

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 191 2 February 2011 30p/80p

For a workers' government

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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.
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Will Murdoch be saved?

Press Watch

By Pat Murphy

Rupert Murdoch's News International group has long been the bane of the left.

The *Sun* and *News of the World* (NoTW) have routinely attacked trade unions, demonised the left and championed Thatcher and then New Labour. There is great pleasure to be had, therefore, in seeing it struggle to kill off the poisonous scandal which has developed around phone-hacking at the NoTW.

It started in 2005, when the Royal Family began to suspect that salacious stories about them could only have been the result of phone hacking. An investigation led to the conviction of the paper's royal reporter (Clive Goodman) and a private investigator (Glenn Mulcaire). The NoTW bosses hoped that this would put an end to the story and so did the Metropolitan Police. The Met conducted a cursory investigation, sought no evidence of wider phone-hacking and essentially helped the paper bury the

story.

Then others became convinced that they too had been the victim of hacking and pursued their own complaints. Fearful of critical damage, at least two complainants, Professional Football Association leader Gordon Taylor and PR adviser Max Clifford, were offered huge payouts by News International to get them to settle without a trial.

A trial would have meant the exposure of documents and records showing just how many journalists were involved. The payments were again attempts to be done with the scandal before the true scale of the operation could be exposed.

But that didn't work. The cover-up unravelled as more victims have uncovered evidence, more journalists have been sacked and the Met Police have been dragged into the scandal.

There is a temptation to treat the substance of all this as a sideshow — rich celebrities fighting a right-

wing scandal sheet — amusing but nothing to do with us. We should resist that.

This is fast turning into Britain's equivalent of the infamous Dreyfus case in France in the way it is exposing the corruption of an overconfident, unaccountable ruling class.

Earlier this month, after years of denying any knowledge of the criminal behaviour of his journalists, former NoTW editor Andy Coulson finally resigned chief political adviser to Tory leader David Cameron.

The Met police are being asked to explain why they failed to investigate the original allegations properly and failed to tell the people whose names appeared in Goodman and Mulcaire's records that they had been hacked.

The Press Complaints Commission (PCC) twice carried out enquiries which concluded that there was no evidence of further misconduct or attempts to mislead it.

At every level of the British state there appears to have been a conspiracy to cover up the criminality of the *News of the World*.

Even the paper's media rivals have shown no interest in investigating and ex-

ploiting the story — well, they have all been doing it for years!

What the phone-hacking scandal shows beyond doubt is the extent to which the various components of Britain's ruling class are interwoven with each other, with mutual interests and personnel, all of which they will fight to protect. News International has been able to get away with persistent law-breaking for years because the forces supposed to hold them accountable are actually on their side whether that be the police, the PCC or the government.

That will become even clearer when Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt eventually — and inevitably — approves Murdoch's bid to buy up the 61% of BSkyB that he does not already own.

If these forces will conspire together to help the tabloids keep us fed with salacious stories about footballers, soap stars and actors, we can only imagine the ruthlessness with which they would try to undermine any workers' movement to resist the cuts and challenge their power. That's not the paranoia the left are often accused of. It is simply knowing your enemy.

NHS reform: is this GP choice or market madness?

By Stuart Jordan

The BMA has been in the vanguard of opposing the Health and Social Care Bill now being debated in Parliament, but it is not a consistent or coherent opponent.

For instance, Dr Hamish Meldrum of the BMA qualified his criticism with this statement: "The BMA supports greater involvement of clinicians in planning services".

Meldrum was expressing the BMA's long-standing grievance that GPs are sidelined from decision-making processes in the NHS. But Meldrum should remember that these powers were stripped from medics as part of the privatisation process where clinically-trained managers were replaced with financially-driven executives.

Those executives introduced the internal market, which meant, for the first time in NHS history, financial restrictions were placed on clinical decision making.

The abolition of PCTs and "GP commissioning" under the new law will

hand power back to the medics, but only to burden them with further financial restraint.

The Nuffield Trust's research into medical groups in California shows the massive expansion of market mechanisms to regulate health care may come into direct conflict with GP's duty of care.

Their report starts by acknowledging the strong financial incentives in the US to "over-treat" patients. For example, patients are given more expensive, complicated procedures in order that hospitals and doctors can tap higher insurance payouts.

To counteract this tendency, firms like Kaiser Permanente have incentivised "quality primary care" that promotes "prevention" and "minimises costly hospital-care". GPs are given money to keep people out of hospital.

Meanwhile it is unclear that the patient has received the correct treatment.

And more bureaucracy will be created around the distorted structures of the new system.

The details of GP incen-

GPs rule okay?

tives in the UK are not finalised. But however it is organised, we can expect financial considerations to increasingly influence clinical decision-making and distort health needs.

These tendencies will be exacerbated by shortfalls in funding. The *Guardian* (31 January) reported that west London GPs involved in a government "pathfinder" scheme for the new system will face a £1 billion shortfall in funding by 2014-15. And an internal NHS document says "closing this funding gap will require significant change in how we deliver healthcare". Saving money will be "the bottom line" in the new system.

The old NHS operated without cash exchange, without financial incentives for staff or services. Services and workers in the NHS were motivated by values of human decency not individual monetary gain. Clinical decision making was made without pressures of the market clouding medical judgement. To combat the Health and Social Care Bill, opposition groups will need to articulate an alternative political vision which tells the truth about privatisation and also challenges the underlying contemptuous view of humanity as being motivated purely by greed. Because that is the ideology of the boss-class.

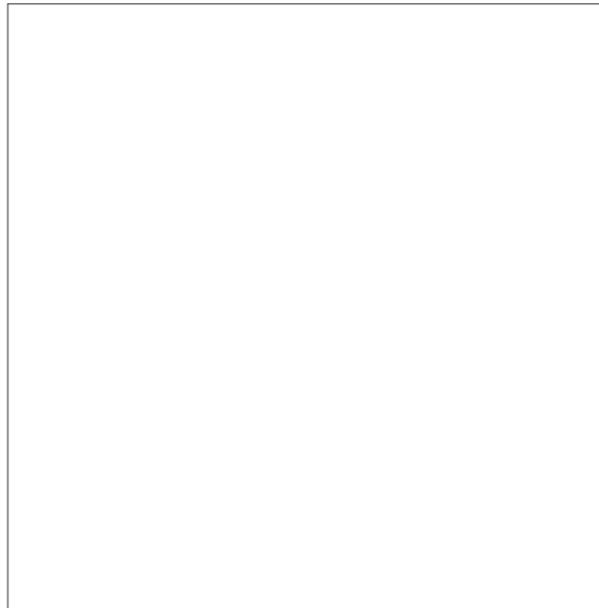
Irish election is the most important since 1932

By Jack Cleary

The 26 counties general election on 25 February is the most important election the state has had since 1932, when De Valera and the Catholic nationalists — Fianna Fail — formed their first government (with non-participating Labour Party support). Irish politics is in the melting pot.

The main governing party, Fianna Fail, has a new leader, Micháel Martin. It has not got much else. The rats are deserting the sinking ship. No fewer than 30 — out of a total of 72 — Fianna Fail TDs are not contesting seats. Some of them, such as Neal Blaney in Donegal, are scions of old Fianna Fail local dynasties.

The small Green Party, Fianna Fail's partner in coalition, with six seats now, is expected to have more after the general election. Sinn Fein, the new constitutional nationalists, the would-be new Fianna Fail, is almost certain to win more seats, maybe many seats.



IMF-imposed cuts have shaken up Irish politics

The Labour Party, which in tandem with Fine Gael, the 26 counties' second bourgeois party, is committed to a coalition, but has now distanced itself from the savage cuts imposed by international finance on the state and, following the example of the British Labour Party, is arguing for less immediate cuts.

This is belated, but looks like an attempt to do as the British Labour Party did before it lost the British May 2010 general election. Unlike the British Labour Party, the Irish Labour Party has not been in government. With a bold policy it should be able to greatly increase its Dail strength. The patterns of voting for

first, second, third, etc, preferences in the 26 counties version of PR, are complex and often surprising, but a lot of Fianna Fail "first preference" voters vote Labour second preference. The Labour Party might benefit greatly from the disillusionment with Fianna Fail.

Sinn Fein is offering a mixture of economic and nationalist demagoguery — tear up international finance agreements — that could chime with the feelings of many voters. It is seemingly radical and outsider, far more so than the Labour Party, veteran of many coalitions.

The last thing the workers of Ireland need is a resuscitation of the national chauvinism of early Fianna Fail, during the Great Slump. Yet, in desperation and disillusionment with the recent past, it will probably be what many of them go for. And Sinn Fein, despite the demagoguery, is in the marketplace of Irish politics, too, looking for the best coalition offer it can get after the general election.

Italy: carworkers strike against Fiat bosses' attacks and austerity

By Hugh Edwards

Tens of thousands of Italian workers in the metalworkers Fiom-Cgil union and the USB union took part in a nationwide strike on Friday 28 January. The strike was in protest at the attempts by Fiat car company in Turin to implement draconian work conditions and reflected the fear that this could spread to other car manufacturers.

Fiat's conditions will mean intensification of the workload, reduction of rest and mealtimes and a severe curtailment of rights to sickness benefits.

Fiom, which represents the largest component of metalworkers at Fiat, is now deprived of its right to represent its members on the plant's shopfloor committees.

Other unions — those who shamefully bought into the bosses' blackmail threat to pull out of Italy if the new conditions did not get passed in a recent plant-wide referendum —

will continue to be represented.

However, the strike turnout across the country (in Bologna 30,000 struck and marched) demonstrated a fierce determination to fight on among carworkers.

Strikers were joined by thousands of students, researchers and teachers, all acutely aware that the struggle at Fiat is an integral part of everyone's battle against the government's attacks on education, health and welfare services.

At many of the mass meetings the demand for an all-out general strike drowned out much of the pussy-footing trade union bureaucrats.

Fiom leaders announced mass meetings of all its workers to discuss widening the action.

If the momentum is not to be lost the maximum unity of all the varied fronts of struggle against the government and bosses is needed: a worker led campaign of democratic and radical challenge.

Southern Sudan: starting to build social movements

In the first complete results of a referendum, 99% of South Sudanese have voted to secede from the north. Tim Flatman recently spent three months in South Sudan and continues a series of articles on the future of a new country, set to become independent in July.

Jobs, working rights, public services and control of resources are the current demands of southerners.

They are important not only in themselves, not only because they impact on the environment in which social movements operate, but also because they are a precondition for further political organisation. And implementing separation takes priority over every other issue. But there is also a psychology that separation will give Southerners permission to develop their own country, including developing political organisation.

One of the reasons I am using the label "social movements" instead of referring to a working class, labour movement, trade unions or even agricultural classes is that most of South Sudan is starting from a blank slate in terms

of economic development.

For many, economic relations over the last 50 years of war cannot even be classified as subsistence. Survival through harsh years of war has been ensured by scavenging for roots and leaves. The collective memory of how to cultivate has evaporated in areas where successive generations have been forced to flee; often there is no point producing anything, as it may be destroyed before there is chance to reap the benefits.

A frustrated returnee involved in trying to build a proto-trade union federation told me that the concept of collective action is culturally alien and that there was hard work ahead to embed the benefits of associations in public consciousness. This is made even more difficult because nearly all associations that sprung up during the war have clear ties to the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

It is too easy to characterise the SPLM as a domineering influence (such thinking led the West to support splits which resulted in hundreds of thousands of Southerners losing their lives in the mid-90s); the SPLM was the only po-

litical organisation known by most Southern Sudanese during the war and its setting up of civil administrations, youth leagues, etc, in the "New Sudan" (liberated areas) rather than leaving military hierarchies in control was a welcome approach. But now most associations have formal or informal ties with the SPLM, with implications for the level of political debate.

So too there is a deference to authority and legitimisation of hierarchy that is surely related to the high degree of participation in the Sudanese People's Liberation Army during the

war. This deference is only strengthened by the lack of available jobs, the informal nature of much work and the mechanism of patronage as a key means of securing work. For example, I witnessed government officials wait hours for permission from management rather than make trivial decisions on their own.

Further complicating factors include high levels of fear and suspicion resulting from war traumatising; anyone you don't know intimately is suspect as they could have been bribed by the North as infiltrators or to sow division between Southerners.

Recent unity between Southerners is commonly regarded as being based on the necessity of fighting a common enemy and guaranteeing the referendum. (However, broadening of the SPLM, church growth, reconciliation measures, peacebuilding between communities, recent inclusion of opposition political parties and military pardons from the Government of South Sudan have also played their part. So too division was based on actions of the Government of Sudan which may now be less prevalent.) Ensuring a transition to multi-party democracy which does not

see parties split down ethnic lines is regarded by most without a direct stake in the government as virtually impossible, but crucial.

Nonetheless, there are reasons to hope these conditions making political organisation a challenge are changing. For instance separation makes political association more culturally relevant, as Southerners see a new set of political challenges as immediate.

Southerners are already highly politicised — the forms war has taken in the South means a high degree of political awareness has been crucial for survival. Knowing who to trust, who you can trust now but might not be able to trust in a few months, and understanding the intentions of your allies and enemies has been a matter of life and death for 50 years. Referendum is also seen as a matter of life and death and so conversations, for example, about the political leanings of particular diplomats and the structures they work in in their home countries were common even amongst people who had no education or personal resources.

Next week: expressing solidarity

The militant working-class suffragist

On Whose Shoulders We Stand By Jill Mountford

Selina Cooper

"Women do not want their political power to enable them to boast that they are on equal terms with the men. They want to use it for the same purpose as men – to get better conditions. Every woman in England is longing for her political freedom in order to make the lot of the worker pleasanter and to bring about reforms which are wanted. We do not want it as a mere plaything..."
(Selina Cooper, from *Wigan Observer* 1906)

A millworker from the age of 12, and daughter of a navy, Selina Cooper (née Coombe) was born into a big working class family in 1864. She was a trade unionist, suffragist and socialist in the north of England, who began her campaigning life fighting her bosses for better conditions for women in the workplace.

The fight for doors on the toilets and against sexual harassment at work meant more than just taking on the bosses though. The men who ran the female dominated Cotton Workers Union had to be challenged too.

Selina taught herself about history, politics and medicine; studying the latter in order to be able to advise fellow workers who could not afford to pay for a visit to the doctors.

Selina married Robert Cooper, a committed socialist and

trade unionist who had been sacked from the Post Office for his union activities. They had three children, two of whom survived infancy.

Juggling family life with work and political activity, she was active in many different campaigns, organisations and groups including the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Independent Labour Party (ILP).

In 1900 Selina collected more than 800 signatures for the 29,000 strong petition of women workers in Lancashire calling for women's suffrage. This meant standing outside local factory gates, knocking door-to-door, persuading women of the need for their support for women's suffrage.

In 1901, supported by the SDF and the ILP, she was the first working-class woman ever to be elected as a Poor Law Guardian (local administrator of "relief" payments to the unemployed), despite local newspapers campaigning against her. Usually in a minority, Selina was generally outvoted by middle-class "do-gooders" on the committee.

Selina now had a fast-growing reputation as a passionate speaker able to put the arguments across and carry people with her. She made her a home for herself in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), which was the dominant campaign amongst women in the north of England and operated in stark contrast to the Women's Social and Political Union, led by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, the "celebrity suffragists".

By 1912 Selina was a paid worker for the NUWSS speaking around the country and lobbying the giant Miners' Federation to throw its weight behind the demand for women's suffrage. She won their support in 1913.

Selina and Robert opposed the First World War, swimming against the political tide. They campaigned in support

of conscientious objectors and in 1917 Selina led a Women's Peace Crusade march through Nelson to be greeted by derision and jeers from many caught up in the nationalism and jingoism of the war.

After the war Selina stood for election on the town's council in Nelson; she stood as Labour candidate but her opposition to the war and her outspoken views on birth control ensured her defeat. After this she concerned herself with campaigning against domestic violence and threw her energy into the movement for birth control. In the hard economic depression of the 1930s she campaigned and spoke passionately for the right of married women to work.

In 1934, when she was 68 years old, she joined the pro-communist (Stalinist) Women's World Committee Against War and Fascism. In 1940 she joined the People's Convention (a CP initiative) for which she was expelled from the Labour Party. At 76 she found herself outside of mainstream Labour politics for the first time in fifty years. She died in 1946 at the age of 82.

I would offer no apologies for Selina's drift towards supporting the Stalinist Communist Party, but it has to be seen in the context of the betrayals of the Ramsey MacDonald and Philip Snowden led Labour Party and the rise of fascism in Europe. It would be wrong to judge her life's work by that last decade or so.

Selina Cooper is a fine example of a working class woman who educated herself and fought tirelessly — juggling family, work and politics — to improve the lot of working-women. She saw the big picture, and looked beyond the question of the right to vote towards matters such as rights at work, the right to work and birth control. These are shoulders on which we stand.

The Guardian goes "ultra-left"

Reason in Revolt

By Sean Matgamna

"Revealed: how Palestinian leaders gave up on refugees". There were no two readings which either the quick-glance or the pause-and-reflect-on-it reader could make of the front page headline on 25 January.

Or of the smaller bullet-point straplines:

"Papers show PLO accepted just 10,000 to return". "Rice suggested resettlement in Latin America". "Negotiations accepted Israel as 'Jewish state'."

This was all presented as "revelations" from leaked Palestinian documents, but, as John Strawson pointed out in a letter to the paper the following day, none of the information was new.

Which paper was this? *Socialist Worker*? The *Morning Star*, self-proclaimed "paper of the left"?

The fact that seriously critical letters were published shows that it couldn't be either the *Morning Star* or *Socialist Worker*. Of course, it was the *Guardian*, headlining an article by Ian Black and the paper's associate editor, Seumas Milne. The page one headlines set the keynotes for all the coverage in the paper.

Everything in those four headlines was more than merely questionable. The substance, tone, manner was that of an agitation exposing and denouncing outrageous departures from long-agreed positions and ideas — indeed, of a finger-pointing, hoarse-voiced heresy-hunt.

The headlines begged all the important questions in the conflict between Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab and Islamic states.

In the real world, they lined up the *Guardian* behind the positions and demands of Arab and Islamist forces committed to war until Israel goes down, and against those prepared to make peace with Israel.

The Palestinian leaders "gave up" on refugees? But who among even half-informed people in Britain over the last 60 years ever believed that the bulk of "the refugees" could "return" other than in the wake of conquering armies that had first smashed the Israeli state?

Who thought that any negotiated "return" would be anything but token thousands?

Who advocated full "return", except those who wanted, or were prepared reluctantly to accept, the elimination and destruction of Israel (and in fact of the Hebrew nation).

Who has ever supposed that short of such conquest of Israel, there could ever be a re-rolling of the film of history, back to before 1948, when as a result of a 1947 UN resolution both Israel and a West Bank/Gaza Palestinian state were set up? (The Palestinian state was eliminated, most of it going

to Jordan and Egypt).

"Just ten thousand"? The *Guardian* thinks the five or six million defined as Palestinian "refugees" (there are varying figures) can and should "return", and accepting anything less — "just" some token number — is treachery by the Palestinian leaders to the true Palestinian cause (the "cause" embodied in Hamas?)

Let's break that down a bit. In 1948 and in the years after, there were (mainly forced) "population exchanges" between the new state of Israel and Arab and Islamic countries — about 750,000 Arabs driven out from the territory assigned to the Jewish state by the UN, and about 600,000 Jews pushed out from Arab countries.

By now, of course, most of the five-million-plus Palestinian "refugees" are descendants of refugees, not "refugees" in the usual meaning. "Refugee" here is a political definition, almost the name by now of an Arab sub-nation. To a large extent, the "refugees" are forced into living like refugees by the policy towards them of Arab governments, denying them rights to become citizens or sometimes even to work.

The "right of return" for those millions, who are as numerous as, or more numerous than, the Israeli Jews, implies the displacement of the Israeli Jews born in Israel, or most of them.

In some rational and benign other world, maybe, over five million Arabs could be added to the existing five million Jews within Israel. That is not our world. Nations and national identities are powerful things.

There are a lot of people on the left who don't think it through beyond the impulse for a benign solution. But by now, there can't be many people who have thought about it and yet don't know that the "right of return" is code for the destruction and elimination of Israel. I doubt that Seumas Milne, who in politics is a man of the would-be left, is among those who don't know.

"Accepting Israel as a Jewish state"? That is what exactly? Accepting that it is not a Palestinian or an Arab or a binational state? That it is, in its national character, what its big majority want it to be, their state?

And the *Guardian's* alternative? How are the people of the state to be prevented from making it their state? By the Hebrew nation being deprived of the right of self-determination?

The rights of the one-million-plus Israeli Arabs can be improved by negotiation and reciprocal agreements. Certainly they should be.

For a certainty, the overall Jewish or Hebrew character of Israel will not be altered by negotiations or as part of a general Middle East peace settlement.

There are good-hearted people who consult only what they would like to see happen, and substitute that for what is conceivable now in the way of improvements — an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Unable to face the harsh realities on the level of calculation, they are easily led out to face them blindfolded with the realpolitik logic of those who want to conquer Israel, and in practice commit to further decades of conflict and war, and more decades of hell for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

There are malicious pedants who quibble about the meaning of Israel being a "Jewish state": isn't it just a religious thing, etc.? The point is that the Hebrew nation in Israel *is*. It exists. It is a national entity. Full rights for Israeli Arabs can be secured within it, as rights can be secured for national minorities elsewhere; but cancelling out or suppressing the national entity itself is another matter.

Much more could be said about the coverage in the *Guardian*, did space permit.

It is an old joke in *Solidarity* that the SWP are "*Guardian* readers with placards". Here we had the *Guardian's* front page, and five more pages of that issue, turned into crude pseudo-left (indeed, pseudo-ultra-left) placards.

"Intransigence" was used as pseudo-left gloss on the politics of Arab and Islamic revanchism. The *Guardian* became a conduit for "revelations" and "exposures" that help Hamas and Hezbollah against the saner Palestinian politicians.

And against all the real political interests of the Palestinians.

It is the Palestinian people who have over decades suffered terrible consequences from Arab and Islamic "intransigence" and refusal to make peace.

Today it is Israel, from a position of great strength, that refuses to make a peace which the Arab states and the Palestinian majority offer it. But the other millwheel that combines with Israel to grind down the Palestinians — and perhaps, as settlements expand in Palestinian territory, eventually to remove the very possibility of an independent Palestinian state — is Arab and Islamist obsession with eliminating Israel. Demagogy about the "right of return" is today the standard code for expressing that obsession.

The *Guardian* is the organ of the invertebrate liberals — those who feel an inner compulsion to accommodate to reactionary forces, in the Middle East as elsewhere. Its "liberal" backbone crumbled long ago. The *Guardian* of 25 January is further proof that — as the would-be left shows painfully — demagogy rots your brain.

Egypt: support democratic revolution and workers' freedom

As *Solidarity* went to press on 1 February, Hosni Mubarak, dictator of Egypt since 1981, declared that he would not stand in the country's presidential election in September, and would work until then for an orderly transition.

His rule had been fatally damaged since the Egyptian army, on 31 January, declared that it would not use force against the demonstrators on Egypt's streets, and even that it recognised the demonstrators' demands as "legitimate".

The main demand of the demonstrators had been that Mubarak should go. He probably will not make it to September.

The blows of the world economic crisis, and especially of the big food price rises of 2008 and the recent months, have cracked the established order first at a point where it looked most solid and congealed, but in fact was most worn and discredited.

Mubarak is the third chief of a regime in office since 1952. In Tunisia, Ben Ali was the second chief of a regime ruling since 1956.

Other Arab regimes are mostly of the same stripe: out-right hereditary monarchies, in Morocco, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia; dictatorships which owed their initial impetus to Arab-nationalist claims of decades ago, such as the Ba'athists in Syria (since 1963), the FLN/army regime in Algeria (since 1962), or Qaddafi in Libya (since 1969). They are the "oldest" regimes in the world.

In their day they consolidated national independence from European colonial rule, nationalised much industry, and pushed through land reforms. But all have been stiflingly unfree.

Despite the afflux of oil incomes to the region — some of which spreads out to countries with little or no oil, through workers' remittances home — economic growth has been poor. Rapid urbanisation and expansion of the education systems in these countries has produced a generation of urban young people often highly educated, taunted by the processes of capitalist enrichment and corruption around them, but without jobs or prospects. In Egypt, over 30% of young people are unemployed.

The new market-oriented economic policies of governments like Egypt in recent decades have stripped protections from the poor like food subsidies, but produced no flowering of private capital.

In Tunisia and in Egypt, the working class has been central to the upheavals. In Tunisia, the trade-union confederation UGTT, despite a long history of political accommodation to power, is the axis of the opposition. In Egypt, the movement on the streets follows a rise of workers' strikes since 2004, and has given birth to a new independent trade-union federation.

With independent political organisation and a chance to educate itself and discuss — things which will take much effort and probably much time — the workers' movement in these countries can take the lead in fighting for full



Tahrir Square protest

democracy, link that fight to its battles on wages and conditions, and lead society forward to a workers' government.

For now the UGTT is committed to political coalition, and the initial step of the working class separating itself out as an autonomous political force is yet to be completed.

The upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt will reverberate throughout the Arab world. A clear independent voice from the workers' movements in those countries — where it is stronger than in many other Arab countries — can shape the outcome across the whole region.

OTHER FORCES

Other forces than the working class will also strive to shape the outcome.

In Egypt, the international diplomat Mohamed ElBaradei has put himself forward. He appears to want a development like that in Indonesia after the fall of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998, or the Philippines after the overthrow of the Marcos regime in 1986: a regime politically more liberal, but economically neo-liberal.

That would at least allow the working class space to organise.

The army chiefs are also contenders for power. In both Egypt and Tunisia the army stood aside, effectively licensing the street demonstrations, and is seen by many as a

friend rather than an enemy.

Direct military rule is perhaps less likely than the installation of coalition civilian governments buttressed by and close to the army.

A big difference from the Philippines, and from Indonesia, although in terms of *religious belief* Indonesia is mostly Muslim, is the strong presence in Egypt and Tunisia, and across the Arab world, of *political-Islamist* groups as the longstanding legally-banned but visibly active opposition to the dictatorships. This is true even in Tunisia, by many standards a very secularised society.

Though the Islamist movements have played little part in the upheavals, the fact that they have political cadres and organisation already in place gives them scope to shape outcomes.

Iran since 1979 shows that political Islam is a deadly threat to democratic, workers', and women's rights. Iran in 1978-9 shows that democratic promises by the Islamists before taking power are worth nothing once they gain power.

It may be that the young people of the Arab countries know enough about Iran that they will strongly resist political Islam. It may be that the Islamist movements in Egypt and Tunisia, lacking Iranian Islamism's structure of a clerical hierarchy, prove less solid than they seem. We hope so.

Much of the left in Britain has ignored the threat of political Islam to the revolutions in the Arab world, or positively endorsed political Islam, thinking that its demagogic hostility to the US and European governments makes it progressive. This is a betrayal of the workers' and women's movements in the Arab world.

Our solidarity should be with the workers' movements, and with a fight for full and broad democracy in the Arab world.

“Moderation” is reckless

The unspoken assumption by union and Labour Party leaders, that the Tory/ Lib-Dem cuts are inevitable and can only be alleviated by negotiating voluntary redundancies and used as grist for electoral agitation, is being proved reckless.

Evidence is mounting that the cuts will bring not only their obvious immediate damage, but also some degree or another of “double-dip” downturn in the whole economy.

The crisis of September 2008 came from overaccumulation of debt. An intricate network in which one capitalist borrowed from another, who borrowed from yet another, and then yet another, with households and industrial or commercial capital as the first borrowers in the chain, eventually toppled, as doubt about whether debts could or would be repaid flooded through the system.

Governments limited the collapse by taking over or guaranteeing key debts of the major banks. Governments command greater confidence as repayers of debt, but not unlimited confidence. Thus, now, the crisis of the debts of Greece and Ireland, and soon of Portugal, Spain, and Italy.

To pay down the debts, even governments need expanded income. That is unavailable without an expansion of industrial and commercial investment and of household consumption.

The theory of the Tory/ Lib-Dem cuts is that by limiting the expansion of government debt they will limit interest rates and the “crowding-out” of industrial and commercial borrowing by government borrowing, and thus clear the way for private capital to expand.

Even on the most mainstream of economic assumptions, this argument depends on those desired effects outweighing the depressive influence of reduced market demand from workers who have lost their jobs and capitalists who have lost their public-sector contracts.

The statistics of the decline of output in October-December 2010 suggest that the depressive influences are weightier. And that is before any economic shocks.

Such shocks are likely. Portugal, Spain, Italy, Ireland, and Greece will probably not get through the next year or so without further crises caused by doubt about their ability to cover debt. Across the rich capitalist world, the unsustainable household debt levels of 2007-8 still prevail, and are unlikely to improve soon.

Not to fight to stop the cuts now is recklessly to accept the probable devastation of a whole generation by prolonged economic depression.

Fund drive: £25,000 to mark 25 years?

After 25 years in Peckham, AWL has moved to new premises near Tower Bridge, London.

Our offices are a centre for producing the weekly *Solidarity*, but they're also an important space for producing other materials and organising our activity.

Your donations were vital in allowing us to complete the move, and they'll continue to be vital as we get the new office established.

Can you donate to support this work? One-off donations are great, monthly standing orders are even better.

Thanks this week to James P for new standing order, Rich B for a £15 donation, Ed S for £30, Bryan E for £100 and Will A for £200. That leaves our fundraising total for this week at £347, and our overall total at £20,300. We're aiming to raise £25,000 by 26 March; if we make it before then, we'll set a new target. Please help out as much as you can.

From Mehmet Ali to Mubarak

By Colin Foster

Egypt is the largest country in the Arab world. Cairo, with more than 18 million people, is one of the world's biggest cities, a centre of great riches and ballooning poverty.

About one and a half million people in Cairo are estimated to live on other people's roofs. About one million use the old Mameluke graveyard as home, making dwellings out of the tombs. Other graveyards, particularly abandoned Jewish cemeteries, are considered as "better" shantytowns, compared to the outlying ones, because they are more central and they provide materials for comparatively solid dwellings.

Egypt was one of the earliest centres of human civilisation. For centuries it languished under the Ottoman Empire, centred in Turkey. Between 1805 and 1848, a local governor, Mehmet Ali, made a drive to win autonomy for Egypt and modernise it on European lines. He failed.

European capital rushed in, particularly with the building of the Suez Canal (1859-69). The khedive (king, under the overlordship of the Ottoman Sultan) ran up huge debts and did not have a tax-gathering machine sufficient to pay them. Britain invaded on behalf of the bondholders in 1882, and became overlord of Egypt for 70 years, until 1952.

In 1952, a nationalist coup by army officers ousted the king. Gamal Abdul Nasser emerged as leader of the new regime. In 1956 he nationalised the Suez Canal, and faced down an invasion by Britain, France, and Israel.

The USA, anxious for influence in the Middle East and convinced the old ways of European colonialism would not work, had applied decisive pressure to make Britain, France, and Israel retreat. But after 1956 Nasser swung towards the USSR in the Cold War polarity of world politics of that era.

He carried out big land reforms, which seriously improved peasants' living standards for a while, and nationalised almost all of industry. Old owners of Egyptian origin generally continued to run their businesses as managers under government ownership, but the large section of Egypt's bourgeoisie which was of Greek, Jewish, or Armenian extraction were dispossessed. Greek, Jewish, and Armenian families, including poor ones, were driven out of Egypt, and especially out of the once fabulously cosmopolitan city of Alexandria.

Nasser became the hero and leader of "Arab socialism". Briefly (1958-61) Syria joined his rule as part of a "United Arab Republic".

In the early days Nasser had been relatively open to negotiation with Israel, but nothing had come of that. Now, as Arab nationalist discourse burgeoned, it came to define Israel as "the enemy". Colonial rule had gone; there was now no further "national independence" measure that could mend the Arab states' adverse position in world-market capitalism; Israel was targeted, essentially, as a scapegoat for the inability of bourgeois Arab nationalism to unify the Arab world and make social improvements.

Tension culminated in war, in 1967 — and a startlingly quick and complete defeat for Egypt and the other Arab states. Nasser died in 1970. His successor, Anwar Sadat, opened the economy up to Western investment and market forces ("infatih"), and, under US pressure, in 1979 made a peace deal with Israel, becoming the first major Arab country after Jordan to recognise the Jewish state.

The peace deal was popular at first, but soured over time. Sadat was assassinated by an Islamist in 1981, and Mubarak has ruled since then. The regime, like most of those in the Arab world dating from the heyday of Arab nationalism, has become more and more sclerotic, corrupt, and discredited. Egypt is the world's biggest recipient of US military aid, after Israel.



Mubarak on TV

Egypt in revolt

By Clive Bradley

At the time of writing Hosni Mubarak, president of Egypt since 1981, is still clinging to power. He probably won't last long. Thousands of people are still in the streets of Alexandria, Suez and other cities, as well as Cairo, despite curfews, and despite a death toll of around 100 people. (Some reports put the numbers of dead higher.)

The army is on the streets, but has declared (31 January) that it "will not resort to force" against the people and tells the demonstrators that it is "aware of the legitimacy of your demands". This follows the pattern of Tunisia, where the army's refusal to shoot demonstrators was the signal for Ben Ali to flee the country.

Many commentators expect that the army chiefs will tell Mubarak to step down. Then there would be some kind of transitional government before elections are held. Whether that government includes, as in Tunisia, representatives of the old regime — and whether, then, opposition groups agree to join it, as many have done in Tunisia — would be the big immediate question.

After Friday 28 January, when the scales decisively tipped and the demonstrations reached unstoppable proportions, and prior to the deployment of the army, the much-hated police vacated the streets. Many of them were then besieged in the Ministry of Interior, where there was armed fighting.

With the police gone, citizens in many areas formed "civil defence groups" to defend their homes and stop looting. There were reports of bands of thieves from poorer districts robbing houses in richer suburbs, but also extensive eye-witness evidence that the robbers were policemen.

Thousands of prisoners have been allowed to escape from four jails. Many of these were political prisoners, among them 34 recently-arrested members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Many were ordinary criminals, presumably some of them violent.

NEW WORKERS' MOVEMENT

The protests have been marked by acts of solidarity, from the sharing of food to the establishment of impromptu clinics to deal with the wounded and dying.

They have been marked, too, by the near absence of religious slogans.

According to one report, when a section of a Cairene crowd tried to raise a religious slogan, others drowned them out with "Muslims, Christians, we are all Egyptians!" (which also rhymes in Arabic). About 10% of the Egyptian population is Coptic Christian, recently victim to increased sectarian attack, including a bomb on New Year's Eve which killed 25 and wounded 200 in Alexandria. The chanting of anti-sectarian slogans is very significant.

Groups active in the current uprising include unemployed or underemployed students, some of whom have been mobilised since 2008 in the April 6 Youth Movement, a group which began on Facebook to build support for a coming major strike by textile workers in the Delta town of Mehalla al-Kubra.

And on the afternoon of Sunday 30 January 30, representatives of groups of workers who have been fighting for independent trade unions over recent years came together in Tahrir Square to announce the formation of a new union federation, independent of the state, and to plan for a general strike.

Up to now, only tax collectors, who won a major strike a couple of years ago, had won recognition of their union independently of the state-run federation. The new unions are an enormous step — and the presence in the uprising of working-class militants who recognised the need to take an initiative publicly, in the centre of the uprising, is very significant indeed.

MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

It has been said for many years that Egypt's long-established political-Islamist movement, Muslim Brotherhood, would win a fair election in Egypt. The last election was blatantly rigged, and the Brotherhood boycotted it, like many other oppositionists, including the supporters of Mohamed ElBaradei, the international diplomat who returned to Egypt on 27 January to put himself forward as a new leader.

Previously the Brotherhood had 88 MPs who (despite the Brotherhood itself long being banned) gave it parliamentary representation.

After several days of apparent silence, the Brotherhood announced it was supporting the protests. More recently, it has issued a statement to the effect that it wants to be part of discussions about a new government. Other religious authorities called on people not to participate in the demonstrations; and the remnants of the "salafi" radical Islamist groups opposed them altogether.

It has been suggested that the Brotherhood kept a low profile as deliberate tactics, but it seems more likely that it was simply taken off-guard by events.

Or maybe the Brotherhood is weaker than had been imagined; its votes in a poll where it may seem the only feasible vehicle for protesting against Mubarak don't translate into real support. We don't know.

It is true that the big protests on Friday began after prayers, and hundreds of people have prayed together in Tahrir Square. It would seem, though, that most have not prayed; and in any case, religious feeling is not at all the same thing as support for Islamist politics.

By the standards of Islamist movements, the Muslim Brotherhood has evolved in a legalistic and "bourgeois" direction. It has officially renounced violence, and says it wants to participate in pluralistic politics.

In the 1980s and 90s, it was being pushed the other way by competition from much more radical Islamist movements in the 1980s and 90s, such as Jihad, one of whose leaders, Ayman al-Zawahiri, went on to be Osama bin Laden's right hand man.

Those militant jihadi groups were crushed by the state — and that must be one of the things giving Mubarak the sense that he can ride the storm. The Brotherhood's canniness is testament to its experience and popular roots.

In recent years the Brotherhood has been prominent in protests against the Iraq war, and Israel's wars in Lebanon and Gaza. It seems some sections of the left, including the far left, have made a turn to joint work with them, and more of an orientation towards their base.

Trying to get the ear of the Brotherhood's base may make sense, especially if it's true that many young Brotherhood activists aren't particularly religious, but are attracted more because of issues like the Iraq war.

But it would be a mistake to lose sight of what the Brotherhood is. It remains an organisation with a programme for a religious state (even if they declare themselves ready to share power). Even a few years it announced a political programme which declared that no Christian or woman could be president of Egypt.

Socially, it is a conservative movement. It sees its legitimacy as coming from God, not the people. It would be foolish for leftists to trust it to stick to its promises of democratic behaviour.

And it has, fundamentally, no economic programme, certainly not a radical one. This could prove decisive in the weeks ahead.

WORKERS' STRUGGLES

Underlying the current uprising, along with hatred of the dictatorship, are profound social and economic grievances. The Muslim Brothers have no answers to these questions. The emerging new workers' movement may be able to develop answers and combine them with giving a lead to the democratic aspirations of the millions.

Workers' movements have a long history in Egypt. At the time of the so-called "Revolution" of 1952 which brought the current regime to power, there was a powerful strike wave. The new regime quickly crushed the strike and executed its leaders.

Wages of most Egyptian workers are inadequate to pay for food, clothing, shelter, and education. Even with two wage earners, the typical monthly wage of textile workers, which ranges from \$45-\$107 a month, is below the World Bank's poverty line of \$2 a day for the average Egyptian family of 3.7 people. According to the World Bank, nearly 44 percent of Egyptians are "extremely poor" (unable to meet minimum food needs), "poor" (unable to meet basic food needs), or "near-poor" (able to meet some basic food needs).
Joel Beinin, *Foreign Policy*, May 2010

As the Nasser regime moved, after 1956, towards “Arab Socialism”, full employment and an improved standard of living were targets of policy. Genuine trade unions were not. The Egyptian Trade Union Federation is an arm of the state, its role to raise productivity and whip up support for government policy.

When the regime shifted towards the West with the policy of “infatih” under Sadat in the 1970s, it didn’t change its relationship with the workers. The state unions stayed in place. There were strikes, and in 1977 a near-insurrectionary movement when Sadat withdrew subsidies on food.

In the 80s, Islamist groups came front-stage, but there were big workers’ struggles at the end of the decade. One of the leaders of sit-in strikes at the Iron and Steel Co in Helwan, south of Cairo, in 1989, Kamal Abbas, went on more recently to help found the Centre for Trade Union and Workers’ Services (CTUWS), which is the source of information about the new federation.

But the big resurgence of the workers’ movement began in 2004. For example, “During 2007 strikes spread from their centre of gravity in the textile and clothing industry to encompass building material workers, transport workers, oil workers in Suez, and many others. In the summer the movement broadened to include white collar employees and civil servants”. (Joel Beinin, *The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*, Washington DC, Solidarity Centre, 2010).

There was a big movement at the Misr Spinning Co, a huge plant employing 25,000 workers, from 2006 to 2008. That was the impetus for the formation of the April 6 Youth Movement.

Between 1998 and 2010 “over 2 million workers... partici-

pated in more than 3,300 factory occupations, strikes, demonstrations, or other collective actions protesting low wages, non-payment of bonuses, wage supplements, and social benefits, and private investors’ failure to uphold their contractual obligations to their workers”. (Beinin, *Foreign Policy*, 1 May 2010).

This big wave of workers’ strikes last year is part of the background to the revolution now.

The strikes included a campaign for a minimum wage of LE 1,200 (\$215) — a demand emerging from the Mehalla al-Kubra strikes. The official rate, set in 1984, was only \$25 — although in March last year Nagi Rashad, a worker at the South Cairo Grain Mill and a leading figure in the workers’ protest movement, won a court decision which theoretically guaranteed the setting of a new, fair minimum wage.

The strikes and sit-ins are usually opposed by the official unions at national and local level. Often strikers call for the sacking of union officials, or for government recognition of the unofficial structures (strike committees) formed in struggle. The already-combative workers’ movement can make its mark on unfolding events.

WEST’S SUPPORT FOR MUBARAK

Tony Blair, speaking from Switzerland at the weekend, seemed to remember fondly working closely with Mubarak in the Middle East peace process. Obama has gone a little further in trying to distance himself from the obviously-hated dictator, though he still has not openly called for Mubarak to step down.

The United States gives Egypt \$1.5 billion a year in aid, \$1.3

billion of it military aid. The US is very concerned that all that hardware could land up in the hands of its opponents.

Israel, also, is worried. Almost any new government would be less cooperative with Israel than Mubarak is over policing Egypt’s border with Gaza. Netanyahu is urging his colleagues to keep quiet.

That such a vast amount of aid to a poor country with growing inequality is almost all military is a damning indictment of the world in which we live. If Obama is worried about anti-American feeling in Egypt he could just give the entire sum — \$1.5 billion — in food instead of tear-gas canisters, guns, tanks, and jet aircraft. That is unlikely to happen.

Western fear of political Islam is one factor in backing Mubarak, but not the only one. The US does not want a radical development which remains secular, either. As working-class and popular struggles begin to address the economic issues underlying the current protests they will not find allies in Washington or London.

As in Tunisia, the world recession since 2008 is the background. Much of what is driving people onto the streets of Cairo is the same that drove protestors in Athens, or Paris — or London. The revolts have already transformed the Middle East. They could also be of global importance.

We urgently need a socialist movement — a working-class based movement which fights for justice, equality, and an end to exploitation and oppression across the planet. It is out of mass struggles from below like those now in the Arab world, that such movements can emerge and grow.

Socialist revolution is not immediately on the agenda in Egypt; but out of this immense explosion of popular anger an independent workers’ movement, and a socialist current within it, and a workable democracy within which they can operate, can be won. We should do what we can to help.

● Centre for Trade Union and Workers’ Services (CTUWS) (<http://www.ctuws.com/Default.aspx>) — site apparently suspended at the moment by the government.

● *The Struggle for Worker Rights in Egypt*, by Joel Beinin (http://www.solidaritycenter.org/files/pubs_egypt_wr.pdf) — downloadable book.

Why the Muslim Brotherhood is a threat

The Muslim Brotherhood, or al-Ikhwan, in Egypt is the oldest party of modern “political Islam” or “Islamism”. It was formed in 1928.

It began as a conservative social movement, concerned about the spread of “Western culture” in Egypt. It opposed British colonialism, but also opposed increasing freedom for women.

In 1946 Tony Cliff, later to become the leader of the SWP in Britain, then a Trotskyist in Palestine, defined the Brotherhood as “a clerical-fascist organisation”. The Muslim Brotherhood was based largely in the urban middle class, especially in Cairo.

In 1952, a military coup brought nationalist army officers, led by Gamal Abdul Nasser, to power in Egypt. At first, the nationalist government included people who were close associates of the Brotherhood. But later it turned sharply against it.

In the 1960s, the Brotherhood sharpened its ideology, under the guidance of Sayyid Qutb.

Qutb was a government official, sent to the USA in 1948-50 to study on a government scholarship. He was shocked by US society and its liberalism, especially the (relatively free) position of women.

Returning to Egypt, Qutb joined the Brotherhood, became its chief ideologue, and redefined not only Western govern-

ments but even the officially-Muslim-but-secularising government of Egypt as “enemies of Islam”. Nasser’s government jailed Qutb and put him to death in 1966.

In 1970, Nasser died. His successor, Anwar Sadat, at first sought to co-opt the Brotherhood.

More militant Islamist groups were developing. One of them assassinated Sadat in 1981 for making peace with “the Jews” (Israel).

Since the 1990s, the Muslim Brotherhood has been the more moderate end of a spectrum of Islamist groups in Egypt. More militant Islamist groups have killed secular intellectuals, organised sectarian attacks on Christians, and murdered tourists.

The Brotherhood has chosen canny tactics, “boring from within”, taking control of student organisations and professional and business associations.

By such methods it has become the strongest organised political movement in opposition to Mubarak.

It has extended its support beyond its middle-class core by welfare projects in poor districts, at a time when what little social provision there ever was in Egypt has been trashed by Mubarak’s neo-liberal economic policies.

There is said to be dissent within the Brotherhood between its elderly leadership and younger activists.

● Cliff on the Brotherhood, 1946: <http://bit.ly/fXqLsl>

New workers’ co-ordination

Representatives of independent trade unions and workers’ organisations, including the CTUWS, have set up a new organisation to represent their interests in the current struggle and its aftermath.

They say: “the labour movement is the heart and soul of the Egyptian people’s revolution ...to emphasize the economic and democratic demands voiced by the independent labour movement through thousands of strikes, sit-ins and protests by Egyptian workers in the past years.”

Their appeal is being circulated by international trade union bodies. They called for a general strike on 1 February. Socialists and the British labour movement should throw their solidarity into supporting this initiative.

Egypt: what the left is saying

By Sacha Ismail

Socialist Worker's coverage of the Egyptian uprising is useful because their comrade, Judith Orr, is on the ground and thus able to paint a vivid and often moving picture of the burgeoning movement.

It also contains some extremely important factual nuggets, like the report from Monday 31 January that "three factories are now on indefinite strike until Mubarak falls. One is a steel mill that produces 70 percent of Egypt's steel... Also news that workers in two Cairo factories, one textile company another a printing press, have dismissed their bosses."

However, Orr's reporting lacks any programmatic comment or even real political analysis. She is not at all focused on workers' struggles or socialists' ideas and role in the movement. It is more like an extended "Isn't it wonderful?" — which it is, but that isn't enough to say! She reports: "Many believe ElBaradei is the person who can unite the opposition and force Mubarak out", without comment. "...everyone is united on one thing: Mubarak must go."

And there is no mention of the Muslim Brotherhood, let alone the idea that they pose a threat to the Egyptian working class.

The Socialist Party, in contrast, trots out plenty of its stalest clichés, climaxing with:

"A socialist programme of nationalisation of all the big corporations and banks under democratic workers' control would lay the basis for planning the use of Egypt's resources to meet the needs of all those who are denied a decent life under Mubarak's corrupt and cruel regime."

Workers' Power, predictably, goes one better by producing an extremely detailed, 14 point (yes!) programme for the revolution — despite not having any particular links, as far as you can tell, with comrades in Egypt.

Both the SP and WP refer to the Muslim Brotherhood as a bourgeois force, but there is no sense from either that it poses a reactionary alternative which could "confiscate" the current revolutionary wave and turn it into counter-revolution by crushing the workers even more comprehensively than Mubarak's regime. WP comes closer to acknowledging this, but in the student movement their activists have been arguing that Egyptian socialists should make a "united front" with the Muslim Brothers.

How revolution can be stolen by counter-revolution

By Martin Thomas

Is it good sense, or "Islamophobia", to warn against the danger of the uprisings in the Arab world being confiscated by fascist-like Islamist movements?

When socialists who said in the 1950s and 60s that revolutionary Stalinism, in China or in Indochina, was a reactionary and not a progressive alternative to the established order, other leftists jeered that those "Third Camp" people were enthusiasts for revolution in theory, but never in practice.

It was an easy jibe, but glib. What are the facts? In the modern capitalist world, do mass plebeian upheavals — based on working and poor people — always push towards socialist and democratic progress?

Or can they be confiscated to produce tyrannies worse than they replaced?

They can.

Witness Maoist China, with its tens of millions killed in the "Great Leap Forward" and "Cultural Revolution"; Cambodia, with its "Year Zero"; Iran, since 1979.

Fascism, too, can confiscate great social upheavals. In Italy in 1922 and Germany in 1933, the fascist coups, though conducted by leaders using social demagoguery and with plebeian support, were made in open opposition to strong organised labour movements.

In Poland, however, as Leon Trotsky wrote, when Jozef Pilsudski "was forced, in May 1926, to save bourgeois society by a coup d'état directed against the traditional parties of the Polish bourgeoisie... the official leader of the Polish Communist Party, Warski took the coup d'état of Pilsudski to be the road of the 'revolutionary democratic dictatorship' and called upon the workers to support Pilsudski".

The socialist-turned-fascist Pilsudski was helped to power with a general strike by workers disgusted by the conservative Witos government which he overthrew.

In their first revolutionary political declaration against capitalism, the Communist Manifesto of 1848, Marx and Engels were harsher against what they called "reactionary socialism" than against the bourgeoisie itself.

Then, they assumed that this "reactionary socialism" would surely fade as society "more and more split up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: bourgeoisie and proletariat".

The most economically-developed capitalist societies have gone somewhat that way, though even there the "middle class" has great weight. But as capital has spread helter-skelter across the world, planting modern factories amidst antique peasant societies, many countries have got more convoluted class structures.

The capitalist class proper is encased in a mélange of privileged groups clustered round the state machine and its patronage; the working class shades off into a huge social grouping, much bigger than the wage-working class proper, of paupers, semi-proletarians, people with occasional employment, petty traders, and so on; and in between is a vast urban mélange of better-off traders, lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, clerics, officials, and so on.

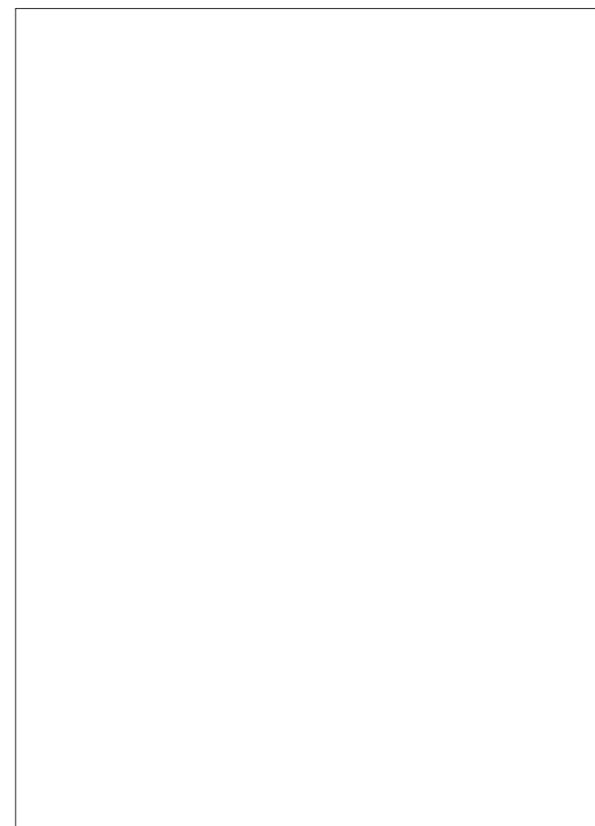
In many countries, Egypt and most other Arab states among them, the working class has never gained the openings available under even limited bourgeois democracy, and (despite sometimes rich histories of struggle) has never established a stable political movement of its own. There, the working class is especially vulnerable to being overwhelmed by mass mobilisations led by middle-class groups and using nationalist or religious slogans.

A short and apparently freakish episode of French politics in 1887-9 was the forerunner, in the day of Engels though not of Marx (who had died in 1883), of enormous political facts of the 20th century.

A general, Georges Boulanger, whipped up a big political movement on the basis of chauvinism and condemnation of corruption in the parliamentary government.

The French socialist movement was also on the rise at the time. Some socialists, notably Karl Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue, prefigured the Warskis and the leftists who would back Stalinism or Islamism in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Lafargue declared: "Boulanger has against him the rich



Revolutions can be confiscated by tyrannies worse than they replaced

and satisfied bourgeoisie and all its political chiefs bar a few rare exceptions, and draws his strength only from the plebeian masses, poverty-stricken and confusedly disillusioned by the republic. And with the people he has the elements not of a coup d'état, but of a revolution".

Engels rebuked Lafargue. "I want our people to show that there is a real third issue besides this pretended dilemma [corrupt parliamentary regime or Boulanger]... and not to take the muddling philistine and basically chauvinistic Boulangist movement for a really popular one..."

Against Mubarak and the Muslim Brotherhood today, it is again the job of socialists "to show that there is a real third issue".

Defining that "third issue" only sociologically, as "support for the workers", is inadequate. Workers too, especially when lacking previous stable political organisation, can be swept along into Islamist, Stalinist, or even fascist movements. Democracy, workers' rights, politically-independent organisation of the working class, define the "third issue".

According to reports so far, the Muslim Brotherhood has played little role in the upheavals in Egypt, and the Ennahda Islamists have been marginal in Tunisia.

They may yet be a threat. They have established cadres and organisation; funds; prestigious associations (the successes of Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, etc.); and the ability to appeal to potent and centuries-old religious feeling.

In 1989 the great plebeian movements against the old order in Eastern Europe were not led by Thatcherites. Their political sentiments were closer to social democracy or a generous liberalism.

But because the workers were not able to establish independent political movements of sufficient strength, and the Thatcherites had cadres in place, they dominated the outcome.

Islamism, as it showed in Iran in 1978-9, can confiscate a mass plebeian movement, fuelled by democratic aspirations, to the benefit of fascist-like counter-revolution.

Neither overawed by the Islamist threat, nor complacent about it, socialists across the world should do all we can to assist the emergence and triumph of politically independent workers' movements in the Arab world.

SWP: unity around Mohamed el-Baradei? Who can tell?

Tunisia: the defeat of fear

Two Tunisian activists spoke on 26 January to a French libertarian-left group, the Collectif Lieux Communs. We've translated sections of the interview about grass-roots organisation in Tunisia, about the role of the UGTT trade union, about the army, and about the Islamists.

At the start, in the two or three days after the fall of the regime, what everyone talked about was corruption and about the political parties and individuals who were going to take over. Now, people are wondering about how the movement is going to go forward.

Some people say: since... there are still four ministers from the old regime, the demonstrations must continue until they're gone. Others think that behind the scenes parties are usurping the movement for their own interests, and ask questions about the strangely large number of political formations — when were they set up, etc. ... Some people fear that the army will take over if the movement continues...

For us, what can be done now is to continue the revolution, but not in the form of demonstrations, riots, etc., rather through struggles wherever possible, in the factories, in the administrations, etc.

At the end of the day, what this "revolution" has given us is the fact that people are no longer afraid to express themselves, and not only in papers or in the internet, but above all in the workplaces where they are...

The main street of Tunis, Avenue Bourguiba, has become an enormous discussion space: everywhere you see people discussing, debating, or demonstrating. Currently there are demonstrations every two or three hours...

Another gain is the constitution of neighbourhood committees. Those structures are totally spontaneous. Officially, publicly, they have been set up to supplement the forces of order and to maintain order... In fact, in practice, those committees have allowed people to chill out, to let off steam, to discuss, every night, and have thus in fact defied the government curfew.

That confirms a general tendency that can be summed up thus: as soon as the masses begin to take their destiny in hand, and to reflect, they set up structures, committees, councils, soviets, shoras — the name does not matter...

There are many social demands. In Tunisia there are many workers who have no legal status, ill-paid day labourers... Small and medium businesses do a lot of subcontract work for big European businesses. Conditions of work are truly lamentable.

A law of April 1972... allows foreign businesses to open export factories here with a five year tax break. Those businesses benefit in fact from state protection, from free infrastructure for example, on the pretext of the struggle against unemployment — and in them there are no trade unions or anything like that, despite the poverty wages.

There are also demands of a more political sort. In businesses and administration, there is corruption, string-pulling, cronyism: there is a whole movement today against

UGTT backs coalition

"The UGTT [Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens, General Union of Tunisian Workers]... demands the 'nationalisation' of the property of the Ben Ali clan, that is, the taking of control by the Tunisian Republic of a large part of the economy..."

"Along the way, the UGTT calls for 'a constituent assembly through free and democratic elections which reflect the will of the people'..."

Hacine El Abassi, deputy general secretary of the UGTT, stated the union's views in an interview with the 27 January issue of the French left-wing paper *Informations Ouvrières*. IO, representing the "Lambertist" strand of would-be Trotskyism, gives uncritical support to the UGTT leadership.

However, as of now, the UGTT is aiming only at a coalition government with bourgeois opposition parties, rather than an independent political voice for the workers.

El Abassi told IO that "the UGTT... will help the opposition political parties arrive at forming this government of national salvation, so that it can be posed as the transitional political alternative to this RCD government rejected by the whole of the Tunisian people.

"Our only agenda is the accomplishment of the goals of our revolution. The UGTT will play its role to help to rally and unify all the political opposition forces in that direction".

all those practices and that mentality.

The UGTT... has always had a fundamental political role in the country, for example in the 1960s experience of collectivisation [of agriculture] in Tunisia: that was a UGTT project.

Later, with the rise of raw capitalism in the 1970s, the UGTT supported what is called "liberal democracy". The UGTT has always been a prop for the government.

Since the uprising went beyond all the party and union cadres, from the start, the UGTT is now pretending to embrace it. It is jumping on the bandwagon and hegemonising all the opposition political organisations.

For example, all the opposition parties now meet at the UGTT offices.

It put forward three ministers for the government, and then withdrew. Why? Because when all the political formations, leftists, Arab nationalists, etc., all essentially petty bourgeois, put themselves under the aegis of the UGTT, it became the main political force of the country.

Thus it is no longer simply a union; it has practically become a government within the government. The common front under the aegis of the UGTT is haggling to try to get a government where all the movements involved, 25 of them, will be represented, and that is impossible. There will be big political squabbles about places in government.

The UGTT was founded in 1946 and has always been a political force. I would even say — a political party, and a component of the political machine of the Tunisian bourgeoisie. It participated actively in the national liberation struggle from the start, and the wages-and-conditions dimension has always been sidelined. It was always the national liberation struggle aspect which predominated...

[As for the army] it has to be said that Ben Ali did all he could, from the start, to limit the role of the military. He is from a military background himself, and thus knows very well the danger that the army could represent for his power.

As a counterweight he consolidated the repressive apparatus of the ministry of the interior: today there are 50,000 soldiers but 220,000 police...

The military did not want to intervene to limit the disturbances. Then, for 24 hours, there was total anarchy triggered by the absence of the police... The military intervened, but only to re-establish order...

If the movement carries on in the same way, the army will intervene directly, for the bourgeoisie will not tolerate the situation...

The army refused to fire on the masses, and put pressure on the dictator to make him pack his bags and go... Now the military is politicised and intervenes directly in the political and social field...

We think that the Tunisian Islamists are very dangerous. They were absent from the uprising, except on the last day when they tried a manoeuvre to hegemonise it, by way of the instrumentalisation of martyrs, but without success. Their tactic today is to participate, but in an invisible way.

In fact they have infiltrated many plebeian areas of Tunis. The leader of the fundamentalist party Ennahda is about to return to Tunis, and he intends to restructure the movement to bring forward new generations.

The Islamists thus have a secret agenda: they do not put themselves forward immediately, but are preparing for the next elections. They are there, they are ready. When the others have run out of puff, they will go onto the attack.

The slightly reassuring factor is that the new generation, let's say those between 15 and 25, did not live through the rise of Islamism in the 1980s, and so it is a little inoculated against fundamentalism, though nothing is certain there. It seems that people in the neighbourhood committees are already scared by the arrival of fundamentalism — the arrival of Ghannouchi...

None of that stops the fundamentalists wanting to take over, even if that's not something they can do tomorrow. We have to remain very vigilant; all the more so because leftists are now making alliances with the fundamentalists, and that is very dangerous.

For example, in the meeting of all parties which took place recently, there were representatives of the fundamentalists there too: so in the same hall we had Trotskyists, Stalinists, Islamists, etc. We find it really incomprehensible that people ally themselves in this way.

The two comrades make clear that they think it is a "leftist" illusion to believe that there are possibilities of social revolution in Tunisia now: "you have to see things with their limits and work for the long term..." Their testimony is valuable even if we don't agree on that. <http://www.magmaweb.fr/spip/spip.php?article435>

Could Yemen be next?

Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East, has been rocked by demonstrations following the Tunisian uprising.

Mass protests in Sana'a started on 16 January when Sana'a University students took to the capital's streets. 50% of the 23 million Yemeni people live on less than \$2 a day, and 40% are unemployed. Protesters demanded political reform and an end to corruption.

In response to the protests President Ali Abdullah Saleh announced a plan to raise the salaries of government employees and military personnel by almost \$50.

Tawakkol Karman, a journalist, has emerged as the public face of the protests. When she turns West her public face is that of a feminist and campaigning journalist. But Tawakkol Karman is also a senior member of the right-wing religious party, al-Islah, Yemen's main opposition party. She has called for Thursday 3 February to be a "Day of Rage" throughout Yemen.

Yemen shares many of the basic features of other Middle Eastern states. President Saleh, has been in power for more than thirty years — first as the authoritarian leader of North Yemen, and then after unification with the South over the whole region.

Parliament is currently debating a constitutional amendment which would allow Saleh to rule for life; it is rumoured that he wants his son to succeed him. Al-Islah is demanding Saleh steps down.

The country is already home to a series of different conflicts — a secessionist movement is demanding independence for the south; al-Qaeda is active; a Shia sect is waging an on-off armed revolt in the north. President Saleh has little control over most of the country.

More democracy in Yemen might well lead to an Islamist government. It also could mean the break-up of the state itself.

Tommo Peaceful played by Mark Quartley

Private Peaceful

Stephanie Ann Cooper (age 10 years) went to see *Private Peaceful* at the Greenwich Theatre (now on tour).

This is a story about a boy called Tommo Peaceful. It's about the First World War and about how young working-class men in Britain were taken for granted by their bosses and expected to kill young German working-class men. All these people were innocent, it was not their war.

Tommo is the only person in the play. There are lots of characters whom Tommo acts out while in a prison cell waiting to meet the firing squad who are going to kill him the next morning.

The firing squad is not the German army who are meant to be the enemy but the English army, the side Tommo has been fighting for. He spends his last night on earth reliving his 18 years of life.

Tommo comes from a poor family but he had some touching memories of times with his brother Charlie and his girl Molly. He relives his time in the trenches. This is harsh and powerful. He tells us about the German soldier who holds a rifle to his head, looks him in the eyes and says "Go, get out of here!" He then turns to the audience and tells us about his brother Charlie, who has been badly injured by a grenade and cannot walk.

Tommo decides to disobey orders from 'Orrible 'Anley, the sergeant major, and says he won't go into "no man's land" because he knows they would all be shot down by the Germans. Tommo carried his brother Charlie on his back all the way to the base camp. For this he was court martialled. He told the truth, but they said he was a coward even though he had fought in the war for two years.

The play ends as Tommo leaves his prison cell at dawn. Off stage you hear the roar of the rifles as Tommo's life is taken by people on his own side. I highly recommend this play; if you can't get to see the play, at least read the book *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo.

Workers' film and video

By Stan Crooke

"Workers Film and Video" is a new website which aims to bring together into a single site links to footage of key events in working-class history.

Material already accessible through the site, which was set up only earlier this year, includes both historical material, such as the 1905 Russian Revolution and the German Spartakist Uprising in 1919, and also more contemporary material, such as last year's workers' protests in Egypt.

Not all of the footage to which is the site links is unedited footage of events. The site also links to debates and documentaries about topics such as the French Revolution, the October Revolution, "Did Trotsky Point the Way to Socialism?", and even the re-enactment of a (supposed) discussion amongst Parisian Communards in 1871.

A more in-depth political analysis of some of the events covered on the site is provided by links to articles in publications and other websites such as *Critique*, *Revolutionary History* and the AWL's website.

The website is an open one. It welcomes suggestions for other films and footage to which it could link.

The question thrown up by the website is one of selection. Does the value of the documentaries linked to by the website, for example, lie in the original footage which they include or in the political analysis which they provide? (Or maybe in both?)

And has the footage selected for linkage been chosen simply because it is available rather than because it really is a "key event in working-class history"?

The site links, for example, to a collection of 58 videos of speeches produced by the Communist Party of Great Britain (producers of the *Weekly Worker*).

Does Jack Conrad speaking on "The CPGB Draft Programme: What programmes are, how they should be organised, and why they are important" count as a "key event in working-class history"? I think not.

Another example is the site's linkage to footage of the 2009 picket of the Iranian Embassy in solidarity with Iranian workers. This was a worthwhile initiative, but hardly on a par with the Russian Revolution.

Even so, the site is well worth a visit and new links can be suggested by its viewers:

<http://workersfilm.blogspot.com/>

Why do floods happen?

Science

By Les Hearn

Why do floods happen? And why so fast rising? In Queensland, it had rained fairly continuously for a long time before the floods suddenly arrived. Their depth, some 5m in Brisbane, was also far greater than the depth of the rainfall.

Are the recent floods in Australia, Brazil, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the forest fires in Russia and so on, symptoms of CO₂-induced global warming and climate change? I don't know, and neither does anyone else. The science of climate is an inexact one, being better with long-term general predictions than short-term ones relating to quite small areas of the Earth.

It is interesting, nevertheless, to look at some of these long-term predictions:

1. Rising air temperature (near surface); 2. rising atmospheric moisture content; 3. rising ocean heat content; 4. rising sea level; 5. rising sea surface temperature; 6. rising temperature over oceans; 7. rising temperature over land; 8. loss of snow cover; 9. loss of glaciers; 10. loss of sea ice; 11. latitudinal shift of the jet-stream; 12. changes in soil moisture content; 13. increases in drought events and severity; 14. increases in flood events and severity; 15. reduced crop production capacity due to precipitation and drought events.

And, according to the OSS foundation, each of these is *actually* occurring.

This does not amount to conclusive proof. It is true that CO₂ absorbs heat radiation and, all other things being equal, it logically follows that increased atmospheric CO₂ would lead to increased average temperatures.

Earth benefits from a substantial "greenhouse effect", explained by the Irish physicist (and pioneering alpinist) John Tyndall, who showed in 1863 that water vapour in the atmosphere absorbed infra-red (heat) radiation. He found that the contribution of other gases, such as CO₂, was negligible. At that time, average CO₂ levels were about 25% lower than today. This effect keeps the Earth about 30 °C warmer than it would otherwise be and prevents substantial day-night fluctuations, clearly making the Earth much friendlier to life.

Around 1900, the Swedish physical chemist Svante Arrhenius studied the absorption of infra-red by CO₂, predicting that doubling current levels would lead to an average rise of about 2°C. This compares with the 2-4.5°C predicted by the IPCC2. He estimated that it would take 3000 years for this to occur but, at present-day rates, it will occur in about 100 years.

Throughout the 20th century, CO₂ emissions grew as fossil fuels were burnt at an increasing rate. It was assumed that most of the extra CO₂ would be absorbed by the oceans. In 1957 oceanographer Roger Revelle showed that the ability of the oceans to do this was lower than thought.

Earth's climate is very complex, depending on energy from the Sun, the Earth's rotation, the tilt of its axis, and the unequal distribution of land and sea. Australia is affected by periodic warming and cooling of the Pacific Ocean due to El Niño and La Niña effects. Rainfall is extremely variable from year to year and decade to decade. Occasionally, extreme rainfall with flooding is to be expected. This is be-

cause the ground can only absorb so much water and subsequent rain runs straight into rivers.

How can this cause the enormous depths of flooding seen in Queensland recently? Well, if 21cm of rain fell on Queensland in December and this was to run straight into the 6.5% of the state which is water (rivers and lakes), their depth would increase by a factor of 100 ÷ 6.5 or about 15-fold. That's about 3m. Water running downhill to lower-lying areas will be concentrated in smaller areas and therefore rise higher. The speed of rise will be limited by the speed of the flow into the rivers. This is where human activity can have an effect.

Australia has long had a policy of deforestation and brush clearance. This increases the rate of run-off, while decreasing the ability of the soil to absorb water. Also, people have been placed in the target area by policies of building on flood plains. The degradation of Australia's environment since colonisation by Europeans is discussed in Jared Diamond's book *Collapse*³.

It is said that ocean surface temperatures were particularly high at the time of the rains and that this would have contributed to their amount, by causing more water to evaporate. This does not amount to proof that global warming made the floods worse but it adds to the circumstantial evidence.

Not everyone is convinced, though. Brendan O'Neill⁴, eminence grise of sp!ked⁵, a compendium of contrarian thought, wonders whether environmentalists, with their "obsession with global warming", might have "exacerbated the impact of the flooding in Brisbane." This, he claims, is because Australian politicians believe that the problem is "increased heat, droughts and a lack of rainfall."

O'Neill is clearly not aware that low rainfall characterises the Australian climate, except in narrow coastal areas. He criticises the water policies of the Queensland government, which built dams to collect water, not realising that between 1991 and 1995 Queensland suffered its worst drought on record, severely affecting agriculture. He is not aware of the effects of El Niño and La Niña events on droughts and flooding. He is also not aware that global warming models predict increased droughts and floods.

Diamond describes how Australian farming policies are quite inappropriate for the climate, a deeply unwelcome message for sp!ked, whose writers reject any suggestion that the world's resources may be limited and believe that all problems can be solved by technological progress.

1. Open Source Systems, Science, Solutions <http://www.ossfoundation.us/>
2. IPCC = Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change <http://www.ipcc.ch>
3. *Collapse: How societies choose to fail or survive*, Jared Diamond, Penguin 2006
4. Brendan O'Neill, former journalist for *LM (Living Marxism)* magazine, journal of the Revolutionary Communist Party, now finds himself blogging for the *Telegraph*: <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/>
5. www.spiked-online.com/

Letters

X Factor toxins

Daniel Randall (*Solidarity* 3-190) says he doesn't want to get snobbish about the fact that people like watching the *X Factor*. Fair enough.

Except socialists should not abandon critical judgement in an effort to be laid back and non-judgemental. The *X Factor*, and most shows like it, really are toxic viewing.

The drum 'n' bass producer Goldie, interviewed in the *Observer* on 30 January 2011, could not have put it better:

"Think about the people who aren't making it on there [i.e. on the *X Factor*]. Think about how dysfunctional they feel, how failed they feel, a panel of people going: 'Sorry you're going to fail'. I find it quite crushing. I can't watch it. I actually physically want to vomit. It's a circus. Simon Cowell is the George Bush of the music industry... I'd rather sit down and have dinner with that guy from Korea [Kim Jong-il]."

Cathy Nugent, Lewisham

Texas blues

Texas is in bad shape. Rick Perry was re-elected for another term as governor and the Republicans have a two-thirds majority in the State House.

The Republicans are committed to solving a deficit without a tax increase. Texas is one of the few states with no state income tax, and the Tea Party has stiffened the resolve of the "less government, less tax" current. Cuts are proposed to funding for public schools, colleges and universities, and to health coverage for poor people and children.

There is little in the Texas state budget that is discretionary, so cuts are necessarily savage on the areas where they apply.

It is not clear that there is any group that will do much to oppose the cuts. The state workers' unions perhaps.

Texas legislature meets for six months every two years. The first issue of the session that started this month was the House Speaker. The Tea Party started a fight in the Republican Party over their support for Jo Strauss as House Speaker. He is a fairly conservative Republican, but he was regarded as a fair Speaker. The campaign against his reelection focused on the need for a Christian conservative Speaker — Strauss is Jewish. In the end, the campaign collapsed with the Republicans mostly supporting Strauss.

Will Adams, Texas

Cuts: fight on the ground, fight now

By Martin Thomas

According to the *Morning Star*, a meeting of all TUC unions on 28 January “united to beat Con-Dem axemen” and “thrashed out plans” for action.

Sadly, it's not true. The union leaders reaffirmed the TUC's 26 March demonstration against cuts — but that was already fixed — and beyond that resolved only not to rule out coordinated strikes as a “last resort”.

The meeting may even have worked against industrial action, by pressing all union leaders to follow a common script in public. Talking to the press after the meeting, left-wing PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka sounded less militant than right-wing Unison leader Dave Prentis.

Serwotka said: “We are

always prepared to try to reach agreement, but if the government proves unwilling to do the same then we will press ahead with our plans for industrial action”. Prentis said workers would have “no choice” but to take action if the cuts went ahead.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber stressed the “concession” from the government of allowing three more months, until June, for negotiation on how it will implement, from April 2012, an average 3% rise in public sector workers' pension contributions.

The Government insists that neither the scale nor the timing of the increase is up for negotiation. Still less flexible is the Government's plan to index public sector pensions to CPI

rather than RPI inflation, a move which will cut your pension 16% by the end of 25 years' retirement but was put through Parliament in June 2010 and takes effect in two months' time, in April.

The university and college lecturers' union UCU is already heading for a strike over pensions in the week before 26 March, and FBU general secretary Matt Wrack called at the 28 January meeting for a coordinated all-union day of action. Apart from that the union leaders remain focused on pensions, rather than immediate job and service cuts, as the issue for large action, and on the idea that an indeterminate stretch of “seeking negotiation” lies between now and action.

The Government re-

sponded aggressively, briefing the *Guardian* that “ministers are looking at raising the threshold in a strike ballot so that a strike would only be lawful if more than 50% of those entitled to vote backed a strike”. (Only 23% of those entitled to vote backed the Tories in the May 2010 general election).

The core of anti-cuts strategy for a while yet will be local organisation; pressure on union leaders to encourage, support, publicise, and extend partial battles in which groups of workers feel confident to fight cuts; and turning the unions to a real public campaign for the right to strike.

• Cuts fight round up: tinyurl.com/anticutsroundup

Tube: a rank-and-file voice is needed

By Becky Crocker, RMT rep (pc)

Between September and November 2010, the RMT and TSSA led a series of solid one day strikes against job cuts on London Underground.

Then they stopped fighting. They declared a truce over Christmas and the union leaders recently voted not to strike before the cuts' implementation on 6 February.

This has put local reps and activists like myself in a difficult situation. I am faced with questions like, “Why have I lost four days' money and put myself on the line for this union? They have let me down and I am still losing my job!” Some of the best activists are disillusioned and do not think that we can win future battles. Management will capitalise on this weakness.

I have tried to be as honest as possible and not cover up for the union's mistakes. Away from the workplace and the receiv-

ing end of the cuts, closer in lifestyle to the management they oppose, union leaders will not lead a fight as if their life depended on it.

At a recent meeting the Assistant General Secretary said tellingly that his priority at the end of each dispute is “to keep the union intact”, i.e. to protect the union as an institution. I tell people that when we strike, we are not striking “for the union”, but for our own interests.

We in Workers' Liberty must push our perspective that our union movement should be led by rank-and-file workers, from the workplace. People are seeing the results of bureaucratic, undemocratic leadership. If we don't present another way of doing things, they might leave altogether.

This is why we produce our bulletin *Tubeworker*, which encourages rank-and-file members to get more involved. We need to organise so that rank-and-file feeling can no longer be so easily ignored.

Unions must fix “confidence problem”

By Pat Murphy, NUT Executive (pc)

Building a campaign of co-ordinated industrial action to oppose the government's attacks on public sector pensions is proving a very slow and painful business indeed.

The TUC finally held a meeting on 28 January. Around 55 unions were invited based on an assumption that they were “actively considering action”.

The evidence of what happened at that meeting is not encouraging (see above).

The truth is there is little to talk about with the government. All of the public sector pension schemes are in the early stages of a new set of arrangements which was designed to make them more affordable. The government's latest plans are not based on an assumption that there is anything going wrong with those arrangements. They simply plan to pilfer public sector pensions to raise rev-

enue and reduce the deficit as an alternative to taxing the rich.

Most unions, and all socialists, are for no increase in the pension age, no increase in contributions and no cut in our living standards in retirement. The idea that we can force the government to withdraw their plans in talks is risible.

What is needed at this time is the language of serious intent to fight. We should be saying that we have agreed plans for joint and co-ordinated industrial action over a specified period to have these proposals withdrawn. What we seem to have is a statement of indecision.

The politics of this sluggishness are complex. For Barber and many of the larger unions it's about finding ways to curb the enthusiasm of others. For them the pressure for action is little more than a problem to manage.

In particular the big Labour affiliates probably don't want any industrial action this side of the May

elections. For the more left-wing unions it's in part a problem of confidence. It's undoubtedly true that one union acting alone is unlikely to defeat these proposals so a lot of effort is being put into coaxing the less willing. But this is dragging on.

There is little evidence in the NUT of “pressure from below”. But the confidence problem is circular. It is unlikely that members will be gung ho for action if they detect uncertainty and caution in their leaders

A lot of material has been sent into schools telling teachers what the government plans to do and urging them to “join the campaign”, but it is not so clear how they can do this.

The most common action proposed is to “email your MP”. It's not a worthless thing to do, and more than 15,000 NUT members have done just that since November, but not enough to be described as “joining a campaign”.

The NUT website includes a list of around 40

pensions roadshow meetings all round the country in January, February and March; members are being surveyed on their willingness to take action.

But there are also members already on strike against job cuts, for example at Rawmarsh School in Rotherham. The East London division is balloting members in all schools to oppose cuts in central services at Tower Hamlets Council.

If we want to boost confidence and encourage the idea that action is possible, then these examples need to be publicised and celebrated throughout the union in material that goes into schools and to individual members.

Equally, members should mobilise for those meetings and invite their local branch officers into school to talk about the pensions campaign.

An all-London meeting will take place at 6pm on Thursday 17 February at NUT HQ, Hamilton House, Mabledon Place, WC1H 9BD.

In brief

Notts County; Southwark speech therapists

Following a consultative ballot which voted 2 to 1 to move to a formal ballot, members of Nottinghamshire County Unison will vote on taking industrial action against proposed job cuts.

The ballot will involve 3,600 workers and comes in response to a briefing paper from council management which asserted that 1,000 compulsory redundancies are “likely to be needed” in 2011.

Unison is building for a demonstration at County Hall on 24 February. The strike ballot closes on 15

February and action is therefore likely to coincide with the demonstration. For more, see nottsunison.org.uk.

Elsewhere, speech and language therapists working for the NHS Primary Care Trust in Southwark will strike on Thursday 3 February. Cuts to services will massively impact frontline care, meaning vulnerable children will be deprived of one-to-one support.

Unite regional officer Richard Munn said: “Our members have decided to take a stand against the cuts being made which will have a detrimental effect on some of the most vulnerable children and families in our society.”

Rebuilding solidarity in the trade union movement



Maria Exall

Co-ordinated industrial action by trade unions to halt (at least some of) the massive attacks on workers' jobs and living standards by this Tory-led Government is promoted as the current main demand of the trade union left.

Perhaps it should be, but

as Marxists we need to face a few uncomfortable truths about focussing on this strategy alone.

The only co-ordinated action being seriously contemplated by trade union leaders is against the attack on public sector pensions.

Of course the public pensions issue is important and it may well be possible to win a round of national ballots on the proposed massive hike in contributions and other changes. But another set of negotiations with the Government is due, agreement on implementa-

tion has been delayed until June, and everyone seems to be waiting for someone else to make the first move...

An issue that would unite public sector workers now (and indeed some private sector workers and all benefit claimants as well) is the change in indexing from the Retail Price Index to Consumer Price Index.

This, it is estimated, will save the Government in the long term £1.8 billion from the value of public pensions and £6 billion from welfare payments. But as things stand this is likely to go un-

challenged before the change is made this April.

We are being robbed — we must fight back.

There is a collective timidity amongst many on the right of the trade union movement in the face of the cuts, and it has a deeply worrying aspect in relation to union rights.

The Tories are talking tough on restrictions on the right to strike and many right wing trade unionists don't want to rock the boat. (This was why many failed to properly support John McDonnell's Private Mem-

bers' Bill last year).

But fear of not rocking the boat when Labour was in power is why we have the absurd hurdles (40% and differing bargaining units) on ballots for union recognition. It is these concessions that the Tories are using as a springboard for further attacks on union rights. Now is no time to compromise on the right to strike.

Public sector workers up and down the UK are receiving redundancy notices and many private sector workers are feeling the effects of a slowdown in

growth — pay freezes, reductions in terms and conditions, reductions in service delivery as well as major job losses.

The least we in the organised labour movement can do in such circumstances is to practise effective solidarity. As trade unionists we can't demand that politicians fight every cut if we don't fight for every job.

• Maria Exall is an Executive member of the Communication Workers' Union and a member of the TUC General Council. She writes here in a personal capacity.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Luton: help the defence against EDL racists

Remember David Kato: fight for LGBT liberation

By Ira Berkovic

David Kato, one of the most prominent spokespeople for gay rights in Uganda, has been murdered.

David was one of several LGBT individuals targeted by a recent campaign by *Rolling Stone*, a small Ugandan newspaper.

The paper published the names and whereabouts of several people as part of an article which called for them to be hanged, and repeated the hoary homophobic slander that gays were infiltrating schools to "recruit" children. Kato and others successfully

David Kato

sued the paper, which has denied any connection between its campaign and Kato's death.

The murder comes against the backdrop of an ongoing climate of homophobia in Uganda and many other African countries. In 2009, Uganda's parliament considered a bill that would have made homosexuality punishable by death. Kato was at the forefront of campaigning against the proposal. Uganda has also been targeted by American evangelical groups who have visited the country to run workshops on how to "turn" gay people straight. Many Ugandan activists blame the evangelists for helping stoke up anti-gay hatred.

Ugandan police are claiming that Kato's mur-

der was connected to a robbery rather than hate-crime. Even in the ludicrously-unlikely case that this claim is true, the tragic fact is that the struggle for LGBT liberation has lost one of its bravest activists on a front where brave activists are perhaps most needed.

It is disgraceful that anyone, anywhere in the world, should be killed or in any way harmed because of their sexuality. If we want to honour David Kato's memory and activism, we should work to ensure that the disgraces and outrages that permeate capitalist society are consigned to history.

London/Manchester show student fight continues

By Ron Canfael

More than 5,000 students and workers protested in London on 29 January in a lively march that showed that the revolt which began in early November 2010 is far from over. Although the parliamentary votes to increase fees and abolish EMA and the Christmas break have led to an ebbing of the movement, 29 January represented a launch pad from which to rebuild.

A rally outside ULU featured labour movement speakers including AWL member Janine Booth, the London Transport region representative on the RMT Executive.

The march, called by the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, took protesters down Whitehall to Parliament Square, and then to Millbank. From there, defying police restrictions, a majority of the demonstrators marched to the Egyptian embassy to show solidarity with the democratic uprising. Small groups of protesters then dispersed to carry out smaller UK Uncut-style direct actions targeting high-street tax-dodgers such as Vodafone and Topshop.

A parallel march in Manchester mobilised around 3,000 people and was notable for the frosty reception given to sell-out NUS leader Aaron Porter.

On the initiative of AWL members from Hull Students Against Fees and Cuts, around 500 marchers demanded Porter justify his record. Rather than engage with them, he chose literally to run away and hid behind a cordon of riot police. Subsequent allegations that he was subject to anti-semitic abuse are, as far as AWL members present can tell, fabrications.

Shane Chowen, the NUS bureaucrat Porter appointed to replace him at the rally while he hid inside the Manchester Metropolitan SU building, was unable to finish his speech due to the amount of hostile chanting.

Following their abject failure to support their own members, and their de facto collusion with kettle and beating-happy police against activists, receptions of this kind are the least these scabs deserve.

• For more on the Aaron Porter incident see tinyurl.com/porterchased and tinyurl.com/portersmears.

cannot get a large bank loan you will not be able to study."

Jack, trade unionist

"The Tories are using the bank crisis to privatise and cut everything in sight. It's time people stood up and stopped letting the rich and politicians screw them over."

Minal, student, London

"I don't want to live in a country where everything is about money. What about people who can't afford things? Vulnerable people will be the ones who suffer from the cuts."

Why I marched

Glenda, pensioner

"My daughter is having a baby soon and all of us are worried about the future. There are no jobs, benefits are being cut and now poorer kids won't be able to go to university."

James, postgrad, City University

"It is already very difficult to study on a postgraduate course unless you have a lot of money as you cannot get a government loan to do so. If you are not wealthy and

By Ed Maltby

On Saturday 5 February the English Defence League (EDL), a racist street-gang drawn from football hooligan firms, will hold another "demonstration" in Luton. They are advertising it as "the biggest yet".

Luton has a special importance for the EDL as it was here in May 2009 when they first appeared, as a bunch of white racists rampaging through the town, attacking Muslim-owned businesses and "Muslim-looking" bystanders.

The riot took place following a provocation staged by the Islamist group Al-Muhajiroun in March 2009, at a parade for soldiers returning from Afghanistan.

The police are making preparations to avoid any clash with anti-fascists on Saturday. They will allow the EDL to parade triumphantly through the streets they terrorised three years ago.

The "official" counter-demonstration by Unite Against Fascism has been moved from its original location in St George's Square to Park Square, on the other side of the city centre, in order to minimise the possibility of the groups meeting.

However, local youth and the Muslim Defence League, a religiously-defined grouping of young Muslims organised to defend Muslims from EDL attacks, have organised a rally in Westbourne Road to defend local residential streets from attack.

Stop Racism and Fascism Network, a working-class anti-fascist network which Workers' Liberty and other working-class activists participate in, will seek to ensure that the demonstrators are not hopelessly kettled; and that local youth are not left to defend their community alone.

• If you want to join us on the day, contact stopracismandfascism@gmail.com or see <http://srfnetwork.org>

Jade Baker for NUS Women's Officer

By Jade Baker, VP
Education, University
of Westminster (pc)

I'm standing for National Union of Students Women's Officer as an anti-cuts activist and an unashamed revolutionary socialist feminist.

I oppose the current NUS leaders, because I want to see NUS lead the student revolt against cuts and fees, not continue to sell it out. The Women's Campaign should be at the forefront of the fight to

make that happen. I'm a member of Workers' Liberty and a supporter of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts; I'm proud to have been involved in the recent student revolt — a movement where women have often been at the forefront.

Women students deserve better than another year of an NUS Women's Campaign run by another Labour Student, who will talk left but continue to back up the NUS leadership and run the Women's Campaign as a bureau-

cratic shell.

We need a grassroots anti-cuts activist Women's Officer, committed to socialist feminism, who will build a militant, campaigning student women's movement. For more on my campaign see tinyurl.com/jade4womens officer.

Police use CS spray on UK Uncut

By Pdraig O'Brien

Activists taking part in a peaceful UK Uncut protest at a Boots store on 30 January in central London were attacked by police using CS spray. Three protesters were hospitalised and others were still feeling the effects hours later.

Anyone who thought the police had calmed down or softened up after their relatively laid-back showing at the London protest on Saturday 29 January will have been given an unpleasant shock by their attack on the UK Uncut action the next day.

And, while the Met were

handing out glossy leaflets telling marcher they were there to facilitate our "right to protest", our comrades in Manchester were being kettled.

John McDonnell MP denounced the police's actions at the Boots protest as "political policing". He has put down an Early Day Motion demanding an inquiry into the incident.

Of course all policing is political. The very existence of the police is part of the means by which the capitalist state defends its interests, ultimately by any means it deems necessary.

To fight back against the stepping up of violent clampdowns against protesters, AWL members

have been involved in launching the Right to Resist initiative, which aims to equip activists with the political arguments and practical tools to fight police repression.

The National Assembly for Education, which was attended by several of the UK Uncut protesters on their way back from the Boots action, voted to promote Right to Resist alongside similar campaigns such as the "Defend the Right to Protest" campaign launched by the SWP.

Right to Resist's "little red book", which features legal advice from the Green and Black Cross, can be ordered from righttoresist.wordpress.com.