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The Real Dilemma is not “Parliamentarism OR Fascism” But “Socialism OR Barbarism”

*In the wake of the murder of the rapper Pavlos Fyssas at the hands of a neo-Nazi Gold Dawn thug and the arrest of the leader of that party Greek Internationalists issued the following leaflet. Its warning is clear. To be **only** anti-fascist today is to fall into the trap of the Greek “democratic” state which is bringing in new repressive measures not only against immigrants but against all dissenters of capitalism.*

In the current context Greek neo-Nazis have become part of the neo-liberal management of the deep crisis of domestic capitalism and express its anti-working class attitude ... They emerged from the bowels of a bourgeois society in deep crisis. They were nourished on the politics of rapid devaluation of labour power

and the suppression of weaker elements of the working class, and on the racist and nationalistic propaganda that was prevalent in the politics of the conservative and social-democratic governments.

The government, which like every previous one, was harbouring and protecting Nazi terrorism, today plays on anti-fascism to exploit the event for petty electoral purposes and primarily to defuse tension in a way that is the most profitable for itself and for the system. It presents the image of an anti-fascist state that intervenes as the guardian of democracy and legality which acts decisively in a civil conflict between the “two extremes”. This tactic is designed to reassert the State’s monopoly of violence in order to

carry out the repressive aims of the Nazi gangs themselves.

Amongst the current governmental plans is the extension of this legislation to non-armed political groups. For anyone with a modicum of political intelligence every effort to criminalise the political existence of the Nazis, under the guise of “defence of democracy” — something that is opportunistically supported by various members of the capitalist left and some stupid ultra-leftists — gives the state a free hand to suppress the real opponents of the system.

And because the state is not neutral but a class institution, and the current parliamentary state is nothing but the democratic dictatorship of capital, any strengthening of it contributes to the

enhancement of the current brutal class war of capital against labour. It is, after all, the same parliamentary regime that nurtured the Nazis which is a component of the state itself. As always, anti-fascism, even in its most militant form, cannot but end up in the lap of bourgeois democracy.

The current bourgeois strategy in conditions of deep recession is to revive the system by smashing the working class. This strategy, which is still in progress, if only just beginning, consists in the dramatic fall in the price of labour power, the systematic suppression of the unemployed mass, the militarisation or even the elimination of the “excess” population through strengthening the rule of authoritarianism and consolidation of a permanent state

of emergency.

The necessary fight against neo-Nazism should be a subset of the struggle against the bourgeois state and capital. Under conditions of an acute crisis of capitalism any prospect for reform or humanising the system is a vain hope that could turn out to be lethal. What we need is to develop an autonomous proletarian movement and to create an internationalist class political organisation of the proletarian vanguard.

Internationalist Comrades
<http://engymo.wordpress.com/>
Athens 25/9/2013

[This is an extract. The full leaflet can be found on our website – CWO]

Good News For Capital

For the Working Class: The Mixture As Before

Good news then: the IMF says the UK is the second fastest growing economy amongst the world’s seven richest states (the G7). Apparently only the United States is growing faster than here. So what are we to make of news about hundreds of thousands of federal workers suddenly being told to take leave of absence without pay (furlough) as their workplaces shut down while Congress debates the budget deficit? And why, if the economic recovery is doing so well, is the world as a whole threatened with disastrous consequences if Congress fails to raise its self-imposed ‘debt ceiling’, i.e. the amount the government can borrow for public spending? The truth is that the ‘growth rate’ of the US economy and the world as a whole is lower than before the ‘great recession’ that was triggered when capitalism’s biggest ever financial bubble burst. All told, the system is in a worse position than ever. Central banks have pumped in trillions of dollars, euros, pounds, yen, yuan ... to prevent an even more colossal financial crash and a more severe recession but the global debt mountain is still estimated to be over 9 times global GDP. No-one is pretending that this debt can ever be paid off. It can’t be written off without massive and unpredictable social consequences (for example when everyone’s savings and pension funds are wiped out). The best that most governments hope for now is to be able to maintain interest payments on the national debt in the hope that one day growth rates will miraculously revive before another financial catastrophe

rocks the system. Meanwhile, pander to the credit ratings agencies and reduce government spending to try and keep up your rating to ensure low interest payments ... as if states were in the same position as private individuals. By contrast with the sums being pumped into the financial system, reduced spending on health and welfare services, employment benefits, schools, roads, community amenities in general: all the cuts that go under the heading of ‘austerity’ are set to continue. Just as the pantomime between the Republicans and Democrats in the US Congress is useful propaganda to emphasise to the working class how important it is that they make even more sacrifices in the national interest, so propaganda about the need for the UK to “live within its means” and keep up its credit rating helps persuade workers here to accept ‘austerity’.

Osborne of course is more smug than ever: “I think the overwhelming majority of people now realise Britain was right to tackle its debts.” Over the past five years the majority of people in Britain have certainly put up with a lot. Declining real wages (on average over £30 per week), well over a million jobs lost despite the talk of people holding onto their jobs, reduced public services, pension losses and the postponing of the retirement age, perpetual reductions to benefits for the unemployed and for people living in social housing accompanied by increasing harassment and intimidation of individuals.

Clearly some people are worse affected than others. Those in the weakest position have been hit the hardest. But it’s no use thinking the ‘recovery’ is going to change this. Labour and the TUC are trying to make out that this is because the government has mismanaged the economy and that the recovery is “way behind schedule” (TUC). Ed Balls, shadow Chancellor claims Labour would “build an economy that helps working people” whilst still managing to stick to the 2015/16 spending totals set out by the current coalition. In practice, whichever political party is in office the economy will be run to meet the needs of capital. Working class livelihoods will be increasingly threatened as employers strive to reduce their labour costs and the government continues to reduce welfare spending. Throughout the globe the game of the bosses is how to up productivity, how to get more unpaid work from their labour force. Forget about companies ‘providing jobs’. The only reason any capitalist firm exists is to make a profit.

Cheapen the cost of labour power: the outlook for the working class as a whole

There is only one source of genuine growth — i.e. the creation of new value or wealth, as opposed to the fictitious value created by financial speculation — and that is upping workers’ productivity. Historically capitalism’s drive for a higher rate of profit has brought continual technological

innovation and the unprecedented possibility of the majority of humanity escaping the need to labour all hours of the waking day to survive. This is testimony to the past usefulness of capitalism to humanity. Of course this is all an indirect result of an exploitative class society whose ruling class hides the fact that unpaid labour is behind all wealth creation. Moreover, it was never a straightforward process: the history of capitalism is one of cycles of ever-more encompassing slumps and recoveries from a more concentrated and centralised base. Once that cycle reached world proportions then its consequences have extended far beyond the strictly economic: the two world wars were a direct product of world economic downturn. Today the continued existence of such an irrational and unstable system as capitalism is a threat, not a benefit for humanity. After forty years of falling profit rates, restructurings, new technology and globalisation have not prevented declining growth. Despite new layers of workers joining the global labour force any ‘recovery’ on the agenda must be at the expense of the working class. By contrast, in a rationally organised society — one not dominated by a class living off the fruits of other’s labour — everyone would be involved in the task of producing first the necessities and then the ‘luxuries’ of civilised life. The means already exist for everyone across the globe to enjoy a reasonably comfortable life with a substantially shorter working day. The capitalist reality where the pursuit of profit

drives everything is very different. On the one hand capital is driving down wages and insisting on more and more ‘flexibility’ and fewer and fewer legal obstacles to deploying workers when, where and how it likes. On the other hand the global ‘reserve army of unemployed’ is growing inexorably and the long-searched for ‘recovery’ based on high tech manufacturing would only add to the problem.

Above all it is today’s youth who are threatened by this unprecedented situation. The route often dangled before young people as the road to success, education, is increasingly proving to be a road to nowhere as capitalism is unable to integrate the product of its advanced educational establishments. Graduates in debt, lucky to get a call centre job find themselves part of a dismal panorama of escalating asset bubbles palmed off as “recovery”. It is no surprise that those countries with the highest unemployment rates have seen the most street protests and uprisings. These have sometimes toppled governments but without any solution to the problems, which are global and defy national answers. Only when the working class in general asserts its capacity to paralyse the system of production will the existence of capitalism be challenged.

Global Warming Capitalism is dragging us to catastrophe

The latest UN Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) report makes a dismal reading. It states loud and clear that global warming is caused by human activity, and sees the argument on this issue as now settled. Since its last report in 2007, there has been no significant attempt to cut global emissions, in fact the rate of emissions of greenhouse gases has accelerated. In the 6 years since 2007 55 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide, CO₂, have been emitted. The total amount emitted between 1750 and 2011 was 545bn tonnes which means that in the last 6 years we have emitted 10% of the total emitted in the previous 2.6 centuries. Annual emissions are now 60% higher than the time of the first IPCC report in 1990 and CO₂ concentrations in the atmosphere are the highest they have been in the last 800,000 years. The result is that in the last 6 years there has been a 43% increase in the process known as “radiative forcing” in which greenhouse gases entrap heat in the atmosphere.

The report lists the disastrous consequences. Temperatures could increase to 3.7°C by the end of the century. Glaciers and polar ice sheets are melting, threatening to turn vast arable areas of the planet into desert and threatening to disrupt ocean currents and alter climatic conditions. The sea levels are rising. A rise of .82m could occur this century threatening major cities. Through the absorption of additional CO₂ seas are becoming more acidic, killing off marine life. The increased energy in the atmosphere is leading to more extreme weather events such as droughts, floods and hurricanes.

Capitalism’s response has been to produce more oil, gas and coal. Oil tar sands, the most polluting form of oil production have been developed, additional oil and gas has been produced by fracking and off-shore drilling. The response to the melting of the Arctic Sea ice has been to start drilling there also. In the UK record amounts are being invested in North Sea oil fields, tax breaks given for fracking and 30 new gas fired power stations

are planned. All this can be summed up as “business as usual”. Although it is clear that to continue on the present trajectory will make the planet largely uninhabitable and possibly lead to human extinction, capitalists are incapable of addressing this issue. Why is this?

Capitalism cannot resolve climate change because of the way the system operates. Under capitalism production is for profit alone. Because of the structural problems inherent in the system, the need for profit demands continual growth. Capitalism must expand or die. However, a global growth rate of 3%, means that the size of the global economy will double every 24 years. Since energy is largely produced by burning fossil fuels which produces CO₂ this means that when the size of the economy doubles, CO₂ emissions will double. Capitalism cannot exist in harmony with nature. It treats it as a raw resource to be exploited mercilessly. Neither scientific proof of the consequences of continual growth, nor moral condemnation for the rape of the planet, can change any of this.

During the past 6 years the economic crisis has produced a collapse in growth which has probably reduced the increase of emissions. However, throughout this period workers have been forced to accept pay cuts, social service cuts and a double helping of austerity, all this in order to restore economic growth. Our rulers have explained that cutting emissions will damage profits. Already the effects of climate change are being loaded onto the shoulders of the working class. It is the capitalist system which created this potential environmental disaster. Only the overthrow of capitalism can avert it. Other so called “solutions” are simply dreams.

Only a society which produces for human needs, not profit, will be able to roll back and repair the devastation which a few centuries of capitalist production have inflicted on the planet.

Saving Stocksbridge Leisure Centre – The limits of local action

A local facility threatened by the crisis

In January 2013 as part of their package of cuts in jobs and services Sheffield City Council announced that Stocksbridge Leisure Centre would shut at the start of April with funding set aside to demolish it. The announcement produced an immediate response with more than 700 people gathering outside the Centre in freezing snow on the first available Saturday morning to protest at the plan. The slogan which was chanted was very straightforward, “Save our Leisure Centre, Save it now!”. During the weeks that followed local people organised themselves to campaign for that slogan. Some of the leading voices were people whose parents and grandparents had been involved in months and years of effort and organisation to raise the funds to build the Centre 40 years ago.

Self-organisation in action

In those first weeks in January and February a number of meetings were held. The first was called by the local Stocksbridge Town Council with a platform dominated by politicians and Council Officers. The plan which they came up with was to call for local people to form a group to support a campaign controlled by the Town Council. However, there was an immense feeling that people wanted to take on the battle for themselves and weren’t prepared to be the pawns of the establishment. Instead of a compliant stage army to act as supporters of local vested interests and political factions the argument was won that a separate, fighting organisation had to form under the control of the activists. In February, the organisation 4SLC was formed at a meeting of some 200 people. Its constitution was adapted from a model taken from the local voluntary and community network but with a crucial difference. A committee and officers were directly elected but these were always directly accountable to open meetings of the full group. The constitution stated clearly that “The role of the Committee is to implement, between Group meetings, decisions and strategic policies decided by the Group. Where there is challenge or doubt the view of the Group will prevail”.

During February and March the group met regularly with attendance at meetings never falling below 100. In addition, working groups started work organising lobbies, supporting petitioning and carrying out events and activities to publicise the campaign and build support. Alongside that activity 4SLC also had to respond to the fact that the Council was pushing through a budget which embedded their planned cuts. The campaign decided to use all available means which meant that arrangements were made to pursue a “judicial review” – a legal advice that could possibly stall the Council plans and force them away from closure/demolition. Alongside that work a working group completed studies to present a basis for management of the Centre to be passed to 4SLC.

During February-April as the campaign continued to show determination and maintain local support from the community and user groups, Sheffield Council buckled under the pressure. Although the legal procedures had not forced a further delay in the closure the Council agreed a plan which averted the planned demolition and allowed the centre to reopen managed by the local community. A Charitable company, the 4SLC Trust, was formed by 4SLC and the Centre, now renamed the Stocksbridge *Community* Leisure Centre was reopened at the start of October.

The lessons of January to October

“People power helps re-open leisure centre” – Headline in *Sheffield Star* – 8th June, 2013
4SLC proved itself as an organisation capable of carrying out an effective struggle between January and May. Its struggle to defend a community facility was not derailed into abstract sloganising about forcing the Labour Council to adopt a more left-wing face. Its ability to force the Council onto the back foot was based on the campaign being controlled by the activists.

Many of the activists who had never experienced struggle before learnt quickly to trust their own organisation and activities rather than being drawn into the machinations of the local political factions. The strength drawn from collective action has left an imprint which will remain for a long time.

During July and August volunteers contributed thousands of hours of work to the reopened Centre. Their efforts and achievements to refurbish a building neglected by the Council for decades were tremendous. The activity again evidenced the power of cooperation and collective efforts without the direction of bosses or the enforced discipline of waged-labour.

To keep the Centre open volunteer effort will have to be maintained indefinitely. The mass meetings to prevent closure and demolition succeeded but that period of struggle has passed. It’s now being replaced by the challenges of organising a “not-for-profit” business at a time when the effects of the global crisis continue to rip away at working-class communities. The ability of the state to “recuperate” our efforts is very clear.

At least one leftist observer has criticised the campaign for having fought for the wrong slogan. Instead of fighting to save the facility the leftists, who never penetrated the campaign, now believe that the fight should have been to demand that the Council kept the Centre open under their control. We have no sympathy with such arguments –

- The line of march and demand to “Save our Leisure Centre” came from the community and never drifted into irrelevant requests for the Council to stop acting as agents of the bosses system
- Any commitment by the Council to maintain the facility would only have been at the expense of other facilities and would have been cancellable every twelve months as rounds of cuts succeed each other

The challenge of running a cooperative enterprise in an ocean of decaying capitalism has been well-rehearsed. We recognise that such an outcome is one of the possibilities when local struggles push back capitalism’s attacks.

But all the difficulties ahead cannot mask the benefits of the experience of self-organisation in struggle. Hundreds of working-class people in a small town have seen that it is possible to push back attacks through collective action. For all its limitations, the Stocksbridge campaign is part of the movement towards a general fightback.

A longer version of this article is available on our website.

Revolution and Organisation

Anton Pannekoek once wrote that the only weapons of the working class are its consciousness and its organisation. As a class its place in production gives it enormous social weight but that can only be brought to bear when it acts collectively. The working class also has no property to defend. Its freedom depends on the abolition of all property relations. This means that the working class revolution has to be different. We cannot simply defend our form of property inside the capitalist system or its state. We have to be aware of what we are doing and those who first reach awareness of our need to smash the capitalist state should proclaim that goal. At present we, as a class, are a long way from questioning the system and even further from acting collectively to fight it.

There are those who theorise this weakness as a strength and argue that the revolution will come from nowhere so we don’t need to worry. History suggests otherwise. In any social crisis the absence of a clear anti-capitalist agenda means that the capitalist can fill the gap with an ideology and an alternative of their own choosing. This has happened scores of times throughout history when a workers’ action has ended in capitalist *cul-de-sac*. Consciousness and organisation go together. Only when the working class gives an organisational expression to its consciousness, its awareness of its past lessons and future goals can we say that we are on the way to overthrowing the system. And only when those who are already aware of this, and already organised in more or less small groups, debate and discuss internationally can this lead to wider organisational possibilities.

Many point to the Indignados, the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring as indicators of the potential to fight back. It is not surprising that these movements have arisen largely backed by those masses of young people that a stagnant capitalism has no hope of integrating. However the movements on the streets can only pose the anti-capitalist question. It has to be answered by the workers in production taking to mass strikes for both economic and political gains. This is the real strength of the working class and this is what the capitalists truly fear. In Egypt the Army only deposed Mubarak when workers began a wave of strikes.

When a movement which starts in the streets and on the squares is matched by a strike wave that paralyses the system then the question of a new society will really be posed. New and old organisational forms of the class will then appear to coordinate these struggles. Those who recognise the need to smash capitalism and its state will need to fight within these organs to point out that a revolution cannot stop halfway, and cannot be restricted to a single country. This is not substitutionism. Revolutionaries can point the way or take a lead at key moments but they cannot take over a movement which empowers the majority (or else it ceases to be such a movement). Only the mass of the class in the final analysis can create a new world but those who already glimpse that world should not be shy in proclaiming it.

Join the revolutionrevolution!

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No Justice for Workers

On 1 April 2013 the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act brought in massive cuts to legal aid. The result is that civil legal aid will generally no longer be available for areas of law such as employment, welfare benefits, clinical negligence, immigration, debt, divorce and custody of children. The areas that have been cut are those that have the greatest significance for workers, both employed and unemployed, and those with disabilities. So if you are unlawfully sacked by your boss, refused a benefit to which you are entitled, or if you suffer injury at the hands of the NHS you will only be able to obtain legal representation for these matters if you can afford to pay for it, or are lucky enough to have access to the very limited number of ‘pro bono’ or free legal advice services.

No sooner had these cuts been implemented when the government announced its intention to make still further cuts. By the end of the year they intend to introduce a residence test for civil legal aid which will limit eligibility to those who can prove 12 months lawful residence in the UK. This test is probably illegal under UK and EU laws intended to prevent discrimination on grounds of race or nationality. There is no evidence that this proposal will even save much money, so it appears that its main driver is the ‘divide and rule’ ideology of xenophobia. The government is also proposing further constraints on legal aid funding for judicial reviews which enable the courts to scrutinise and sometimes overturn unreasonable and unlawful decisions by the government and other public bodies.

These cuts will reduce the legal aid budget by just under a quarter, but perhaps more significantly will deny the poorest sections of society access to redress against the decisions of the State that affect them. The removal of legal aid for welfare benefits advice comes at a time when major changes to the benefits system are being implemented such as Universal Credit and the transfer of disability benefits to Personal Independence Payments which are estimated to affect about half a million claimants. Those who fall victim to the State’s attempt to deprive them off benefit or even just the inevitable bureaucratic chaos that ensues from system change, will struggle to find any legal assistance to challenge the DWP’s decisions. Similarly employers will know that they can flout what remains of the employment protection laws with little risk of any comeback. These legal aid cuts are a direct attack on the working class. They are part of the wider strategy to drive down wages and create a supine and compliant workforce.