

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 190 26 January 2011 30p/80p

For a workers' government

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**UNITED
CAMPAIGN**



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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

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Sudan: secession vote, what next?

Tim Flatman recently completed a three-month tour of South Sudan. In the first of a series of articles he reports on the recent referendum on secession and the future of the social movements in the new country.

Any election or referendum where the final result is expected to beat Alexander Lukashenko's latest showing by nearly 20% on a 95% turnout would normally be regarded as suspect. To anyone familiar with the politics of South Sudan, however, a 99% vote for secession in a free referendum (held on 9-15 January) is highly plausible.

There were always going to be difficulties holding a vote in a large region with virtually no infrastructure, contested census results, where the first ever universal elections were held less than a year ago and where the entire population is war-traumatised. Add to this the shortened time-frame due to Northern attempts to delay/frustrate the referendum.

In a handful of counties the turnout is expected to exceed 100%, clearly less than ideal. However, reliable reports suggest the referendum was consistent with international standards and "none of the shortcomings undermine

the credibility of the referendum process" (Sudanese Network for Democratic Elections). The predicted results in South Sudan itself are backed up by similar results from smaller samples of diaspora who voted in the US, UK, Israel, Kenya, Uganda and other countries.

In just over 100 days, talking with hundreds of people across South Sudan, and despite encountering a surprisingly high degree of openness, I only found one Southerner who supported continued unity with the North. Such is the desire for secession that the Government of South Sudan, and the dominant part of the South, the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), undertook serious efforts to persuade ordinary people to allow campaigning for unity to take place, in the knowledge that the vote for secession was always going to be overwhelming and that their best bet for persuading other nations to accept separation was a free and fair referendum. The biggest threat to such an outcome came from war-traumatised individuals for whom differences of opinion have traditionally posed a physical threat, rather than from political institutions. This threat was successfully contained.

Demands around jobs, working rights, public services and control over resources are seen, by everyone, at every level of society, as contingent on separation first being im-

plemented. And despite the overwhelming vote for separation and international endorsements of the voting process, separation is not guaranteed.

The National Congress Party military dictatorship based in the north still has hopes of frustrating separation by creating confusion over border demarcation and making agreement on resource-sharing difficult. If it can provoke a proxy conflict in Abyei and successfully create the impression that both sides are equally to blame, it will provide a ready-made excuse for states with interests in preserving unity (China, Egypt) to refuse to recognise a separate state of South Sudan. Other states will find it more difficult to recognise a state without clearly defined boundaries.

The very least the North would hope to get out of such confusion would be a higher proportion of the South's natural resources, without which development of the new South Sudan is hamstrung. Any deal Southerners saw as unfair would prompt ordinary Southerners to want to renegotiate resource-sharing agreements and that could lead back to war. However, the North hope that even if recognition of an independent South can't be prevented, they can retain possession of the contested area of Abyei, a contested area.

Space does not allow a full discussion of the problems of Abyei here, but the

only sustainable solution is transferring the entire region, as defined by the Hague, back to the South in a speedy manner. This solution is supported by the entire permanent population of Abyei, expressed through the nine traditional chiefs (whose mandate is more democratic than Western liberal democracies might sneeringly suppose), the regional administration, religious congregations, local Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement and all the local civil society organisations including youth, women, teachers, cattle-owners and health workers.

Socialists must support and mobilise for the results of the referendum to be implemented, that recognition of an independent South takes place whatever the reaction of the North, that the wishes of the permanent residents of Abyei are respected and that the bribe for peace with the North (resource-sharing) is not so burdensome as to cripple the new nation before it is even born.

However, even once these formational demands are met, there are still huge, unique, challenges in South Sudan that inhibit the emergence of social movements. I'll return to that question in the next article.

• Tim is a Labour Party member and former party official.
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Defend Palestinian right to negotiate

By Cathy Nugent

The al-Jazeera/*Guardian* reports (24-25 January) of leaked documents showing Palestinian peace negotiators offering large concessions to Israel — on Jerusalem and the long-term citizenship of refugees — are not "revelations".

The Israelis have often accused Palestinian representatives of not being credible partners in negotiation. But they said that to construct a narrative conducive to their own political priorities.

The Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas says the selection of documents is *political*, and gives a distorted picture of Fatah's stance, which continues to be solidly for a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital. Whether Abbas is right about the politics of the report or not, anyone who has followed the depressingly unproductive course of the Israeli-Palestinian "peace talks" will

know the Palestinian side — under pressure and as a measure of weakness — has conceded a lot.

There will be political fall out from these reports.

It will be said that Fatah representatives should not have made *any* concessions. That will be the line of Hamas, anti-Israel Arab nationalists and many on the left. It is even the line of the *Guardian* (see picture).

We give no political endorsement to Fatah, but consistent democrats should not give blanket condemnation either. The Palestinians have the right to manoeuvre and compromise in order to win a political settlement for themselves.

If these reports strengthen the hand of Hamas that is not good. They do not accept *any* negotiations by the PA, never mind "compromises", because of their consistently hostile attitude to the existence of Israel.

The reports confirm a view of Israel as consistently obstructive and

Guardian condemns

hardline in talks. Nonetheless it is not true that Israeli governments cannot be forced to change tack. The fact is that internal (left) opposition and external (from the US and Europe) political pressure on Israel has, especially over the last 10 years, been very weak.

A poll last year showed that only 32% of Palestinians are for direct negotiations now. They cannot be blamed for having no faith in the 20 year long "process". Any expectation that Obama was able to push for a settlement has also been pushed back. These "revelations" will not help matters.

Accepting a drift towards further Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other potential conflicts in the Middle East is not something any socialist should want to see. Yet that is the logic of condemning outright any Palestinian attempt to manoeuvre and negotiate.

"Two states" remains the only democratic formula which can accommodate the rights to self-determination of both nations, Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs. It is a way to arm workers, Arab and Jewish, to unite across the borders and fight the many political and social injustices they both face.

Nottingham student protest on 19 November

Students march to save EMA

By Pat McCabe

Over a thousand people assembled in Piccadilly Circus and marched to Westminster on Wednesday 19 January to protest against the government's plans to scrap the Education Maintenance Allowance for 16-18 year old students. Protests were held elsewhere in the UK.

The demonstration was called by the National Campaign against Fees and Cuts in response to the proposed debate and vote over the issue of EMA in the House of Commons, where the Labour Party would attempt to overturn the decision to scrap the scheme. The vote was lost, but considering the limited preparation time, the initiative shown by the student movement and the subsequent mobilisation resulted in a fantastic turnout on the streets.

People began to assemble in Piccadilly Circus, before proceeding towards Westminster via Embankment. The mood of the demonstration was good natured and peaceful, with marchers determined to show their opposition to government cuts amidst a lively carnival atmosphere. As the demonstration flowed into Parliament Square, the crowd were entertained by an impromptu open-mic performance from various hip-hop artists, whilst the sound speaker on wheels catered for the dub step heads.

The mood of the demonstration was a testament to the good character of the marchers and highlighted how a demonstration can take place peacefully when the police use tact and restraint rather than the open belligerence seen on previous days of action.

NCAFC conference: a mixed bag

By Chris Marks, Hull Students Against Fees and Cuts

Around 150 activists came together for the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts conference in London on Saturday 22 January.

The conference was a frustration in that it failed to achieve its main aim of establishing an ongoing and stable structure for the campaign. The tens of thousands of students around the country who have participated in NCAFC-initiated days of action and who identify with the campaign have no mechanism for getting involved with the running of the campaign.

This conference was intended to resolve that, but it was a knife-edge vote on whether the campaign should have an elected steering committee, split almost 50-50 after several recounts.

Conference decided that this did not represent a sufficient mandate to take a decision and decided in-

stead to maintain the status quo.

The current way of working allows individuals from organisations that have been implacably hostile to NCAFC from the beginning to opportunistically participate in the campaign on an equal basis to those who have been committed to the project and worked hard to build it.

The event was certainly not without its positives; in a session which debated political motions, a discussion around the usefulness of raising the "call" for a general strike now was had at an usually high level.

Workers' Power and SWP members argued that NCAFC should back the call because "it will put the bureaucrats under pressure". AWL members and others argued that in a context in which union bureaucrats are unwilling to support groups of workers fighting back immediately, pretending that their main crime is their failure to back the general strike call actually lets them off the hook. The conference decided comprehensively

against backing the "call".

Although the conference did not create a national committee, it was decided that the NCAFC would organise a regular programme of open regional organising meetings.

In the absence of a committee structure, these can be used to give the campaign permanence and political direction. In the era of Millbank and the Parliament Square kettles, headbangers about steering committees are not glamorous or appealing but they are necessary. The Christmas lull has already seen a slight ebb of the movement; we will not be able to maintain an explosive pitch of action forever.

When further lulls occur, we will need stable, permanent organisations that can put in the hard graft to revive the movement. Despite a frustrating conference, NCAFC, with its commitment to democracy and its class-struggle, direct-action politics, is still the best-placed network to become such an organisation.

• NCAFC: anticuts.com

Double-dip doom looms

By Rhodri Evans

The Tory/ Lib-Dem line that their cuts are only a fair and necessary price to pay for private-sector prosperity has been demolished by economic figures for October-December 2010.

GDP had been rising modestly since the end of 2009, after crashing in 2008-9. It dipped again in October-December, at a rate indicating economic decline of two per cent a year.

The Tories say it was just the snow. Hard-headed capitalists don't think so. The pound fell on financial markets. The

Financial Times quoted bank economist Bob Carnkell: "With public spending cuts set to bite this year into what already looks a fairly soft starting point, concern over the effect of the UK's ambitious budget restraint on its growth could begin to mount..."

Unions had started to drift into a stance of accepting the cuts as inevitable and trying to soften them through voluntary-redundancy and redeployment deals. The new statistics should jolt them into new awareness of the openings to build a huge movement to block the cuts altogether.

Judge extends anti-union laws

By Janine Booth, London Transport region representative, RMT Council of Executives

A judge has banned a planned strike by RMT members on Docklands Light Railway, issuing an injunction that makes it even harder for trade unions to hold lawful strikes.

RMT balloted members employed by Serco Docklands over several issues, including attacks on pension rights, differences in working hours, and the sacking of two members. The union's ballot did not break existing anti-union law, so the judge announced an extension of the law and declared that the ballot notification did not meet its requirements and therefore the strike could not go ahead!

Legislation dating back to 2004 states that a union has to notify the employer of the number of members in each grade and location that it is balloting for industrial action, and to explain how it has put this information together. That is quite difficult and onerous to comply with, particularly in companies with many different workplaces and grades and where staff change grade or location frequently.

But although RMT has used the same format in providing this explanation since the law was introduced, without being legally challenged, this judge decided that it was not detailed enough. He banned the DLR strike because the union's explanation did not meet requirements that up until that moment had not existed! He also ruled that it was inaccurate for the union to claim that it had updated and audited its membership information, as this implies that it car-

ried out two separate processes when it had not done so!

The purpose of the law requiring unions to provide this explanation is to give the employer the information it needs to undermine the strike, for example by campaigning among the members involved or organising to cover work duties that would be left uncovered by the strike. The judge seems to have rewritten the purpose as well as the detail of the law, as he states that the purpose of the explanation is to allow the employer and the court to monitor the union's information-gathering so that they can ensure the information is accurate. In practice, this means that the unions have to provide a detailed explanation so that the employer can scrutinise the notification and look for slight inaccuracies that allow it to ask the court to ban the strike!

No-one can seriously believe that balloting legislation — or the court judgments that extend and deepen it — are about ensuring that strikes are organised democratically and fairly. The Serco Docklands case shows clearly that the laws and judgments are about arming employers to have entirely democratic industrial action banned so they can force through attacks on the workforce without effective resistance. They show the government and the judiciary acting in the service of the employers against the trade union movement.

Our unions need to expose and oppose these laws and rulings. They also need to organise a major protest movement to demand their repeal and to assert the democratic right to strike. RMT is appealing against this injunction, and discussing how to campaign effectively against anti-union judgments.

Royal Mail sell-off imminent: union needs to regroup

By Colin Foster

The government's Postal Services Bill, for selling off Royal Mail, completed its "third reading" in the House of Commons on 12 January.

It still has to go through the House of Lords and get Royal Assent, but those are formalities. The Government's problem is now not getting the law through, but finding a buyer.

The post and telecom union CWU ran two previous campaigns against selling off Royal Mail with success — against the Tory government in 1996, and against Mandelson in 2009.

However, the 2009 campaign was much more limp than the 1996 campaign, and succeeded only because the New Labour government must have decided that it was not worth the stress of forcing privatisation through Parliament on Tory votes (a lot of Labour MPs would have voted against) when in any case it was unlikely to find a buyer before the general election.

The CWU's response to the Bill passing the Commons was even more limp: "government MPs have missed the opportunity to safeguard post offices and postal services by not backing key amendments".

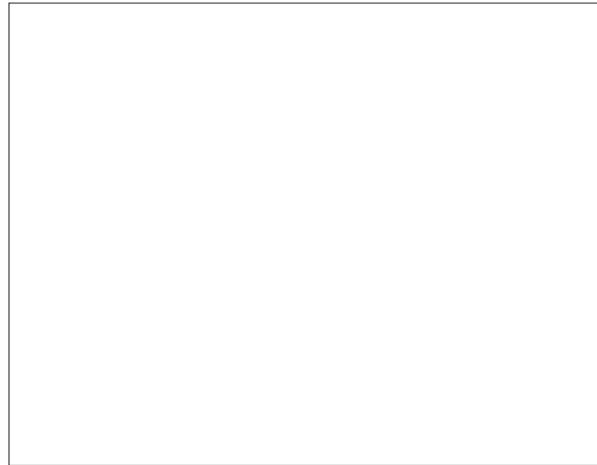
Before 2003, Royal Mail workers accounted for one-third of all strikes in Britain. They still have stronger organisation than many other groups, but the weakness of the CWU on privatisation reflects the inertia of the bureaucracy as well as the cumulative effect of setbacks.

Levels of strike action fell from 50,000 days a year up to 2002 to about 3000 in 2005 after the "Major Change" deal of 2003.

In 2007 an industrial battle between postal workers and Royal Mail ended with the union leadership letting industrial action dribble away, and then, after a long pause, pushing through a deal which gave Royal Mail bosses a go-ahead for "flexibility".

Another dispute on jobs and conditions in 2009 ended the same way.

The CWU now needs to focus on organising to meet the more drastic attacks on jobs and conditions that will come with privatisation. An effort to organise casual workers in Royal Mail, and workers in private mail companies, is central.



Chinese internet police. Internet activists face many obstructive tactics by hostile states.

Activist websites under threat



A major study released in December has confirmed that websites belonging to independent media and human rights organisations around the globe are increasingly vulnerable to cyber-attack.

The report issued by Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet and Society has implications for all civil society organisations, including trade unions and leftist groups.

Though the study focussed on distributed denial of service (DDOS) attacks on websites, the researchers learned through surveys and research that organisations have reported a whole range of issues.

Hijacking of domain names, filtering of content (states censoring websites), and site defacements are common.

Denial of service attacks aim to keep a website offline and inaccessible. Site defacements occur when attackers get access to the site and are a form of cyber-vandalism. Hijacking of domain names is a particularly difficult problem to solve, especially for small organisations.

And the solutions to one problem (such as defending one's site against denial of service attacks) actually make it harder to solve another (such as circumventing what has been called "the great firewall of China").

The release of the study coincided with the well-publicised attacks by supporters of WikiLeaks on websites which were perceived to have lined up against Julian Assange and his project.

Those attacks managed to briefly shut down some of the most important websites in the world, such as PayPal.

But the focus of the Harvard study was on much smaller sites which in some cases take days or weeks to recover from such attacks and get back online.

While huge companies can easily recover from attacks – often within a few minutes – smaller groups struggle with this.

One cause for concern is that some of the most popular content management systems used by trade union and leftist websites are particularly vulnerable to these kinds of attacks.

Drupal and WordPress were both named in the report as being vulnerable if used with their default configurations.

The final section of the study consists of a number of recommendations for organisations seeking to protect themselves from cyber-attack.

These included making sure that sites were regularly, and thoroughly backed-up, which most will be doing already.

But they also recommended the creation of live mirror sites ready to take over if an existing site is brought down by a cyber-attack, which is something few unions or political groups will have done.

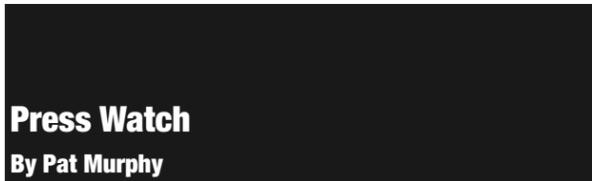
In looking over some of the sites attacked and those who were likely to be doing the attacking, it becomes clear that some of our sites are likely future victims if we are not careful.

For example, the Iranian and Vietnamese governments were named as possible perpetrators of cyber-warfare targeting opponents of the regimes.

When we campaign against the jailing of worker-activists in those countries, aiming to get the attention of those regimes, in doing so we may well be putting our own online presence at risk.

- Eric Lee is the founding editor of LabourStart

Standing up for the oppressed?



The Daily Mail has a problem with the Tory-led coalition. It's gone too far and some of its policies are not what they expected from David Cameron.

Does the *Mail* think the cuts, or the reforms of the NHS have gone too far? No. The target of their fury is the impeccably Conservative Home Secretary, Theresa May.

Conservative MP Philip Davies captured just how serious the problem in the *Mail on Sunday* (24 January 2011) "In many respects, Theresa May is as bad as Harriet Harman." In Mailworld that's about as bad as it gets.

It is the fact that Harman's Equality Act is being left on the statute book that allows the *Mail* to breathe new life into their old gripe about "political correctness gone mad". Their front page read: "Equality madness: Government spends £30m to discover whether preserving fish stocks harms ethnic Chinese, or hovercraft discriminate against gays".

There are probably too many words and too much information in this headline for it to have the desired impact on the average bigot, but the story that followed was a "special investigation" into a litany of loony projects paid for out of tax-payer's money in the name of equality.

As always a close reading with a half-way functioning brain revealed that most of the projects were unremarkable equality checks or blindingly obvious protections against discrimination and harassment. And not particularly expensive. When, for example, a scheme to fund home insulation for low-income families was cut, the Department of Energy and Climate carried out an audit to assess whether various minority groups would be particularly disadvantaged. Outrageous.

Basically the *Mail* has just spotted that the Equality Act now requires employers to carry out an "equality impact assessment" when they introduce new initiatives. To all but those already predisposed to be hostile to "equal opportunities" the *Mail* has come up with a pretty disappointing set of mad examples.

However some of the work they do list reveals how little the *Mail* has moved from its hateful, poisonous tradition. "Another Home Office initiative 'Blow The Whistle On Gay Hate,'" they report, "encourages victims of homophobia to go to the police". They quote the very charming Philip Davies again, "This is the kind of politically corrupt driv-

that we had come to expect from Harriet Harman and the previous Government, but it is the type of thing that makes the public's blood boil and it is a complete waste of everyone's time and money."

So there's a new revelation for you. The *Mail* has decided to go soft on crime. As long, that is, as the crime is directed at gay people, immigrants, Muslims or asylum seekers.

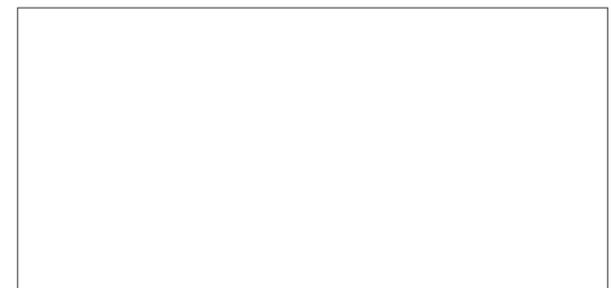
Postscript: It wouldn't be fair to claim that the *Mail* is not concerned with the rights of minorities or the oppressed however. Elsewhere it has been very keen to make a stand for an unfortunate couple who had their dearest beliefs and principles trampled on by the state: the Christian couple, Peter and Hazelmary Bull who were forced to pay £3,600 in damages to a gay couple to whom they refused to rent a room in their Bed and Breakfast in Cornwall.

The paper presented the saga as one of the persecution of Christians, a group which was being "pushed to the margins of society" rather than one of vile prejudice against two men on the basis of their sexuality.

Really? But doesn't the Head of State have to belong to this group? Doesn't it have guaranteed seats in the House of Lords? And a regular five minute slot on the most listened-to radio news programme every morning of the week?

Not important. You see the downtrodden Bulls had to rely on donations from the Christian Institute and "are struggling to pay debts". Steven Preddy and Martin Hall, the gay couple involved, "were supported by the taxpayer-funded state equality body the Equality and Human Rights Commission". So not only have "the gays" won out over the Christians but we the taxpayer are paying for it.

But are we really? According to the *Mail* Mr and Mrs Bull are "facing financial ruin" because they have been "ordered to pay most of the costs of the commission". Well that's a relief. There is some justice in this sorry tale.



Mr and Mrs Bull. Persecuted Christians? Bigoted idiots more like.

Why I joined the AWL



People who have joined the Alliance for Workers' Liberty recently tell us why

Donna Allen is a station worker and RMT activist on London Underground.

Until I met the AWL I'd not been in touch with many people who shared my way of seeing the world. I've been on the Tube for four years, and in the RMT all that time, but it was only with the fight against cuts and the recent dispute that I became really active.

I met the AWL when two comrades came to our picket line, and gave out the *Tubeworker* bulletin and the paper. From there I got involved in Janine's campaign [Janine Booth's successful campaign to be elected London Transport rep on the RMT executive], and from there it was a short step to joining up. I wanted to play an active role in the group, engage in activities and discussions and expand my knowledge.

Chris Norton is a sixth-form student in Sheffield.

When I was nine I came home from school and said to my dad, "Dad, don't you think communism would be the perfect system?" I didn't really know what I was talking about, but I had a general idea of socialism. Last year I met an AWL comrade, Max, selling *Solidarity*, and he made an effort to speak to me and my friend.

We agreed to meet regularly, though we were worried it would involve him standing up on a chair and shouting "Burn them all!" in the middle of the café. In fact the discussions were good, and fleshed out the ideas I already had.

I went to more meetings in the holidays, and when I was asked whether I'd join, I thought, yes, it makes sense...

I'm glad it did, as it's provided me with lots of support, particularly with the school students' protests, when my ideas really passed from theory to practice. I'm not just turning up at protests, I'm really involved in something. My friend didn't join because he was interested but didn't want to make a commitment — I did.

What I like about the AWL is that we don't just get up and shout — we do shout, but we're the thoughtful Trots, if you like.

Lawrie Coombs is a probation officer who lives in Stockton on Tees.

Why did I decide to rejoin the AWL after a number of years outside it? I never lost my libertarian socialist, Marxist politics, but the years of hard grind took their toll. I'm more careful with my time now.

Nonetheless, the situation in the world, the election of a Tory government worse than the one in the 80s, reminded me of a responsibility to be active involved in political struggle. I think the best avenue for that is membership in the AWL. The recent student struggles inspired me too, and I was impressed by the organisation's turn outwards, which I hope will continue.

I don't want to be someone who just spouts off at work or to my friends. I want to spread the ideas, and play a role organising others too.

Pat Smith, from Hull, is a Leeds Uni student occupier.

I met the Hull comrades at a Palestine solidarity demo. I thought the AWL line on Palestine made sense, and that drew me in. I started going to branch meetings and organising with them, then went to Ideas for Freedom. I became a member after I'd stood up at Hull Trades Council and introduced myself as AWL — I thought, if I'm going to say that, I'd better actually join!

Courts and Tories attack right to strike

Courts and the Government are making a two-pronged attack on the right to strike. It becomes more and more urgent for the unions to launch a big political campaign for union rights.

On 19 January, Justice Michael Tugendhat granted Serco Docklands, the operators of the Docklands Light Railway, an injunction (legal order) banning a strike by the rail union RMT due to happen on 20-21 January (see page 2).

Judges' interpretations have pushed the circumstances in which bosses can get injunctions wider and wider, and this judgment pushed them wider still.

Yes, the RMT had given Serco a list of the members in each grade and location that it had balloted for industrial action, and to explained how it put this information together. No, the employer could not find flaws in the list.

In bigger strike ballots, the employer almost always can find flaws, however meticulous the union is, and that loophole was used last year to ban BA cabin crew strike action. Not this time. The bosses' lawyers and the judge found a new pretext.

The union's explanation of how it had compiled the list of workers being balloted was not good enough, the judge said — although the format was exactly the same as the union has used for many years!

Further, the judge said, the union claimed to have updated and audited its membership information. That implied two separate processes, but in fact it was one. Strike banned!

The judge introduced a new criterion by saying that the purpose of the explanation which the union must provide with its list is to allow the employer and the court to monitor the union's information-gathering.

It's a common process when the labour movement is on the back foot; the judges reinterpret the laws, again and again, to make them more restrictive.

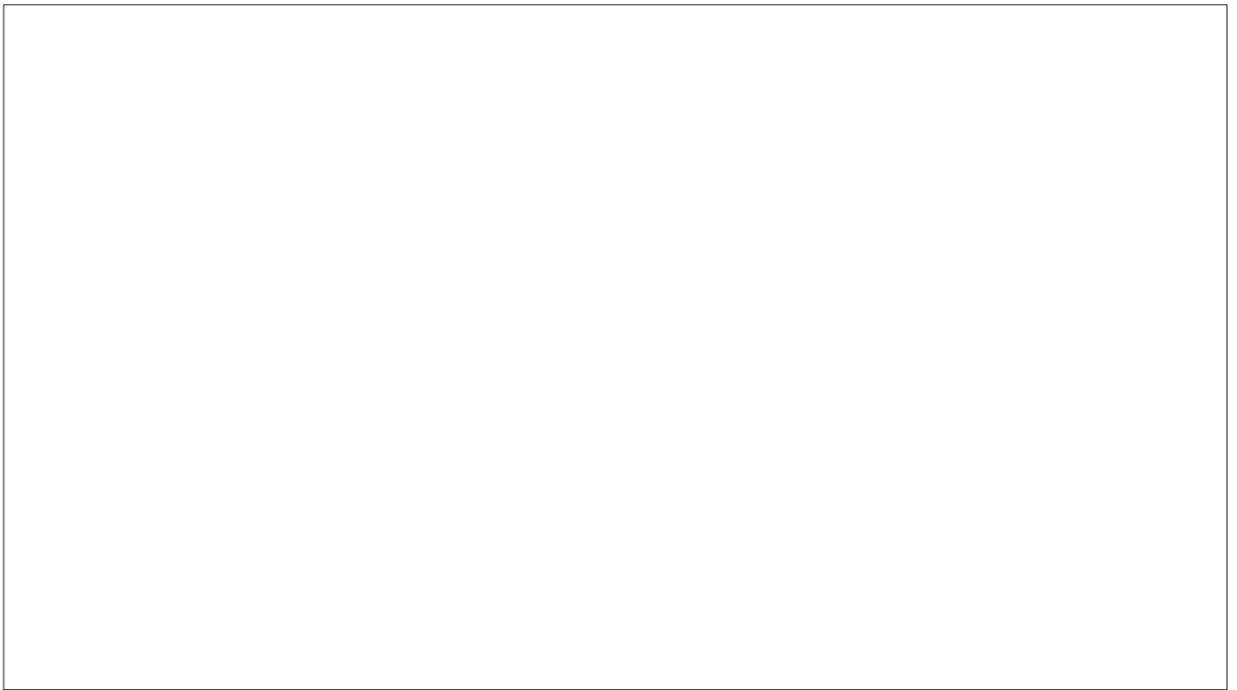
In case that is not enough, prime minister David Cameron declared in Parliament on 12 January that he was "happy to look at" plans for new anti-strike laws, to come on top of the Thatcher laws which already restrict workers' rights in Britain more than in any other big wealthy country.

Boris Johnson, the Tory mayor of London, and the bosses' federation CBI have called for banning strikes unless the ballot shows a 40% (CBI) or 50% (Johnson) majority for strike among all those entitled to vote, not just among those voting.

On that criterion of a majority, neither Johnson nor Cameron would be in office! 19% of people entitled to vote in London chose Johnson in 2008; 23% of those on the electoral roll voted Tory in 2010.

The same day, Cameron co-signed an article with Boris Johnson in *The Sun* denouncing unions which had talked of striking around the time of the Royal Wedding.

Lib Dem policy is for a new law to empower the government to ban strikes which hit "essential services". Vince Cable reaffirmed that policy in the run-up to the May 2010



Union buster

general election.

The government knows it will face strikes against its cuts. With the judges, it is preparing the way to use the law against those strikes.

In this area, more obviously than in any other, the law is no expression of abstract and timeless justice. It is a reflection of the balance of forces between the working class and the bosses, and then, a factor in shaping that balance for the future.

In almost every European Union country, the constitution or the law establishes a right to strike (though with limits, sometimes slight and sometimes, especially in Eastern Europe, serious).

Almost everywhere even employers concede that the right to withdraw your labour is fundamental to enabling workers to operate as people with rights and an effective way of defending those rights, rather than serfs or slaves.

Without that right, whatever the claims of the country generally to be a democracy, tyranny reigns in our working lives.

Britain, Ireland, and Malta are the only European Union countries not to establish in law the right to strike.

Over decades, British workers forced the law to concede, in a grudging, backhanded sort of way, that in practice strikes should be allowed. This was summed up in a law passed in 1906 by a Liberal government under pressure

from the then-young Labour Party, giving strikers and unions "immunity" from being sued to repay the cost of strikes to employers.

Thatcher's Tory government, in the 1980s, through huge confrontations, redefined the law both on the statute books and in practice, restricting strikes hugely.

Then union leaders scandalously allowed Labour to govern for 13 years without repealing Thatcher's anti-union laws.

Even now, with the Tories back, the union leaders are sleepwalking on the issue. Both the DLR judgement, and Cameron's speech, passed almost without comment from union leaders.

Left-wing Labour MP John McDonnell, having won a place in the ballot which allows a few backbench MPs to get Bills before Parliament, pushed a Bill simply to stop judges banning strikes on grounds of minor errors in the balloting.

His Bill soon fell, on 22 October, because not enough Labour MPs turned out to back it, and the Labour front bench would not back it. Union leaders let that pass without calling the Labour MPs to account.

Reversing the drift is urgent. Activists in every union should demand that their union leaders get together to launch a strong, visible, lively campaign for the right to strike and to take solidarity action.

• More: www.workersliberty.org/eu-rights

Ireland: was it for this?

*"Was it for this the wild geese spread
The grey wing upon every tide;
For this that all that blood was shed,
For this Edward Fitzgerald died?"*
W B Yeats, September 1913*

The Republic of Ireland (26 of Ireland's 32 counties) has been in the throes of economic revolution for more than two years, since the collapse of the "Celtic Tiger" boom economy. Now it is experiencing the consequent political revolution.

Dublin's Fianna Fail/Green coalition government has collapsed. A general election will most likely be held on 25 February.

The alternative government to the Fianna Fail/ Green coalition is a coalition of Fine Gael and the Labour Party and, maybe, the supple-spined Green Party again. All these parties, all the parties of both outgoing and income coalitions, agree on the savagely severe Fianna Fail/ Green Finance Bill that has been dictated to Dublin by the international bankers. All of them, Labour as well as the others. Labour aspires no higher than coalition.

Worse than that, and in its own way startling, all four of the parties in government, or soon to be in government, are determined to pass this Bill, against which there is massive popular anger.

The living standards of the people and, in the first place

the workers, have been cut by 10% or more. The Finance Bill is another assault. And these "democratic" politicians want to pass the Finance Bill on the eve of the General Election. They rush to declare Irish democracy bankrupt!

This is worse, because more blatant and explicit, than what happened in Britain in the May 2010 general election. The Tories did not spell out any details of the cuts they would make. The Lib Dems, who are now giving the Tories the parliamentary votes to make the cuts, fought the election on a pledge to fight Tory cuts, and ratted on their voters after the election. In Ireland the politicians of the three main parties and the Greens are determined to prevent the voters "interfering" in the big business of government — the Finance Bill.

This acceptance of the dictates of the international financiers has already shown what the politicians' routine palaver about "Irish sovereignty and independence" is worth.

Sinn Fein is likely to be the electoral gainer from this shambles.

Sinn Fein denounces the main parties for not letting the electorate decide on the cuts dictated by international financiers. It tries to speak to the large part of the working class and other electors which rejects and opposes the reduction in living standards.

Sinn Fein won a recent election in Donegal, long a Fianna Fail stronghold. Fianna Fail calls itself "the Republican

party", and Sinn Fein is best place to appeal to Fianna Fail voters. It is standing candidates in almost all the (multi-member) constituencies. Gerry Adams is standing in Louth.

But Sinn Fein too is looking for a governmental coalition to join. Its strategy for a decade has been to become Fianna Fail's junior partner in government, to match its position in Northern Ireland where it governs in coalition with the DUP.

It was greatly disappointed by its vote in the last (2007) general election. All is changed. Now Sinn Fein has a pretty clear political field. This time Gerry Adams will very likely win a Dail seat.

Sinn Fein will be like the Lib Dems in the 2010 British election. And after it, too, when the dirty horse-trading and bargaining will begin.

Ninety years after nationalist Ireland won an independence that generations had fought and died for, the gombeen bourgeoisie has reduced things to this shambles. It is a bourgeois mockery of the aspirations of the best of those who worked and fought for Irish independence.

* Notes: The wild geese were Catholic Irish who fled to Catholic France, Spain, Austria, etc. as mercenary soldiers in the 17th and 18th centuries, when their people in Ireland were held in a sort of apartheid. Edward Fitzgerald was a leader of the republicans allied with the French Revolution, the United Irishmen. Yeats wrote the poem during the 1913-14 labour war in Dublin. Yeats sided actively with the workers, publishing an article in their paper, the *Irish Worker*.

Left calls for a constituent assembly

Two Tunisian socialists based in the UK, Nadim Mahjoub and Shawky Arif, spoke to *Solidarity*

Nadim: On 23 January, about 300 people set off in a “Caravan of Liberty” from rural areas, to join demonstrators in Tunis. They quickly grew to 1,000. People from other towns tried to do the same, though some were blocked by the police.

When the protesters arrived in the capital, some of them sat down in front of the Prime Minister’s office. They changed slogans, calling for the overthrow of the government, and the dissolution of the RCD ruling party. Tents have been put up. The organisation that exists there is a combination of grassroots community organisation and left-wing trade unionists.

When general Ben Ammar tried to convince the sit-in to disperse, bottles were apparently thrown at him.

One of the slogans raised widely in the capital is for a constituent assembly. People fear a vacuum, and the possibility that the army will intervene. There are also committees in the neighbourhoods, which began on 14 January to organise self-defence against police terror.

Developments in the workplaces are slower, because the unions are split. Some people want to continue the strikes, others to go back. In Sfax, the second biggest city, the union bureaucracy has been forced by pressure from below to call a regional general strike for 26 January. A few other areas are going to follow, but we don’t know what will happen in the capital.

On 24 January there was a successful strike in primary education. The government wanted to reopen the schools and universities bit by bit, but in Sfax they were completely closed, and in Tunis the strike was also a success. I thought the movement would die out, but it seems that it is continuing. It’s not as big as 14 or 15 January, but there are still many thousands on the streets demanding the overthrow of the government.

No, no one is raising the slogan of a workers’ government. Even the leftist groups around the January 14 Front are not raising that, but focusing on the dissolution of the regime and a constituent assembly. From there they will draw up a programme. The economic and social demands which the movement began with have not been so prominent in recent days — the focus is on the regime itself. The January 14 people talk about a coalition of all democrats or “progressive people”, a real democracy in Tunisia.

The Communist Workers’ Party of Tunisia is Stalinist and influenced by two-stage theory, sure; but they are also influenced by the fact that people are not really at the level of calling for a workers’ government. The January 14 Front is to the left of the movement, certainly to the left of prominent human rights activists of the type who want to be candidates for president but don’t have any economic programme at all.

The Islamists have not participated in any serious way — perhaps a few individuals, but that’s it. In the 1990s they claimed they had majority support, but they have not been visible in this movement. Now, if you read an interview in the *Financial Times* with Rached Ghannouchi, the “spiritual leader” in exile of Ennahda, the largest Islamist party, he says they are for the revolution and a democratic Tunisia. Some on the left advocate an alliance on the basis that these people are different from other Islamists, and don’t advocate a caliphate. They may not raise it now, but if they take power it will be a different matter — otherwise they would not be Islamists.

There are two levels of support the Tunisian movement needs. The first is to see and hear of people on the streets in other countries, so there is an internationalisation and not just an Arabisation of the movement. The other level is direct support for the unions in Tunisia. If people are worried about giving money to the union bureaucracy, there are channels for getting money directly to the rank-and-file.

• Nadim is a supporter of the Tunisia Solidarity campaign: tunisiasolidarity.wordpress.com

Shawky: Some of Ben Ali’s former ministers have resigned from the ex-ruling party, to give people the impression they are clean, but it has not stopped the protests. People want a clean break with the old regime, including its personnel.

The interim government, under the pressure of strikes, is reshuffling its cabinet again. Perhaps they will get rid of three or four ministers, but the protests will continue.

On 23 January a Liberation Caravan left from Sibi Bouzid began their march to Tunis. They planned to walk all the way, but were given lifts by the bus drivers. When they arrived they sat in at the prime minister’s office, with slogans like “We won’t go home till you get out of our lives”.

To give you a picture of Mohamed Ghannouchi [the prime minister, who happens to share the name of the Islamist leader mentioned above] — workers know him as the former head of the government’s privatisation committee. Since 1987, when Ben Ali came to power, 219 firms have been either totally or partially privatised — with job cuts, more pressure, more exploitation and so on. Workers resisted, too, sometimes with strikes.

The protesters feel that the current “unity government” is not expressing their revolutionary ambitions. It is just a change of personnel.

One interesting development is the creation of the January 14 Front, which unites various leftist and Arab nationalist groups to call for the dissolution of parliament, a new constitution, the abolition of the political police, investigations into corruption, torture and looting of the country’s wealth, and general democratic rights.

It also demands nationalisation measures, including the seizure of the assets of the oligarchy, privatised companies and strategic economic sectors.

Tunisia: be

By Clive Bradley

Tunisia’s uprising is the first mass movement toppling an established government in the Middle East and North Africa since the Iranian revolution of 1979.

It is the first time ever in history that an Arab dictator has been removed by a popular revolution rather than a coup.

There have been mass movements before in the Arab world, notably the one in Iraq in 1958 which overthrew the British-linked monarchy and installed a left-talking military regime and a period of ferment before the Ba’th party clamped down in 1963; but the nationalist, developmentalist, statist regimes introduced in the 1960s have been long-lived, mostly modifying themselves only by palace coups.

The Tunisian uprising has already had echoes throughout the region. In Egypt, demonstrators chanted that Mubarak should get on a plane, too. In Algeria there have been protests and “copy-cat” self-immolations.

Qaddafi, who has ruled neighbouring Libya since 1969, was quick to criticize the irresponsibility of the Tunisian people. Some observers believe Qaddafi is perhaps the “safest” of local dictators.

But then the most recent book-length study of Tunisia concluded: “it does seem clear... that political change in Tunisia will not come about through some dramatic event that suddenly replaces the existing order...”! (Christopher Alexander, *Tunisia: Stability and reform in the modern Maghreb*).

The Tunisian uprising — fuelled by economic and social grievances — is also the first revolt on such a scale against the new world order ushered in by the crash of 2008. It is part of the same struggle as in Greece, Ireland, France — and, of course, here. Its outcome will affect not only the Arab world, but also every country suffering in the crisis.

What are the prospects? Will they be like Iran, where a movement which had included tremendous workers’ strikes for secular and democratic demands ended up in an Islamist dictatorship more crushing even than the Shah’s? Or will they open the way for a reassertion of the Arab working classes?

TUNISIAN CONDITIONS

Tunisia is more urbanised (66% urbanised in 2000) than Egypt (45%), Syria (55%), and Morocco (56%), though only slightly more so than Algeria (60%) and less so than Iraq (77%).

Its average income per head (on purchasing-power-parity figures) is below the poorest countries of Europe - \$9500, as against \$11500 for Romania - but above most Arab states other than the oil-rich ones (Syria \$4800, Morocco \$4900, Egypt \$6200, Algeria \$7400).

The Tunisian people did not need a Wikileaks cable to tell them that their government was repressive and corrupt. According to one international study, 75% of Tunisians’ salaries only last them half the month; the minimum wage is only 130 euros a month. Unemployment in the Sidi Bouzid region is 45%. Unemployment among graduates is 40%.

In 2008, phosphate miners in Gafsa, where unemployment is 30%, were at the centre of an intense struggle, over a six month period. Starting in January, trains between quarries and factories were halted; unemployed youth occupied the regional office of the UGTT union demanding justice; strikes and demonstrations spread, attacking the boss of the phosphate company, who was also regional deputy of the ruling party, the RCD.

Unemployed youth, university students, school students and teachers joined the struggle.

The UGTT leadership was hostile to the actions, threatening to suspend militants who took part. But the rank and file, particularly teachers, carried on being involved. Then the regime cracked down.

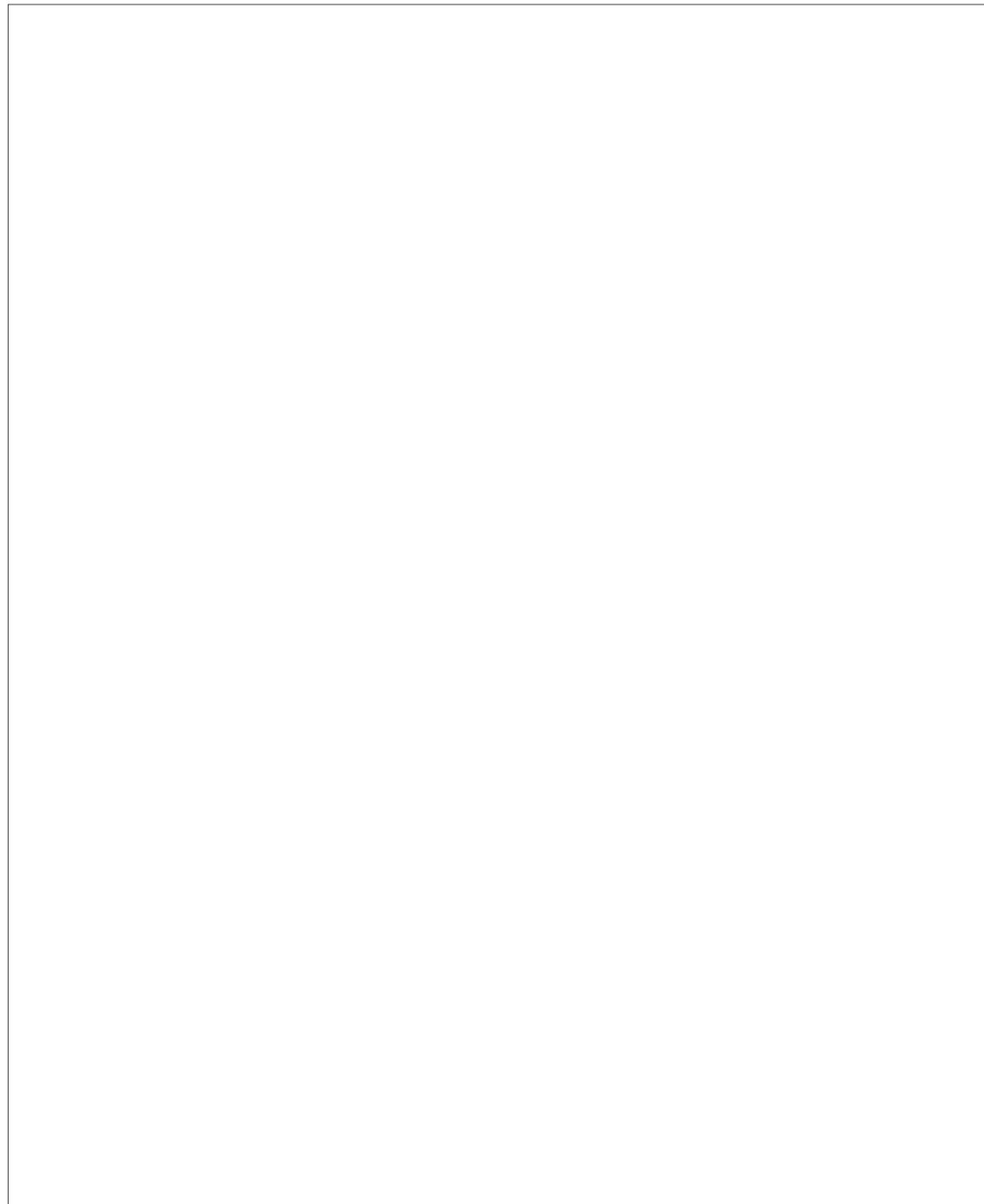
Mohamed Bouazizi, the street vendor who set off the movement of January 2011 by burning himself to death in protest, and his family, were involved in that earlier movement. He was not just an unknown individual, but a respected militant.

The 2008 struggle, like the “jasmine revolution”, seems to have been spontaneous, in the sense that no particular organisation was central to it. Right now there is no party or group which can claim to be leading the movement.

The UGTT has certainly been a driving force, and although it is weaker (and smaller) than it has been in the past, is still

Tunis police

Behind the “jasmine revolution”



one of the strongest organisations in Tunisian society, with an unbroken, sixty-plus year history. Its decision to oppose the interim government seems to be because of pressure from below.

But although workers have been central to the struggle, this has not, on the whole, it seems, been in the form of strikes. A general strike was called earlier in January in protest at repression. But the fall of Ben Ali was largely due to the movement on the streets, rather than in workplaces.

There have been forms of popular organisation. “Citizens’ civil defence committees” were formed in some neighbourhoods, particularly to organise resistance to the militias and the police, who were violently policing the curfew immediately after the departure of the president (to whom they remain loyal — unlike the largely conscript army).

POLITICS

But no political movement has yet emerged as any kind of leadership. The main parties are legalistic and bourgeois: opposition leader Najib Chebbi was quick to denounce the UGTT for “irresponsibility” when it resigned from the interim government, and has accepted the ministry for the regions.

There is a Democratic Front (or Forum) for Labour and Liberty (FDTL), which is an associate member of the “Socialist International”, and close to the French Socialist Party. The

former Communist Party, now called Ettajdid, has the ministry for higher education.

A group called the Communist Workers Party (PCOT) seems to have some weight, though it seems to be Maoist (Hoxhaite, that is, supporting the former dictator of Albania). Its record which includes trying to develop alliances with the Islamist movement Ennahda.

Ennahda seems to have had little or no role in the street demonstrations; there have been, apparently, no religious slogans in the “Jasmine Revolution”. This cannot be solely because of repression. Egypt and Algeria have been considerably more repressive towards Islamist parties without driving their slogans out of circulation.

Accounts of Tunisian politics from the 1990s, however, perceived the threat of an Islamist take-over as very real, even imminent. In 1989, Islamist candidates (allowed to compete as “independents” although the Ennahda Party was still not legal) won 17% of the vote. Not a single opposition candidate was elected to the Assembly — the elections were rigged — but it seems that the Islamists’ base had at that point dramatically eclipsed the secular left’s.

How far it has decreased since then, we do not know.

HISTORY

Tunisia was a French “Protectorate” — colony — after France seized it from the Ottoman Empire in 1881 and until

it won independence in 1956. The colonial period, and the struggle against it, were markedly different from that in neighbouring Algeria.

Algeria, a much bigger country, was a settler-colony, with a huge population of French colonists. France resisted Algeria’s struggle for independence with extreme violence. Perhaps a million people were killed in the war before independence was won in 1962. The resulting regime of the Front Liberation Nationale introduced drastic nationalisations, land reforms (with cooperatives), and a state-centred regime focused on national development and calling itself “socialist”; it was part of a wave of such policies across the Arab world in those years.

Tunisia was not a settler colony; nor was it formally part of France, as Algeria was. Its nationalist movement, led by Habib Bourguiba, was strikingly more moderate and pro-Western than its Algerian counterpart.

Bourguiba fought the French, of course, and later supported the Algerian nationalist movement, but he was careful not to alienate France too much. Tunisia has maintained, since independence, a very close relationship with its former colonial ruler.

In the 1960s, Bourguiba introduced some “socialist” (that is, state-led and planned) measures, including collective farms; but they were a failure, and Tunisia moved towards so-called economic “openness” ahead of other Arab states. Egypt, which had led the “Arab socialist” fashion, moved to a policy with the same name, “infatih”, a bit later, in 1973.

Bourguiba dominated Tunisia after independence, building a deeply authoritarian state. The regime was conservative in economic and foreign policy. On secularism, it was one of the more radical Arab governments of the era. Bourguiba was very concerned to “modernise” the country. He banned the hijab; on one occasion he very publicly drank orange juice during Ramadan, encouraging everyone else to break the fast; and it is still illegal for political parties (such as are legal!) to have religious names.

An important part of the movement Bourguiba built was the trade unions, organised since the 1940s (that is, a decade before independence) into the Union General Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) — the Tunisian General Union of Labour. One of the union’s top leaders, Habib Achour, was a close associate of Bourguiba, and Bourguiba depended in part on the union’s support at various times. Bourguiba’s party, the Neo-Destour, however, was led mainly by middle-class and business interests, so there was always a limit to the labour movement’s influence.

One union leader, Ahmed Ben Salah, was driven out of the union itself when the regime shifted to the right in the late fifties, but later re-emerged as chief architect of the “socialist” policy in the sixties. He again fell out favour, however, was arrested, and was forced to flee the country after escaping from prison.

The UGTT was and is a real workers’ organisation, but a conservative and cautious one, with a long record of collaboration with both Bourguiba and Ben Ali.

Invited into the new interim government, the UGTT almost immediately resigned its posts and called for a government without members of the old ruling party.

RECENT YEARS

The biggest social battles before this year were in the 1970s and 80s. There was a growing and militant student movement. Strikes grew in size and militancy. In October 1977, a strike and occupation at a state-owned textile plant in Ksar Hellal (the birthplace of the Neo-Destour) escalated into a three-day general uprising. Phosphate miners won a big strike in November.

At the beginning of 1977, the UGTT leadership had signed a “social contract” with the regime. This had drawn sharp criticism from within the unions; and the strike wave through 1977 forced the leadership to change track. In January 1978, the UGTT called the first general strike since independence.

These events revealed

“... the full extent of the government’s policy of non-conciliation. While the army, police and militia attacked the workers in the streets, the government moved to decapitate the UGTT, arresting [UGTT leader] Achour and all but two members of the confederation’s executive. Predictably the

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Socialist Party gets “its own” anti-cuts centre

The left

By Colin Foster

The conference of the National Shop Stewards' Network in London on 22 January voted by 305 votes to 89 for a Socialist Party motion to set up a third national anti-cuts coordination to compete with Coalition of Resistance and Right to Work.

The new coordination will be a Socialist Party affair. After the conference, nearly all non-SP members of the NSSN committee resigned.

As far as I could tell, all of the speakers for the SP-backed motion were SP members bar one, Steve Hedley, London Transport regional organiser of the RMT rail union. Alex Gordon, president of the RMT, as “guest speaker”, also indicated support for the SP.

How long the RMT leadership will continue to be taken in tow by SP projects remains to be seen. Chris Baugh, assistant general secretary of the PCS civil service union, claimed that PCS backed the SP motion, but we understand from PCS activists that the PCS Executive has not voted on it.

RMT and PCS should be getting together with other unions and approaching COR, RTW, and the NSSN to co-sponsor a unity conference.

The SP's argument was that the NSSN (meaning the NSSN majority, meaning the SP) are the only people with a clear line against all cuts, and that the setting up of an anti-cuts front by the NSSN ensures that workplace power is brought into the campaign.

SWP and other speakers pointed out that RTW and COR are also against all cuts — including, despite SP insinuations, cuts made by Labour councils — and called for unity. NSSN chair Dave Chapple argued that NSSN should continue to strive for a non-partisan shop stewards' link-up, rather than being transformed into an SP anti-cuts front.

The SWP is sometimes soft on Labour councillors; some anti-cuts committees are dominated by union full-timers. These issues should be debated in united anti-cuts movements rather than being caricatured exaggerated and made into excuses for setting up competing fronts.

The SP leaflet to the NSSN conference said they would not seek to set up rival local committees, but the clear implication of SP speeches was that COR or RTW-aligned local committees are so poor as to demand the setting-up of rivals.

In any case, the SP's claim to be the guarantor of uncompromising industrial action against the cuts is unfounded.

SP speakers referred to Liverpool's Labour council in the mid-1980s, when it was controlled by Militant, fore-runners of the SP, as a model. In fact Liverpool council never openly confronted the government; it made cuts in the course of the 1985-6 financial year and in its 1986 budget.

Today the SP-led PCS union is riding through a wave of job cuts in the civil service right now, with no campaign for industrial action to oppose them.

It is not within the power of the SP, or anyone else, to launch widespread PCS industrial action against cuts instantly. But at the 22 January conference the SP responded to speakers who attempted to discuss the weaknesses of the union movement with sneers and demagoguery.

People who had voted against the SP motion met in a pub afterwards. The non-SP former members of the NSSN committee will meet, and there will be a side-meeting at the anti-cuts convention on 12 February called by Right to Work (SWP) with the support of the Labour Representation Committee.

• Motions debated on 22 January, and the debate leading up to it are available to read at: www.workersliberty.org/node/15643.

Tunisia: behind the “jasmine revolution”

Continued from page 7

government put the blame for the trouble on communists, Baathists and agitators linked to Libya. For the first time since independence, a curfew was ordered and kept in effect for nearly a month.

“The UGTT newspaper, al-Sha'b, which had been highly critical of government policies before the events, was brought under control when its editor Hassan Hamoudia was arrested; numerous reporters quit in protest and the paper was put under close supervision by the new union leadership.” (Nigel Disney, “The Working Class Revolt in Tunisia”, MERIP reports May 1978).

The general strike escalated, like the movement the previous October, into a more general revolt. It was savagely repressed. According to non-governmental sources, 200 people were killed (some of them children), 1,000 wounded; over 300 were given jail sentences of up to seven years. The repression became known as “Black Thursday”.

In the early eighties, the UGTT and the regime became reconciled. The UGTT signed a deal which traded a wage increase for a promise to refrain from future wage demands and strikes.

Leftist militants opposed the deal. Then, “[i]n 1984-85, [Prime Minister] Mzali waged a fierce campaign that split the union, jailed its leaders, and took over its headquarters. [This] crackdown ended the UGTT's reign as 'the sole political mediator between the government and the nation'.” (Alexander, Tunisia).

By then, wider struggles were escalating. The lifting of subsidies on basic foods in January 1984 had provoked ‘food riots’. Turning on the UGTT, the government decided to offer, instead, a “carrot” to the Islamist movement — known then as the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI), and led by Rachid al-Ghannouchi (no relation to Ben Ali's Prime Minister currently running the interim government).

Ghannouchi has been the dominant figure in Tunisian Islamism. Influenced by the usual suspects of Sunni Arab Islamism — especially the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its two principal figures, Hassan al-Banna and Sayid Qutb — Ghannouchi had concluded from the movement's failure to participate in the 1978 strikes that it needed a more active social orientation.

He took hold of the government's carrot with relish. The MTI supported the UGTT against repression and began seriously to implant itself in student and professional organisations.

The regime quickly realized that the MTI was growing too powerful, and turned to repressing it instead.

The severe crackdown brought the country, by the late summer of 1987, to the brink of civil war. Ghannouchi was arrested for making a speech in an “unlicensed” mosque. Then police uncovered a network of Islamic militants with ties to Iran, and used it as a pretext for trials of leading Islamists, which Bourguiba hoped would lead to executions. When the courts didn't hand down this sentence, the presi-

dent demanded a retrial...

That was the signal for others in the regime to move against him and replace him with Ben Ali. In November, Ben Ali assembled seven doctors who attested to Bourguiba's inability to govern, and took over as president.

The first period of the new president's rule included some effort at relaxing repression. Ghannouchi, along with thousands of political prisoners, was given an amnesty. A National Pact was formulated, which sixteen political parties and organizations signed.

The system remained highly authoritarian. Debate, in essence, was only allowed within the ruling party, not in society as a whole, and the ruling party, renamed RCD, remained an almost Stalinist machine. Often getting work depended on membership of, or at least the favour of, the party.

The liberalising phase didn't last long. Ben Ali soon concluded that appeasing the MTI (later renamed Ennahda) didn't work. The regime turned back to wholesale repression.

A civil war such as ravaged Algeria did not take place. In part this was perhaps because Ghannouchi himself is (by Islamist standards) a “moderate” and pragmatic politician.

On the eve of the 1991 Gulf War (when Ben Ali supported the US-led war to drive Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait), Ghannouchi's speeches were becoming more radical, calling for veiling woman, suppressing tourism, shari'a law and a popular uprising. But later Ennahda's policy drifted towards building alliances with other opposition movements, and toning down its demands for “Islamisation” of the country.

Social inequality grew to dizzying levels, and the families of Ben Ali and his wife, Leila (née Trabelsi), known as the ‘Queen of Carthage’, accumulated huge personal fortunes.

Western governments supported Ben Ali because they saw him as a bulwark against the rising tide of Islamism and because of his continued economic orientation towards Europe and the US.

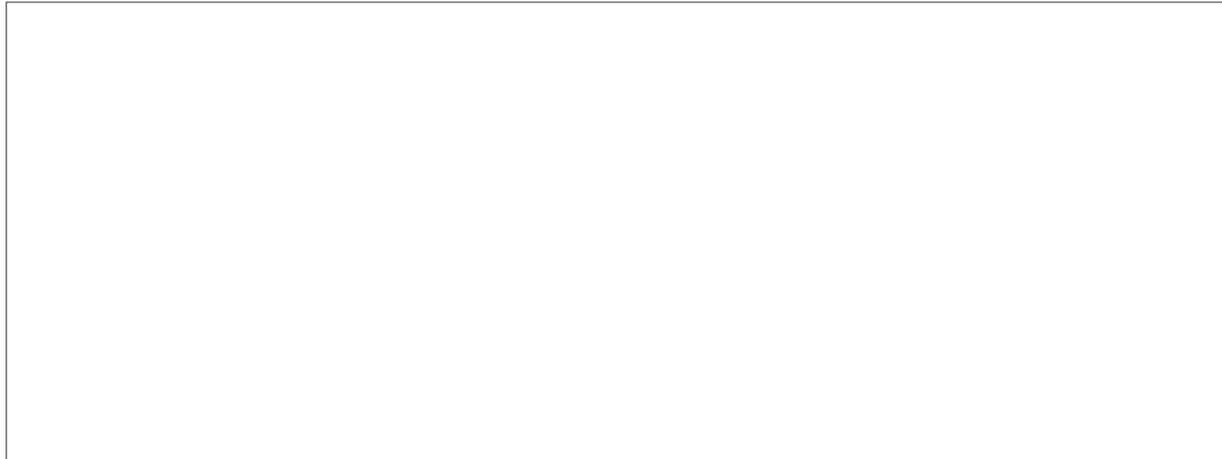
It would be complacent to dismiss the possibility of an Islamist triumph in Tunisia, which could have terrible repercussions in the region.

In Egypt, most people reckon the still-illegal Muslim Brotherhood would win any fair election. In Algeria, when the Islamist FIS did well in the first round of the 1991-2 general election, the army staged a coup, cancelling the second round and plunging the country into a terrible, extremely bloody civil war in which perhaps 100,000 people were killed. The Islamist movement is still strong in Algeria.

But Tunisia is known as being the most “European” of North African countries, and government secularism has perhaps been able to run deep. Perhaps in fact the constituency for radical Islamism is much smaller in Tunisia than in some of its neighbours.

There is an opening for secular, democratic, working-class politics in Tunisia such as not been seen in the Arab world for decades. And that too could ripple across the whole region.

Thousands of Jordanians protested on 21 January against high unemployment and the cost of living and called for political reforms, including direct election of the prime minister, who is currently appointed by the king, Abdullah II. The Islamist Islamic Action Front, Jordan's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, has apparently organised most of the protests. They are the main opposition group in the country, although they are not represented in the parliament since they boycotted the last elections. In January the government reversed earlier cuts in subsidies, and raised pensions, and salaries of state employees hoping to subdue unrest.



Natalie Portman as Nina in "Black Swan"

Good visuals, slack plots

Clive Bradley continues his reviews of films nominated for Bafta and Oscar awards

Black Swan, directed by Darren Aronofsky and written by Mark Heyman, Andres Heinz and John McLaughlin, has received widespread plaudits and is expected to pick up a few Baftas and, later, Oscars.

Natalie Portman won the Golden Globe for best actress. She stars as Nina, a troubled ballerina rehearsing for the role of her life, as both swans in Swan Lake. Nobody doubts her ability to dance, but many — including her choreographer, played by Vincent Cassel — question whether she has the inner darkness to convincingly dance the evil black swan.

Driven by her failed-dancer mother, in a great performance by a sadly almost-unrecognisable (thanks to "work") Barbera Hershey, Nina is on the edge of sanity. She's obsessed with her predecessor (Winona Ryder), who's been injured in an accident, and terrified of her rival (Mila Kunis), who has no shortage of inner darkness.

There's no doubt Portman gives an excellent performance. Real ballerinas, apparently, don't find her dancing up to scratch, but to the untutored eye she's pretty impressive.

I don't always like her as an actress (she wasn't the worst thing about *V for Vendetta* but she should still have been imprisoned for it). But here she manages well to convey a perfectionist but self-doubting artist. Less impressive is the character of the demanding, sexually-predatory choreographer. Indeed, he is only the first of an ultimately bewildering number of clichés which take over the film. Towards the end I was praying the plot would take a less obvious and predictable route, but was disappointed. Visually stunning, for sure, *Black Swan* unfortunately never escapes the weight of its own obviousness.

Inception, written and directed by Christopher Nolan, is up for the Bafta for best film. In many ways revisiting the themes of his breakthrough movie, *Memento*, it did very well with audiences who enjoyed its impressive special ef-

fects. I'm a big fan of Nolan's Batman movies, but I found this an irritating mess, full of effect for the sake of it, trying to play with notions of dream-time and layers of consciousness, but utterly failing to convince. That, ultimately, we are apparently supposed to care which of two billionaires control the world's energy reserves sums the movie up. (If, indeed, that level of reality is, well, reality. But frankly by then I had lost the will to live.)

True Grit, the latest offering from the unpredictable but often brilliant Joel and Ethan Coen, also up for best film, is a remake of the classic Western which originally starred John Wayne in his last role. This time grisly old Rooster Cogburn is played by Jeff Bridges, with Matt Damon as his Texas Ranger rival/partner; and the girl whose father's killers they are hunting is played by newcomer Hailee Steinfeld, who's up for leading actress and is certainly a talent to watch. It's a curiously old-school and unironic take on the Western — good, watchable, but not the same level as the original.

The other nominees for Best Film (*The King's Speech* and *The Social Network*) have already been reviewed in this paper. One other nomination worth mentioning, though — in the Best Original Screenplay category — is *The Fighter*, directed by David O Russell and written by Scott Silver, Paul Tamasy and Eric Johnson, which stars Mark Wahlberg as a plucky boxer, spurred on by his failed-fighter drug-head older brother, played by Christian Bale. It's tough, well-acted stuff, but in rather familiar will-he-win-the-big-fight-or-get-smashed-to-shit vein.

A film which surprisingly hasn't made it into any Bafta categories is the recently-released *Blue Valentine*, directed by Derek Cianfrance, which stars the underrated Ryan Gosling and Michelle Williams as a couple whose relationship we watch both as it disintegrates and as it began. These are real performances, vastly more impressive than Colin Firth as a stuttering monarch, which is what will probably win Best Actor. It's a powerful, moving if not indeed upsetting character-study, which has, in Britain at least, been sadly overlooked.

in similar struggles. Our next weekend of planning and action will build for the TUC demo on 26 March. We're hoping to develop a strong visual and creative presence on and around the day.

We are specifically titled "Arts Against Cuts" and not "Against Arts Cuts" for a reason. One of the reasons this grassroots collective has sprung up is due to the void that the conservative Save the Arts campaign left; one of their phrases "Cut us but don't kill us" is indicative of the politically lazy and ideologically weak, insular campaign they have run.

We will campaign against any and all cuts, putting particular energy and focus into those that directly relate to culture.

I personally think the role of creativity within struggle is extremely important; there is a long standing relationship between the aesthetic and emancipatory politics. It is important that the arts are not shunned to a periphery of political engagement, or felt to be something left aside until after a revolution has taken place. We need to ingrain that which we are fighting for into the very core of our practice and ensure we challenge both the role of art within neo-liberalism and also within our own organisations.

• This article is abridged from a longer interview, which can be read online at: <http://tinyurl.com/aacinterview>

A "soundtrack for the movement"?

The Ruby Kid, aka Daniel Randall, is a political activist and hip-hop artist. A member of Workers' Liberty since 2002, he has been recording and performing music since 2007. Here he joins in a debate about the meaning of "protest music" today, and whether the new youth and student movement needs "a soundtrack". For more info on The Ruby Kid, visit www.therubykid.com

Things are kicking off a bit these days. You've probably noticed. Comparisons to the Thatcher era abound and, while the workers' movement isn't as strong now as it was then (before she crushed it), the comparisons are not without legitimacy.

When I'm not busy writing for *Solidarity*, I like to make hip-hop music, so one of the things that's interested me as an artist about the general response to the upturn in struggle we're seeing is the questions some people are asking about the movement's artistic, and specifically musical, accompaniment. John Harris put it most starkly in *The Guardian*: "Where Is The Protest Music for 2010?"

I don't see myself as a "protest" rapper and I don't make "protest songs". I even baulk slightly at the description of my music as "political", as if there's somehow some music which is disconnected from or untouched by politics. I think all art is a product of the world that generated it and as such all art is "political". We don't need a special category for it. Our movement will embrace art, but we'll embrace the art that makes us feel something and we won't vet it on the basis of its political credentials.

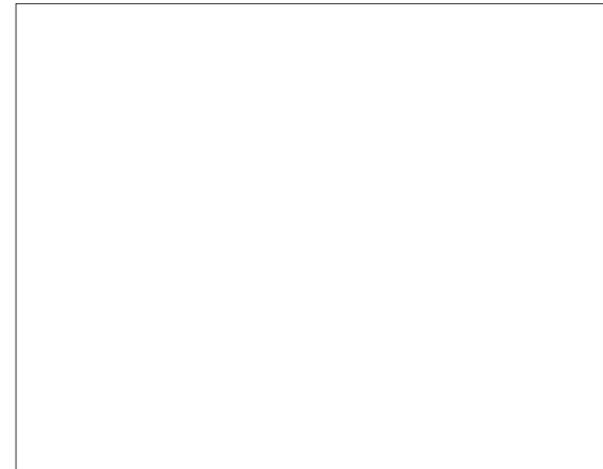
I also bristle at what I see as the snobbishness that sometimes underlies a lot of comment around this issue. People bemoan the lack of "political" music and disdainfully lament that people are watching X Factor instead of listening to... I dunno... someone "political", I guess.

The movement I'm interested in building will include many X Factor viewers. Undoubtedly as the movement grows and continues this debate will continue and probably a lot of people's artistic predilections will shift and change. That's good and healthy, but for right now, a movement that demands people leave their existing musical tastes at the door and embrace only "political" music and "protest song" is not useful.

I think art does have a direct role to play in any social movement; it can be used to raise awareness, challenge ideas, to raise money. Sometimes a direct exposition of political ideas in the content of a work of art is useful and important. But we shouldn't get hung up on that or turn it into a dogma. Like wiser folk than me have said, art must be judged on its own terms.

There is no single "soundtrack" to this movement. We will have many, and none. The music we will listen to and the art we will enjoy will be as diverse as the movement itself. Most fundamentally we will remember that, whatever we listen to, the frontline of our struggle is in our workplaces, schools, colleges, and communities. And not on our iPods. So listen to whatever the fuck you like and I'll see you on a picket line sometime soon.

• Full article at tinyurl.com/soundtrackforthemovement



Above: X Factor viewers and potential revolutionaries!

Art and the cuts

By Louis Hartnoll, President of University of the Arts London SU and activist in Arts Against Cuts

The Arts Against Cuts collective is a group of students, lecturers, artists, cultural workers and those interested in creative resistance, organising in a non-hierarchical structure against both the cuts and the ever increasing use of the arts and culture as a tool of ideological and political control.

Since being set up around three months ago a number of actions have been facilitated by the group, and we will continue to do that indefinitely.

So far we have had a large number of very diverse participants and always welcome anyone to our open weekly meetings. There is no single person or group steering the collective and anyone wishing to join in has just as much ability to shape the actions as those involved from day one.

We have co-ordinated a number of direct actions at a variety of events organised by various anti-cuts groups. At our recent "Direct Weekend" we facilitated space for Southwark Save Our Services alongside members of the PCS union and are actively looking to work with groups that are involved

Running scared... to the PR spivs

Jon Lansman

We know that web-based organisations like Wikileaks and UK Uncut are doing a great job, but it is still gratifying to read that corporate Britain is running scared as a result. The question is, will it make the tax dodgers clean up their act. *PR Week* gives us some clues, but it's not good news! The report reveals:

"One senior agency source told *PR Week* that boardrooms across the UK were fearful of web-based organisations such as Wikileaks and UKUncut. 'A lot of corporate Britain is running scared', said the source".

Leading corporate PR company chief executive, Nick Murray-Leslie of Chatsworth Communications, said that, for top corporate executives whose recent concerns have been primarily about financial risk and exposure: "reputational risk is now in the ascendancy". Asked why Wikileaks is so dangerous, he added: "Quite simply, because it has changed everything. It has opened an extended risk front to the business world, that of almost instant, global reputational risk".

Hill & Knowlton's boss of crisis management, Tim Luckett, agreed that the internet was making corporate reputations more vulnerable: "Fundamentally, the web not only exposes businesses to a far broader range of critics, but also makes it easier to bring them together. Add to that, the reputational legacy of such incidents via the Google Effect and there becomes a significant threat to your brand. The way in which activists are mobilising has changed — these online organisations have increasing influence and subsequent of-fine power".

So what is the corporate world doing about this new threat? Cleaning up its act? Paying a fair amount of tax, perhaps? Err, not exactly, it seems.

Murray-Leslie explains: "Not being evil helps but if you can't do that, prepare, prepare, prepare".

Spending a lot more on employing PR consultants seems to be the answer.

Jon Lansman is secretary of the Labour Party Democracy Task Force. His contributions to *Solidarity* are taken from the blog www.leftfutures.org.

Targeting high-street tax dodgers

The UK Uncut campaign, which targets high-street tax-dodgers, has captured the imagination of many with its innovative direct-action stunts. Activists from the campaign spoke to *Solidarity*. An unabridged version of this interview is at <http://tinyurl.com/ukuncutinterview>.

What are the origins of UK Uncut as a campaign?

Twelve friends met in a pub in October, two nights after the Comprehensive Spending Review was announced and, over pints, started off complaining about the cuts. Someone had brought along a copy of *Private Eye* with the article about Vodafone's £6bn tax dodge.

We couldn't think of a better example to undermine the government's claims that there is no alternative to the cuts and that we're all in it together. Someone suggested shutting down Vodafone's flagship store the following Wednesday. I don't think many of us believed we'd actually do it but just five days later, 80 people were sitting inside the flagship store on Oxford Street in London.

Our hashtag #ukuncut trended on Twitter and the idea went viral. Within three days nearly 30 Vodafone stores had been shut down across the country.

How does UK Uncut function? It's notable for its lack of formal structures; is this deliberate?

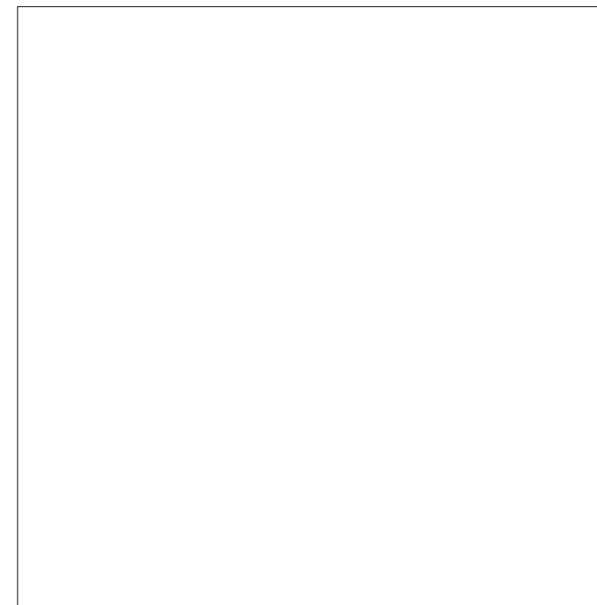
Yes. A strict hierarchical model would be inappropriate for this sort of protest. It relies on people across the country sharing ideas, tactics and skills but, essentially, taking on the work and decisions for themselves.

How do you see the anti-cuts movement developing and, ultimately, winning?

Diversity. Localism. Solidarity. No one organisation will win this. We need a plethora of groups, ideas, targets and tactics that can dynamically evolve according to the specifics of the campaign. The cuts must be taken on where they will take effect. In the workplace, on the high street, and in local communities.

A lot of general anti-cuts agitation has targeted things like, for example, big banks or military spending. You've chosen a slightly different angle by focusing on corporate tax evasion. Why was that?

The issue is a compelling one because it undermines both the There Is No Alternative and We're All In This Together



UK Uncut protest

narratives of the Tories. It was also one that was virtually unknown about even though it's so simple. But you're right — there's loads of ways of attacking the cuts narrative. Tax avoidance is a useful one for now, but things will change and we'll have to move on.

There's been criticism from some on the anti-cuts left (e.g. at bit.ly/hjdf3N) of a perceived softness on the part of UK Uncut to capitalism in its "mutualist" or "cooperative" forms. What's your view on that debate?

Obviously one of the issues of open networks is that not everyone will always agree on stuff. This is inevitable but doesn't have to be a problem. UK Uncut obviously has no official line on mutuals or co-ops. The person who set up the action took the action down after he was made aware of John Lewis's record on unions, etc.

I think the episode demonstrates the robustness of horizontal networks rather than their inadequacy. In our three-month history this has been one of the only problems of this type.

Letters

To: solidarity@workersliberty.org
Cc:
Subject: media workers

Media workers can fight

While I share and agree with many of the points made by Martin Thomas ("Floods of sloppy reporting", *Solidarity* 3-189), I was disappointed that he provided no possible solutions or way to lead the fight against cost-cutting by owners. That's something I'm all too concerned with, as a local journalist myself.

Yes, much of a newspaper is made up of re-written press releases — sometimes I have even seen untouched press releases in our rival newspaper, having received the same original document myself.

Journalists often are harassed, and occasionally uninterested, as the author notes. It is true that "better reporting... could have been done by a single person with an hour available..." But an hour is a luxury for a journalist to write a story. Even if they are given that amount of time, or a chance to do their own research, they will often be required to churn out pages of copy, rather than one well-written, well-researched article.

Media workers are not just lying down and taking this comfortably. At the start of January, workers at Newsquest titles in the south of England took strike action over pay, pensions and conditions, with more action in the pipeline at other centres around the UK. Staff at other media companies are gearing up for action as job cuts are announced.

Last autumn BBC workers went on strike against changes to their pension scheme.

National Union of Journalist activists and other concerned media workers are campaigning against the "churnalism" coverage given to the far-right. I could continue.

The point (which I should make before I make the same mistake that I criticise Martin Thomas for), is that media workers are fighting for changes, in both their own conditions and in the way the media works.

If we can show the money is there to employ more reporters/sub-editors/researchers, more time can be spent on quality journalism.

Media workers should become active if they are not already. Join the NUJ, BECTU or other media union. Talk about the underlying principles behind coverage in their workplace. Set a good personal example.

I would also ask that they consider getting in touch with the AWL's own media worker fraction, by emailing myself.

Yes, the media is far from perfect — much of what is wrong with capitalism can be seen in journalism — but there are ways to fight it in this industry as in any other.

Will Lodge, Essex, will_lodgey@hotmail.com

Support AV

In *Solidarity* 3-189 Martin Thomas argued that on balance socialists should not support Alternative Vote (AV) in the May referendum. I believe he is wrong. Socialists as consistent democrats should critically support a vote for AV.

The yes campaign supporting AV is likely to be a fairly lacklustre affair which will probably be defeated. Most supporters of electoral reform support some kind of proportional system and may not mobilise to support AV. The vast majority of Tories will oppose AV and a large number of Labour supporters are likely to oppose it, even if officially the Labour Party supports AV.

The key question for socialists should be democracy. AV

would be a small technocratic improvement to Britain's limited bourgeois democracy. Marxists are not indifferent to such questions. AV allows voters to express a preference for more than one party. AV in union elections allows far left candidates to stand as propaganda candidates without being open to the fear they would let the right in. In unions without AV, such as Unite, elections are skewed towards "left" bureaucrats because socialists do not want to split the left vote.

AV would allow a socialist propaganda candidate to appeal to working class voters without letting the Tories or Lib Dems in. It might also allow local agreements between left-wing CLPs and socialists to transfer to each other. We should continue to argue for Proportional Representation but we should accept that AV is more democratic than FPTP and support it.

Martin argues that the consequences of AV could help the Lib Dems because they can offer electoral pacts to swap preferences in return for concessions. This may be true now but it would not always be so. We would surely argue for Labour to rebut such offers from the Lib Dems. Neither is it clear that such pacts would have much effect, as Martin acknowledges voters may take little notice of them.

We should not fixate on whether we think this or that electoral system would swing results in Labour's favour in the here and now. We fight for independent working class representation and a workers' government.

Arguing for AV gives us a chance to present our democratic programme to those anxious for change. Our programme includes the abolition of monarchy, all titles and the House of Lords; supports secularism, federalism, the Single Transferable Vote (STV) in elections, and annual parliaments. All MPs should also be recallable and on an average worker's wage.

Dave Kirk, Leeds

Union reps threatened as Tube jobs fight falters

By a Tube worker

After four months with four one-day strikes against job cuts on London Underground (LU), and a two-month lull since 28-29 November, RMT general secretary Bob Crow announced on 21 January: "It was agreed that we continue to take part in the ongoing review process and we will advise [members] of developments when the work of the reviews become clearer."

In other words, RMT will not name any more strike dates before the station job cuts come in on 6 February. Nor will the other station staff union, TSSA, which joined with RMT in four strong strikes between 6-7 September and 28-29 November.

The RMT Executive had resolved in December to schedule further action in January. Leaving members in the dark for two months had damaged momentum, but a members' meeting on 17 January showed significant continuing support for action. With confident leadership and hard work, morale would have built up again as staff faced the reality of the awful new rosters. But the RMT Exec decided on 19 January not to call any more strikes.

The Workers' Liberty bulletin *Tubeworker*, and many union activists and members, had argued for action in December. We failed to win that, but then argued that the unions should name a 48-hour strike in January to demand LU suspend the cuts' implementation until the job-review process conceded by Tube bosses had been completed.

The winding-down of the jobs dispute brings back bad memories of how RMT resolved the last pay dispute. Fighting for a few days, killing the dispute with months of silence, then finally putting it out of its misery. RMT is more willing to go into a fight than the other unions, but seems to do

so hoping for the best, with no strategy or determination to see it through.

Activists must organise inside the union to prevent such things happening again. The first demand is that disputes be controlled by rank-and-file strike committees, rather than being switched on and off by the Executive, often without much reference to the rank and file.

Immediately, the RMT on the Tube faces a battle on victimisation of union reps.

On 15 January, drivers on the Bakerloo line and at the Northern line's Morden depot struck to demand the reinstatement of sacked workmates Eamonn Lynch (RMT health and safety rep) and Arwyn Thomas (longstanding RMT activist).

LU responded by victimising another rep. It sacked Peter Hartshorn on 19 January. Peter, who is RMT's rep on the Green Park group of stations, was sacked after a manager accused him of swearing at him. Several witnesses say that they heard no such thing. The manager concerned has previously had a grievance upheld against him for anti-union behaviour. Peter was carrying out union duties at the time. It is clear that he has been sacked because he is an effective union rep.

These sackings are a deadly threat to union organisation. If the union cannot win reinstatement, then members who might previously have considered being union reps will think again, and the unions will become much weaker in the workplace.

So far, the campaigns to defend the sacked reps have focused around their particular areas and branches, though the RMT Regional Council has publicised them around the job.

We now need rank-and-file members from every line and grade, and members of other unions, to rally round to fight off this attack.

Campaign stops academy

By Darren Bedford

A campaign has succeeded in forcing governors at Tidemill Primary School in Deptford to withdraw their application for the school to become an academy.

The precise reason for the withdrawal is a technicality; a legal challenge mounted by the campaign exposed the governor's financial model to be flawed.

But the key lesson is that

campaigning can win. Without a strong parents' and teachers' campaign, the investigative work into the technicalities would never have been done and even if they had been exposed, the governors might have felt confident to find ways around them without significant pressure from below.

The campaign's website is sayingno.org/cms, and *Solidarity* hopes to feature interviews with some of the activists in a future issue.



Students at Rawmarsh school in Rotherham show their solidarity with teachers striking against job cuts. The dispute continues. Solidarity messages to ralphdyson@yahoo.co.uk

Wales, Norwich, and Sheffield, have already been set up as call centres. Others are due to transform to call centres in the near future.

The workers are demanding that they are given a mixture of duties, rather than just answering telephone calls. This work is very stressful. This, coupled with the harsh management regime, means that "Contact Centre Directorate" as management call it has the highest level of sickness in DWP.

Workers are "scheduled" which means they have to come and go and take their breaks at specific times, unlike the rest of the workers in DWP who have more flexibility.

The strikers will now embark on a campaign of work to rule and an overtime ban. The DWP Group Executive of PCS will now ballot all members working in Contact Centre Directorate. Many of these workers are in call centres that have been established for years.

DWP strike

By a DWP worker

Nearly 3,000 civil servants in the Department for Work and Pensions across seven sites struck on Thursday 20 and Friday 21 January.

Some of the offices in Bristol, the Chorlton district of Manchester, Glasgow, Makerfield near Wigan, Newport in south

Scotland: councils plan to squeeze their workforces

By Anne Field

Scottish councils are lining up not just to cut jobs and services but also to attack the terms and conditions of their workforces.

Over the next two years Glasgow City Council plans to axe at least 3,500 jobs and cut its spending by £100m, on top of nearly £40m cut in the current financial year. Additional job losses are likely when Glasgow "pools" some of its departments with neighbouring councils.

Further "savings" are to be made by attacks on its workforce's terms and conditions: cuts in annual leave entitlements, longer working day, more rigorous absence management policy, end to flexible working patterns, and cuts in sick pay and out-of-hours payments.

Although the city's teachers are covered by a national agreement on pay and terms and conditions, Glasgow is intending to target them as well — effectively putting an end to national pay bargaining.

Edinburgh City Council wants to axe 1,500 jobs over the next two years. East Renfrewshire is cutting 500 jobs over three years. South Lanarkshire wants to scrap 400 jobs. Dundee is aiming at 200 voluntary redundancies. East Ayrshire is axing 270 posts, including 170 compulsory redundancies.

North Lanarkshire is proposing a series of changes for the worse to staff con-

tracts. Renfrewshire is cutting back on overtime pay. Aberdeen City Council wants employees on more than £21,000 a year to accept a 5% pay cut. And East Dunbartonshire has put nearly 200 staff on 90 days notice in order to force through changes to their contracts.

Other local authorities are considering moving some staff onto a four-day working week, and changing the contracts of non-teaching staff in schools from 52 weeks a year to term-time only. Renfrewshire has reduced teaching time by teachers by two and a half hours a week, with the gap filled by untrained council staff who will give talks promoting healthy lifestyles.

Activists in the public sector unions are arguing the need to step up anti-cuts campaigning and organise industrial action to stop the cuts.

So far, though, the union response has not gone beyond verbal denunciations, staging last October's demonstration in Edinburgh, and mobilising for the TUC demonstration in London in March.

Scottish Unison, which has a policy of approaching other unions to organise a one-day public sector strike in Scotland, has yet to initiate strike ballots. Its policy that councils set no-cuts budgets has remained a dead letter as well.

Union leaders are making excuses to justify their inertia. The mood is not

there. The anti-union laws make co-ordinated strike action too difficult. Pensions rather than cuts is the big issue. Avoiding compulsory redundancies is good enough. Unions cannot have a separate strategy in Scotland. Lost strike ballots would be a victory for the government.

It is one thing to make an honest assessment that there is only a limited mood for action and then work out what kind of campaign is needed to change that. It is something different to make impressionistic judgements about the mood and then use them as a rationalisation for doing nothing.

Moreover, the pace of conflict is likely to escalate rapidly as the cuts begin to hit home.

This makes a good turnout — both in terms of numbers and what it represents — all the more important for the Scottish anti-cuts conference in Glasgow on 29 January.

Initiated by the "Defend Glasgow Services" campaign, it aims to launch a Scottish-wide anti-cuts alliance which advocates: opposition to all cuts; support for industrial action against cuts; and councils and the Scottish Parliament to set no-cuts needs budgets.

"No cuts! No privatisation!" — 29 January, assemble 11.30am, George Square, Glasgow
Anti-cuts conference: 1.30-4pm, Unison offices, 18 Albion Street, Glasgow

The working class has a right to leisure

By Will Lodge

The fight against cuts can happen in the most unexpected of places.

Tendring District Council, a Conservative-led administration in north east Essex, has announced the first round of cuts to close a budget deficit of £4.3 million by 2014.

The cuts are from the "leisure" portfolio: the council is justifying the cuts in the name of "maintaining front line services".

Among the cuts is the ending of more than £100,000 of small grants to voluntary organisations who plan to lobby the council against it.

The fees levied on beach huts are also set to rise. Beach hut owners are not renowned for their left-wing tendencies — yet the

head of one association plans to organise a march on the next council meeting.

The left should be ready to defend the leisure facilities of the working-class, especially those who can't afford to go abroad on holiday. And any fightback creates an arena for discussion of wider politics.

The council opposition is a rainbow alliance of Labour, Liberal Democrat, independents and other small, local, groupings though this has officially broken up ready for the elections in all wards in May.

At present there is no anti-cuts group in Tendring, although neighbouring areas do have grass-roots campaigns. Perhaps this will change as we get closer to 5 May.

Norfolk against cuts

By Pat Yarker

AWL comrades joined trade union and community activists in a day of action called on 15 January by South East Region TUC.

Norfolk Coalition Against the Cuts (NCAC) held protests across the county, petitioning, leafletting and staging a "crime-scene" in Downham Market with a cuts-victim's outline chalked on the pavement and scene-of-crime officers on hand to detail the damage done by the government's policies.

Norwich Topshop was picketed to draw attention to the millions of pounds in tax "avoided" by capitalists such as government advisor and Topshop owner Philip Green.

NCAC is organising to lobby Tory-controlled Norfolk County Council in opposition to £155m of cuts.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Cuts fight: don't wait for the big bang

By Martin Thomas

On Friday 28 January the TUC is holding a meeting of all its affiliated unions to discuss possibilities for co-ordinated industrial action against the cuts.

That's good. But don't hold your breath. The core of anti-cuts strategy for a while yet will be local organisation, and pressure on union leaders to encourage, support, publicise, and extend partial battles in which groups of workers feel confident to fight cuts.

On 30 December, Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS civil service union, told *The Times* that he hoped the January TUC meeting would plan more-or-less simultaneous national ballots for strike action (on public sector pensions) by a number of unions in late March, and more-or-less simultaneous strikes in late April.

The Government plans to increase workers' contributions by about 3% of pay (in effect, imposing a pay cut of that amount); index the pensions to the CPI inflation rate rather than RPI rate (which will cut your pension 16% by the end of 25 years' retirement); and link pensions to career-average rather than final pay.

Yet PCS has no campaign for industrial action against the big job cuts in the civil service. Unison and GMB have authorised some strike ballots on redundancies in local government, but Unison has blocked ballot requests

elsewhere in local government. The general stance of the unions in local government has been to accept cuts and negotiate for the best deal on voluntary redundancies and redeployment.

The front-runners for national industrial action are, oddly, the university and college lecturers' union UCU, and the generally very unmilitant teachers' union ATL.

UCU is balloting all members between 2 February and 2 March over pay and conditions for 2010-11. It will hold another ballot between 23 February and 11 March on action against changes to the Teachers' Pension Scheme, which covers teachers in further education and post-1992 universities as well as schools, and yet another on action against changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (covering teachers in pre-1992 universities).

UCU is heading towards strike action in the week beginning 21 March.

On 21 January the ATL action committee voted to "make necessary preparations for a national ballot for strike action and action short of a strike, to be undertaken jointly with other unions", over pensions, and to "seek agreement with other teacher unions to ballot concurrently".

The two bigger teachers' unions, the NASUWT and the National Union of Teachers, have said nothing publicly about industrial action. We understand that the NUT is considering a ballot for

UCU soon balloting for strike action

strike action, but at a later date than the UCU's schedule (February) or Serwotka's projection (March).

PCS is less bold than ATL, saying in its latest bulletin to its activists: "if the government will not negotiate or reach an agreement, we must also prepare for industrial action as a last resort" (emphasis added).

Some groups of workers, in local government for example, are keen for a fight now. Many other workers would respond to a determined lead from the unions. The student revolt has stirred spirits. For all that, so far organisation and confidence within the working class is too patchy to put much pressure on the union leaders for national action, or even to indicate that broad national strike action would be sustained through to victory if the union leaders were to call it now.

Yet all the union leaders are slow, and their slowness is a factor in the patchiness. The government made its plans on pensions clear soon after the May election. It's as long ago as June 2010 that Unison general secretary Dave Prentis windily declared that the government "wouldn't know what hit it" if it went ahead with those plans.

The change from RPI-indexation of pensions to CPI-indexation was put through Parliament seven months ago, in the June 2010 Budget, and comes into effect at the start of April. The second "Hutton report" on pensions is due

in March. The Government's plans will be more or less finalised in the 23 March Budget, though details of the changes in different pension schemes will remain to be worked out after that.

Let's go for a union "big bang" on pensions, and at a pace which signals a will to win rather than a hesitant going-through-the-motions! But above all, let's demand that the unions nurture, assist, and spread the local sparks of resistance flying up now.

Local battles

Back in November, the *Financial Times* reported: "Leeds city council has been forced to re-examine the proposed closure of... crèches at leisure centres after fierce opposition..."

"In Brighton, a state nursery threatened with closure was saved after staff and trade unions organised a campaign that garnered 1,600 supporters."

"Devon county council [has reversed] plans to cut free travel for primary schoolchildren..."

"In Nottingham, school support staff have forced the council to delay plans to cut teaching assistants' pay by up to 25 per cent."

Local battles can push back cuts, and a cascade of such battles could shatter the Government's whole strategy; but union leaders have done little to flag up or help this resistance.

Take over your student union!

By Ed Maltby

The protests against the abolition of EMA on 19 January, when thousands turned out across the country at very short notice, showed that the student movement which began before Christmas is still alive.

On 26 January, there will be more protests, and 29 January will see big student demonstrations against fees and cuts in London and Manchester.

It is important we prepare for more demos to come. But the movement will not be sustained purely on the basis of one mobilisation after another.

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts has produced a "Battle Plan" to guide student activists in the months ahead. You can read the full text at www.anticuts.com. Activists should:

- Localise the struggle. The movement will only develop if university and college anti-cuts/fees groups develop demands to fight their managements — against cuts, against course and department closures and to block the implementation of higher fees.

School students should organise ongoing activist groups in their schools.

- Take over their student unions. Except for the 10 November demo, most student unions have played

little role in the movement. Most have sabbatical and other elections coming up — and in many anti-cuts activists are organising slates. This should not just be about replacing one set of personnel with another, or even just of changing policies, but of tearing up the structures which block mass involvement and replacing them with the democratic ones that have grown up in the anti-cuts movement — general assemblies and so on.

School students who feel able to should form unions and apply for affiliation to NUS. (We need a fight in NUS for such affiliations to be accepted.)

- Link up with workers in struggle. We need to build on examples like UCL occupiers and Euston tube strikers organising solidarity delegations to each other.

Every student anti-cuts campaign should take part in the local anti-cuts committee. We need a big student turn out for the TUC demo on 26 March.

Last but not least we need to develop NCAFC — still the most open, democratic important campaign in the student movement, but one which remains without adequate and sustainable structures. The AWL will be fighting to change that in the period ahead.

- NCAFC: anticuts.com

Get your little red book

By Pdraig O'Brien

As the police attempt to round up and arrest activists involved in the student revolt (codenamed "Operation Malone") continues, so must the campaign of the movement to resist police brutality and state clampdowns on dissent.

The Right To Resist campaign, which AWL helped initiate, has produced a handy wallet-sized handbook containing useful tips on police tactics and what to do if you're detained.

With legal advice from the Green and Black Cross project, the handbook could become an essential tool for protesters.

Right To Resist is seeking

support from union branches and other labour movement bodies.

Left-wing Labour MP Katy Clark has launched an Early Day Motion (effectively a parliamentary petition) calling for the banning of kettling. 24 MPs have backed it so far. The EDM "expresses serious concern that in recent demonstrations individuals, including minors, have been indiscriminately kettled by police for up to nine hours..." and "notes that a number of individuals have suffered very serious injuries, such as bleeding to the brain, as a result of police action during recent kettles." Right To Resist is calling on supporters to lobby their MP to back the EDM.

Mobilise against the EDL in Luton!

The English Defence League is planning another racist provocation on Saturday 5 February, this time in Luton, the town which was the scenes of the rioting that launched the EDL. Stop Racism & Fascism Network will be mobilising to respond and, if possible, to confront the EDL and prevent them from demonstrating. The RMT union will be organising transport from central London; email financialsec@rmtlondoncalling.org.uk to book your place on the RMT coach, and see srfnetwork.org for more information.

- Right To Resist handbook: bit.ly/eQ8Lfh
- Green and Black Cross: greenandblackcross.org/legal
- Right To Resist model motion: tinyurl.com/r2rsupport
- Anti-kettling EDM: tinyurl.com/r2redm
- Contact Right To Resist and order copies of the handbook: righttoresist.wordpress.com