

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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Workers' demonstration against unemployment, poverty and Mubarak in Helwan on 25 January, organised by the Centre for Trade Unions and Workers' Services, which has become a key organisation in the struggle.



EGYPT: A NEW WORKERS' MOVEMENT IS BORN

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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.
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- 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.
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Capitalism leaves Haiti to rot

By James Bloodworth

On 12 January 2010, Haiti was rocked by an earthquake which killed 230,000 people. One year on, in the capital Port-au-Prince, between 1.3 and 1.7 million people continue to live in squalid tents with little hope of moving.

Despite the huge sums of money charities and aid organisations received in a show of international solidarity following the quake, less than 30,000 of those displaced have found permanent homes. A recent cholera outbreak killed more than 3,300 people; and of the 20 million cubic metres of rubble created by the disaster, less than 5 per cent has been cleared.

Already the poorest country in the Western hemisphere before the earthquake, Haiti has now fallen five points in the world's poverty league — from 140 to 145 out of 182.

Out of \$5.7 billion earmarked for Haiti by governments and aid organisations, only \$473 million dollars has actually reached the country.

Moreover, the "international community" which jostled to send "humanitarian aid" to the country in the aftermath of the quake, is the same "international community" responsible for the squalor and suffer-

ing it now aims to reduce. Ever since the US invaded and occupied the country in 1915, every attempt to allow Haiti's people to move "from absolute misery to a dignified poverty" (in the words of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide) has been violently and deliberately blocked by the US government and some of its allies. As the *Guardian* noted:

"Aristide's ... government ... was overthrown by an internationally sponsored coup in 2004 that killed several thousand people and left much of the population smouldering in resentment. The UN has subsequently maintained a large and enormously expensive stabilisation and pacification force in the country... Proposals to divert some of this 'investment' towards poverty reduction or agrarian development [however] have been blocked..."

CORPORATE

In fact Haiti's tragedy has served as an opportunity to further enrich corporate interests.

Lewis Lucke, a 27-year veteran of the US Agency for International Development (US AID), was named US special coordinator for relief and reconstruction after the earthquake. He worked this job for a short period, then moved to the private sector, where he

could sell his contacts and connections to the highest bidder.

Lucke subsequently landed a \$30,000-a-month (plus bonuses) contract with the Haiti Recovery Group (HRG). HRG was founded by AshBritt, Inc., a Florida-based contractor which received substantial bad press for its post-Hurricane Katrina contracting. AshBritt's partner in HRG is Gilbert Bigio, a wealthy Haitian businessman with close ties to the Israeli military. Bigio made a fortune during the Duvalier regime and was a supporter of the right-wing coup against Haitian president Aristide.

According to Naomi Klein, within 24 hours of the earthquake, the influential right-wing think tank the Heritage Foundation was laying plans to use the disaster as a means to further privatise the Haitian economy.

But international aid is not the solution. Even the capitalist class acknowledge this fact. Regine Barjon, a member of the Haitian-American Chamber of Commerce, based in

Florida, called the billions of aid donated to Haiti "the equivalent of putting a band-aid on a cancer patient".

Aside from the fact that Haiti itself is a deeply unequal society (Haiti's richest 1% own nearly half of the country's wealth), the stability of world-markets depends on countries like Haiti remaining poor. The commitment of the US government is not to building a sustainable road to development for Haitians but is geared toward subsidies for US farmers, which, by their very nature, undermine the ability of Haitian farmers to themselves sustain a living.

In Britain we wouldn't allow our pets to live in the conditions endured by the Haitian people. It is in the interests of multinational companies, rather than people, whom the capitalist world has in mind first and foremost when it deals with poor countries such as Haiti — even in times of unimaginable disaster.

Indeed, in a chauvinistic and distorted capitalist world economy, countries like Haiti will necessarily languish in poverty and despair while begging for crumbs from the master's table of the "international community". We need to remember that and continue to make solidarity with the Haitian workers.

• www.haitisupportgroup.org

Opportunities for new social movements

Tim Flatman, who has recently returned from the region, concludes a series of three articles about South Sudan

The process of referendum has had positive consequences for grassroots independent political organisation in South Sudan.

People had to come together to demand separation for themselves (as political parties were by law banned from doing so). It has been the central demand of many groups whose purpose was previously primarily social, those traditional structures which still exist, etc while specific forms of association have also sprung up to fill the political gap.

Southern Sudan Youth Forum for Referendum is a key example — holding rallies for separation with thousands in attendance, organising through schools, town centres, villages, etc. Their chair told me that after the referendum they will continue as an independent civil society organisation campaigning for open,

transparent democracy. So too Youth For Separation. These kinds of organisation will be beneficial for continuing to open up political debate by providing alternative viewpoints to those in government without being direct electoral competition.

In the North, formal trade unions are controlled by the government, and in the South they barely exist. However, Southern Sudan Workers' Association, run exclusively by a handful of former exiles who are all unpaid, has begun the hard task of federalising those associations which do exist. This includes, for example, the boda-boda drivers' association in Juba, teachers' associations, bus drivers, and so on. They have tried to inaugurate a mass membership structure by forming a jobs agency under workers' control which helps members find jobs, and by charging a token fee for membership of SSWA.

However, this means they are reliant on donations rather than member contributions and need support from international partners so they do not begin to rely on sources of funding external to the

labour movement who would seek to control their operation. It also means they have no systematic organisation in workplaces, instead having individual membership spread across separate workplaces and sectors.

This in turn has placed severe limits on the ability to organise collective action.

SOLIDARITY

There can be no perfect labour movement in the circumstances (if there ever can) and building links to indigenous organisation is better than imposing our own, culturally alien, organisations.

SSWA are calling for solidarity visits from trade unionists from developed economies. They understand the need to make sure South Sudan's new constitution does not hamper emerging trade unions, and would appreciate legal advice on what laws they should be lobbying for. Used technological equipment would also be a major boost.

There is also the possibility of direct solidarity with constituent associa-

tions (and those who are not yet affiliated or may choose for whatever reason not to be affiliated to SSWA) like teachers' associations. I was told by several teachers that they are often not paid for months at a time and in many cases their training is inadequate. Direct links between teachers' unions here and there could help.

Due to the extent which the SPLM permeates through the whole of Southern society, their status as a party of liberation and one which the Southern people broadly trusted in April 2010 to guarantee the referendum, and their broadly social democratic politics with more radical elements and a crudely Marxist past mixed in, socialists should be critically supportive of the SPLM.

We should keep open the possibility of formal ties to the Labour Party depending on how the political situation plays out — whether there are splits along ethnic lines, whether they live up to promises to "bring the towns to the villages" and continue to be seen by the poorest as their party, and how open they stay to the furthering of democracy.

EDL marches in Luton

By Charlie Salmon and Gayle Langdon

With the aid of an overwhelming police operation and in the absence of sufficient counter-mobilisation, the anti-Muslim racists of the English Defence League marched and rallied through Luton on Saturday 5 February.

Anywhere between 1,500 to 3,000 EDL supporters (media and police estimates vary) massed from across the country for what the organisation called a “homecoming” event.

Over 1,000 local people — mainly from Muslim, Pakistani backgrounds — took to the streets in the Bury Park district to protest and defend the most vulnerable areas of Luton.

In the city centre a UAF-organised rally was “kettled” by a massive police operation. Despite the best efforts of the demonstrators very few were able to break through police lines to join the defence of Bury Park.

From the very start of the day police effectively contained and managed rival groups of protestors. They stopped coaches, vans, and cars, sometimes

searching and then escorting them to different parts of the city.

Supporters of Unite Against Fascism on the train from London blockaded the train station to stop the EDL for a short period; but racists and anti-racists were kept apart by barriers and police lines for the remainder of the day.

A number of anti-racists — including members of the AWL — made it through police lines to Bury Park, and there was one larger-scale breakout attempt, eventually blocked by the police.

ABYSMAL DEMO
The official demonstration inside the kettle was abysmal. It amounted to nothing more than several hundred anti-fascists shuffling around the Love Music Hate Racism stage listening to (sometimes rather ill-chosen) music.

Speakers would then encourage the “whose streets?” slogan, but without point or reason. The EDL were over a thousand feet away and the police had protesters heavily locked in. Not exactly “our streets”.

Effective anti-fascist activity calls for more than staying within a desig-

nated protest area. It is high time the SWP/UAF leadership recognise that militant, socialist anti-fascists understand that confronting groups like EDL and showing solidarity with local communities is key to defeating the rise of far-right activity on our streets.

UAF had been operating in and around Luton in the run-up to the EDL demonstration. As far as we can tell — from what limited information we have and from the evidence of events as they unfolded — no substantial attempts were made to liaise or organise with the main targets of the EDL: the local Muslim community.

Such attempts would have needed a short but intensive period of leafletting and door-knocking in the area, meetings and discussions. These activities should have been possible

given that UAF and the Socialist Workers Party have organisation on the ground in Luton. Perhaps such efforts were made, but rebuffed — possible, but not likely given the character of those massing on Dunstable Road.

The hundreds of mainly male, but not ostentatiously religious, Muslims who assembled were very clear in their intentions. They ignored and rebuffed demands of “stewards” and reacted quickly to rumours of sightings of the EDL.

There was no religious chanting whatsoever until the closing minutes of the demonstration. When earlier on in the day a small number of people stopped to pray, the majority stood by indifferently.

The majority were ordinary working-class Muslims out to defend their community from attack.

People's Convention: the signs are not good

By Sacha Ismail

The “People's Convention” against cuts called by SWP and LRC on 12 February should be a chance to make good the damage done by the SP's coup in the National Shop Stewards' Network (creating a new SP-line “anti-cuts movement”) and the Coalition of Resistance (anti-cuts campaigning as an exercise in listening to lots of celebrities speak).

To take that chance, all the SWP needed was good sense, telling them to make the conference practically-focused, open for serious debate, and unity-oriented.

But four days before the conference there is no agenda — just an ever-longer list of workshops and celebrity speakers, many of them not very good.

The minority caucus after the NSSN event decided to take up an offer from SWP to run a workshop on 12 February, but SWP has apparently been tactless enough to put them off.

The conference should:

- Propose specific united actions with the other national anti-cuts campaigns; support FBU general secretary Matt Wrack's call on the unions to organise a unity conference.

- Tell the SWP to stop setting up local Right to Work groups as fronts for the SWP, often in competition with broad-based anti-cuts committees. (In Lambeth, for example, the SWP has still not reconciled itself fully to working in the Save Our Services campaign.)

- Orient towards struggles that are happening now, and generalising them. Tell the SWP to give up demagogic calls for a general strike. (Will the SWP be putting this demand on the union bureaucrats speaking at the conference?)

- Make itself a space for real debate among activists, not just set-pieces, and create a properly functioning open and democratic structure.

Anti-cuts activists should attend the conference to push these ideas.

Labour Party needs real conferences

Jon Lansman is the secretary of the Labour Party Democracy Task Force. He spoke to Martin Thomas

MT: In recent months, over 40,000 people have joined the Labour Party. That's quite a big figure in terms of today's politics. What's your assessment?

JL: We don't really know the complexion of those numbers. Some may well be disaffected Lib Dems. However, it's pretty clear that some of them are people who've previously resigned from the party in disgust at previous shifts to the right and are now returning. That's good news. We want to get more returners, and we also want to recruit people who've never been members and are attracted to the prospect of the party shifting to the left. In particular that means young people, who're being seen to be far more politically active than for some time.

MT: In 2010 only 65% of CLPs sent delegates to Labour Party conference, the lowest figure for decades, although right up to 2003 near to 80% sent delegates.

JL: Yes, even in the early Blair period constituencies continued to send delegates. The real death knell seems to have been the abolition of contemporary motions. Although they were reinstated this year, I think people can be forgiven for not believing this was going to happen until it actually happened.

It's going to take time to rebuild the credibility of conference with activists within the party, never mind people outside the party. There's a deep cynicism about it. It's only when the changes are seen not only to have happened but to be working that people are really going to believe again. It isn't going to happen overnight.

Miliband's “organising agenda”

Beat the ultra-Blairites in the Labour leadership contest, then do pretty much what the ultra-Blairites demand in order to stop them condemning you as “Red Ed” or “the prisoner of the unions”... that seems to be Ed Miliband's line.

He has let it be known that next month, jointly with his brother David, he will relaunch the “Movement for Change” set up as a would-be Obama-type support base for David Miliband in the leadership contest.

Lord Sainsbury has put in £250,000 to fund the training of a new cadre of “grassroots organisers” for the Labour Party — selected and controlled, as with trade unions' increasing corps of full-time organisers, from above and outside any process of election by the rank and file.

The aim is another top-down scheme to circumvent the democratic processes of the party.

MT: What are the main things the Task Force should be campaigning for in order to do that?

JL: We have to have a real conference, which has real debates and real votes. For me the real test is how much of the time at conference is devoted to delegates being allowed to speak about things that they want to speak about, and having votes at the end of those debates. That's absolutely critical.

If party and union activists can see that policies that they propose can find their way through into conference decisions and get into the manifesto, that will make a fundamental difference.

MT: You've been through this sort of thing before; you were the secretary of the Rank-and-File Mobilising Committee many years ago. How would you compare and contrast that with the campaign now?

JL: The left is an awful lot weaker. It's weaker in society as a whole, but it's clearly very much weaker in the Labour Party. There's more than one new generation that's simply not joined the Labour Party, and other people have left. That's one thing.

In the trade unions, I think a large section of the left in the unions are, understandably, pretty cynical about the Labour Party. I don't blame them for that. But I don't think the right solution is to disaffiliate from the Labour Party or ignore the Labour Party; I think we need to look to the whole left in the trade union movement to respond positively to initiatives that are now underway in the Labour Party.

- Labour Party Democracy Task Force: <http://labourdemocracy.wordpress.com>

- Interview abridged here. Full text: www.workersliberty.org/node/15952

Sheridan should not be in jail

By Darren Bedford

Tommy Sheridan, the former leader of the Scottish Socialist Party, has been sentenced to three years in jail for perjury.

Unlike other self-promoting fake-left demagogues such as George Galloway, Tommy Sheridan has a respectable background in socialist politics and has been an impressive class fighter.

Many would have found it difficult to sympathise with him after a chemically-pure fit of egomania led him to foolishly smash up the SSP (at one time a project with great potential) in order to preserve his public image.

As his eventual sentencing shows, that was all for nothing. The wreckage of the six-year long process leaves the SSP a much diminished shadow of its former self, Sheridan in jail and his breakaway project, Solidarity, little more than a rump group.

But socialists must oppose the sentence he has been handed. Whatever his

stupidity, we never look to the bourgeois state to punish such behaviour with three-year jail sentences. He is being jailed on the basis of laws deliberately rigged to protect the rich and powerful.

What the Scottish left can learn from the whole sorry saga is that the hero-worship of leader figures such as Sheridan can only end in disaster. When the SSP and other forces do eventually regroup it is a mistake they must work to avoid repeating.

Sheridan was stupid but three years is a crime

Letters

To: solidarity@workersliberty.org
Cc:
Subject: Islamism

Vicarious Islamists

Selling *Solidarity* at the Unite Against Fascism protest in Luton on 5 February, I got a lot of hostile reactions from SWPers to our front page headline “No to Islamist counter-revolution” (in Egypt). Nothing articulate, but the hostility was plain.

On the way back to London I talked to comrades who had been at the other anti-EDL protest in Luton on the day, mainly of local Muslims in Bury Park.

From the Muslims they had had no such hostility. They had sold lots of papers, had good discussions, and found people agreeing that yes, it would be very bad if the Muslim Brotherhood took power in Egypt, and yes, in Britain al Muhajiroun are just as bad as the EDL.

On the pretext of avoiding “Islamophobia”, the SWP is lining up with the conservative fringe in the Muslim population.

Rhodri Evans, London

Israel/Palestine: there is another way!

I found Sean Matgamna’s article (“The *Guardian* goes ultra-left”) in *Solidarity* 3/191 problematically one-sided. We clearly differ on how much attention to pay to the opinions of the *Guardian*, but even setting that disagreement aside, the article presented a view of the refugee question that began at the admittedly very unpleasant realities of bourgeois diplomacy and didn’t go much further.

To pose as an ultimatic demand the “right” for all the Palestinian refugees and their descendants to displace the current inhabitants of the homes (or land) from which they (or their ancestors) were once displaced is either utopian or reactionary, and amounts to a “demand” for history to be rewound. But Sean’s article extrapolates from this reality and appears to conclude that any attempt to fight for a settlement that goes beyond the token numbers of returning refugees that the Israeli ruling-class is currently prepared to accept is similarly utopian. I disagree.

As Sean points out “nations and national identities are powerful things”; just as the Israeli-Jews are unlikely, in the immediate or medium terms, to want to give up the “Jewish” character of their state, so the Palestinian people are unlikely to give up their demands for far more substantial level of “return”. Nor should they. There are options other than the measly numbers talked about in the leaked document or the utopian-reactionary fantasy scenario.

Any democratic two-states settlement would involve open negotiations on these questions, and others, that go far beyond the boundaries of bourgeois diplomacy. Of course, we should not be disdainful or contemptuous of any potential progress within those boundaries that might help ease off the vice-like pressure of Israeli’s oppression of the Palestinians; even “token thousands” would clearly be better than none at all. But Sean’s article was too ready to de-emphasise our own positive programme in order to strike a blow against the utopian-reactionary ultimaticists of the left. Critiquing them is important, but we shouldn’t let them determine the terrain of the debate.

Ira Berkovic, London

KS3 Islam?

Recently I had a day in an inner-London school supply-teaching Religious Education.

In the first lesson I was helping a regular teacher with a year 8 class. The teacher instructed the students that Muslim girls and women must wear headscarves and loose-fitting clothes.

I murmured to her that lots of Muslim girls and women do not wear headscarves, and some mainly-Muslim countries have laws against the headscarf. Of course, replied the teacher. But this is as much as the students need to know for Key Stage 3!

Actually, that particular school had lots of Muslim girls who didn’t wear headscarves, mostly of Kosovar, Turkish or Kurdish background.

The non-wearers showed no sign of being intimidated. For that matter, the teacher in question, though of South Asian and (to judge by her name) Muslim background, wore tight-fitting clothes and no headscarf.

But the question still stands: why is the state education system adding its weight to the most conservative parts of Muslim opinion (even if ineffectively, in this case)?

Colin Foster, North London

Where is the recovery?

Barry Finger

There are two competing economic narratives in the American economics and business press explaining why, with recovery of the stock market and the purported increase in corporate profits, the economy is failing to produce job-generating expansion.

The Keynesians — for lack of a better description — worry that the anemic government stimulus package is an insufficient offset to the overall decline in private sector spending. Consequently, they argue, the economy is poised on the precipice of a deflationary spiral. Businesses are therefore hesitant to add to productive capacity or use more of their existing capacity for fear that additional output will bring a lower rate of return in the context of declining prices.

This eventuality is less feared by conservative monetarists, who look to the “wealth” effect of declining prices as a stimulus to renewed spending. As prices decline, the purchasing power of the dollar would increasingly make it less useful to hold idle balances. But this scenario, conservatives would argue, is currently beside the point. The downward fragility of the near zero rate of inflation is an artifice of government manipulated statistics that conservatives have — correctly, in my view — little faith in, but which Keynesians such as Paul Krugman or J K Galbraith built their case for public sector expansion on.

GREENSPAN

It has evidently disappeared down the memory hole that, under arch conservative Alan Greenspan, the government long ago departed from the fixed-basket of goods approach in measuring changes in living costs.

The Fed chairman, after substituting other means of low-balling increases in the cost of living ultimately embraced what he labeled the “core” inflation rate, which conveniently eliminated energy and food prices from official calculations. Obviously, this was and remains politically useful in cutting cost of living adjustments to public pensions and Social Security.

On the other hand, to admit to an underlying positive presence of inflation, even if the rate has diminished, would be to undercut the immediacy of the Keynesian argument. A modest rate of inflation, even in the absence of additional government induced demand, should provide a sufficient incentive to expand production, insofar as price increases can be expected to outstrip that of money wages. And since this is manifestly the case, the question remains: why haven’t increased profits led to economic recovery?

Conservatives have a ready answer. They argue that corporations have, in effect, staged — though they would be loathe to admit it frankly — an investment strike and are, in

their opinion, fully justified in doing so. In their view, corporations fear the “inevitability” of tax hikes directly or indirectly arising from the need to address budget deficits, comply with cap and trade antipollution measures or fulfill new health care mandates.

The increased public sector spending that liberals call for is therefore a nonstarter. It would exacerbate all the underlying problems that currently threaten future profitability. Corporations will, as it now stands — or so it is argued — only invest in those rare sectors that promise an abnormally high compensatory pretax profit rate. Clearly such “exceptional” opportunities cannot be expected to be the engine of a broad general recovery. Unless — and this is the right-wing game changer — the tax structures can be dramatically overhauled to reduce the overhead costs of government, coaxing businesses to renew investment with secured prospects for higher post-tax profit rates.

DEBT

The sovereign debt crisis that Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Latvia and others are facing has its American counterpart in the fiscal crisis of state and local governments. Many — such as California — have economies as large as these nation states themselves.

American states cannot by law run deficits. So, either the federal government can run ample deficits and share its revenues with the states — and, in the process, modestly increase the rate of inflation, thereby gradually diminishing the real burden of government debt — or the state economies will eventually implode dragging the overall economy into a deflationary abyss. It is here that the Keynesians would seem to have the upper hand.

But capitalism, unlike socialism, is not a system of demand induced production, even if it is ideologically sold as if it were. It is a system in which markets expand in the course of capital accumulation.

Capitalists are interested in selling their commodities at an adequate profit, not merely at whatever prices are needed to clear the market. As such, capital accumulation is intimately tied to profitability.

A state-led “recovery” as foreseen by the Keynesians can only create, at best, a pseudo prosperity as far as the ruling class is concerned, because the state would have effectively committed itself to appropriate sufficient resources needed to bolster demand and do so regardless of its effect on net profitability.

The business class and its ideologues argue that they can still diffuse the American state debt time bomb from a receding public sector through robust accumulation. But they can only do so if a “proper” business climate is quickly restored. This extortion means nothing less than a civilizational step down. But it is a cost that the American political system seems poised to surrender to.

Trade unionists on the net

Eric Lee

LabourStart has just completed the first ever large-scale, global survey of trade union use of the net.

More than 1,300 union members participated in the survey, nearly all of them from English speaking countries (the survey was in English). Much of what we learned will surprise no one. But some of the results were important and in some cases unexpected. Here is some of what we learned...

Nearly everyone uses Facebook. If you’re on Facebook, you probably already know this. But those who aren’t may think that Facebook is some kind of passing fad, or something used by students only. The survey revealed that 88% were Facebook users and 60% said their unions had a presence on that social network. The next most popular social network used by the trade unionists who responded was UnionBook, followed by LinkedIn. Less than a third said they used Twitter.

Second Life, the virtual world that was the subject of considerable interest by (among others) the TUC in recent years, has almost no union members involved in it. In spite of well-publicised and well-funded investments in a “Union Island” on Second Life, only two percent of those who responded admit to being part of this virtual world.

We learned that trade unionists are largely satisfied with their national union’s websites, but somewhat dissatisfied with (or unaware of) local union websites. Over 91% of those

who responded said they visited their national union websites daily or sometimes. Only 73% said the same about local union websites. And while almost 65% rated their national union websites as “excellent” or “good”, only 45% said the same about local union sites. Four times as many rated their local union website as “poor” as compared to the national union website.

Unions are apparently making no use at all of the possibilities offered by smartphones and tablet computers (such as iPads). Even though over a third of the respondents said they accessed the net using smartphones and tablets, less than 5% believed that their union had an “app” for such devices.

We asked people where unions should be investing in these technologies and the most popular answers were email lists and online recruitment of new members. The least popular choices were Internet radio broadcasts and creating apps for smartphones and tablets.

So, what should unions be doing? Unions need to invest more in creating high-quality local union sites.

They need to stop wasting money and time on fads such as Second Life and instead invest in the social networks where trade unionists actually spend their time.

Instead of bells and whistles on their websites, they need to focus on practical applications such as recruiting new members and using tried and tested technology such as email lists.

But a word of caution: the wisdom of crowds isn’t always so wise. One wonders why those trade unionists who use smartphones and tablet computers — of which there are many — don’t see a need for their unions to maximise their presence by having apps of their own. That may change over time.

Egypt: a new workers' movement is born

- The new movement needs solidarity
- Support democratic revolution and workers' rights
- No to Islamist counter-revolution

As Solidarity went to press on 8 February, workers at the centre of Egypt's economy, in the Suez Canal Company at the cities of Suez, Port Said, and Ismailia began an open-ended sit-in strike.

Over 6000 agreed that they would not go home at the end of their shift, but hold the workplace until their demands against poor wages and deteriorating health and working conditions met.

The strike will stop one of the world's biggest shipping routes, and cause huge losses to business if it continues long.

Such battles are inseparable from the democratic revolt on Cairo's streets. Denial of political freedoms, and economic corruption and denial to workers of the right to organise and to civilise conditions at work, are two faces of the same stifling dictatorship that has ruled Egypt for decades.

The sharp food price rises of the last six months, hitting much harder in Egypt than they do in relatively well-off Britain, will have been central in sparking the revolt. They come on top of a process since the 1980s of scrapping the food price subsidies which the poor depended on, trashing

Labour struggles have increased in recent years

social provision, and "opening" up the economy to privatisation which has enriched a wealthy elite at the top and a relatively small middle class.

In the last two weeks Egypt's workers, who have never before in history had a large independent trade union movement, have formed a new trade union federation.

The street revolt's ability to break the spell of the fear on which the dictatorship relied opens the way for workers to organise and fight to improve their conditions. With workers organising and fighting comes the possibility of a new labour movement which will combine answers to economic exploitation with answers to political unfreedom.

The same in Tunisia. It is out of the headlines now. But underneath the attempts of the transitional government to restore quiet, workers there are striking, organising, and agitating to throw out old-regime authorities at local level.

We do not know how far and how fast the upheavals in the Arab world will spread. A demonstration had been called in Syria for 5 February, but that country's political police, even more rigid and ruthless than those of Egypt and Tunisia, forestalled it. A rally has been called in Algeria for 12 February, and banned by the government. The organisers say they will go ahead.

All these regimes — Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria, and others — have sat on their countries since the 1950s or 60s, allowing no room for democratic change, altering faces at

the top only to install a chosen successor when the previous leader dies or becomes incapable.

Now politics is thrown open for the first time in many decades. The outcome will be shaped not only by the raw force of the people's revolt, but also by the political battles between the different political forces now emerging.

There is the new workers' movement. There are small groups of socialists, especially in Algeria.

There is the army. There are the old-regime figures trying to recycle themselves as democrats, like Suleiman in Egypt and Ghannouchi in Tunisia.

There are people like al-Baradei in Egypt, dissenters from the old regime but of a mild sort, tied in to international capitalist networks and interests.

And — the chief rival to the socialists and the labour movements at grassroots level — there are the Islamist movements, the movements whose fundamental political programme is to give (their interpretation) of ancient religious law force of compulsion over their societies, like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

Harking back to a mythical Islamic past, before capitalism, these Islamist movements have no answers to the social questions, but can win support. There is a danger that they will confiscate the revolutions and turn them into counter-revolutions on the model of Iran in 1978-9.

The Islamists, the old-regime figures, the upper-class dissenters, will all get help from rich and powerful people on an international level. The socialists and the labour movements will have to rely on our support. Let's organise!

• Activists with the Middle East Workers' Solidarity network are seeking contacts for an initiative in solidarity with the new Egyptian workers' movement. Contact them via <http://middle-east-workers.blogspot.com/> or meworkers@gmail.com.

To the Barricade!

AWL news

By Aidan W. Lomas

The student movement, with hundreds of thousands of school students walking out of classes to demonstrate against cuts, has thrown whole new layers of school and college student activists into activity.

Suddenly, thousands of students are examining their political ideas and looking for ways of becoming politically active. Through the prominent role that many Workers' Liberty activists have played in the student movement and the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, as well as in local trade union anti-cuts groups, we have been coming into regular contact with many of these new student activists, and looking for ways to help them organise and get to grips with socialist ideas.

One of the tools we are using to do this is *Barricade*. *Barricade* is a socialist zine, published by Workers' Liberty for school and college students. It carries reports on the activity that local school student activist groups are organising, pieces about the movement against the cuts, and articles on big political ideas and international news.

School students use it to start debates about politics in school — handing it out in class has been known to derail whole lessons and turn them into debates about class politics and the cuts. The presence of *Barricade* as a national publication gives political back-up to often isolated socialist activists who have to argue their politics alone.

In many colleges, school students are setting up activist groups — moving from meeting up informally with mates to having formal, regular meetings to discuss politics and plan actions.

Barricade supporters have pulled off various actions — sending "class struggle Christmas cards", sending solidarity greetings to local strikers, organising debates on issues from cuts to class to Israel-Palestine, putting on a "reception" for Tory MPs visiting their school, and campaigning against punishments for students who took part in walkouts.

Workers' Liberty wants to help school and college students organise local, democratic groups that can link up with the workers' movement, keep the anti-cuts struggle going, and provide a political education in socialist ideas for young activists.

We hope that *Barricade* can be a useful tool for this. Unlike some sectarian groups, we don't want to muscle school student groups into a front project or come along to give them their marching orders. We want to facilitate the work that these groups do, and hopefully along the way convince many activists to join Workers' Liberty.

Solidarity rally with Egyptians and others in North Africa and the Middle East fighting for democracy

**Saturday 12 February,
12 noon to 2pm, Trafalgar Square,
London**

**Organised by Amnesty International
and supported by major trade unions**

Tunisia: new government tries to calm revolt

By Ed Maltby

In Tunisia, strikes are continuing, notably in transport, the national airline and among agency workers. Workers at the national radio station are protesting against the appointment of new management without any kind of negotiation or consultation.

There are reports that during the height of the revolution, many enterprises came under effective workers' control, with managers being sent on "holiday" by workers.

The fall of the Ben Ali dictatorship has created a breathing space for Tunisian politics. Political forces can operate more-or-less openly. Meetings can be held and political discussions can take place in public, in the streets, and in the newspapers.

The transitional government is trying to restore normal economic functioning and promising elections. The pages of the country's newspapers are carrying debate between prominent intellectuals about how the new-style Tunisian parliamentary democracy should look.

In cities and towns, grassroots organisations like the neighbourhood "committees for the defence of the revolution" and local trade union (UGTT) organisations are organising demonstrations to root out the remnants of the power of the RCD, Ben Ali's former ruling party, now formally dissolved.

Last week in the mining town of Gafsa, the site of the last big strike wave in 2008, demonstrations forced out the newly-appointed, RCD-linked governor, Mohammed Gouider, who had to leave in an armoured car while demonstrators demanded "total rupture... with the old regime". The *Guardian* reports similar demonstrations in Sfax and other cities.

The UGTT national executive, previously dominated by RCD-aligned bureaucrats, has come under huge grassroots pressure and is demanding "a government that breaks completely with the old regime".

Thugs, paid by the RCD in cash and alcohol, have been sent to rampage through towns like Kasserine, where 1,000 destroyed public buildings in a riot last week.

In an interview in the Tunis newspaper *Le Temps*, Rached Ghannouchi (no relation to ex-RCD member Muhammad Ghannouchi, the new Prime Minister) says that his Islamist Ennahda Party is planning to re-group, holding its congress later this year, and launching a newspaper and a radio station. The party is currently taking a legalistic, moderate tack, emphasising its commitment to "democratic salafism".

But "democratic salafism" is a sort of contradiction in terms: "salafism" means taking the words of Muhammad and the two generations of Muslims after him, in the 7th and 8th centuries, as eternal and literal prescriptions for society today.

Ennahda is a threat. The revived workers' movement has the potential to dispel that threat, and take Tunisia forward, if it organises politically in an independent way.

Israeli solidarity with Egyptian workers

The two independent trade unions in Israel — WAC-MAAN and Power to The Workers — were due to hold a solidarity demonstration in Tel Aviv to support the Egyptian workers and people struggle on 8 February.

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) called for trade unions around the world to join a day of action for democracy and social justice in Egypt on 8 February.

• <http://www.wac-maan.org.il>

Egyptian workers

By Clive Bradley

In Egypt, Tahrir Square has become a symbol for grassroots democratic organisation, with mass movements holding daily plebiscites on strategy and programme, with an unquenchable thirst for political discussion, and a vibrant sense of the power of ordinary people when they lose their fear. Local communities, in the absence of the police, have organised their own defence.

There have also been some instances of workers taking over their workplaces and beginning self-management. Left-wing Egyptian blogger Hossam el Hamalawy (who is close to the British SWP) told an interviewer: "I received a report about a textile mill owned by a company called Ghazl Meit Ghamr in Daqahliya, which is a province in the Nile Delta. The workers there have kicked out the CEO, they have occupied the factory and are self-managing it. This type of action has also been repeated in a printing house south of Cairo called Dar El-Ta'awon. There as well the workers have kicked out the CEO and are self managing the company.

"There are two other cases in Suez, where the clashes were the worst with the security forces during the uprising. The death toll is very high in Suez, we don't actually know the real death toll until now.

"In two factories there, the Suez Steel Mill and the Suez Fertilizer Factory, workers have declared an open-ended strike until the regime falls. Other than that we have not seen, at least to my knowledge, independent working class action." (<http://www.occupiedlondon.org/cairo/?p=300>)

Workers have taken action against representatives of the state-run trade union federation — calling for its leader to be prosecuted on charges of corruption. A new, independent union federation was on 30 January declared after a meeting in Tahrir Square which involved representatives of workers across Egypt, including the three already-existing independent unions (tax collectors, health technicians and pensioners). The new union federation has already won wide support from the international labour movement.

SHIFT

As we go to press on 8 February, the uprising in Egypt is entering its fifteenth day. Thousands of people continue to occupy Tahrir Square; every day there are demonstrations across the country.

Although there are reports of some return to normality, Egypt remains paralysed, and in particular paralysed politically. Breakdown has come in attempts by the regime — now in effect run by Vice-President Omar Suleiman, although Hosni Mubarak still refuses to step down — to establish formal negotiations with the opposition, including the still-outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

Even the attempt is a huge shift in the dictatorship's policy. Less than a week ago it attempted to break the protest movement's will by sending its thugs — some of them, surreally, on camels — into Tahrir Square. Goons caught by protesters had police ID on them. There were two days of fighting. In the end the pro-regime forces had to withdraw, and something of the previous carnivalesque air returned to

downtown Cairo.

The pro-government thugs had to be permitted access to the Square by the army. The army's alleged sympathy for "the people" was in danger of being discredited. It moved quickly to recapture its previous image as the nation's "most respected institution".

The army has essentially run Egypt since the "Revolution" — in fact a coup — of 1952, and continues to do so. Now, under increased pressure from the Obama administration (Egypt gets more military aid from the USA than any other country bar Israel, and the Egyptian army has close links with the US military), the army and the regime know they must try to negotiate an "orderly transition" and string along the uprising so that it runs out of steam.

None of the principal leaders of the revolt — the various youth movements which have mainly co-ordinated action, or high-profile liberal figures such as Mohamed al-Baradei — participated in the talks this week. On the contrary, they criticised the negotiations both for not representing the protesters, and for falling short of the basic demand that the President must step down immediately.

Suleiman has given no indication, yet, that he will improve on Mubarak's current promise not to stand for re-election, and guarantee that his unpopular son will not be a candidate. Talks were intended to "discuss" elections, which is not the same as holding them.

USA MOVES

The Muslim Brotherhood says it agreed to meet the government only to hear what it had to say, not to negotiate anything. It quickly withdrew.

That the talks with representatives of the Muslim Brothers were plainly sanctioned by the United States is significant: Washington has moved from a policy of supporting the dictatorship in order to keep Islamism at bay to one of trying to draw in and tame the Brotherhood.

For the moment, there is stalemate. Suleiman, the former head of the security services (who led the near-destruction of the most extremist Islamist movements in the 1990s), is very unlikely to turn towards wholesale repression. Al-Jazeera calls him "the CIA's man in Cairo"; and at least for now such a policy would be unacceptable in Washington. If Suleiman can't find a way to manage the transition Obama wants, presumably there will be pressure for a further shift at the top of the regime.

Underlying everything that has happened in Egypt and across the Middle East in recent weeks is the economic crisis and deepening, and highly visible, social inequality. Mubarak is hated also for the "crony capitalism" which is endemic and blatant. "Experts estimate the net worth of Mr. Mubarak and his family at between \$40 billion and \$70 billion," according to the Voice of America. "They say the Egyptian president has much of his wealth in Swiss banks or tied up in real estate in New York, Los Angeles and London... Mubarak's wife, Susan, and their two sons, Gamal and Alaa, are also reported to be billionaires."

The Brotherhood has no answers to the social inequality. The workers' movement has the power to create answers. We must lend it every support we can.

Algeria: "link democratic and social demands"

By Vicki Morris

President Bouteflika announced some liberalisation measures after riots over the price of food in January in which five people died. But protests have continued. A man tried to set himself alight during a protest outside Algeria's Employment Ministry for "a decent job for every Algerian" and unemployment benefit equal to half the minimum wage. The protest was organised by a group called the National Committee for the Rights of the Unemployed.

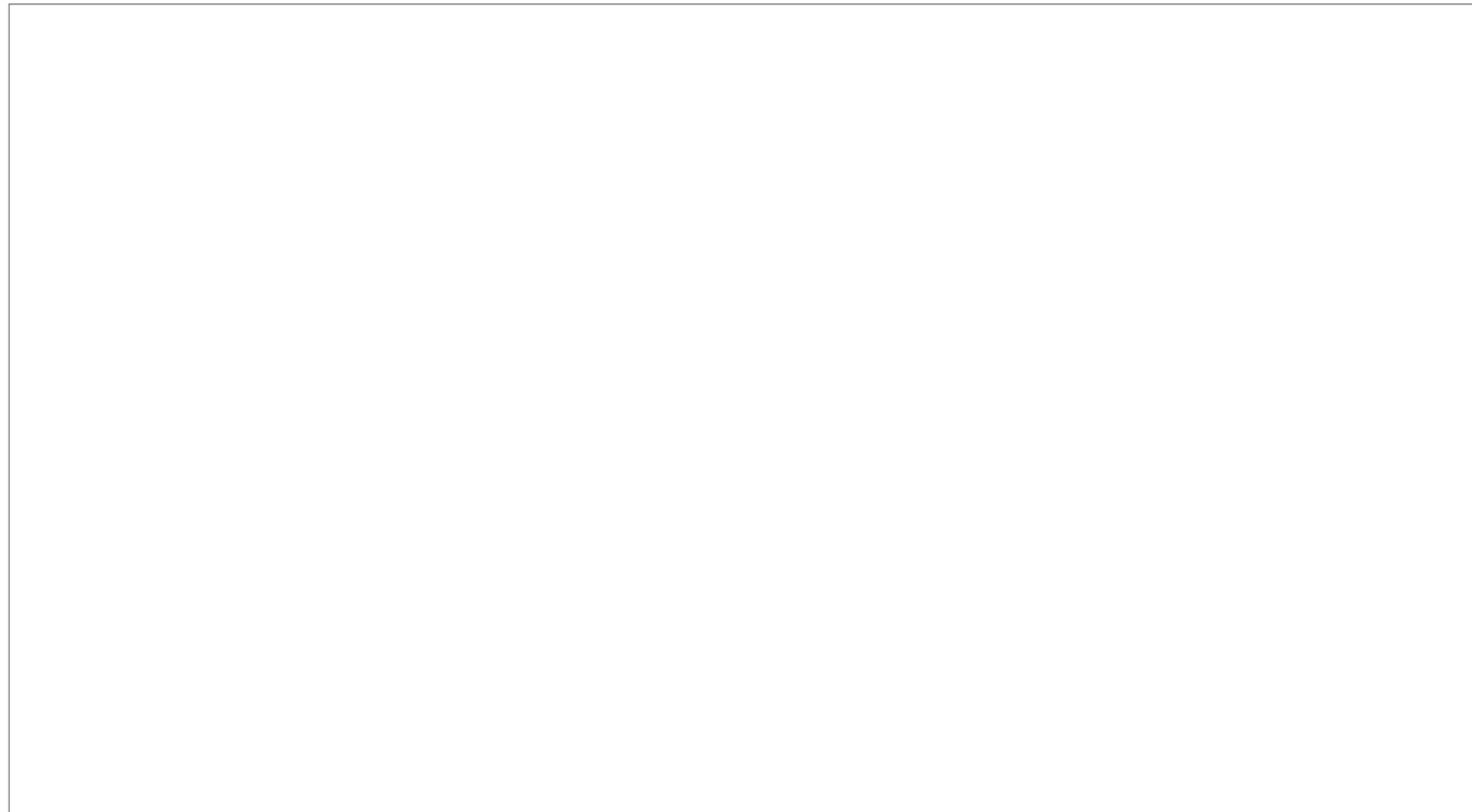
The government has banned a rally planned for Saturday 12 February called by the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD: no relation to the Tunisian RCD), the more right-wing of the two mainly-Berber-based opposition parties, and an umbrella group of which it is part, the National Coordination for Change and Democracy (CNCD), set up at a meeting on 21 January 2011.

CNCD also includes a grouping of independent unions in the public services, the Syndicat national autonome des personnels de l'administration publique (SNAPAP), set up in the 1990s. SNAPAP is under constant pressure from the authorities and a number of its leading figures were recently detained.

The Algerian Socialist Workers Party (PST), not an offshoot of the British SWP but an affiliate of the Fourth International, participated at the meeting that set up the CNCD but, like the more left-wing mainly-Berber-based opposition party, FFS, PST has not joined CNCD and is not formally supporting the demonstration on 12 February. They complain that CNCD does not want to raise social demands.

"The social question, that of jobs, housing and the high cost of living, is at the heart of the revolt and is once again prioritised by the desperate young people who try to burn themselves alive. Action must be taken to join the democratic dimension and the social question."

ers start to move



This workers' demonstration in Helwan on 25 January was organised by the CTWUS

“Workers must form committees”

Tamer Fathy, International Relations Secretary of the Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services, spoke to Solidarity about the new union federation in Egypt.

On 30 January, union leaders and worker activists met to form a new federation. It adopted the broader demands of the revolutionary movement, but its main focus is the creation of new independent unions that are responsive to the workers.

To give you a taste of the official unions — the leaders of these unions were quoted in the newspapers saying that no workers would go on these demos, but also calling for union officials to monitor workers and report if they did demonstrate! We also received reports that the official unions were trying to mobilise people to take part in the pro-Mubarak gangs that attacked demonstrators. They even offered people money... So the need for an alternative union federation was obvious.

The new federation involves tax collectors, health technicians and many others from the public sector, as well as the most important sections of private industry — textiles, metals, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, iron and steel, auto workers... I'd say the main issues facing us, beyond the broader political demands of the revolutionary movement, are the minimum wage and unemployment benefits. But beyond specific demands, the key thing is for workers to form democratic committees in the factories and enterprises, to get organised, to get more power. They can cooperate with the neighbourhood committees which people have organised since the police withdrew. The most important thing is for

workers to get organised.

What is CTUWS?

We are an NGO, established in 1990. Our aim is to defend the right of workers to strike and form independent unions. The official union federation [which is controlled by the state] was not representing workers, and the law stated that all unions must come under the umbrella of this federation. Plus, with changes in the labour market and moves towards a more neo-liberal economic model, workers had no rights. There was no right to strike; even when permitted, it was limited by all sorts of conditions. So we were responding to an obvious need.

The Centre was founded by workers' leaders, mostly from a leftist background. One of them was our General Co-ordinator, Kamal Abbas, who led the famous strike of iron and steel workers in 1989. He was arrested and fined because of his activities, and formed this association as the next step.

What have been the most important struggles in recent years?

Strike movements at the end of the 1980s were violently suppressed. A new wave of struggles began in 2006, when workers at the Mahalla textile company organised an uprising over working conditions. This was a huge strike, with huge protests, and inspired workers in many other sectors. Since then the movement has grown and grown. In the last four years, every day we've seen new struggles, strikes, all forms of protest.

In 2008, the struggle spread into the public sector, when real estate tax collectors went on strike. They protested in front of the cabinet, and stayed in the street for fifteen days.

Their main demand was for parity with their colleagues in the income tax collection department.

In 1973 the real estate tax department came under the control of local councils, and since then they have lost out a lot. Their demand was therefore to rejoin the Ministry of Finance. In the end, they won all their demands. In addition, the general committee created to run their strike developed into an independent union — the first to be recognised by this regime. This inspired other, similar struggles, for instance by the health technicians, who won in December last year. These struggles were the sparks that eventually lit the fire of a mass movement this year.

Now, people are getting more determined and their demands stronger every day. At first people just wanted Mubarak to go. Now they demand the dissolution of the current parliament, and the removal of the whole regime.

I honestly don't know what will happen next. No one imagined before 25 January that the revolution would begin, or imagined after that we would succeed in continuing the protests against attacks by Mubarak's thugs, or that the police would simply collapse. Victory against Mubarak is still possible. But, whatever happens, the most important thing is that ordinary people on the streets now feel they have the power to change their lives and their society. It's quite amazing.

What international links do you have?

We have links with unions across the region — in Tunisia, yes, but also Algeria, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq — and with unions in many European countries too. During the Mahallah struggle we had some support from your TUC, but otherwise our links in Britain are very limited. It would be great to change that.

Can fascists turn social-democrat?

Dave Osler

There is no historical precedent for the transformation of a fascist movement into something akin to a mass social democratic organisation. Yet although the Socialist Workers' Party would never state things as explicitly as that, this is effectively the claim it makes about the trajectory of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.

Given the revolutionary events in that country in recent weeks, the validity of such an assessment matters massively. While the Muslim Brotherhood has not led the protests, it was at the time of writing among the opposition groups in discussions with the regime. So significant is its social weight that it cannot reasonably be excluded from any transitional government. Were it to turn against the working class, the consequences would be unthinkable.

Its past is frankly ugly, of course. Among the first prominent Marxists to evaluate the group as "clerical-fascist" was Tony Cliff, writing in 1946. This is not something of which the SWP likes to be reminded. Let us not forget, either, that the Muslim Brotherhood was the milieu from which Sayyid Qutb emerged.

But it is perfectly coherent to maintain that while Cliff's designation was correct at the time, no political formation is static, and that it today represents a very different animal.

Thus the autumn 2007 edition of *International Socialism Journal* carried an interview with an Egyptian socialist — presumably a co-thinker — which describes the Muslim Brotherhood as a "reformist mass movement", with which joint struggles are possible "based on the Marxist tradition of the united front". If that is true, the implication is that the Muslim Brotherhood is not an openly bourgeois force, and even functionally equivalent to a reformist workers' party.

It would be presumptuous of me to second guess an Egyptian comrade on this matter, but it is legitimate to highlight the 180 degree change of line, and ask for details of how the new stance was reached.

Pivotal to SWP thinking on such issues was a 1994 article in ISJ by the late Chris Harman, titled *The Prophet and the Proletariat*. Indeed, a substantial section is devoted to the Muslim Brotherhood and its "reformist" Islamism.

The outcome of thorough research, most of the document offers a reasonable Marxist take on Islamism up to that point in time. Of course, Islamism has changed markedly since. It is no longer exclusively seen in Muslim countries, and one section of it has taken a turn towards terrorism.

Long out of print, Harman's piece is available again in a volume of his selected writings, published last year by Bookmarks. If only because it provided the theoretical underpinnings for the Respect fiasco, it repays a rereading by anyone seeking to understand the dismal disorientation of the largest player on the British left over the last decade.

The key formulations come towards the end. Harman insists: "Where the Islamists are in opposition, our rule should be, 'with the Islamists sometimes, with state never'."

Sorry, but even as rules of thumb go, there are huge gaps in such a guideline. With the Islamists sometimes? Maybe, but the obvious question is "which times, exactly?"

And with the state never? Well, certainly not with Mubarak's state. The sooner it falls, the better. The Muslim Brotherhood has patently not acted as a fascist tendency in the current uprising. Fair elections in Egypt would perhaps result in it becoming the largest single party, just as the January 2006 vote for the Palestinian Legislative Assembly gave victory to Hamas.

Then we will see what kind of party it is. A share in state power has a way of turning previously radical outfits into pragmatists; check out Sinn Fein for an example closer to home. Maybe the Muslim Brotherhood will turn out to be de facto social democrats after all. Hey, I hear the Socialist International is looking for a new section in Egypt right now.

Yet there are Islamist groups active in many countries that wish to bring about totalitarian theocracies, and which would oppress and even murder socialists, feminists, trade unionists, lesbians, gays and democrats were they to succeed. Other than in the limited sense of, say, opposition to summary execution, in what way should socialists be "with" such people?

Finally, there is a chance that both the Cliff and Harman prognoses could be vindicated. Like any genuine mass organisation, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is not monolithic. There are within it a number of factions with varying orientations.

While most reports suggest that the moderate wing is currently dominant, that does not mean that reactionary components are not also present. As Gerry Adams might have put it, they haven't gone away, you know.

Brotherhood is a threat

By Martin Thomas

In this paper we have warned against the Muslim Brotherhood as a force which could confiscate the revolution in Egypt and turn it into an Islamist counter-revolution. In the *Financial Times* of 1 February Ed Husain presented a reasoned argument against our assessment.

Husain is not a "cultural relativist" who thinks that the Muslim Brotherhood is fine for Egypt because "it's their culture" and that secularism, democracy, and women's rights are only for "the West". He is not a flabby liberal who responds to any powerful force, like political Islam, by advocating soft deals.

He is a former Islamist militant who broke from Islamism, wrote a book about it, and has been sharp against "soft-sell" Islamism — against, for example, the Islam Channel, run by the former leader of the Tunisian Islamic Front (who nevertheless has got himself invited to speak at a number of British left events).

Husain is not a "kitsch anti-imperialist", who thinks that the Muslim Brotherhood should automatically be supported because it is anti-Israel and anti-American. Far from it. He is now a member of the US foreign policy establishment, working for the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in Washington.

In fact Husain is mostly talking to boneheaded "hawks" in the US ruling class, trying to convince them that the Muslim Brotherhood is not Al Qaeda (it isn't) and that the US government can do deals with it (it probably can: the Muslim Brotherhood's offshoot in Iraq, the Iraq Islamic Party, has been almost the only Sunni-Arab-based group to collaborate consistently with the US since 2003).

He is telling the US establishment that Egyptians are in the streets for "universal values of freedom, of dignity, of human equality", and that most of those on the streets are not Brotherhood supporters.

But an element of Ed Husain's argument cuts against what we say. He asserts that the Brotherhood has changed so that it no longer seeks an Islamic state.

SCOFFED

He thinks it possible that US diplomats could get the Brotherhood to sign up for a "secular, liberal, democratic" constitution, and recognition of "Israel's Jewish democratic status as a neighbour", and it would not be dissimulation.

"Mohammed Badie, the Brotherhood's leader, comes from its conservative wing. But he recently scoffed at the idea of an Islamic state, saying his aim was to be part of a civilian administration.

"Another relative hardliner (and my former teacher) Kamal ElHelbawi said... 'Islamists would not be able to rule Egypt alone'. He argued for cooperation with secularists...

"To its credit, the Brotherhood also often calls for improved human rights... [And] even Mr ElHelbawi, often an apologist for suicide bombers, does not dismiss existing agreements between Israel and Egypt".

In any case, "in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and even Pakistan, Islamist parties do badly at the polls".

Backstop argument: even if the Brotherhood does gain a majority, Israel's military strength means it has "little to fear from Egypt's shabby military".

But what about the Palestinians? Israel would survive a Brotherhood government in Egypt which supported Hamas, but the Palestinians would be ground to pieces in the clash between rival chauvinisms. And what about the Egyptian people under Islamist rule?

The Brotherhood is canny. Of course it doesn't propose an Islamic state now in Egypt, or the breaking of Egypt's treaties with Israel. It doesn't want to throw itself into a showdown with secular forces in Egypt (including, probably, important or decisive elements of the army) and with the USA, at a time when it would lose that clash.

But has the Brotherhood really "bio-degraded" into a sort of Muslim-Democratic party, as hegemonised by secularism and liberalism as European Christian Democracy?

Or is its caution more like that of Stalinist parties, in the heyday of Stalinism, who would spend long periods pretending to be just good democrats and patriots, with no aspirations for the foreseeable future beyond an "advanced" or "people's" democracy, but were ready to impose Stalinist rule when they had the chance?

The Stalinist parties eventually "bio-degraded" in Western Europe, but only after decades of everyday absorption

Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood demonstration

in running local authorities and parliamentary contests within stable and prosperous parliamentary democracies where the Stalinist "model" became more and more unattractive even to Communist Party activists.

It is not like that with the Brotherhood. Its "final goal", a state in which religion is law against all workers', women's, and democratic rights, still enjoys prestige and a huge emotional charge given to it by religious conviction. Secularism, in Egypt, is not an exciting new model not yet tried, but something tainted by association with decades of stifling bureaucratic demagoguery.

Although very many Egyptians are secular, the trend for decades now has been to more "Islamisation" of society rather than less.

The Brotherhood's activists have had to operate in illegality and often in prison. That makes them cautious: but does not encourage them to think they should forget their final goal and stop at tokens and sops.

If the Egyptian workers' movement can organise itself politically, it can quickly win over great slabs of the Brotherhood's base and shatter its confidence.

But if not... Husain himself sees dark possibilities, though his hope of avoiding them rests on deft US diplomacy rather than working-class action: "Egypt could all too easily go the way of Iran, or Gaza".

That can happen without the majority ever wanting it, or doing more than becoming reconciled to it once the new tyranny is in place. It can be avoided only by the construction of strong-enough political alternatives to the Brotherhood.

The main enemy is at home!

The opposition "14 January Front" in Tunisia has a 14 point programme, mostly centred round demands for democracy, a constituent assembly, freedom of speech and association, and social welfare.

One of the 14 points jars. It is the only substantive point about international issues, and it calls for: "Resistance to normalisation with the Zionist entity, its penalisation, and the support for the national liberation movements in the Arab world and the whole world".

Whether it was the (small, so we understand) Nasserist or Ba'thist groups in the Front who pushed this, or the (larger) Hoxha-Stalinist group, we don't know.

But it is particularly diversionary and demagogic in Tunisia to try to define "national liberation" as the desire to pitch the Palestinians (who mostly support "two states") into a "no compromise" attempt to wipe out "the Zionist entity" (codename for Israel among people who refuse to recognise that the Israeli Jews are a nation).

Israel does not oppress distant Tunisia. On the other hand, the shrinking of the Jewish population in Tunisia from 110,000 in 1948 to 1,700 in 2011 reflects anti-Jewish pressure within Tunisia.

The main enemy for Tunisian workers is at home. The main external enemy is the world capitalist market, not Israel.

<http://bit.ly/hCUyUV>

How to organise to change the world

On 27 January Ed Maltby of Workers' Liberty idebated journalist and activist Laurie Penny at an AWL London forum. This is an abridged version of Ed's speech.

Our starting point is that revolution is possible. If you think that the working class is incapable of making a revolution, or that capitalism is the best form of society possible, then none of what I am about to say will make sense to you.

The working class, the class which has its hands on the wheels of production, the class which is taught by capitalism how to co-operate on a global scale in order to operate the machinery of capitalist society, can overthrow this system, re-organise society on the basis of common ownership, and social need, not profit.

The only way for a mass of people to own anything collectively is through mass democracy. And that means that the working class must take power consciously. Millions of workers must understand the process of revolution, and choose it, and debate it. A cadre of experts cannot do it on their behalf.

In order to do this, the working class needs a way of coming together, to debate, to consider the experience of struggle, to educate itself and develop revolutionary ideas. Under a barrage of capitalist propaganda and pressure, this cannot be done individually. It needs to be a collective effort.

An organisation needs not only to talk about ideas, but it needs to organise, teaching through struggle to increase the confidence and self-activity of the workers around the organisation. A party like this is not like a typical bourgeois or Stalinist party, which has an active leadership and a passive membership. A revolutionary workers' organisation needs to break down the division between leaders and led, to create a struggling collective of equals. This is a minority — but a minority trying to raise the rest of the workers to its own level, through struggle.

Sometimes, during a great upsurge, miracles happen. In a small way, we have seen this with the student movement. Suddenly, thousands of people were thrown into activity and received a rapid political education. They improvised an impressive movement. But an understanding of capitalist society and the history of working-class struggle can't be improvised at the last minute.

You can't expect these educational experiences to be renewed regularly. After a defeat, there can follow a long lull, during which lessons from the last upsurge can be forgotten, or their meaning corrupted. This current movement will recede, its lessons will be forgotten — unless they are preserved by through conscious effort.

A lot of people are disgusted by the idea of a Leninist party. It doesn't help that some organisations describe themselves as Trotskyist when they have inherited their ways of organising from Stalinism. I don't intend to defend these organisations. I think people are right to mistrust them. In Workers' Liberty, we want to clean this crap off the left.

CULTURE

In many organisations on the left, members are prevented from meaningfully debating their party's line. Most leftwing newspapers don't contain debate: only the official line is presented.

If there is any discussion of a given topic within the party, it is not presented in the paper. That means that the paper can't function as a tool for the movement or as a memory bank for the class. In most left groups, factions are effectively banned. But factional struggle — organising collectively to change your comrades' minds on a given idea — that's how an organisation thinks!

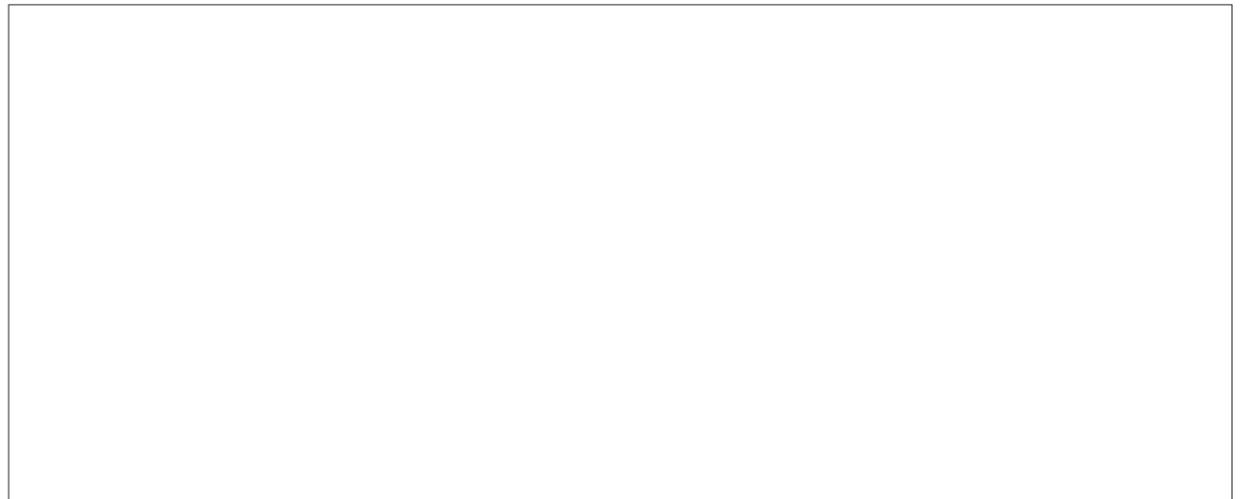
This culture teaches people that open disagreement can only ever be hostile, or "sectarian". It teaches people that theory is the sole property of experts on the central committee. It criminalises dissent. Reason is replaced by bureaucratic manoeuvre. This cannot help people to emancipate themselves. It is chemically pure Stalinism.

We don't see "the revolutionary party" as a monolithic machine which must simply be built until it is big enough to seize power. We see revolutionary parties — and undoubtedly in any revolutionary upsurge there would be more than one — as democratic collectives of revolutionary workers that seek to convince the majority of their ideas; not an external force seeking to "lead" the working class like some kind of army.

A party committee cannot produce a revolution to order. But a lot of groups think that this is the case.

SWP activists have a stock speech about the need for the revolutionary party. They say, "the bourgeoisie is very organised, and we need to be very organised too. That's why we need a party".

It's true that we need to be organised. But we need ideas, too! The SWP, with their ban on serious internal discussion, view the party not as a debater, an educator and a persuader: they view it as an apparatus, which projects instruc-



Yes, but what sort of revolution? And how can should we decide?

tions and disciplines the activity of the movement: "It doesn't matter what you think — go hand out these leaflets!" But this is not a project for self-emancipation. This is a project for building an organisation for its own sake.

When you think that the party is the only entity that matters, and it is by the disciplined action of the party alone that the revolution will be brought about, you lose the basic idea of revolutionary socialism — that the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves.

You cease to define your politics by what you are for — working-class self-activity — and base them on what you are against.

WHAT ARE YOU FOR?

The common sense of the UK left is to support Hamas and Hezbollah, "against Israel"; the Iranian regime "against America"; and the Cuban regime "against capitalism".

Tragically, we have started to see some leftists in the UK cheerlead for Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia.

You come to these dreadful conclusions when you forget the central thing — working-class democracy and working-class self-emancipation.

Some people, including a tendency in the movement that Laurie is aligned with, have turned to alternative organisational models. Their urge to turn away from Stalinism and find an atmosphere where activists can breathe more easily is correct. But from the point of view of making a revolution, these strategies are not adequate.

Look at UK Uncut. It's an impressive tool for organising one thing — protests outside of tax-dodging businesses. It provides a template, and call-outs for action, which allow a lot of people to perform one kind of action well. Taken on its own, this is good — it raises awareness of a given issue, knocks the authority of the rich, and gives people a good experience when they take part in these protests. But it can't go further than that. There is no way to collectively debate the next step.

You can see already, in the ludicrous actions promoting John Lewis as an alternative model for the economy, how much difficulty the network has in elaborating an alternative vision for society. Followers of UK Uncut on Twitter are reliant on the elite group at the centre of the network coming up with better ideas.

There is also a feeling among the "new", loosely-networked movements, that debate over ideas is unnecessarily confrontational and that it disrupts unity — that the ideas will sort themselves out over the course of the struggle.

Now, this is true of UK Uncut — an ideologically loose movement can coalesce around one idea, without nitpicking about it, and pull off great actions.

But it's only one idea, not a full programme. Also, the idea that the banks should pay tax is a very easy sell. If you want to pull off actions around one idea that it's hard to disagree with, then you can make do without ideological debate.

But if you want to convince people of the need for socialist revolution — you need to say unpopular things, and figure out very complicated ideas. You also need to draw conclusions from them.

In order to do that, you can't say — "oh, the ideas will sort themselves out, let's just go leafletting". You need to think hard and collectively about these ideas, question them constantly to be sure they're right — and draw conclusions from them.

A loose network where actions are disconnected from debates over ideas, and where debates are relaxed and fluid because what everyone is going to do tomorrow does not really depend on them — that's fine if you're going with the flow. In fact, it is a recipe for following the path of least resistance. But if you want to think difficult and unpopular

things, it's not adequate.

Some people in the movement are hostile to ideological debate, seeing it as a self-indulgence for privileged blokes, and a distraction from the struggle. They think that we can make a movement that works without talking about ideas.

But look at the workers of Tunisia. They have just overthrown one government, and they may be about to overthrow another. They're standing in the streets now, looking at each other and saying, "what next?" And who is going to answer that question? The Islamists? The Ba'athists? The new cabinet? The ideas that are dominant in the working-class movement are going to determine everything.

If you think that rigorous debate of ideas, and struggle for the right ideas, are not important in social movements, you are saying that you never expect the British working class to get to that point; you never expect us to be standing over a defeated government, asking "what next?"

If you think that society can be cleaned up with a tweak here, or a nudge there, then a variety of single issue campaigns, moving in loose convoy — tax avoidance here, tar sands there — that's sufficient.

But if you want to overthrow capitalism, then here-and-there tweaks and nudges will not do. You will need to say unpopular things, remember events you are not supposed to remember, face danger with comrades, and maybe alone. You will need to elaborate strategies for the mass movement, and work patiently to win people to them.

In the twists and turns of a long and sometimes rapid class struggle, you will need to examine your ideas and those of your comrades to make sure you are on the right track. You — and not just you, but thousands of revolutionary class-fighters — need to learn, be trained, and train others, make sacrifices for an idea you constantly question, face enormous pressures, and make a long commitment.

You can't do that alone. You need people around you who you can rely on, every day. You can't use Twitter for that. It means a democratic party, a revolutionary organisation. And if I have convinced you of that, then join Workers' Liberty, and help us create one.

• Full text: <http://bit.ly/f4BVZB>.

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Religion, race and class in Israel

Two Workers' Liberty activists — Louise Gold and Rosie Huzzard — who were on a recent delegation to Israel and Palestine reflect on *Louis Theroux: Ultra Zionists*, shown on BBC2 in early February, and the first episode of *The Promise*, a drama based in 1940s Palestine and modern day Israel and the West Bank, Channel 4, Sundays.

Louis Theroux is well known for his “faux-naïf” and “hands-off” journalistic approach, and this continues to be his tack in this most controversial of settings — time spent in Jerusalem and the West Bank with the ultra right-wing Jewish settlers, and those who support them.

The documentary opens with a snippet from an interview with a worn-looking Israeli man in the olive groves. Regarding the Palestinians, he proclaims, “they want to annihilate us... They want the whole thing.” This sense of victim status is reiterated throughout the documentary and is, of course, not completely groundless, but is also reinforced with profuse myth making.

Theroux spends a significant amount of the documentary with Daniel Luria, spokesperson for the group Ateret Cohanim, who facilitate the settlement of Jews in Arab areas, mainly in East Jerusalem and the Old City. Luria's argument for this, as well as religious righteousness, is that the Jews can either expand into Palestinian areas or “pack our bags and go back to the ovens of Auschwitz.” He follows this bathetically by saying “or I go back to the shores of Australia.”

Families are often placed in deliberately contentious neighbourhoods, both to drive out Palestinians and to stake a claim to the land. Rent doesn't drive people to live in this area, “what drives him is ideology.”

DISPOSSESSING PALESTINIANS

During our trip we were shown Palestinian houses that had been possessed by the IDF as military outposts. This exposes the cavalier attitude of both the state, and extreme right wing, toward Palestinian property and livelihoods, and as such the continued trend of displacement.

Luria explains to Theroux that international Jewish donors buy up buildings in the old city. At the same time, a Palestinian neighbour shouts that the house being filmed was taken while the family was at a wedding. And it is true that the family's belongings are still in the building.

Theroux's questions regarding how exactly families come to possess these properties, how the Arab families are persuaded to leave, and whether or not external funding is used to help the cause all go unanswered, and Luria looks evasive.

Next Theroux travels to the West Bank, home to 2,500,000 Palestinians and 300,000 Jewish settlers (figures from the show).

He visits the illegal settlement, Ehad Gilud, built by a small group of radical Zionist youths, one of whom argues for his right to live wherever he wants in the West Bank, on the premise that the “Jews are the chosen, we're not gonna go from here.” When we were on a “Stop the Wall” tour, this kind of maverick construction was described to us as being at the fringe of ultra-Zionist activity, but we were told that it often leads to the establishment of more permanent communities of settlers. Young extremists, usually male, arrive first, pitching tents and caravans, where more enduring structures are eventually built, which the Israeli state finally endorses.

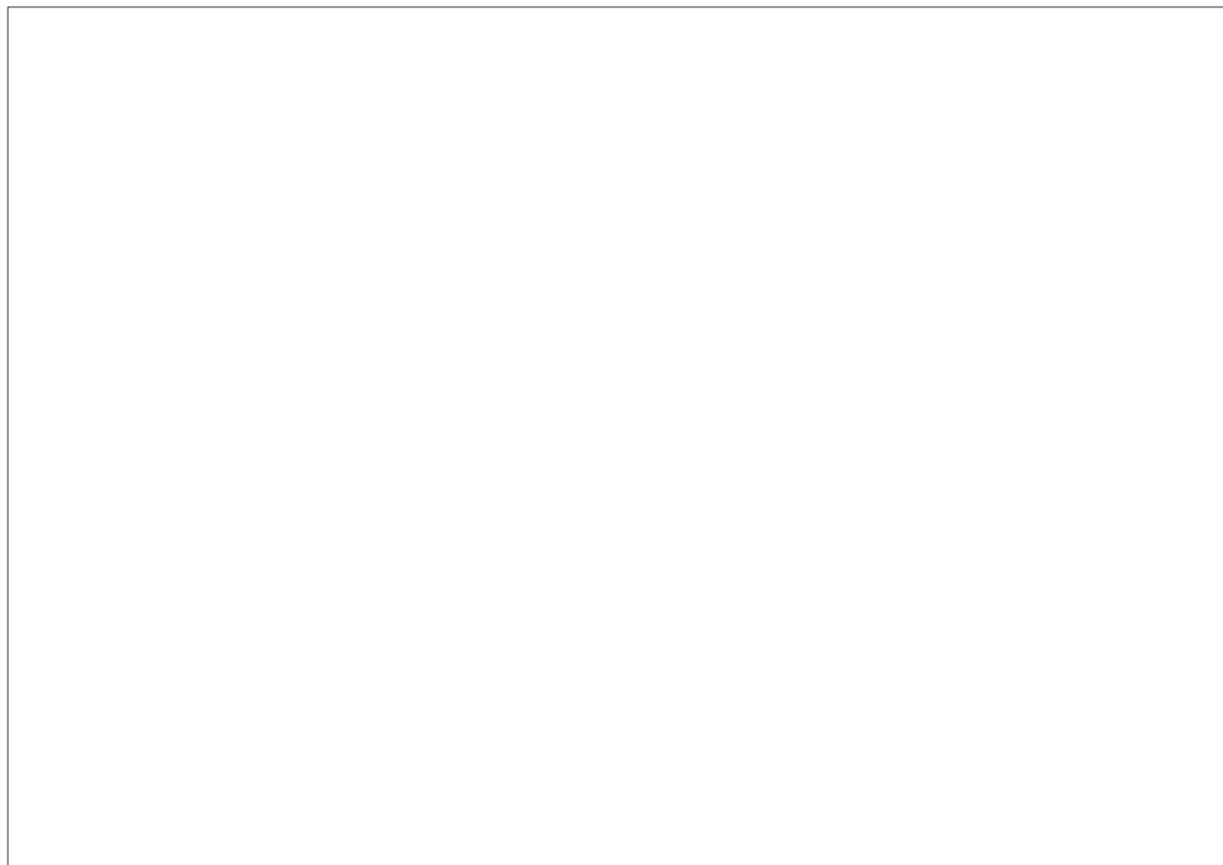
One of the most disturbing moments of the documentary was Theroux's visit to Bil'in. Only a few months ago we found ourselves on the weekly Friday march, approaching the security barrier that makes up part of the partition wall, which prevents the villagers from reaching 60% of their arable land.

This land seizure was not mentioned by Theroux, or the IDF. Instead the group of unarmed Palestinian, international, and Israeli activists were considered to be there because “...it was a convenient place for left [wing] Israelis to come from Tel Aviv.”

They were engaging in the glibly described Friday “ritual”. The activists we met organise scrupulously for these events, giving health warnings at the beginning. The IDF conversely seem to see it as a game. In the last year and a half, two siblings have been killed at the Bi'in demonstration, Bassem from a canister to the chest and his sister Jawahar Abu Rahman from tear gas inhalation on New Year's Day 2011.

While children throw stones at the fully armed soldiers, the marches are more generally proactively peaceful. Yet as the ritual begins, the IDF soldier says, “He threw the tear gas, the Palestinian.”

The Palestinian villagers do not have weapons. The soldier's accusation is impossible to believe, unless the canister was first fired by the IDF. Louis Theroux's comment, “injuries on both sides were not uncommon”, following this



Israeli settlement

scene, was stomach churning.

There was a lot of footage of children throwing stones at the IDF and settlers throughout the documentary. We were told when we were in Palestine that a lot of children suffer psychological problems and chronic bed wetting because of the constant IDF presence and weekly attacks.

A left-wing British-Israeli who travelled with us in the West Bank expressed her confusion as we initially saw the children throwing these stones. In Israel, she said, the IDF using tear gas is seen as a justified dispersal method towards violent protestors, and a just and balanced reaction. Here though, there were just children with slingshots.

RELIGION AND RACE

In Hebron there are 700-800 settlers in the middle of a Palestinian town. The head of security for Hebron's Jewish community is Yonni Blachmart. He explains that there is no provision such as buses for Palestinians in the settlement, despite the fact they have to pass through to get to shops, because it is “a safe zone, it's sterile”.

The argument moves from religious supremacy to race. He also explains that it is the Israeli police and army who are called out, whether it is Jews or Arabs throwing stones in Hebron. When asked whether he sees how the police and army might favour the settlers, he says, “No. That's not democracy... They have their own government in their own municipalities.”

If the Palestinian Authority had any real control of the area to rival Israel, they would have their own police force. The PA has control over a small section of the land in the West Bank where there is a dense Arab population only, and Israel has control of the rest, including the borders. It is a very partial democracy. While driving around with settlers, Theroux doesn't seem to notice that there are two separate road systems for settlers and for Palestinians.

One of the final lines of the documentary that seemed to sum up the sheer madness of the political situation in Israel and Palestine was in response to Theroux asking Luria, “is it possible Daniel, that you are a religious extremist?”

“If I am an extremist, then millions of citizens of Jerusalem and the state of Israel are also extremist,” says Luria, unblinking.

This is an unfair characterisation. Many of the Israelis we met were the opposite. However, what currently governs the Knesset is certainly influenced by that religious and racist extremism.

The documentary came off as pro-Palestinian, but more from giving the right-wingers a forum in which to voice their views, by which they hung themselves, rather than a concerted effort from Theroux. His hands-off approach, usually laudable, here left the whole project feeling under researched. There was not enough information given from which to make an analysis.

THE PROMISE

The first in the series *The Promise* was shown on C4 on Sunday 5 February. In many ways it was what Theroux's effort was not: thoroughly well researched.

It was also highly dramatic in a very different way to that of “Ultra-Zionists” hard-hitting realism. Shown through the eyes of the (at times) almost unimaginably naive British teenager Erin, the show uses high production values and the virtues of the landscape to full effect. It reeled through harrowing footage of Bergen Belsen being liberated in 1945 before cutting to Jewish immigrants arriving on Palestinian shores, greeted by the British army. It took us into a bourgeois slice of glamorous modern day Israel and the more flatly oppressed occupied West Bank, before flashing back to scenes of Palestine under British mandate.

The scenes contained in them some of the most central issues to the region: immigration now and then; occupation and all that entails, including checkpoint harassment, the debate about the security wall, and methods of protest; IDF-conscription; soldiers breaking the silence; conciliatory discussion between ex-fighters from both sides; and suicide bombing. We enjoyed the episode, but in spite of the focus on the extraordinarily privileged family of Eliza in Israel and the lack, as yet, of political diversity or real engagement with the Palestinian story.

CLASS IN ISRAEL

At the Workers' Advice Centre in Tel Aviv, they explained how the marketisation of Israel since the 1970s has pushed the Jewish working class down, into a position that left the majority in as much need of unionisation as Arab workers in the country.

There is possibility for unification and solidarity beyond ex-combatants, a dynamic that is missing in “The Promise” because the central family are so horribly middle class. We doubt the drama has room in it to explore fights for workers' rights and women's rights in the West Bank either.

The plot touches on groups of ex-IDF soldiers who now speak out against the occupation, such as Breaking the Silence (http://www.shovrimshatika.org/index_e.asp), represented in the rebellious young son of the central family. There were many other interesting touches. Erin and Eliza's reaction to seeing young IDF soldiers sitting in a cafe with their rifles, and the humiliation for a young Arab-Israeli citizen at the border are familiar and common reminders of the daily life in this part of the world.

Another problem was the sensational final scene which depicted a terrorist bomb exploding in an Israeli cafe. This sort of attack hasn't happened for five years. It was the only moment that felt over the top and delivered for dramatic effect over and above authenticity. It was a shame in an otherwise more or less historically accurate and politically reasonable portrayal of the conflict.

Organising at work: “we have to take action ourselves.”

By Graeme Park, Unite shop steward

I'm an electrician and work for an electrical company in the north-west. There are 40 of us working here and we travel all over the area.

Three years ago we had no union rep and only a handful of people in the union; this was down to the way the previous shop steward was treated. He eventually left the company.

With no rep or any kind of organising it became a workplace where everybody just looked out for themselves, laughing at the managers' unfunny jokes but turning a blind eye when people seemed to lose their jobs with no good explanation.

People in the workplace were those who had been

there a long time and felt they had too much to lose and also a number of young people and agency workers who didn't feel they had enough experience or job security to take on the role of a shop steward.

Having no union meant that we couldn't express our opinions without fear of repercussions. Management could impose changes in work conditions without any consultation.

We finally decided that we'd had enough. We contacted the union and told them we were going to elect two reps. We then held a meeting with all the workers present. We spoke about how badly management had treated us over the previous couple of years and said that it was time to stand up and fight. Everybody joined the union that day.

I had a meeting with the manager in which he told me he “could do anything he wanted, it might cost him money in court but “it would probably be worth it”.

I realised we would have to learn fast and work hard. We attended union courses where it was made clear you have to put in the hours, learn your procedures and have the courage to stand up for what you believe in.

TACKLING INTIMIDATION

Management tried various ways to intimidate us. The disciplinary actions came thick and fast. But because of the hard work we put in, we were able to stop them.

We benefited from refusing to accept unfair decisions and involving all the members in deciding what

action we should take whenever possible. Good results gave us the inspiration to keep fighting when the intimidation started to heat up.

I was threatened and told “I'd be sacked if carried on down this road”.

When this didn't work I was told I needed to think of my family and that we were wasting our time because the workers would let us down. After this they asked the union to remove me from my role, as I apparently “only see things from the workers' point of view”.

But the regional officer fought our corner, telling the company that when we could choose their managers then they could choose union reps. He then warned me to watch my back.

After I returned from a holiday, management again

tried to set me up. I was pulled in for damaging company property and failing to report it. The manager I had informed about the damage said he “didn't remember” me reporting it. Luckily I was able to produce dated photographs showing I had.

Recently when new workers have started they have been told not to get involved with the union or myself and that they will be “looked after” if they kept away from us. But because we have told the truth about the conditions at work they have joined anyway.

We have had many highs and lows but when the union showed it was prepared to fight and not be intimidated the workers did exactly the same. We all have to be reminded from time to time what sacrifices our comrades in the past-

past made for us and how we need to stick together if we are going to win our demands.

In the last three years, we've managed to improve our salary by over 20%, gain recognition and fought to defend every job — agency and staff.

I believe that when workers know you're willing to put your job on the line for them they will do the same for you. If the union and political leaders did this, they would have the support they need to make real change. But do they have the courage that workers show everyday in workplaces around the world?

Instead of saying what they can't do they should show us what they can do. If they don't then we will have to take the action ourselves.

British Airways workers await strike dates

By a BASSA activist

An announcement on strike dates will have to be made by mid February. New Fleet [Walsh's new scheme for restructuring terms and conditions] has started, although it numbers only in the hundreds of crew at the moment.

Their rosters are appalling and probably unsustainable for any length of time, as they do not give the crew sufficient rest between long and short haul flights. Their take home pay (for the Juniors) is around £800 per month; this is not a realistic salary for someone working at Heathrow, where renting a room is around £550 per month.

Even if rooms away from the area are cheaper, there is then the cost of transport to consider. When crew are expected both to report for work and get home after work outside the times when public transport is available, it is obvious that, long term, no-one will be able to have any sort of a

life on this level of pay.

Suspensions for “bullying and harassment” continue relentlessly with non-strikers complaining about strikers for the slightest little thing. A lot of crew spend their “standby” duties in the coffee shops of T5 (instead of the crew reporting centre) rather than risk getting involved in any discussion that could lead to their suspension.

Another of the reps was recently dismissed. The charge against her was interfering in the relationship between BA and its employees. In other words, trying to represent crew who had been suspended. The atmosphere at work is atrocious and depressing, and how it will all end is anybody's guess.

One thing is certain; if Walsh is successful in destroying the union then his tactics will be rolled out throughout this country and abroad. At a time when employers will be suffering a downturn in their profits due to the ongoing recession, they will surely be seeking to maintain their margins by getting all employees to work harder for less remuneration.

from across the borough.

Only one Labour councillor, Kingsley Abrams, spoke out against the cuts, prompting council leader Steve Reed to call him a “disgrace”. When Reed's comments drew an outcry from the public gallery, the police were called, but were forced to beat a hasty retreat.

For more, see <http://bit.ly/dH5NvB>.

Southwark speech therapists strike against job cuts

By Duncan Morrison

On Thursday 3 February Southwark speech therapists struck in protest at cuts to jobs and services that are being proposed.

The therapists provide critical support to children and their families who have language and communication difficulties.

Under the proposed cuts 11 out of 35 staff will lose their jobs in March. This will almost certainly be fol-

lowed by more job losses when the Primary Care Trust which employs the therapists is abolished.

The strike was well supported with over 20 therapists on the picket line on Thursday morning. The strike was preceded by a rally on Wednesday evening where the strikers received support from other speech therapists in Lambeth and Islington. There are no plans for further action at the moment.

Save Norfolk's Unthank Centre!

By Jacky Offord

Norwich AWL comrades joined the weekly Norfolk Coalition Against the Cuts city centre stall on Saturday 4 February bringing with them representatives from the Save The Unthank Centre campaign.

The campaign has attracted nearly 1,000 signatures on its on-line petition. Norfolk County Council aims to close the unique family centre as part of their massive cuts to public services.

The Unthank Centre has a countywide remit working with families who have children aged 12 and under. These children are living with extremely difficult emotional and psychologi-

cal problems, including abuse and neglect. A multi-disciplinary approach is offered in the Centre which operates within a secure and safe environment.

The Council wants to cut the workforce by 50% and close the unit — the remaining practitioners will work across Norfolk but with no dedicated bases and no colleagues immediately available for issues of referral.

Once again the Conservative-controlled administration has targeted the most vulnerable as it hacks into departmental budgets — isolating dedicated staff, impeding their professional practice and increasing workloads to an unsustainable level.

Sign the petition at <http://bit.ly/dFeDXz>

University of Glasgow students occupy

By John Coan

On Tuesday 1 February, students at the University of Glasgow went into occupation in order to save the Hetherington Research Club and prevent the university management from converting it into office space.

The club, which was closed in February last year, catered for mature students, post-graduates, international students and staff members, providing them with a valuable social space in which to exchange ideas and engage in group study.

The club also regularly hosted meetings of various student societies and a number of popular club nights. The Hetherington, which first opened its doors in 1954, was the only establishment of its kind in Scotland and was much loved by Glasgow students and people in the wider community. The club's closure was a bitter blow to the Glasgow student body, especially to those students who lost their jobs in the

club's bars and kitchens.

It was felt that an occupation and reopening under student control should take place before the rest of the club was converted to other uses. The club is providing a space from which to organise against the redundancies and cuts currently being enforced by the university management, headed by Professor Anton Muscatelli, who is paid £283,000 per year.

The occupiers' demands are that the Hetherington be returned to its former role as a space for post-grad and mature students. They are also campaigning against any cuts to courses, teaching budgets and against all redundancies at the university and against the wider cuts in education and for free education for all. If you or your student unions are engaged in similar struggles or you just want to show your support then please send any donations and messages of solidarity to: The Free Hetherington Club, 13 University Gardens, Glasgow, G12 8QQ.

AWL Unite bulletin: an industrial bulletin for members of Unite with features on anti-cuts strategy, fighting the anti-union laws and Unite's upcoming rules conference.
<http://bit.ly/i5VND4>

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Bankers loot, Cameron cuts

By Martin Thomas

Scarcely two years after they were rescued from going bust by £1100 billion (yes, £1100 billion — £18,000 for each child, woman and man in the UK) of cash, loans, and credit guarantees from the taxpayer, the bankers are blithely coining it again.

Meanwhile the Cameron government is making public service workers and the worse-off pay the price of the bailout and of the bankers' crisis through crushing cuts.

Barclays boss Bob Diamond will get a bonus of £9.5 million this month. At the Royal Bank of Scotland, saved only by a government buyout, over 200 fatcats will get bonuses of

over £1 million each.

Two years ago Prince Andrew, in a comment which shows what world the royals live in, deplored fuss about bankers'

bonuses because, he said, really they are "minute".

In a way, though, he's right. The millions in bonuses are only the icing on the cake of billions in

profits.

2010 profits for the biggest four banks, to be announced this month, are expected to be over £24 billion (*Daily Telegraph*, 30 January).

The total profit figure for all the banks may be £30 billion.

That profit figure, for one year, equals the total of the planned scything of benefits, local services, and education for the next four years.

Labour should quit engaging in petty quibbling about the details, and commit itself to seizing the whole of the bankers' wealth for public purposes, so that investment can be democratically controlled for social ends, rather than geared to the enrichment of a minority of profiteers.

Fees of £9k? Nein, danke!

By Edward Maltby

From September 2012, universities in England will be allowed to start charging higher fees to undergraduates. The upper limit on university fees will be raised from £3,290 to £9,000.

In an attempt to sweeten the pill of the fees increase, the government had said that the top rate of £9,000 fees would only be charged "in exceptional circumstances". However, the BBC reports that education experts, NUS President Aaron Porter, and Cambridge University management all expect most universities to charge the full amount.

It is likely that Vice Chancellors of English universities will announce the new level of fees they plan to charge over the next few weeks. The government has set a deadline of 31 March for university managements to submit their plans for new funding and access schemes.

The student movement needs to put pressure on Vice Chancellors not to raise tuition fees in this period — and if VCs announce increased fees, they should keep up the pressure through the next academic year to prevent their

implementation.

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts has called a national day of mobilisation on 24 February, to coincide with the Universities UK Conference, a get-together for Vice Chancellors. There will be a demonstration outside the conference on Woburn Place, London, and universities outside London will take action on their campuses

HULL FIGHTS BACK

On Monday 7 February, students from Hull Students Against Fees and Cuts started an occupation of Staff House, used by Hull Uni management to host dinners.

The occupation is backed by the university UCU branch and the Students' Union. The occupiers are holding open meetings, educational and other events, including a meeting by Workers' Liberty activists from our Israel-Palestine delegation.

The demands of the occupiers include: open the books on university finance; VC to refuse to raise fees; no redundancies; VC to uphold current pensions agreement with UCU; security staff should be employed in-house.

The student revolt, class struggle, and socialism: an event for young activists, Saturday 26 February

11am-6pm, Highgate Newtown Community Centre, 25 Bertram Street, London N19 5DQ

Sessions include: "Young people — our role in the class war", with Ed Maltby (AWL and NCAFC activist) and Becky Crocker (RMT activist on London Underground)

£5 waged, £4 unwaged/uni students, £3 school/college students

For more information email students@workersliberty.org or ring 07961 040 618

Peter Hartshorn reinstated: is the tide turning?

By Darren Bedford

Peter Hartshorn, victimised RMT Industrial Rep from the Green Park group on London Underground, has been reinstated on appeal with his dismissal suspended for 52 weeks.

Peter was dismissed after he was accused of swearing at a manager, despite witnesses stating otherwise. Peter's sacking was part of a spate of victimisations which also saw drivers' reps Arwyn Thomas and Eamonn Lynch lose their jobs.

Speaking on the victimisations, RMT's General Grades Committee said "Following other victimisations on London Underground, it is obvious that

LU has become a ruthless anti-union employer, prepared to defy all notions of justice in its efforts to disarm this union by removing our reps. It is imperative that we take all necessary action to defend our reps, and to explain to our members the importance of doing so."

Activists hope that Peter's reinstatement is a turn of the tide in terms of management's attacks on union reps. Workers have taken strike action against the sackings of Thomas and Lynch, both of whom have won interim relief appeals. The union will hold a public meeting on 17 February to continue the campaign against victimisations. For details, see tinyurl.com/defendreps.

Reinstate Sue Caldwell!

By Vicki Morris

Sue Caldwell, head of maths at Friern Barnet secondary school, has been suspended while she is investigated for allegedly having encouraged pupils to leave school on 24 November to join protests against education cuts. Sue denies the charges.

Sue seems to be the only teacher to have been disciplined in this way for the protests, fuelling suspicions that this is a political victimisation. Sue helped to set up Barnet Anti Academies Alliance to respond to the council's drive to push all the borough's schools to become academies.

Her local NUT association has produced a petition calling for her reinstatement, available here: <http://bit.ly/gnq599>.

As part of the national day of action in defence of libraries on Saturday 5 February, about 30-50 local people from New Cross, south London, occupied their library overnight. The library is threatened with closure.

Local people have called for the library to stay open in council organised consultation meetings and collected more than 5,000 signatures on a petition.

At least 100 actions took place around the country on the day. Photo: Eleanor Davies