

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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Student occupations restart

By Sacha Ismail

Many thousands of students have participated in occupations, demonstrations and direct action in recent weeks.

On 29 January, around 10,000 students demonstrated in London and 6,000 in Manchester. In Manchester hundreds of students chased NUS President Aaron Porter off the demo, a crucial step in the chain of events which ended with him announcing he would not stand for a second year of office, the first president since 1969 to do that.

February saw student occupations at the University of the West of England, Manchester, Aberystwyth, Glasgow and Hull.

Students at the London School of Economics organised a flash occupation to demand their university breaks its links with the Gaddafi dictatorship in Libya — and won.

Then on the 24 February Day of Action called by the student left, hundreds demonstrated in London, and new occupations were organised at UCL and Royal Holloway.

At the same time, activists have organised left slates in student union elections across the country — at Bristol, Westminster, Hull, City, Edinburgh, Royal Holloway, UCL, LSE, the two universities in Leeds, Sheffield, Queen Mary, Liverpool, Southbank to name just a few. Most results are not yet in, but at traditionally deeply conservative Royal Holloway the left has won student union president.

Another thing to note is the high level of political consciousness involved. The LSE occupation over Libya is a case in point.

There is a widespread desire for unity with

LSE occupation

workers in struggle, and to some extent these links are being made.

At the moment militant activism is limited to relatively few centres. It is much more narrowly centred than before in London and the richer universities than at the end of 2010, when school students, sixth-formers and students at poorer universities played a leading role. While there are still many school student activists organising, the school student struggle has receded dramatically.

One problem here is that the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, which played such an important role in the pre-Christmas protests, has stagnated. A failure to create substantial structures has had costs.

It has produced a lack of coordination. The Socialist Workers' Party dominated the negotiations over a left slate for NUS conference in a way that was out of proportion to their size or the degree to which they represent the activist left in the student movement.

With UCU balloting for strike action over pensions and job losses this month, there is an obvious focus for student struggle in the period ahead. We should

fight to maintain and develop the current level of student activity with a focus on supporting our lecturers' struggle.

But to do that effec-

tively we need national organisation, and that means putting the National Campaign back on a sound footing.

Anticuts Space opened

Royal Holloway is a university based in Egham, in Surrey, outside West London. Traditionally its political culture has been quite conservative, but the building of a strong anti-cuts group and a big occupation last November changed that, with socialist Daniel Lemberger Cooper winning the student union presidency.

On Thursday 24 February, immediately after a packed Israel/Palestine report-back addressed by AWL solidarity delegation members Jade Baker and Sacha Ismail, Royal Holloway activists occupied the Arts building on their Egham campus.

The next day, having issued a set of demands to university management, the occupiers travelled to central London to transfer the occupation to an RH building in Bedford Square. They have now

been joined by activists from other London universities and colleges, creating an "Anticuts Space" for use by the broader anti-cuts movement, workers as well as students.

What you can do:

1. Send a message of solidarity to anticutsspacelondon@gmail.com
2. Drop by to visit the Space: 11 Bedford Square, WC1 (Tottenham Court Road or Goodge Street tube).
3. Organise a meeting in the Space — there are five large rooms and several smaller ones. Email to make a suggestion.
4. Circulate information about the Space in your workplace/union, university/college/school or campaigning group.

• anticutsspace.wordpress.com

Death threat to Zim socialists

By Ira Berkovic
52 Zimbabwean socialists have been tried with treason and "subverting a constitutionally elected government", and could now face the death penalty, following arrests after a meeting organised in solidarity with the Egyptian revolution.

The activists are members of the International Socialist Organisation, a group linked to the British SWP but which cooperates with other tendencies. Mike Sambo, a leading ISO member, spoke at Workers' Liberty's Ideas for Freedom event in 2008.

The despotic regime of Robert Mugabe is undertaking a general clamp-down on dissent in advance of possible elections later in 2011 and clearly fears a Middle Eastern-style upheaval in Zimbabwe.

Other left-wing and labour movement bodies in the region, including the powerful Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) have spoken out against the arrests. For information on where to send statements of protest and solidarity, see tinyurl.com/zimbabweiso

Union challenge

Bob Carnegie, a member of Workers' Liberty Australia, is running for election as secretary of the Queensland branch of the Maritime Union of Australia — Australia's union for dockworkers and seafarers. Nominations open on 7 March, and the ballot runs from 28 April to 14 June.

Bob was a prominent member of the MUA — and, before it merged into the MUA, the Seamen's Union of Australia — in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1998 he resigned from his full-time position as MUA Branch Organiser because he could not back the deal made by the union leadership to settle the lock-out by Patrick's, one of Aus-

tralia's major port employers.

Since then he has worked in construction and as an organiser for the Builders Labourers Federation, but recently returned to working as a seafarer.

His campaign has three major planks. To start a fight against casualisation, which has become widespread in the industry since the 1998 deal. To commit the union to defend delegates against victimisation. And to democratise the union and return it to the rank and file. These are key issues for working-class militants around the world.

• More: bob2011mua.wordpress.com

Wave of protests in Iraq

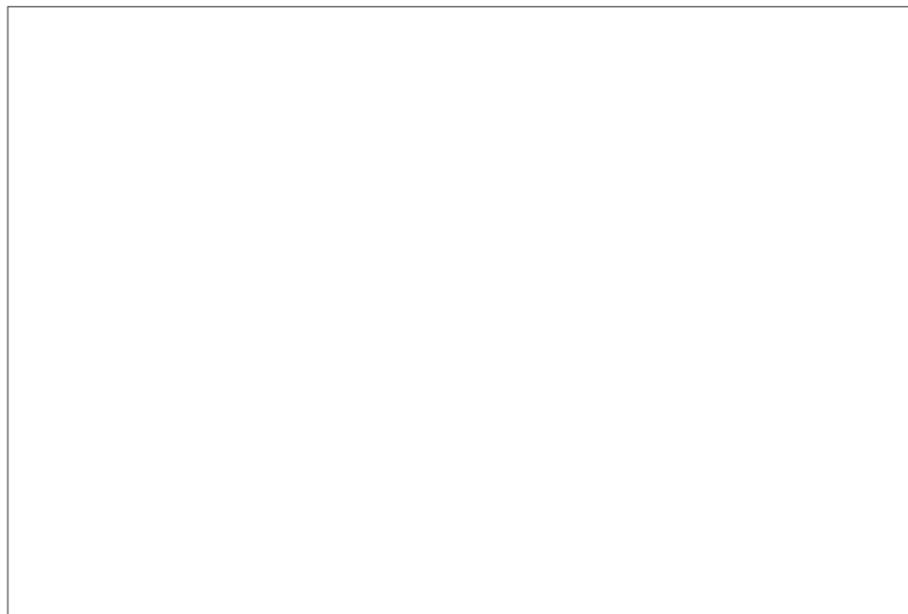
Despite a government-ordered "lockdown" designed to prevent them, demonstrators took to the streets in Iraq on 25 February in at least 17 cities, protesting against government corruption and neglect of basic services.

The *Washington Post* reports that Iraqi security forces detained about 300 people, including prominent journalists, artists, and lawyers in the aftermath of the Friday protests. The demonstrations are part of the biggest wave of social upheaval since Saddam Hussein's regime fell. The growing movement has included significant workers' militancy, particularly amongst workers in the energy sector. Abdullah Muhsin, the UK representative of the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (traditionally the most mainstream and moderate of Iraq's union centres) spoke to *Solidarity* about the situation. For a longer version of the interview, please see tinyurl.com/abdullahm

This is the most significant wave of action since 2003. There was a massive change in 2003; whether you agreed or disagreed with the war, for the first time in the history of Iraq, people are free to organise, to march and to protest.

However, there are limited services and attacks on freedom of association and freedom of speech.

These protests are not limited to one area. The current protests are generated by internal circumstances within Iraq, but it cannot be said that they were not influenced by what took place in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere. Eight years after the fall of



25 February demonstration in Baghdad

Saddam Hussein, people still have no jobs, no clean water, no electricity. There's enormous corruption, both administrative and financial. After the last general election in Iraq, it took nine months to form a government and three key ministries are still not functioning. People have had enough with the false promises. That's how the protests started.

The trade unions were the first to organise support for the uprisings in the other countries. We were inside embassies in Baghdad calling for an end to dictatorship. Like those protests, the protests in Iraq were started by youth movements. That's how it started – with people using mobiles, Twitter and Facebook. Young Iraqis are politically aware. Those were the two trends – one of solidarity with the Arab uprisings, and one of people, particularly young people, demanding their rights.

We're still campaigning to win a labour law. Fundamentally we want a law that allows pluralism and the right of public sector workers to organise. The current draft only names the General Federation of Iraqi Workers and professional association as recognised trade-union bodies; we're in favour of pluralism and the right of other union federations to organise. We've worked together with the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq but we can't force the state to put their name on the document. In general we're very clear that we're in favour of pluralism and we will not be moved on this.

The electricity workers' union's offices are still shut after being raided last July. The state has accused them of corruption, but they themselves are corrupt. The union has come back with a strong message, supported by ICEM and ITUC, demanding the right to organise.

Al-Shahristani, the minister who de-recognised

the electricity union, also victimised oil workers' leaders in the south and transferred them away from their jobs. The oil union in Kirkuk has also been very active and have been protesting since 12 February. Their demands include permanent contracts for temporary workers, an end to corruption and family patronage, the right to organise, and an improvement in wages and working conditions. Oil workers in Baghdad have organised a demonstration in front of the oil ministry in Baghdad demanding the same thing.

We have a relationship with the new trade unions in Egypt. We organised some symbolic solidarity actions in support of what was going on in Egypt. In most Arab countries there are state-run unions, but a change of regime will mean a change of structure and pluralism.

We support pluralism and democracy. We do not support state-run trade unions.

Industrial focus in Oman

By Martin Thomas

As we go to press on 1 March, street demonstrations in the oil-rich Gulf state of Oman are in their fourth day.

The protests have been centred in the state's main industrial city, Sohar. Al Jazeera reports: "Hundreds of protesters blocked access to an industrial area that includes the port, a refinery and aluminium factory..."

"We want to see the benefit of our oil wealth distributed evenly to the population", one protester yelled over a loudhailer near the port".

Like other despots, the Sultan of Oman has responded by handing out cash but so far refusing to move on democracy. The state is an absolute monarchy, with only an "advisory council", and all political parties banned.

The Sultan has increased the minimum salaries of private sector workers by 43 per cent; promised 50,000 new government jobs; offered an increase in stipends for students and the unemployed; and replaced six cabinet members.

In Syria, the Assad regime is clamping down even on small demonstrations supporting the people of Libya against Qaddafi. At the same time it is doling out economic concessions. The combination suggests a regime in fear of working-class upheavals.

On 23 February about 100-150 Syrians demonstrated in solidarity with Libya's struggle against Qaddafi in front of the Libyan embassy in Damascus. One of them reports: "Seven young people were captured and violently questioned for a few hours. A girl was beaten badly by the riot police... We were chanting peacefully, peacefully but still the police punished us and prevented us from reaching the embassy".

Reporters Without Borders has published an article condemning the arrest of a number of young Syrians who keep blogs over the last year.

Meanwhile the government has launched a multi-million-dollar social aid fund, and increased heating fuel subsidies for two million public sector employees by 72 per cent.

Deadlock in Bahrain?

Mahmood, a Bahraini living in England, spoke to *Solidarity*

The government will do one of three things.

1. Make tangible concessions, which naturally won't happen until the government exhausts its capacity to terrorise the population.

2. Allow a prolonged stalemate, make a big fuss about its newfound "tolerance" of dissent in the media, and secretly hope that they'll get tired or bored.

3. Somehow find or manufacture an excuse and make a bloodbath, depending on how the protesters will behave.

Out of these three scenarios, the latter is the most likely, in my opinion. I'm not very optimistic. The government may make relatively small or symbolic concessions before doing so, but that's about it.

I say this because Bahrain's importance is not weighed according to its strategic role alone in the larger framework of US hegemony (which is important enough). The immediate repercussions of a Bahraini victory a few kilometers down the causeway

is infinitely more important.

Mostly Shi'as inhabit the Eastern Province. And that is the most important piece of rock on this planet, politically speaking, for is under it the world's largest oil fields. The Saudi government would make Gaddafi look like a teddy bear if the Shi'as there get any "funny ideas" and start posing as a real threat.

If pushed enough, the US will permit any means necessary to put a lid on the revolt in the Gulf. Crushing the Bahraini revolt, to Washington, would be seen as a pre-emptive measure.

I'm also not optimistic because the opposition seems to be losing touch with the pragmatic question of what is or isn't politically feasible in this tiny island. They're escalating their demands.

I may be wrong because the US may be far weaker than my assessment assumes.

Given its enormous firepower and its virtual military omnipresence in the region, there's good reason to think that US imperial interests won't go down without a very nasty fight.

Socialists arrested in Iraqi Kurdistan

From the Worker-Communist Party of Kurdistan

On 25 February 2011, the masses of Sulaimaniya, Iraqi Kurdistan, held a large demonstration as part of demonstrations which have been taking place since 17 February against oppression committed by the two ruling parties of Kurdistan, the KDP and PUK.

In the demonstration of 17 February, KDP militias shot and killed three people and wounded many others.

Daily demonstrations were launched in response. KDP forces and the Asaiysh (security forces) of

both the ruling parties arrested and abducted those who were active in organising mass rallies and demonstrations.

After the demonstration on 25 February in Maidani Azadi (Freedom Square) in Sulaimaniya, four members and supporters of our party (Nawzad Baban, Moayad Ahmad, Shakhawan Nasih and Khalid Majid), who actively took part in the demonstration, were kidnapped.

Abduction and arrest is a model carried out by the authorities in Kurdistan and other groups and militias.

• The comrades have since been released.

Protest in Sulaimaniya

Bieber fever

Type the words “Justin Beiber” into Google and you’re presented with 139 million results; page after page of gossip, photo shoots and the occasional online shrine in the 17-year-old “sensation’s” name.

A wave known as “Bieber Fever” has swept the world. This “fever” and the influence he has over (mostly) teenage girls are somewhat worrying after his recent interview with *Rolling Stone*.

I really wish I could be taking him out of context, when asked about the subject of abortion after rape. His response was “everything happens for a reason.” Where have we heard that one before? Well, he does end his live shows with “God loves you”...

This is a lad who once, when asked if his surname was German for basketball, replied, “German? We don’t use that word in America”.

Despite heavily conservative views on abortion and sexuality, he does have surprisingly progressive views on healthcare, referring to the American medical system as “evil”. Still, I think I preferred the consistency of him being an over-privileged reactionary. Now he’s just a contradictory twat.

Ria Simpson, Milton Keynes

Organise! Organise!

I was involved in the occupation of Lambeth council chamber on Wednesday 23 February (see back page).

It really brought home to me the necessity of tight and disciplined action. It sounds a strange thing to say — that organisation is a good thing — but there is a lot of “talk” around about how such organisation is undemocratic and we should “just let things happen”. Nothing would have happened if Lambeth SOS had not put lots of time into planning the night. Planning ensured that people stepped forward, were willing to lead and were committed to the action and ensuring that it went ahead.

If we need more direct action, this is the way to go!

Ali, Lambeth

This isn’t what democracy looks like

Numbers at the recent Sheffield Trades Council AGM were high — 50 delegates and plenty more observers. For me it was a little lesson in democracy — a negative lesson I think.

John Campbell was the sitting President. Knowing he’s unpopular, and his position was up for election again, he turned out masses of Unison local government members. That branch has 70 potential delegate places but it’s rare if even one turns up.

A good speech was heard from Bill Greenshields from the NUT and People’s Charter. Unfortunately, John Campbell in the chair didn’t give him a chance to talk about how the TUC could be helping the local anti-cuts group.

John Campbell’s President report was basically just an election speech, as the vote between himself and Martin Mayer (standing against him) was up next. (It was the only contested position!) I went to the bar during his speech... but the only thing to note that I heard was that he said he wanted to “help younger people to become organised”. Hmm.

I, a younger member trying to get organised, asked whether there would be hustings. I was told no. I asked whether it was constitutional not to have hustings, I was told no, it was just not usual. Then they just carried on.

Although Mayer had given his Treasurer’s report by this stage, Campbell clearly had an advantage in being able to make his speech. Anyway, it was a paper ballot — which was good.

In the end Mayer won by three votes at which point he shook hands with Campbell, thanked him for all his hard work, and then Campbell just swiftly exited through the main door!

A Sheffield TUC delegate

The 2010 generation

Dave Osler

The Black Bull pub on Whitechapel High Street was always a pretty down at heel boozery, standing out as noticeably grubby even in the days when most pubs in that area fairly merited that description. Unsurprisingly, it was turned into an Indian restaurant several years ago, and that’s no great loss to East End drinkers.

But right up until the 1980s, every Thursday night would see a bunch of old boys who had been comrades in the local branch of the Communist Party in its pre-war heyday put back a few beers and chat about the past.

The Smart Alec student Trots in the neighbourhood — among whom I then featured, of course — knew about these drinking sessions, and would affect contempt for the geriatric Stalinist fools. Had they learned nothing in the intervening decades? Would they ever be as all-knowing about Marxist theory as we were?

This was rather ungenerous, of course. After all, when these people were about the same age, they busied themselves fighting the British Union of Fascists on Cable Street and building a working-class base that eventually led to the election of Communist MP. Indeed, the CPGB even hung onto a councillor or two long after that. They cannot have been getting absolutely everything wrong.

What struck me even at that point, though, is that it is possible to speak loosely of “generations” in leftwing politics. Sometimes they are named after a year, such as the 1956ers or the 1968ers; others coalesce over a slightly longer period, such as the 1930s, or else around specific campaigns, in my case Rock Against Racism and Youth CND.

Naturally they grow old with each other. From time to time I still come across people I worked with in the fight against Thatcherism. They are typically a stone or two heavier and the hair is greying if it hasn’t gone altogether. But a gratifyingly high proportion of them — perhaps almost all of them — are even now interested in politics.

True, only a handful remain paid-up Trots. A fair number have moved to the right, ending up as Blairite councillors or nondescript Green Party members or respectable union officials. They tend to be somewhat embarrassed at any recollections of those early morning factory gate paper sales after those all-night Hackney squat parties.

Yet many of the others have hung on to at least a part of their youthful ideals. It’s just that parental responsibilities and healthcare worries make activism harder, while disgust at the lows that Blair inflicted on the Labour Party and the continuing stupidities of the far left have reinforced the cynicism that comes naturally with middle age. But to this day they see themselves as socialists, and maybe even revolutionary socialists.

The trouble is, the left’s last sizeable “generation” intake probably came with the miners’ strike, which is now a long, long time ago. Don’t get me wrong; many good individuals radicalised around later issues, such as the poll tax or the invasion of Iraq, and got involved with Marxist organisations.

But the numbers have not been sufficient to meet the qualifying threshold I’m talking about here. For many years, the proof of that proposition could be ascertained simply by looking round the room during a leftwing meeting. The absence of anyone under about 40 was all too noticeable.

That finally appears to be changing. At the two meetings I attended in the week prior to writing this, more than half the room were not old enough to regularly require moisturising cream.

The reason is obvious, I guess. The student demonstrations in recent months, followed by the wave of uprisings in north Africa, are generating an enthusiasm for activism on a scale that has been conspicuously lacking since the last time I looked good in leather trousers.

Friends who are in Trot groups tell me that they are recruiting some of these people, and from the tone in their voice, it is obvious that this time they are not lying.

The question is whether there will be enough newcomers to constitute a “2010 generation”, a development that would do a power of good to a milieu that has in some cases become as sclerotic in its politics as it has unfortunately sometimes become in its arteries. I can only wish them greater success than we had.

The new generation

C is for capitalism

ABCs of Marxism

By Tom Unterrainer

At the most fundamental level, capitalism is a system based on labour-power — the general human capacity to create new wealth — becoming a commodity, something to be bought and sold, across society.

Capitalism is geared around the relationship between those who own the factories and workplaces, and buy labour-power, and those who have no choice but to sell their labour-power.

Workers sell our labour-power — in capitalist society, a commodity like others, and yet not quite like others because it embodies the capacity to add new value — for a pittance sufficient to keep us in trim to continue selling it. The bosses win profits by organising labour — i.e. “consuming” the labour-power they have bought — in such a way as to add more and more value, more than they paid out in wages.

In his book *Capital*, Marx identified not only the “laws of motion” and tendencies of capitalism but its historical development.

He wrote: “If money... comes into the world with a congenital blood stain on one cheek’, capital comes dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.”

Capitalism is not eternal. It is transitory. It became established as the dominant mode of production not by quiet progress but in violent ways. In previous periods other forms of production and exploitation dominated.

The advances of previous exploiting societies created new social classes — such as the bourgeoisie within feudalism

— and so destabilised those old ruling orders. Capitalist production first emerged in northern Italy, where feudalism never really took root, in the 14th and 15th centuries. It came into full flower, transforming technology as well as formal economic relations, with the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th and early 19th century, first in England.

In fairly short order, a new class — the bourgeoisie — came to dominate society, forcing a dramatic reordering of the world. Society was divided into two camps: bourgeoisie and proletariat; capitalists and workers.

Marxists recognise and in many ways admire the achievements and innovations of capitalist society. Capitalism is a system of exploitation, war and oppression. It is also its own worst enemy, and lays the basis for its own overthrow and replacement by a better society, because as capitalism expands, the working class grows ever greater in number.

As the bourgeoisie forced a revolution against feudal society, so also the working class must do the same against capitalism.

What capitalists will not do to ensure the production, flow and expansion of commodities could be written on the back of a stamp with a very thick pen. Force, in the form of states, laws, and armies, is used to preserve the interests of capitalism. New methods and techniques are continually deployed against nature and humanity to extract more and more value.

And devious financial ingenuity is applied to all aspects of human activity and within the financial system itself to fuel growth today at the cost of slump and ecological destruction tomorrow.

• Further reading:
Karl Marx, *Capital*
Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*
Karl Marx, *Wages, price and profit*

Egypt: strikers defy the army

The fall of Mubarak was prepared by an upsurge of strikes in Egypt, over several years since 2004. It has been followed by a greater upsurge, exceeding anything ever seen before in the region.

Soon after taking over from Mubarak, the army told journalists that it would ban strikes, and then made a public call for strikes to end. In fact it has not been able to stop the strikes. It has not even been able to keep Tahrir Square clear of demonstrators.

The activity reported in the mainstream press — the Tahrir Square demonstrations, the Facebook agitation, the discontented middle class — is important. But the heavy artillery of the revolution in Egypt, little reported by the mainstream media, has been the working class.

On 30 January, a new independent trade union federation was formed, challenging the old state-run fake “unions”. In the last few days we have reports of new parties being formed in Egypt, based on and aspiring to represent the working class.

These parties are making their way in a country where working-class politics of any sort has been stifled and repressed for over half a century. There was a Communist Party, a small but real revolutionary workers’ party, in the 1920s; but like Communist Parties elsewhere it fell victim to Stalinism, and in 1965 it voluntarily dissolved itself into the ruling party, then called Arab Socialist Union.

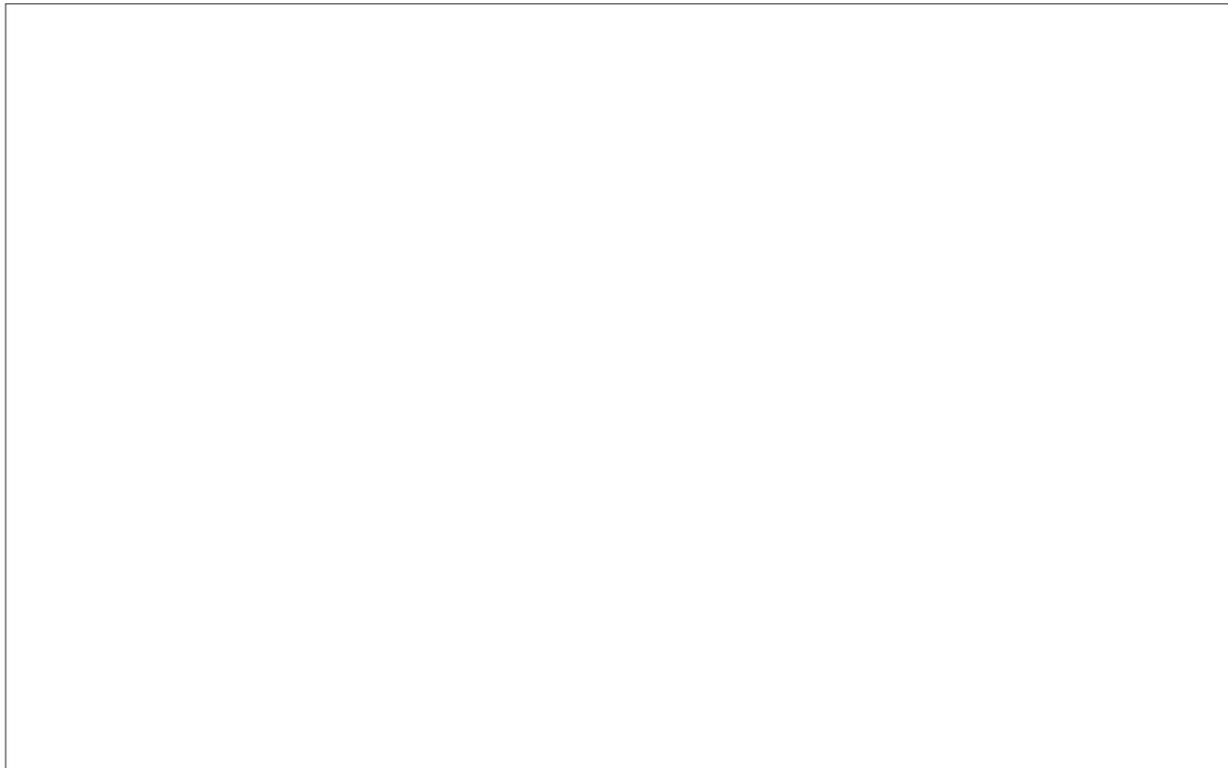
The way forward for the new workers’ parties will thus be difficult. But they can draw on a working class much bigger than before the 1960s, and with a recent rich experience of struggle.

Egypt has the biggest working class in the Arab world. Workers’ movements in Egypt can cross-fertilise with rank-and-file movements in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, to its west, where real (though conservative and bureaucratic) trade-union federations, and larger elements of a political left, already existed before the recent upheavals.

To shape the new order in the Middle East and North Africa, the workers’ movements will have to vie with other forces.

Everywhere, the bulk of the old ruling machines remains intact. Junior members of the old regimes will come forward, offering a more democratic gloss, but keeping democratic concessions to a minimum and the basic neo-liberal course unchanged.

In Egypt the main opposition force existing under, and



semi-tolerated by, the old regime, was the Muslim Brotherhood, a group aspiring to an “Islamic state” and long hostile to the working class. The upheavals in Egyptian society have also created ferment within the Brotherhood.

At the end of February a section of the Brotherhood’s youth declared a plan to stage a sit-in protest demanding the dissolution of the Brotherhood’s two leading committees and the “modernisation” of the movement. Some Brotherhood people have openly proposed the scrapping of its historic aim of an “Islamic state”.

That ferment must create openings to win over to secular, democratic, and socialist politics people who may have backed the Brotherhood when it looked like the only voice of political opposition to Mubarak. Another hopeful sign is

something that *hasn’t* happened. Although the Israeli Embassy in Cairo is in the city centre, and the police would neither have been interested nor able to stop protesters, at no point in the street activity so far have anti-Israeli demagogues been able to divert the demonstrations to attack the Israeli Embassy rather than the rulers of Egypt.

The value of all openings depends on the strength and energy of the forces which can seize those openings. There are tremendous openings now for the birth of a lively workers’ movement across the whole region, and for it to play a central part in winning democratic rights and achieving social improvements. Our solidarity can make a difference. Let’s organise it!

• www.egyptworkerssolidarity.org

140 years ago: the Paris Commune

“On March 18, 1871, a group of Parisian women stepped between armed soldiers and cannons, deploying their words and bodies to block the removal of artillery from their working class neighbourhood.

“Ordered to fire, the troops instead raised their rifle butts in the air, turned and arrested their general. Within hours, the general lay dead, the army had pulled out of the city and the cannons remained in place. This spark ignited the revolutionary civil war known as the Paris Commune.”

Eight days later, 26 March, the world’s first successful workers’ revolution got fully under way, as a municipal council made up of workers and soldiers was elected to the Paris Commune.

140 years ago this month workers in Paris took control and, for a brief but beautifully inspiring moment, the workers organised things very differently.

The Commune replaced the standing army with the National Guard — a citizen army. It proclaimed a separation of church from the state. It abolished state support for religious bodies (the state stopped paying the wages of the priests), and insisted education be secular; as Lenin put it, it “struck a severe blow at the gendarmes (police) in priestly robes”.

Night work in bakeries was forbidden and the system of workplace fines by bosses, “this system of legalised robbery” as Lenin described it, was abolished. A decree was issued that all factories and workshops that had been abandoned or stopped by their owner were to be handed over to associations of workers in order to start up production again.

As if to emphasise its character as a truly democratic proletarian government, the Commune decreed that the salaries of all civil servants and government officials should not exceed the normal wages of a worker.

For 72 days workers and their allies turned upside down the very order of society. The Commune was a “deadly menace to the old world, founded on (wage) slavery and

exploitation”.

The bosses’ class, the master class, “could not sleep peacefully so long as the Red Flag of the workers waved over Paris City Hall”. Revolutionary Paris was besieged by French government forces from 2 April. On 21 May they pushed through the city walls, and for eight days, from 21 to 28 May, the workers heroically defended the Commune in street-to-street fighting.

In the end were defeated. 30,000 Parisians were slaughtered. 45,000 were arrested, and many afterwards executed. Around seven and a half thousand were exiled.

Only then were the bourgeoisie satisfied. “Now we have finished with Socialism for a long time”, declared their murderous leader, Thiers.

But as history shows us time and again, ideas cannot be slaughtered. By the end of the 1870s a new workers’ movement was emerging in France. In 1879-80, the jailed and exiled Communards were amnestied, and a new workers’ party was formed.

As history unfolds before our eyes in North Africa and the Middle East; the least we owe to those who made such an heroic attempt to create a better society is to work to understand the Paris Commune and learn the lessons. And it’s the least we owe to ourselves.

140 years ago workers introduced the maximum wage, they took control of factories and workshops, they burned the guillotine and cancelled rents. Marx believed the Commune should have seized control of the Bank of France. Lenin pointed to an essential lesson — our class cannot afford to be magnanimous to our enemy. In class war it’s us or them.

Celebrate the courage and ideas of the Commune, remember the dead, but above all else, learn the lessons from this struggle, so when we step out of the shadows we are able to realise and win our dreams of a society based on meeting human needs.

As Lenin said “The cause of the Commune is the

cause of social revolution, the cause of the complete political and economic emancipation of the workers. It is the cause of the proletariat of the whole world. And in this sense it is immortal.”

Class struggle in the USA

By Barry Finger

The Great Recession and its aftermath have generated a wholesale and unprecedented assault on the living conditions and future prospects for the American working class. This is the backdrop for the dramatic conflict now unfolding in Wisconsin.

The organised working class in the United States is a shell of its former self, pummeled by protracted neo-liberal policies of aggressive union busting, globalisation, and the relative decline of the manufacturing sector. At the same time, the Chamber of Commerce has rebooted itself from a network of small town grandees into a confrontational and highly assertive national advocate for free market policies. Business elites plowed profits into conservative think tanks, transforming these into handsomely paid ideological sinecures whose “studies” widely displaced those of academic institutions in framing social policy initiatives.

By 1978 unions had all but abandoned big ticket social programs, in favour of a modest package of labour law reforms believed needed to bolster its ability to organise. But here too it was cruelly betrayed by inaction on the part of Democrats who controlled both the Congress and the White House, just as it would again be under the first two years of the Obama administration, which declined to even bring the Employee Free Choice Act to the floor for a vote.

But by abandoning its inspiring vision of an economy tightly bound by an interlocking web of social protections and unable to deliver wage growth and the spillover effects that such victories invariably provide, the union movement began — fairly or unfairly — to assume the whiff of a special interest lobby. Or at least this is how the business dominated media tirelessly recast it.

Union density in the private sector dropped to just under 7%. The trade union movement became increasingly distant and irrelevant to the day-to-day lives of most working people.

With the loss of union standing within working class communities, the dormant habits of subservience to power resurfaced.

Strikes, increasingly rare, were met with disdain and sometimes utter hostility in working class communities. The 2005 NYC transit strike was defeated to no small extent because it failed to elicit broad community support.

Workers began to ape the attitudes of the ruling class, that union workers are a pampered, privileged and elite strata. The autocrats who run the economy incredibly re-sold themselves, with no little success, as “job creators” to a working class desperate to keep its head above water. The “scissorsbill” mentality — to borrow an old Wobbly phrase — that any worker with sufficient ambition could still rise economically and socially took hold in a period in which, ironically, the odds of experiencing a 50% drop in family income have more than doubled since 1970.

An inauspicious time for the defining confrontation of our era, but let’s remember. The strike wave of the early 1930s took place against a broadly similar backdrop. The roaring twenties was a period in which all the old conservative mental silt again encrusted itself into the mindset of American workers. Union membership was similarly seen as the elite confine of highly skilled workers. It was fortified by the manifest failures of the unskilled to independently sustain themselves organisationally and the indifference of the AFL to intervene on their behalf, which reinforced the public’s perception of them as a narrow interest group.

ECONOMIC REVIVAL?

The American economy is now said by economists to be emerging from a traumatic economic dislocation. The vaunted boom in profitability which might presage a broader economic expansion, is however unconvincing to most capitalists. And for good reason.

Pre-tax domestic non-financial profits as a percentage of the national income are at about 7%, far below the 15% of the late 1940s, and 12% of the 1950s and 60s. Profits are simply not that high by historical standards. And taxes are now at their lowest level since the end of the Second World War. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, it is the financial and overseas sectors alone that are exceeding the mid-century profitability levels. Domestic sales revenues have barely grown. To the extent that domestic profit margins have improved this is almost entirely due to cost cutting at the expense of the employed and the liquidation of inventories. Business is not investing. Not surprisingly, the economy is growing at an anaemic rate of 2.8%, far slower than the 3.4% average of the past 80 years.

Moreover, while the financial sector revived because the government pumped out the poisonous assets and saddled them on the public, the engine of financialisation is exhausted. The mid 2000 boom was inflated by excess consumer demand supplemented by continuous refinancing of

the housing stock. The value of that stock has now been drained of 35% of its value.

Exploitation hit the working class at both ends, both in the process of production and at the point of consumption. Workers lost a collective \$743 billion each year during that boom, while the top one percent gained \$673 billion. The working class can no longer maintain its standard of living by siphoning the value from its only significant asset. Consumer markets are consequently blocked, and the mechanism of enhanced exploitation — which is the real significance of financialisation — has been disengaged if not disabled.

The only cost left for business to cut is its overhead tax burden. Cheap government has always been the battle cry of small business. This has now caught on across the business spectrum. The recession itself blew a hole in state government finances, with tax receipts — income, sales, and property taxes — declining sharply, while the demand for state services grew dramatically. The AIG bailout alone, if it had been applied to the states, would have been sufficient to cover the combined costs of state deficits and it would have provided a more robust thrust to economic expansion than the banking bailout ever could. But that was never on the table.

WELFARE STATE MUST GO

Business is desperate to dismantle the last vestiges of the welfare state, the remnants of “big” government. But this cannot be done without decimating the public sector unions that stand in its way.

Business has been preparing the public for this assault for months. It has ginned up a near lynch mob mentality against public workers. It successfully took tax increases for the obscenely wealthy — happily characterised as “job creators” — off the table, while castigating “selfish” government employees (and retirees) for not accepting cuts in their pay and benefits needed to subsidise the profits of these beleaguered “job creators” in their quest to jump start the economy.

This is a two-pronged attack. On the federal level, it’s a struggle against “entitlements” — social security and medicare/medicaid — that is, to further beggar the working class itself as it loses its commodity status due to old age or disability. On the state level, where most government workers are employed, it is an assault against the operating costs of government through squeezing state workers and reducing or eliminating services.

Republican governors have been in the forefront of this assault. First, it was a question of givebacks, but this morphed in Wisconsin into a basic question of union bargaining rights. The governor and his Republican assembly had already precipitated the immediate crisis by giving a tax break to the wealthy, which made the projected shortfall in revenue immanent. He reinforced and made permanent this revenue shortfall by ramming through a bill that requires a two thirds vote in the assembly to pass tax rate increases on income, sales or franchise taxes.

Walker then decided to kill two birds with one stone. Not only would he demand givebacks, but he would limit future bargaining to basic wages and put any negotiated wage increase above the cost of living to a state plebiscite for approval. He would also demand a re-certification vote for

public sector unions on a yearly basis and eliminate dues checkoffs from paychecks. In other words, he would render state workers defenseless.

What is particularly outrageous is precisely how the Wisconsin governor, Scott Walker, has twisted the facts out of all relation to reality in order to sell this program. The elimination of “dues checkoff” would simply cripple unions. His justification for this is the bald face lie that union dues are used for political purposes, that is, to fund his Democratic opponents. Unions are in fact prohibited by law from using dues in this way and must ask for voluntary pledges earmarked for political purposes.

Then there is the assertion that public workers are overpaid relative to their private sector counterparts. Were this so, it might be a selling point for the union cause. As it is however this lie is simply red meat to overtaxed working people. The truth is that public servants enjoy a pretty hefty pay cut for the privilege of being employed by the state. Adjusting for age, experience, gender, race, etc., Wisconsin public sector workers face an annual compensation penalty of 11%, 5% if adjusted for their slightly shorter work week.

Even this understates the problem. The equation of the government sectors — the equivalent of medium to large corporations — with the whole of the private sector, whose average undertaking is dwarfed by the scale of government, is indefensible. The large share in the private sector of small businesses which typically offer lower wages and benefits so distorts the issue as to make comparisons useless. To properly make the Governor’s case would require matching the compensation package of public sector workers with packages of workers employed by medium to large corporations. This is never done. It would not serve Walker’s purpose of playing both sides against the middle.

MALARKEY

Finally there is the Governor’s assertion that public sector workers are being given an extra gift by the taxpayers in terms of outlandish pensions and Cadillac health care plans. This is malarkey on stilts.

And it is a lie that is swallowed and regurgitated by the mainstream media almost without exception. Many if not most states have low balled their wage packages to public sector unions over the years, but sweetened the pot by offering enhanced benefit packages that may entail obligations from the taxpayers should there be investment shortfalls, as a result, say, of a stock market downturn. But not in Wisconsin’s case. As Pulitzer Prize-winning tax reporter, David Cay Johnston, explains it:

“Out of every dollar that funds Wisconsin’s pension and health insurance plans for state workers, 100 cents comes from the state workers.

“How can that be? Because the ‘contributions’ consist of money that employees chose to take as deferred wages — as pensions when they retire — rather than take immediately in cash. The same is true with the health care plan. If this were not so a serious crime would be taking place, the gift of public funds rather than payment for services.”

It is therefore utterly meaningless to demand, as the Governor has, that public workers contribute a larger share of their wages to health care and pensions. It would not save tax payers a single dime. All the state does is distribute a part of negotiated earnings on behalf of the employee to the different funds, modifying the apportionment that was previously agreed to in the contract. It does not add to that fund from state revenues. Walker’s demand would merely present an accountant’s problem of redividing payment to reduce cash wages and expand health or retirement funds.

Again, the purpose of this whole charade is to bamboozle hard pressed private sector workers into believing that the Republicans are removing greedy state hands from their pockets. When the propaganda, distortions and misrepresentations are swept away, the attitudes of the oh-so conservative Republicans resemble nothing as much as Polish Stalinists of a thankfully bygone era confronting workers in the Gdansk shipyards.

Strikes against the state offer socialists unique opportunities, because labour struggles for wage and working conditions can only be divorced from the broader economic and political struggles at their peril. It is in such confrontations that workers directly experience the latent authoritarianism of the business dominated state, the intersection of capital and politics. That is why, in times of heightened struggle, street solidarity is “what democracy looks like.”

The spirit of Wisconsin street solidarity is inspiring union members in Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan to jam capitol buildings by the thousands to fight a raft of union-busting bills in their states.

That next stage in that struggle may soon commence. In sly defiance of the Taft-Hartley act, the Madison AFL-CIO local requested that the “Education Committee immediately begin educating affiliates and members on the organisation and function of a general strike.”

A turning point

By Traven Leyshon, President, Green Mountain Labor Council

The corporations, and the politicians in their service, have launched what they hope will be a decisive offensive against America's unions.

In the past weeks, hundreds of bills have been introduced seeking to weaken, if not to effectively ban, unions in virtually all fifty states, facilitated by the corporate media's message about states going broke because of government workers' wages, pensions and benefits.

In the living experience of the American working class, we have not confronted such a threat. It isn't as if these types of attacks are new; what's different is their scale and their real possibility of success. And public employees are fighting back, nowhere so dramatically as in Madison, Wisconsin.

The epicenter of this struggle is Wisconsin where through Governor Walker's "budget repair bill", Walker would limit collective bargaining to wages (not exceeding the rise in the cost of living), end payroll deduction of dues, compel unions to hold votes each year to recertify their status as bargaining units, and impose higher employee contributions for pensions and healthcare, which, if the bill passes, cannot be negotiated.

This bill is a union-buster, but it's more than that: it would slash Medicaid and BadgerCare, the health care program for kids in low-income families, massively cut public education and public services, affecting union and non-union workers alike. The full budget is anticipated to be even worse than this bill.

The stakes in Walker's war on labor are clear. If he wins, he'll set an example for Republican governors and legislatures out to break public-sector unions. He'll also make it easier for Democratic governors to appear more reasonable as they press their demands that public sector workers suffer cuts in wages, pensions and jobs. The difference is that Democrats will leave unions mostly intact — they want labor's fundraising and get-out-the-vote operations at election time.

That this is a strategic, ideologically driven attack is demonstrated by the reality that while many states face real budget problems, those in Wisconsin were manufactured by Walker. Walker cut business taxes, threw state funds at special interests, and turned a \$121 million budget surplus into a \$137 million deficit. Two-thirds of corporations in Wisconsin paid no taxes at all last year.

Walker won the election in 2010 with Tea Party backing and funds supplied by the billionaire Koch brothers, who are also major funders of the Tea Party movement.

While the attack and resistance is sharpest in Wisconsin, we are facing a nationwide escalating corporate offensive — not helped by President Obama calling for a freeze on federal workers' pay. Severe cuts in public jobs and services have become standard fare across the country. Employers, the two political parties, and governments at all levels have decided that the time has come to move against what is the last bulwark of American unionism: the public employee unions.

The attack on public sector workers, often focused on teachers, is long standing. Teacher tenure is being targeted in five states. And in Providence, Rhode Island, the school board recently voted to send notice of termination to every single teacher.

Policymakers are proposing legislation that would effectively let states declare bankruptcy. This would let them rip up contracts with current public sector employees and walk away from their pension fund obligations.

Right-to-work legislation has been filed in 12 states; this is in addition to the 22 that already have such laws on the books. Such legislation makes union shop or agency fee agreements illegal even when a majority of workers vote for them. Practically speaking, right-to-work laws make building and maintaining a strong union very difficult, which in turn makes it harder to organize. The average worker in a right-to-work state earns over \$5,000 less than workers in other states. Twenty-one percent more people lack health insurance.

We expect 12 more states to file bills or initiatives banning the collection of union monies for politics. In twenty states there is legislation expected to ban Project Labor Agreements (measures which facilitate negotiating union standards for construction jobs with public financing).

Simply put, the employers are exploiting the fiscal crises in 44 states to go after what is left of organized labor — public workers' unions. The overall union membership rate in America has declined to 11.9%, with union density in the private sector at just 6.9%. The public sector, with union density at 36.2%, is labor's last stronghold.

AN INSPIRING WORKING CLASS RESPONSE

In the face of this aggressive anti-worker offensive, teachers, janitors, clerks, plumbers, steelworkers, teamsters and many more have stood together and pushed union leaders and politicians where they weren't willing to go.

Mass demonstrations, sit-ins and civil disobedience have so far prevented Governor Walker from muscling through a bill that would undermine public sector workers' basic union rights. In Minnesota, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and, above all, in Wisconsin, public employees demonstrated, called in "sick", and stormed their respective state legislatures in opposition to proposed laws. Madison schools were closed for four days with their sick-strikes. Demonstrators began occupying the Capitol building on 15 February, and at this writing have remained there for two weeks. The firefighters were among the union workers who have taken turns occupying the Capitol through the night, with the knowledge that it would be harder for police to throw out the student supporters if the firefighters are also sleeping in. Even the Wisconsin Professional Police Association took the unprecedented step of calling on members to come sleep in the Capitol.

Last Saturday, over 100,000 people rallied in Madison in the largest demonstration Madison has seen in 40 years. The response by private sector unions has been excellent, with no apparent split between private and public sectors. The favorite chant was, "This is what democracy looks like!" — the slogan of the 1990s global justice movement.

This movement is not confined to the Midwest as Wisconsin workers are being reinforced by supporters coming from all around the country. On 26 February tens of thousands of people marched in solidarity protests in more than 65 cities to support the workers' resistance in Wisconsin.

On Sunday night, hundreds of demonstrators defied police orders and slept inside the State Capitol building in defiance of Walker's order to leave. The protesters couldn't be dismissed as excitable students — the occupiers were multi-

generational and included union firefighters, electricians and teachers, as well as students. Capitol police decided not to enforce Walker's edict after hundreds of labor activists, students and supporters insisted on staying put.

Despite the splendid show of union power and broad community support, labor leaders have already agreed to Walker's demands for higher employee contributions on health care and pensions — as long as he agrees to maintain collective bargaining and allow the collection of dues that sustain the union apparatus.

Officials excuse their offer by saying that their polls indicate strong public support for preserving collective bargaining, but not on economic issues. That contradiction has rankled activists, who are frustrated that officials haven't fully challenged Walker's claim that workers must make sacrifices to help close state budget deficits.

Yet, the Republicans have no interest in compromising — Governor Walker has said that he will not budge, and that's how you win, by breaking the other side like Reagan did to PATCO! Hearing Walker say that is strengthening the resolve of rank and file workers and supporters to fight the whole bill. A broad unity is building to oppose Walker's other attacks: from wage, health and pension cuts to the attacks on public health, the environment, transportation, affirmative action, reproductive rights, and sexual orientation.

More militant unions, like National Nurses United (NNU) and the South Central Federation of Labor, are arguing for rejecting any more concessions for workers. According to Rose Ann DeMoro, NNU executive director, the first lesson to be taken from Wisconsin is that: "Working people — with our many allies, students, seniors, women's organizations, and more — are inspired and ready to fight... Working people did not create the recession or the budgetary crisis facing Washington or state or local governments, and there can be no more concessions, period."

A TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENT?

In Wisconsin, the old concept of labor solidarity, that "an injury to one is an injury to all," has been reborn. Some of the unions increasingly see themselves as fighting on behalf of the entire working class. And nonunion workers, professionals, and students are coming to understand that the organized working class has the power to hold the line against employers and politicians who are determined to carry out a permanent and deep cuts in public services, education and the standard of living of working people.

We are seeing signs of the birth of a real labor movement where public sector unions join together with private sector unions, manual with intellectual labor. This is different from traditional parochial business union practices where unions largely ignore other unions and often neglect the issues of the labor movement as a whole, to say nothing of broader working class issues.

The new labor movement that is arising is from the beginning a political movement. It may lead to political confrontation. It must focus on the political and programmatic issues usually take up by political parties: the right of workers to bargaining collectively, state budget priorities, and the tax system which funds the budget. This has tremendous implications for the traditional relations between organized labor and the Democratic Party, especially since the Democrats, from Barack Obama to state governors, are also demanding that public employees give up jobs, wages and benefits.

Today the labor movement is at a turning point. When large numbers of workers go into motion, political consciousness grows and changes rapidly. Many of those demonstrating have never before participated in a strike or a political event. Some would still characterize themselves as conservatives. Yet workers who today simply fight to defend union rights will, if we succeed in resisting the attempt to destroy our unions, go on to fight to expand not only our rights, but to improve our working conditions and standard of living. Most importantly, we will fight to expand our power.

A revitalized labor movement will challenge the old political relationship between the unions and the Democratic Party. With the Democrats lowering taxes on the rich, cutting budgets, and laying off public employees, we may be in for the kind of confrontation between workers and a pro-business Democratic party that can produce a potent political alternative. Unions will fight to force the Democratic Party to give up its conservative budget, tax and labor policies, and failing in that, may finally seek another vehicle. Whether we will develop the vision and build the power to put forward a national political alternative remains to be seen.

The right wing offensive and the massive union led resistance in Wisconsin and beyond are bringing the ideas and experience of class politics and power into working class life on a scale we haven't seen in the US for over 35 years.

We see this in the extraordinary example of the South Central Federation of Labor in Wisconsin, which represents 45,000 workers in 97 affiliated branch unions, raising the idea of a state general strike if the law passes. The last time we saw this was in 1946.

Tunisian left organising

Loumamba, an activist in the Ligue de la Gauche des Travailleurs (Left Workers' League), spoke to Ed Maltby

There are around 100 in the LGT; it was re-founded recently. Our major implantation is in grassroots unions organising in education, the post, phosphate mining, petrochemicals.

There is a struggle within the revolution between a moderate current and a radical current. We are co-ordinating this latter current, which has been mobilised by radical left activists and which has existed for a long time.

Popular committees still exist in towns and villages and they are protecting the gains of the revolution.

It is as if we are in the period before the formation of the Kerensky Government. Mohamed Ghannouchi [prime minister, who resigned on 27 February, after this interview] and his lot are part of the old regime. There are liberals and bourgeois democrats in the government, but the masses are not represented in the government.

The situation in the [left] Front of 14 January is dynamic. For the moment the politics which dominate it are the politics of the Marxist left. The nationalists, Nasserites, Ba'athists and others have come over to us. We have not changed our position. We have made a common front with them to fight fundamentalism in the past.

The programme of the Front is for the elimination of the remnants of the old regime, for a "government of national salvation"; for a constitutional council; and a programme of struggle against poverty and unemployment. If the masses

follow us we want to deepen this political process towards socialist or anti-capitalist politics.

In local committees each LGT activist intervenes as a militant of the LGT and not as a militant of the Front.

Ennahdha (the Islamists) are an imminent threat. They attacked a red-light district. They have killed a Christian priest. They have attacked a synagogue. A demonstration of about 5,000 was organised in response. A counter-demonstration for Islamism of about 100 took place.

Ennahdha present themselves as moderate partners for the new liberal Tunisia; they say they accept democracy, but their activists are doing something else.

They are not strong enough to crush the workers' movement. They are not as strong as in Egypt. They have a presence in the UGTT, but they are not dominant.

They could not take power in elections — but perhaps they could do well with alliances. But I don't know who with. Perhaps with the remnants of the RCD or the liberals.

No-one in the Tunisian left has illusions in the Islamists as a progressive force.

If we only succeed in transforming the bourgeois dictatorship into a bourgeois democracy, then that is a failure.

The army does not play a political rôle in Tunisia and never has. There is no threat of an army takeover.

The army will take up a position within bourgeois democracy. In a confrontation between the workers' movement and a bourgeois democracy, we know which side they will be on.

• More: www.workersliberty.org/world/tunisia

Morocco: the King must go!

Achil Guerrier, a member of the Courant Marxiste Revolutionnaire (CMR, Revolutionary Marxist Current) in Morocco, spoke to Solidarity

Social-democrats and Stalinists and Maoists hope to see the King become a constitutional monarch. Revolutionary Marxists and the left-Maoists of "Voie Democratique" are for a socialist Morocco and for the departure of the King.

Young people split along these lines are using the internet to organise demonstrations. We have so far avoided real debates on the level of politics, but organise joint demonstrations on the basis of social, political and economic demands.

For us, what is important is to mobilise people to come out into the street to demand, at the very least: press freedom, freedom of association, human rights and rights for women, increase in public sector pay, free education, social security.

For us, these are minimal demands, for others they are the maximum. But we're against a revolution "by stages" — there is no wall between the minimum and the maximum.

Who is heeding the calls for demonstrations? Intellectuals of the left and the different political tendencies, the unemployed, the youth, workers in the informal sector and in agriculture, and the urban poor.

The big demonstrations were in Tangiers and Tetoun — with about 80,000 people.

On 20 February, about 1,000,000 people came out across

Morocco. In particular there is a strong movement in the Rif, where there is a history of revolt against the government and colonial rulers; Agadir in the South, where the CMR is strongest; and Casablanca.

Workers' movements exist, but they are still politically controlled by union leaderships, which are close to the government. There is work underway on grassroots organising in the two big unions in Morocco but the success of the undertaking hangs in the balance.

There is a call to create a new, independent union. We prepared the way for this through work in the big unions and in the workers' clubs we have created, which function as working-class educational associations, teaching people to read and so on. Remaining in the official unions cannot be the solution to the crisis of trade unionism in Morocco. They are for the monarchy. They are attached to liberal political parties. There is no independence for the unions from these parties.

We will work in the official unions but we think it is impossible to stay there — we must collect workers there, leave, and give an example through struggle. Even if there are dangers related to this strategy, there is no real alternative.

We have not yet launched the union, but we are preparing it. The name is "Offensive Union Voice". There are already 3,500 people in our workers' clubs, concentrated in the south, in Agadir. We think that provides a base for the project — but numbers aren't the only thing, quality is important too.

Egyptian s raise new

By Bruce Robinson

Despite threats from the army to ban strikes, every day brings more news of Egyptian workers taking militant action to raise their demands in the new situation following the overthrow of Mubarak.

Sit-ins, the blocking of major roads, protests outside the offices of employers — and the official state-run, corrupt union federation, the ETUF — and just plain walk-outs have taken place in virtually all sectors from gold miners and coke workers, via textile and transport workers, through to bank employees — who closed the stock exchange — and teachers. It is as if the lid has been taken off a pot of previously repressed grievances. The paper *Al-Ahram* commented: "Drunk with the revolution spirit, the workers and activists don't pay much attention to what the law does or doesn't permit".

Textile workers at one of the biggest plants in Mahalla, who played an important part in inspiring the youth movement through their strike in 2008, returned to work after a four day strike of 15,000 workers won its demands. The military initially considered force to end the strike but in the end conceded the firing of the corrupt plant director and a 25% wage increase. There is no naive trust in the army. One labour activist stated: "If the military doesn't keep its promise, we'll just go back on strike". They have also launched a petition demanding the recall of the fake union committee and new union elections.

Their demands are typical of those raised by workers in Egypt, centring on economic issues and the removal of corrupt managers and officials, who in many cases benefitted from the wave of privatisations carried on under Mubarak. In the face of rising food prices, demands for minimum and sometimes maximum wages, meal or health benefits, the permanent employment of contract workers and the implementation of old paper agreements are common.

Alongside this, the call for the removal of managers who are corrupt or have embezzled funds is almost universal.

Replacing managers has so far taken the form of a demand on the employers or authorities rather than the workers taking

Left parties emerging

We now have a report of the formation of two new left-wing parties, including one that explicitly calls itself a labour party — Labour Democratic Party.

Its founding statement says: "Businessmen and political elites have their own parties and groups while workers, despite their critical role in the revolution, don't have a political party to represent and lead them in the struggle for power."

Kamal Khalil, its spokesperson, is or was a leader of the Revolutionary Socialist group. It appears that the party seeks to base itself on the emerging independent trade union movement, which is a very good thing. However, it's unclear yet how large a group of workers that will represent. Moreover, since Kamal Abbas and the Center for Trade Union and Workers' Services will be a central element in this formation, it is likely to maintain a bread and butter focus and to shy away from ideological-programmatic issues.

Another thing to look for is whether Kamal Abu Eita and the independent Real Estate Tax Assessors' Union support this party. Kamal has been a leading member of the unrecognized Nasserist Karama Party.

There is a third party with a left outlook: the Tagammu, whose leadership is corrupt but which does have some good elements among its base, especially workers in places like Suez and Tanta.

Joel Beinin

Make solidarity with independent Egyptian unions

A new solidarity campaign, Egypt Workers Solidarity (EWS), has been set up. We are asking people to sign the statement below, and organisations to invite a speaker, and donate. The EWS website carries regular news updates of the emerging movement.

The emergence of free and independent trade unions in Egypt is an event of enormous significance for the entire region and is to be welcomed by trade unionists around the world. We call upon the International Labour Organisation, the TUC, the International Trade Union Confederation, and the global union federations to recognize these new unions as the legitimate representatives of the Egyptian workers. The state-controlled labour front, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), should not be recognised as a genuine union organisation. We call upon the Egyptian government and the military to respect the internationally-recognised rights to join and form trade unions, including the right to strike. We will do everything we can in our unions and in the TUC to support the emerging Egyptian trade unions including solidarity delegations, provision of training and equipment, and financial support.

• Email: info@egyptworkerssolidarity.org • Web: egyptworkerssolidarity.org
• The US solidarity group Labor for Palestine are circulating a statement in support of Egyptian workers: <http://www.laborforpalestine.net/wp/2011/02/23/labor-for-egypt>

Strikers demands

control themselves, perhaps in part because workers' self-organisation is still only beginning in many places after the previous repression.

However, many sectors are also starting to develop union organisation, independent of the state-run ETUF, whose officials were appointed by Mubarak and whose general secretary called on the workers to "Stop these protests." (Its previous president, Megawer, is now having his finances investigated by prosecutors.) Across a wide range of sectors there are calls for the replacement of ETUF "representatives" appointed after rigged elections and the beginnings of independent rank and file organisations. The labour centre CTUWS is campaigning for the non-recognition and dissolution of the ETUF — and calling for support from international unions in isolating it.

There is no sign of the strike wave ending. Teachers have called a national strike for 6 March and 1,200 steel workers in Suez and 2,000 at Cairo's railway workshops have come out as we go to press. The army clearly feels unable to intervene decisively — for now. This space gives the opportunity to organise new unions to resist any crackdown and to win confidence in the battles in the workplaces.

• There is more detailed information on the strikes and independent unions at www.egyptworkersolidarity.org

Demands of the Egyptian workers

1. Raising the national minimum wage and pension, and a narrowing of the gap between minimum and maximum wages so that the maximum is no more than 15 times the minimum... payment of unemployment benefit, and a regular increment which will increase with rising prices.

2. The freedom to organise independent trade unions without conditions or restrictions, and the protection of trade unions and their leaders.

3. The right of manual workers and clerical workers, peasant farmers and professionals, to job security and protection from dismissal. Temporary workers must be made permanent, and dismissed workers to be returned to their jobs...

4. Renationalisation of all privatised enterprises and a complete stop to the infamous privatisation programme which wrecked our national economy under the defunct regime.

5. Complete removal of corrupt managers who were imposed on companies in order to run them down and sell them off.

Curbing the employment of consultants ... who eat up £E3bn of the national income, in order to open up employment opportunities for the young.

Return to the enforcement of price controls on goods and services...

6. The right of Egyptian workers to strike, organise sit-ins, and demonstrate peacefully, including those striking now against the remnants of the failed regime, those who were imposed on their companies in order to run them down prior to a sell-off. ...if this revolution does not lead to the fair distribution of wealth it is not worth anything. Freedoms are not complete without social freedoms. The right to vote is naturally dependent on the right to a loaf of bread.

7. Health care is a necessary condition for increasing production.

8. Dissolution of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation which was one of the most important symbols of corruption under the defunct regime. Execution of the legal judgments issued against it and seizure of its financial assets and documents...

• Full text www.egyptworkersolidarity.org

Banner of the new Egyptian Federation of Independent Unions in Tahir Square

“The working-class component of this story”

Joel Beinin is Professor of Middle East History at Stanford University, USA. He has written extensively on workers' movements in the Middle East, including for the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center. He spoke to *Solidarity* about the prospects for Egypt's new workers' movement.

Workers were critical in bringing the reluctant generals to the decision to ask Mubarak to step aside (or force him out, it's unclear). They also continue to play a role by engaging in strikes since Mubarak's departure.

But there isn't a nation-wide leadership of the workers' movement, despite the fact that it has been developing on the basis of local mobilisations around economic issues for over a decade. So while it is clear that a large element of the working class opposes in practice much of the neo-liberal program that has been put in place since 1991, there is no national network and no significant political party that can put forward a programme that credibly speaks in the name of any large sector of the working class. This may change. I hope it does. But that's the state of affairs now.

Workers, like most others, have a strong interest in the democratisation of Arab societies. It is also possible to promote, as some groups of Egyptian workers have been since 25 January, demands like a national monthly basic minimum wage of £E 1,200.

Certain kinds of anti-corruption demands also have a specific working-class component. For example, workers demanded the dismissal of the CEO of the public sector Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in Mahalla al-Kubra, the largest textile enterprise in Egypt, on the grounds of corruption. And they won this demand after a three-day strike.

The main threat continues to be, as it has been for at least two decades, the neo-liberal economic restructuring of Egypt and Tunisia (this is much less an issue in Libya and Yemen).

The business cronies of Gamal Mubarak, the son of the

former Egyptian president, people like the steel magnate Ahmad Ezz, have been dealt a strong blow. But they will not disappear so easily, and it is very possible to imagine that once "stability" has been re-established they, or others like them, will return.

I am no fan of the Muslim Brothers, who have historically opposed independent working-class organisation of any sort (usually on the grounds that it is communist). But the Brothers are no longer a unified organisation with one coherent outlook.

One current of thought among the Brothers thinks it is important to protect the national economy of Egypt. That would result in policies that would to some extent protect the livelihoods of working people.

Anything perceived as intervention by Europeans and North Americans in Egyptian politics can be a liability; perhaps this is somewhat less so in Tunisia. The European Trade Union Federation and the International Trade Union Federation have supported the right of Egyptian workers to organise independently and they have protested repressive actions taken against the Center for Trade Union and Workers' Studies and its general coordinator, Kamal Abbas. It's impossible to know exactly what impact that has had. But the government did reverse the closure of the CTUWS after a year of international protest.

My view has been that the more the names of leaders and the more the details of various labour struggles are known outside Egypt, the more protection they will have from government repression.

Disseminating accurate news of what is happening with workers and their supporters and putting the working-class component into the general story of the popular uprisings in both Tunisia and Egypt, since the corporate media — including Al Jazeera — have largely ignored or marginalised it, is probably the most useful thing to do.

Don't give Qaddafi "anti-imperialist" cover

By Colin Foster

On 23 February, soft-left groupings in Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria called for their own governments "and international authorities" to intervene in Libya to help the people against Qaddafi.

Meanwhile, from the Cuban and Iranian governments, and from sections of the international left, the US and UN sanctions against the Qaddafi regime, imposed on 25 and 26 February, have triggered an outcry against "imperialist intervention in Libya".

The record both of the big powers and of the governments in the region mandates an attitude of distrust and refusal of confidence to any intervention. Whatever they do, they will do for their own interests, which are those of continuing profitable business rather than of maximising freedom. They will shape what they do, as far as they can, to help the most conservative forces of post-Qaddafi Libya.

That much must be said against the statement of the North African soft left. Something also needs to be said against the attitude of those on the international left who on this question follow Fidel Castro and Ahmedinejad (and Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez, who has been more cautious than Castro or Ahmedinejad but said on 25 February: "I can't say that I support, or am in favour, or applaud all the decisions taken by any friend of mine in any part of the world, no, one is at a distance. But we do support the government of Libya").

The measures so far taken by the United Nations (a freeze on assets and a travel ban for Qaddafi and his close associates, an arms embargo for the regime) and by the USA (a more far-reaching asset freeze on people linked to Qaddafi) cannot be flatly denounced without effectively saying that Qaddafi should be free to import as many guns as he likes to kill his people, and to move out as much loot as he likes. Imposition of a "no-fly" zone against Qaddafi's airforce is also more likely to be welcomed than feared by the people of Libya. The USA is doing what it is doing not because it hopes its measures will enable it to seize Libya's oil fields, but because it hopes its measures will overshadow its previous complicity with Qaddafi and place it better to do deals with a post-Qaddafi regime.

In fact, in the actual circumstances, a large military intervention by any government, such as could "seize Libya's oil" and "impose neo-liberalism on Libya" — or destroy the threat to Libya's people from Qaddafi's hard-core military loyalists — is improbable. Any government doing it would face hostility from others fearing that they would be shut out; no government is strongly enough placed to shrug off that hostility.

Qaddafi and Chavez

At least one of the groups signing the 23 February statement — the FFS in Algeria — has suffered much at the hands of its own country's army (there was virtual civil war in Algeria in the early 1990s, which the army used as an opportunity to settle scores), and is based in a country which had to fight a long and bloody war to win national independence. It is out of place to lecture them about having illusions in their own country's army, or in imperialism.

In Britain, the problem runs wider than the "Workers' Revolutionary Party" — "We urge the Libyan masses and youth to take their stand alongside Colonel Gaddafi to defend the gains of the Libyan revolution". This is the tiny rump of an organisation of the same name which was once the biggest group of the supposedly-Trotskyist left in Britain, but from 1976 turned itself into an apologist for Qaddafi in return for money from him.

HERALD

In the 1980s wide sections of the left accepted the paper *Labour Herald* — produced by a WRP executive editor, on WRP presses, under the titular editorship of Ken Livingstone and Ted Knight — as an authentic paper of the Labour left, despite it enthusing for Qaddafi as lavishly as the WRP's own press.

Today, for example the Workers' World Party in the USA, while being cautious enough not to back Qaddafi outright, states that he "has not been an imperialist puppet like Hosni Mubarak. For many years, Gadhafi was allied to countries and movements fighting imperialism. On taking power in 1969 through a military coup, he nationalized Libya's oil and used much of that money to develop the Libyan economy. Conditions of life improved dramatically for the people. For that, the imperialists were determined to grind Libya down... Many of the people [in Libya] being promoted in the West as leaders of the opposition are long-time

agents of imperialism".

Socialist Appeal, while unequivocally endorsing the revolt against Qaddafi, attributes it to the loss of "progressive features the regime might have had in the past", which, were, apparently, its opposition to the USA and other big powers.

Libya today shows the hollowness and falsity of the world-view which measures the "progressiveness" of a regime, or movement, by its hostility, demagogic or real, to the USA and other big powers. Decades of Stalinism had shown that already: the leftists who accredited Stalin, or Kim Il Sung, or Pol Pot, as "progressive" because they were in opposition to the USA had lost their bearings. But the lesson still needs to be re-learned.

It is not that Qaddafi was once a "progressive", when he nationalised oil interests in Libya, or preached war against Israel, or financed groups like the WRP; ceased to be "progressive" in recent years when he did deals with the USA and Britain; and presumably can be made "progressive" again by the USA or the UN taking measures against him.

He was always a reactionary. His supposedly "progressive" measures were all about promoting the wealth and standing of his clique on the backs of Libya's people and its many migrant workers. They were all tied together with fierce repression of all freedoms in Libya.

23 FEBRUARY STATEMENT

At this very moment, our Libyan brothers are suffering the agony of another age. Hundreds of victims have fallen under bullets, heavy arms and war planes.

It is a genuine industry of extermination that has been unleashed. We must stand up to it, as any conscious individual would, and do everything to stop this massacre. Gaddafi is capable of anything: he is setting tribes against one another, activating his militia and using an army of foreign mercenaries. This man has lost all sense of humanity... The political parties which co-sign this statement urgently call on the governments of the Maghreb and international authorities to do everything to halt this revolting massacre which will remain engraved as a disgraceful stain on the collective memory.

Signed by: Parti démocratique progressiste (PDP, Tunisie); Mouvement Ettajdid (Tunisie); Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés (Tunisie); Parti du progrès et du socialisme (PPS, Maroc); Union socialiste des forces populaires (USFP, Maroc); Front des Forces Socialistes (FFS, Algérie).

• alturl.com/ge8ys

Left

By Paul Hampton

New revolutions need clarity

The musings by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri on the recent uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East (*Guardian*, 25 February 2011) are a studied exercise in opacity.

Having mapped the road to nowhere for the anti-capitalist movement a decade ago, these confusionists now seem intent on misdirecting the great revolutionaries who've toppled dictators.

They are correct to argue that the recent revolts undercut the racist argument that Arabs and Muslims cannot fight for democratic politics. Marxists have known that for more than 150 years. That's because our analysis posits the division of all societies into classes, and hence the universality of class struggle. Past battles long ago settled that argument. There's no place for exceptionalism in our socialist politics.

But Hardt and Negri are fundamentally wrong in everything else they write. First, they claim the recent uprisings are so original and unique that they defy even the description of "revolution". Their view of the spontaneity of the "multitude" is so deconstructed they can barely bring themselves to acknowledge the events as collective acts.

Of course, revolutions, as festivals of the oppressed, where masses of people actively intervene in making world-historic events, are innovative. But class questions assert

themselves. These revolutions have removed the political figureheads, but they have not smashed the state. The armies and the bureaucrats remain in place in Egypt and Tunisia; and socio-economic relations are far from overturned. More Leninism is needed: realism on the political and social nature of the revolutions and the contending forces, along with our Leninist emphasis on the need for new democratic organs of working class self-rule.

Second, Hardt and Negri are wrong to view these revolts as "the multitude without a centre", with merely "horizontal networks" and no leaders. Tell that to the workers of Mahalla, whose great struggles over the last decade laid the basis not just for the emerging independent workers' movement, but inspired the youth as well. Tell the Centre for Trade Union and Workers' Services. Tell the strike committees, the workplace occupations, the mass meetings and the unions — the collective organisation that has been built clandestinely and semi-legally for years. Such organisations would dismiss this woolliness with the flourish of their palm.

And Hardt and Negri are triply wrong when they hope that the revolutions in the Middle East will take Latin America as their model. Only a self-denying revolution would be inspired by the left Bonapartism of Chavez, who has embraced the world's worst despots, or the social democrats in Brazil and Bolivia — or, worse, the croaking stasis of Cuban Stalinism. Nor should we go soft on the Muslim Brotherhood, whose rule would be utterly reactionary.

Far better to take the models of the Russian revolution in 1917 and the Paris Commune, when workers seized power from the bourgeoisie and took it into their own hands. The cry of freedom has been heard. The hegemony of the working class — the permanent revolution — is the road to emancipation.

Galloway and Sheridan

Last Monday saw the "Defend Tommy Sheridan Campaign" (DTSC) stage its first public meeting in Glasgow since Sheridan was sentenced to three years in prison for

having committed perjury.

The DTSC is backed by "Solidarity — Scotland's Socialist movement", a flag of convenience for the SP and the SWP. Its website is headed by a quote from Ian Hamilton QC:

"Scottish Justice has notched up another political miscarriage of justice alongside that of Al Megrahi and Muir of Huntershill."

According to the DTSC leaflet advertising last Monday's meeting:

"An unholy alliance of the Scottish Crown Office, Lothian and Borders Police, the *News of the World*, and senior members of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) conspired to secure a conviction against him (Sheridan)."

The claim of a "conspiracy" involving the state and the SSP has been a consistent theme of the DTSC from the outset. Since the end of Sheridan's trail the rhetoric about a "conspiracy" has been ramped up even more.

SSP leaders can be accused of all kinds of things. But engaging in this kind of "conspiracy" is certainly not one of them. The SWP and SP should publicly dissociate themselves from what they know to be a slander against fellow socialists.

They might also question one of DTSC's choice of speakers for its public meeting — George Galloway.

If Galloway is concerned about wrongly-imprisoned political activists, maybe he could use his cordial relationship with the rulers of Syria and Iran to try to secure the release of the thousands of political activists imprisoned in those countries.

Of Syria's Bashar Al-Assad, for instance, Galloway has had the following to say:

"I was very impressed by his flexible mind. Syria is lucky to have Bashar Al-Assad as her president. ... For me he is the last Arab ruler, and Syria is the last Arab country. It is the fortress of the remaining dignity of the Arabs."

All of which adds an element of farce to a Glasgow University Palestine Society public meeting addressed by Galloway the following day:

"Turmoil in the Middle East: George Galloway Speaks Out Against Injustice, Dictators and Oppression."

United Left Alliance gained five seats

Fianna Fail crashes, far left breaks through

Reason in Revolt

By Sean Matgamna

It is true, as the leader of the biggest political party in the new Dail, Enda Kenny, boasted, that the 26 Counties Irish state has had a revolution by way of the ballot box in the 25 February general election. Sort of.

The outgoing government party, the party that has been the main party of government, the main party of the Irish ruling class, in the 79 years since it formed its first government in 1932, Fianna Fail, has had a crushing defeat. It lost 57 of its 77 seats. Fianna Fail has had an electoral meltdown like the one that, for a while, the British Labour Party looked like it would get in the 2010 general election.

The Irish Labour Party won more seats than ever before. It is the second largest party in the Dail, with 37 seats to Fianna Fail's 20. Already Fine Gael and Labour are negotiating to set up a coalition government.

Sinn Fein, which did very badly in the 2007 general election, came fourth, winning 14 seats. Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams won a seat in Louth.

The Greens, the other party in the outgoing Fianna-Fail-dominated coalition, lost all of their five seats. The revolutionary left (Socialist Party and United Left Alliance) won 4 seats; independents, some of them left-Labour, won 15.

A revolution, yes, but only on the level of Dail representation. In terms of what the new government will do, this revolution will mean, at best, only small differences.

All the parties in the outgoing Dail, except Sinn Fein, voted last December for an emergency budget that, on the diktat of the international bankers, imposed vicious cuts. They did it on the eve of the election, thus deliberately depriving the voters of the chance to vote on the budget.

Fine Gael promises to "renegotiate" the deal with the international bankers, but it could hardly do less. Any changes will be marginal.

The Labour Party distanced itself from its likely partner in a new government, Fine Gael, in advance — something like what the British Labour Party did in the 2010 general election with its talk against "Tory cuts". Labour did very well with it, but is still only half as big in the Dail as Fine Gael. Fine Gael is only seven seats short of a majority, and could probably get deals with independent TDs that would allow it to rule without Labour. That weakens Labour's position in the bargaining over the programme of a coalition government.

Where in Britain the real difference between Labour and Tory policies, and fear of the Tories, saved Labour from the meltdown that threatened, in Ireland differences between Fine Gael and Labour will be papered over in a coalition. With British Labour "opposing" the Tories in alliance with the trade unions, Labour's commitment to a milder version of the Tory government's cuts has not stopped it criticising the government. Irish Labour's coalition with Fine Gael will

put an end to criticism of Fine Gael's policies by its coalition partner.

So, not a revolution so much as a great parliamentary upheaval.

In Ireland the outgoing Fianna Fail government could not go on because the electorate were not willing for it to go on in the old way. Thus two of the three conditions Lenin used to define a revolutionary situation were in operation in the general election. Lenin's third condition was absent — the existence of strong forces able to lead the disaffected in the creation of an alternative.

The first two conditions led to a parliamentary upheaval; the absence of the third will, for a while now, be worked through negatively in more of the old parliamentary game — the beginning of a new parliamentary cycle.

If the Labour Party were to remain in opposition, it could continue to grow as the main political embodiment of opposition to Irish governments that will serve the Irish bourgeoisie and the international bankers. But coalitionism is in the genes of the Labour Party. Five times since 1948 — twice in the 1950s and twice in the 1980s — Labour has been in coalition, with Fine Gael as its main partner each time.

Leaders hungry for office and lucre are eager to get their snouts in the ministerial troughs. More than that: most of the electorate take coalition government as pretty much the norm. The only party that has ever governed alone in the last eight decades is Fianna Fail.

MAIN OPPOSITION

The main Dail opposition to the cuts, austerity, and subservience to international finance will come from Sinn Fein, the revolutionary left coalition that won four seats, and some of the independents.

The transformation of Sinn Fein's situation in the South is also tremendous. But it is nothing for socialists to rejoice in.

Sinn Fein is now what Fianna Fail was at an earlier stage of its evolution — a demagogic populist nationalist party.

Fianna Fail was the mainstream of those who had fought a civil war over the terms of Treaty that ended the Anglo-Irish war of 1919-21. The Treaty brought less than full republican independence, but nonetheless a form of independence on which real independence might be built (and in fact was built, in the 1930s, by Fianna Fail in power).

Founded in 1926 as a split with those who are the ancestors of the present Sinn Fein, Fianna Fail appealed to the disaffected in Irish society. For its first year in government (from March 1932) it depended on the parliamentary votes of the Labour Party. For most of its history, Fianna Fail has had the votes of most of those whose "natural" party would more properly have been the Labour Party or a revolutionary left. It also became the main party of Irish capitalism.

After it transformed the relationship between the 26 Counties and Britain (getting rid of an oath of allegiance to the English monarch, and negotiating the evacuation of British naval bases), its nationalism became just an appeal to old loyalties and old issues. It focused on the partition of the country.

It misrepresented that as only a matter of British imperialism (so did Fine Gael, its "Treatyite" opponents in the civil

war) and called on Britain to end it — the policy which the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein have expressed in the last four decades as the demand that Britain "persuade" (in real terms, coerce) the Protestant-Unionist majority in the Six Counties to unite with the South.

The demagogic politics of the "constitutional nationalists", Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, and others, primed their "unconstitutional" co-thinkers of the Irish Republican Armies and helped prepare Republican attacks on the North in the 50s and early 60s. It helped generate the Provisional IRA in the 70s.

Now Sinn Fein, the constitutional heir of the "physical force" republicans of the last decades, is on the edge of substituting itself for Fianna Fail, the worn-out and discredited Sinn Fein of yesterday and the day before. It is at an earlier stage of the same evolution that Fianna Fail has gone through. In Northern Ireland it is in government, carrying through the same sort of cuts that it denounces in the South. Fianna Fail is dying? Long live Fianna-Fail-Sinn-Fein...

Independent Ireland is being transformed from what it was in the 20th century. The Catholic Church, which was in Ireland what political Islam is in Iran, has been seriously undermined by an awful series of child sex scandals. Recruitment to the priesthood is not enough to replace old and dying priests. And now Fianna Fail has been electorally shattered.

Against that background the election of a bloc of, broadly speaking, revolutionary socialist TDs is a tremendous breakthrough.

The negative side of it is that the main forces in the coalition are offshoots of the British SWP and the SP. That will limit their effectiveness and, probably, diminish their potential. Politically, they are what the SWP and the SP are. Even so, the electoral breakthrough is momentous, and the achievement of the United Left Alliance is tremendous. We congratulate them.

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Protest against destruction of Paraguayan forest, home to uncontacted people

The last free people?

By Stuart Jordan

In our highly manufactured world, it is useful to be reminded that we are all natural beings (a part of nature) and everything in our world is sourced from natural materials (albeit in highly manipulated form).

The world we live in is the product of human hands adapting and manipulating the forces of nature. In many respects, this Marxist understanding of ecology is the message of the BBC's latest nature series, *Human Planet*.

Human Planet opens by explaining that human beings are the only animal that has been able to live in all regions and environments on earth. We can survive in the most varied climes because of our ability to adapt nature and the natural resources around us to our own needs. We are not alone in being able to do this — bees adapt their environment to make a nest, beavers can divert whole rivers. However, we are by far the best.

The series looks at people who live in the most remote and extreme environments on earth, each episode focussing on a different geographical feature — mountains, deserts, the arctic, jungles, etc.

In each locality, we are shown incredible adaptations of the natural world to human needs. For instance, the Korawai tribe who build enormous treehouses in the rainforests of West Papua. Or the Brazilian fishermen who have learnt to work in collaboration with local dolphins. Or the Nepalese who practice sky-burials by feeding their dead to vultures. All have changed the nature around them to satisfy their human needs.

But the changes that these peoples make to their environment also determine the kind of people they are and the societies they live in. Marx explains: "by thus acting on the external world and changing it, [humanity] at the same time changes [its] own nature." So the Bajju sea gypsies of the Sulu Sea spend so much time on the sea that they get "land sick" when they go on land to trade.

LINKED

Almost everyone in the series is linked in some way to global capitalism, even if money transactions and the products of the global marketplace form a very small part of the economy. In the *Behind the Lens* section we catch a glimpse of the "fixers" who make money by bridging the extremes of our globalised world between remote backwardness and advanced capitalism.

The series is good in that it goes some way to explain how advanced capitalist societies interact with nature. The grasslands episode features Australian farmers who herd their cattle with mini helicopters, providing more than \$1.3 million of beef to the international market.

The most remarkable footage in the series is of an uncontacted tribe in the Amazon rainforest. A Brazilian government official is charged with flying over the rainforest to take video footage of isolated tribes in the hope that he can protect them from logging and mining corporations. He says: "It is important for humanity that these people exist. They remind us that it is possible to live in a different way. They are the last free people on the planet".

Taken as a purely political statement this "reactionary anticapitalism" glorifies primitivism and backwardness. However, it is also a statement about alienation, about how capitalism has stripped us of the skills and social organisation we would need to survive in a world without money.

As capitalism spreads across the world, many of the societies featured on *Human Planet* will be destroyed. With the destruction of these communities will come a loss of different understandings of our relationship to nature and to each other. As capitalist production destroys the earth's ecosystems and our communities, so it undermines the once common understanding that we are dependent on our environment and on each other. Simply by describing reality as it is, *Human Planet* does a service in trying to combat our alienation.

• www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00llpvp

Life after "Marxism"

Russell Carr reviews *Marxism Today* by Phil Collins, an exhibition showing at the British Film Institute until 10 April

The Film Theatre worker lights your way, with the aid of a torch, down the darkened corridor to the cinema/classroom. You take your place at the battered school desk. The lecture has already started, but you pick it up quite quickly.

A middle-aged German tutor is lecturing to a class of 20-something students and the subject is Marx's *Das Kapital*. You're confused. The seminar is relevant and engaging enough, but the sense of surreality is heightened by the interspersed scenes. A statue of Marx is swung through a Berlin park skyline, pitching up on what looks like a children's toy train. All the while our teacher is expounding on the difference between product and commodity, use-value, exchange-value and the theory of surplus value.

It could be a documentary from the Honecker era (East German Stalinism), but the nose-rings of the students and the Euro symbols that the tutor scribbles on the blackboard, instead of marks or dollars, tells you that we are in the now. At one point we are gazing at a few wisps of white cloud in an empty blue sky — all that is solid, melts into air?

The film ends and the lights go up, revealing a second room behind the "classroom". You cross through and take a seat. "Marxism Today (Prologue)" begins. This consists of the testimonies of three former lecturers, all specialists in the "discipline" of "Marxism-Leninism". Their narratives are broken up by documents from their personal lives, loves and travails, along with archive footage from the DDR state.

All three monologues inform us of professional lives led in a state of full-employment rights and free and well-funded higher education. They tell of the tricky transition from Stalinist state "socialism" to a full-on capitalist mode of production and how well, or badly, the teachers fared in adjusting to their altered material conditions.

The testimonies conclude with the story of the celebrated gymnast daughter of the third teacher. Her touching tale of a career blighted by injuries, incurred by a harsh training

regimen, is lent a further bizarre quality by the accompanying footage. Colourful, ever-so-slightly kitsch, sped-up acrobatics lead to a finale of lithe young athletes spelling out *Sozialismus* in red and white lettering.

But Collins' film art offers up no apology for the command and control regime of the former East German spy state, nor does it indulge in, or pander to, any form of Ostalgie. Instead, what we get here is a serious and interesting investigation into what happens to the lives of people committed to a singular, particular, ideological belief system, once History has cast them aside. What makes this all the more intriguing is that these teachers' disciplines were also, ostensibly, the political and economic foundation stones of the society in which they taught.

At a time when interest in Marx's analysis of capitalist economy is growing, this work acts as a timely reminder of the potency and relevance of Marx's critique of political economy. It is left to Andrea Ferber (the lecturer from the first film: use! value! exchange!) to tell us in the second documentary how she put the theory of capitalism into practice after re-unification and became rich.

Revealingly though, she says that she never gave up the Marxist viewpoint and describes her first encounter with the teachings of Marx as akin to: "the window being opened and the fresh air entering."

What happened to these East German teachers?

Who can save the Earth?

By Paul Hampton

***The Ecological Rift*, the latest book by John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark and Richard York, epitomises the strengths and weaknesses of the *Monthly Review* school: "half echo of the past, half menace of the future".**

Some echoes of the past are done well. The authors have done much to develop the metabolic approach to ecological questions pioneered by Marx. On this view, labour mediates the relationship between society and nature; capitalism generates a metabolic rift in the ecology of the earth; and metabolic restoration requires a new, more progressive socialist system.

Foster, Clark and York also explain some elements of Marxist political economy clearly. They set out the Lauderdale paradox, the original distinction between use value and exchange value, or between wealth and prices under capitalism. Without this distinction, it is impossible to understand the way capital treats nature and unpaid surplus labour as free gifts.

They also include a useful critique of the "treadmill of production" metaphor, which is popular among ecologists. The problem is that it "feeds into an abstract notion of growth divorced from the specific form that this takes under the regime of capital". Better to call it a treadmill of accumulation.

However, there are a number of arguments in the book which qualify as a menace of the future. Firstly, there are some problems with their political economy of ecology. They write that, "Ecological degradation is influenced by the structure and dynamics of the world capitalist system, arising from the fact that a single world economy is divided into numerous nation-states, competing with one another both directly and via their corporations" (2010 p.346). This is doubly wrong: first, ecological degradation arises directly from the exploitation of waged labour by capital — competition between capitals is secondary; and second, the structure of the world economy is determined by capital relations prior to state relations, not the other way around.

Another problematic conception is "ecological unequal exchange", which highlights how "the extraction and export of natural resources from peripheral countries involved in the vertical flow of not only economic value, but also

value in terms of energy and matter, to more developed countries" (2010 p.347). Underneath this is a mistaken division of states into centre and periphery. Of course there is extremely unequal competition between states to attract or retain a share of global surplus value to their territories. But all these states have an interest in the global exploitation of labour. Exploitation is not principally the exploitation of poor countries by rich countries, but of global labour by global capital.

Foster, Clark and York also offer a dystopian vision of the future and call for a "stationary state". This telescopes unnecessarily their views on entropy and non-substitutability of natural resources. To make this demand now is to consign much of the world's workers to an unacceptably low standard of living that is incompatible with socialism.

The main failing of the book is the same failing of the author's previous work — namely on social agency. Although they note the contradictions in Venezuela's "oil rentier development model", apparently it is healing the rift because it is in "transition to socialism". Similar eulogies are delivered for Bolivia, Ecuador and Stalinist Cuba. They rightly reject the ecological strategies of the dominant powers, only to embrace those of lesser states and their ruling classes.

Perhaps sensing the inadequacy of this approach, the book throws up two other potential agents. The first, "meta-industrial labour" includes "those workers, primarily women, peasants, the indigenous, whose daily work is directed at biological growth and regeneration". They are regarded as "rift-healing". The work of these groups, while important in their own terms, is not the central dynamic of capitalism. Without tackling the exploitation of waged labour and its connection with ecological degradation, which are the real core of the system, strategies built on the margins will remain marginal to fundamental change.

Almost as an afterthought, the authors concede that "the main historic agent and initiator of a new epoch of ecological revolution is to be found in the third world masses most directly in line to be hit first by the impending disasters".

They point to workers in China, India and elsewhere in Asia, who really do represent the great hope for the working class socialism in the twenty-first socialism. But these workers deserve more than recycled Stalinist and third-worldist conceptions if they are to garner anything valuable from the history of socialist ecology.

• Longer version at: <http://alturl.com/cog3v>

Working-class struggle and anarchism

By Martin Thomas

Anarchism opposes the capitalist state. Some anarchists — primarily the anarcho-syndicalists, who on this issue have the same idea as Marxists do — identify with the working class as the force to defeat the capitalist state and create a new society; but most do not.

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the “father of anarchism”, was opposed to unions, strikes, and class struggle. “We...wage war”, he wrote, “not upon the rich but upon principles... We are socialists, not despoilers... men of reconciliation and progress”.

He condemned the press for supporting workers’ strikes for better wages. “It is impossible for strikes followed by an increase of wages to end otherwise than in a general rise of prices... The working men, supported by the favour of an indiscreet press, in demanding an increase of wages, have served monopoly much better than their own real interests”.

He did not even see industrial capital as exploitative. In his view only financial and merchant capital were exploitative.

He seized upon a lull in trade-union activity in Britain to exclaim: “The British workers have got out of the habit of combination, which is assuredly a progress for which one cannot but congratulate them”.

Proudhon is credited with coining the phrase later popularised by Marx, that the emancipation of the working class must be the task of the workers themselves. At any rate Proudhon wrote in 1848 that “the proletariat must emancipate itself without the help of the government”.

But Proudhon did not mean emancipation through class struggle. He meant that the workers should organise themselves into small workshop groups and trade between the groups. He claimed that by doing that “they would soon have wrested alienated capital back again... become the masters of it all... without the proprietors being despoiled...”

By the time that Mikhail Bakunin became the leading writer of anarchism, in the 1870s, working-class struggle was strong enough to make Bakunin support unions and strikes. Bakunin still (like Proudhon) opposed workers organising into a workers’ political party.

He did not see the working class as the central agent of revolution. He considered peasants and the urban unemployed, beggars, petty criminals, etc. to be much more potent revolutionary forces.

Today, anarchists identifying with Zapatismo accept the Zapatistas’ strategic decision to orient to the peasants of Chiapas, an economically little-developed region in the south of Mexico, rather than the workers in Mexico’s huge cities. “Autonomists”, in practice close to anarchism though their ideas originate from Marxist discussions, hold that the agency for change is now no longer the working class, but the “multitude”. By “refusal, desertion, exodus and no-

madism”, the “multitude” can produce “a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism”.

Revolutionary activity, for them, is not about class struggle, but about “the affirmation of the movement itself as an ‘alternative society’... To conquer and control its own ‘spaces’...”.

The contemporary “social-ecology” anarchist writer Murray Bookchin insists that “we are no longer living in a world where revolutionary consciousness can be developed primarily or even significantly around the issue of wage-labour versus capital”. Instead, “the revolutionary project” must be “a counter-culture”.

The working class, he complains, expresses not universal human interests but “bourgeois egoism”. “Anarchist theories and movements” are linked by an “umbilical cord” to “organic societies... the clan, tribe, polis, medieval com-

mune... the village and decentralised towns of the past”.

How Bookchin thinks that such an unpromising society as capitalism, with the majority of the population belonging to the proletariat, “the most inorganic of all oppressed classes”, can generate a “counter-culture” except as marginal, is not clear. In practice, many anarchists pursue the day-to-day business of “counter-cultural” activity as an end in itself, and the final aim remains in the blurred distance.

PREPARATION

It is no part of Marxism to deny the value of imaginative “stunts”. But we do believe that revolutionaries must prepare for revolution by a focus on patient, long-term

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The romantic viewpoint

Marx wrote: “In bourgeois economics — and in the epoch of production to which it corresponds — this complete working-out of the human content [by ever-expanding, ever-more-diverse production] appears as a complete emptying-out, this universal objectification as total alienation, and the tearing-down of all limited, one-sided aims as sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external end...”

Only, Marx argues that the working class can and must press forward, through this “working-out”, to overthrowing capital and creating the free association of producers on an extensive and rich rather than a localised and poor basis.

“The mass of workers must themselves appropriate their own surplus labour. Once they have done so — and disposable time thereby ceases to have an antithetical existence — then, on one side, necessary labour time will be measured by the needs of the social individual, and, on the other, the development of the power of social production will grow so rapidly that... disposable time will grow for all. For real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals. The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time”.

“It is as ridiculous”, writes Marx, “to yearn for a return to [the] original fullness as it is to believe that with this complete emptiness history has come to a standstill. The bourgeois viewpoint has never advanced beyond this antithesis between itself and this romantic viewpoint, and therefore the latter will accompany it as legitimate antithesis up to its blessed end”.

Anarchism — with the exception of anarcho-syndicalism — is essentially a variant of the “romantic viewpoint”.

Nestor Makhno

David Footman, in his book *Civil War in Russia*, describes the efforts in 1917-21 of the peasant army led by Nestor Makhno.

The “Makhnovshchina” was arguably the largest-scale effort ever made actually to run a significant area on anarchist lines.

Most of the “theoretical” anarchists who joined Makhno quickly quit when they saw that the necessities of battle had brought him to the same wartime expedients which they had damned as “authoritarian Marxism” when employed by the Bolsheviks: military orders, secret police, summary assassination of opponents (which, for Makhno, most of the time, included Bolsheviks).

Yet Makhno was a serious man of ideas, and had real support among peasants. As Footman records, “Many of [the Makhnovites’] ideas made sense to Ukrainian peasants whose one political obsession was to be rid of any outside

interference. Most of their ideas make nonsense when applied to any larger or more developed administrative unit”.

The Makhno movement had no idea how to organise towns. It airily told workers concerned at the fact that they had not received wages and had no food to “organise a free economic order from below”. At the two workers’ conferences which the Makhnovites organised in the area they controlled in October 1919, the big majority of the workers were hostile to the Makhnovites.

To peasants, or small-scale craft workers, used to living their whole lives in small collectives, it can make sense that the small collective should manage its own affairs and deal with whatever it needs from outside its area by ad hoc contracts with other similar collectives.

To the modern wage-worker, used to living in large cities, to moving from job to job and city to city, and conscious that her or his job is part of an enormously ramified chain of production, it makes no sense.

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work in working-class struggles (even small ones).

The wage-working class in capitalist society has a twofold character. It is both the basic alienated class, having its life reduced to the margins around a process of labour for capital which sucks out its energy while returning to it only a pittance by which to keep its labour-power in trim; and the basic creative class, developing an ever-more-multifarious cooperative potency in production.

Capitalist production throws the working class into constant conflicts with capital over the terms and conditions of the sale of labour-power. Even if limited to the issue of wages, those battles generate class organisations of the workers — trade unions — and ties of class solidarity. Extended to issues of workers' control over production, they pose the question of the principle of solidarity replacing the rules of the market.

A cooperative commonwealth is not just a benevolent scheme to relieve the sufferings of the workers. It is the photographic positive for which the negative is provided by the struggle of the working class, within capitalist society, to lift the burdens of its class subordination by abolishing it.

In opposition to the Marxist view, focused on long-term organising, activists can be drawn to anarchism today by either one of two apparently contradictory impulses: the desire for immediately "revolutionary" activity, or the resigned conclusion that revolution is so remote that the best we can do for now is to poke at the capitalist order piecemeal but in the most colourful way we can find.

Anarchists know as well as Marxists do that only a minority in normal times are consistently active. But anarchists — again with the exception of anarcho-syndicalists — lack a coherent idea of how the minority can act today so as best to contribute to majority action tomorrow.

ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

Anarcho-syndicalism is the version of anarchism that identifies the society of the future as a federation of industries each run by the trade-union of the workers in the industry, rather than as federation of small local communes.

Unlike other variants of anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism focuses on the wage-working class. It has a coherent idea of what to do in un-revolutionary times: build up the unions which will later be the instruments of revolution.

Anarcho-syndicalism is far from "pure" anarchism, where the axis is the small local autonomous group (or even individuals) against (any) state, rather than workers against capital. Arguing with fellow anarchists to turn away from their closed discussion circles and small bomb-throwing conspiracies towards the unions, Fernand Pelloutier, the pioneer of French anarcho-syndicalism (which was a mass movement between 1902 and 1914) wrote that:

"Nobody believes or expects that the coming revolution will realise unadulterated anarchist communism". Trade-union administration of society would be the best "transitional state" available.

Weren't the trade unions disciplined, collective bodies? Didn't that outrage the individualist sensibilities of anarchism? Well, said Pelloutier, in unions "individuals are at liberty to quit, except... when battle has been joined with the enemy". Presumably he hoped that anarchists would overlook how big an "except" that was...

Inside the mass French trade-union movement, the CGT, the determined revolutionary syndicalists formed a self-conscious "active minority", mostly grouped around newspapers and magazines, who deliberately strove to educate rather than just to rely on spontaneous rebellion.

Trotsky described that French revolutionary syndicalism as "a remarkable draft outline of revolutionary communism".

Unfortunately, most anarchists today are not anarcho-syndicalists. When there is a big workers' struggle, the people contributing support and proposals, organising rank-and-file groups, and so on, are mostly (for better or for worse) the various Marxist or would-be Marxist groups, not anarchist groups. And the anarcho-syndicalist "draft outline" was and is lacking in several respects.

Firstly, in anarcho-syndicalist perspectives the unions have to combine the three distinct roles played in a Marxist perspective by three distinct sorts of organisation — the workers' political party (or proto-party), the unions, and the workers' councils.

The result is a sort of pantomime-horse effect. Unions, if they are to be effective, must include as nearly as possible the whole workforce, excluding only strike-breakers. Under anywhere near normal conditions, they include many workers whose social ideas are conformist and bourgeois.

To try to make the union a revolutionary-educational force is to narrow it down and make it ineffective as a union. The activists end up with neither an effective union, nor an effective party, but something which is botched in both respects. The French revolutionary-syndicalist idea of "the active minority" was a partial answer, but only a partial one, to that problem.

Further, even the broadest unions usually organise only a minority of the workforce. Usually the worst-off sections of the working class are not, or only scantily, unionised. In revolutionary times, those worst-off sections explode into activ-

ity. Workers then need much broader and more flexible organisations than even the trade unions — namely, workers' councils.

Those workers' councils will be the foundation of the future workers' state. It should be the unions instead? But if the unions are to play the role of rulers in the future society, then what will play the role of unions? Even under a workers' state, individual groups of workers may sometimes need to assert their particular interests against the collective.

Although, as Pelloutier admitted, the anarcho-syndicalists effectively abandoned the "pure anarchist" idea of immediate abolition of all government, they did keep warning the workers against what Emile Pouget, another leader of the CGT, called "the virus of politics".

The warnings could not stop the "virus" spreading. Politics abhors a vacuum. Despite the CGT's calls not to vote, most CGT workers voted socialist... and for socialists who in their majority turned out to be unprincipled parliamentary reformists — since anarcho-syndicalist doctrine banned the more revolutionary activists from using the electoral arena for their own agitational, educational, recruitment efforts.

Syndicalism cannot be equated fully with "economism". Around the end of the 19th century, a section of the Russian Marxists, bowled over by the success of their new agitation on workplace economic issues, came to argue that socialists should focus exclusively or overwhelmingly on such economic issues, leaving outside-the-workplace political issues to the bourgeois liberals for the time being, and that socialist politics would then easily grow out of the extension of economic struggle. That was "economism".

The CGT put much effort into political campaigns against militarism, and indeed explicitly against "patriotism". That makes its collapse into supporting the French government in 1914 all the more revealing of the ultimate inadequacy of its strategy.

The syndicalists were not quite "economists". But they curtailed their political agitation by their belief that strong union organisation was ultimately enough, by itself, to make a revolution; and by their fear of the "virus of politics".

They could campaign against reactionary government

measures — in 1913, the CGT established a united front with the Socialist Party, to protest against the government introducing a three-year term of compulsory military service — but they could never campaign for positive reforms to be nailed down in law! They could not campaign for votes for women, for example, because their principle was to avoid and reject voting for parliament. All their political activity was done with one hand tied behind their backs.

STATE

As Trotsky pointed out: "By the manner in which they treat the question [of the state], the syndicalists, unwittingly of course, contribute to the passive conciliation of the workers with the capitalist state."

"When the syndicalists keep drumming into the workers, who are oppressed by the bourgeois state, their warnings about the dangers of a proletarian state, they play a purely reactionary role.

"The bourgeois will readily repeat to the workers: 'Do not touch the state because it is a snare full of dangers to you'..."

The anarcho-syndicalists had no real idea of how to deal with the bourgeois state, other than the thought that if they could organise a full general strike then bourgeois power would simply collapse. They took great comfort in calculations that compared the numbers of the French army with the length of railway line in France, and concluded that in a perfect general strike the army could not exert control over the railways, let alone over any other industry.

In reality, such a perfect general strike is impossible. Faced with World War One in 1914, the syndicalists knew that their cure-all of a general strike to stop war was impractical. While revolutionary Marxists like Lenin and Luxemburg, who had always rejected the anarchist myth of the perfect general strike, were able to start organising opposition to the war, the CGT collapsed into support for its own government in the war no less abjectly than the parliamentary-reformist socialists.

Only a minority among the syndicalists, people like Alfred Rosmer and Pierre Monatte, remained true to their principles. And in the course of doing so, they found that they had to develop their principles, and become "political" revolutionary communists, Marxists.

The murmured alternative

The constant whirl of capitalist restructuring implies also a constant whirl of breaking-up and sidelining workers' organisations as they exist at any given time. The organisation constantly requires rebuilding. After a series of defeats, it may stumble at a low level for a long time.

And it may need to be rebuilt in a form seriously different from what it had before the defeats. After the Chartist movement of the British workers in the 1830s and 1840s, and the mostly short-lived trade union organisations associated with it, were defeated, for a long time attempts to organise a revival came to nothing. When the working-class revival came in the 1880s, its form — the New Unionism, mostly in large-scale industry, and the first Marxist groups — was significantly different from that of 1830s and 1840s.

But, so long as capital continues, the workers' movement will rebuild, and its rebuilding will include trade-union organisation, even though we cannot predict the specific forms and tempos.

While the workers' movement remains at a low level, it cannot overthrow capital and make a revolution. But nor can anyone else. The revolutionaries need to decide what long-term work they can do, in relatively quiet times and (if the revolutionaries are not very numerous) on a small scale, which will best prepare the way for mass revolutionary action in the future.

In September 1850 Marx decided that he and his comrades faced a long period when the workers' movement would be at a low level. He broke with the majority of the Communist League exiles in London, with these words:

"We tell the workers: If you want to change conditions and make yourselves capable of government, you will have to undergo fifteen, twenty or fifty years of civil war.

"Now they are told [by the majority]: We must come to power immediately or we might as well go to sleep. The word 'proletariat' has been reduced to a mere phrase, like the word 'people' was by the democrats.

"To make this phrase a reality one would have to declare the entire petty bourgeois to be proletarians, i.e. de facto represent the petty bourgeoisie and not the proletariat. In place of actual revolutionary development one would have to adopt the revolutionary phrase".

Only by a lengthy development within capitalist society (by civil war, Marx evidently means social war, rather than necessarily military battle), does the working class become the revolutionary working class.

To adopt the "revolutionary phrase", that is, to pretend that conditions are always immediately revolutionary, is to end up recommending whatever oppositional movements, or even just protest activities, are immediately to hand, and glossing them up as more than they are, rather than cleav-

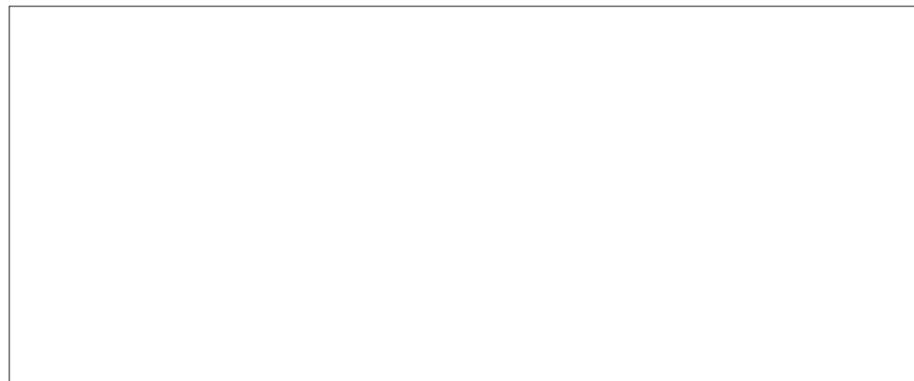
ing to the long-term interests of the working class.

Antonio Negri once expressed well a basic idea of Marxism. "The fact that we cannot spell out the alternative does not necessarily mean that it does not exist. It exists as a murmuring among the proletariat".

Marxist tactics are about organising ourselves to hear and listen to that "murmuring among the proletariat", to develop dialogue with it, and by dialogue to raise it first to open speech and then finally to a yell of victory.

New Unionism — the working-class revival of the 1880s

Council chamber direct action



Anti-cuts protesters demand access to Camden Town Hall as the borough's council makes cuts. Photo: Eben Marks

By Stewart Ward

Following previous actions in Islington, Lambeth and Lewisham, London activists have taken more direct action against council meetings as councillors of all main parties push on with passing cuts budgets.

In Haringey, activists stormed a council meeting on Thursday 24 February, forcing council business to be suspended and councillors to leave the chamber. The council eventually manage to conclude its business, passing a budget including £34 million of cuts. Labour councillor Sheila Peacock claimed it "broke [her] heart" to pass the cuts, but clearly the situation was not heartbreaking enough to motivate her to act or vote against them. Local press reports of the action have shamelessly focused on the traumatic effect the action may have had on councillors and the police rather than on the devastating effects the cuts will have on local working-

class communities.

In Camden, activists took control of a section of Euston Road after they were denied entry to the council chamber. As Camden's Labour council pressed ahead with making £100 million cuts, the police and security guards put Camden Town Hall on Judd Street on effective lockdown. Following a protest by a delegation from Camden United Against Cuts (which had been allowed inside), the meeting was suspended and some activists were let in.

A heavy presence by police and support officers prevented an occupation of Brent town hall on Monday 28 February as the council set its cuts budget. Activists shouted "let us in!" as police barred all but a small number from entry.

Protesters at an action in Newham report that cops beat a 14-year old activist as the Labour council made nearly £50 million of cuts.

Spineless Labour councillors have desperately attempted to jump on the

anti-cuts bandwagon, claiming that their sympathy is with the protesters but they have no choice but to make cuts. If this were true, one might imagine that letting those protesters into their meetings to scrutinise the process by which they are making these cuts they have no choice in might be a reasonable request, but even that is an act too far for the poor dears.

The recent wave of direct action directed against councils' budget setting meetings has been met with an increasingly heavy-handed response by police and council authorities. While this kind of lightning-strike action will not stop cuts by itself, it will send a clear message to councils that activists will not limit themselves to polite lobbying.

Councillors are taking direct action against our jobs and services; taking direct action against their meetings is the very least we can do in response.

result of wage discrepancies, which have proved to be a serious issue for some of our members who have been short-changed by hundreds of pounds, a dispute exists between Mitie and RMT and following a 100% vote for action we will strike. This appalling situation shines the spotlight on just how these facilities companies operate and how they treat their low-paid staff."

BURTON'S FOODS
Despite a promise to guarantee work until 2012, food company Burton's is planning to close its site in Moreton near Liverpool.

The site employs 342 workers and has been a major employer in the area since 1953. Unite leader Len McCluskey said "This is the moment for Burton's workers, supporters and the

whole community to send a clear message to Burton's Foods that we are not prepared to sit back and let decisions be made that will destroy our community." A demonstration on Saturday 26 February brought together nearly 1,000 workers and supporters to protest the closure. A TV report of the demo is available at tinyurl.com/burtonsmarch

LABOUR COUNCILS
The National Shop Stewards' Network has called a protest outside the Labour Party's local government conference, aimed at pressuring Labour councillors to defy the cuts.

The demo, which will take place on Saturday 5 March, will assemble at 11am at Geraldine Mary Harmsworth Park, St. George's Road, London SE1 6ER.

March against NHS cuts!

By a health worker

Activists will march against cuts to healthcare on Wednesday 9 March as the government presses ahead with the most radical restructuring and cuts package in NHS history.

500 jobs have already gone at local NHS Primary Care Trusts and unions estimate that 120,000 jobs could be under threat nationally. Across London, community health services such as district nursing face cuts of up

to 50%.

Kingston Hospital in southwest London plans to axe nearly 500 workers, almost 20% of its total workforce. St. George's Hospital in south London will cut 500 staff including nurses and senior doctors. It is also closing three wards, leading to the loss of around 100 beds. 630 jobs will go at the Bart's and Royal London Trust, while £100 million will be spent each year to pay a private company to run new PFI schemes.

Workers have already begun to fight back against

the implementation of cuts. Speech therapists in Southwark, south London, have taken strike action and there have been sizeable demonstrations at the Royal London and Homerton Hospitals, the latter of which is facing cuts of up to £15 million.

The 9 March demonstration will assemble from 5pm at the Royal London Hospital, opposite Whitechapel tube station, and march through the city to Bart's Hospital.

Scottish unions rally

By Dale Street

Around 300 people attended the 26 February Scottish TUC anti-cuts rally in Glasgow's Pavilion Theatre. It would be unfair to be overly critical of the event.

If anyone from another planet had been in the audience, for example, they would doubtless have found the glittering array of eight platform speakers all saying the same thing in not particularly different words an illuminating event.

Any alien visitor would also have learnt that education cuts are bad, as too are local authority cuts, health service cuts, civil service cuts, Ministry of Defence cuts and the closure of RAF bases in Scotland. Attacks on public sector pensions are very bad as well.

But if these cuts are so bad, an extra-terrestrial life-

form would surely ask, what is being done by trade unions to stop them? The answer to that question was not particularly clear.

The Unison Scottish Secretary referred to unions "bringing hope in the face of uncertainty." The Unite Scottish Secretary, who attacked the Tories for "cutting too much too soon", called for a tax on financial transactions (the Tobin tax). And the EIS President, slightly more positively, talked briefly of "collective organized action".

In campaigning against privatization of Royal Mail the CWU would "consider industrial options". The PCS would also be "prepared to take industrial action". Cuts needed to be opposed through "industrial and political channels", said the STUC General Secretary.

But apart from the UCU, which was already balloting its members on indus-

trial action, no-one mentioned any timescale for when industrial options, industrial action and industrial channels would actually be brought into play.

The one thing that all speakers were agreed upon was the need for trade unionists to turn out for the TUC's 26 March anti-cuts demonstration in London. "See you in London on the 26th," was the closing comment of every speaker's script.

That trade unionists should mobilize for 26 March is true enough. But is sitting through one and a half hours of platform speakers really the best way to enthrone people to make the trek down to London?

Especially if the speeches at the TUC demonstration are only a repeat of last Saturday's performance at the Pavilion Theatre...

BA ballot back on

By Darren Bedford

After calling off its initial ballot over fears of a legal challenge from bosses, Unite has begun the process of re-balloting British Airways cabin crew workers for further strike action.

This strike is not over the job cuts and casualisation that sparked the initial action, but against victimisations and sackings that occurred during the course of the strikes. However, a strong strike could force

concessions from BA boss Willie Walsh on those issues and possibly inspire workers with the confidence for a renewed fight on the underlying issues.

An activist in BASSA, the section of Unite which organises the workers, told *Solidarity*: "It's hard to gauge the reaction to the latest events at BA. For some people the continuing disruption and loss of revenue for BA is enough to make up for the fact that the ERBS [Electoral Reform Services] do not appear to have conducted the last bal-

lot correctly. For others, 'it's all BASSA's fault' and for sure some people have cancelled their membership as a result. On the other hand, some people have joined or re-joined in the last week or so. Hopefully people are finally realising that this upcoming ballot is their last chance to stop Walsh. If we do not get enough support, then the job will undoubtedly change beyond all recognition in the next few years."

The new ballot closes on Monday 28 March.

Hackney six put to the test

Six Labour councillors in Hackney, east London, have declared: "We would like to see local Councils across London leading the charge."

They should refuse to adopt cuts budgets as a result of government enforced policies and produce Needs Budgets to show what should be funded". One of them, Ian Rath-

bone, announced at a Hackney anti-cuts demonstration on 23 February that he would vote against all cuts and called for the lobby of the council budget-setting meeting to be so big that councillors would not be able to get into the council chamber to vote for cuts.

With the other five, it is still not clear how what they will do — when the

council votes on 2 March — will relate to what they "would like to see". Activists are arguing that we can bring what we "would like to see" into view only by upholding its principles in practice, not by waiting for someone else to enforce them.

• Statement of the six: <http://bit.ly/gI7jPv>

In brief

By Ira Berkovic

ARRIVA

Train drivers on Arriva Trains Wales have taken strike action in a dispute over a number of issues, including pay.

Arriva drivers are amongst the lowest paid in the country, and ASLEF — one of the unions which organises the drivers — says they are paid substantially less than their English counterparts. The strike had a significant impact on services with only four scab drivers turning up for work.

The action comes hot on the heels of a strike by cleaners employed by Mitie at First Great Western's Cardiff and Swansea depots. Speaking before the action, RMT general secretary Bob Crow said "As a

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

What to do for 26 March

By Gerry Bates

The organisers of the TUC anti-cuts demonstration on 26 March have felt obliged to put out a statement that no, they are not actually banning placards from the march.

They couldn't, of course. But unions are being asked to produce flags rather than placards. The stated reason is that people can take flags away with them, whereas placards generate a big clear-up problem at the end of the march.

But no placards also means no slogans and demands, and that's a real issue. The demonstration is entitled "March For The Alternative", but the TUC leaders say as little as possible about what "The Alternative" is.

The nearest the march website gets is the wish that "rich individuals and big companies [should] have to pay all their tax, that the banks [should] pay a Robin Hood tax".

None of this should discourage activists from mobilising as strongly as we can for 26 March. Whatever about the TUC leaders' wishes, the bigger and livelier the march, the more confident workers will be after 26 March about resisting the cuts.

Nor should activists allow ourselves to be discouraged by other bits of TUC finagling. People trying to get places on trains and coaches to London for the march have too often been told "no, it's full up", or "no, that transport is reserved for members of our union only". But there is

some transport open to all, and there are other ways to get down.

The TUC is positively encouraging people to arrive late and leave early. "People... from London and the South-East may not want to arrive for the start", and "not everyone who arrives early will want to stay through to the end". Coaches will drop off and pick up in outer London — Wembley or Canning Town — so that people may have to hurry away promptly to reach them.

But activists will understand that we want the maximum numbers on the streets, for the biggest impact.

Insider reports tell us that the official platform of speakers, in Hyde Park at the end of the march, is being carefully controlled to exclude militant voices. But no-one can stop demonstrators talking to each other on the coaches, on the trains, and on the march. No-one can stop us setting up "fringe" platforms at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park so that rank and file activists can get a hearing.

The cuts will be condemned, from the Hyde Park platform, by the same union leaders who have "sat on" demands for industrial action ballots from their members and put pressure on Labour councillors to implement the cuts — but "in consultation with the unions" — instead of defying them.

In some parts of London, such as Islington, "feeder" events for the demonstration are being organised by

Labour council leaderships who this month have been calling cops to clear protesters from their Town Halls as they comply with the Tory / Lib government and vote through huge cuts.

So? We should be there, telling councillors that if they rightly condemn cuts as "unfair", then they should join the fight against those cuts rather than help carry them out.

Activists in every union should use 26 March as an opportunity to get together and put pressure on their leaders.

• Placards not banned: <http://bit.ly/f2UJSN>. Transport and details for march: <http://bit.ly/gbFQTD>

The real alternative to cuts can be summed up in four demands:

- Organise for strikes to save jobs and services;
- Democratise and rebuild the unions, from top to bottom, so that they can fight as they need to;
- Make Labour councils defy cuts;
- Fight for a workers' government which will impose public ownership and democratic control of high finance.

Lambeth occupies

Around 300 people demonstrated outside and then occupied Lambeth Council chamber on Wednesday 23 February. They then held an anti-cuts meeting whilst the councillors scrambled around for a room to vote through £37 million in cuts.

When security and police refused to allow members of the public into the galleries and overflow rooms, protesters challenged them and then rushed into the Town Hall. •<http://lambethsaveourservices.org>

Come and celebrate International Women's Day by showing solidarity with migrant women imprisoned at Yarl's Wood!

Saturday, 5 March 2011, 1pm @ Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre, Twinwoods Road, Clapham, Bedfordshire, MK41 6HL

The coalition government has skilfully employed the "end" to child detention to avoid talking about the brutal and inhumane detention regime. Over the years, countless reports and accounts have documented the inhuman treatment of women locked up at Yarl's Wood. And it's getting worse. The average length of stay had increased by 50% since the last inspection, and one in ten women had been detained for more than six months.

End the detention of migrant women! Close Yarl's Wood now!

Libya: revolution and prospects

By Martyn Hudson

Benghazi, which consolidated itself early for the rebellion in the midst of violent tension and with astonishing speed, is already the power base of the Libyan Interim Government.

Since the uprising began on 15 February, the territorial gains of the revolution have been huge. The use of mercenaries has been overplayed in the media, however: the regime still has many supporters.

Qaddafi's son has alleged that the uprising is Islamist. Certainly the demonstrations in Libya in February 2006 against the Jylland-Posten cartoons, also directed against the secular nature of the regime, had an Islamist component.

However, the transitional government in Benghazi looks very little like an Islamist Emirate. The National Front for the Salvation of Libya is essentially monarchist in orientation. The Senoussi pretenders to the throne, deposed in 1969, still have widespread support in the country and will be a major player in the future form of government — at least in initial negotiations. They have indicated over the last few days that they will be returning to the country to argue for a constitutional monarchy.

Qaddafi has fought a low level war against Islamist militias since the mid 1980s, and the prison massacres in the early 90s were largely directed against the Islamists. There have been several gun battles with Islamic militants in the cities over recent years.

The central Islamist grouping seems to be the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), long linked to the GIA in Algeria, although it has publicly severed ties with Bin Laden and global Salafism in favour of a more locally rooted, less global concept

of a Libyan Khalifate.

The fluidity of the Libyan borders has traditionally helped militias such as the LIFG to operate, and their ranks are strengthened by elements who fought the Soviets in Afghanistan. Profoundly influenced by classical Salafist clerics from Saudi Arabia who went into exile in North Africa in the 70s and 80s, the group is very hostile to the Libyan tribal structures that supported the Qaddafi regime and to the Senoussi pretenders, who were among the backers for anti-Islamist Sufism in the Maghreb.

The visions of these rival blocs or estates vying for power will be sustained by their respective access to military power and the rival army factions will be the arbiter of government once the regime falls.

But the army factions will also be taking the measure of the working people of Libya who ignited the rebellion in the first place and will not sanction yet another despotic regime.

Libyan living standards have been high for North Africa — a small population in an oil-rich territory. An unusual feature of the regime has been the levels of migrant workers in the region — everything from British and American oil workers, through Russian advisers, Filipino and Sudanese labourers, to press-ganged central African mercenaries from Chad and Niger.

The significant Palestinian diaspora in Libya has been treated dreadfully throughout the history of the regime, and simultaneously used as a whip to beat Israel.

The deaths of the rebels killed by Qaddafi will not be in vain if they signal the sending of the Libyan despotism to the shithheap of history. Let the Libyan revolution be the third of thirty revolutions!

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker is trying to push through a "budget repair bill" which would limit collective bargaining to wages (but not exceeding the rise in the cost of living) and attack other conditions and union rights. Other US states are preparing similar laws. But workers are fighting back. See pages 6 and 7.