The lies about the debt p8-9

Racism in Britain today p12

Anti cuts movement p6-7

workers power 5.

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Monthly paper of the British section of the League for the Fifth International

SAVE THE NHS

Lansley wants to destroy the NHS – stop him now!

John Bowman

ANDREW LANSLEY'S NHS and Social Care Bill is a fraud. It's no exaggeration to say that it will destroy the NHS as we know it – letting privatisation rip the heart out of our health service.

There is no honesty in how it's presented. The Lansley strategy is pernicious. He has bombarded us with jargon and doublespeak – "consortia", "pathfinding", "Monitor", "foundation trusts", "social enterprises" – designed to cover up the real intentions of his policy.

But despite this campaign of misinformation huge numbers of people are seeing through the lies. Patient groups and service users are angry – over a quarter of a million people have put their names to an online petition against these so-called "reforms".

The Royal College of Nursing – not a union known for its radicalism – passed a motion of "no confidence" in Andrew Lansley and condemned his plans. The British Medical Association, whose doctors are supposed to be behind Lansley's reforms, have proposed over 100 amendments to the bill, and called for it to be withdrawn at its first-ever emergency conference called to discuss the plans.

It's time to kill the bill

Does the bill give power to GPs? No, it puts in place a dangerous conflict of interest.

Currently, when you go to your GP, they will assess your medical condition and refer you to the hospital or service which best suits your case. Your local Primary Care Trust. looks at county or borough-wide medical services to see which treatment centres have vacancies, whether you can have care at home, or in a community-based hospital, and allocate payment to those services for the care they provide to you. PCTs are state owned and funded and are currently

…continued on page 2

Battle for Libya rages on

FIERCE FIGHTING continues across Libya as the revolutionaries struggle to bring down Gaddafi's regime.

Rebel fighters, mostly a hastily assembled militia of men who only 8 weeks ago were shepherds, engineers and students, are fighting against Gaddafi's well armed and trained mercenary force. The rebel held city of Misrata has seen fierce fighting, street by street, house by house as the fate of Libya is decided by arms in front of the worlds media. The rebels are battling Gadaffi's snipers who were trained and armed by the British up to a year ago, while Grad rockets and banned cluster bombs rain down indiscriminately on schools and markets.

Nato's supposed humanitarian intervention has done nothing to protect them. Rebel fighters, medics and journalists think as many as a thousand people have died in the siege of Misrata alone.

But still the revolutionaries will not be bowed. Even without Nato help, the rebels are holding their own. Gadaffi admitted as much when he threatened to bring in tribal loyalists to boost army forces. The truth is, the dictator cannot suppress the popular revolution.

To understand why Libyans are so prepared to die for their cause, listen to how one Benghazi resident spelt out what the revolution meant for him: "This is total freedom. Before, somebody was in charge – really in charge – of everything. Now we can do whatever we want, and it means nobody is in charge and we are discovering the meaning and the borders of freedom."

The fake "humanitarian" intervention by the Western powers, however, threatens to strangle the revolution. In the first month of the revolution they refused to send arms to the rebels. Now military special forces from Britain, France and Italy have been sent to train the

…continued on page 11

The editorial SIMON HARDY

Strike against the coalition's cuts

THERE HAVE been two events in the last few months which have shown that we have the power to beat the government. The first was when the students occupied the Tory HQ at Millbank. The second was the mass demonstration on March 26. It proved that there is a mass movement against cuts here in Britain, as over half a million people joined the TUC demonstration in a magnificent show of anger and determination to fight.

Our resistance must now step up a gear and move from mass protest, to resistance at every level, in every workplace, in every town and city. We must take these steps, for the simple reason that what we stand to lose if we don't fight today is enormous.

This isn't just about a single service or a particular attack on jobs and conditions. We are faced with a historic offensive on working people: devastating cuts rolling back the welfare system to its bare bones, a huge programme of privatisation, including the wholesale marketisation of the NHS.

Now our movement faces a tremendous challenge. Cameron and Clegg think that workers won't dare to fight, but they are taking a tremendous risk. By attacking the whole public sector at once they are forcing workers and service users to unite in a mass campaign. By letting the axe fall on jobs, slashing our pensions, and cutting pay, they are forcing our unions to unite too.

The movement is growing

Some say that the unions are weaker today than they were in the 1970s and 80s. But we can build a powerful union movement in the process of fighting the cuts, through rank and file organisations and anti cuts committees that can link up the struggles across unions and draw in wider support from everyone who wants to fight the cuts. Strong rank and file organisation, a powerful and determined industrial struggle culminating in a general strike, and a huge social movement linking the workplace to communities and service users can together bring down the government.

Today, the Tories are weak – they don't have the support they had in the 1980s - they are in an unstable coalition, and they fear the power that working people have to stop their plans.

They know the danger of attacking too much at once, and they know the NHS will be a key battle ground. That's why the Tories have started to beat a retreat on some of the vicious health reforms by suspending the vote on the Bill for "further consultation".

Many unions are now discussing co-ordinating industrial action against the attacks on pensions and both the journalists union and the teachers in the NUT have backed calls for a one day public sector general strike. That's a start. It shows mass industrial action is possible, lifting the confidence of workers to resist, and getting the ball rolling for further strikes. But we must have no illusions that one or two days of strike action will force a retreat from this government. Readers will find Dave Stockton's article on the 1926 general strike useful as a lesson in militancy and how the Trade Union leaders can sell out these struggles.

Debates on strategy in the movement are inevitable – but we need to be clear now that we have to build a movement to win and that means bringing the government down. The Tories and the Liberals have staked their political lives on these reforms, stopping their plans means defeating the entire ruling class agenda. Dave Prentis on Unison said on 26 March, "We should march in our thousands and vote in our millions." But we can't wait to simply re-elect a Labour government to carry out "fairer cuts" in four years time after our welfare system has been decimated by the Tories. We have to fight to win now.

Lansley bill will destroy the NHS – stop him now!

...continued from page 1

responsible for 80 per cent of the health budget.

This won't be the case by March 2013 if Lansley has his way. PCTs will be abolished, and their administrative responsibility will be taken over by GP "Consortia". GP surgeries are being asked to group together into these "consortia" which will then have control of the NHS budget and use this money to purchase these services directly, transferring care administration – and crucially responsibility for the budget – to your doctors.

When GPs refer a patient, we trust them to recommend the best care for us, based upon their medical expertise, and only that – they are committed to our health, not required to balance the books or create a profit.

That's what Lansley's bill would change. Now GPs won't just be charged with recommending the best treatment for you, they will have to balance their medical opinion against the financial priorities of the consortium and its budget. It's a dangerous concoction – combining medical opinion with financial priority.

Just think of the kind of decisions your local GP might make for you towards the end of the financial year if cash is running short. With £20 billion planned in "efficiency" cuts to the NHS budget by 2014 under the Tories' plans too, the focus on healthcare will be lost completely.

Private companies

And really it won't even be GPs themselves administering the budget; they are too busy seeing patients 9 to 5. They will have to outsource it. They can't outsource care administration to the PCTs, because under Lansley's bill they won't exist. Instead GP consortiums will need to spend their budgets paying private healthcare companies like United Health to decide where, or if you should be treated.

They will be tasked with saving money, they will be in competition with the NHS and public healthcare, and they will allocate care not on the basis of need, but on the basis of how to save costs and maximise their profit.

When the amount of budget control these private companies will have is taken into account, this will result in a huge, almost total privatisation of healthcare administration and the healthcare budget.

Whilst PCTs are far from perfect, they are publicly owned and run and the NHS budget remains under state control while in their hands. They are to a degree accountable to the public, having to publish minutes and allow access to their meetings. Companies like United Health, the second largest health insurer in the US, operate under a veil of business secrecy, will be unaccountable to the public.

NHS hospitals to close

Healthcare can be allocated to "any willing provider" under Lansley's scheme, including private companies. The definition of "willing provider" is suitably vague to allow any dodgy private firm to compete for healthcare services.

The private companies will attempt to win contracts by making themselves cheap – using less experienced staff, but also charging below-cost prices to win the contracts in the first instance, causing public NHS services to become financially unviable, and "go bust". Then they can then raise prices, and cut standards in future years to make large profits, and drive down the quality of care in the longer term.

They even have a word for this vicious policy – "loss leading": a company prepares to make losses in the first few years, drives NHS hospitals and services out of business (that's your local hospital that could be forced to close or "downsize"), then reap the benefits thereafter.

Even if NHS hospitals can survive cut throat market competition it will still hit services. They will be forced to cut staff and reduce services as competition will create more and more pressure to cut budgets. The conflict between providing cheap "competitive" treatment and having experienced medical staff and good quality care will intensify.

The real agenda

The reforms are not about improving patient care, they are to privatise public healthcare on an unprecedented scale to boost private profits. Under the cover of an economic crisis, the Tories are trying to deliver their historic goal of breaking up the NHS for good.

It turns the idea of state run public services on its head – the taxpayer just ends up buying services from semi-state bodies or private companies. But it also puts the infrastructure in place to remove the taxpayer from the equation completely, leaving people to buy their own health care from insurance companies and abolishing free universal healthcare provision for good.

There is so much at stake – but the Tories are on the backfoot. They fear a battle with a mass movement and their "consultation" is aimed at dividing the opposition.

But if we fight together – workers, patients, everyone – there is no doubt we can win this one.

Health unions prepare to strike

The Royal College of Nursing is considering industrial action for the first time in its history over pay. The British Medical Association called Lansley's reforms "dangerous." And Unite's health executive fumed at its national meeting, setting the ball rolling for strikes over pensions.

Workers are furious at the threat hanging over our health service – it's the Lansley regime that is squarely responsible for the moves towards strikes. Now we must demand the unions unite in a mass campaign of strikes, protest and civil disobedience.

Andrew Lansley: Thatcher's man who's out to kill the NHS

BORN IN Essex, and son of a pathologist, Lansley's first taste of politics came at the university of Exeter where he won a close battle to become president of the student guild against a communist candidate, securing support from Tory, Labour, and Lib Dem students.

After the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, he quickly sided with the hard-right of the Conservative Party, joining the Department of Trade and Industry as a civil servant.

In 1984, the year of the great miners' strike, Lansley became Principal Private Secretary to Norman Tebbit, who was secretary of state for Trade and Industry. Tebbit was Thatcher's right-hand man responsible for ruining working class communities, closing down the mines and launching a war against the poor. The poverty and unemployment caused by that policy are still felt in ex-mining towns across Britain today.

Tebbit's ongoing war against trade unions made him a hero in Lansley's eyes, and persuaded him to become a Tory politician.

After 1990 and the anti-Poll Tax movement, Andrew Lansley believed that the Tories should have stuck with Thatcher and her policies – he was against the party ousting her in a desperate bid to restore their popularity. He still believes they should have stuck with the "Iron Lady" to this day.

Nevertheless he played a key role in John Major's victory in the 1992 election, which many believed could have been won by Labour. For this he received a CBE, a reward for service to "Queen and Country" which Lansley described as his "proudest moment."

Nowadays, Lansley prefers not to dwell on his anti-union Thatcherite past. His official website says, "Coming from a public service family, he is committing to improving the NHS for everyone." It's a re-write of history if ever there was one.

Lansley got his political training in the most vicious anti-working class government this country has ever seen – and now he is back to finish off what Thatcher started, indeed what she never achieved: the destruction of the NHS.

Lansley: carving up our NHS

Who wants privatisation?

GIANT MEDICAL and outsourcing companies are salivating at the prospect of getting lucrative contracts for NHS healthcare. That's why private health bosses donated £750,000 to David Cameron's 2010 election campaign. Now they are hoping their loyalty will be rewarded with the passing of Health Secretary Andrew Lansley's NHS and Social Care Bill.

Company: *Norbrook Laboratories*
CEO: *Eddie Haughey aka. Lord Ballyedmond*

Haughey is the richest man in Northern Ireland with a fortune of £370 million. Owner of Corby Castle and its surrounding estates, Haughey gave the Tories a personal donation of £50,000 for the general election.

His company, Norbrook primarily makes drugs for animals, with factories on four continents, but since 1999 it has been "aggressively expanding growth opportunities for new developments in private healthcare".

Company: *The Priory Group*
CEO: *Philip Scott*

The Priory Group is most famous for it's private re-hab clinic, treating stars such as Kate Moss and Amy Winehouse. But over 77 per cent of its profits already come from the NHS. Last month it merged with Craegmoor to boost its numbers of old peoples' homes and mental healthcare hospitals.

The Priory Group expects to do well out of GPs contracting out services. "We expect to become the partner of choice for many of the new commissioning entities," a spokesman said.

Philip Scott gave £20,000 to the Tories, and the previous owner, Chai Patel was at the centre of the cash-for-honours scandal, lending £1.5 million to Labour and being rewarded with a nomination to the House of Lords by Tony Blair – only blocked by the ensuing scandal.

Company: *Care UK*
CEO: *John Nash*

Nash, former chair of the Venture Capital Association, and his wife have donated hundreds of thousands to the Tories over many years, but sparked particular outrage by donating £21,000 to Andrew Lansley's private office.

Care UK was quickly and handsomely rewarded with a £53 million contract to run healthcare in Britain's prisons in the North East.

And the company was doing well out of taxpayers even before this, making 96 per cent of its money through NHS contracts – in particular walk-in centres and treatment centres built during Labour's time in office.

Company: *TLC Group*
CEO: *Dolar Popat*

A life-long Tory peer in the House of Lords, Popat is a millionaire and chair of TLC, which owns many private elderly care homes. He has given the Tories £209,000 out of his £42 million fortune, and gave them an extra £25,000 one week after the healthcare Bill was published.

TLC has undergone rapid expansion in the Republic of Ireland, and has been criticised for serious understaffing.

New Health Worker Network Launched

Mark Booth

HEALTH WORKERS have formed a new rank and file network to stop the attacks on the NHS. NHS staff are dedicated to the services we provide. Many of us didn't get into this for the money – in the case of nurses certainly not!

We've been struggling for years and years to care for people in the face of ever more difficult conditions, far higher workloads and less pay. Being on the frontline, we often take the blame when things go wrong, but usually it's not our fault.

When politicians talk about cutting back on the NHS, but protecting frontline services, there's no truth in it at all.

The leadership of the main healthworkers' union, Unison, has let this happen for far too long, but will not launch the kind of fight we need against Lansley's big sell off.

Health Worker Network will fight to force our union leadership to take action, and organise to act independently when they don't.

We want healthworkers to unite with everyone who uses the NHS, because our interests are the same. We've produced a bulletin that we distribute round the hospitals, and want as many health workers as possible to get involved.

You can download it from: **www.healthworkernetwork.co.uk**

HIGHLIGHTS

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May 1926: when workers stopped the country

Dave Stockton

AT A TIME when we are facing a major offensive on workers' gains and the union movement, the 85th anniversary of the 1926 general strike is a good opportunity to review its lessons for us today.

It's not just an example of the power of mass workers' action, but also shows the critical importance of leadership, and the necessity to build up an alternative rank and file controlled centre of power to the official structures of the trade union leaderships, whether right or left.

Here we look back at the heroism of the strikers and their leaders' betrayal.

On 30 June 1925, the owners of Britain's coal industry abruptly terminated all existing wage agreements with the 900,000 strong Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) and unilaterally cut their pay. The response of the union and its recently elected militant secretary Arthur James Cook was the slogan: "Not a penny off the pay, not a minute on the day".

The Trades Union Congress – which over the preceding year or so had moved to the left – announced that it would call solidarity strike action. Unprepared for a general strike, the Conservative government of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin retreated. It announced a nine-month government subsidy to miners' wages and a Royal Commission to discuss the future of the industry. The MFGB was pressing for all the pits to be nationalised.

The workers' movement called this victory "Red Friday". It demonstrated the power of workers' solidarity. But instead of using the breathing space to prepare for the inevitable counterattack the union leaders did nothing. The government and employers at once began preparations.

The country was divided into 10 districts, each under a "Special Commissioner". The Tories strengthened the army and police, creating a Civil Constabulary reserve made up of ex-soldiers. They set up the Organisation for Maintenance of Supplies (OMS) – a strike-breaking organisation to run the rail and road supply system. A State of Emergency would be declared, which suspended many constitutional liberties. In October 1925, a police raid resulted in the arrest of 12 of the top leaders of the Communist Party (CP) and their sentencing to between six and nine months in prison.

The lack of action from the TUC General Council was the more outrageous in that it contained a sizeable left wing. The miners' leader, A J Cook, together with TUC president George Hicks and builders' and engineers' leaders A.A. Purcell and Alonso Swales enjoyed the support of many workers as they argued a militant line. But most of these lefts were, as Leon Trotsky commented, radical in words rather than deeds.

It was left to the rank and file, organised in the Communist-led Minority Movement, to prepare from below. On the eve of the general strike, the Minority Movement was able to hold a conference of delegates from 547 union bodies, representing 957,000 workers.

At this conference and throughout the general strike, the Communist Party correctly called for the setting up of local councils of action to organise and politically lead the strike. It also fought for workers' defence of picket lines and strikers against the expected violence from fascists, upper class scabherders and the state.

But while these policies were correct, the fatal weakness of the CP's policy lay in its attitude to the union leaders. It did not warn workers of the unreliability of the lefts as it did warn of the treachery of the main right wingers like Jimmy Thomas of the rail workers.

The leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Communist International under Joseph Stalin and Nicolai Bukharin, in pursuit of their policy of building socialism in one country, had abandoned the practice of international revolution in favour of seeking allies in the reformist parties and trade unions of the imperialist countries. In Britain this took the form of the "Anglo Russian Committee" (ARC) – an alliance struck between the Russian and British trade union leaders.

Before and during the general strike the CP's slogan – "All Power to the General Council" – disarmed and confused the militants, leaving them unprepared for the sell out.

The miners' leader, A J Cook, speaking during the 1926 general strike

Nor was there any warning that the left leaders would not fight a betrayal by the right wing.

Trotsky had outlined an alternative to this disastrous policy and warned in advance that the left leaders would vacillate and betray. But with a campaign against "Trotskyism" in full swing, his warnings were either suppressed or construed as "sabotage" because they undermined the ARC.

This all meant that the CP found itself tied to the left wing of the bureaucracy precisely at the moment when it needed to lead the Minority Movement in offering an independent fighting policy that could win the strike.

Employers' offensive

In March 1926 the Tories went onto the offensive. The Royal Commission proposed scrapping subsidies to the coal industry, a measure that would immediately result in massive wage cuts and job losses. If it went ahead it could pave the way to similar cuts in other industries.

A J Cook, Herbert Smith and the MFGB leadership rejected the proposals and declared themselves ready to strike. The TUC once again pledged to support the miners.

But open right-wingers on the General Council, like Jimmy Thomas and leaders more in centre, like Ernest Bevin of the Transport and General Workers Union, dominated the TUC's negotiating committee. In an attempt to avert the crisis the union lefts effectively ceded leadership to these two, dispatching Thomas on his famous trip to Downing Street to "beg and plead" for a compromise. The support for a general strike was tied to the miners' acceptance that the TUC would negotiate for them – a fatal error. Thomas feared that a general strike could lead to revolution – the last thing the reformists wanted. He even stated openly; "the state must win on an issue like this..."

But the miners were already facing a lock out by the mine owners when the printers at the *Daily Mail* refused to typeset an editorial "For King and Country" which declared: "A general strike is not an industrial dispute. It is a revolutionary move which can only succeed by destroying the government and subverting the rights and liberties of the people."

The government at once broke off negotiations, saying there would be no further talks unless the threat of a general strike was unconditionally called off.

The lock out and the pressure from below effectively forced the trembling TUC leaders to call the general strike.

Despite the weakness of the leadership the response from the ranks was immediate, solid and overwhelming. Yet even now the TUC did not call out all workers but a first wave of some 1.5 – 1.75 million workers: railwaymen, transport workers and dockers, printers, iron and steel workers. To coordinate the strikes at local level the TUC called for councils of action to be formed.

Workers' power

In the absence of a printed press and the BBC's total support for the government, local strike bulletins mushroomed. The councils gathered delegates from every type of workers' organisation. Some of them became real centres of embryonic working class control, like the "soviets" which had taken power in Russia in 1917.

The most effective of them organised themselves into separate "Commissariats". They distributed food and organised workers transport, issuing permits to move food, supplies, etc. They organised workers' defence units to protect supplies and to stop police and the middle class and university student OMS strikebreakers attacking pickets. They produced trade union bulletins and papers to counter the propaganda of Winston Churchill's anti-strike paper *The British Gazette*. The TUC's daily paper, *The British Worker*, reached a circulation of one million by the end of the strike.

Mass pickets were organised to stop strike breaking at strategic workplaces and on the roads to the docks where the OMS, police or the army had taken over.

In the Fife coalfield, in Scotland, the trades council formed a workers' defence corps. A member of the Fife council of action wrote: "The organisation worked like clockwork. Everything was stopped – even the railway lines were picketed... After police charges on mass pickets, the defence corps, which 150 workers had joined at the outset, was reorganised. Numbers rose to 700, of whom 400 marched in military formation through the town to protect the picket. The police did not interfere again."

Throughout the country the strike was gaining strength. In contrast the union leaders were desperate to find a way out. General and Municipal Workers Union leader, Charles Dukes expressed their fears: "Every day the strike proceeded, the control and the authority was passing out of the hands of responsible executives into the hands of men who had no authority, no control." A revolutionary situation was developing. The strike did not just call into question the survival of the government; it called into question the survival of the system.

Betrayal

What was urgently needed was for the Communist Party to actively push this development towards its natural conclusion – the formation of a revolutionary workers' government. This would have entailed preparing the workers for seizing power and smashing the obstacles that stood in their way – namely the police, the OMS and the army.

But the Communist Party failed to challenge the hold Hicks and Purcell had over the most advanced workers. And as the strike continued, these lefts ran for cover behind the coat tails of Bevin and Thomas. They negotiated a deal with Lord Samuel, the chair of the Royal Commission, behind the backs of the miners' leaders. It required the miners to accept both wage cuts and a lengthening of the working day.

When the MFGB refused, the TUC leaders set out to call off the strike on the basis of what they thought was their deal. It required only a High Court judge to declare that a general strike was not a trades dispute, thus opening unions up to prosecution by employers, to knock what wind remained in the union leaders' sails out of them. This applied equally to the left leaders as it did to the right. There was, they thought, no alternative but – in the words of TUC secretary Walter Citrine – to "hand ourselves over body and soul to Baldwin."

There was, of course, no deal that Baldwin would recognise and he repeated his refusal to negotiate until the general strike was called off. On 12 May, only nine days into the strike, the TUC leaders Pugh, Thomas and Bevin delivered their unconditional surrender to the Cabinet.

Lord Birkenhead, one of the Tory hard liners, remarked that the TUC envoys surrender was "so humiliating that some instinctive breeding made one unwilling even to look at them."

The TUC lefts stayed silent. Even A. J. Cook, general secretary of the miners, refused to go over the heads of the TUC and call for continuation of the action from below. Yet the workers themselves showed no signs of wanting to retreat. On the day after it was called off 100,000 more workers came out on strike.

Thomas and Bevin soon found that the railway companies would not take back strikers without cuts in wages and victimisation of militants. They were forced to sanction national strikes to protest their members. Angry demonstrations denounced the TUC's sell out. The Merseyside Council of Action tried to continue the strike but the Communist Party and the Minority Movement (despite the heroism of their militants at local level) did not try to organise a break from the surrender of the TUC and the continuation of the strike. After several days of tumult and confusion workers bitterly returned to work. In the end the miners were left to fight alone till October. Starvation and TUC enforced isolation led to a terrible defeat for them which it took decades to recover from.

The Communist Party too failed to learn from the defeat. Indeed Stalin's faction rushed to cover it up. They criticised the right wing of the labour movement and even chided the left-wing allies but at the same time they maintained their alliance with the TUC strikebreakers in the Anglo-Russian Committee. They fiercely attacked Trotsky for his criticisms and the demand that the Russian trade unions should publicly break with the traitors in full view of the working class.

Lessons

The positive experience of the general strike – the impressive solidarity and high morale of the strikers, the self-organisation of working class communities, the fighting democracy of the councils and of action – can and should inspire us today. But the negative lessons are just as important.

Workers prevent a tram driven by a scab from moving in London

The government recognised its political character, its character as a class struggle, indeed as civil war, and it organised accordingly. Warships were even sent to the Clyde and the Mersey. Civil rights were suspended, communists arrested and the middle classes mobilised.

But the general strike was defeated not because the forces of the state were stronger than the working class, nor because the rank and file gave in, but because the union leaders were faced with a choice: the survival of capitalism or the fight for workers' power.

If the TUC had not surrendered or been able to enforce its surrender, then a fully revolutionary situation would have emerged. It was the duty of the Communist Party to prepare and mobilise for this with all its strength.

The Communist Party, existed to provide an alternative strategy to the union bureaucrats and at the critical moment to rally an alternative leadership for the struggle, treated the dispute as a trade union rather than a political conflict, subordinating itself and the Minority Movement to the left leaders who duly subordinated themselves to the right. To no one's surprise the right surrendered to Baldwin and the Tories.

Trotsky accurately summed up the situation: "The entire present 'superstructure' of the British working class in all its shades and groups without exception is an apparatus for putting a brake on the revolution."

The defeat of the general strike and the miners was a massive set back for the British workers. Thousands of militants were victimised and wages slashed. General strikes were outlawed. The unions lost millions of members as the whole movement retreated after this strategic defeat of the working class.

The conclusion that the union leaders drew was "never again". But a general strike is not simply a tactical option to be used or not according to taste but something that was forced by the actions of the ruling class.

Leadership

The main lessons of 1926 is that it shows how a general strike can certainly be necessary for victory when faced with a decisive offensive on the working class, but that it won't in itself be sufficient. Taking hold of the opportunity such a mass strike presents, however, requires firm and unflinching leadership along with democratic control of the movement from below.

Building up rank and file organisation, that firmly controls the movement – taking it out of the hands of the bureaucratic "superstructure" Trotsky condemned as the dead hand on the revolution and putting it in the hands of the workers – is crucial to victory. We can march with them when they fight but must be ready to continue the struggle and oust them when they betray.

Britain's General Strike is also a magnificent example of the revolutionary power of the working class.

It shows that in a critical conjuncture, like the one that developed in 1926, the contradictions inherent in the capitalist system are stretched to breaking point, and at this moment greater tasks are posed – unless the workers go forward to seize power, then they can be thrown backwards into defeat and demoralisation. Next time an opportunity like this presents itself, communists must learn the lessons of 1926 and seize it with both hands.

Lessons of the Anglo Russian Committee

THE ANGLO Russian Trade Union Committee was formed at a conference in London in April 1925, on the initiative of the Council of the Soviet Trade Unions with the official support of the British TUC. Prominent on the General Council at this time were the lefts, Alfred Purcell of the Furniture Workers, Alonzo Swales of the Engineers and George Hicks of the Building Trade Workers.

The Committee's aims were to reunite the Amsterdam-based International Federation of Trade Unions and the Moscow Based Red International of Labour Unions, to wage a struggle against the preparations of the major world powers for a war with the Soviet Union, and to struggle against the ongoing capitalist offensive against the working class.

These were all entirely correct positions – indeed, developing these kinds of links, the international solidarity they involved, were crucial to protect the Soviet Union and to foster revolutionary developments outside its borders. But in its development the Committee increasingly resembled a non-aggression pact between two bureaucracies: the one that was slowly ensnaring the Soviet Union, and the British TUC's hold on the working class.

The Committee lent a militant prestige to these leaders in the eyes of a leftward moving trade union rank and file. They also hovered around the fringes of the Minority Movement and the Communist Party praised them lavishly in its publications.

Yet in 1926 they played no role in opposing the right wing betrayal. If in its immediate aftermath the Soviet trade unions had broken off its relations with the TUC in the ARC this would have had a powerful impact in the British trade unions.

Instead it was not till September 1927 that the General Council itself broke up the Anglo-Russian Unity Committee in support of Baldwin's breaking off of diplomatic relations with the USSR. Thus even the pretext of "defending the USSR" was shown to be an empty sham.

How can we unite the anti-cuts movement?

With a number of trade unions lining up to strike together against the coalition government's attacks, there is a burning need to unite all existing anti-cuts campaigns into an all-Britain anti-cuts federation, writes **Joy Macready**

Socialist youth group Revolution on the TUC's March for the Alternative protest

THE MASS strikes on the horizon are a major opportunity to strike a decisive blow against the Tories, and can mark a turning point in the fight against cuts.

They present an opportunity to the just short of 200 anti-cuts groups that have been set up in every locality, from Aberdeen Against Austerity to the Cornwall Anti-cuts Alliance, to combine the direct action and community-based protests that many groups have successfully held, with industrial action too.

Local anti-cuts groups can help to coordinate the actions of different sections of workers, by building cross-union networks of activists, and linking them with the local community.

By doing this, striking workers have the confidence that local communities and service users are on their side, while local communities have the most powerful weapon of protest– strike action – backing up their campaigns.

If we can do this locally, and many anti-cuts groups are, then why not nationally?

The answer is that we can – and we must – by building an all-Britain anti-cuts federation that can link up and coordinate our actions nationwide, and become an organising centre for the struggle against the government. Yet today we are faced with several competing national anti-cuts campaigns. How can we unite them?

National campaigns

Out of the three main national anti-cuts campaigns, two of them are strongly associated with Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party: the National Shop Stewards Network, and the Right to Work campaign respectively. The other major campaign is the Coalition of Resistance. All these campaigns have their strengths, and also their weaknesses.

The Right to Work Campaign is perhaps the most radical of the campaigns, and calls for a general strike to bring down the Tories. It is dominated and run by the SWP, and because of this has never really managed to bring in forces outside of the party and its existing periphery. When the potential to establish a broader alliance presented itself, in the form of the Coalition of Resistance appeal, the SWP held back, arguing that the focus should be on existing campaigns, "such as Right to Work".

The competition with the Coalition of Resistance (set up in the first instance by Counterfire and its supporters within the Stop the War Coalition, but later joined by a number of other left groups, campaigns, and the Unite union), led the two campaigns to sign a "non-aggression pact" so they would avoid clashing meetings and holding events too close together.

Of course, there was nothing wrong with this in principle, if it was a step towards a fully united campaign. The danger with the so-called "pact", is that it doesn't take us any closer to this, but does mean that the SWP, on the one hand, can continue to build their own campaign, and on the other hand means that the leadership of the Coalition of Resistance isn't challenged by the more radical positions of Right to Work / SWP in the context of a national, united movement.

Coalition of Resistance's growing profile in the anti-movement, spreading a strong "stop the cuts" message on the TUC demonstration, and bringing on board different forces are certainly big strengths. But it has not yet developed a perspective for drawing in and becoming an organising centre for the local anti-cuts groups, or assertively pushing for the unity we need in the movement.

At the COR conference we will be arguing for an open meeting for all the anti cuts committees and organisations in the country to come together and for a delegate based federation.

The National Shop Stewards Network has links to many industrial workers, shop-stewards and trade union activists. But under the stewardship of the Socialist Party it has been sectarian towards the other national anti-cuts campaigns, refusing to unite with them and has an uncritical relationship with middle-ranking trade union officials. It is important that any anti-cuts campaign does bring in local and national trade union leaders, and their members, to build the strongest anti-cuts coalition. But socialists must be free to criticise union leaders and officials when they duck the fight or hold back action.

The National Shop Stewards Network suffered a split when the Socialist Party forced through a motion to form a new national anti-cuts campaign at their conference last year, in opposition to all the existing anti-cuts campaigns. This caused all non- Socialist Party members to vote against and leave the campaign.

Unity

When different political groups, trade unions and activists can work together in anti-cuts campaigns at the local level, there is simply no principled reason why it can't be done nationally – it's only a question of will.

All political disagreements in the movement need to debated out openly within a united anti-cuts federation. We need to put the goals of the movement first, not the short term organisational advantages this or that campaign.

Regionally, local anti-cuts groups are already starting to coordinate their actions. To do this nationally, bringing in all the national campaigns too, is the way to unite everyone to beat the Tories – in a campaign that has total freedom of debate and discussion, but unity in action.

UK Uncut: direct action spreads against the cuts

Jo Cassidy

THE UK UNCUT occupation of luxury goods department store Fortnum and Mason during the March for the Alternative mass demonstration was part of series of stunts and protests the direct action network have organised over the past months. Over 100 protestors staged a mass sit-in and entertained themselves playing music and games.

The network has organised a string of high profile flashmobs and occupations targeting tax-avoiding mega corporations such as Topshop and Vodafone. They have turned banks and shops into hospitals, libraries and theatres with Sam West, Josie Long and Mark Thomas performing.

The actions have been remarkably successful, taken up by numerous groups up and down the country, and has a struck a chord with ordinary working class people.

It is little wonder: their message that big-business should pay their tax has resonated with working people at a time of massive public sector cuts. It exposes the hypocrisy of a government invoking the language of austerity while letting corporations get away with tax-avoidance on an eye-watering scale. There is no shortage of wealth in the UK to pay for public services – the problem is it that it sits in the pockets of big business.

The action on 26 March was met with heavy police repression, with over a hundred activists arrested on trumped up charges of 'aggravated trespass'. It shows that the state fears civil disobedience.

But UK Uncut faces a challenge if it is to have a lasting impact on the resistance movement. There is a limit as to how far actions can go if they just name and shame the tax-dodgers – we need to develop a critique of capitalism and a clearer anticapitalist message by exposing how tax-dodging is part and parcel of this system, and how we need to overthrow the system, not just curb its excesses.

Anticapitalism

Although many activists in UK Uncut consider themselves anticapitalist, its arguments have been more limited in scope. The positive side is that this has opened up the actions to a range of new people, who haven't yet come to the conclusion we need to get rid of the whole system.

The negative side, however, is that after the first wave of actions, we need a political discussion as to where to go next.

Without a clearer anticapitalist message, UK Uncut is in danger of falling into the trap of drawing a line between the 'good' corporations who pay their taxes and the 'bad' ones. This was seen at the high point of its actions, when a group of activists called an action in praise of John Lewis, publishing a manifesto which argued that co-operative-based capitalism was the way to go. Although there was a backlash against this perspective in the network, it shows there is still a debate to be had.

Another difficulty UK Uncut faces is that currently it operates as a loose network, mainly mobilising through Twitter and the social media.

In many ways this has been its strength, allowing it to mobilise groups of people quickly in towns and cities across the country. But if UK Uncut is to send out a more concrete political message, it will needs to have a debate on its aims, goals and methods – just like any campaigning organisation does.

We certainly need militant direct action in the fight against the cuts, and now we need to link it to the mass workers movement.

Imagine how effective it will be on 30 June if actvists occupy the head quarters of companies which are proposing job cuts and a clearer perspective to fight against the government cuts and reform agenda.

UK Uncut targets BHS over unpaid taxes

The problem of autonomism

Luke Cooper

"SOCIALIST SOLIDARITY is autonomy", wrote the French radical Herbert Marcuse, "self-determination begins at home – and that is with every I and the We whom I chooses."

This is one of the founding principles of autonomism – a set of ideas that has become increasingly popular among young people and students drawn to the resistance movement against austerity.

Autonomism is an enormously 'broad church' – it encompasses an array of different anarchisms, from more Marxist-influenced ideas through to less explicitly ideological forms of political activism.

But despite this tremendous variety, autonomists will tend to agree with Marcuse's basic point: radical forms of solidarity take as their philosophical starting point the idea of the autonomous individual who wants to be free from the shackles of capitalist oppression.

It sounds compelling – aren't we all individuals? Don't we all have a right to live as we choose and isn't the fundamental problem with capitalism that it denies us our freedom?

Yet, though it sounds convincing, once we think this idea through, we can uncover serious problems with it – problems that are as practical as they are philosophical.

It is a relatively recent development in human history that the idea of the individual has come to dominate thinking about how we relate to one another in society. It's particularly associated with the rise of capitalist market economies and liberal accounts of how political institutions should work and function.

Individualism was a tidy solution to the problem of legitimacy that capitalism had: it got round the knotty issue of class divisions between rich and poor by promoting the idea that we are all individuals.

Autonomists will nearly always reject capitalist, liberal individualism and point out capitalism doesn't actually make us free as individuals at all – we are subject to whole number of compulsions.

But there are reasons for thinking the idea of the individual as a separate entity to the rest of society is the bedrock of regressive politics. In reality, part of who we are, our ideas, identity and social class, is formed out of the world in which we live and our relationships with other people.

We are what Marx called 'social beings'; we can only exist in a society with others, so there's no such thing as an individual who isn't already part of society. Some of these relationships we have are oppressive and exploitative, but where we have common interests we can unite in solidarity.

Which is why it's not as simple as just "choosing our We" as Marcuse suggests.

We unite with our brothers and sisters in a common battle against racism, social oppression and exploitation because we have a shared interest. That can often mean putting aside our own feelings and passions in favour of a collective interest. The flipside of Marcuse's position is that it risks embracing 'egoism', where the goal of liberation is that we just do as we please regardless of others.

Individualism in politics

Autonomists stole the headlines on 26 March when the 'Black Bloc' carried out direct actions on the fringes of the big TUC march. Many autonomists groups favour direct action in small, affinity group networks, over larger acts of collective power, and some promote property damage as a tactic.

This often leaves them isolated from the mass movement of workers that we need on our side to defeat the cuts and achieves little – smashing a window doesn't do any damage to capitalism, but it can undermine our cause in the eyes of many working people.

Direct action is crucial to win – but it needs to be orientated to building a mass movement, through strikes, civil disobedience and occupation.

Fetishising the 'autonomy' of the individual can often stand in the way of this.

Autonomists organise in affinity groups, with each individual group free to choose what action is or is not acceptable, but then the wider group will still defend the actions from any repression that ensues. The problem with this is that there is no collective way of deciding – through mass democratic voting and accountable structures of authority – what action the group should take.

We can see how then the philosophical focus on individual autonomy can badly undermine democracy and collective principles of working. In addition, by organising in anonymous groups they are particularly vulnerable to infiltration by the police.

Nearly all autonomists will support workers' strikes. But the principles around which these are organised are very different. When workers decide to take action they vote as a majority, then the minority respects the decision which is enforced through picket lines.

This undermines individual autonomy, but instead it promotes the collective social power of the working class. And it's this collective power we have together that can be truly liberating.

We want to build a system where there is no contradiction between the free development of the individual and of all humanity – what Marx called communism. But collective – not autonomous – forms of organising and methods of struggle will be essential if we are to realise this future.

Fact and fiction: the politics behind the deficit debate

Are the cuts about ideology or necessity? Many on the left have argued they have more to do with Tory politics than raw economic necessity, a case put forcefully by journalist and blogger Johann Hari. ***Richard Brenner*** puts forward an alternative perspective

THE STATE debt crisis went global this month. Stock markets dived and capitalists dumped their dollars after rating agency Standard and Poor's (S&P) warned that the USA's credit rating might need to be downgraded.

On 18 April S&P, one of the main organisations for assessing the credit-worthiness of states, said "Because the US has, relative to its [top rated] peers, what we consider to be very large budget deficits and rising government indebtedness, and the path to addressing these is not clear to us, we have revised our outlook on the long-term rating to negative from stable".

Roughly translated, S&P is saying the banks and rich investors who lend money to the US government can no longer be 100 per cent sure they will get it back... unless Obama makes massive cuts.

This followed a similar message on the 1 April from Bill Gross, Managing Director of Pimco, one of the biggest investment firms in the world. To fund public spending, governments around the world issue bonds paying fixed rates of interest to investors -as one of the biggest buyers and sellers of US bonds, Pimco is a key lender to the USA.

So US policymakers were shaken when Gross announced that if he were in front of a Congressional hearing he would say:

"I sit before you as a representative of a $1.2 trillion money manager, historically bond oriented, that has been selling [US bonds] because they have little value within the context of a $75 trillion total debt burden. Unless entitlements [benefits] are substantially reformed, I am confident that this country will default on its debt..."

Of course as a mega-rich capitalist Gross's solution is as predictable as it is barbaric: "Without attacking entitlements - Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security - we are smelling $1 trillion deficits as far as the nose can sniff."

Sound familiar? So it should. In the UK the bankers, investors and money-men have spent the last two years pointing to the deficit and calling for vicious cuts in health, education, benefits, jobs and services to solve it.

They used just the same type of scaremongering too.

Just before the election the Tories claimed Britain could be downgraded if their plan to eliminate the deficit in four years didn't get through. And last month Lib Dem Vince Cable told the bosses' Financial Times that "The budget deficit ... means that, in a world of financial markets nervous about sovereign debt problems, the government runs the gauntlet of a confidence crisis unless we plough ahead with our deficit-reduction commitment."

The deficit - with fears of a state defaulting on its debt - is now the number one worry for capitalists and the number one justification for cuts.

The very people who caused this crisis are now demanding that working class people pay. The deficit sits at the heart of the economic crisis and of the bosses' austerity offensive on working class people and our living standards.

And of course the USA and Britain are far from being the worst affected. It is in Europe and in particular the Eurozone that the crisis of state debt has been sharpest.

And it is Europe that poses the biggest risk of the crisis deepening and spreading. The British capitalists are all too keen to point to Europe, supposedly as a warning of what would happen unless they get away with the cuts.

Only a few weeks back Portugal joined Ireland and Greece as the third Eurozone state to need a massive bailout to avoid bankruptcy. As a condition of the bailout, eye-watering austerity packages have been imposed.

International resistance: Portuguese workers march against government austerity package

Now everyone is asking if Spain will be next to need a bailout. And rumours are spreading on the financial markets that Greece can't meet its obligations under its existing bailout and will have to have its load lightened (by 'restructuring' its debt). The bankers and bondholders are worried that they will be asked to 'take a haircut', which is their revealingly blasé term for being told that they will not get all their money back at the expected rate of interest.

A leaked email from huge US bank Citigroup on 20 April said:

"The last few days the talks over [Greek] restructuring/rescheduling have intensified, despite the ongoing denials by [Greek] foreign officials. If a credit event [banker talk for default - RB] takes place it is crucial to see what the terms would be as a haircut would have a much different outcome vs an extension of maturities" In other words the bankers might actually lose some money, not just have to wait longer for it to be paid.

To avoid this Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, countries which are already suffering terrible cuts and massive unemployment - more than one in every five Spanish people is out of work - are being asked to take yet another round of austerity and cuts.

So why is the deficit so high in some countries? Will countries a real driver of cuts, that it is just an excuse: "The real reason why David Cameron is imposing these massive cuts has nothing to do with the national debt or the deficit. It is because he regards himself as, in his words, 'the child of Thatcher', and he wants to pursue her agenda harder and faster than she ever dreamed."

Of course a lot of this is spot on and every socialist would agree with it. But at the root of Hari's argument is a serious mistake – one that suggests the crisis is only being caused by wrong government policies, and that the debt crisis isn't a real problem, let alone one that has arisen because of the whole way the capitalist system works.

While socialists agree the Tories are using the deficit to make the sharpest cuts they can for ideological reasons – they hate the welfare state – we also believe that this ideology is driven by the real demands of the capitalist profit system. We think the debt and deficit crisis is real.

If we're right, then an Ed Miliband government would immediately give in to huge pressure from the bond markets and start carrying out the same cuts as the Tories. And if a radical government tried to abandon the cuts programme and spend as Hari suggests, we think the bosses would launch an investment strike, cut off funds and attack the British currency.

Unlike Hari, who quotes leading economist Paul Krugman to claim that the so-called "bond market vigilantes" are "invisible" and "don't exist", we think they are real, part of this rotten system, have huge power and massively influence economic policy.

That's why socialists think to have a chance of sustained redistribution of wealth and planned extension of services we'd need to confiscate the funds of these huge financial institutions and investors, impose state control of foreign exchanges, renounce ("default") on the debt altogether, and spread that as fast as possible from one country to another.

"My deficit's bigger than yours"

One of Johann Hari's strongest arguments is that the scale of Britain's deficit is nothing like as big as the Eurozone states that are facing bailout and the threat of default.

He says "Our debt is not high by historical standards, and it is not high by international standards." The implication is that this means there is no risk that bond markets would downgrade British sovereign debt in the way they have Eurozone economies or have threatened to do to the USA.

But looking at the facts we can see how weak this argument is. Today the Office of National Statistics reports that at the end of December 2010 UK government debt was £1.1 trillion, equivalent to 76.1 per cent of GDP. The OECD forecasts the UK's debt to GDP ratio will reach 95 per cent by 2012. HSBC predicts that it will hit 94.1 per cent this year.

Certainly Greece is way beyond that level, with its debt at 155.8 per cent of GDP this year and predicted to rise to 165.1 per cent in 2012. So is Ireland: 110.4 per cent this year and 125 per cent the next. (Both estimates from the Economist Intelligence Unit)

So is Hari right in making a positive comparison with the Eurozone? Sadly not. Bailed out Portugal's deficit last year was 81.3 per cent of GDP. And Spain, next in the firing line for the bond market attack and next on the list for a potential bailout, has a debt to GDP ratio of 69.6 per cent this year, well below the UK.

So it is no good pretending the problem doesn't exist or that a different type of government could make British capitalism work without cuts. It is true that British debt is longer dated than Ireland's and Greece's, but the bond markets are not only concerned about immediate repayment. If the bond markets can target the USA, they can certainly target Britain.

Similarly Britain's deficit of 10.2 per cent of GDP in 2010 contrasts with 9.7 per cent in Greece, 34.2 per cent in Ireland, 7.3 per cent in Portugal and 9.2 per cent in Spain.

Therefore our programme of action against the cuts needs to include not only calls to clampdown on tax evaders, not just calls for more spending on jobs and services, but a call to renounce the debt and bust the bondholders.

If Cameron says he wants to eliminate the deficit and the debt in four years, and Miliband says he'll halve it in two years, our answer is to abolish it overnight: by seizing the profits of the banks and telling the bondholders and the Bill Gross's of this world that we won't pay them back a single penny.

There might be a few people in Greece, Portugal and Ireland that would follow suit if we did.

The risk the bosses are worried about is that the 'contagion' of sovereign debt crises spreads further across the Eurozone and starts to hit countries not in the periphery of the EU but at its highly developed core.

Finance ministers agree bailout fund to rescue any member of Eurozone from default

Investors breathed a momentary sigh of relief in mid-April when the Spanish government succeeded in selling €3.4 billion in long term bonds. But this episode revealed just how nervous the financiers are about Spain. A few days before the sale Spanish economy minister Elena Salgado, had had to make an appeal for calm when an earlier bond sale got into trouble. A continuing fall in house prices and rising declarations of bad loans by Spanish banks spooked bond markets.

Can the Eurozone survive?

The Economist Intelligence Unit, in its report State of the Union: Can the Euro Zone Survive its Debt Crisis, raises concerns that "Spain faces, above all, a liquidity risk [cash flow problems] in the next five years as it tries to reduce its deficit against a background of extremely high unemployment, a medium sized property crash and a risky banking system."

None of this is to predict that Spain necessarily will need a bailout, let alone default. But the possibility is real enough to be being debated in financial and government circles. All this stiffens the resolve of the European capitalists to clamp down hard on spending and on the working class.

Could the EU – and in particular its strongest powers Germany, France and Britain – afford to bailout Spain? The answer is probably yes: but only just. The bigger question is whether the EU could handle the potential knock-on effects.

The EU's current emergency credit mechanism for bailouts goes by the ungainly name of the European Financial Stability Facility. It is a special fund that borrows money in commercial credit markets, backed by loan guarantees from the strongest EU powers, and then lends – not gives – the money to EU member states that get into trouble.

At the moment its capacity to lend is limited to €250 billion, but the Eurozone states have agreed to extend that to €440 billion, in case Spain needs a bailout.

So could it cope? The Economist Intelligence Unit's "main risk scenario", which it claims has a probability of 25 per cent, says that if Spain asks for a bailout for its funding needs for 2011-13 (estimated at €470 billion), the EFSF could cover it, so long as it could draw on existing available IMF funding taking its capacity up to €525.

So, at a stretch it could be done.

But that assumes a Spanish bailout would have no impact on the banks in Germany, France and Italy. Suffice it to say, it would.

German banks' exposure to Spanish government debt is vast: €29.4 billion, more than their exposure to Greek debt and more than twice their exposure to Portuguese and Irish debt put together. Italian banks are also exposed. And French banks would really make a loss. They have €19.8 billion in Greek debt, 6.6 billion in Irish debt and 16.1 billion of Portuguese debt already...but a massive €46 billion is held in Spanish debt.

As the EIU points out this could have a severe impact, with banks across the Euro area "exposed to securities that in the worst case face a value destroying restructuring."

If these banks needed bailing out, that would increase pressure on state funding still further, causing bond market lenders to look very closely at the finances of other, apparently more stable states.

And it is very clear that, as the EIU report puts it, the current EFSF plus IMF funding would "not be enough for Spain plus any other potentially vulnerable country, such as Belgium (which has funding needs of around €140 billion during 2011-13) and certainly not Italy (€820 billion)."

Would a Spanish bailout turn the attention of the "invisible" bond market vigilantes onto Belgium and Italy? It can't be ruled out, especially when we remember that Belgium's state debt is more than 100 per cent of GDP, and Italy's is around 120 per cent.

This would bust out the EFSF and leave the EU staring death in the face. Germany and France could risk cranking up support for bailouts even higher, but they are already deeply unpopular at home. And with the nationalist True Finns party doing so well in the recent Finnish election on a "we shouldn't pay for Greece and Portugal" ticket, it is doubtful governments could maintain the fragile constellations of class forces needed to drive another mega bailout through.

Historic crisis of the system

Avoiding this scenario assumes several things. The Spanish government will have to impose another round of austerity and make it stick. The European banks will have to hold firm. The economic recovery will have to switch up a gear and after extremely painful cuts allow Greece and Portugal to start growing their way out of debt.

And above all, Germany – the economic motor of the EU – will have to continue its strong recovery, which is based on massive expansion of its exports to China, whose soaraway growth cannot last forever and whose economy is at danger of overheating, raising the prospects of a crisis of its own over the years to come.

The outcome depends on the class struggle. Re-establishing a stable equilibrium of capitalist expansion can only be done over the ruins of the jobs, services and benefits of the working class of Europe. We can resist and can break the cuts and bring down the austerity governments if we follow the path of the French and Greek workers and exceed their efforts by launching indefinite general strikes not limited in time in advance, that stay out until the regimes fall like in Egypt.

Every victory in the battle against the cuts will without doubt meet a frenzied response from the international financiers who will threaten to bankrupt whole nations if they do not make the workers pay for the crisis. That is why the logic of the mass anti-cuts movement leads directly towards generalised working class action and a struggle for political power. It's why militant opposition to cuts takes on anticapitalist logic – one that we need to raise into mass consciousness by linking our struggles to the fight for an alternative system.

The Tories claim the deficit was caused by the working class – too much spending on our health, our welfare, our education. Left-wing reformists and the more militant union leaders increasingly claim, less eloquently than Johann Hari but with the same basic arguments, that the deficit is just an excuse and has no real bearing on the cuts.

Both these ideas are false. The deficit was caused by the great financial crisis and the downturn that followed it. As rates of profit fell in 2007-08, the banks stopped lending and destroyed huge swathes of capital. They had to be bailed out to the tune of trillions from state money. Then the downturn bit as companies scaled back, sacking millions around the world. State revenues from tax plummeted just as the cost of unemployment and other benefits skyrocketed. The capitalist crisis caused the deficit and it is real and the bosses want you and me to pay for it.

Anticapitalism

So let's take the argument back into the heart of the resistance everywhere – the crisis of state debt arose because the bosses used the state to socialise the losses of the employers and the bankers. The debt is unsustainable and shows that the capitalist system doesn't work.

Even if the bosses struggle through the next two years without a country going bankrupt and defaulting, the next financial crisis will leave governments unable to raise the funds for another round of bailouts. An even deeper breakdown of the system could result; creating enormous competitive pressures on the major global powers and threatening the integrity of the world currency and trading systems.

Denying the existence of the deficit and the power of bond markets will dull the ability of the resistance to target the system itself. We need to point out the reality and the insanity of this system so we can prepare an international movement to overthrow it.

Read Johann Hari's blog post 'The Biggest Lie in British Politics' **tinyurl.com/6739eto**

industrial overview from
JEREMY DRINKALL

All out for 30 june!

THE FIGHT against the cuts is taking a big step forward on 30 June, with a string of unions now pledging to shut the country down in a mass public sector strike.

The PCS, UCU and NUT have been planning action for a while now, and the Unite union national health committee has voted in favour of coordinating action too.

In a separate development, journalists at the NUJ's annual delegate meeting voted overwhelmingly that the TUC should coordinate a 24-hour public sector general strike. It looks possible too that strike-shy unions like the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the NASUWT teachers' union, even the Royal College of Nursing could join that list.

This shows that increasing numbers of union members, and even some leaders, are ready for more than just marching in the streets at weekends. If 26 March had the look and feel of a European style union demo, with flags, balloons and vuvuzelas, could Britain be gearing up for European-style days of action and even a general strike?

Roadblocks ahead

Certainly a massive day of action on 30 June could be a springboard for this. But we should also be aware of some pitfalls that still lie in the path.

First, we've been promised coordinated strikes for two years now – the NUT in particular has been talking about joint strikes against the demolition of public service workers' pensions since October 2010. The NUT has yet to commit to a date, while the PCS would only start their ballot on 23 May if their conference passes the motion on the 18th.

The NUJ is not even preparing a ballot, simply calling on a TUC that has already declared itself against such a move. Meanwhile the bigger unions – GMB, the majority of Unite, and Unison – remain silent. Dave Prentis even told last month's Unison NEC that the union could not ballot before 2012 – before he was forced to recant by angry members.

So it will be up to rank and file union members to press for the 30 June date and not let it slip. Journalists should call on their leaders not to wait for the TUC but call an NUJ-wide ballot now. Civil servants should use their union mandating meetings in the next few weeks to insist conference names the 30 June date. All trade unionists can use this opportunity to demand their national leaders join the rebellion – and that their own branches, sectors and regions call strikes anyway.

Secondly, why should we strike for only one day? Does anyone imagine that Cameron and Clegg will back down after one day? For the past 25 years, British unions have got into the habit of taking one, two, or at most five-day strikes. Right wingers are quick to point to the miners' defeat as the reason why.

But the miners did not lose because they went on all out indefinite strike. They only lost because other unions failed to deliver solidarity, bring their own claims forward and strike alongside them! They lost in short because there was not a general strike. And the cost was the decimation of whole industries and the communities that depended on them, the halving in size of the unions. Are we prepared to let the Tories do this to the public sector?

Of course just calling on the TUC leaders for coordinated public sector action or even a general strike will not bring either about. We will have to build it from below. A strong movement from the rank and file in our unions, action by local anti-cuts groups and public service users, could really put the pressure on our leaders, building inter-union solidarity to continue the fight until victory. People worry about the anti-union laws but if we all come out together then we can break them through collective action.

True, our European sisters and brothers have up to now been ahead of us in the resistance to austerity. The Greeks and the French nearly won their battles but failed to link up their days of action and put the question to their governments point-blank: "Either you back down and pack your bags – or we will run the country ourselves."

Only an all-out general strike can pose the question that way. Which is why every activist should use this new opportunity to get as many workers as possible on strike on 30 June – and agitate for a Hot July as well!

PCS: Time to move beyond one day strikes

Rebecca Allen, PCS shop steward

THE PUBLIC and Commercial Services Union has played a leading role in calling for the co-ordinated public sector strike on 30 June.

Its conference will vote on 18 May to ballot 250,000 members in the civil service for action alongside teachers.

If all public sector unions balloted, then millions of workers could strike as one to stop the Coalition Government from taking their axe to our jobs, pay and pensions.

Across the board we are facing billions in cuts, an increase in the pension age, a pay freeze, cuts to redundancy pay, workplace closures and thousands of job losses. The government is attacking us all at once; to defeat them we need to stand together and fight back.

Co-ordinated strike action is a great start, but if we're going to win then we have to go beyond the established PCS strategy of one-day strikes. Public sector one-day general strikes in France and Greece failed to stop cuts and pension reform there. We need to walk out together and stay out together – until we win.

Under Blair and Brown, PCS held a series of one-day strikes and won very little, even at a time of high investment in the public sector. The Tories want to break apart our services and are determined to achieve this in their five-year term in power. They are openly discussing strike-breaking and new anti-union laws. All the more reason for us to start fighting now.

Half a million people marched through London on 26 March, demonstrating the power of the unions. Mass strike action has to be the next step – it's where the real power of the unions lies. Rank and file union activists and reps must demand that we are balloted for effective action that can stop the cuts, not just one-day strikes.

One motion to PCS conference, A3, calls on the TUC to organise a general strike. We should join the NUJ and NUT in supporting this call. But this is the last thing the TUC leaders want. So we need to organise across the unions to deliver one ourselves.

Teachers taking action over pensions

Rachel Brookes

THIS YEAR'S NUT conference passed important resolutions calling for co-ordinated strikes over pensions and backed calls for a one day public sector general strike. Teachers will now join with hundreds of thousands of other public sector workers on strike on 30 June in defence of their pensions.

Teachers are now no longer able to retire at 60, and the Tories are looking at upping the age from 65 to 67. They are being asked to increase their pensions contributions by an extra £45 per month, but this won't go anywhere near the pension pot.

But with Education Minister Michael Gove's enormous expansion of city academies, free schools, and cuts, this is just the tip of the iceberg – and teachers are furious.

At their recent national conference, the National Union of Teachers discussed a motion condemning the government's entire economic and political strategy.

"The rush to cut public spending is motivated by long-standing Tory support for privatisation and profiteering rather than any real concern for the efficiency or quality of public services."

They also discussed launching a political and industrial campaign against city academies and free schools, that are not motivated by "raising standards" but are aimed at "privatising and deregulating state education."

In response they aim to "encourage and support NUT members to take strike action, where possible with other unions, against proposals to convert to academy status."

Presently in terms of national action, pensions is now the cutting edge of working class resistance, it has the potential to unite the education sector in a Britain-wide strike. The Association of Teachers and Lectures (ATL) are mandated to ballot for strikes, and the NASUWT looks as if it could follow the same path.

One motion stated that the union should "organise coordinated ballots for discontinuous action should that prove necessary", and that it will "organise national and local demonstrations, rallies and public meetings in conjunction with other unions and pensioners organisations."

The big chance to beat the government is if the education unions not only unite with all other public sector unions under attack, but prepare for the sustained strike action that can bring the Tories down.

Egypt: the struggle for freedom continues

Jeremy Drinkall & Marcus Halaby

THE REVOLUTION in Egypt has entered a new phase.

New independent trade unions are recruiting tens of thousands and demanding an end to starvation wages and sweatshop conditions. The popular movement is forming local and national committees to demand the fulfilment of the democratic promises made when Hosni Mubarak fell.

Yet the "reformist" government of Essam Sharaf wants to ban strikes and demonstrations and restrict the right to form political parties.

The Egyptian people – with the working class and urban poor in the front – may have succeeded in overthrowing Mubarak, but their revolution did not go all the way and seize power. It may have paralyzed the army as an instrument of repression but it did not break the power of its commanders over the rank and file.

The movement that made the revolution must continue to challenge and veto the regime's decisions. Above socialists all must agitate for a revolutionary party to complete the democratic revolution and overthrow the capitalist system and break imperialist domination of the country.

Counter-revolution

Apart from a few changes at the top, Mubarak's resignation has resolved none of the causes for the revolution.

An unelected junta – the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces – headed by Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, a former Commander of the Presidential Guard – has assumed Mubarak's powers. Egypt's emergency law of 1958 remains in place.

The State Security Investigations Service – Egypt's secret police – has formally been disbanded, only to be resurrected in a new guise.

The 40,000-strong independent teachers' union is demanding a 7 per cent pay rise, reduction of class sizes from 90 to 40 and 33,000 new schools. Union leader Abdel Hafiz said teachers wanted to "gain control of their work", adding that many wanted to form new, secular workers' parties.

Every trade unionist felt a boost when the regime was forced to detain yellow ETUF union leader, Hussein Megawer, for organising the "battle of the Camels", one of the bloodiest assaults on the revolutionaries in Tahrir Square.

Revolutionary conference

A coalition of youth groups and political organisations is holding a conference in May with the aim of revolutionary unity on the basis of proposals for the constitution, social justice, action prior to the election, and setting up a national council to "give voice to the people's aspirations and coordinate with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces".

This follows a successful national meeting of the Popular Committees for the Defence of the Revolution in April. PCDR leaders Khaled Abdel Shaheed told El Ahram: "Our ultimate aim is for there to be social monitoring in the coming period for all branches of the government and all institutions as a guarantee of the revolution's consummation."

Absolutely right. But the development of dual power –between mass organs of the revolution, workers councils, a popular militia – is itself only a step towards the real solution: the power of the workers and peasants of Egypt. Such an outcome requires the formation of a revolutionary party, based on the socialist groups, the new trade unions and the most far-sighted and determined activists of the popular movement.

Popular Committees launching first conference in Tahrir Square, 22 April

Battle for Libya rages on

...continued from page 1

anti-Gadaffi forces. The US has sent its unmanned Predator drones, notorious for slaughtering wedding parties in Pakistan, to patrol the no-fly zone.

The revolutionaries need to beware: the West is cynically abusing the desperately unequal struggle to secure their total submission to its interests: control over the oil and stem the flow of migrants into Europe. Nato has intervened not at all to replace Gadaffi with a regime based on mass popular democracy, but on "reliable" forces drawn from the old regime. As they get bogged down, they will increasingly sacrifice Libyans in their bid for control of the revolution.

It is crucial that socialists fight to end the no fly zone and get Nato's military advisers out of the country. If the West really wanted to help the rebels establish democracy then it would arm them with no conditions. It has not done so. Libyan revolutionaries should call on volunteers from Egypt and Tunisia – especially those with military skills – to fight alongside them. At the same time Libyan revolutionaries should make it clear to the European and US multinationals that they will not sell their country or support its occupation by Nato.

Although the self-appointed Transitional National Council is adopting an openly pro-imperialist position, this does not reflect the aspirations of many of the young fighters. They must fight to replace it with an anti-imperialist one, based on the workers and the youth, which can defeat Gadaffi, reject the West's interventions, and link up with the revolutions across the Arab world.

imperialism in the dock
MARCUS HALABY

Syrians can bring down Assad regime

SYRIAN security forces shot dead over 80 protesters on 22 April. They killed another 12 the next day, as the democracy movement attempted to bury its dead. President Bashar al-Assad has opened a river of blood between his regime and the people.

The Arab revolution, though slow to spread to Syria, has now proved democracy campaigners are as willing as their cousins in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya or Bahrain to sacrifice their lives for the overthrow of dictatorship.

The movement began with small protests in support of the Egyptian and Libyan people and against the police brutality with which these were treated. But the regime's arrest of children for daubing anti-regime graffiti in the poor southern province of Daraa and its lethal response to local demands for their release ensured the spread of the movement across Syria.

Hoping to exploit people's fears of communal conflict between Syria's different religions and sects, presenting itself as the only defender of national unity, the Ba'ath Party regime has tried to paint the protests as sectarian.

Indeed, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Yusuf al-Qaradawi has linked "regime change" to Sunni sectarian hostility to the Shi'a Alawi minority, of which Assad is a member. So far, however, this has had little effect in splitting the protests.

The pro-democracy movement embraces all Syria's communities, including the Alawi minority. Whatever resentments may exist against Alawis on account of the regime's corruption and favouritism, the protesters understand that sectarian slogans – in a country where one-third of the population belongs to an ethnic or religious minority – would hand victory to the regime on a plate.

In Homs, Syria's third-largest city, the government even made claims of an "armed Salafist [Islamist] insurrection" when protesters occupied the central Clock Square. However, the protesters asked certain tribal sheikhs to leave the sit-in, when it became clear that they did not support their demands. Later, they chanted: "We are not Muslim Brotherhood or Salafis – our only demand is freedom."

The revolution has won victories: forcing the government to grant citizenship to 200,000 Kurds in the north-east and to rescind the 1963 emergency law, which banned demonstrations and severely limited freedom of speech.

While promising reforms, however, the Ba'ath regime continues to kill unarmed protesters, while fabricating stories about "armed gangs" terrorising neighbourhoods.

In reality, everyone knows that the only "armed gangs" in Syria belong to the regime – in the form of shadowy militias and security forces. Rumours have even circulated that soldiers in Homs have cooperated with civilians in looking for gunmen, resembling the way in which the Egyptian army's lower ranks began to fraternise with protesters in Tahrir Square.

While the army may not have split yet, this is a sign of growing mass sympathy for the movement – which can only continue to infect the state's repressive institutions, as the people become more united and insistent in their demands.

Fight racism - defend migrants

Jeremy Drinkall

PRIME MINISTER David Cameron has again whipped up racist fears about immigration, calling for "good immigration, not mass immigration" and claiming he will stop "hundreds of thousands" coming to Britain.

In a speech to the Tory Party faithful, but broadcast far and wide, Cameron said "significant numbers of new people, not able to speak the same language, not really wanting to integrate, have created a kind of discomfort and disjointedness in some neighbourhoods".

Cameron as Prime Minister, defending a capitalist system which sees growing inequality in Britain between rich and poor, must surely take a lot of the blame for any sense of discomfort and disjointedness that people feel - not immigrants.

But in times of economic crisis and social decline racism is a tried and tested method of divide and rule. Using emotive language which is designed to whip up prejudice and appeal to the headline writers in the Murdoch press, Cameron and the Tories prefer to deflect attention away from the bankers and the rich and towards some of the poorest people in our society.

It is racist scaremongering pure and simple. Cameron uses vague generalisations that cannot be challenged. He refers to one horrific court case about Asian pimps to make an unrelated point about "young British girls" being preyed upon. These are the same arguments that the BNP used in West Yorkshire to win support.

The speech chimed with other recent comments he has made, condemning multiculturalism for "encouraging different cultures to live separate lives, weakening our collective identity" and calling for an "active, muscular liberalism" to combat Muslim extremists. That he made this jibe on the day the fascist thugs of the English Defence League were marching in Luton attempting to carry out another pogrom against the local Asian community speaks volumes about where Cameron's "muscular" allegiances lie.

Fact and fiction

This is the old Tory Party. In the 1960s Enoch Powell warned of "rivers of blood" caused by immigration. In the 1970s Margaret Thatcher claimed white people were being "swamped by people with a different culture". Both replaced fact with fiction.

The reality is that Black and ethnic minority people are systematically discriminated against in Britain.

Black Caribbean boys are three times more likely to be excluded from school than white boys. Almost a third of all stop and searches are instigated against ethnic minorities – over a half, when police are looking for knives and guns. Young black adults are four times more likely to be in prison than white youths.

In the job market, the pattern is the same. Two-fifths of people from ethnic minorities live in low-income households, twice the rate for White people, a figure that rises to 50 per cent for black Africans and two-thirds for Asian Muslims. Black youth unemployment officially stands at 50 per cent, though Lee Jasper of Black Activists Rising Against Cuts reckons the true figure could be as high as 70 per cent. Yet the percentage of the British population who are ethnic minorities is less than 10 per cent.

Meanwhile Britain continues to terrorise, impoverish and detain asylum seekers. Many are deported to hostile regimes, some to their death. Three Iranians, encouraged by Britain to rise up against the regime in 2009, are now on hunger strike, their lips sown up, fearful of being sent back to their torturers.

Roots of racism

The root of this racial oppression has nothing to do with a "clash of cultures" or a refusal by immigrants to "fit in". It has everything to do with the needs of British capitalism.

The bosses need a differentiated labour market, where it is justifiable to pay some workers less than a living wage. By excluding black and Asian people from equal access to education, ingraining poverty in their communities and criminalising their youth, they ensure there is a stagnant pool of hungry labour, ready to do the jobs at the rates that others would not.

Racism is the ideology that both "justifies" this inherently unjust relationship, and attempts to bind some workers to "their" bosses. This can take the form of support for imperialist wars in Afghanistan and now Libya. It is similar to the poision of national chauvinism, like the "British Jobs for British Workers" strikes in 2009 that aimed at taking away jobs from migrant workers.

So it is excellent that Lambeth Unison and the Save Our Services anticuts group joined the demo in support of justice for Smiley Culture last month. Racism and the oppression of black and Asian communities is on the rise. The bosses know that, in times of job losses, service cuts and wage restraint, racism is a useful to keep us divided.

Cameron himself made this clear in the most telling part of his Tory conference speech: "The real issue is this: migrants are filling gaps in the labour market left wide open by a welfare system that for years has paid British people not to work… Put simply, we will never control immigration properly unless we tackle welfare dependency."

This is as clear as one, two, three. First whip up fears over their way of life being threatened by immigrants; second blame ethnic minorities for the inadequacies of schools, housing and hospitals, cut to the bone by the cuts programme; and third say, "We'll get tough on black and Asian workers, if you'll work for peanuts in hellish conditions."

It's a con. And there's only one group, one class of people who are benefiting: the bosses and the bankers who caused this crisis in the first place.

Immigration is presented as the problem in Britain today but the real problem is capitalism and the growing gap between rich and poor. Working class immigrants need to be welcomed into the workforce and labour movement. Racism needs to be exposed, confronted and defeated, wherever it raises its ugly head – through demonstrations, strikes and self-defense. Only this way can we unite the whole working class in the struggle for genuine socialism.

Thousands march for Smiley Culture

"DIRTY BABYLON!" snarled the crowd in time to the reggae beat. It was a line from a 1980s Smiley Culture hit: "Cockney say Ol' Bill, we say Dirty Babylon". How appropriate.

The death of Smiley Culture in police custody is yet another suspicious death at the hand of the Met. Little wonder it has angered the black community across south London. Over two thousand turned out on 16 April in the largest black-led demonstration in years.

According to the police, on 15 March officers inexplicably allowed Smiley, a reggae star from the 1980s, to go on his own into his kitchen to "make a cup of tea" – even though he was under arrest at the time. The police initially claimed that Smiley had stabbed himself through the heart with a knife so big that it clean came out of him the other side.

Smiley's family and friends know the singer's death fits a pattern: 400 dead in police custody over the last decade, not one officer convicted. As one protester put it, "Smiley just happens to be the most well-known man to have died in police custody."

That's why so many other campaigners for victims of the police were out for Smiley: Kingsley Burrell Brown, Sean Rigg, Habib "Paps" Ullah and more. The march called for justice for all those who have died or suffered at the hands of the police – black or white, Smiley Culture or Ian Tomlinson.