



AURORA

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To Really Fight We Have to Unite

In 90 countries round the world the “Occupy” and “Indignados” movements have posed the question. Things cannot go on as before. We need an alternative to capitalism. Perhaps that’s why the state in many countries has attacked the peaceful occupations? As it happened coordinated repression in the US only came AFTER they linked up with the workers in Oakland, California. They created a general strike across the city from the port to the pizza shop. This really does frighten the ruling class. When those who create the wealth say “enough is enough” capitalism cannot function. This is why we need to recognise our struggle goes beyond the fight for jobs, defending pensions or benefits. It is a fight for a different way of organising how we live. If we support each other across firms, sectors, and countries we can turn our righteous indignation into more than protests. And that’s the only way to answer the question the current crisis poses ...

November 30: Unions Follow the Rules while the Bosses and Government Tear up the Rule Book

While the government’s arbitrary changes mean that everyone has to work longer to get a state pension, while the capitalist crisis is wiping out private pensions, when every day brings news of more job losses, when workers in general are facing wage cuts and harder working conditions the public sector unions are doing their best to limit 30 November to a single ‘day of action’ over a single issue — pensions — by workers in a single sector [state employees].

The truth is the unions do not want a serious fight by a unified working class: that might cause problems for the system which might lead to something they cannot control. Whatever power the unions still have today is due to their ability to contain any response by the workers they represent to safe ground for capital.

For the union leaders, with their five figure salaries and sitting in offices divorced from the conditions of the workers they represent, the potential strike action of their members is simply a bargaining chip to be used in a complex game in which the ordinary union member plays no part. For example, take Dave Prentis, leader of Unison the biggest public sector union. Not so long ago he was boasting that the turn-out on 30 November would be like the 1926 general strike. (One of the earliest union sell-outs.) Nearer the time he’s modified this to “rallies and events are being organised around the UK in conjunction with the TUC, to show our strength of feeling against government minister proposals to cut our pension rights” (Unison website 14.11.11) Even more clearly, the same statement shows just how much ‘strike action’ for the unions (because this applies to all of them) is a last resort bargaining chip emptied of any real threat to powers that be by the legal chains under which they play the game.

We will meet to discuss offers any time, any place up to and beyond 30 November. Our strike action will go ahead on that date because Tory anti-

trade union laws dictate that we have to take action within 28 days or the ballot is invalid.

As it happens the low turn-out in the various union ballots (e.g. 31% for Unison; 28% for Unite) has already put the leaders on the back foot. The TUC itself no longer feels much pressure to put up a show of solidarity. The government is biding its time to see if it can get away with the take it or leave it marginally ‘improved offer’ made by Danny Alexander (Chief Secretary to the Treasury a few weeks ago. If the impact of November 30 is low the government is more likely to follow Tory calls for strikes below a minimum ballot turnout to be made illegal. So, if most of the 3 million or so workers involved simply have a day off and stay at home the unions will find themselves sidelined even further.

All this sounds as if there is nothing much at stake. Nothing could be further from the truth. Could it be that the majority of workers themselves sense that the ritual play-acting of the unions is no basis for a real fight back? We know, for example, that building site electricians — who’ve been fighting against the introduction of drastic pay cuts if the big building firms get their way and tear up the existing contract — are pushing for November 30 to involve ALL workers. The trouble is they’re still trying to extend solidarity through the unions. However, when it is becoming apparent to everybody that capitalism itself is in deep, deep crisis it must surely also be clear that the time for bargaining with bankrupt governments and profit hungry bosses is over. All over the world capitalism is resorting to the only option it has left: cut back and cut back on the cost of the wage workers who keep society going and who produce the real wealth. Either we break out of the chains that bind us or capitalism will keep on turning the screws and push back working class lives to a modern version of the nineteenth century.

Don’t Kid Yourself This is One Crisis that Will Not Go Away

Listen to the news on any day and there is no shortage of crisis talk. The bulletins tell us that we are in a mess for many reasons. Greedy bankers, corrupt politicians, unbalanced state budgets (so-called sovereign debt), or the Euro, all get a mention. But the truth is that this crisis is much more serious than any of these.

This is not a crisis caused only by “greedy bankers”. The speculation and bad loans of the last 20 years or so are the result of a much deeper crisis going back years. Ever since 1971, when the post-war boom came to a final end, the system has stagnated. Workers have paid the price for this — real wages today are lower than in 1973 (and that’s official). But this has not been enough to revive capital accumulation. Although more profits have been squeezed out of an increasingly exploited workforce they have not been enough to revive the global economy. The massive transfer of production to places like China (where wages are miniscule) and financial speculation have proved to be no “solutions”. The financial speculation came to a halt in 2007-8 when, as we had predicted for a decade, the fantasy of increasing debt finally hit the buffers.

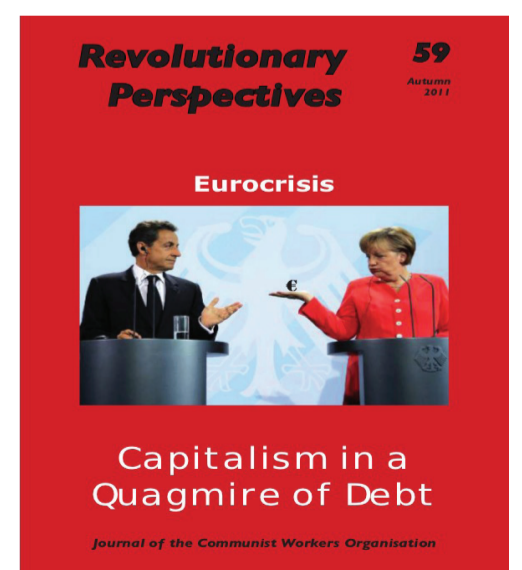
To stop the system melting down completely governments all over the planet bailed out the financial sharks. They had no choice. A banking collapse would have cut off the revenue streams created by financial bodies which redirect the world’s wealth to the richest countries. In Britain the government put up £850,000,000,000 to “save the banks”. And what are the same financial institutions doing today? They are insisting that government debt (mostly due to the bailout of banks) should be reduced or else they will cut its credit rating. This will massively increase the interest the state has to pay on its debt. Their solution is therefore more cuts and more attacks on a working class which has already suffered enough.

This might seem insane but even if we accepted all the cuts (and more cuts) in our living standards which they call for it would still not lead to a recovery. This is because there is an over-accumulation of capital that cannot be profitably re-invested. Profit rates are too low to make it worthwhile.

Speculation earns more money (even if based on the value of work done by others). At the same time the cuts make matters worse since fewer workers means fewer people to buy what other workers produce. The only “solution” the capitalist system has is a devaluation of capital. What they really need is another global war! But this is not yet on the agenda (even if the present currency wars are like a precursor to more serious struggles ahead).

In fact the capitalist class everywhere still has not given up the hope that making us poorer will save the system. It won’t. The message for the world working class is that capitalism only offers us more suffering and more poverty. And no amount of our sacrifice can save it. We need to start by rejecting austerity. We need to use our greatest weapon — our collective strength. We need to unite across sectors and workplaces and fight, not just against the cuts, but for an alternative that goes beyond capitalist contradictions.

To deepen an understanding of these issues read RP59 - out now



For correspondence write to:
CWO, BM CWO
London
WC1N 3XX

email: uk@leftcom.org

Or visit our website:

<http://www.leftcom.org>

And for those without a job ... The Work Programme

Workfare – the idea that claimants should work for their benefits now that capitalist economic crisis and corporate moves to exploit Far Eastern cheap labour has thrown them on the dole – was imported from America by the last Labour Government [the so-called Flexible New Deal]. Naturally, the ConDems have picked up this nasty anti-claimant baton and have refined it as the Work Programme, pledging to throw £5 billion at the corporate vultures waiting to feed on our misfortune.

So, at a time of 2.6 million officially unemployed (with a further 2.4 million out of work but not showing on registered statistics) and the Office of National Statistics showing one vacancy for every 10 jobseekers, the unemployed, the so-called jobshy, are going to be 'retrained' and 'job-prepared'. This is a lie

One third of all contracts have gone to A4E and Ingeus Deloitte (the latter's UK chief executive was up until recently a Director of the DWP!). Basically, charities will provide free volunteers to work with press-ganged claimants while big corporates cream off taxpayers money (£5 billion, remember) for executives and shareholders.

The Context

Keep in mind the context of these moves: the vast majority of us are unemployed involuntarily; many of us find ourselves with the wrong skills in the wrong place thanks

to the machinations of the rich and powerful (we can all see that there is plenty of work needing to be done in housing, infrastructure, welfare, production etc but capitalism can't make profit out of such socially necessary work); the housing market makes it difficult for us to move; some of us are too ill to work (the 2010 Labour Force Survey found the unemployed three times more likely to suffer depression than the rest of the population).

Despite all the hot air, The Work Programme has nothing to do with helping us into meaningful work, or helping us 'back into society'. Its aims are to cut the welfare budget, an attack on the social wage, and to attack actual wages, providing cheap disciplined labour. Providers have been given a 'black box' contract – no mandated requirement to do specific things whilst 'training': they are free to do whatever they think necessary. The programme applies to people on JSA, IS, and IB who have been unemployed for six months, though some can be 'fast tracked', and sanctions, beginning at loss of all benefit for two weeks, progressing to 6 months, can be applied for 'non-compliance'.

Further Benefit Cuts to Come

And to supplement the attacks of the Work Programme, the government have added the Mandatory Work Activity programme.

Now claimants, within days of signing on, can:

- Be forced to work 30 hours per week for 4 weeks for their benefits – which means at £2.25 per hour.

- The 30 hours can cover 7 days a week, so they can be made to work weekends.

- Face up to 4 such 'activities' per year.

- Be sent to work unrelated to the claimant's work goals, or their past experience or qualifications.

- Be 'sanctioned' (ie lose all benefits) for an INITIAL period of 13 weeks, rising to 6 months, for 'non-compliance' (eg lateness)

- Be able to appeal this only within a 5 day period (unlike the old 30 day system).

The decision to refer to an 'activity' will be at the discretion of the DWP adviser – who we now know, thanks to a Guardian investigation, is subject to targets that have to be met. The pretence that any of this is anything to do with training or support has been stripped away. Claimants will have no right to withdraw their labour and no right to the National Minimum Wage.

Some may have read the article in the recent Guardian telling us that young claimants are being made to work for Tesco or Poundland etc, for nothing. [see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/nov/16/young-jobseekers-work-pay-unemployment>].

At a time when education and training is under threat, and housing benefit, working tax credit, and other public services and benefits are being cut, this is a double pronged attack by the state on our conditions:

1 – It's an attack on ALL wages, creating a

pool of ultra cheap labour with no right to industrial action.

2 – An attack on already savaged benefits as 'sanctions' will rocket.

We have to fight back as one class.

For more information see <http://edinburghagainstopoverty.org.uk/>

It's a Fact:

In the USA the richest 1 percent now receive almost 24 percent of national income, up from almost 9 percent in 1976.

The richest 1,000 people in the UK possess £395.8 bn — equivalent to one-third of the national debt.

In the UK more than 1 in 5 16-24 year olds are without work.

Spain has the highest youth unemployment rate in the euro zone with 43.5% of the under-25s out of work.

According to Bain & Company's latest global luxury market research the global luxury goods sales in 2011 will grow 10 percent to 191 billion euros.

About 25,000 people die every day of hunger or hunger-related causes, according to the United Nations. It is children who die most often. Yet there is plenty of food in the world for everyone.

Twenty per cent of the 55million mortgage holders in the US are behind with payments.

There is a Real Alternative

There's one thing about the present crisis: the idea that there must be a better alternative to capitalism is gaining ground. Day by day, as daily life becomes more and more gruelling, the need to find that alternative is becoming a practical necessity. Yes, the technological means and infrastructure exist to make another world possible, a world where everybody can make a contribution to society, where no human being is in a position to exploit another and where nobody need go hungry or without a roof over their head. But we should be under no illusion that such momentous – dare we say it, revolutionary, change — can be tolerated, much less introduced by any of the existing political and legal set-ups that comprise even the most 'democratic' capitalist state.

In fact, one of the things this crisis is highlighting is that parliamentary democracy has nothing at all to do with giving workers a say in how they live and work. Quite the opposite. All over the advanced capitalist world parliaments and congresses, upper houses and lower houses, are passing austerity programmes, slashing health care, cutting pensions, reducing social security payments, loosening employment protection laws all of which mean sacrifices for the majority of wage workers for the sake of bailing out a system openly based on making profit. Under capitalism the well-being of the majority of people is incidental to that prime purpose. To any rational observer this is ludicrous.

Our "Democracy"

Workers can run things differently. They carry the seeds of a new society within them every time they decide on

collective action. In real independent struggles we organise from the bottom. Mass meetings elect strike committees to coordinate the strike and link up with others in the same boat. The committee is responsible to the mass meeting and can be immediately recalled by it. Committee members can be replaced if necessary. Compare this to capitalism's offer of a vote every 5 or so years for one or other party backed by the millions of capitalist money.

Our system would be based on delegates from local level going to regional level and electing delegates to go to higher bodies beyond that. These are not like MPs who are "representatives". In fact MPs don't even represent the voters who elect them but only themselves or their parties. And they cannot be removed for years. A delegate system is entirely different. At every level the delegates can be quickly recalled if they fail to carry out their mandates.

Equality

This would be more "democratic" than the current set up. But that is only half the story. You cannot have real "democracy" without economic equality. At the same time as setting up a new political structure we have also got to get rid of the inequalities which capitalism needs to survive. Working people will have to take over the running of their own firms and run them for the community producing for the general good of all. At the same time money as a system of accounting will have to be abolished and everything will be freely distributed according to need. This does not mean work would be abolished but it does mean

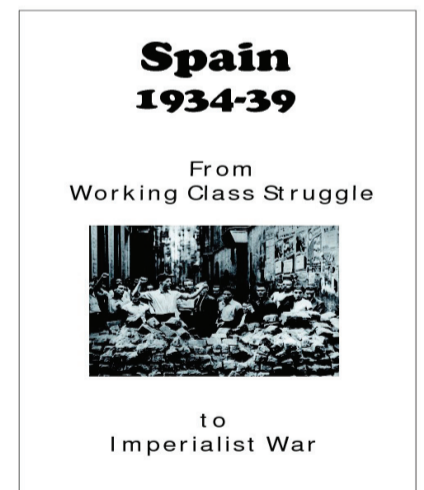
it would be shared out evenly so that we would have meaningful work for all without drudgery and wage slavery.

Such a world would be organised according to the original motto of Karl Marx "from each according to their ability; to each according to their need." This is his original vision of communism - a world without classes, nations and states. It has nothing to do with the nightmare that emerged in the USSR.

Some will argue that "human nature" will prevent us arriving at such a society. This forgets that human nature is not a static factor. It is fixed by the kind of society you live in. We have had 300 years of capitalist competition, war and greed but it can be shaken off. Revolutions have always altered people's perceptions. They allow them to "get rid of the muck of ages" (Karl Marx). The next one will be no different.

True, our alternative will not come about overnight. It will have to be fought for politically. This is why we need an international revolutionary organisation which will coordinate our scattered struggles and challenge the capitalist power structure everywhere. This is not a government

in waiting (we have no "leaders") to put yet another set of exploiters in charge but a fighting organisation which leads the onslaught on capital. We are committed to finding ways to work with other like-minded working class organisations in order to reach the wider working class. If you agree with the principles outlined here help to turn it into reality by joining in the fight. We have a world to win.



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group address**

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

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