programme may bring public opinion to the boil and open up a chance for the trade union movement to give decisive leadership.

16. Third, there is the European dimension. Trade unions in many countries across Europe struck against austerity on November 14. A repetition of continent-wide 24-hour strike action would provide an obvious occasion for our movement to step up to the plate, which would incidentally highlight the greater legal burdens we work under and may inhibit the government from seeking to use the law to prosecute action permissible elsewhere in Europe.

17. A further idea to consider would be raising a voluntary levy within the movement to enable us to pay all, or a substantial part of, the wages of particular selected and identified groups of workers taking strike action in pursuit of the TUC’s objectives. Such a levy could help sustain particular action for a longer period. This would have the effect of raising debate and discussion among our members, including those who may decide not to contribute to the levy.

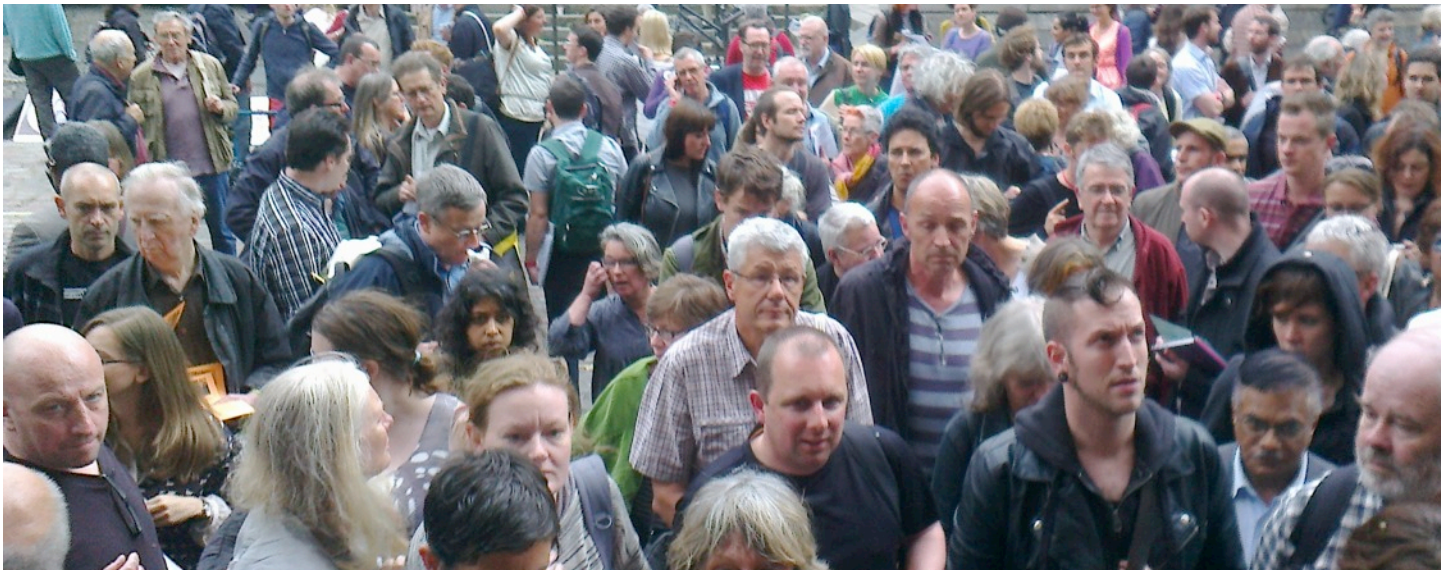
18. The main issue for the General Council now, in our view, is how we raise the strength and confidence of our movement to the point where mass strike action becomes plausible. It is Unite’s view that, in principle, such action is desirable, both because it would provide a real source of pressure on the government to change course, and because it would be a landmark in our movement’s recovery of its morale, strength and capacity to play a leading part in a society crying out for credible and honourable leadership.

### **Specific campaigning initiatives**

It is our view that we are in need of a “roadmap” that takes us on a journey to the General Election in 2015 and beyond. It will be the case that a range of initiatives and actions will take place as we proceed along this road; each will involve a range of affiliates from all, such as with the TUC demonstrations on 26 March and 20 October, to those involving the PSLG unions over attacks to public sector pensions, NHS privatisation and pay. All of which serve to develop a wider confidence amongst members as well as advancing particular issues and campaigns.

1. Such continuing industrial action may only accelerate given on-going Government hostility to public services and pay restraint. Coordinated industrial action in the public sector specifically should be encouraged in the face of such an attack. Unite will certainly be taking this view into such a discussion with affiliates and within both the Executive Committee and the General Council of the TUC.





### ***Queuing to get into the People's Assembly Against Austerity***

2. To assist in this coordination of industrial actions, we believe that the TUC should establish a facility within Congress House within which affiliates could notify the TUC of all industrial action(s) planned or proposed within their respective unions. This would enable a full report to be made to the Executive Committee and a discussion about the opportunity to establish a specially constituted "Disputes Coordinating Team" within which affiliates could engage in a wider discussion than is currently possible within the various sector committees on the opportunities to "coordinate" industrial actions across the movement (public and private sector) towards a specific day(s). Unite would support the establishment of such a Disputes Coordination Team.

On a more general and broader note, we believe that a significant step along the "roadmap" would be the development of a nationwide long-distance march.

1. Organised by the TUC with direct support from affiliates, this march should be a moving demonstration that rallies in larger towns and cities across our nation on its route from Glasgow to London.

2. Such a demonstration would focus on those issues that link growing public disquiet with government action with our industrial and political priorities; NHS, welfare cuts and wider cuts to Community Support and Services. Focusing a growing opposition to Tory austerity would also give a necessary political confidence to the Labour leadership as we work to develop consensus towards manifesto priorities for 2015.

3. The march would map out a route that takes in major cities and towns such as Edinburgh, Newcastle, York, Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool, Stoke, Birmingham, Cardiff, Bristol and London. The "marchers", of whom we would need a core of about 20, would take in towns on route and affiliates would be responsible for welcoming parties and evening events as well as liaising with local authorities on overnight accommodation/food etc.

4. Affiliates should provide a "liveried bus" to join the march at agreed points to "build" momentum as it develops along route. This would provide an opportunity for some 20

buses to travel in convoy with the marchers gathering support, leafleting, signing up to petitions and linking to industrial disputes/priorities in the local area as well as messaging with local media etc. Trades councils and TUC unemployed centres could play a leading role in building local organisation in support of the march and events on the day of its "arrival in town".

5. For the London arrival a central rally and demonstration should be planned, linking in councillors from across the country around the theme "not in my name". We have already booked Central Hall, Westminster for the Peoples Assembly supported by a number of affiliates on 22nd June that could easily become the arrival rally point.

6. The end point of the rally should be a "Carnival against the cuts" in a London park on Sunday 23 June. Such an event could be based on the successful "Rock against Racism" event in the 1980s and Victoria or Kennington Parks would be suitable locations to hold such an event.

7. There are a growing number of well-known artists, groups and comedians signing up and speaking out against the government that we should consider approaching about such an event. A successful event would build a bridge across the generations as well as serving as a focal point for our messaging and end to the march with national speakers from unions and political life.

8. Such an event requires considerable planning and resourcing and affiliates would be encouraged to assist with both financing and human resources. Liaising with the Police and others about routing and public events will take time and so an early decision on progress for such an initiative is paramount.

We make these proposals in the conviction that initiatives of this sort can help create a climate which, combined with likely events, can put mass industrial action in support of social justice a credible option for our movement..

(Editorial note: So far the other TUC affiliates have not agreed to the proposal for a long march and open-air rally. The TUC and Unite are however currently campaigning with "liveried buses" across the country.)

***In 70 cities across Europe***

# **People United Against the Troika**

On 1 June 2013 there were co-ordinated demonstrations against the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and the IMF) for imposing austerity and misery across the continent. Below, we print the message from the London demonstration, followed by a comment from Workers International



***Some of the demonstrators in London***

## **MESSAGE FROM LONDON**

We are here today not only to protest against austerity in the UK but also to show that we act in solidarity and coordinated with movements across Europe. We are here today because WE ARE Europe. Because the fact is that today social rights are being rolled back in Britain, as they have in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy and Cyprus too. Because we are inevitably all in this together.

They do not represent us. Cameron in the UK represents the interests of the few just as the European Commission / European Central Bank / IMF does. Unlike what we are led to believe, they protect the few, the powerful, the wealthy. Rajoy in Spain, Samaras in Greece, Coelho in Portugal, officially elected to protect the public interest, are on the contrary the protectors of an international, European, capitalist class, to which they belong, to which they are loyal.

Elected officials impose the same anti-people and pro-profit measures in Britain, Greece, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Cyprus that the unelected officials from the European Commission call for. Yes, they protect the same interests whether they live in London, Dublin, Athens, Madrid Lisbon or Nicosia, whether they are elected or not.

Alternatives to austerity and authoritarianism exist. We should demand more, not less Europe: a real economic

union, a common welfare state across European Union, including a common minimum wage and minimum health care protection, and most importantly, a real political union. But a democratic one, not a European Union under the diktat of the Troika and the corporations that lobby it.

If we are to stop the destruction of our rights, rights whole generations have fought for, we have to understand that we can only win if we come together, across boundaries, and if we identify who we are up against: an international capitalist class. They want to make of THEIR crisis an opportunity to further the very system that got us to this point, to continue their anti-people and pro-profit measures. But this can be instead OUR opportunity, only if we resist together in a Europe united against austerity.

## **A comment from Workers' International**

Demonstrators in over 70 cities around Europe participated in an international protest against austerity on 1 June.

The previous day, 3000 demonstrators "closed down the city centre of Frankfurt, Germany, home not only to the European Central Bank, but also hundreds of other financial institutions." On the day itself, 150 mostly young and mainly Spanish, Portuguese and Italian people working in London



marched from the Treasury in Whitehall to the European Commission offices nearby. The message issued on their behalf is right to emphasise the solidarity of the action across Europe and also the fact that “WE ARE Europe”.

The message is right to emphasise that “social rights are being rolled back” across the continent. (The message issued by the Frankfurt protestors also points out that “The labor market reform pushed through in Germany in 2004 – slashing long fought-for workers’ rights and securities and resulting in a massive precarisation of the workforce – serves as a model for the neo-liberal reforms that the German government and European financial elites try to push in all of Europe.”) Above all, the “Message from London” more correctly identifies “who we are up against: an international capitalist class”.

The London marchers propose to turn “their (the capitalists’) crisis” into “our opportunity ... if we resist together in a Europe united against austerity”. But if they are to turn hundreds and occasionally thousands of protestors into a powerful mass movement of hundreds of thousands which can really seize the opportunity, they must also turn to the workers’ movement.

It should be remembered that the social gains which the capitalist class is trying to reverse were won by a well-organised and class-conscious movement of workers and more broadly working people in general. It was they who

insisted that governments should place full employment and progressive welfare legislation at the forefront of their work. It was the parties and trade unions of this workers’ movement which for decades kept a sharp eye out to defend these gains.

For these reasons, Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International urges the young demonstrators who organised and participated in the 1 June action, and worked for the unity of the “people’s tide”, the “idignados”, the Occupy movement and the rest, to centre their efforts on reviving and restoring that movement of the working class to its full strength, albeit in the more difficult and challenging conditions of today.

We appeal to the London marchers on 1 June to see themselves now as part of the British workers’ movement, to get involved through their workplaces in its trade unions and to join up in its communities with their campaigns against cuts and austerity.

It is though the parties, campaigns and trade unions of the working class that the mass of people can formulate and fight for their demands.

For Workers’ International, this is summed up, for the many and varied peoples of Europe, in the slogan for a “Working Peoples’ Europe”

**Bob Archer, June 2013**



**Just a few of the 4,000 participants in the London Peoples’ Assembly 22 June**



# **The Spirit of '45**

**Dir. Ken Loach ( 92 mins) . “Dogwoof DVD”. Film review by Nick Bailey**

In Ken Loach's new film, a retired nurse relates the case of a man with failing eyesight who, prior to the setting up of the National Health Service, was reduced to carrying around in his pocket a piece of bottle glass to help him read.

Such testimony dramatically illustrates what the post World War II gains, commonly called the welfare state, meant for millions of people. Decent housing, free secondary education, adequate unemployment and disability benefits and above all access to proper health care (which included eye care) as of right.

At a time when what remains of the welfare state – and the NHS is a huge part of this – is under attack, Loach has produced a film which shows how, in 1945, the vast mass of people were determined to ensure that there would be no return to the conditions of the 1930s. The form this movement took was the landslide election of a labour government committed to a program of social housing, nationalisation of basic industries and the formation of a national health service – publicly provided and free to all.

Loach's film is therefore timely, providing a focus for the much needed discussion in the labour movement and beyond about the kind of movement necessary to defend what is left of the gains.

Ken Loach and his team have dug out some wonderful documentary footage – look out for Churchill being booed at an out- door meeting – interspersed with people reflecting on the times; and what an array of people. These are not only academics and professional people but trade unionists and partisans of the labour movement, not a few of whom knew the story – both before and after '45. And a key point made by one of the contributors is this: that the experiences and lessons of '45 must be talked about and passed on to young people, many of whom are not aware of the origin of social gains which we have come to take for granted. The film is in two parts. The first sets the scene,

giving a flavour of what life was like in the 1930s for many working class people. We hear from the doctors' fee collector, from miners about conditions in the pits and the appalling state of housing.

There are quotations from the Labour party manifesto and from (the Liberal) Lord Beveridge's report. What the film makes clear however is that the social gains in housing, health and pensions were forced out of the bourgeoisie by a mass movement (the 'spirit of '45'): They were the price for allowing a demoralised and bankrupt British capitalism to continue.

The section dealing with the nationalisation of the coal industry is interesting as it on the one hand conveys the genuine elation of the miners while at the same time making the point that the old capitalist management remained in place.

However, whatever peoples' expectations, the reforms could not be granted on a permanent basis. The ongoing crisis of British capitalism, emerging in the 1970s at the end of the boom, made sure of that - whatever the intentions of succeeding governments.

And so we move on to the second part of the film which deals with the emergence of Thatcher, the attacks on the Trade Union movement, culminating in the miners' strike, and the breaking up of the previously nationalised industries.

Here some have seen a weakness in the film: the 'jump' between the two periods without explanation of what happened 'in between'. This is fair criticism, although how that could have been avoided without making a very long film indeed is not clear.

Loach is to be congratulated on this film. For this reviewer it's a welcome return to form after a recent series of films that were a bit too 'feel good'. The Spirit of '45 deserves the widest possible distribution.



***This picture – used in “Spirit of ‘45” – of the conditions under which working people lived in the 1930s helps to explain the mass movement for reform after World War II***

# **Socialist nostrums and how to build the International**

A Comrade wrote recently: "... the new rising tide of the international working class starting in 2011 is what is putting all groupings which claim to be Trotskyist to the test. If the working class was not defending itself as it does and was to go quietly to its doom, such groupings would have another lease of life with their glorious 'socialist' nostrums drawn from the previous period. But as things are, it is all put in question: the understanding of the meaning of the Transitional Programme and how you build the International".

That is indeed the nub of the question, and our comrade has put his finger right on it. There undoubtedly is a rising tide, even if it has peculiar features which make it rather difficult to form a clear picture of it. These peculiar features themselves echo and reflect difficult conditions which are more severe and weigh more heavily than in the past under which the working class is seeking a way forward. They deform and retard it. Let us try to sum them up (in broad outline).

\* What we are dealing with is that they are coming out of a defeat, but not just any old defeat such as they might have known in the past. The liquidation of the USSR as a consequence of the fact that the bureaucracy held power, but also of the conscious action of a good part of that bureaucracy, meant an historical setback for the working class on an international scale. There is no doubt that in itself this threw the class a long way backwards. Its Soviet section was disorientated and demoralised and unable to stand up for itself apart from a few sporadic flashes. For too long, the domination of Stalinism had, by crushing and eliminating its best elements, disfigured its gains and poisoned its consciousness.

\* A number of consequences in turn worsened and generalised this defeat. The Stalinist parties' right-wing policies had already long since weakened the working class. Now this leadership's treachery became a sudden general collapse, with these parties shrinking considerably if not disappearing. Stalinism exploded (not its base in the bureaucracy, and not its politics in general). The mistake we made in Workers International was to conclude from this that it opened the road for the working class to march towards revolution. That is to say that we one-sidedly welcomed a victory (the defeat of the bureaucracy) which was above all the defeat of the USSR brought about by the bureaucracy in its decrepitude.

\* What this counter-revolutionary turn in events and the dislocation of the USSR brought about was to undermine the morale of communist workers and disarm them in the face of recrudescing and unbridled bourgeois propaganda

(helped by many ex-Stalinists) against socialism and Marxism, a propaganda which exploited the abominable and universally abhorred practices of Stalinism. At the same time this gave a new lease of life to an, itself degenerate, social democracy.

The so-called ultra-liberal offensive of the bourgeoisie was already well under way, and it was abruptly strengthened and made general. It became omnipresent, planet-wide in vigour and scope, and its sharp point was aimed at the destruction of the working class as a class. This is no exaggeration!

\* The bourgeois practice of de-industrialisation centring on Europe was not "simply" an economic transfer to countries with much inferior wages and trade union rights, or the winding down of unprofitable industries (such as mining). It was also and above all a policy of physically destroying an important, indeed the most robust, conscious and militant, part of the working class. This destruction considerably increased the weight of the petit bourgeoisie, but not in production (since small farmers and craft workers have largely been eliminated) but in bureaucracy of every kind, in services and in intermediate layers in general.

\* The way the trade unions have been domesticated, with the help of swollen trade union bureaucracies, into "social partners" constitutes another important facet in this destruction of the working class.

\* The attacks on the gains workers have made in the social field etc. have developed into a general offensive, described everywhere as "reforms" (!!), intended to make this destruction utter.

On the other hand, it is necessary to locate, among the special features of the current rising tide which render it more difficult, the contradictory but for the most part negative heritage of the Fourth International. Broadly speaking it has two aspects:

a. The overwhelming majority of this heritage is negative, although its history undeniably has some positive aspects. From the start of World War II, with Trotsky's assassination, the Fourth International entered a long process of degeneration. I shall omit the details, but this long first phase of its perversion ended with the big split of 1952-53, followed by an exponential rise in splits and desertions. Again omitting details, I merely state that there exists a whole galaxy of organisations and internationals; -- this dispersion and proliferation in turn have been accompanied by and engendered a whole constellation of theories and ideas whose sources can be located already well before the degeneration and in my view show a lack of understanding of Marxism and above all how it was enriched by Lenin and



Trotsky. (The second part of my work *Marxist Considerations on the Crisis* is devoted to a detailed examination of this problem during the revolutionary wave of 1942-1946).

b. I think that in Workers International we have finally got to the point of understanding the essential elements of this (to do with Marxism and its development), just as, very probably, several activists scattered around the multitude of organisations will have understood them or will be able to assimilate them.

These special features, and others, make the rising tide more difficult and chaotic. They are expressed in its jerky, meandering, character, proceeding in fits and starts, retreats interspersed with sudden rebounds. It carries on all the same, because it is often provoked and pushed forward by the greed and impatience of the bourgeoisie's attacks. They thus obviously and mutually reinforce each other. Driven back to the last ditch, the working class is forced to defend itself with every means at its disposal. But we must be on guard: Spontaneity has its limits!

Nevertheless, the tide is rising. It started in Africa. The revolutions which have unfolded in North Africa gave the signal. There was the massacre of the miners at Marikana which galvanised workers and activists who support them in South Africa, where the illusion in relation to the ANC is shattered, even if not finally put to rest. In Namibia, too, our comrades are conducting a large-scale and fruitful struggle at the heart of the Namibian working class which is busy organising and spreading its struggle.

Since the beginning of 2012 the working class of Europe has visibly redoubled its defensive struggle. It has even forced the union leaderships to adopt a more forthright fight in defence of its interests and resisting attacks, including repeated general strikes (which sadly entail their own powerful capacity to exhaust). All this in a number of European countries. As a whole, these struggles have disrupted the tranquillity of the so-called "partnership" on the part of trade unions. – Moreover, with much difficulty, lack of clarity and mal-formation, the working class has even been able to start a long struggle to rebuild its parties. That is the profound significance of the appearance of Die Linke, Syriza and the Front de Gauche.

#### **Party building has started**

In the midst of and because of the difficult and raw special features mentioned before, these formations are unlike the, as it were, conventional splits in the past. This renders these formations more limited and pragmatic, but also more receptive to the rising working-class tide (despite often very big differences between them). They are not homogenous organisations but coalitions of a variety of organisations, of breakaways from social democracy and from the exhausted and shrunken communist parties, as well as those coming from this or that organisation claiming allegiance to the Fourth International, as well as some groups of petit bourgeois. For all that, they are relatively stable coalitions rather than simple ad hoc blocs.

The fact that no single one of the organisations which have joined in the coalitions is able, taken separately, to project a convincing presence reflects the weighty

difficulties presented by the peculiar features of the present tide. But the other fact that they have achieved and maintain and develop their coalition attests to the existence and strength of the working-class tide.

They are at the beginning of a road which can lead to the emergence of revolutionary parties of the working class – as long as certain conditions are fulfilled. This start is embodied in the independent way they position themselves in relation to the bourgeoisie, and it is concentrated in their opposition to the latter's European policy.

It is a remarkable fact that in France the near majority of all organisations claiming adherence to Trotskyism (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, Lambertist Parti Ouvrier International, Lutte Ouvrière) are outside of and even opposed to the Front de Gauche coalition, while in Greece a far from negligible part has remained outside Syriza (to say nothing of the Stalinist KKE, and I am not sure of the situation in Die Linke in Germany). The fact remains that a terrible sectarianism, one of the as it were hereditary taints of pre-war Trotskyism, one of the factors at the root of the degeneration of the so-called Fourth International but also a fruit of this degeneration – against which Trotsky fought incessantly – condemns these organisations to stay outside this promising re-awakening of the working class. This refusal is not their only defect, but the refusal to get mixed up in the vulgar masses for fear of losing their (actually long-squandered) virginity has long ago become second nature to them.

This is what breathes life into and gives concrete meaning to our comrade's words when he says: "...the new rising tide of the international working class starting in 2011 is what is putting all groupings which claim to be Trotskyist to the test. If the working class was not defending itself as it does and was to go quietly to its doom, such groupings would have another lease of life with their glorious 'socialist' nostrums drawn from the previous period."

I shall not go into greater detail here on the Lambertists, Lutte Ouvrière, etc. It needs doing and I am sure other comrades will do it. But we must draw the general conclusion that through these conditions a concrete path has opened for building the revolutionary parties which have for so long been lacking, while the main body of those who claim to be Trotskyists have remained outside of them. – And that we can no longer remain passive in the face of this paradox.

But do be careful! This is only half the truth. It is only complete if we see and integrate into our conception that we are dealing with profoundly unstable coalitions which have not even got half way towards building revolutionary parties, even if we should not underestimate what has been achieved. To look just at the Front de Gauche (the other coalitions have more or less the same characteristics) we should view it politically as a centrist formation which, given its size and position could (and should) evolve towards a revolutionary party. Now the forces holding it back at its present stage are enormous, because none of the organisations of which it is composed have ever gone beyond this centrist stage at which they are stuck. The cause

and content of their centrism is to be found in the incomplete, unfinished character of their break with the bourgeoisie.

Vehement as it may be, their criticism is only directed against the so-called ultra-liberal version of bourgeois politics, against its attacks, but remains still within the limits of a kind of Keynesian policy – which is just as bourgeois. It also remains at a strictly national level. For the time being, all the organisations making up the Front de Gauche coalesce and reach mutual understanding within these two limitations. That is what constitutes their shared ideology, which might differ in detail inasmuch as a left Keynesian is different from a so-called classical Keynesian. (You can play the same tune in different ways.)

In this sense, the political line of Ch. Picquet's Gauche Unitaire (Unified Left), which split from the NPA, or the Gond faction which also broke away from the same NPA, only differ very slightly, or not at all, from Melançon's Parti de Gauche (Left Party). These former Trotskyists of ill repute have – rightly – joined the Front de Gauche, but in doing so they have – wrongly – completely adapted to its centrist (and in fact bourgeois) line.

The French Communist Party (PCF) is entirely controlled by the ex-Stalinist bureaucracy in the trade unions and local government, which sets its seal on its policies while the shrunken working class rank-and-file is kept at the back, as indeed it always was. This partly explains why on the one hand it has not been able to break completely with Hollande's social democracy (especially in view of local elections) and on the other the fact, as comrades have noted, "Communist workers find Mélançon more popular than their own central committee".

### **Sectarianism and opportunism**

In reality, the way in which so-called Trotskyist organisations react to a concrete opportunity opening up to forge a genuine workers' party provides a measure of how deeply they have degenerated. The vast majority of them line up on a sectarian position while a minority split away and joined the Front de Gauche, only to languish in opportunism. Probably the truth of the matter is what Trotsky said: the sectarians take that stance because they are scared that the possibilities offered by an opening will expose their opportunism.

In fact we are confronted here with the same basic problem that has faced the workers' movement from the outset: how are revolutionaries to relate to the class as a whole and its movement?

It is no coincidence that Marx and Engels twice (!) referred to this problem in the Communist Manifesto, once in the form of a general explanation that communists are not separate in any way from other proletarians but are distinguished by two essential elements: they represent (1) the international character of the movement and (2) its more distant general goals. In the second instance they go concretely into greater detail on these principles in relation to particular parties in specific countries. Nor was it a coincidence that Trotsky devoted two chapters of the *Transitional Programme* to the need to struggle against both

these scourges – sectarianism and opportunism. The whole of his fight for the Fourth International was entirely marked by this struggle in theory and practice. You only need to look at his works to see this – and to arm yourself against these evils. Moreover, he never stopped guiding the members of the International right through the 1930s not just in the struggle for the united class front but also to enter the social democratic parties, not to adapt to them and get infatuated with them, but to push them to go further towards socialism and strengthen the revolutionary party so that it would come out stronger in the case of a split.

It is particularly important to re-read the articles on the fusion of the French Trotskyists with Marcel Pivert's new party which broke away from Blum's social democratic party in 1938. One should think about Trotsky's letters (published in Pierre Broué's *Le Mouvement communiste en France*, Minuit 1967), even if the situation is different and the problems are raised in a different context, with different questions and different actors. So recognising the centrism in today's Front de Gauche does not at all mean thinking it is the same as the centrism of the 1930s.

The difference arises above all in the fundamental difference between the situation then and now. Then, the world was marching towards a coming war, and petrified centrism was condemned to explode very soon. Today, on the other hand, we are confronted with the impossibility of any return to Keynesian-type policies or any re-hash of them. The bourgeoisie simply are not able to do it. They are even forced to cut their military expenditure and the budget of their European venture. So they are obliged to pursue their austerity policies. Two consequences appear inevitable:

\* On the one hand, the masses of workers and working people will be obliged to fight back harder

\* On the other, in the short term, all centrists will be faced with a choice: surrender or advance.

### **On the question of programme**

In this context, the task of building the party in France, linked to rebuilding the Fourth International, will go by way of the unstinting support of Workers International members for the opening that Front de Gauche represents, which is part of and a significant stage in this process of reconstruction. It will also allow us to get to grips with the reconstruction of the Fourth International and link up with building the party by virtue concretely of the fact that it will make it easier for us to intervene with all those who claim allegiance to the Fourth International.

At the same time, and in the same way that we undertake the building of the revolutionary party in a manner closely connected to the concrete situation, i.e. as associates of the Front de Gauche, we should also in the same way approach our tasks and demands, in short the Transitional Programme.

Obviously our strategic orientation remains the proletarian revolution as a precondition for building socialism. This goal is supposedly shared by all organisations claiming allegiance to Trotskyism, from the Pabloite NPA to the Lambertist POI, by way of Lutte Ouvrière, the CWI's GR



and all the various factions in these organisation. But how to achieve it? That is the fundamental question and that is where all the differences emerge and stand out to the point that they actually obscure this general orientation.

Our comrade is 1,000 times right when he says that various organisations keep repeating their old nostrums for building the International and the same demands without understanding what either this work of building or the *Transitional Programme* actually mean. Concretely, this means that it is absolutely not enough to repeat mechanically a programme which was written in 1938 (not that that makes it outdated!).

In itself it is significant that centrists of every kind, including those who claim allegiance to the Fourth International, are mostly unable to explain openly, against all the desperate efforts of various wings and strands of the bourgeoisie to find and put forward endless remedies and “solutions” to repair a floundering bourgeois economy, that the one and only remedy is to move on to socialism by way of the overthrow of the capitalist system of ill repute. If certain organisations like the Lambertist POI or Lutte Ouvrière do put forward the socialist solution, it remains isolated from real living problems and remains suspended in mid-air. But even if most organisations do suggest something, it is very often a new recipe for “correcting” or “improving” the existing capitalist system, eked out at most with this or that old demand from the *Transitional Programme*. Even if these entirely retain their validity today, nonetheless, put there in themselves, they also become a version of a – maybe more radical – bourgeois “solution”, because they remain fixed and lose that essential thing, i.e. their character as a transition to socialism. I shall not refer to Trotsky’s many explanations on that score: how this programme acts as a bridge by mobilising the mass of the exploited to make it easier for them to understand the need to overthrow capitalism.

So it is easy to understand why we insist both on its concrete content, sticking close to reality, and on its merely “transitional” character. So it becomes clear why we need to adapt our old programme to the living, concrete requirements of today.

However, we must specify immediately that even without adapting it in that way, the main assertions of our *Transitional Programme*, and even most of the specific demands are still entirely valid. But here too, our task is to translate that into the language of today’s problems, so that it can immediately be read and understood by all workers here and now.

Everybody knows, for example, that although the USSR occupies an important position in this programme, it no longer exists. However, we should use even this “obsolete” part not just to formulate our demands against the weight and despotism of the workers’ bureaucracy, but simply in order to understand this bureaucracy and the Stalinist conceptions and reflexes which still prevail in a big part of it.

As a system, Stalinism is finished, but it still lives as a theoretical and practical heritage.

I believe another example is that it is no longer enough to repeat what the programme says about banks. Indeed, we need a whole series of demands over finance, in particular, debt (where the demand to cancel the debt is not enough to arouse a movement against it, but should have a transitional character aiming at this outcome, the essential point of which is to mobilise working people). Similar problems arise over Europe, where the – still correct – call for a United Workers’ (or Socialist) States of Europe as such is not sufficiently rooted in the concrete and immediate questions of the day. (I have attempted to approach these problems in my articles through demands for a public investigation into the debt and a struggle for a Working Peoples’ Europe.)

Adapting our programme properly is not a matter of scratching our heads to make up this or that demand, but of laying hold of those which have arisen in the course of the struggle, either spontaneously or brought in by some other organisation. Most demands of this kind are around already. (Let us not forget that in 1917 the Bolshevik Party, lacking a worked-out peasant policy, simply adopted that of the Left Social Revolutionaries.) So we take hold of those which are already going around as demands. Not all of them, obviously, but those which, like the *Transitional Programme*, have the capacity to mobilise working people. Generally speaking we do not repeat them as they exist formally, but give them the character of class mobilisers (which is the essential point about the *Transitional Programme*) which point the way to socialism.

I think a good example is the struggle Mélançon has launched for a Sixth Republic. Look how the revisionist fake Trotskyists reacted! A comrade called Yvan Lemaître (probably in the NPA) wrote an article criticising another article by comrade George Kaldy (Lutte Ouvrière) in which the latter announced that his organisation would not join in the demonstration called by Mélançon. Lemaître (like the NPA) declared in favour of the demonstration, but squarely asserted in the article that, like Kaldy, “we do not share the position of Mélançon and the PCF (Parti Communiste Français) on the Sixth Republic ...” Here you can see very well the completely negative, not to say harmful attitude these two organisations have, which very well expresses the sclerotic state they are in.

Obviously you could take this slogan as it stands as a call for a return to a possibly “improved” Fourth Republic, which is probably what all the inveterate centrists think (including many leaders of the PCF). Others who think Mélançon is a bit of a pin-up figure may just see this slogan as one of his catchphrases. In my view, a Marxist ought to take up this demand and provide it with a quite different content and meaning. For us, a Sixth Republic should be and will be a workers’ republic crowing a victorious struggle against the bourgeoisie. In this sense it has the same algebraic quality that a workers’ and peasants’ government had for Trotsky (and still has for us). The dynamics of the struggle will provide the exact detail and content of this republic.

Another example has appeared most recently in Great Britain, where the central trade union force rallying a left

alliance has rightly adopted the demand for the re-establishment of the welfare state practically liquidated by the bourgeois offensive.

Of course it cannot be re-established, but it is up to us Marxists to explain that we think that there has to be a struggle for a real, actual welfare state, i.e. a workers' and socialist one!

We must keep working in this area and further enrich our arsenal of demands, bringing them together in order to point them all in the direction of the socialist revolution, as a great bridge towards it, never losing sight of their fundamental and essential content, which is to mobilise the working masses to fulfil their work of emancipation. To sum up: in every organisation listed above, their centrist politics is clearly marked by three major defects:

a. Either they repeat their ultimate aim of socialism, but without any real link (apart from empty assertions) between these distant goals and today's concrete tasks and demands.

b. Or they put forward these current and concrete demands drawn also from our *Transitional Programme* (but not updating it), but remain stuck at this level and do not dare argue for socialism. They forget that these demands are only a bridge which is meant to cross the river to socialism.

c. They have no opening for building / rebuilding the Fourth International. In the best case, they poach individual members one by one while squabbling with other centrist groups, convinced that they have already built (or rebuilt) the true Fourth International. In the worst cases, they do not even have any such prospect, and some of them throw it all overboard and opt for a Fifth International (whatever that may be).

**Balazs Nagy, June 2013**

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### **On the question of slanders:**

# **Warning:**

It is with some surprise, mixed with indignation, that we note the protest (3 May 2013) signed by Raymond Clavier and others against the slanders a certain Imsirovic uttered against ourselves (see *WIRFI Bulletin* December 2012).

The reason we are indignant is that the signatories of this protest stuck the name of Pierre Broué together with the slanderers Lambert and Just. This is not acceptable, since Pierre Broué is actually the only one of the former leaders of Lambert's party to have clearly dissociated himself from these slanders.

On 29 November 1993 the Secretariat of Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International adopted a statement (published in its journal *The International* No. 14 of February 1994). There one can read, among other things, "Pierre Broué earlier in 1993 made a public condemnation of the slanders against Comrade Balazs Nagy by Lambert and his organisation ... (previously) we believed and stated that Pierre Broué agreed with the slanders, sharing responsibility for them with Lambert and Just".

This is very clear and precise. However, we see among the signatories of the recent protest, which ranks Broué among the slanderers, at least three people (Slaughter, Pirani, Borovi) who participated in drawing up the document

quoted above. It is true that they subsequently stated that they had lost confidence in Marxism and the Fourth International, and our ways parted. But changing one's point of view to this extent goes far beyond political differences and turns these signatories themselves into slanderers.

Particularly since, when we learnt that this protest was under preparation, we firmly condemned (in a letter from Comrade R.Pavlovic to R.Clavier) the creation of this amalgam between Broué and the slanderers and asked him to remove Broué's name before the document was published. The only response has been that they have persevered in and published their slander.

We have a complete right to wonder what they are trying to achieve. What purpose does it serve to deny the truth in this way?

Be that as it may, we insist that the Pierre Broué's name is withdrawn from this document and that the mistake is explained publicly. That is the least that can be done. Should they refuse, we state that we do not accept being "defended" by people who themselves are uttering a slander.

**Balazs Nagy and Radoslav Pavlovic  
20 June 2013**